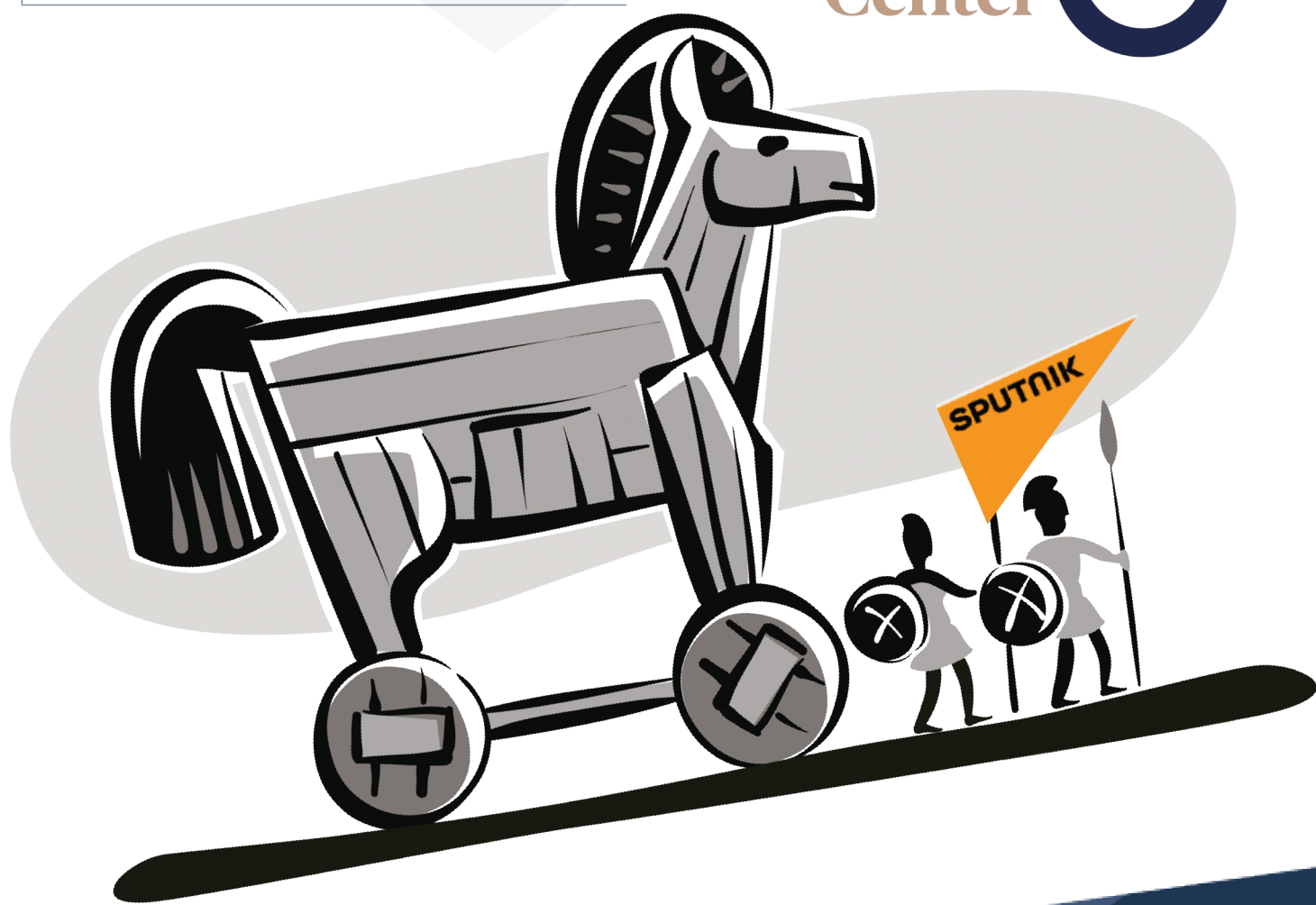


Sputnik Polska

Propaganda Narratives and Cases

Aliaksandr Aleshka



Sputnik Polska. Propaganda narratives and cases

About the Author

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About EAST Center

The Eurasian States in Transition Research Center (EAST Center) is an independent, interdisciplinary think-tank focused on post-Soviet and east European studies. The EAST Center's mission is to produce high quality research on disinformation in the Central and Eastern Europe, domestic and foreign policies in the eastern European countries, and the Eurasian Economic Union.

