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Disinformation, that is Russian Sabotage in the Polish Media

The most spectacular examples of disinformation concerning the military sphere in 2016-2017

The report presents a review of the most spectacular disinformation, that is, manipulated or made up information, which came up in the sphere of the Polish media in the period from July 2016, that is before the NATO summit in Warsaw, until September 2017, that is, right before the Belarus – Russian manoeuvres Zapad 2017 near the Polish border. It concerns the cases of creating and broadcasting information, opinions or medial communicates which are hundred percent false, whose authorship is ascribed to high rank militaries and officials, as well as cases of breaking into media and self-government web pages in order to spread them. Their subjects, among others, sharp criticism of NATO, including the presence of USA forces on the territory of Poland, and discrediting Polish armed forces, can testify that they had been inspired by Russia, which perceives NATO and the rise of its involvement on the eastern flank as one of the greatest military and political threats.

„We do not give our consent for our Homeland – Poland – to become another victim to American imperial politics, to American expansionism”.

On the 7th September 2017, toward morning, on the portal of “Nasz Dziennik” (“Our Daily”), a Polish newspaper of catholic-national profile ([archivised web page](#)) [some of the links in the paper can be inactive due to removing false contents by the owners of the portals, that’s why, where it is possible, we shall put in brackets the links to archivised pages, for example a Google cache – note by the author], there appeared information about an alleged letter by Paweł Kukiz, the leader of the opposition party Kukiz’15, to President Andrzej Duda. The politician allegedly demanded from the President of the Republic of Poland removing the American contingent from Polish land, in the name of retaining national sovereignty. He allegedly addressed him with the words: „We, the Polish patriots, express our doubts and our opposition in relation to introducing and locating USA troops on the territory of our Homeland”. The text was accompanied by a screenshot of the politician’s profile on Facebook with the scan of the letter with the characteristic official stamps.

The information on the page [naszdzienik.pl](#) was there until afternoon of that day and it started to be widely spread in social nets. Then it was revealed, that from the very outset it had been made up and put in the paper’s profile, [as the editor maintains](#), in result of a hacker’s attack.

In the morning of the same day, a similar incident took place on the portal [Kresy24.pl](#), publishing news from the Belarus, Lithuania, Ukraine, Russia, Asia and Transcaucasia. However, here the members of the editing board were more apprehensive and they removed the piece of false information immediately. The editor of [Kresy24.pl](#) also published a statement in which it informed about yet another [hacker’s attack on their page](#).

Both the portals can be described as media of the so called mainstream, functioning for many years already and cherishing much trust among their readers.

It is really noteworthy to see the time and the context of the false information's appearance. The fake letter of the leader of Kukiz'15 party appeared on the day before the manoeuvres Zapad 2017 began – in the manoeuvres, according to official data, just by the Polish and Lithuanian borders on the territory of the Belarus, 13 000 soldiers are to participate, including 3000 of the Russian contingent.

The informational service Kresy24.pl had fallen victim of a hacker's attack already before. On the 15th June 2017, on the page there appeared the text "[Dragon-2017 manoeuvres shall unleash the war](#)" ([archivised version](#)).

„For half a year, NATO has been throwing their equipment [original spelling – note by the author] and things over to the area of Poland. This is presented to the citizens as strengthening the country's defensibility against Russian invasion. Everybody, however, knows by now that NATO army is going to defend only Germany, perhaps France, Italy and Holland (please note that all the units are along the western border). Why has Poland been chosen as the terrain where the manoeuvres are to be run? Why do so many American soldiers live here almost on a steady basis" – declared the article written in clumsy Polish, containing not only stylistic, interpunction, but also spelling mistakes. The text was accompanied by an apocalyptic drawing copied from the game Red Alert 2.

In the text there appeared also charges against USA, accusing it of the intention of imposing its dominance over Europe, and of conquering Russia in order to scoop up its natural resources. The text was quickly removed from the page.

