

## FUNDAMENTAL SHIFTS IN ANTI-BELARUSIAN DISINFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA: ANALYSIS OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE CHANGES\*

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<sup>1</sup>\* This is a shortened version of the report. Full version in Russian can be found at [this link](#).

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## Executive Summary

Monitoring of anti-Belarusian disinformation and propaganda in the Russian online media, conducted in August-November 2016,<sup>2</sup> primarily focused on publications by the *Regnum* and *EADaily* media outlets containing hate speech. Many materials questioned the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Belarus, contained derogatory statements about the Belarusian people, language, and culture.

The study indicated that the Belarusian authorities used the most radical and inexpensive method of combating the anti-Belarusian propaganda campaign by arresting three authors of such materials. The monitoring concluded the following: "Whether the anti-Belarus campaign fades away or, on the contrary, takes a new impetus, either way is of great importance in assessing evolution of Russian Belarus-related media propaganda."

Has the situation in this area changed two years later? This study, which is based upon regular monitoring and analysis, shows that there have been significant changes for the worse in both quantitative and qualitative terms, namely:

- The number of online resources which regularly publish items related to Belarus and contain disinformation, propaganda narratives and hate speech has increased severalfold (to about 40 fairly active sites);
- Over the past two years, several new active outlets of disinformation and hate speech which are entirely devoted to events in Belarus have appeared online. Their number currently stands at about 15. Earlier, the primary sources of disinformation about Belarus were Russian websites with a broad information agenda, which only partly focused on Belarus;
- A fully-fledged coordinated network of regional online portals with regular publications containing hate speech against various social, political, religious, and professional groups of the Belarusian population began its activity in 2018. Publications use aggressive, chauvinistic rhetoric, sometimes openly questioning the existence of an independent Belarusian ethnic group and language, discrediting and distorting the history of Belarus;

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<sup>2</sup> Andrei Yeliseyev, Veranika Laputka. Anti-Belarus disinformation in Russian media: Trends, features, countermeasure. EAST Center, December 2016, <http://east-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/EAST-Media-Review.pdf>

- The leaders of a number of the most active sources of disinformation and propaganda narratives on Belarus periodically using hate speech are associated with a Russian CIS-EMO organization with a very ambiguous reputation and the "Soyuz" ("Union") civic initiative formed in 2018. They also have at least an indirect connection to Russia's Embassy in Belarus thanks to their membership on the Coordinating Council of the Leaders of the Belarusian Public Associations of Russian Compatriots (KSORS).

The content of this study is as follows:

- Classification of disinformation and propaganda sources concerning Belarus;
- Analysis of the features of the regional disinformation network, the establishment of which was finalized in 2018;
- Review of examples of hate speech regarding various groups of the Belarusian population in the materials of the regional disinformation network;
- Review of offensive statements about the Belarusian people, their culture, language, and history published by the regional disinformation network in the first quarter of 2019;
- Top-15 most incongruous statements by the regional disinformation network during the first quarter of 2019;
- Analysis of individuals and organizations behind some of the most aggressive outlets of anti-Belarusian propaganda, disinformation, and hate speech.

## 1. Classification of Sources of Disinformation and Propaganda Concerning Belarus.

In 2016, disinformation and propaganda, as well as the use of hate speech in publications regarding Belarus, was a relatively new phenomenon. During the monitoring, conducted at the end of 2016, *Imperiyanews.ru*, *Regnum.ru*, *Eurasia Daily (EADaily)*, *Zapadrus.su* and *Sputnikpogrom.com* were considered the main sources of such content. For these and several other sites studied at that time (*Rusnext.ru*, *Cont.ws*, *Fondsk.ru*, etc.), Belarus was not and still is not a single or defining topic.

To date, the number of Internet sites that relatively regularly host such content has increased significantly and reached about 40. Many other portals which have extremely low attendance and frequency of updates, post such materials rarely, re-publish such content exclusively from other sources, and not targeting Belarusian audience only, are not taken into account here.

Periodic changes in the editorial policy and priorities of online portals complicate their classification. Nevertheless, based on the state of affairs during the first quarter of 2019 and taking into account some arbitrariness of categorization,<sup>3</sup> the primary sources of disinformation and propaganda against Belarus among websites can be classified as follows:

