

# Strategic Challenges Review



Dezinformation – the challenge of 21st century

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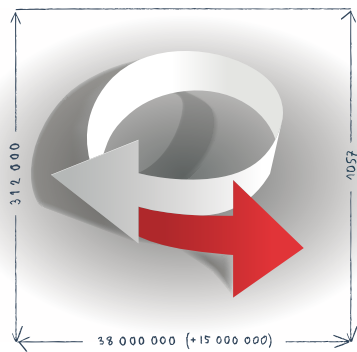


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## POLSKA WIELKI PROJEKT



# **Where do we draw our knowledge about our countries from?**

Goran Andrijanić

## INTRODUCTION

Poland and Croatia are countries with many similarities. Firstly, they were both created by two Slavic nations. Their history was filled with various dynamic events, marked by the struggle for freedom and sacrifices made in its defense. And finally, the identity of both nations was strongly shaped by the Catholic faith. Blessed Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate of the Millennium, once said about the threats facing Poland:

"If they come to destroy this Nation, they will start with the Church because the Church is the strength of this nation."

What the blessed said about the Poles can also be freely repeated in the case of the Croats. History has proven that anyone wanting to destroy Croatian national identity always attacked the Church and its prelates first. The history of Blessed Alojzije Stepinac, the Archbishop of Zagreb, imprisoned by communists after a fabricated trial in 1946, illustrates this well. Catholicism is so deeply rooted in Polish and Croatian cultural codes that even those who are negatively inclined towards it cannot avoid confrontation.

The similarity of the historical fates of both nations has further strengthened by the shared experience of communist repression in the 20th century. Although there are differences between the Sovietized communist system that ruled Poland and the concept of "socialism with a human face" promoted by Yugoslav communist leader Josip Broz Tito, both systems were based on the same totalitarian, anti-civilizational impulse that destroyed people, communities, and societies.

Continuing this common historical experience of communist repression are similarities in the experiences of transitioning from a communist to a democratic system. In a sense, both Poland and Croatia faced or still face similar challenges: the demands of economic transformation, cleansing the communist political and social legacy, and the need to create a truly pluralistic society where all citizens have equal opportunities for development.

The specificity of Croatia lies, of course, in the fact that the construction of the new state was associated with a bloody war for

independence in the years 1991-1995. However, this fact somehow deepens the similarities between the fates of the Polish and Croatian nations. Namely, both have suffered serious sacrifices for freedom. This shared martyrology, understood in the positive sense of building national community, helps better understand what these societies live today when they are together in the European Union and NATO.

Taking into account all these similarities between the two nations raises the question of how much they contributed to the creation of specific plans for political, cultural, and social cooperation. This question includes another: to what extent are Poles and Croats mutually aware of these similarities, and to what extent are they informed about them? In other words, how much do they know about each other and from what sources do they draw this knowledge?

This journalistic text will try to at least partially answer that question. Its author is a journalist who has written and lived in both Croatia and Poland, speaks both languages, and has the opportunity to compare how these nations perceive each other.

The text does not aim to cover the entire history of Polish-Croatian relations. Instead, it will focus on the last thirty years, from Croatia's independence to the present. During these 30 years, perhaps the most important event concerning Polish-Croatian relations is the fact that the presidents of these two countries initiated an important political idea - the Three Seas Initiative.

## **THREE SEAS**

It seems that a good starting point for analyzing how we create knowledge about each other would be the example of the Three Seas Initiative and the issues it faced in Croatia.

"The state of Polish-Croatian relations is very good - there are no open disputes on the political and economic fronts. Croatia's accession to the EU in 2013 set the basic platform for bilateral contacts and elevated the importance of relations with Poland. Poland and Croatia share similarities in their perception of the international situation and engagement in the region. The Presidents of Poland and

Croatia are the originators of the Three Seas Initiative, both countries actively participate in the so-called Berlin Process, supporting the European aspirations of the Western Balkan states, and Croatian soldiers are stationed in Poland as part of NATO's forward presence," reads the official website of the Polish government.

In the introduction, we posed the question of whether the similarities between Poland and Croatia resulted in a concrete political plan deepening cooperation between them.

Since August 2015, when Croatian President Kolinda Grabar Kitarović and Polish President Andrzej Duda began to seriously consider strengthening economic and political cooperation between Central European countries from the Baltic to the Adriatic, it seemed that the answer to this question was affirmative. Polish and Croatian politicians united in creating a project that could change the economic and political situation in Central Europe was a scene that truly looked like the realization of everything that binds us.

This sense was present when the initiative took on concrete forms in the form of the Three Seas Initiative. As we know, after the preliminary meeting in New York in September 2015, two additional countries joined the project (Romania and Bulgaria), expanding the strategically important area to the territory around the Black Sea, and the project received its final name.

The reception of this political project seems to say a lot about how the Croatian public perceived Poland. In Croatia, a large part of the discussion about the Three Seas Initiative showed how contemporary state geopolitical thought was not prepared for the concept of placing the country in a new direction – north. This thought, accustomed to analyzing Croatia's relations with major Western powers or neighbors from the Southeastern European regions, was surprised by a project that revitalized the concept of "Central Europe" in Croatian public discourse. A term that in the political and cultural sense was somewhat neglected in Croatia in the previous period. One reason for neglecting the Central European perspective in Croatian intellectual life is the years of communist rule and power, which allowed

such a view only in the context of strengthening cooperation with "progressive" socialist forces.

In cases where this cooperation drew attention to common historical elements experienced by Central European countries through their belonging to the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and the same cultural circle, it was hindered. Croatian political and cultural intelligentsia inherited something from this communist reluctance to deal with the common historical fate of this part of Europe and its future.

Additionally, this situation showed that the current Croatian knowledge of what is happening in Poland is based on the narrative of Western news agencies, which is then uncritically copied by Croatian media. Unfortunately, since 2015, Western media has dominated a narrative demonizing Law and Justice and portraying this party as a formation "destroying" democracy and the rule of law. It is clear what information reaches the Croats. Polish journalist Rafał Woś recently published an article in British media stating that this negative campaign against PiS (Law and Justice) started in mainstream German media because Berlin does not like a government in Warsaw that insists on partnership rather than vassal relations.

"German media are the most powerful media on the continent, whether someone likes it or not. Not by accident, after the debt crisis, European media created an image of lazy Greeks or living beyond their means Italians. It had no support in the facts, but this narrative dominated European press, produced by German media. There has always been a problem with PiS, already during its first government. The fact that there was a government in Warsaw that had its concept and could say 'no' to Germany caused outrage. When PiS returned in 2015, the second round began. The situation escalated after the recent elections to the European Parliament when Germany significantly strengthened its presence in European institutions, pursuing a kind of imperial policy under the European flag," Woś said in a recent interview for Sieci weekly.