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INTRODUCTION

Sputnik is one of the largest Russian state-controlled international media outlets and is part of the Russia Today media group. The first online article of Sputnik Polska dates back to February 1, 2015.

The number of monthly visits to Sputnik Polska normally varies between 1.3 and 2 million². Polish mainstream online news media are much more popular. For instance, Wiadomosci.onet.pl, Gazeta.pl and Rp.pl, correspondingly, had 98.7 million, 84 million and 11.7 million views in June 2020. However, Sputnik Polska is quite visible among various anti-establishment Polish online media outlets.

Over the last year, around 30 authors actively contributed to Sputnik Polska, ten of them were Russia-based columnists. Sputnik Polska often republishes op-eds originally released by other Sputnik's offices.

Around two thirds of Sputnik Polska content is unrelated to Poland. It includes news about economic development, international relations, and various breaking news stories such as COVID-19 epidemic. Although there are examples of editorial bias, neutral and objective reporting is far more prevalent in such publications. It is less so in case of publications about Russia's and Ukraine's domestic development and foreign policy, which make up to 10–20% of Sputnik Polska content. Propaganda and media manipulation is mostly found in op-eds authored by either Sputnik journalists or external contributors.

² <https://www.similarweb.com/website/pl.sputniknews.com#overview>

This study is based on the systematic monitoring of materials published by Sputnik Polska from June 2019 to May 2020. Its first chapter defines 12 most recurring propaganda narratives promoted in Sputnik Polska publications and provides exemplary cases from EUvsDisinfo database³. Two other sections review two most recurring pro-Kremlin propaganda narratives concerning Poland's sovereignty and historical issues, based on Sputnik Polska publications.

³ <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/disinformation-cases/>

Sputnik Polska's common propaganda narratives

This section presents 12 most recurring propaganda narratives promoted by Sputnik Polska. They concern Poland's domestic and foreign policies as well as the ongoing historical dispute between Poland and Russia. Particular disinformation messages may fall into more than one propaganda narratives as often they are overlapping and interconnected.

POLAND IS A NON-SOVEREIGN, RUSSOPHOBIC STATE WHICH FACES SUBSTANTIAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND WAGES A "HISTORY WAR" AGAINST RUSSIA.

01 02 03

"Lost sovereignty" narratives

04 08

Russophobia and anti-Russian actions

05 06 07 09 10

History-related narratives

11 Polish imperialist intentions

12 Substantial economic problems

12

Poland faces substantial socio-economic and energy problems.

01

Poland is not a sovereign state.

02

Poland is an American "puppet state".

03

Poland is exploited by the US economically and financially.

04

Poland is a Russophobic country implementing anti-Russian policies.

05

Poland cooperated with Nazi Germany before WWII, it shares responsibility for WWII.

06

Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact has no connection with the WWII outbreak.

07

Poland revises history for political goals.

08

Poland is interested in anti-Russian, war-stricken Ukraine.

09

Poland owes the USSR a lot but does not value its goodwill.

10

Poland fights the memory of the Soviet soldiers who liberated it from Nazis.

11

Poland implements imperialist policies, threatens Ukraine and Belarus.

12
MAIN PROPAGANDA
NARRATIVES

1.

POLAND IS NOT A SOVEREIGN STATE, ITS DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICIES ARE DEPENDENT ON THE UNITED STATES, THE EUROPEAN UNION, GERMANY, ISRAEL AND OTHER FOREIGN ACTORS.