- 1. The most aggressive sources:** which focus entirely or predominantly on the coverage of Belarusian topics, regularly post their own (exclusive) materials containing disinformation and propaganda narratives while often using hate speech: [Vmeste s Rossiyey \(Together with Russia\)/Ross-bel.ru](#), [Teleskop](#), [Sozh](#), [Vitbich](#), [Berestje-News](#), [GrodnoDaily](#), [Mogilew.by](#), [Podneprovie-Info](#), [Imhoclub.by](#), [Dranik](#), [Politring](#).
- 2. Sources with a high level of disinformation:** the Belarusian topic is either their main or one of the priority ones; they relatively often transmit disinformation and propaganda in their own materials or items from other sources, but without using or with a relatively rare use of hate speech: [4esnok](#), [Sonar2050](#), [Druzya-Syabry](#), [Sputnik Belarus](#), [Belvpo](#), [Vesti24](#), [EADaily](#), [Regnum](#).
- 3. Sources with an average level of disinformation:** Belarusian topic is not predominant, but still rather significant (a number of outlets contain a separate section on Belarus or specific tags), periodically publish exclusive materials containing disinformation and propaganda narratives on Belarus: [RIA FAN](#), [IAREX](#),

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the frequency of using hate speech in publications may vary depending on the period being studied. That is why *Regnum* and *EADaily* in the first quarter of 2019 were not included in the first group of sources of disinformation and propaganda.

[Politnavigator](#), [Oko-Planet](#), [News-Front](#), [Ukraina.ru](#), [Materik](#), [Topwar](#), [Ruskline](#), [Cont.ws](#), [Fondsk.su](#), [Rusvesna](#), [Rubaltic](#).

**4. Less active sources of disinformation:** sites that are entirely or partially dedicated to Belarusian topics and regularly publish materials with disinformation and propaganda narratives, but are not very popular and do not produce their own content:

[Rosbelsoyuz](#), [Inspect.by](#), [Vitrusdom](#), [Soglasie](#), [Mogilew.net](#), [Mogilew.org](#), [Mogilew.com](#), [ImperiyaNews](#).

The most aggressive sources	Sources with a high level of disinformation	Sources with an average level of disinformation	Less active sources of disinformation
			

The first group of sites is the most destructive, since it is targeting exclusively Belarusian audience and quite often uses hate speech of varying degrees of severity, demonizing social, political, and professional groups of the Belarusian population. The expansion of their audience is a matter of time and money, and some of them do not lack financial resources judging by the scale of their activities in both quantitative and qualitative terms (including regular maintenance of numerous groups on social networks).

The significance of the second and third groups of sites on the formation of public opinion in Belarus and Russia also cannot be underestimated. Many of those sources where the Belarusian topic is not on the priority list are nonetheless very popular and significant in shaping public opinion in Russia (for example, <https://riafan.ru/>). An increase in the number of materials on Belarusian topics and the degree of their aggressiveness might only be a matter of time. It is significant that in rare cases these sites even have Belarusian language versions (<https://www.rubaltic.ru/>).

## 2. Analysis of Features of Regional Disinformation Network.

One of the most important phenomena of anti-Belarusian disinformation and propaganda at present is an active full-fledged network of regional sites. It includes *Teleskop-by.org*, *Sozh.info*, *Vitbich.org*, *Berestje-News.org*, *GrodnoDaily.net*, *Mogilew.by*, *Podneprovie-Info.com*, *Dranik.org*, and appears as follows:



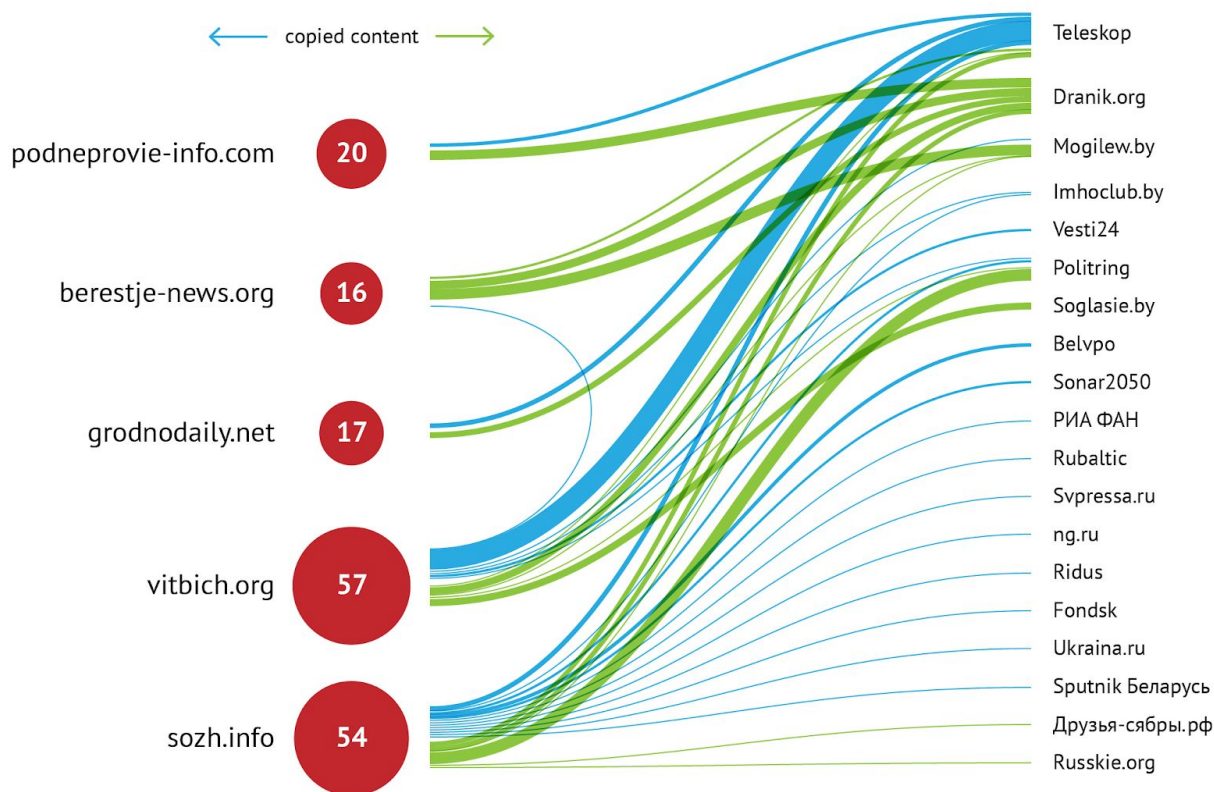
The establishment of this network was completed in 2018. While each of the non-capital regions of Belarus has its own source of disinformation and propaganda (and two for the Mahilyow (Mahiloŭ) and Brest (Bieraście) regions)<sup>4</sup>, there is currently no such portal for the Minsk (Miensk) region. Apparently, *Teleskop-by.org* serves as a nationwide resource and at the same time as a kind of Minsk (Miensk) analog of a region-specific source.

