



COUNTERING RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION: EUROPE DUSTS OFF "THE MIGHTY WURLITZER"

By John R. Haines



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"The Might Wurlitzer" is a 1950s quip by Frank Wisner, who was the first director of the Central Intelligence Agency's Office of Special Projects, soon renamed the Office of Policy Coordination. As the *New York Times* put it succinctly, "For most of the [first] three decades of its existence, the Central Intelligence Agency...engaged in an unremitting, though largely unrecognized, effort to shape foreign opinion in support of American policy abroad."¹ It acted through a series of conduits or information gateways and individuals, which CIA used to direct information to targeted publics. The official name for Wisner's complex of front organizations was the "Propaganda Assets Inventory." To those inside CIA, however, "it was 'Wisner's Wurlitzer'."²

The historian Hugh Wilford explains the metaphor:

"CIA's relationship with its front organizations has often been depicted in the imagery of musical recitation or theatrical performance. The Agency has variably been portrayed as playing the keys of a giant organ, pulling the strings of marionettes, or calling the tune of a piper. Whatever the metaphor, the implication is the same: from behind the scenes, the spies exercised complete control over the recipients of their covert largesse."³

The reality, as Wilford writes, is more complex. Cautioning against being dogmatic in such matter—"Foreign policy is too intricate a topic to suffer any total taboos"—George Kennan wrote of regretting the decision to engage in clandestine operations of this sort.

"Operations of this nature are not in character for this country. [...] Excessive secrecy, duplicity and clandestine skullduggery are simply not our dish—not only because we are incapable of keeping a secret anyway...but importantly, because such operations conflict with our own traditional standards and compromise our diplomacy in other areas...such operations should not be allowed to become a regular and routine feature of the governmental process, cast in the concrete of unquestioned habit and institutionalized bureaucracy. It is there that the dangers lie."⁴

¹ John M. Crowdsen (1977). "The C.I.A.'s 3-Decade Effort to Mold the World's Views." *The New York Times*, 25 December 1977.

² John M. Crowdsen (1977). "Worldwide Propaganda Network Built by the C.I.A." *The New York Times*, 26 December 1977. The name "Mighty Wurlitzer" is from the organ Rudolf Wurlitzer made specially for movie theatres.

³ Hugh Wilford (2008). *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 249

⁴ Kennan (1985), *op cit.*, 214.

“At the push of a button, Wisner could play any tune he wanted to hear.”⁵ The loudspeakers of Wisner’s “Mighty Wurlitzer,” wrote Evan Thomas, “were known as ‘the Radios’—giant transmitters located in Munich, blasting propaganda across the Iron Curtain.”⁶ As the *New York Times* described it, Wisner’s Wurlitzer “became the means for orchestrating, in almost any language anywhere in the world, whatever tune the CIA was in the mood to hear.”⁷

Europe appears ready to dust off the Mighty Wurlitzer. In early June, the Czech daily *Hospodářské Noviny* was first to report the European Union was forming “a special group to fight Russian propaganda.”⁸ Based in Brussels, the group will include experienced journalists and press officers who are fluent in Russian. It is charged with promoting the EU more effectively and strengthening its media presence, with special attention to Russian-language media.

It is part of a broader campaign to counter Russian disinformation that European leaders called for in March. EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini was charged, “in cooperation with member states and [other] EU institutions,” to “prepare by June an action plan on strategic communication in support of media freedom. The establishment of a communication team is a first step in this regard.”⁹ The mission was met with skepticism from some commentators:

“The EU is engaged in a new Cold War with Russia. It is a struggle for Europe’s soul, European values and the future of peace and democracy on the continent. Not that you’d know from reading EU leaders’ conclusions on Thursday (19 March).”¹⁰

Czech officials have been particularly outspoken about the corrosive effect of Russian “propaganda campaigns that manipulate using emotional words, and conspiracy theories that combine truth with lies,” according to Ivana Smoleňová.¹¹ She cited the example of a recently-aired Russian documentary about the “declassified pages of history” which claimed the Soviet Union launched its August 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia “to defend the Soviet ally against an ‘aggressive’ NATO.”¹²

Formation of the EU special group was one recommendation contained in a draft paper submitted in late June by the EU’s foreign service—formally, the European External Action Service—that called for formation of an Eastern Strategic Communications “East StratCom” Team. The draft declared the “use and misuse of communication tools” by Russia “played an important role in the dramatic political, economic, and security-related developments” in the EU’s eastern neighborhood in the past eighteen months. The draft recommended the EU promote its policies in former Soviet states, including “targeted training and capacity-building of journalists and media” in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.¹³ It also called for the EU to

⁵ Frances Stonor Saunders (1999). *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*. (London: Granta), 85.

