

# Toward Understanding the Hungarian Right-Wing Media Narrative about the Russian Aggression in Ukraine



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The Hungarian government has always had a strong relationship with Russia. This has changed since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine due to the fact that Hungary is, after all, a member of the European Union (EU). This is why Hungary could no longer keep such a strong connection to Russia as before. Still, the Hungarian right-wing media is known for its centralized opinions coming from the government<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, it is crucial to explore which Hungarian right-wing media outlets are using Russian propaganda, how they are doing it, and what links can be found between Russian and Hungarian media.

The governing party uses its media to spread their ideas, which allows it to be more radical than in their own communication. *"After the turnaround in 2010, the media system was re-monopolized. More and more organs became the governments mouthpieces; above all, the channels, which had been downgraded from public service to state ownership, and many other privately owned presses. Media pluralism, i.e., diverse, factual[,] and objective information, is under threat"*<sup>2</sup>.

While the government changed their messaging concerning Russia, their media kept promoting ideas coming in from the Russian Federation. State television channels, newspapers, and online pages are still using Russian propaganda. They promote these ideas because the government has been pursuing a pro-Russian narrative for the past decade.

<sup>1</sup> Máriás, L., et.al. (2019) "Központosított Médiarendszer Lány Cenzúra 2018", [in]: *Mérték Füzetek* 17. szám [in Hungarian]

<sup>2</sup> Martin, J.P. (2019) "Kéz a kézben a lejtőn. Korruptió és sajtószabadság a média trendek tükrében", [in]: *Médiakutató*, Vol. XX, No. 3. [in Hungarian]

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IN 2014, IN HIS INFAMOUS SPEECH IN TUSNÁDFÜRDŐ, PM ORBÁN ANNOUNCED THAT HUNGARY IS NO LONGER A LIBERAL DEMOCRACY, BUT RATHER AN ILLIBERAL ONE AND IDENTIFIED PUTIN'S RUSSIA, AMONG OTHERS, AS A MODEL COUNTRY

As Hungary is a member of organizations such as the European Union and NATO, it is understandable that the government cannot talk about Russia in the same way as it did before, but their voters are used to the Russian narrative. This is why the right-wing media continue to use Russian propaganda, so as not to be seen as a sudden shift in communication. Media can talk about the Russian aggression in a more friendly way and even can blame Ukraine for it. It is possible because the media simply can do more than an elected government. These media products are

directed by the governmental propaganda machine, but as a journalist or a TV presenter you can still say that it is just your opinion. However, someone who is an elected politician does not have the same ‘freedom’.

The government uses its media to keep a good relationship with Russia and broadcasts fake information about the war for Hungarians. Interestingly, the Russian propaganda machine often talks about Hungary – to an extent that a well-known tv presenter willingly participates in this, which shall be discussed in detail below. It is also good for the government, because after years of Russian propaganda usage, the people who believed that information can still get those and are not subject to cognitive dissonance redundancy, but the government can say that they do not support the aggression at all.



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In fact, the Hungarian government’s main message is that peace is the most important thing in the world, and the opposition side is the one who wants to force Hungary into the war. But their media is quite different.

## THE CHANGE OF THE MEDIA SYSTEM IN HUNGARY

During the first two decades after the change of regime (the end of the communist era) in 1990, right-wing parties operated primarily small media platforms. This changed when Fidesz – KDNP won the elections and started to build a new media system in 2010. As observed by József Péter Martin, a senior lecturer at Corvinus University of Budapest, *[i]n the 2010 parliamentary elections, with a two-thirds majority in parliament, the Fidesz-KDNP coalition made a new media law.*<sup>3</sup> Moreover, no opposition parties nor NGOs were consulted before the legislation was tabled, and all opposition parties later voted against the amendment. This law, which is still in force today, also created a new media council, all members of which were voted in by a two-thirds majority of the governing coalition. The powers of the council were extended not only to television, radio, or print media, but also to the internet<sup>4</sup>. This has been the most significant change until this day in the media system in Hungary as the law made it possible for the government to manage the media as they please.