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<sup>4</sup> Belarusian geographic names are given both in accordance with standardized US English spelling and Belarusian Latin alphabet.



## Reposts of unique materials by the network's sites during January-March 2019.



Characteristic features of the regional propaganda and disinformation network (*Sozh.info*, *Vitbich.org*, *Podneprovie-info.com*, *Grodnodaily.net*, *Berestje-news.org*) are the following:

- A seemingly neutral design. No ambiguous symbols which may indicate belonging to radical ideologies are featured. Instead, they use images referencing the historical emblems of the regional centers (Homyel (Homiel), Vitsyebsk (Viciebsk), and Brest (Bieraście) outlets), memorial buildings (Mahilyow (Mahiloŭ) Town Hall), or have a neutral look (Hrodna (Horadnia) regional site). *Teleskop-by.org*'s design depicts an ornament similar to traditional Belarusian pattern.



- Combining neutral news, informative, and entertaining content, taken from other original sources, with their own extremely aggressive, chauvinistic materials. The content copied from regional government and independent websites, national portals of Belarus and certain outlets from the Russian Internet segment serves as neutral.

The two features mentioned above make it possible to use the "Trojan horse" strategy when readers' attention to promoted materials is attracted by providing a variety of neutral content.

- Frequent use of hate speech against various social, political, religious, and professional groups of the population, including journalists from Belarusian non-state media outlets and bloggers, citizens sharing pro-European views, human rights advocates and activists, individuals who do not subscribe to views considering the Belarusian nation as part of the "all-Russian people," etc.
- Frequent use of chauvinistic, totalitarian, non-scientific allegations, including revision and distortion of the history of Belarus, conspiracy theories in various forms, offensive statements about national symbols like "Pahonya" (literally: "Pursue") emblem, periodical denial of the existence of the Belarusian nation outside the concept of the "all-Russian people," denial of the existence of the Belarusian language as a full-fledged, naturally formed language, and not "artificial" or "created by the West," etc.
- The authorship of many of their exclusive materials is concealed under pseudonyms. At the same time, the style of the articles and the uniformity of grammatical errors and stylistic forms make it possible to assume the real authorship of the publications.
- Actively sharing of their exclusive content with other outlets of disinformation and propaganda narratives, especially by the following sites: *Teleskop-by.org*, *Politring.org*, *Mogilew.by*, *Dranik.org*, and to a lesser extent by *Vesti24.by* and *Sonar2050.org*.

Regional disinformation network websites advocate a radical rapprochement between Belarus and Russia, which, in fact, would mean the loss of real sovereignty in internal and external affairs, even if nominal independence remains. So, the publications of the first quarter of 2019 suggest, among other things, the following steps:

- Consider deploying Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus as part of a confrontation with the West;
- Promoting in Belarus Russian organizations that form a "common Russian identity" among Belarusians;
- Introducing the Russian ruble as a currency in Belarus;
- Stop the dialog with the West, deploy Russian military bases in Belarus and introduce criminal liability for "incitement of fear at the expense of Russia.