Thomas Troy wrote in a sometimes-pointed review of Saunders book (which was published in the United States as *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*) in the journal *Studies in Intelligence*, “Frances Saunders evidently was dismayed and shocked! shocked! to learn there was gambling in the back room of Rick’s café. She finds the Agency’s activities to be reprehensible and morally repugnant and believes that the CIA’s ‘deception’ actually undermined intellectual freedom. She rejects the ‘blank check’ line of defense offered by some people that the Agency ‘simply helped people to say what they would have said anyway.’ [...] For Saunders, however, the CIA’s ‘interference’ was much more invidious. She writes that, ‘The real point was not that the possibility of dissent had been irrevocably damaged...or that intellectuals had been coerced or corrupted (though that may have happened too), but that the natural procedures of intellectual enquiry had been interfered with.’” See: Thomas M. Troy, Jr. (2002). “Intelligence in Recent Public Literature.” *Studies in Intelligence*. 46:1. <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol46no1/article08.html>. Last accessed 23 June 2015.

⁶ Evan Thomas (1995). *The Very Best Men: Four Who Dared: The Early Years of the CIA*. (New York: Simon & Schuster), 61.

⁷ John M. Crewdson (1977). “Worldwide Propaganda Network Built by the C.I.A.” *The New York Times*, 26 December 1977. Quoted in Jaap van Ginneken (1998). *Understanding global news: a critical introduction*. (London: SAGE), 97.

⁸ “EU bude bojovat s ruskou propagandou. Ve speciální skupině je i novinář z Česka” (“The EU will fight Russian propaganda with a special group that includes a Czech journalist”). *Hospodářské Noviny* [published online in Czech 4 June 2015]. <http://domaci.ihned.cz/c1-64113920-eu-bude-bojovat-s-ruskou-propagandou-ve-specialni-skupine-je-i-novinar-z-ceska>. Last accessed 23 June 2015.

⁹ Andrew Rettman (2015). “EU to strike back at Russian propaganda.” *EU Observer* [published online 19 March 2015].

<https://euobserver.com/foreign/128071>. Last accessed 25 June 2015. Mogherini’s formal title is High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

¹⁰ Gareth Harding (2015). “Russia: half-hearted EU propaganda no match for robust policies.” *EU Observer* [published online 23 March 2015]. <https://euobserver.com/opinion/128101>. Last accessed 25 June 2015.

¹¹ “Česko je ve sféře ruské propagandy, která demoralizuje, tvrdí expertka” (“Russian propaganda tries to demoralize the Czech Republic, says expert”). *Hospodářské Noviny* [published online in Czech 23 June 2015]. <http://domaci.ihned.cz/c1-64213170-cesko-je-ve-sfere-ruske-propagandy-ktera-demoralizuje-tvrdi-expertka>. Last accessed 23 June 2015

¹² “Invaze v roce 1968 jako záchrana před NATO? Ruský dokument je podle historika Tůmy ‘nejzprofanovanější propagandou.’” (“The 1968 invasion as a rescue from NATO? Profane propaganda, says historian Tůmy”). *Hospodářské Noviny* [published online in Czech 29 May 2015]. <http://zahranicni.ihned.cz/c1-64085560-invaze-v-roce-1968-jako-zachrana-pred-nato-rusky-dokument-je-podle-historika-tumy-nejzprofanovanejsi-propagandou>. Last accessed 23 June 2015.

¹³ “East StratComTeam займется борьбой с российской пропагандой” (“East StratComTeam will fight against Russian propaganda”). *EuroUA* [published online in Russian 23 June 2015]. <http://euroua.com/europe/ru/4289-east-stratcomteam-zajmetsya-borboj-s-rossijskoj-propagandoj>. Last accessed 23 June 2015.

support “independent media” and “increased public awareness of disinformation activities by external actors.”¹⁴

The proposal did not go unnoticed by Russian propaganda trolls, which quickly denounced it a “propaganda cell in former Soviet states.”¹⁵ The reaction of mainstream Russian media exemplified “grey” propaganda—the trade name for information of questionable accuracy and origin that is not sourced.¹⁶ *Lenta* warned, “Europeans are preparing for an information war with Russia” directed at “convincing the citizens of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova...that at some point the reforms promoted by the European Union will have a positive impact on the lives of citizens,”¹⁷ a clear allusion to the Greek financial crisis.