Unfortunately, the negative PR in European media, of which the ruling Polish party has long been a victim, has also left its mark on mainstream Croatian media. Rarely do they publish articles that



go beyond the narrative of PiS as a "threat to democracy." If it does happen, it is most often a column by a conservative author. However, the Croatian media landscape is characterized by a left-liberal discourse that mostly mirrors the narrative of the West.

If we want Polish reality to be treated more fairly in Croatian media and presented more accurately, a lot of effort needs to be put into creating an appropriate communication channel that would enable this.

On the other hand, if we analyze how Poles form an image of Croatia, one of the most important sources of this image is undoubtedly tourist visits to the warm Adriatic.

## **"AGAIN WE ROAM THE WARM LAND"**

Polish poet Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński spent several vacations in Croatia on the Adriatic coast during his short but fruitful life. Twice he visited the island of Šolta near Split in 1937 and 1938, in the village of Nečujam, where commemorative plaques remind of this fact today. Baczyński wrote everywhere. Some of his poems were undoubtedly inspired by the Croatian sea, including the one that inspired Grzegorz Turnau to compose music for it, resulting in the song "Znów wędrujemy ciepłym krajem" ("Again We Roam the Warm Land").

These verses beautifully capture the fascination of Poles with the Adriatic, the warm sea closest to them, which they increasingly visit.

Last year, 2022, was a record-breaking year. According to the Croatian Tourist Board in Poland, by September 20, exactly 1,331 Poles had come to Croatia, realizing 6.39 million overnight stays. The magical million was reached two months earlier than in 2021.

"Among the favorite destinations of Polish tourists are the Splitsko-Dalmatian, Istrian, Zadar, Primorje-Gorski Kotar, and Šibenik-Knin counties. The five most popular places visited by Poles for years have been Makarska, Omiš, Zadar, Baška Voda, and Orebić.

Individual tourists dominate (70 percent), while travel agencies account for a minority (about 30 percent). However, this second form of travel is gaining popularity. It is worth emphasizing the very

good results achieved this year by Polish travel agencies, which sent 246,715 guests to Croatia, who realized 1,538,331 overnight stays, compared to 2021: 106.46 percent and 99.69 percent", we read in the Croatian National Tourist Board.

Regular visits by Poles to the Adriatic represent invaluable capital in the process of bringing the two nations closer. It is a mutual process – as Poles get to know Croatia, interest in Poland also grows.

For Croats, Poles are increasingly pleasant guests. Croatia's economy relies heavily on tourism. The summer of 2020, dominated by the pandemic, was a serious crisis for Croatian tourism. In the second quarter of 2020, Croatia recorded a staggering 15.1 percent drop in GDP. Analysts, well aware of how closely Croatia's finances are tied to the tourism sector (about 17 percent of the state budget), predicted at the beginning of the season that this country would be the biggest loser of the pandemic.

However, the season in Croatia turned out much better than expected, while other European countries experienced significant drops in tourist visits (some up to 90 percent). July and August were the peak of the season, which turned out much better for Croatia than anticipated. The overall income was significantly less than in previous seasons, but still more than expected, with only a 30 percent drop compared to the same period last year.

This was thanks to the Poles. In the fall of 2020, columnist Zvonimir Despot wrote an article titled "Polacy, moje ukłony. Ura-towaliście nam ten sezon turystyczny" ("Poles, my bows. You saved our tourist season").

In the same text, Despot wrote the following words:

"Despite the crisis and despite some countries putting Croatia on the red lists, Poles massively got into their cars and came to the Adriatic. Every year we hear our tourism workers fight for Germans, Austrians, Brits, and even Americans, we watch reports from tourism fairs in those countries. The time has come for Croatia to focus strongly on Poland and other Eastern European countries. But above all, on Poland, a large and wealthy country with almost 40 million inhabitants."

Despot then wrote a few very interesting sentences. He described how, in the past, during communism, Poles came to Croatia for trade, to earn some extra money. Today, the situation has changed, and Poles experience a tremendous civilizational leap.

"We Croats constantly complain that throughout our history, we have suffered a lot, and that's true. We repeat that the last war caused us a lot of damage, that it is the cause of our current situation, economic backwardness. But let's look at what the Poles went through. Just the 20th century is enough. What did the Germans do to them first, and then the Russians? What did Poland look like when communism fell? A completely devastated country, like all other states under the Moscow boot. And today? Just walk through their cities..."

These words are evidence of the thesis I emphasized earlier. Polish tourists in Croatia represent a chance for both nations to get to know each other, bring about mutual understanding through direct communication, and strengthen social and cultural ties. Now it is the task of the Polish and Croatian states to recognize the potential of this opportunity and make maximum use of it.

## **CROATIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE**

Understanding Croats and today's Croatian state is impossible without understanding the Croatian War of Independence, which lasted from 1991 to 1995. It is often said that the Russian aggression on Ukraine is the largest war conflict in Europe since World War II. Considering the objective number of casualties and destruction, this is true.

However, the war that marked the disintegration of Tito's Yugoslavia, caused by Serbian imperialism and its communist leader Slobodan Milošević, was a bloody war that would have a lasting impact on the fortunes of nations in this part of Europe. Croatia lost 15,000 citizens, about 9,000 of whom were civilians, which is a significant loss for a 4-million country. Not to mention the material losses caused by Serbian artillery, which were really significant in some regions.

Like the Poles, the Croats also have their hero-cities that suffered greatly during the war, but their sacrifice saved the country.

Vukovar is a city in eastern Croatia, on the Danube, a river that serves as a natural border with Serbia. During the War of Independence, the city had exceptional strategic importance, so the Serbs invested enormous military forces in its conquest. Clashes in this part of Croatia began in August 1991, and by the end of the summer, the city was partially surrounded. The only food supply channel for 15,000 civilians was cut off.

It is estimated that the Serbian aggressor sent about 30,000 soldiers and paramilitary groups with a huge arsenal of armored weapons to Vukovar. On the other hand, the city was defended by about 1,800 soldiers, members of the 204th Vukovar Brigade, and volunteers from all over Croatia. For three months, they heroically resisted a stronger and extremely aggressive opponent. During the heaviest siege, about 7,000 shells fell on the city daily. The image of destruction closely resembled that of Warsaw after the fall of the Warsaw Uprising.