### 3. Hate Speech in Regional Disinformation Network Publications.

There is no internationally accepted definition of the term "hate speech", but in general, it can be defined as a set of linguistic means that projects discriminatory hate towards people based on national, religious, political, and other grounds. In extreme cases, hate speech can take the form of xenophobia, ethnic hatred, and intolerance, and therefore its radical manifestations are directly prohibited by both international and national law.

Hate speech uses a variety of techniques, including referring to various groups or individuals in a derogatory and offensive context, making allegations of inferiority or moral shortcomings of representatives of certain groups or individuals, general accusations of a negative influence of a group on society and attributing hostile actions to it, veiled incitement to violence or discrimination (for example, in the form of calls to "sort them out," "put them in place," an appeal to Stalinist repressive policies), an unfounded and generalizing reference to the alleged links between targeted population groups and foreign organizations to discredit them, etc.

Hate speech attributes can be found in many publications of regional network webpages (*Sozh.info*, *Vitbich.org*, *Podneprovie-info.com / Mogilew.by*, *Grodnodaily.net*, *Berestje-news.org / Dranik.org*) concerning several Belarusian population groups including:

- Independent journalists and bloggers;
- Civil activists and representatives of democratic opposition;
- Citizens with alternative political views;
- Citizens who do not support the conception of a triune Russian people;
- Followers of the Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church;
- Human rights activists and citizens who resort to international human rights protection mechanisms.

Furthermore, the publications contain defamatory statements towards some political and civil activists and journalists. As part of the research, the articles of regional disinformation network published in the period from January to March 2019 (over 150) were analyzed. Whereas the complete collection of hate speech instances is available in the Russian language version of the report, a few examples are provided in English below.

#### **Independent journalists and bloggers**

##### **Derogatory statements about *Nasha Niva* newspaper and its journalists:**

*I always knew that the situation with education and qualifications among opposition supporters is*

very tough; however, I did not realize how bad it is... I cannot imagine who and based on what is employed at Nasha Niva, but it seems that lowlifes and drug addicts are being hired, who are caught in the basements and forcefully dragged to the office.<sup>5</sup>

### **Civil activists and representatives of democratic opposition;**

#### **Claims about moral deficiencies and attribution of hostile actions:**

*Our opposition supporters are not economists, they are not gifted. They are just demagogues and populists. Therefore, their main objective is to close down loss-incurring enterprises and to let their employees go home, even better to sell such enterprises to the West and to allow the Westerners to bankrupt them... Surely, our oppositionists dream about American [military] bases on our territory and foreign men speaking language unknown to our people. This is what they dream about!*<sup>6</sup>

### **Citizens with alternative or pro-western views, those who do not adhere to the conception of triune Russian people.**

#### **Claims about deficiency, attribution of hostile actions, a generalized claim about group's connection with foreign structures for defamation purposes:**

*As it goes, as a real patriot of Belarus he has a pathological propensity toward foreign countries but not toward Belarus. Usually, 'Belarusian zmagary [a mocking reference to the oppositionists] choose Poland or Germany for worshipping... This often happens among oppositionists due to a deficit of women's attention. They degrade to some perversion and then even become zmagary... Kanstantsin[Dzmitrachkow] is not alone in his aspirations, all patriots happen to be sad that Poles did not manage to exterminate Belarusians. This is patriotism...*

### **Defamatory statements toward a number of political and civil activists and journalists**

#### **Ungrounded accusation of politician Mikalay Statkevich in terrorism:**

*Let us recall that two years ago at Freedom Day Statkevich's team planned to stage a terrorist act at the rally. However, for some reason, the US State Department does not consider these facts. And the reason is that because they are interested in destabilizing our country just as our opposition members are. Therefore they have to make a big deal out of it and try to make candy out of shit [as stated in vernacular].<sup>8</sup>*

### **Insulting statements about Natalya Radina (Editor-in-Chief of Charter'97), Marina Zolotova (Editor-in-Chief of TUT.BY), and Irina Levshina (Editor-in-Chief of Belapan):**

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<sup>5</sup> <http://vitbich.org/oppozicionnaya-pleyada-i-ee-mify-i-legendy-vladimir-nabagez/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://podneprovie-info.com/2019/01/07/oppoziciya-bessilna/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://sozh.info/zazerkale-svyadomogo-patriotizma-v-licakh-kanstancin-dzmitrachko%D1%9E/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://vitbich.org/andrej-korshunov-iz-muxi-slona/>

*In general, if you figure this out, whom in Belarus is responsible for the independent information field? Whose opinion is being imposed on Belarusian society? These women can be counted on the fingers of one hand: Marina Zolotova (Editor-in-Chief of TUT.BY), Irina Levshina (Editor-in-Chief of Belapan), and Natalya Radina (Editor-in-Chief of Charter'97). These three women after they have grown balls [as stated in vernacular] and became men, began dictating and imposing the opinions of Belarusian opposition on everyone. That is, instead of cooking borshch at home, they started doing politics and decided to go up against serious men from the government, including the Russian one because here we talk about Russian Ambassador, Mikhail Babich"<sup>9</sup>*