## THE HUNGARIAN NARRATIVE BEFORE THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Before 2010, PM Orbán held the view that the future of Hungary lies in its western orientation. After Fidesz won with a two-

<sup>3</sup> Bajomi-Lázár, P. (2017) “Tekintélyelvűség és szabadelvűség között – Paradigmaváltások a magyarországi politika és média viszonyában”, [in]: *Politikatudományi Szemle*, No. 26. [in Hungarian]

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

third majority in 2010, this opinion soon changed, and he announced the politics of ‘eastern opening’. In 2014, in his infamous speech in Tusnádfürdő, PM Orbán announced that Hungary is no longer a liberal democracy, but rather an illiberal one and identified Putin’s Russia, among others, as a model country<sup>5</sup>.

The right-wing media in Hungary has always presented the same opinion as the governing party and the Prime Minister. For example, one of the biggest pro-government sites, *Origo*, wrote about the Orbán-Putin meeting in 2019 as follows:

*“Russian President Vladimir Putin, one of the world’s most influential politicians, has visited Budapest, where he signed eight agreements with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. A new gas supply contract was announced, the new Ukrainian leadership and the situation of Hungarians in Transcarpathia were discussed, bilateral economic relations were discussed, NATO and Western countries’ relations with Russia were improved (...)”<sup>6</sup>.*

The positive context of presenting the events, calling Putin “one of the world’s most influential politicians” may indicate that the government’s and the right-wing media’s point of view is the same.

## FAKE NEWS AND THE RUSSIAN NARRATIVE

When the right-wing media is controlled by the government, fake news may occur. In Hungary, in addition to the public media, the government is also able to influence media outlets that are initially linked to private entrepreneurs – this can be done in such a way that these owners do not have a government role, but are still sympathetic to the government. In 2018, KESMA (Central European Press and Media Foundation) was established, to which more than 470 Hungarian media outlets were transferred from these private entrepreneurs<sup>7</sup>.

Spreading fake news for political gain is one thing, but using propaganda from Russia is a whole other part of the story. The fact that Hungarian right-wing media use Russian narrative is clear. For instance, the employees of the taxpayer funded national MTVA network have, admittedly, fabricated fake news about immigration for the benefit of the government. In addition, pro-government media spread pro-Kremlin conspiracies, as well as fake news, on political and non-political issues – both in public media and in private media close to the government<sup>8</sup>. Interestingly, Hungarian right-wing media still uses disinformation from Russia, but they changed the extent of it, apart from some extreme examples.

<sup>5</sup> Szabad Európa (2023) *Hogy jelenik meg Magyarország Putyin propagandájában, és fordítva?*. Available [online]: <https://www.szabadeuropa.hu/a/magyar-orosz-putyin-kormanypropaganda-cimek/32407272.html> [in Hungarian]

<sup>6</sup> MTI/ORIGO (2019) *Óriási magyar sikert hozott az Orbán-Putyin csúcstalálkozó*. Available [online]: <https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20191030-orban-viktor-es-vlagyimir-putyin-budapest-talalkoztak.html> [in Hungarian]

<sup>7</sup> Szebeni, Z., Lönnqvist J.E and I. Jasinskaja-Lahti (2021) *Social Psychological Predictors of Belief in Fake News in the Run-Up to the 2019 Hungarian Elections: The Importance of Conspiracy Mentality Supports the Notion of Ideological Symmetry in Fake News Belief*. Available [online]: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.790848/full>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## ORGIO.HU: THE PROBLEMATIC HUNGARIAN RIGHT-WING NEWS SITE

When it comes to adapting the narrative to be less problematic in light of the ongoing full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Orgio.hu, the third biggest web portal in Hungary (infamous for spreading the narrative of the Hungarian governing coalition, Fidesz-KDNP) is a very telling example. Being one of the key news sources for most Hungarians, after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, this media outlet has changed its messaging.

According to the 2023 research conducted by the Political Capital, a Hungarian think tank, the headlines used by Orgio are similar to Russian propaganda. One of the findings indicates that Vladimir Putin is mentioned more frequently in headlines than Zelensky.