1. Today, Poland is not perceived as a country of strategic significance, and surely not as a country with [an independent foreign policy](#).
2. The Polish government is submissive not only to its main ally (or even a hegemon) – the United States but also to much smaller countries such as Israel. The evidence for this statement is the recent anti-Iranian conference in Warsaw, which was in reality organized by the USA and Israel. Polish independence is weakening, or it has [already been completely liquidated](#).
3. Currently, Poland is not an independent country as it entirely depends on the United States in a political and military way, and on Germany in an economic way. It means that Poland is not able to [implement an independent foreign policy](#).

2.

POLAND IS FULLY SUBORDINATED TO THE POLITICAL WILL OF THE UNITED STATES. IT IS AN AMERICAN PUPPET-STATE AND A “BANANA REPUBLIC”. THE POLISH DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY IS BASED ON PROMOTION OF AMERICAN GOALS IN THE CEE REGION AT THE EXPENSE OF POLISH NATIONAL INTERESTS.

1. Poland plays the role of a “banana republic” in its alliance with the United States. This country is allowing the hegemon to take advantage of it, without being forced to. The behavior of the American Ambassador in Poland may be described in colonial or post-colonial categories – “she behaves like a Governor of an area, which can be exploited. The locals have some legal regulations preventing such exploitation, so it is necessary to do something about it, [for example, using blackmail](#)”.
2. Poland is not an independent geopolitical subject, it only executes orders coming from the West; which incite direct confrontation with Russia. The Polish elites have been brought up by the Western foundations and power groups. Poland is governed by the US Embassy and the [American troops stationed there](#).
3. If the Polesit took place, it could happen only as a result of the command from Donald Trump and his policy of [pressure on the European subjects](#).

3.

POLAND FACES SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC LOSSES FROM ITS COOPERATION WITH THE UNITED STATES. DUE TO RUSSOPHOBIA AND FULL SUBORDINATION TO THE US WILL, POLISH POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT IS WILLING TO PAY A VERY HIGH PRICE FOR AMERICAN GAS AND WEAPONS.

1. The Polish Government is consciously fueling the anti-Russian propaganda in order to convince the Poles in need to bear [high expenses for American weapons](#).
2. The goal of Mr. Waszczykowski [former Head of the Polish MFA] is deeper economic dependency of Poland on the United States, this is manifested in the purchasing of expensive American gas. There is no talk about any military conflict in the region or a military confrontation between NATO and Russia as these are unreal. The constant intimidation with Russia and the spread of Russophobia has an economic dimension. Poland has to purchase American gas and weapons, provide the USA with beneficial concessions for the extraction of silver and copper and boycott the tax on the [American digital giants \(despite the EU position\)](#).
3. The American military base in Poland is very important for the USA, but not necessary at all for the Polish interests. Poland finances 100% of the costs of this base – it means that the Polish state pays 100% of the costs to achieve US strategic goals in the region. Poland helps the USA to play its geopolitical game [increasing the pressure on Russia](#).

4.

POLISH POLITICAL ELITE'S RUSSOPHOBIA EXPLAINS POLISH POLICIES TOWARDS RUSSIA. POLISH RUSSOPHOBES WISH TO HARM RUSSIA IN EVERY POSSIBLE SITUATION.

1. Every country of the world wants to take part in a big geopolitical game. Warsaw has recently become the “world’s mongrel”, ready to “bark” at Russia against any common sense and the [position of its EU partners](#).

2. The new National Security Strategy of Poland is a continuation of a traditional Russophobic course of the Polish authorities. It shows their determined and permanent orientation towards the United States and manifests their Russophobia. This situation is connected with active use of nationalism in the ideology of Poland – nationalism requires the presence of an enemy. It is important for the Polish authorities to have an enemy as they build their entire domestic policy on this fact. This document underlines the loyalty of Poland to the [USA as its main European ally](#).