Vukovar and its heroism are now one of the foundations of our identity. Croats have a centuries-old tradition of striving for independence. Moreover, Croatian politics was compromised at some point by crimes in Croatia during World War II. Crimes committed by the collaborationist Ustashe regime.

However, the roots of today's Croatian statehood and identity, do not lie in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) and the Ustasha movement, but in the War of Independence from 1991-1995. Furthermore, contemporary Croatian statehood is clearly distanced from the Ustasha regime and the crimes committed by this regime. We are building our national identity from the first half of the 1990s, participating in a war where we showed heroism and the will to fight for freedom. Our most important national heroes were born there.

As I mentioned, anyone who wants to understand the Croats must understand the circumstances of the formation of their state. The source of the Croatian-Serbian war was not Zagreb's desire for independence (confirmed by the Croatian nation in a 1990

referendum), but the political project of Greater Serbia, which Serbian communist-nationalist leaders wanted to realize on the ruins of Yugoslavia.

Sometimes it seems that in Polish intellectual circles there is a lack of understanding of this simple fact. Although it is known that such a lack is shown by post-communist and left-liberal academic and intellectual circles, still fascinated by Tito's Yugoslavia, it is strange that the phenomenon can also be observed in conservative, patriotic circles in Poland.

In these circles, one can also encounter the theory popularized by the Krakow political scientist Marek Walderberg, who claims that the breakup of Yugoslavia was a "project of international powers," and Berlin, London, and Paris "forced" Croatia to independence. Besides insulting the Croatian and Slovenian desire for freedom and independence, these theories are simply factually incorrect.

Here is what the Croatian historian Ante Nazor says about the theory of the alleged influence of Germany on the crisis in Yugoslavia:

"I would like to remind you that no country in the world supported the decision of the Croatian parliament to declare independence in June 1991. Germany did not either. Their reaction came only after the military campaign of pro-Serbian JNA (Yugoslav People's Army) and Serbian forces in the Republic of Croatia. After the mass crimes committed by these forces against the civilian population, as well as the destruction of Croatian cities."

And next:

"Wars could have been avoided, and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia preserved if the leadership of Serbia had accepted the proposals of Slovenia and Croatia in October 1990 regarding the reorganization of the then-state into a confederation. However, the leadership of Serbia was encouraged by the support of the federal army, the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), which disarmed Croatia, confiscating the weapons of the Croatian Territorial Defense immediately after the elections in May 1990."

"The idea that the West forced the breakup of Yugoslavia is essentially Serbian-Russian propaganda, which, as seen, also has its

supporters in Poland. Part of this propaganda from the East is also the narrative of NATO's intervention in 1999, which ended the war in Kosovo. The operation overthrew Slobodan Milošević's regime and also prevented a humanitarian catastrophe caused by intense ethnic cleansing by Serbian forces against Albanians in Kosovo, then a Serbian province and now an independent state."

"This military operation is often mentioned in the context of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, and Moscow and its spokespersons sought some kind of justification for the attack on Ukraine. It is about cynical Russian war propaganda that tries to compare two completely incomparable situations. After all, Serbia was attacked after being the main perpetrator of wars in the former Yugoslavia for years."

"It often seems that the Polish scientific and cultural perspective on Croatia is always created in the shadow of the post-Yugoslav context.

It appears that Poland and Croatia have quite strong academic cooperation. In 1995, an agreement on scientific cooperation was signed in Zagreb between the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Croatian Academy of Sciences, and cooperation between the University of Warsaw and the University of Zagreb dates back to 1996. The University in Zagreb also collaborates with the Jagiellonian University, the University of Silesia, and the University of Wrocław. The opportunity to learn the Croatian language is provided by institutions such as the University of Warsaw, Jagiellonian University, University of Silesia, University of Wrocław, and Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The Polish language is taught at the Universities in Zagreb and Rijeka."

"However, a convincing part of this scientific and cultural cooperation takes place within recognizable ideological and worldview frameworks of left-liberal orientation. This applies to both sides. The Polish academic scene cannot stop perceiving Croatia outside the post-Yugoslav context (in my assessment, this applies to almost all Croatian studies in Poland). On the other hand, the Croatian intellectual scene perceives Poland solely in the categories imposed by the left-liberal establishment of the Third Polish Republic."

This is a situation that needs to be changed if we want true cooperation between the two nations.

## **WHAT TO DO?**

All sociological research and the results of the majority of political elections - since June 1991, since Croatia regained independence - indicate that the majority of the nation holds Catholic, conservative, and patriotic views. In 2013, we had a referendum that concerned the inclusion in the Croatian constitution of the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman. Under the referendum proposal, 700,000 signatures were collected (Croatia has around 3.8 million inhabitants). In the 27 years of Croatian freedom, the left was in power for eight years. Meanwhile, left-liberal views dominate in the media.

Why this is the case is a question that requires a complex answer and is not to be found here. It can only be mentioned how post-communist structures used the media to find a place for survival in the new conditions of democracy. Through these structures, media and managerial elites were formed. This process lasted for the first decades of independence.

In any case, this situation hinders the proper perception of what is happening in Poland not only over the last 8 years but essentially since the formation of the Third Polish Republic.

At some point, it seemed that the launch of the Three Seas Initiative could change this. After initial skepticism, which I have already described, the initiative gained momentum at some point, which was also reflected in the perception of Poland in Croatian media. Poland may not have been particularly "praised" in these media, but at least it was not particularly criticized.

However, today the situation looks different. The COVID crisis and the war in Ukraine effectively pushed the Three Seas Initiative into the background. In the meantime, in 2020, Zoran Milanović replaced Kolinda Grabar Kitarović as the President of Croatia, not taking up the Three Seas Initiative. The project initiated by the Polish

President Andrzej Duda and Grabar-Kitarović, Milanović has long assessed as "meaningless and erroneous." In the pre-election campaign, he also criticized it, saying that "this idea is unnecessary and superfluous, bringing together a large number of united countries without any criteria."

Aware that the powers of the President of Croatia in the international politics of the Republic of Croatia are quite significant (cooperating with the Government in shaping and implementing foreign policy, making decisions about appointing and dismissing heads of diplomatic missions), it seems quite clear that Croatia is not currently joining the Three Seas Initiative with full commitment.

However, even if it is not a political moment to intensify the Initiative, it is certainly a moment to create channels of communication through which we will inform each other. Not only in the political space but also in the cultural one, as there is a lot of room for changes and improvements. Let's add one more symptomatic fact. No Polish media, private or public, have a permanent correspondent in Croatia. The same goes for Croatian media and correspondents in Poland. This is a great oversight in terms of mutual reliable communication.