*"Putin was typically featured more in the first five months of the war, from 13 to 26 times, while in the last eight months, he has been in the headlines 7 to 12 times a month. Zelensky has been mentioned more frequently in headlines since November last year, but Orgio readers were still more likely to see a headline about Putin each month"<sup>9</sup>.*

However, one could argue the fact that the Russian president is mentioned more often still does not necessarily mean that it is indicative of spreading Russian propaganda. That may be true, but the research does not stop there – the Political Capital also examined the contexts and connotations of the headlines. They found out that 'Zelensky' appears predominantly in a negative context.

*"If we look only from here, we can see – in line with Russian propaganda claims – a picture of a "reckless leader" with "dangerous" and "crazy ideas", making "scandalous" and "desperate" decisions. Moreover, he "takes revenge on his own people", "sends his soldiers to their deaths", "wants to involve more countries in the war", and "has started a third world war" and "nuclear war". He is a "human wimp": a "liar", a "coward", a "drunk" (to the extent that he "started speaking Russian"), a "secret neo-Nazi" and has a "scandalous business record"<sup>10</sup>*

In contrast, as regards representing the Russian president,

*"Origo breaking news articles of the past 13 months have portrayed Vladimir Putin – the leader who initiated the war- not as an aggressor but as a determined but prudent head of state of a great power. Putin "makes announcements" (37 times), "sends messages" (28), "responds" (12), "takes decisions" (10), and usually does so in a "tough", "dramatic", "unexpected", and "extraordinary" way. A negative context like that of Zelensky and Biden did not appear in any of the 160 occurrences"<sup>11</sup>.*

In their study, the Political Capital found that, according to *Origo*, Putin is portrayed as a strong, and more importantly, a calm leader who does not matter what tries to win this war as quick as possible. On the other hand, Zelensky is said to have poor leadership skills, be reckless, and kill his own citizens in the war<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Krekó P. and Cs. Molnár (2023) *Disinformation Wonderland in the Hungarian Government-Controlled Online Media: Origo's Articles on Putin and Zelensky*. Available [online]: [https://politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article\\_read=1&article\\_id=3192](https://politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article_read=1&article_id=3192)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Of course, the Hungarian government does not communicate the war in Ukraine in the same fashion. Interestingly, before the full-scale invasion, the government and their media communication went hand in hand, although the latter has always been a bit more radical than the government. This has not changed, except in one case. When the Fidesz government talks about the war, the statements of the right-wing media and the government are completely different.

The position of the Hungarian government is that peace should be achieved as soon as possible (yet, they have never explained how this could be done), whereas the right-wing media usually talk about peace as well, but they have a specific proposal on how to achieve this goal: it is Ukraine that must stop the war. This is not only sur-

real, but also implicates that Ukraine is the one who started the war<sup>13</sup>.

How is it possible that a news portal such as *Origo* operates in a country that is a part of the European Union? Interestingly, *Origo* is one of the oldest online news sources in Hungary (it was founded in 1998) and has not always propagated Russian propaganda. Before 2015, it used to be one of the most reliable and popular news sites in the country. It was that year that everything changed, and the owners had to sell the site to a media company which has the same interest as the government.

Moreover, “[o]ne of the members of the media group that bought *Origo* also benefited from the growth loan programme of the Hungarian National Bank led by György Matolcsy, under a contract signed in August. [...] *New Wave Production Kft.*, the sister company of *New Wave Media Kft.*, which bought the Internet portal for HUF 4.2 billion, received a HUF 500 million loan from the Central Bank’s loan program[m]”<sup>14</sup>.



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<sup>13</sup> According to the Political Capital, “*The breaking news in Origo shows no intention of correcting the foreign policy orientation of the Hungarian government, and the news about Zelensky has become even more extreme in recent months than it initially was. The articles often openly cite exclusively Russian sources [...] and in many cases, clearly reflect the narratives spread in Europe by Russian disinformation outlets (e.g., about bioweapons or Zelensky dragging Europe into nuclear war)*”. Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to note at this point that the author had to use waybackmachine.com to access the article, because it was released in a newspaper called *Magyar Nemzet*. Back then, it was independent, but nowadays it also belongs to the government (although it is not widely known for propagating Russian propaganda). See: Horváth, C. L. (2015) *Ki vette meg valójában az Origót?*. Available [online]: <https://web.archive.org/web/20170330032015/https://mno.hu/belfold/ki-vette-meg-valojaban-az-origot-1319887> [in Hungarian]

Spreading fake news is morally reprehensible and can cause enormous damage. Therefore, nobody should be able to afford to do so, even if they are paid by the government – and that is often the case. According to an investigative journal called *Átlátszó* the pro-government media lost almost 400 press lawsuits, from this *Origo* lost more than 100<sup>15</sup>.

### RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA IN THE HUNGARIAN PUBLIC MEDIA

In theory, in most countries, public media serve as an all-around information service where the pro- and anti-government voices shall both be represented. In Hungary, however, it is quite a different story. Since 2010, public service media has been reorganized to provide programs and news that serve the interests of the government<sup>16</sup>. The programming is prone to spreading the ideas promoted by the government. In the case of Russian aggression against Ukraine, the main narrative is that we must strive to make peace as soon as possible. Moreover, information which seems like Kremlin propaganda is presented as well. When referring to the war in Ukraine, it is mostly about how President Zelensky is more responsible for the whole situation than Russia<sup>17</sup>. They also talk about a different path that Hungary took than the European Union and NATO.

<sup>15</sup> Erdélyi, K. (2022) *Közel 400 pert veszített 5 év alatt a Fidesz-barát média, ebből 103-at az Origo bukott*. Available [online]: <https://atlatszo.hu/kozugy/2022/02/23/kozel-400-pert-vesztett-5-ev-alatt-a-fidesz-barat-media-ebbol-103-at-az-origo-bukott/> [in Hungarian]

<sup>16</sup> Máriás, L., et.al. (2019) "Központosított Médiarendszer Lány Cenzúra 2018", [in:] *Mérték Füzetek 17. szám* [in Hungarian]

<sup>17</sup> Lakmusz (2022) *Orosz Propaganda A Magyar Állam Támogatásával: Hazai Dezinformáció Az Orosz-Ukrán Háború És A Választások Idején*. Available [online]: <https://www.lakmusz.hu/orosz-propaganda-a-magyar-allam-tamogatasa-val-hazai-dezinformacio-az-orosz-ukran-haboru-es-a-valasztasok-idejen/> [in Hungarian]



## NEITHER THE RUSSIAN NOR HUNGARIAN TELEVISION PROGRAMS MENTION PUTIN AT ALL

In other cases, the public media claim that the Hungarian opposition parties want Hungary to be part of the war efforts<sup>18</sup>. Sometimes, they highlight the fact that Hungarians living in Ukrainian Subcarpathia must face extensive political repression (which is actually true)<sup>19</sup>. They also tend to claim that President Zelensky is responsible for most of the actions in the war, while they barely mention Vladimir Putin<sup>20</sup>.

A rather telling case is when Georg Spöttele, a security policy expert known for his proximity to the government, an analyst at "Nézőpont Intézet" (which is a pro-government think-tank), who worked as

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Molnár, Sz. (2022) *Életbe lépett az új ukrán nyelvtörvény*. Available [online]: [https://index.hu/kulfold/2021/01/16/karpatalja\\_ukrajna\\_kulhoni\\_magyarsag\\_nyelvtorveny/](https://index.hu/kulfold/2021/01/16/karpatalja_ukrajna_kulhoni_magyarsag_nyelvtorveny/) [in Hungarian]

<sup>20</sup> Zubor, Z. (2022) *Kétkulacsos kormánykommunikáció: a közmédiába is bekerültek az orosz háborús propaganda állításai*. Available [online]: <https://atlatszo.hu/kozugy/2022/02/28/ketkulacsos-kormanykommunikacio-a-kozmedia-ba-is-bekerultek-az-orosz-propaganda-allitasai/> [in Hungarian]

a UFO researcher in the 1990s, claimed in an interview in the public media that Ukraine started to develop nuclear weapons<sup>21</sup>. He stated that *“Ukraine had crossed the red line, ‘blowing Putin’s fuse’ by announcing that it was preparing to develop nuclear weapons”*<sup>22</sup>. This false accusation was made verbatim in Putin’s speech announcing recognition of the breakaway republics two days earlier<sup>23</sup>.