The state-controlled *RIA Novosti* declared bluntly, “Russian Foreign Ministry: Demolishing the myth of ‘Russian propaganda,’ the EU interferes with the media.” According to its account, “Continuing to inflate the myth of ‘Russian propaganda,’ the EU narrows the boundaries of the free press,” the intent of which *RIA Novosti* claimed “is clearly aimed at eliminating any Russian presence in the international news media.”¹⁸ Its parent organization, *Rossia Segodnia*, is an old hand at propaganda across the color spectrum including:

“Carry[ing] out Soviet-type *disinformatsiia* (disinformation), routinely using ‘old-school’ active measures to create fictionalized versions of events. Typically, a conspiracy theory will be reported, perhaps citing a fake twitter account. After a few days, having been exposed as a fake, the story will be taken down, sometimes with an apology and the implication that there was a genuine misunderstanding. However, the false information has already been released and has entered the narrative of an event.”¹⁹

Russia’s *REGNUM* took a more interesting tack. It announced, “Lithuanian politician disappointed the EU ‘not countering the propaganda of the Russian Federation.’” The politician in question, Petras Auštrevičius, is a member of the European Parliament for Lithuania. He is quoted saying the EU plan “says nothing about Russia’s information war in the west” against the EU and the countries of the Eastern partnership.²⁰ *REGNUM* continues, “According to Auštrevičius, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini does not understand or chooses deliberately to ignore the threat” posed by Russia’s information war because “Obviously, Commissioner Mogerini sees the problem extremely narrowly.”²¹ The intended message to Lithuanians: you’re on your own.

¹⁴ Andrew Rettman (2015). “EU draft plan on Russia’s media ‘misuse.’” *EU Observer* [published online 23 June 2015]. <https://euobserver.com/foreign/129247>. Last accessed 23 June 2015.

¹⁵ The quote is from the English language website Russia Insider [published online 23 June 2015]. <http://russia-insider.com/en/politics/eu-establish-propaganda-team-former-soviet-states/ri8246>. Last accessed 23 June 2015.

¹⁶ The United States Central Intelligence Agency’s May 1954 “Principles to Assure Coordination of Gray Activities” defined white, grey, and black propaganda as follows:

White. Acknowledged as an official statement or act of the U.S. Government, or emanates from a source associated closely enough with the U.S. Government to reflect an official viewpoint. The information is true and factual. It also includes all output identified as coming from U.S. official sources.

Gray. The true source (U.S. Government) is not revealed to the target audience. The activity engaged in plausibly appears to emanate from a non-official American source, or an indigenous, non-hostile source, or there may be no attribution. Gray is that information whose content is such that the effect will be increased if the hand of the U.S. Government and in some cases any American participation are not revealed. It is simply a means for the U.S. to present viewpoints which are in the interest of U.S. foreign policy, but which will be acceptable or more acceptable to the intended target audience than will an official government statement.

Black. The activity engaged in appears to emanate from a source (government, party, group, organization, person) usually hostile in nature. The interest of the U.S. Government is concealed and the U.S. Government would deny responsibility. The content may be partially or completely fabricated, but that which is fabricated is made to appear credible to the target audience. Black activity is also usually designed to cause embarrassment to the ostensible source or to force the ostensible source to take action against its will.”

Source: United States State Department. *Foreign Relations of The United States, 1950–1955. The Intelligence Community, 1950–1955.* DOCUMENT 181. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950-55Intel/d181>. Last accessed 24 June 2015].

¹⁷ “ЕС поборется с «российской пропагандой» при помощи европейских ценностей.” (“The EU will compete with ‘Russian propaganda’ with the help of European values”). *Lenta* [published online in Russian 25 June 2015]. http://lenta.ru/news/2015/06/25/counter_propaganda/. Last accessed 25 June 2015.

¹⁸ “МИД РФ: раздувая миф о “пропаганде России”, ЕС препятствует работе СМИ” (“Russian Foreign Ministry: Demolishing the myth of ‘Russian propaganda,’ the EU interferes with the media”). *RIA-Novosti* [published online in Russian 24 June 2015]. <http://ria.ru/world/20150624/1085608367.html>. Last accessed 25 June 2015.

¹⁹ John Lough, *et al.* (2014). “Russian Influence Abroad: Non-state Actors and Propaganda.” Chatham House Russia and Eurasia Programme (24 October 2014), 2. <http://www.chathamhouse>

²⁰ The Eastern Partnership (EaP) was established in 2009 as a joint initiative of the EU and its six Eastern European partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

²¹ “Литовский политик разочарован ЕС, который «не дал отпор пропаганде РФ»” (“Lithuanian politician disappointed the EU ‘not countering the propaganda of the Russian Federation.’”). *REGNUM* [published online in Russian 24 June 2015] <http://regnum.ru/news/1936570.html>. Last accessed 25 June 2015.