„The head of the General Staff: I expect to the demission of Macierewicz”.

On the 5th of September 2017 on the blog platform of the portal [Tokfm.pl](#), the blog platform [Salon24.pl](#) ([archivised page](#)) and the portal for citizens' journalism [Wiadomosci24.pl](#) ([archivised page](#)) there appeared a piece of information containing a fabricated screenshot of the screen of the portal "Dziennik Bałtycki" ("The Baltic Daily"), a paper from Pomerania (the sea-coast region of Poland), [dziennikbaaltycki.pl](#) quoting the head of the general staff, General Leszek Surawski, who allegedly was expecting quick demission of the Minister of Defence. Here, however, the ineptness of the fakers was rather striking. The title "The head of the General Staff: I expect to the demission of Macierewicz" is a clear calque from Russian. In the text there appeared charges accusing the Minister of National Defence of breaking up the Polish Army, of having many liaisons with the Kremlin people, and also claims that in the Polish army there is an epidemic of drug addiction. The information was debunked by the General Staff of the Republic of Poland.

„Drunkards, hypes, thieves, sluggards, these are the soldiers of the 15th Giżycko Mechanized Brigade”

On the 26th of May 2017, on the day of the end of Polish-NATO trainings Puma 2017 in Orzysz, in the net appeared a fake interview with the lieutenant colonel Steven Gventer, the commander of NATO's Battalion Battle Group. The readers could learn e.g. that the soldiers from the 15th Mechanized Brigade trade and take drugs. The criminal gang is commanded by the brigade commander, General Jarosław Gromadziński.

„I am very dissatisfied with what I have seen here. Drunkards, hypes, thieves, sluggards, these are the soldiers of the 15th Giżycko Mechanised Brigade. I have an impression that they don't give a damn about anything” – such was the alleged summing up of the state of Polish soldiers' discipline by lieutenant colonel Steven Gventer.

The text appeared first in English on an alleged page of the American lieutenant on the blog service [Panjury.com](#). The author of the interview was supposedly one of the journalists of the OKO.press portal, which was quickly [denied by his editor](#). Later, already translated, it appeared on the page of the infamous for fierce anti-Americanism, [Niezależny Dziennik Polityczny](#) (Independent Political Daily), in the blog [Zbigniew77](#) in the blog service Salon24.pl, including entries critical towards the USA, and even another fake interview with the lieutenant colonel Gventer, who allegedly maintains that during trainings in Poland one will use the mustard gas.

„USA army in Poland is not a proof of partnership but of our vassalism and weakness”

On the 16th of January 2017, already after the coming of the Americans to Poland, a fake statement allegedly by division general Sławomir Wojciechowski appeared as a part of a fake interview to the popular RMF FM radio journalist, Robert Mazurek. The general reputedly attacked fiercely the American involvement in Poland.

„Since the very beginning I have been saying that the Polish tax payers shall pay for the illusory military American presence in Poland as for grain, blocking the financing of their own army's development, weakening it and making it dependent on others. USA army in Poland is not a proof of partnership but of our vassalism and weakness” – division general Sławomir Wojciechowski would allegedly say.

Of course, the high-rank Polish military officer was not a guest of the programme on that day, and the course of the interview was partly made up and partly compiled of the facebook entry of the deputy of the right-wing National Movement Robert Winnicki, who perceived the presence of “alien military forces in the time of peace” as a sign of a state's weakness.

The text, accompanied by a specially prepared photo of the general in the studio of RFM FM radio, cut out of a photograph made in Kosovo, was promoted by a number of pages associated with Russian propaganda. For the needs of the interview's colportage, a [fictitious blog of the deputy of the Citizens' Platform party, Paweł Suski \(archivised version\)](#) was created in the Salon24.pl service. The information was also published by [Independent Political Daily](#), the blog platform of Interia.pl, Eioba.pl and also the portal [Dziennik Gajowego Maruchy \(Forester Bear's Daily\)](#), from where the material was subsequently shared in social nets.