It is necessary to create communication channels that are independent of the center of cultural and political power in the West and enable direct exchange of experiences. Of course, the language barrier arises, but there are ways to overcome it.

It is necessary to move away from the stereotypes dominating the perception of Polish culture. For example, the stereotype that Lech Wałęsa is the only authentic representative of Solidarity. Or the stereotype that the only Polish writers worth mentioning are those recognized in the West. The same applies to filmmakers and musicians.

Why should we wait until Western cultural circles verify an artist from Poland or Croatia if we want to inform each other about our cultures? As we have established, we are nations with a similar spiritual and cultural sensitivity, with common roots and similar historical experiences. We don't need intermediaries to mutually recognize our cultural codes and identify with them.



Common historical experiences can help us in all of this. Polish-Croatian history is full of personalities that can be a factor in our integration. Let's mention here just a few about whom not much is known, and who can be beneficial for deepening Polish-Croatian relations.

For example, Eugen Kvaternik (1825-1871), a Croatian politician from the 19th century, worked on Croatia's independence from Austria-Hungary and maintained close contacts with the Polish populist movement during the January Uprising. As Croatian historian Ivo Banac wrote about him, "In 1864, Kvaternik was an agent of the Polish revolutionary government and saw Croatia as the guardian of the Adriatic, a role that should be in the interest of both Poland and Europe."

Or Father Anto Dujlović (1914-1943), a Croatian Catholic priest during World War II, who served as a pastor for the Polish community in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina. His parish was in areas controlled by Serbian Chetniks and Tito's communists. When the bishop ordered him to leave the parish during intensified attacks, the priest refused because he didn't want to abandon his parishioners. He died a martyr's death at the hands of Tito's partisans. The beatification process for him is underway in the Legnica diocese, where the descendants of Poles who once lived in villages in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Dujlović worked, now reside.

Another important figure is Miroslav Ferić (1915-1942), one of the pilots who fought in the Battle of Britain in the famous 303 Squadron. His father was Croatian, and his mother was Polish. Miroslav was born in Trawniki, BiH, and raised in Ostrow Wielkopolski. He was one of the best Polish pilots in the division defending the islands.

Another historical figure connecting Croats and Poles is General Stanisław Maczek. Few people know that this hero of the Polish army was of Croatian origin. What's more - his cousin was Vladko Maček, one of the most important Croatian politicians of the inter-war period. Both Stanisław and Vladko died in exile, far from their homelands, to which they had devoted everything.

Among the historical figures uniting our nations, there is one whose spiritual legacy can particularly help bring Croats and Poles closer. This is, of course, St. John Paul II.

## THE POLISH POPE WHO LOVED CROATIA

For Croats, the pontificate of St. John Paul II was significant from its very first day. Just like in other nations that suffered repression under communist regimes in 1978, the appointment of a Pole as pope was seen in Croatia as a sign of hope.

Croatian Church historian Miroslav Akmadža, in his monograph on Cardinal Franjo Kuharić, the Archbishop of Zagreb from 1969 to 1997, writes about the reactions in the then Socialist Republic of Croatia to the election of the Archbishop of Krakow, Karol Wojtyła, as pope:

"The election of Cardinal Wojtyła from Krakow as pope was a great surprise for the whole world, especially for communist regimes in Eastern Europe. It caused concern among them, aware of how strong the new religious and national enthusiasm of the faithful would be in Poland, as well as in other communist countries."

This was precisely what happened in Croatia.

St. John Paul II understood well the situation of us Croats and the position of the Catholic Church in communist Yugoslavia. He aided in the fight against communism in his own way. The significance and strength of the pope's assistance is evident in the statement of Jakov Blažević, one of the leaders of Croatian communists in 1982, who, in 1948, was the prosecutor in the staged trial against the Archbishop of Zagreb, Blessed Alojzije Stepinac. Blažević writes:

"When the Pope blesses Yugoslavia, it is very dangerous hypocrisy. Pius XII was less dangerous for us. He was clearer, a fascist pope. But this one is different. Does he want to polonize the world? For me, the pope's politics are very dangerous, an attempt to make him a leading political force in the world" – we read Blažević's words two years after Solidarity shook the entire communist bloc.

Thanks to his understanding of the fate not only of Croats but also of other South Slavic peoples, St. John Paul played an extremely important role in supporting these nations and their right to self-determination, as well as their efforts to end the war in former Yugoslavia.

In Croatia, numerous works have been written about the role the Holy See played in the international recognition of our country. Let us recall that on January 13, 1992, the Vatican recognized the independence of Croatia and Slovenia. This happened two days before the states of the then European Community did so. It was a diplomatic precedent, as the common practice is for the Holy See to recognize a new state after all other nations have done so. It was a strong message that undoubtedly helped Croatia gain greater credibility in the international community.

Croatian diplomat Dr. Sc. Mario Nobilo, who was one of the main figures in the diplomacy of the young Croatian state at that time, wrote:

"The special commitment of the Holy See to Croatia and Slovenia is, however, the merit of St. John Paul II. He not only defended Catholicism in former Yugoslavia but also fought against communism. If the Pope at that time were someone who was not such an anti-communist and did not have ecumenical scope, the question is, how would it end."

St. John Paul II's role in strengthening the young Croatian state was not only diplomatic but also distinctly spiritual. In September 1994, when the war was still ongoing in Croatia, the Pope visited Zagreb. He celebrated an open-air Mass attended by about a million people. It was probably the largest gathering in the history of the Croatian nation. In the sermon delivered in Croatian, becoming the first pope in history to address Croats in their native language, he spoke the following words to a nation then suffering from Serbian aggression:

"The Lord's Prayer points us in the right direction to take after each of our defeats: it is the path of forgiveness. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Dear ones, we must carefully consider the power of the word 'as,' the promise and the threat it contains. The threat: only a heart free from all hatred can receive God's forgiveness. The promise: there is no condemnation for the one who, though guilty, repents and is merciful to his brothers. The time has come for the Church in Zagreb, like the whole Church in

Croatia, to become a promoter of mutual forgiveness and reconciliation. 'Seek forgiveness and forgive': this could be a concise task for all who want to set firm conditions for achieving true and lasting peace."

This message of Christian radicalism, the call for Croats to extend the hand of reconciliation first, is what marked this first visit of the Pope.

According to many, this message also played a role in the decision of the Croatian authorities to initiate, in 1995, the process of peaceful reintegration of the eastern part of the country, which was then under the control of Serbian separatists. The process included amnesty for all Croatian citizens of Serbian nationality who participated in the rebellion against Croatia but did not commit any crimes. Of course, there were also political factors that influenced this decision. But the fact is that the then President of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, explaining his decision, indirectly referred to the words of John Paul II.