The EU plan suggests parallels to military units like the British Army's 77th Brigade *née* Security Assistance Group, which has both media and psychological operations groups. It is described in a semi-official publication as “the focal point for what is being styled as the soft levers of power. It will be at the heart of the emerging concept of ‘persistent engagement’.”²² The description continues:

“This desire to achieve success by changing the perceptions of adversaries and populations is as old as warfare itself. But what has changed in the past decade is the interconnectedness of the operational environment and the potential exploitation of the virtual domain...”²³

Elsewhere, its role is described as “the provision of Soft Power and Soft Effect capabilities.”²⁴ While the UK government has been relatively silent on the 77th Brigade's mission, the Secretary of State for Defense had this to say in response to a written question submitted in the House of Commons:

“77th Brigade is the new name for the Security Assistance Group. Its continuing role includes: Providing support, in conjunction with other Government agencies, to efforts to build stability overseas and to wider defence [sic] diplomacy and overseas engagement...”²⁵

One might question whether EU white propaganda is an effective counter to the Russian grey variant—which Mathias Bröckers and Paul Schreyer sardonically dubbed *Wir Sind Die Guten* (“We’re the Good Guys”)²⁶—let alone far more pernicious black propaganda. As Nerijus Maliukevičius said, “It’s not an information war, it’s a disinformation war. It’s about creating strategic uncertainty: that nobody knows what the truth is.”²⁷ Lithuania’s Foreign Affairs Minister Linas Linkevičius coined the colorful phrase “a littering of minds,”²⁸ where Daniel Korski says Russian propaganda succeeds “not so much in convincing as in relativizing everything.”²⁹

Discussing data published recently by the Pew Research Center,³⁰ Bruce Stokes recently told the GLOBSEC Bratislava Global Security Forum that there “is a significant [pro-Russian] minority” within the EU—German commentators call them *Putinverstehers* or “Putin-understanders”³¹—with Stokes adding, “There’s some evidence this [Russian propaganda] is having an impact.”³² No doubt, given the well-documented persistence of Russian “troll” armies. One of the better-known examples (after a 2013 exposé by Russia’s *Novaya Gazeta*³³) is the Internet Research Agency, an entity based outside St. Petersburg that

²² Chris Donnelly, ed. *The British Army 2014*. (London: Newsdesk Media), 119.

<http://192.168.1.1:8181/http://army.newsdeskmedia.com/Images/Upload/files/TheBritishArmy2014.pdf>. Last accessed 23 June 2015.

²³ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁴ “Force Troops Command. Overview and Brigades,” 29. <https://britisharmedforcesreview.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/force-troops-command-overview-and-brigades.pdf>. Last accessed 23 June 2015.

²⁵ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2015-02-24/225283/>. Last accessed 23 June 2015.

²⁶ Mathias Bröckers and Paul Schreyer (2014). *Wir Sind Die Guten* (Frankfurt: Westend Verlag GmbH).

²⁷ Quoted in Andrew Rettman (2015). “EU to strike back at Russian propaganda.” *EU Observer* [published online 19 March 2015].

<https://euobserver.com/foreign/128071>. Last accessed 25 June 2015. Maliukevičius studies propaganda at Vilnius University’s Institute of International Relations and Political Science.

²⁸ See @Linkevičius, 23 June 2014.

²⁹ See @VisegradInsight 21 June 2014. Daniel Korski is a special adviser to Prime Minister David Cameron and tweets at @DanielKorski.

³⁰ Pew Research Center (2015). “NATO Publics Blame Russia for Ukrainian Crisis, but Reluctant to Provide Military Aid,” (June 2015).

<http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2015/06/Pew-Research-Center-Russia-Ukraine-Report-FINAL-June-10-2015.pdf>. Last accessed 18 June 2015. For a discussion of these data, see the author’s essay, “Between a Self-Questioning Europe, a Self-Assured Russia, and a Hapless Ukraine: How American Armed Forces Became NATO’s Foreign Legion.” <http://www.fpri.org/articles/2015/06/between-self-questioning-europe-self-assured-russia-and-hapless-ukraine-how-american-armed-forces-became-natos-foreign-legion>

³¹ Bröckers and Schreyer offered a tongue in cheek description of *Putinverstehers* in the German online magazine Telepolis. For them, “Vladimir Putin is a powerful man and a doer, a good czar and a savior of his people, a bad boy and a wise Patriarch—an all-star in the Champions League of world politics... He can drop a Siberian Tiger with one clean shot, play the piano, sing Fats Domino, and recite Goethe. He’s a hardened athlete with a black belt in Judo... Even critics of this self-referential ruler have to confess: the guy’s somehow got it.” See: Mathias Bröckers and Paul Schreyer (2014). “Die Guten und die Bösen” (“The Good and the Bad”). *Telepolis* [published online in German 18 August 2014]. <http://www.heise.de/tp/artikel/42/42539/1.html>. Last accessed 25 June 2015. A soberer appraisal is offered by Klaus-Dieter Frankenberge of the German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*: “There is a considerable part of the German public that is sympathetic towards Russia, not necessarily towards Putin, even though he has quite a few sympathizers as well. There is a traditional romance with Russia; the devastating war experiences, actually on both sides; commercial interests, and sympathies which are the flip-side of a good dose of Anti-Americanism, particularly in East Germany. These people think it was the West who was to blame for what happened over Crimea and what is happening in the Donbass.” See (in Lithuanian) at: <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/vokietija-su-rusija-sicja-tradicija-tapes-romanas-yra-bent-kelios-svarbios-priezastys.d?id=682905886>. Last accessed 25 June 2015.