„NO to USA forces in Poland!”

On the 12th of January 2017, the web pages of at least [12 commune townhalls](#) became victims of amassed informational war. Hackers at the same time put on all of them an entry entitled „We invite you heartily to patriots' march!”, in which they published an alleged [invitation of Daniel Marchewka, the mayor of Żagań, to patriots' march](#) under the slogan „NO to USA forces in Poland!”. The appeal contained, among others, the statement:

„On the 14th of January, on PiS government’s request, Poland is going to lose the remnants of its sovereignty. The American army has conquered Poland without a single shot, the elites’ betrayal had sufficed. Antoni Macierewicz, Witold Waszczykowski, and first of all Jarosław Kaczyński – have brought here the new Teutonic Order!”

The piece of information was quickly debunked by [the alleged author of the invitation himself](#), as well as by the authorities of each particular commune.

The moment of the hackers’ attack was correlated with a column of American soldiers, to be situated in Żagań, crossing the Polish border. The regional daily „Gazeta Lubuska” informed that the information about the march it got by email on the night 12/13 July 2017, [sent from the mailbox of one of the Lubusk communes](#).

„Andrzej Duda initiates war activities”

Two fabricated statements of Polish militaries appeared on the day before the NATO summit in Warsaw. One of them was to be said by General Marek Tomaszycycki, the operational commander of RSZ, allegedly interviewed by the portal Onet.pl. The statement appeared on the 9th of July 2017 on the web page of [TV Gloria](#), which officially gives its Moscow address. In his alleged statement the General was to say, among others:

„We have let ourselves be drawn onto a game which leads to destruction, because already before the beginning of the NATO summit, Mr President Andrzej Duda had given it an anti-Russian tone and this way he initiates war activities”.

In the fabricated interview, the general was to point to tensions between the countries of the alliance. He claimed that according to Germany, strengthening the eastern flank means politics oriented onto confrontation with the Russian Federation and that they definitely opt for preserving the status quo in this area. “Where is this alliance going? This we don’t know, but what we know for sure is that it will be a great success if this organization, which today is simply a dinosaur and a tool of American politics in the world – survives. And Poland? No sense even talking about it!” – declared the general in the fabricated text.

„Trying to stop Russia is a real mistake”

On the 6th of July 2016 on the page of [Twoja Telewizja Religijna](#) („Your Religious TV”) from Wejherowo, as well as on the profile of [Niezależny Dziennik Polityczny](#) (Independent Political Daily) on the platform [NEon24.pl](#) there appeared a fake interview with General Mirosław Różański entitled „NATO – more fuss than real things”, where he supposedly belittled the Alliance’s defence abilities and the possibility of stopping Russia. “From the point of view of the citizens of the inaptly governed European countries, whose stupid politics has already put them in conflict with the neighbouring nuclear super-empire, trying to stop Russia is a real mistake [original spelling – note by the author]. A couple of days ago, German diplomacy another time let it drop – straightforwardly – that in their opinion there is no possibility of ensuring security in Europe, without cooperation – without agreement with the Russian Federation” – goes a passage from the alleged interview

Trial balloons

The above examples, however few, are characterised by a high level of involvement of means and people. Starting from the authors of the fake interviews through the work of the graphic artists to the work of the hackers. The fact that the number of the fakes is rather limited for the time being can suggest that they are a kind of trial balloons aiming at evaluating the susceptibility of the Polish society to contents presented in the fake news, e.g. through checking their range in social nets and defining the target group. The character of the contents proves that their authors wanted to use not only people of anti-American attitude to spread their news, but they also intended to use people of patriotic and national views, manifesting their strong attachment to the idea of national sovereignty. For another target group and potential transmitter of the fakes, the choice fell on people who are afraid of armed conflict, allegedly provoked by NATO.

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The author used information gathered by the authors of the fanpage Russian Fifth Column in Poland on Facebook as well as by the user Szurszur from the portal Wykop.pl