In my deep conviction, the best way to bring Poland and Croatia closer together is through joint research and studies on the spiritual and cultural heritage of St. John Paul II. We are talking about a person who, in the most convincing and profound way, connects the destinies of Croats and Poles in the 20th century. What is important is that the cultural perception of his person and work goes beyond exclusive Catholic categories. This means that those who are not believers but share the values of Polish culture, which are also universal, such as freedom, patriotism, and love for their community, can correspond with his legacy. I write these words from my own cultural experience. For us Croats, Karol Wojtyła during the overthrow of communism was not only a religious authority but also a moral and political one. His voice was heard even beyond religious circles and was an inspiration and encouragement for many. We live in times when his spiritual and intellectual legacy is fading into the background. It needs to be revived and proposed as an authentically Polish cultural project.

# **The 21st Century – an era of technological risks and opportunities. Five digital threats we need to address.**

Jarema Piekutowski

Launched on November 30, 2022, ChatGPT, a tool utilizing a large machine learning language model, gained a million users<sup>1</sup>. within 5 days. The widespread introduction of an artificial intelligence-based chatbot that can answer questions on any topic is another breakthrough in technology, following the developments of the last 20 years. Among the groundbreaking technologies and products that have shaped the first 20 years of the 21st century alongside artificial intelligence are the proliferation of smartphones, the social media revolution, cryptocurrencies, and so-called gig economy platforms such as Uber and Airbnb. Currently, the number of smartphone users worldwide is estimated at 68% of the global population<sup>2</sup> (approximately 5.5 billion people), and the number of social media users worldwide is 72% of the total world population – 5.8 billion people (and this number is increasing every year – in 2017, it was nearly half as much, 2.7 billion). We are witnessing the mass dissemination of technologies that are changing individual and social thinking and behavior.

Information and communication technologies, which are currently rapidly advancing worldwide, present a tremendous opportunity for humanity. They can contribute to great progress in the fields of healthcare, environmental protection, safety, education, and social policy, helping to reduce suffering, excessive inequalities, and raise the quality of life worldwide. However, with their rapid advancement, many threats also emerge. The perennial danger associated with technological progress is the lag of social, ethical, and legal norms behind technological development and innovation.

In addition to rising living costs, climate catastrophe, and geo-economic confrontations, the "Global Risk Report 2023" issued by the World Economic Forum (WEF) identifies, among the ten most significant future threats, both in the perspective of two and ten years, the threat of widespread cybercrime and a lack of cybersecurity. This risk appeared on the list of the top 10 threats for the first time in this edition of the annual report published for

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.statista.com/chart/29174/time-to-one-million-users/>, read: 29.09.2023.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.statista.com/topics/840/smartphones/#topicOverview>, read: 29.09.2023.

eighteen years. The technological threats defined in the report are not only related to criminal activity and international conflicts. As the authors point out, "Advanced analysis of large datasets will enable the improper use of personal data using legal mechanisms, undermining individual digital sovereignty and the right to privacy, even in democratic systems with effective regulations".<sup>3</sup> Among other technological threats listed among the thirty-two most important (both in the two-year and ten-year perspective) are also: "Collapse of critical information infrastructure", "Concentration of digital power", "Digital inequalities and lack of access to digital services" and "Adverse effects of pioneering technologies". While the weight of the threat of digital inequalities is expected to be roughly similar in 10 years, the danger of concentration of digital power and adverse effects of pioneering technologies are expected to increase significantly. Additionally, in the fifth place among the most important global threats in the two-year perspective (seventh in the ten-year perspective) is the threat of erosion of cohesion and social polarization, which is also largely associated with the development of modern technologies, especially social media. Among other threats described by the WEF, reinforced or induced by technological change are, among others: misinformation, worsening mental health, and labor market crises.

Technological threats can be viewed from many different perspectives – including from the perspective of national security, the fight against crime, the economy, or society. This text primarily presents the socio-psychological perspective, complemented by a view from the perspective of the state and the economy. Among the threats that I describe, which should be monitored and responded to appropriately and quickly from this perspective, are:

1. Development of misinformation;
2. Surveillance and the loss of privacy;
3. Power of algorithms;

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<sup>3</sup> „The Global Risks Report 2023. 18th Edition“, World Economic Forum, Geneva 2023, p. 8.

4. Threats to the job market;
5. Threats to mental health.

## **2. Disinformation and Fake News**

The 20th century was a time of rapid development of global media – press, radio, and television – largely created by professional institutions such as publishing networks and editorial offices. The Western world adhered to an editorial standard that involved fact-checking the content and its presentation. There existed something that could be called the society's information center – what information entered public circulation was decided more by elites than the masses (chief editors, department editors, etc.). This system functioned fairly effectively in democratic countries, while in totalitarian states, the ultimate message was largely dictated by those in power, subject to censorship, selective facts, and the dissemination of propagandist lies. Disinformation related to the pressures of powerful actors in social life also occurred in democratic countries, but the editorial fact-checking system largely restricted this phenomenon. The level of disinformation in the Western media system of that time depended on the substantive and ethical levels of groups and individuals who ultimately allowed media materials to be published and the pressure exerted by external stakeholders on these groups and individuals.

In the 21st century, we are witnessing significant, ongoing changes that may foster the development of disinformation. The internet is a medium without an information center, so data sources are dispersed – anyone can be a commentator. This is particularly true for social media. At the same time, the majority of information flow in the media is still material created by major media corporations, with the intensification of competitive racing and the acceleration of information circulation contributing to the use of increasingly strong emotional stimuli towards readers and the development of so-called *infotainment* – blending entertainment with conveying facts, which can also contribute to disinformation, even in mainstream media. As Samantha Lai from the Brookings Institute think tank points out,



*"The excess of information on social media creates an overwhelming, chaotic environment, making it difficult for people to distinguish facts from fiction. This provides bad-faith actors with opportunities to spread disinformation (...). Social media algorithms are designed to provide users with content that will engage their attention"*<sup>4</sup>. The author also notes that machine learning and artificial intelligence technologies can amplify disinformation efforts – bots are created, managing fake accounts on social media, and generating false textual, audio, and video content (deep fake technologies). According to some sources, bots constitute 9-15% of accounts on X/Twitter<sup>5</sup>.

A period of particular revelation of the scale of disinformation was the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the pandemic, massive amounts of false information appeared in the media, including information about the disease itself, its origin, and the effects of vaccines. Since 2022, Russian disinformation about the war in Ukraine has significantly expanded. Intense information warfare aimed at Western countries using disinformation is also being conducted by China<sup>6</sup>.