## **Human rights activists and citizens who resort to international human rights protection mechanisms.**

### **Insulting statements, attribution of hostile actions, claims about moral deficiencies:**

*'Holers' are those who work for the West and leak all information including classified one over there, for personal benefit or to accomplish some crazy idea... For you to understand, 'holers' are the citizens of their country who get things out in the open and therefore betray Belarusian values. For instance, Aleksandr Tyvanchuk lodged a complaint about a high state duty for crossing the 'Western Bug' border checkpoint in Brest. This way anyone can become a 'holer' and complain to the UN Committee about the high price of metro tokens, public toilets fees, taxes, excises, fines, etc... One can be sure to say that the 'holers' den is Vyasna human rights center. Why do they do this? This a good question. First, for the sake of money. Second, for the sake of an idea. Ideological 'holers' are much scarier than money-driven ones. But ideological 'holers' are much more beneficial for our opposition members because they can always be framed to make some money just as some time ago Ales Belyatskiy was framed.<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> <http://vitbich.org/arkadij-vertyazin-durnaya/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://vitbich.org/andrej-korshunov-dyryavye/>

#### **4. Overview of Derogatory Statements About Belarusian People, Their Culture, Language, and History.**

A full version of this section with excerpts of analyzed publications is available in Russian-language version of the report. Here only the essence of derogatory statements is listed:

- The Belarusian language was artificially created in the early 20th century;
- Belarusian people are a part of Russian people, Belarusians are Russians;
- No Belarusian people existed in the late 18th century;
- The name of the country the Republic of Belarus is voluntarist, Belarus is a Western Region of Russia;
- The West's objective is to turn Belarusians into cannon fodder by creating an "artificial language" and religion for them;
- Tadeusz Kosciuszko's actions were analogous to Romuald Rajs's crimes;
- Soviet Belarus illegitimately expanded its territory by adding Vitsyebsk (Viciebsk) region;
- Belarusian Latin alphabet is a Polish Latin version;
- Derogatory claims about Pahonya coat of arms which is considered a historical and cultural value;
- Derogatory claims about former official state flag.

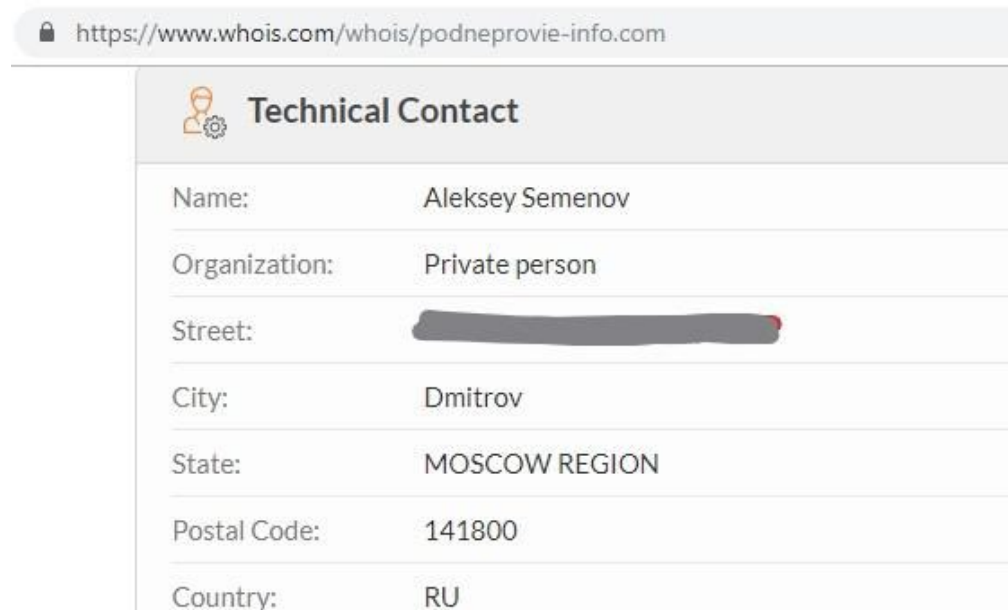
## **5. Top 15 Most Incongruous Statements by Regional Disinformation Network.**

A full version of this section with excerpts of analyzed publications is available in Russian-language version of the report. Here only the essence of the most questionable statements published by *Sozh.info*, *Vitbich.org*, *Podneprovie-info.com*, *Grodnodaily.net*, and *Berestje-news.org* in January-March 2019 is listed:

1. Belarus' officials are "fifth column" of IMF and Western "gauleiters";
2. Belarus' senator Gennadiy Davydko is US State Department agent, Belarusian officials are West's sixth column;
3. Russia will become a target for destruction by Russophobic Belarus;
4. Tavistock Institute of Human Relations controls the development of the world's history;
5. OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media wants turn Belarusian segment of the Internet into "a stinky heap of garbage" and "terrorist haven;"
6. United States planned to occupy Crimea to control the Black sea;
7. In return for the visa-free regime, the EU wants Belarus to lose its independence or least to follow a 'Ukraine's scenario';
8. AIDS does not exist;
9. Feminist harassment of men takes place in the EU, it is foolish to let women to go into politics;
10. EU is a main source of Nazism;
11. The Clinton's bench in Kurapaty memorial site could have been damaged by gamblers on a bet;
12. Poland has a secret plan to take over Belarus;
13. Russophobia has won in Belarus and the country's authorities cannot do anything about it;
14. To prevent its own collapse, the European Union wants to take over Belarus;
15. Belarus' patriots want the United States to occupy Belarus.

## 6. Who Is Behind Most Aggressive Anti-Belarus Sources of Disinformation and Hate Speech.

The domains of four regional websites (*Vitbich.org*, *Podneprovie-info.com*, *Grodnodaily.net*, *Berestje-news.org*) were purchased at the same day on 19 February 2019. They belong to one person listed as **Aleksey Semenov** and based in Moskovskaya Oblast, Russia.



The image shows a screenshot of a WHOIS record for the domain podneprovie-info.com. The browser address bar shows the URL https://www.whois.com/whois/podneprovie-info.com. The record is titled "Technical Contact" and lists the following information:

Name:	Aleksey Semenov
Organization:	Private person
Street:	[REDACTED]
City:	Dmitrov
State:	MOSCOW REGION
Postal Code:	141800
Country:	RU

One of CIS-EMO team members has the same first and last names.<sup>11</sup> This organization positions itself as the one in charge of independent electoral monitoring missions. It served as an umbrella organization for the so-called international observers during 2014 Crimea "referendum." Aleksey Semenov took part in CIS-EMO missions to unrecognized South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Transnistria.

In 2003-2013 CIS-EMO was chaired by **Aleksey Kochetkov**, a former Editor-in-Chief of *Russian Order*, newspaper by Russian neo-Nazi organization Russian National Unity. It was reported that Aleksey Kochetkov used to coordinate his activities with Sergey Vinokurov, head of the Department on Regional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries of the Russian Presidential administration.<sup>12</sup> It was also reported that Sergey Vinokurov left his office in 2012 for electoral failures in unrecognized South Ossetia and Transnistria.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.cis-emo.net/ru/sotrudniky/aleksey-semenov>

<sup>12</sup> [https://web.archive.org/web/20170406081815/http://www.newsab.ru/politics/id\\_342742/](https://web.archive.org/web/20170406081815/http://www.newsab.ru/politics/id_342742/)

<sup>13</sup> <https://newdaynews.ru/policy/366076.html>



Following that, he occupied an office of deputy head of Russia's SVR (Foreign Intelligence Service) until 2016.<sup>14</sup>

Currently CIS-EMO is chaired by **Stanislav Byshok**. In 2016 Aleksey Semenov co-authored a report titled *'Strategy of cooperation with foreign NGOs in post-Soviet space'* together with Aleksey Kochetkov, Stanislav Byshok, Kirill Averyanov-Minskiy and Tatyana Drozdovskaya. This report goes as the following:

*"A hundred years ago Russian intellectuals took the idea of 'independent Belarus' as a rosy phantasy of a handful of outcasts from the North-Western Area of Russian Empire. However, in the turbulent political period, Bolsheviks took over power. By creating Belarusian Soviet Social Republic and proclaiming Belarusians a distinct nation, they legalized Belarusian separatist project".<sup>15</sup>*

Regional disinformation network websites post similar publications about CIS-EMO activities. Among other things, all network websites published a series of articles about CIS-EMO election monitoring mission in Madagascar.<sup>16</sup>

Kochetkov and Byshok publish Belarus-related articles and provide commentaries. In March 2019 both were hosted by *Sputnik Belarus* twice. The video programs concerned Belarus-Russia relations<sup>17</sup> and Belarus' information security concept.<sup>18</sup> *Sputnik Belarus* presented the two as "famous Russian political experts".