3. Many Polish politicians are ready even to support the territorial rebirth of the Third Reich in order to weaken Russia. The current official historical policy of Poland leads to the conclusion that the worst Polish enemy and invader [was not Nazi Germany, but Soviet Russia](#).

5.

POLAND HAD BEEN ACTIVELY COOPERATING WITH NAZI GERMANY BEFORE WWII STARTED, THEY EVEN PLANNED JOINT ANTI-SOVIET ACTIONS. THIS MAKES POLAND CO-RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WWII OUTBREAK.

1. Polish leaders repeatedly met with Hitler, Göring and Ribbentrop. In 1934, the Piłsudski-Hitler pact was signed. This agreement was signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany and the Polish Ambassador to Germany Józef Lipski, known for his anti-Semitic views. Among other issues, this agreement assumed the partition of the land of the USSR, in which [Poland could also have taken part](#).
2. The Poles are trying to hide the fact that in many aspects, Warsaw was responsible for the increased appetites of Hitler towards the occupation of new territories. The Polish authorities repeatedly met with Hitler, Goering and Ribbentrop, carrying out negotiations regarding the conquest of the “living space” in the East. The Polish political elite planned to take part in the partition of the USSR with Nazi Germany. Poland [wanted to occupy Soviet Ukraine](#).
3. A classified report from the OGPU (special Soviet state security institution) speaks about the negotiations between the German Chancellor von Papen and French Prime Minister Édouard Herriot. The goal of these talks was to establish a military union between Germany, France and Poland against the USSR. It was before Hitler came to power when the potential allies mentally divided the Soviet Caucasus, Ukraine and even Sakhalin. Poland was supposed to be [rewarded with Soviet Ukraine](#).

6.

WWII WAS A RESULT OF NAZI GERMANY ACTIONS AND IRRESPONSIBLE POLICIES OF WESTERN DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES REFLECTED IN THE MUNICH AGREEMENT, PARTITION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA, AND WEST'S REFUSAL TO COOPERATE WITH THE USSR. THE MOLOTOV-RIBBENTROP PACT DID NOT PAVE THE WAY FOR WWII.

1. Polish authorities once again showed their Russophobic nature by not inviting Russia to the celebrations of the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II. Polish side, as always, accuses Russia of signing the non-aggression pact [the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact] in August 1939, even though it was repeatedly proven that this document [did not violate the rights of the Polish state](#).

2. The shift of all blame for the WWII outbreak at the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact is the best example of manipulation of history. It is important to remember the existence of the Pilsudski-Hitler pact signed in 1934 (Non-Aggression Pact between Poland and Germany). Signing of this pact [gave Hitler time to re-equip his army](#).

3. In 1939, the “ideal scenario” assumed by the UK authorities at the beginning of the war between Germany and the USSR was the partition of Poland, which was sacrificed by the UK to inspire a conflict between Stalin and Hitler. In this situation, the UK would have been able to present itself as a peace-making force, increasing its influence in Europe. Although, this “UK schedule of war” was thwarted by Hitler, who forced Stalin to sign the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and [attacked France instead of the USSR](#).

7.

POLAND IS WAGING A “HISTORICAL” WAR AGAINST RUSSIA, ADJUSTING THE XX CENTURY HISTORY TO ITS CURRENT ANTI-RUSSIAN POLITICAL GOALS.

1. The main initiators of historical revisionism and denial of truth about the liberation of their territory are the Baltic States, Ukraine and Poland. It is clear that these countries pursue not military, but political revanchism. The current position of these countries (denial of the role of the USSR in WWII, denial of the role of the Red Army in the destruction of Nazis) [fuels their confrontation with Russia](#).
2. In recent years, Poland promoted its historical narratives in a way which does not allow any opposing views. Poland is ruthless in the presentation of its vision of history and it does not see any possibilities [for a civilized discussion on historical issues](#).
3. Warsaw tries to adjust history to politics. Due to the current political situation, within the so-called historical policy, the historical facts are interpreted in a way, which often does not have any connection to history. They are adapted [to justify the current political goals](#).