The majority of false information comes from social media. As the aforementioned report indicates, 45% of respondents obtain information about the world from them. At the European level, a Eurostat study indicated that 44-46%<sup>7</sup> of EU residents use social media as a source of the latest news and knowledge about current events, with younger people (28% of the 15-24 age group compared to 15% of the 55+ group) being particularly active in publishing their own content on this topic. Although social media are generally considered the least reliable source of information in Europe and North Amer-

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<sup>4</sup> Lai S., "Data misuse and disinformation: Technology and the 2022 elections", <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/data-misuse-and-disinformation-technology-and-the-2022-elections/>, read: 29.09.2023.

<sup>5</sup> Dang S., Paul K., Chmielewski D., „Focus: Do spam bots really comprise under 5% of Twitter users? Elon Musk wants to know“, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/technology/do-spam-bots-really-comprise-under-5-twitter-users-elon-musk-wants-know-2022-05-13/>, read: 29.09.2023.

<sup>6</sup> "Dezinformacja i propaganda Rosji oraz Chin w kontekście wojny na Ukrainie", Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych,

<sup>7</sup> Depending on the age group.

ica (see Statista<sup>8</sup>), in practice, they are becoming the primary source more and more frequently. Among people from the 27 European Union countries, only 12% expressed strong confidence in their ability to distinguish disinformation from true news. Poland had the lowest percentage of people declaring that they could definitely make such a distinction (7% – a similarly low percentage was indicated only by Danes; the highest percentages occurred in Ireland (22%), Malta, and Slovakia (20%)<sup>9</sup>.

At the same time, there is a lack of effective tools for sieving out false information. Although fact-checking services exist, such as Demagog.pl, only about 5% of internet users use them, according to the previously cited Digital Poland report. As a result, as the "Disinformation Through the Eyes of Poles" report by DigitalPoland indicates, among other things, 30% of Poles claim that the pandemic was planned<sup>10</sup>, 25% claim that the 5G network is dangerous to human health. Other main areas of disinformation include climate, health, and politics. Schools do not effectively serve as institutions protecting against disinformation – as teachers point out, a lack of time and an overloaded curriculum do not allow for the conduct of effective, practical classes teaching defense against disinformation.

### **3. Surveillance and the Erosion of Privacy**

According to common, widespread understanding of the structure of social media, their clients or users are individuals with their own accounts, reading and publishing content, and communicating with other users. However, if we take a closer look at the direction of the development of these media, significantly different conclusions can be drawn – advertisers are the main clients of social media platforms in terms of business relationships, and users as potential recipients

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/381455/most-trusted-sources-of-news-and-info-worldwide/read>: 29.09.2023.

<sup>9</sup> "News And Media Survey 2022", European Parliament, Ipsos European Public Affairs, European Union 2022, p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> Mieczkowski P. (red.), „Dezinformacja oczami Polaków”, Digital Poland, Warszawa 2022, p. 5.

of ads constitute a resource. The two most valuable elements of this resource are the attention and data of users. A global technological war for user data is currently underway, especially in the era of slowing down the development of social media after the pandemic. As T. Hsu points out in the New York Times, "Shareholder pressure, fueled by years of large profits, still compels these companies to generate revenue wherever possible – including, experts say, by selling low-quality ads"<sup>11</sup>.

Shoshana Zuboff, the author of the book "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism," points out that we live in an era where user data is constantly collected and analyzed by technological corporations. Online interactions serve as raw material for Big Tech companies, which process them to gain a competitive advantage (for example, this data is used for targeted advertising, allowing companies to increase their revenues). The Cambridge Analytica scandal revealed that this data can also be used for political purposes. The use of algorithms to analyze user preferences and behaviors can lead to manipulation of public opinion, an increase in social polarization, and interference in election results.

The erosion of privacy on the internet is becoming an increasingly pressing issue. As technologies develop, new tools allowing invasion of privacy emerge, such as facial recognition or real-time location tracking. This is also indicated by the authors of the previously mentioned "Global Risk Report 2023": *"Artificial intelligence-based tools, such as chatbots, collect a large amount of personal data to function effectively. The mass transition to remote work during the pandemic led to the tracking of employees using cameras, monitoring key presses, and the development of productivity-enhancing software (...) The spread of network data increases the potential for surveillance by a growing number of entities, both from the public and private sectors, despite rigorous regulatory protection"*<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Hsu T., "Why Are You Seeing So Many Bad Digital Ads Now?", "The New York Times", <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/11/technology/bad-digital-ads.html>, read: 29.09.2023.

<sup>12</sup> "The Global Risks Report 2023", dz. cyt., str. 43.

On one hand, users benefit from the personalization of services, but on the other, they lose control over their own data. Many governments and organizations have taken steps to protect online privacy by introducing regulations such as GDPR in Europe. Nevertheless, new ways of collecting and using personal data are discovered every day. Zuboff speaks of surveillance capitalism because continuously operating tools collecting user data from applications – not only social media platforms but also other applications used in everyday life, including the "Internet of Things" – can be used for ongoing, continuous surveillance of citizens' lives. *"As our lives become more digitized over the next decade, our daily experiences will be recorded and commodified through devices with internet access, smart infrastructure, including 'smart cities'"*<sup>13</sup> – write the creators of the "Global Risk Report."

The issue of the erosion of privacy on the internet is deeply connected with the issue of the responsibility of technological corporations and governments, as well as international organizations, which should collaborate to guarantee security and privacy in the digital world. In response to the threat of surveillance and the erosion of privacy, it is necessary to develop stronger legal frameworks and promote digital education to help users understand how their data is used and how they can defend themselves against it.

## **4. The Power of Algorithms**

Algorithms are finite sequences of specified actions leading to the solution of a particular problem. They form the basis of machine learning and artificial intelligence, enabling machines to 'learn' based on the information provided to them, improving their performance as they acquire new data.

The pursuit of cost optimization in modern society has led to an increasing trend of algorithmizing certain activities, previously performed by humans, in both business and government management. This allows companies and institutions to save on labor costs,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid

but it also leads to negative consequences, both at the national and international levels. An example of such a situation was the sudden drop in the value of the pound on October 7, 2016. According to 'The Economist,' the most likely explanation for this decline is the 'action of algorithmic transactions - computer programs that automatically buy and sell assets, from currencies to commodities. Such programs may be set to sell when the price of an asset falls below a certain level. Their action can be 'contagious,' and the transactions of one program trigger selling signals for other algorithms.'"<sup>14</sup>.