³² Quoted in Andrew Rettman (2015). “Russian propaganda wins EU hearts and minds.” *EU Observer* [published online 23 June 2015].

<https://euobserver.com/foreign/129237>. Last accessed 25 June 2015. Stokes is the Pew Research Center’s Director of Global Economic Attitudes.

³³ “Где живут тролли. И кто их кормит” (“Where are the trolls? Who feeds them?”). *Novaya Gazeta* [published online in Russia 7 September 2013]

purportedly employs hundreds of trolls.

Russia is especially effective at exploiting social media for grey propaganda. Pushing back earlier this year, one part of Wisner's Wurlitzer still in operation today—the United States government-sponsored Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty—published several exposés^{34 35} of Russian social media trolling.³⁶ What is especially interesting is that the foundational story for the 25 March RFE/RL exposé (and several others that were based on it) appears—at least in part—to be one published several days earlier in a local St. Petersburg weekly called *My Community*.³⁷ That story is suspect on its face: it appeared in a free newspaper more typically focused on publishing local interest stories and selling advertising to local businesses. Its likely source—and the overall *ur*-story—is an exposé published in late February on the website *Kioski*, which is controlled by Finland's *Yle* public broadcasting company.³⁸

This hypothesized chain of ambiguously sourced stories exemplifies why Jerzy Pomianowski raised a cautionary note about counter-propaganda efforts:

“The sense of urgency for an ‘adequate response’—among others, in the form of counter-propaganda—has entered the political discourse. We are, however, approaching a slippery slope. If we decide to engage in counter-propaganda at the cost of high-quality journalism, the number of people who do not trust any media will only increase.”³⁹

Kennan himself wrote in a similar vein three decades ago:

“One may say that to deny ourselves this species of capability is to accept a serious limitation on our ability to contend with forces now directed against us. Perhaps: but if so, it is a limitation with which we shall have to live. The success of our diplomacy has always depended, and will continue to depend, on its inherent honesty and openness of purpose and on the forthrightness with which it is carried out. Deprive us of that and we are deprived of our strongest armor and our most effective weapon.”⁴⁰

There is also the risk of the unanticipated or unchecked counterpunch. There is the intriguing case of a reputed hacktivist collective, Anonymous International, whose blog is known to Russians by the transliteration *Shaltay-Boltay*⁴¹ (“Humpty Dumpty”). It published classified documents and hacked emails it claimed were leaked by Russian government sources. There is widespread speculation regarding the group's actual connections—some suggest without much proof, Russian intelligence agencies engaged in political intrigue—and whether some documents are genuine—for example, reports published a year ago that were purportedly written by President Putin's chief of staff, Sergei Ivanov (who is considered by many analysts to be stridently anti-West⁴²).⁴³

Nor is the United States immune from this effect. A February 2015 story some believe originated with German intelligence appeared in the tabloid *Bild* under the banner “Kalte Füße—Bullshit—Angst”.⁴⁴ It claimed, “Behind the conference room's

<http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/59889.html>. Last accessed 26 June 2015.

³⁴ “The Trolls Who Came In From The Cold.” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* [published online 16 March 2015]. <http://www.rferl.org/content/russian-trolls-headquarters-media-internet-insider-account/26904157.html>. Last accessed 26 June 2015. The original story was published on 14 March 2015 on RFL/RF's Russian-language website and can be accessed here” <http://www.svoboda.org/content/transcript/26899521.html>. Last accessed 25 June 2015.

³⁵ “One Professional Russian Troll Tells All.” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* [published online 25 March 2015]. <http://www.rferl.org/content/how-to-guide-russian-trolling-trolls/26919999.html>. Last accessed 26 June 2015.

³⁶ So, too, the UK government-supported BBC around the conflict in eastern Ukraine. See: “Ukraine conflict: Inside Russia's 'Kremlin troll army!'” *British Broadcasting Corporation* [published online 19 March 2015]. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31962644>. Last accessed 26 June 2015.

³⁷ “Столица политического троллинга” (“The capital of political trolling”). *Мои Район* [published online in Russian 11 March 2015]. <http://www.mr7.ru/articles/112478/>. Last accessed 26 June 2015. The Russian transliteration of the publication's name is *Moi Raion*.