This was an obvious example of the Hungarian public media system spreading Kremlin propaganda. Such an approach is not only allowed, but even welcome. In the interview, Spöttle talked about the two sides in a very different fashion. He said that *“Russian soldiers are very calm, as the Ukrainians are not putting up any serious resistance”*<sup>24</sup>, whereas when he talked about the fact that President Zelensky had armed civilian volunteers, he said that *“the last time someone committed such madness was Hitler in the last days of the war”*<sup>25</sup>.

One of the root causes for the public media service sharing the point of view that Russia is not an aggressor may be the fact that during the last ten years, the Fidesz government’s communication was all about following Russia’s example<sup>26</sup>. Although the government *did* condemn the aggression,

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Lakmusz (2022) *Orosz Propaganda A Magyar Állam Támogatásával: Hazai Dezinformáció Az Orosz-Ukrán Háború És A Választások Idején*. Available [online]: <https://www.lakmusz.hu/orosz-propaganda-a-magyar-allam-tamogatasaval-hazai-dezinformacio-az-orosz-ukran-haboru-es-a-valasztasok-idejen/> [in Hungarian]

their voters seem to have a radical pro-Russian side and so they will follow Russia no matter what. The public media system is, therefore, serving as a means of keeping these voters supportive of the government coalition.

### ***“YES, I AM ALSO ROOTING FOR THE RUSSIANS!”***

András Bencsik, a famous television presenter in “Hír Tv” (a Hungarian news channel, known for its pro-government statements and programs) uttered that sentence on February 12, 2022, the ‘Sajtó klub’ program. After issuing this rather strong statement, he continued: *“But not because I am pro-Russian. It is because of the filthy, inhuman lies and deceit of the sweater-and-t-shirt actor Zelensky, who pretends to be a statesman while this poor man is just playing a character”*<sup>27</sup>.

Before the Hungarian right-wing media started to call Volodymyr Zelensky a ‘nazi’, ‘reckless’, or ‘incompetent’, he was often referred to as merely an actor (which he used to be before becoming the president of Ukraine). It has also been a cliché commonly used by the pro-government media – which clearly creates a paradox of sorts.

The already mentioned television program did not stop there. Bencsik also claimed that: *“I’ve yet to meet a person in this country who, when he takes a deep breath, doesn’t say, yes, he’s rooting for the Russians”*<sup>28</sup>. This is obviously not true, as the statement implicates that all Hungarians are rooting for Russia, but it nicely

<sup>27</sup> Haász, J. (2023) *“Az oroszoknak drukkolok” – a fideszes megmondóember Bencsik András visszatért az állampárti önmagához*. Available [online]: <https://telex.hu/zacc/2023/02/13/az-orosz-oknak-drukkolok-a-fideszes-megmondoember-bencsik-andras-visszatert-az-allamparti-onmagahoz> [in Hungarian]

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



serves the purpose of spreading the idea that, in Hungary, everyone is pro-Russian.

These statements can be interpreted as opinions, but the presenter continued with something that cannot be anything but Russian propaganda. He said: “[...] *this whole lying machine, starting with Russian aggression... Russian aggression... and when the Russians were shot at by the Ukrainians in the Donbass for eight years, wasn't that aggression?*”<sup>29</sup>. The fact that Donbass was annexed by separatists fighting with Russian support in 2014 and it has been accepted as a state only by Russia, Syria, and North-Korea was not mentioned in the program.<sup>30</sup>

Just after two months, the program with Bencsik featured in a Russian propaganda documentary<sup>31</sup> about Hungary was aired in the Russian television channel RT. Although it was about Hungary, it managed to speak about Ukraine and the war as well. According to 444.hu, an independent Hungarian news site, in the first third of the movie they talk about how the Hungarian government voted against the sanctions (while, in reality, all of them were voted by them), and how it seems like Hungary is pro-Russian, but in reality, they are pro-common sense<sup>32</sup>. Later on, Bencsik becomes the star of the production. He goes on to talk about how he does not understand how the European Union can want Ukraine to be part of the European project, because, after all,

Ukraine is ‘fascist’<sup>33</sup>. Finally, Bencsik expresses the view that the West thinks that they must actually destroy Russia<sup>34</sup>.