Authors such as Cathy O'Neil ('Weapons of Math Destruction') and Virginia Eubanks ('Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor') point out a range of problems associated with algorithms. Firstly, they contribute to the increase in social inequalities due to the so-called negative feedback loop. An example is the support of the credit scoring system, the sentencing system in the judiciary, or recommendations for admitting new students to school. The algorithm learns to make decisions based on historical statistical data, including various information about social status and background. Consequently, a person from a poorer family with lower education, living in a deprived neighborhood, may automatically have fewer chances, according to the algorithm, to get into a good school, obtain a loan, and therefore have lower chances of social advancement and escaping a difficult situation.

A particular case of such an algorithm is the Chinese Social Credit System (SCS). It is a government initiative aimed at monitoring and evaluating citizens based on their social and financial behaviors. This system collects data from various sources, such as urban monitoring, social media, and financial institutions, and then assigns points to citizens based on their actions. SCS poses a serious threat to privacy as the government collects and analyzes vast amounts of personal data without clear consent from citizens. This can lead to an invasion of private life and the creation of a surveillance atmosphere.

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<sup>14</sup> "Why sterling suffered a flash crash", "The Economist", 13.10.2016, <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2016/10/13/why-sterling-suffered-a-flash-crash>, read: 30.09.2023.

The system can also be used to manipulate social behavior by rewarding or punishing citizens for specific actions, leading to authoritarian control of society and a restriction of personal freedom.

Algorithms also decide on the content shown to users on social media, closely related to the misinformation I mentioned earlier. As W. Brady and others indicate, social media algorithms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok exploit the universal tendency to pay more attention to so-called PRIME<sup>15</sup>, information, which includes:

- Information related to social prestige
- Information from a specific social bubble (ingroup)
- Moral issues
- Emotion-inducing content

To maintain user attention and maximize engagement, *"PRIME-type information is reinforced through human-algorithm interactions."*<sup>16</sup> The result is misinformation and an increase in social conflicts.

Another problem hindering the mitigation of the negative effects of decision-making by algorithms is the phenomenon of the 'black box,' the lack of transparency of algorithms. Citizen defense against the consequences of decisions made by algorithms is particularly challenging because, at least in business, the way an algorithm makes a decision is a secret held by the companies creating and using it. In the case of popular social media platforms, abuses regularly occur, such as the deletion of accounts where algorithms detected activity deemed inconsistent with the rules. At the same time, there is no possibility of appeal against such decisions, and often it is not even possible to obtain precise information about why a particular account was terminated. Algorithms that determine how often and to how many users a particular profile is displayed are also opaque – and this largely determines the existence of media in the social media space.

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<sup>15</sup> Eng.: "prestigious, ingroup, moral, and emotional information". Za: "Algorithm-mediated social learning in online social networks", "Trends in Cognitive Sciences",

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

In the face of all these challenges, it is essential to ensure transparency, accountability, and legal regulation in the application of algorithms to minimize the negative effects of their operation and protect fundamental rights and civil liberties.

## **5. Threats to the Job Market**

In the case of the job market, rapid technological development coincides with other unfavorable phenomena, such as the aging of society (in the Western world) and the associated outflow of workers from the labor market. In the coming years, a two-sided imbalance of supply and demand is expected to occur in the labor market. On the one hand, due to an aging population and the failure of education (including vocational training) to keep up with the needs of the labor market, there will be a shortage of workers, especially in occupations related to high technologies. On the other hand, the displacement of workers by digital tools, at least periodically, will intensify the phenomenon of unemployment. According to the World Economic Forum's report, "The Future of Jobs 2023," the largest decline in the number of jobs in the next 5 years will occur in occupations such as:

- Data entry clerks
- Secretaries
- Workers in accounting, finance, and payroll
- Material recording and warehouse clerks
- Managers of business and administration services
- Cashiers and ticket clerks
- Retail salespersons
- Customer information and service workers
- Door-to-door sales workers, information brokers, and street vendors
- Postal workers<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "Future of Jobs Report 2023",

A significant portion of these activities can already be automated. The authors of the report point out that "Big Data analysis, professions related to climate change and environmental management technologies, and encryption and cybersecurity will be the most important factors driving employment growth. It is expected that new technologies in agriculture, digital platforms and applications, e-commerce, and artificial intelligence will cause significant disruptions in the job market, with a significant percentage of companies predicting layoffs in their organizations, balanced by employment growth elsewhere, resulting in a net positive outcome."<sup>18</sup> However, the optimistic tone of the report does not take into account the fact that the automation of additional professions will lead to the coexistence of labor market imbalances. The entry into the job market of ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence tools has also impacted the ICT sector, which has traditionally had a large surplus of demand for work over supply. Many simple programming tasks can now be performed by AI (this crisis coincided with the post-pandemic recession)<sup>19</sup>. The education system is currently not efficient enough to enable the rapid retraining of these individuals, especially since employers consider experience to be the most important quality of a potential employee, in addition to education<sup>20</sup>. In the long term, the automation of additional professions will continue. As the PwC report indicates, the highest likelihood of automation exists in industries such as transportation and storage, industry, construction, administration, and trade. The report predicts three waves of job market automation:

- **Algorithmization wave** (currently): mainly automation of simple computational and analytical tasks. This wave will primarily affect data-dependent sectors such as financial services, information and communication, professional, scientific, and technical services.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 5 i 6.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Paślawski K., "Drastyczny spadek liczby ofert pracy dla pracowników IT", <https://crn.pl/aktualnosci/drastyczny-spadek-liczby-ofert-pracy-dla-pracownikow-it/>, read: 02.10.2023.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. e.g. "Raport z badania pracodawców. Powrót do rzeczywistości? Drugi rok pandemii oczami polskich firm", Polska Agencja Rozwoju Przedsiębiorczości, Warszawa 2022, p. 14



- **Augmentation wave** (until 2030): automation of routine tasks such as filling out forms or exchanging information, and automation of a large part of programming tasks. It will have a strong impact on the financial and insurance sectors and other sectors with a large amount of clerical work (public administration, industry, transportation, and storage).
- **Autonomy wave** (2030-2040): automation of physical work, dynamic problem-solving, and the development of autonomous vehicles and robots. It will have a strong impact on construction, water and sanitation, and transportation.

If these forecasts prove true, over the next 50 years, automation will cover a very large part of the job market, and many people will be left unemployed. Ideas for solving these problems, such as introducing a guaranteed unconditional income, are emerging in public discourse. However, such a solution is problematic from the standpoint of human dignity and development. Work is often a source of satisfaction, giving people purpose and the opportunity for growth. Unconditional guaranteed income can meet basic financial needs, but it cannot replace the psychological and social benefits of employment. Therefore, it is necessary to adapt the current education system and labor market institutions to the new requirements associated with technological development.