8.

RUSSOPHOBIC POLAND IS STRATEGICALLY INTERESTED IN THE WAR IN UKRAINE BECAUSE IT IS DAMAGING FOR RUSSIA.

1. Main political forces of Poland try to prevent the Ukrainian-Russian reconciliation – they are interested in the continuation of the conflict. They need this conflict to have an opportunity to continue frightening Polish society with the Russian Army.
2. Poland does not care about the peace in Eastern Ukraine, or in the East in general, nor about the well-being of the Ukrainians. The Polish politicians, thinking in the anti-Russian categories, perceive Ukraine as an important issue only if it harms Russia. Otherwise, if Ukraine stops harming Russia, the Polish politicians and publicists lose their interest in this country.
3. Warsaw does not carry out any type of policy towards its Eastern neighbours as all of the Polish foreign actions have turned into an instrument used to weaken the Russian positions in the post-Soviet region. For example, the Polish policy towards Ukraine has only one priority – to keep this country in the orbit of the anti-Russian states. Poland's Eastern policy is formed by the actions dictated by the interests of the United States.

9.

THE USSR LIBERATED POLAND FROM NAZI OCCUPATION AND ACTIVELY CONTRIBUTED TO POLAND'S POST-WAR RESTORATION. TODAY, POLAND REFUSES TO APPRECIATE SOVIET ASSISTANCE REFERRING TO THE "SOVIET OCCUPATION".

1. The USSR provided huge economic assistance to ruined Poland, and the Polish economy was revived thanks to the Soviet Union. The recent statements of the Polish authorities is another attempt to rewrite history according to the current anti-Russian sentiments prevailing among the Polish elite. The USSR not only liberated Poland but also [helped to rebuild this country](#).
2. The Nazi command wanted to set a trap, flooding Krakow, its inhabitants and the Soviet soldiers. These plans were not implemented thanks to the operation carried out by the group led by Lieutenant Alexei Botian. This Russian hero led the operation [to save Krakow from Nazi destruction](#).
3. Stalin, after the victory in WWII, did not decide to include new republics into the USSR. He decided [to establish independent countries](#) such as Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania – and Poland.

10.

THE POLISH AUTHORITIES IMPLEMENT A CONSISTENT POLICY OF DESTRUCTION OF THE RED ARMY MONUMENTS AND CEMETERIES. THEY REFUSE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE USSR'S CONTRIBUTION TO POLAND'S LIBERATION FROM NAZIS.

1. The Polish authorities destroy the burial places of Soviet soldiers in order to make history more “comfortable”.
2. Russia believes that the war the Polish authorities waged against monuments to the Soviet soldiers is disgraceful. Poland has carried out another act of state vandalism. These steps by the Polish authorities are aimed at the destruction of the Soviet memorial heritage in this country. Poland continues the shameful war against Soviet monuments, harming Polish-Russian relations even more. The Polish authorities go beyond the borders of behaviour of civilised countries.
3. Russia calls upon the Polish authorities to stop their fight against the memory of the fallen Soviet soldiers and to implement real steps regarding the fight with vandalism.

11.

THE POLISH POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT ATTEMPTS TO MAKE BELARUS AND UKRAINE POLAND'S VASSALS. WARSAW CONTINUES ITS IMPERIALIST POLICIES.

1. The Giedroyc policy is an edition of the Polish imperialism. It tries to pull into the Polish sphere of influence a country [Belarus], which is a natural part of the Russian culture and which is connected to Russia with historical, cultural and ethnic ties. This is done in order [to establish a buffer zone between Poland and Russia](#).

2. The future of the EU depends on whether it will be able to establish space for international cooperation and dialogue. The Polish authorities do everything to undermine this goal. They are obsessed with the revenge ideas for the defeats of the previous centuries. They are dreaming about the dominance in Eastern Europe and reconstruction of a modern Polish Empire similar to the First Rzeczpospolita, where Ukraine and Belarus would be the vassals of Warsaw. Today, this plan of Poland is [one of the biggest threats](#) for the future of the European Union.