As the film draws to a close, they discuss, among other things, that fascism is in power in Ukraine and forced conscription in Transcarpathia is taking place, but there is no mention of the undisputed fact that it was Russia that actually started the war in the first place<sup>35</sup>. It is not a surprise that in a Russian propaganda documentary they are talking about ‘fascist Ukrainians’ and ‘forced conscription’, but if a well-known television presenter willingly takes part in making such a movie, it is a horse of different color.

It is important to notice that the Russian documentary and the previously mentioned Hungarian news sources are talking about the same things and using the same phrases. While the Hungarian government’s communication is more light-hearted, their media has the freedom to continue to spread disinformation coming directly from Russia, and their viewers seem to believe them<sup>36</sup>.

Another interesting detail is the fact that neither the Russian nor Hungarian television programs mention Putin at all. It seems that these propagandistic aspirations are all about presenting Ukraine in a negative light. However, while Russia’s interest in doing this may be relatively obvious, it is somewhat confusing as to why Hungary

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> See full documentary: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouoUIDGt\\_GY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouoUIDGt_GY)

<sup>32</sup> Horváth, B. (2023) *Bencsik András oroszul gyalazza Ukrajnát az RT filmjében*. Available [online]: <https://444.hu/2023/04/29/bencsik-andras-oroszul-gyalazza-ukrajnat-az-rt-filmjeben> [in Hungarian]

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Csatári, F.D. (2022) *Publicus: A fideszesek negyede Ukrajnát hibáztatja a háború miatt* Available [online]: <https://telex.hu/belfold/2022/03/17/nagy-a-zavar-a-haboru-megiteleserol-publicus-intezet-nepszava-kozvelemenykutatas> [in Hungarian]

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MOST OF THE MEDIA IN HUNGARY IS IN THE HANDS OF THE HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT, AND THEY ARE USED RATHER EFFECTIVELY TO PROMOTE ITS AGENDA. FIDESZ HAS ALWAYS KNOWN WHAT THEIR VOTERS WANT TO HEAR, AND SO THEY HAVE USED THE MEDIA SYSTEM TO SPREAD THOSE MESSAGES AMONG THEIR AUDIENCES

follows suit. After a decade of pro-Russian messaging, it is difficult to change it straight away, but it seems like a plausible explanation. In short, we do not really (and probably will not ever) know why the Hungarian right-wing media feel that they must spread Russian propaganda.

### PERCEPTIONS OF PRO-RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA BY HUNGARIAN SOCIETY

According to the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, “[t]he Hungarian government has created a centralized media market that is unique in Europe over the past 12 years. As a result, by 2022 the overwhelming majority of Hungarian media publications were under pro-government influence, supported by a significant grey-zone media presence in uncontrolled social media”<sup>37</sup>. Most of the media in Hungary is in the hands of the Hungarian government, and they are used rather effectively to promote its agenda. Fidesz has always known what their voters want to hear, and so they have used the media system to spread those messages among their audiences.

In most cases, what the government and the right-wing media says is the same thing. The case of Russian aggression is a telling example of how the government can communicate one thing (a more ironed out version, because Hungary is still part of the EU and NATO), but also express some ideas that are popular among their voters at the same time.

One of the topics most discussed by the government and its media is the question of sanctions against Russia. Interestingly, even though the Hungarian government voted in favor of all the sanction packages, it also communicated that these sanctions are harmful not only for Hungary, but also for Europe. The Fidesz government even conducted a survey in every household in Hungary concerning their attitude toward sanctions, asking people whether they

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<sup>37</sup> Szabad Európa (2023) *Hogy jelenik meg Magyarország Putyin propagandájában, és fordítva?*. Available [online]: <https://www.szabadeuropa.hu/a/magyar-orosz-putyin-kormanypropaganda-cimek/32407272.html> [in Hungarian]

would like the government to vote for or against the sanctions. What is even more questionable than the sole fact that the questions themselves were guided ones, was that they started to send out the surveys after they already voted in support of the sanctions<sup>38</sup>.