³⁸ “Yle Kioski Traces the Origins of Russian Social Media Propaganda—Never-before-seen Material from the Troll Factory.” *Kioski* [published online in English 20 February 2015]. <http://kioski.yle.fi/omat/at-the-origins-of-russian-propaganda>. Last accessed 22 June 2015.

³⁹ Jerzy Pomianowski (2015). “Russian speakers deserve good journalism.” *EU Observer* [published online 19 May 2015].

<https://euobserver.com/opinion/128744>. Last accessed 25 June 2015. Pomianowski is Executive Director of the European Endowment for Democracy and Poland's former Deputy Foreign Minister.

⁴⁰ Kennan (1985), *op cit.*, 215.

⁴¹ Russian: Шалтай-Болтай. The group uses the tagline “Always with you, even when you don't suspect it {Russian: Всегда с Вами, даже тогда когда Вы об этом не подозреваете} and publishes on its Russian-language website, <http://boltai.org>.

⁴² See Lough, *et al.* (2014), *op cit.*, 2.

⁴³ See: “Откровения Администрации президента: как манипулируют выборами и рейтингами” (“Presidential documents revealed: How to manipulate elections and poll ratings”). *The Insider* [published online in Russian 17 June 2014]. <http://theins.ru/politika/986>. Last accessed 24 June 2015.

⁴⁴ “Kalte Füße—Bullshit—Angst.” Was US-Politiker WIRKLICH über die Deutschen in der Ukraine-Krise denken (“Cold Feet—Bullshit—Angst.” What US Politicians REALLY think about the Germans in the Ukraine crisis.”). *BILD* [published online in German 8 February 2015].

soundproofed doors in the luxurious Bayerischer Hof, American diplomats speak derisively about their German counterparts.” If the intent was to expose fracture lines inside the Western alliance over how best to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine, it succeeded regardless of the source.

Much is made about hybrid warfare in which propaganda—white, grey and black—plays a significant role. That being said, it is important to remember a truism: Wisner’s Wurlitzer played in a far different era, and it might be said, against a much less artful (if no less dangerous) antagonist. The root word of *antagonist*—the Greek *agón*—denotes a formalized contest, as an *agón logón* between a pair of opposed speeches. In their current *agón logón* with Russia, institutions like the EU and NATO face a formidable, resourceful, and too often underrated antagonist.

In the ongoing battle of memes, Russia’s *Sputnik* website holds the edge. It declared, “New Iron Curtain: EU Leaders to Shield Europe from ‘Kremlin Propaganda’,”⁴⁵ adding for effect, “if after all this the EU still complains that they are losing the ‘information war’ against Russia, perhaps it’s time to realize that people are just tired of the one-sided news coverage of the mainstream media.”⁴⁶

Goodell wrote that no Greek tragedy could exist without a chorus.⁴⁷ Its role is to describe and comment upon the main action of the play, often saying what the main characters could not say. It is to be regarded, Aristotle wrote in his *Poetics*, as one of the actors, as taking part in the action. If Europe’s new information warriors fulfill the role of the chorus, then the question must be asked: to whom, exactly, is that chorus speaking?

Is it European Union publics? If a recent Pew Research Center report is to be believed, they *already* hold Russia in low esteem—less than a third in any EU country give Russia a positive rating, and pluralities in each see it as a military threat to its neighboring countries. Anti-Russia sentiment is even more pronounced in Poland: over two-thirds (70%) of Poles see Russia as a major military threat, and four-fifths (80%) have an unfavorable view of Russia. Given Pew’s findings, and that Europe’s *Putinverstebers* faith was unshaken by events in Crimea in eastern Ukraine, there seems little chance the East StratCom Team will much improve the EU’s home standing.

Is it Russian citizens? The Pew Research Center found overwhelming confidence (88%) in President Putin’s handling of international affairs, and markedly negative views of the United States (81% unfavorable) and NATO (80%) with a softer but still negative view (60%) of the European Union. More than nine-in-ten Russians (93%) expressed a favorable opinion of their own country, and over two-thirds (69%) believe Soviet Union’s dissolution was a bad thing for Russia.⁴⁸ Again, there seems little likelihood the East StratCom Team can have much effect on these numbers.