12.

POLAND IS AN ECONOMIC PERIPHERY OF EUROPE, ITS ECONOMY AND ENERGY SECTOR ARE IN DEEP TROUBLE.

1. Poland is a country with the highest social inequality in the European Union. This situation [causes political problems](#) as the poorest people rarely vote (so they are excluded from political life).
2. Since the 16th century, Poland has been the periphery of Europe – currently, it continues to be the European outsider. The economic growth of this country is achieved by the low level of life of the Poles. Also, the Poles have longer working weeks than any other country (after South Korea). The modern-day capitalists compensate for the lack of innovations in the Polish economy [by the exploitation of workers and low salaries](#).
3. Poland has to find a way to justify the existence of its LNG terminal, which does not bring any financial benefits to the state. Undoubtedly, the LNG deliveries through this terminal are less profitable than gas deliveries from Russia. The gas terminal in Świnoujście is not sufficiently loaded and currently, the [American LNG cannot replace the Russian gas](#).

II. Poland as an American “puppet state”

Sputnik Polska tends to explain most of the Polish actions which contradict Kremlin’s views and policies as a result of Poland’s excessive dependence on the US. Often Warsaw has to follow such policies contrary to its own national interests, Sputnik’s publications say. Claims about Poland’s subordination to US power and its puppet status are the most popular among other propaganda narratives promoted by Sputnik Polska. There are many modifications of the propaganda claim about Poland’s limited sovereignty.

- Poland’s foreign and domestic policies are entirely dependent on the US;
- Polish political establishment promotes American goals, Polish national security strategy was dictated by the US;
- Poland’s anti-Russian policies result from pro-American attitude of Polish authorities and US pressure;
- Polish energy sector decision makers are based in the US, Poland’s position towards Gazprom harms Polish national interests;
- Polish foreign policy is the continuation of the US policy in the Central and Eastern Europe;

- Poland faces economic losses due to military cooperation with the US, it has to pay a lot for American military presence and expensive US weapons systems;
- The US uses Poland for various “dirty” tasks such as anti-Russian provocations;
- The US uses the “Polish” Three Seas Initiative to expand its power in Central and Eastern Europe.

Sputnik Polska alleges that Polish authorities are purposefully spreading Russophobia in order to make Poland even more economically dependent on the US. Washington does not appreciate Polish services and US security commitments to Poland are not credible, Sputnik Polska also claims. It alleges that in case of hypothetical Russian aggression, the US will withdraw its troops rather than defend Poland.



Historical issues on Sputnik Polska's agenda

Sputnik Polska has been actively covering Russia-Poland row over WWII start, which escalated after Vladimir Putin's [controversial statements](#) in December 2019. Since then the number of publications exporting historical revisionism and promoting speculative interpretations has dramatically increased.

The West attempts to revise WWII history.

Accusations of Soviet cooperation with Nazi Germany in 1939–1941 are perceived by Russia as West's attempts to revise WWII history. Sputnik Polska publications conjure the image of an aggressive West attempting to re-write WWII history, thus justifying Moscow's response.

The EU Parliament's resolution "On the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe" adopted in September 2019 gained particular attention from Sputnik Polska. According to Sputnik contributors, the resolution is [aimed at "demonizing" Russia and downplaying the Soviet Union's role](#) in defeating Nazi Germany in World War II.

**The USSR is not to blame for the beginning of WWII.
The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact did not trigger the war.**

Sputnik attempts to minimize the historical significance of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, consistently alleging that it did not pave the way for WWII outbreak. The Pact is presented as a forced step the USSR had to make as a result of irresponsible pre-war policies of Western countries and growing military threat from Nazi Germany.

Therefore Sputnik Polska [shifts the blame for WWII](#) to the Munich Agreement and other pre-war events as well as to the Western countries and eastern European states which [refused to closely cooperate with the USSR](#).