In his January 2019 article for *Teleskop-by.org*, which was also republished by *Vitbich.org*, Stanislav Byshok writes:

*"Enthusiasm to live in a country stretching from Brest to Vladivostok, and not merely to Vitsyebsk (Viciebsk), is easy to understand and has to do with the ideas of cultural and civilizational unity of Belarusians and Russians, as well as with Soviet nostalgia among the old... The longer you exist within your distinct sovereign country, the more you get used to this, and the less enthusiasm remains about the prospects of changing this status".<sup>19 20</sup>*

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<sup>14</sup> <https://og.ru/society/2016/05/12/80798>

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.publicdiplomacy.su/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NPO\\_obrez\\_123\\_200.pdf](http://www.publicdiplomacy.su/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NPO_obrez_123_200.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Some of the links to the posts concerning the Madagascar election mission: <https://bit.ly/2UMB0ps> by Podneprovie-info.com, <https://bit.ly/2VLzCeM> by Sozh.info, <https://bit.ly/2Uu6NXP> by Vitbich.org, <https://bit.ly/2IxaODw> by Berestje-news.org, <https://bit.ly/2VJu98F> by Grodnodaily.net, <https://bit.ly/2UN8oaC> by Teleskop-by.org.

<sup>17</sup>

<https://sputnik.by/radio/20190306/1040434077/Byshok-i-Kochetkov-rasskazali-cto-nuzhno-dlya-polnotsennogo-i-nerushimogo-soyuza.html>

<sup>18</sup>

<https://sputnik.by/video/20190314/1040489534/Eksperty-Kontseptsiya-informatsionnoy-bezopasnosti--zaschita-ot-fake-news.html>

<sup>19</sup> <http://teleskop-by.org/2019/01/23/stanislav-byshok-sotsintern-protiv-soyuznogo-gosudarstva/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://vitbich.org/stanislav-byshok-socintern-protiv-soyuznogo-gosudarstva/>

When it comes to Homiel regional disinformation website *Sozh.info*, its domain's holder is **Sergey Lushch** (last name spelled as "Lusch" in domain registration database), former chairman of "Rus Molodaya" (The Young Rus). *Sozh.info* became functional much earlier than most other regional network websites and has become more popular in terms of the number of visits and social media followers.

sozh.info Updated 1 second ago

Domain Information	
Domain:	sozh.info
Registrar:	Regional Network Information Center, JSC dba RU-CENTER
Registered On:	2016-02-28
Expires On:	2019-02-28
Updated On:	2018-05-24
Status:	clientTransferProhibited
Name Servers:	ns1.hosting.reg.ru ns2.hosting.reg.ru

Registrant Contact	
Organization:	Sergey Lusch
Country:	RU

*Screenshot of Whois database retrieved on 12 January 2019.*

Sergey Lushch is often published by the regional disinformation network websites and national media too. He took part in *Sputnik Belarus* video programs about hybrid warfare,<sup>21</sup> discussion with Belarusian economist Yaraslaw Ramanchuk about patriotism<sup>22</sup> and with a former presidential candidate Tatsyana Karatkevich on the topic of Belarusian society development.<sup>23</sup>

**Stanislav Byshok** (CIS-EMO, supposedly in control of at least four domains of the regional disinformation network), **Lev Krishtapovich** (Editor-in-Chief of one of the most aggressive anti-Belarus websites *Teleskop-by.org*) and **Sergey Lushch** (*Sozh.info* domain holder) are

<sup>21</sup>

<https://sputnik.by/video/20180821/1037215008/lushch-o-gibridnoj-vojne-vsekh-protiv-vsekh-i-novyh-krizisnyh-ten-denciayah.html>

<sup>22</sup>

<https://sputnik.by/video/20181023/1038305696/Romanchuk-vs-Lusch-kak-vyrvat-ponyatie-patriotizm-iz-lap-formal-izma.html>

<sup>23</sup>

<https://sputnik.by/video/20190207/1039962714/Korotkevich-vs-Lusch-a-ne-poprobovat-li-reshat-problemy-strany-v-meste.html>

three out of four co-chairmen of **Civic Initiative 'Soyuz'** which was set up in Belarus in 2018.<sup>24</sup>

Fourth co-chairman is **Sergey Baburin**, former member of Russian State Duma, so-called "Russian Marches" co-organizer, head of "Russian all-people's union" political party. One of the party's objectives is *"to finalize the development of Russia-Belarus Union State quickly and consistently, as a core of a future Slavic superpower, a successor to the best traditions of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union."*<sup>25</sup>



*Lev Krishtapovich, Stanislav Byshok, and Sergey Lushch (left to right) at the founding congress of Civic initiative 'Soyuz' in Vitsyebsk (Viciebsk) in summer 2018. Photo by Teleskop-by.org*

One of the most aggressive sources of anti-Belarusian disinformation and propaganda with the use of hate speech, along with *Teleskop-by.org* and a regional disinformation network reviewed above, is the website of public organizations of Russian compatriots in Belarus 'Together with Russia' *Ross-bel.ru*.

*Ross-bel.ru* regularly posts articles authored by the Chairman of the Coordinating Council of the Leaders of the Belarusian Public Associations of Russian Compatriots (KSORS) **Andrey Gerashchenko** and other KSORS members, including **Sergey Lushch** (holder of *Sozh.info* domain), **Nikolay Sergeev** and **Lev Krishtapovich** (Editor-in-Chief of *Teleskop-by.org*) which often transmit aggressive disinformation and contain hate speech. Russian Ambassador to Belarus Mikhail Babich regularly meets KSORS representatives.