If there is no apparent audience at home or inside Russia, perhaps the EU’s eastern borderlands are more promising? Moldova is mentioned specifically, so public opinion findings published in April by the Chişinău-based Institute for Public Policy are a useful reference. The IPP found Moldovans split evenly on whether Moldova should join the EU (40% for versus 42% against) but by a two-to-one margin favored joining Russia’s Eurasian Economic Union (58% to 26%). Moldovans by a margin of two-to-one favor neutrality over joining NATO (41% versus 21%). President Putin (60.4%) is Moldovans’ most-trusted international leader, ahead of both Chancellor Merkel (43.6%) and President Obama (32.4%).⁴⁹ Ukraine is another East StratCom Team target. There, the Pew Research Center reports two-thirds (67%) of Ukrainians want to join the EU—which is seen favorably by 72% of Ukrainians—and over half (53%) want to join NATO—of which 58% of Ukrainians hold a favorable view.⁵⁰

The problem here should be obvious—while EU and NATO membership are clearly pivotal (if not determining) factors in both countries, that option is likely foreclosed for the foreseeable future. Europe’s closed door—and Pew’s finding that no European NATO country registered a majority in favoring of the use of force to defend an ally in a military conflict with

<http://www.bild.de/politik/inland/muenchner-sicherheitskonferenz/was-us-politiker-ueber-deutschland-denken-39678276.bild.html>. Last accessed 26 June 2015.

⁴⁵ “New Iron Curtain: EU Leaders to Shield Europe from ‘Kremlin Propaganda.’” *Sputnik* [published in English 5 April 2015].

<http://sputniknews.com/politics/20150504/1021695630.html>. Last accessed 27 June 2015.

⁴⁶ “EU Takes Swipe at Sputnik, RT for Challenging Western Media Bias.” *Sputnik* [published in English 24 June 2015].

<http://sputniknews.com/europe/20150624/1023798364.html>. Last accessed 27 June 2016.

⁴⁷ Thomas Dwight Goodell (1920). *Athenian Tragedy: A Study in Popular Art*. (Port Washington: Kennikat Press), 77.

⁴⁸ Pew Research Center (2015). “NATO Publics Blame Russia for Ukrainian Crisis, but Reluctant to Provide Military Aid,” (June 2015).

<http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2015/06/Pew-Research-Center-Russia-Ukraine-Report-FINAL-June-10-2015.pdf>. Last accessed 27 June 2015.

⁴⁹ Institute of Public Policy (2015). *Barometer of Public Opinion*. Republic of Moldova, April 2015.

⁵⁰ Pew Research Center (2015), *op cit.*, 40.

Russia—speaks far louder than any white propaganda.⁵¹ This is markedly so in the eastern borderlands, where the ever-increasing politicization and polarization of daily life is a dominant theme.⁵²

In the meantime, *Sputnik*⁵³—part of the government-controlled *Rossija Segodnya* news agency, it claims to “tell the untold story” through “alternative news content”—carefully hones its message:

“[I]n Britain an entire army brigade of 1500 men has been created, whose tasks include the fight against Russia on social networks. NATO has a task force aimed at countering Russian influence throughout the world. Only recently, *Deutsche Welle* launched a 24-hour television channel in English to counter RT [*Russia Today*, an English language news site]. At the same time, nearly all the major Western media, including the BBC, DW and Euronews have long disseminated their information in the Russian language, while Radio Liberty, funded directly by the US government, also broadcasts in Russian.”⁵⁴

RT (*Russia Today*) echoed *Sputnik*’s commentary:

“It’s not enough that there are hundreds of Western newspapers, TV channels, websites and radio stations, all beaming the same take on what is going on in the world. The UK has created a 1,500-strong army unit to, among other things, fight Russia in the social media space. NATO has a special taskforce dedicated to countering Russia’s influence. *Deutsche Welle* just launched a 24-hour English-language news channel that’s supposed to compete directly with RT—despite the global presence of Euronews, BBC World News and CNN International. If despite all these efforts, the EU is still concerned with ‘losing the information war’ to Russia, perhaps the time has come for it to realize that people around the world simply no longer believe their same tired, one-sided narratives of current events.”⁵⁵

The most fruitful target for the East StratCom Team might turn out to be country-specific pro-Russia trolling. One of the best open-source analyses of this phenomenon was published in late June by the previously mentioned Finnish website, *Kioski*.⁵⁶

Here again, though, Jerzy Pomianowski sounded a cautionary note in an interview on Latvian television:

“While we often hear that the Kremlin’s propaganda should be fought with counterpropaganda, I consider such an approach problematic. If our only reaction to the situation is counterpropaganda, we will only worsen this situation. [...] The only remedy for propaganda is truth.”

Using the metaphor of a “tank” to symbolize Russian information warfighting, he added, “We should not build tanks to fight other tanks—we should fight tanks with truth. If we start building our own ‘tanks’, there will be no winners, and we will all lose.”⁵⁷

⁵¹ Pew surveyed NATO publics in France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom, along with Canada and the United States.

⁵² This has disturbing parallels to, for example, French society in the 1930s. See: Ken Cuthbertson (2015). *A Complex Fate: William L. Shirer and the American Century*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press), 114.