Poland manipulates history, carries out an information war against Russia.

Angry rebuttals by Polish politicians and criticism of Putin's historical claims by Polish historians are presented by Sputnik as Polish information war against Russia. Sputnik Polska accuses the authorities of Poland of [using history for political goals](#) and vicious information attacks against Russia. Poland is presented as a country [unwilling to have a civilized historical discussion with Russia](#).

Poland as a Nazi Germany partner.

Sputnik Polska articles promote the views that Poland actively cooperated with pre-war Nazi Germany and aspired to support its aggressive plans against the USSR. According to Sputnik Polska, [Poland avoids conversations](#) about intensive cooperation with pre-war Germany. Poland [preferred closer relations with Nazi Germany](#) to cooperation with the USSR and [posed a military threat to the USSR](#) as it appeared "in the Nazi block's sphere", Sputnik Polska claims.

Sputnik Polska publications allege that Poland was supposed [to take part in the USSR partition](#) in accordance with the Polish-German Non-Aggression Pact of 1934 and [to occupy Soviet Ukraine](#). A secret protocol to the Polish-German Pact is said [to specify Polish assistance to Germany](#) in case of German-Soviet war. Furthermore, Sputnik Polska alleges that even before Adolf Hitler's rise to power

France, Germany and Poland wished to create a military alliance aimed at partitioning the USSR.

Therefore, Sputnik Polska suggests that as a Nazi ally Poland has no moral right to accuse the USSR of military aggression on September 17, 1939.

Poland turns a blind eye on dark chapters of its history and is ungrateful to the USSR.

Sputnik Polska points at dark chapters of Poland's history and suggests that Warsaw has no moral right to blame the USSR or Russia for Soviet invasion of Poland. Instead, Sputnik promotes the view that Poland is to blame for XX century tragic events and owes a lot to the USSR for liberation from Nazis and post-war economic assistance.

Sputnik Polska uses whataboutism focusing on such issues as the pre-war anti-Semitism in Poland, partition of Czechoslovakia in 1938, and cooperation with Nazi Germany. Moscow believes Poland has an unpaid debt to the USSR and Russia and should be grateful for Soviet liberation from Nazis, post-war reconstruction, and the very fact of existence as an independent state, Sputnik Polska publications claim.

CONCLUSION

As a rule, most news publications by Sputnik Polska maintain standards of journalism and rarely contain explicit propaganda and misinformation. At the same time Sputnik Polska uses selection bias by focusing too much on Russian policies, Ukrainian events, NATO-Russia relations, and geopolitical rivalry. Sputnik Polska consistently offers its audience Kremlin's views on NATO's policies, the annexation of Crimea, Donbas conflict, and other international events. Propaganda and media manipulation is mostly found in Sputnik Polska op-eds.

The whole range of propaganda content by Sputnik Polska can be classified into 12 main narratives, which are aimed at questioning the degree of Poland's sovereignty, pointing at alleged Russophobia and anti-Ukrainian policies, and criticizing Polish perspectives on historical events. All of them fit into two following dominant macro narratives:

- Polish policies towards Ukraine and Russia are driven by Russophobia and Poland's dependency on the US, they harm Poland's genuine national interests. Due to irrational behaviour of Polish ruling establishment, anti-Russian policies cause large economic and political losses to Poland. Instead, it can take a more pragmatic approach by reducing US's control, giving up Russophobia, and improving relations with Russia. Warsaw should follow the examples of Germany or Hungary in yielding relations with Russia to a friendly adjustment.
- Poland rewrites history by distorting facts and refuses to accept correct views on historical events. Poland has no moral right to accuse the USSR and Russia of Soviet invasion as it fell victim to dark chapters of its own history. If Poland cooperated with the USSR in the 1930s, it could have avoided 20th century disasters. Poland is to blame itself for tragic events and owes a lot to the USSR for liberation from Nazis and post-war economic assistance.

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