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<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting that one of the 'Soyuz' civic initiative publications names Aleksey Kochetkov a co-chariman, see: <http://rosbelsoyuz.su/2019/03/07/сопредседатели-гражданской-инициати/>

<sup>25</sup> <http://vsezarus.ru/about/programma-partii.html>



*Ambassador Mikhail Babich (sitting with his back to the camera) meets KSORS activists. Sitting in front of Babich from the left are Sergey Lusch (holder of Sozh.info domain) and Andrey Gerashchenko (Editor-in-Chief of Ross-bel.ru). A screenshot of the video report 'Diplomatic weekdays: One day of Mikhail Babich' by Russian TV channel Rossiya 24, 18 March 2019.*

## ross-bel.ru

Domain Information	
Domain:	ross-bel.ru
Registrar:	RU-CENTER-RU
Registered On:	2013-05-23
Expires On:	2019-05-23
Status:	REGISTERED, DELEGATED, UNVERIFIED
Name Servers:	ns1.megagroup.ru. ns2.megagroup.ru. ns.megagroup.ru.
Registrant Contact	
Organization:	Embassy of Russia in the Republic of Belarus

Russian Embassy is given as a holder of *Ross-bel.ru* domain.

Editor-in-Chief of *Ross-bel.ru* Andrey Gerashchenko advocates for extreme integration of Belarus and Russia, which will likely leave Belarus with only nominal sovereignty:

*"You cannot be half pregnant with integration: either one has to give birth to something or to face the problem of 'placental abruption.' I mean that [addressing] the issues of a common Constitution, parliament and monetary system have long been overdue."*<sup>26</sup>

In a recent publication (dated 18 March 2019) under the guise of a letter from Donetsk-based reader *Ross-bel.ru* wrote the following:

<sup>26</sup>

[http://ross-bel.ru/about/news\\_post/andrey-gerashchenko-nash-glavnyy-partner-rossiya-a-ne-yevrosoyuz-nelzya-stavit-znak-ravenstva-intervyu](http://ross-bel.ru/about/news_post/andrey-gerashchenko-nash-glavnyy-partner-rossiya-a-ne-yevrosoyuz-nelzya-stavit-znak-ravenstva-intervyu)

*"Belarusians, take care of your country! Forget about 'independence,' this is an obvious trick as in the contemporary predatory world there is no one. We will survive only together with strong Russia."*<sup>27</sup>

One of the books available at *Ross-bel.ru* is titled "Belarusian nationalism against Russkiy mir."<sup>28</sup> It was published by CIS-EMO and co-authored by Kirill Averyanov-Minskiy and Vladislav Maltsev and says the following:

- *"Only genuine realization of the Union State project, which envisages Belorussia's [reference to Belarus used in Russian press] incorporation in a common political space with Moscow, can contain Russophobic trends in Belarusian society;"*
- *"As long as Belarusian nationalism has ostentatious anti-Russian focus, the processes which are taking place in Belarus can lead to serious social upheavals. Belorussia is no less Russian-language and Russian-culture region than Donbass; therefore forceful 'Belarusization' is fraught with a repetition of 'Donbass scenario' in the Republic of Belarus;"*
- *"Russia's state bodies (foremost, Rossotrudnichestvo) and Russian media which broadcast on the territory of Belarus, have to do a consistent work on inculcation of the concept of 'triune Russian people' into the public consciousness, the concept which used to dominate in Belorussia until October revolution [of 1917]."*

*Ross-bel.ru* regularly posts publications with extreme conspiracy manifestations:

*"After the Soviet Union disappeared, old revanchist dreams about Rzeczpospolita stretching from the Black Sea to the Baltics returned to Poland from oblivion. In 2006 the Polish government adopted a program of establishing 4th Rzeczpospolita... Called by its proper name, it goes about turning the Republic of Belarus into a vassal-like anti-Russia [entity] dependent on Warsaw and Washington. Its western part is supposed to become "eastern borderlands" of a new Rzeczpospolita, and the remaining portion to turn into an anti-Russian buffer zone."*<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> [http://ross-bel.ru/about/news\\_post/pismo-iz-donetska](http://ross-bel.ru/about/news_post/pismo-iz-donetska)

<sup>28</sup> [http://ross-bel.ru/d/618179/d/extremizm\\_doklad\\_2.pdf](http://ross-bel.ru/d/618179/d/extremizm_doklad_2.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> [http://ross-bel.ru/about/news\\_post/strelkov-podtverdil-khudshiye-opaseniya-po-belorussii](http://ross-bel.ru/about/news_post/strelkov-podtverdil-khudshiye-opaseniya-po-belorussii)