⁵³ *Sputnik* is an international multimedia news service that was launched in November 2014 as the successor to *RIA Novosti* and the *Voice of Russia*. Part of the government-controlled *Rossija Segodnya*, it is produced in 33 languages. According to its website, “Sputnik tells the untold. The agency is uniquely positioned as a provider of alternative news content and a radio broadcaster. Sputnik’s broadcasting is entirely geared toward foreign audiences.”

⁵⁴ “EU Takes Swipe at Sputnik, RT for Challenging Western Media Bias.” *Sputnik* [published online 24 June 2015]. <http://in.sputniknews.com/russia/20150624/1014912784.html>. Last accessed 28 June 2015.

⁵⁵ “EU drafts plan to counter Russian media ‘disinformation’, targeting RT.” RT [published online in English 25 June 2015]. <http://rt.com/news/269509-eu-plan-counter-russia/>. Last accessed 28 June 2015.

⁵⁶ See: “Yle Kioski Investigated: This is How Pro-Russia Trolls Manipulate Finns Online – Check the List of Forums Favored by Propagandists.” *Kioski* [published online in English 24 June 2015]. <http://kioski.yle.fi/omat/troll-piece-2-english>. Last accessed 28 June 2015. See also: “This is What Pro-Russia Internet Propaganda Feels Like – Finns Have Been Tricked into Believing in Lies.” *Kioski* [published online in English 24 June 2015]. <http://kioski.yle.fi/omat/this-is-what-pro-russia-internet-propaganda-feels-like> Last accessed 28 June 2015.

⁵⁷ “Ежи Помяновский: Русский язык не принадлежит только России или Путину” (“Jerzy Pomianowski: ‘Russian language’ doesn’t belong only to Russia or Putin.” *Latvijas Sabiedriskie mediji* [published online in Russian 28 May 2015]. <http://www.lsm.lv/tu/statja/obschestvo/novosti/ezhi-pomjanovskiy-russkiy-jazik-ne-prinadlezhit-tolko-rossii-ili-putinu.a131546/>. Last accessed 28 June 2015.

It is worth recalling in conclusion two lessons learned from the experience of Wisner's Mighty Wurlitzer.⁵⁸ The first is that it failed in its original purpose—the mobilization of eastern-bloc émigrés to liberate 'captive nations'. The second is that its operations were most effective when they succeeded in attracting the support of national elites who shared a positive vision of American power in the world.

Today's information stream is a horizontal network of citizens informing (or misinforming, depending on your view) each other. It is not a Wisner-era vertical in which authoritative journalists inform a receptive public down the information chain. It is precisely this horizontality that underlies why publics have become more susceptible to strategically-targeted, politically-suggestive propaganda; witness the earlier *Sputnik* and RT commentaries.⁵⁹

It must be asked whether an under-defined effort at white propaganda is likely to move the needle appreciably with European Union publics; to reverse the low regard in which Western governments are held by an overwhelming number of Russians; and/or to alter the reality in the eastern borderlands that the doors to Europe's economic and defense unions are resolutely closed. The suggestion is that it may do none of these, or at least do none of them well.

Europe's dilemma is not that large numbers of its citizens hold naïve views of the Russian government or are unduly swayed by Russian disinformation. It is not that Russian citizens live in some Stalin-era time warp. Nor is it that eastern borderlands hear Europe's voice only faintly and furtively over a crackling shortwave receiver. It is instead that some European publics seem resigned to—or worse, intent upon—returning the area east of Germany and west of Moscow to what Polish intellectual Czesław Miłosz called "the white space on the map." That space, he wrote, could easily bear the inscription *Ubi Leones*, "a domain of wild beasts that includes such cities as Prague [...] Warsaw, Budapest and Belgrade."⁶⁰

Some Russian trolls, audaciously embracing *Die Große Lüge*,⁶¹ have adopted George Orwell's aphorism that the further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those that speak it. As Europe dusts off the Mighty Wurlitzer, that aphorism might be instructively recast as "The further a society drifts from the truth about itself, the more it will be hated by those whom it seeks to convince."

⁵⁸ Wilford (2008), 250-252.

⁵⁹ Stéphanie Ha (2015). "Russian Propaganda, Disinformation, and EU strategic communication: revisiting Cold War rhetoric." *Eyes on Europe* [published online 3 May 2015]. <http://www.eyes-on-europe.eu/russian-propaganda-disinformation-and-eu-strategic-communication/>. Last accessed 28 June 2015.

⁶⁰ *Ubi leones* means "where the lions roam". Czesław Miłosz (1983). *The Witness of Poetry; The Charles Eliot Norton lectures 1981/82*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 7.

⁶¹ "The Big Lie" is a propaganda term coined by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, in which he wrote "even the most impertinent lie leaves something dangling...that at least some will still accept as true."