According to the research by Political Capital, “[h]alf of Fidesz voters say the government did not vote for sanctions”<sup>39</sup>. The government’s efforts to convince people that this was actually the case was rather successful, with 23% of the people who voted for one of the oppositional parties also believing that the government voted against the sanctions<sup>40</sup>. Therefore, it becomes clear that even though the Russian propaganda machine is a strong one, it is the Hungarian one combined with disinformation from Russia that can be even more powerful.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that the Hungarian government has been using propaganda from Russia. In the last 13 years, it was able to alter the media system to resemble Russia. Nonetheless, with Hungary being part of the European Union, the Fidesz government does not have the same power as the Russian Federation. Despite this fact, the tendencies and approach to operating the media landscape are rather alike. Luckily, in Hungary, we still have a handful of independent

<sup>38</sup> Magyarország Kormánya (2022) *Nemzeti Konzultáció: Hét Kérdés A Brüsszeli Szankciókról*. Available [online]: <https://kormany.hu/hirek/nemzeti-konzultacio-het-kerdes-a-brusszeli-szankciokrol> [in Hungarian]

<sup>39</sup> Political Capital (2022) *A Fidesz-szavazók fele szerint a kormány nem szavazta meg a szankciókat – kutatás az orosz-ukrán háborúval kapcsolatos attitűdökről*. Available [online]: [https://politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article\\_read=1&article\\_id=3107](https://politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article_read=1&article_id=3107) [in Hungarian]

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



THOUGH THE RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA MACHINE IS A STRONG ONE, IT IS THE HUNGARIAN ONE COMBINED WITH DISINFORMATION FROM RUSSIA THAT CAN BE EVEN MORE POWERFUL

and quality media products, but they are facing an extremely challenging situation – both politically and financially.

The Hungarian propaganda machine is well managed and distributed. No one can express their own ideas in the press, television, or on the radio, because everything must come directly from the headquarters. This is the reason why the opinion of the government and the right-wing media about basically everything is always the same.

When an unexpected event occurs, such as Russian aggression in Ukraine, the government must act professionally, but in the last 13 years they have always expressed the idea that Russia is not only a friendly country, but also a role model. It is, therefore, difficult to explain to the voters how everything that we have known for over a decade has changed all of a sudden. For-

tunately for the government, they do not need to, because their voters are informed by the media, so the government can function professionally, while the right-wing media can continue to deliver the same messages as before.

Even though Hungarian and Russian media have seemingly different goals, it is frightening to see that the pro-government propaganda machine in Hungary uses Russian disinformation on top of their own fake news. The Russian propaganda still tries to present Hungary as a friendly country, as it was portrayed in the propaganda documentary mentioned above<sup>41</sup>. This is the reason why they are able to make a documentary about Hungary in which Hungarian television presenters happily and willingly promote the wildest conspiracies that the Russian propaganda machine produces.

Meanwhile, one of the most popular online news sources (Origo.hu) uses Russian propaganda on a daily basis, and people still read it. Not only the pro-government, but also the oppositional voters tend to believe this kind of disinformation, so it is not just that Russian propaganda is constantly being broadcast by the right-wing media, but also that these messages are reaching most citizens and have an impact on them.

Why is using Russian propaganda beneficial for the Hungarian government? Needless to say, for more than a decade the Fidesz party has been building a specific narrative as they want to ensure that voters receive consistent messaging. However, at this point, in light of the ongoing Russian aggression in Ukraine, it is not clear how

such messaging could still be deemed as useful. Once thing is clear: the Hungarian government continues to propagate Russian disinformation in its media, and there is no change in sight.

<sup>41</sup> Horváth, B. (2023) *Bencsik András oroszul gyalázza Ukrajnát az RT filmjében*. Available [online]: <https://444.hu/2023/04/29/bencsik-andras-oroszul-gyalazza-ukrajnat-az-rt-filmjeben> [in Hungarian]



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