## 6. Behavioral Addictions and Other Mental Health Issues

Smartphone and computer applications are designed to encourage frequent use, which can lead to excessive engagement in online activities at the expense of other aspects of life, such as interpersonal relationships or professional and personal responsibilities. Among the types of digital addictions are, among others, online erotomania („all activities that can be carried out online to induce sexual arousal”), online sociomania (addiction to social contacts on the internet), addiction to the internet, online gaming, online

gambling, online shopping, etc.<sup>21</sup>. Technologies that may contribute to addictions include:

- **Push notifications** (user-triggered), which may encourage users to constantly check their devices.
- **Rewards and incentives** – reward systems, such as points, badges, or levels in mobile games or social apps, can encourage more frequent app usage. Features such as „likes”, comments, and shares can lead to constant checking of social media for confirmation of one's social worth.
- **Automatic playback** – autoplay features in streaming services can lead to continuous use, which, in turn, can lead to neglecting other tasks or duties.
- **Infinite scroll** – in social media apps or websites, it can encourage endless scrolling and spending more time online.

The phenomenon called FOMO (fear of missing out), or fear of missing important messages, can lead to constant device checking.

Technological addictions are favored by a lack of digital hygiene. Conducted in November 2022 on a representative group of adult users, the Nationwide Digital Hygiene Study 2022 indicates significant shortcomings in this area. For example, only 14.3% of adult users control their screen time. The number of notifications is limited by 21.9% of respondents. Only 20.3% of people remove their phones from sight while engaging in focused activities (work, learning, etc.)<sup>22</sup>.

In the information age, where countless stimuli and information are available at any moment, many people experience difficulties with concentration and maintaining attention. Phone notifications, social media, and other online platforms can contribute to attention

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<sup>21</sup> Krzyżak-Szymańska E., "Uzależnienia technologiczne wśród dzieci i młodzieży", Ministerstwo Zdrowia, Krajowe Biuro ds. Przeciwdziałania Narkomanii, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Warszawa 2018, str. 56.

<sup>22</sup> "Higiena cyfrowa dorosłych użytkowników i użytkowników internetu w Polsce", Instytut Cyfrowego Obywatelstwa, Warszawa 2023.

dispersion and concentration problems, leading to stress, frustration, and, in the long run, burnout.

The technological progress irony is that despite the ability to connect with people worldwide, many people experience loneliness. The online world can replace interactions in the real world, and the superficiality of many online relationships can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Furthermore, comparing oneself to others on social media can lead to lowered self-esteem and a sense of inadequacy. Issues with forming romantic relationships are exacerbated by the widespread availability of online pornography. In 2018, one of the most popular pornographic platforms, Pornhub, recorded 33.5 billion visits, which means approximately 92 million visits per day worldwide. Using online pornography leads to addiction and hinders the building of romantic relationships. Citing studies by A.M. Maddox and others<sup>23</sup>, the authors of the report 'Summary of literature and scientific research indicating the negative consequences of using pornography in the context of child and youth protection' point out, among other things, that "Among the respondents, 76.8% of men and 31.6% of women admitted to watching pornography. People who had never watched pornography showed higher quality in their relationships (examined relationships in terms of communication, adaptability, commitment, sexual satisfaction, and the degree of infidelity)."<sup>24</sup>

All these threats require awareness and a balanced approach to using technology to minimize their negative impact on mental health.

## Conclusion

If we want to wisely benefit from the advantages of new technologies and use the opportunities arising from their development for

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<sup>23</sup> Maddox A.M., Rhoades G.K., Markman H.J., Viewing Sexually-Explicit Materials Alone or Together: Associations with Relationship Quality, „Archives of Sexual Behavior”, nr 40, kwiecień 2011, za: „Podsumowanie literatury i badań naukowych wskazujących na negatywne konsekwencje korzystania z pornografii w kontekście ochrony dzieci i młodzieży”, Stowarzyszenie Twoja Sprawa, Warszawa 2019, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

the good of humanity, it is crucial to identify associated dangers as quickly as possible. This is necessary to implement actions, at the individual, small group, and community levels, as well as at the levels of states and international organizations, aiming to mitigate these threats and prevent incurring excessive financial and social costs. In this text, I attempted to point out and describe several particularly significant threats that have already emerged or may arise in the near future in connection with the rapidly accelerating technological progress, primarily in the field of information and communication technologies. My intention was not to present technological progress itself as a threat – it becomes a threat only when accepted in an unconscious and uncritical manner, its social impact is not monitored, and the response to threats occurs too late or not at all. This response, at the level of states and organizations, is additionally hindered because any restrictions on technological development conflict with the interests of its creators, who, in the era of global technological giants, have become more powerful than ever. Therefore, it is necessary to take action now.

# **Disinformation – the challenge of the 21st century**

Ivan Hrstić

## **Hybrid Warfare Russian Influence on Media, Organizations, Politics and Public Opinion in Europe during the Invasion of Ukraine**

### **INTRO: HAS RUSSIA LOST THE WAR IN UKRAINE? AND WHO IS WINNING THE HYBRID WAR ON EU SOIL?**

Russia has lost the war in Ukraine. Period? Well, not quite that fast. Even as early as mid-summer 2021, it was entirely clear to even the most skeptical that Putin's Russia had not achieved and has no power to achieve the key objectives of the "Special Military Operation," which according to alleged unofficial Kremlin expectations should have been secured within the first three days. However, the goals of the "SMO" were never publicly formulated and presented as such, so they always can change on the fly and adapt to the situation on the battlefield.

We didn't capture Kyiv or Kharkiv, we didn't overthrow the legally elected government and install our own? No worries, because that wasn't our main goal, explain Putin's aides now. The main thing is that we prevented Ukraine from joining NATO and laid the foundation for the denazification and demilitarization of Ukraine. We didn't liberate Novorossiia from Kharkiv to Odesa? BUT, we conducted referendums for the annexation of the Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson regions, returned them to Mother Russia, and finally physically connected Donbas and Crimea with a land bridge. Enough for Putin to go down in history alongside the greatest Russian emperors!

Of course, such a presentation has little to do with reality. Putin didn't get less, but more NATO at the Russian borders, with de facto neutral Sweden and Finland joining the alliance, practically turning the Baltic into NATO's sea. Not only that, Putin's czarist adventure has brought the Euro-Atlantic alliance back from the brink of "brain death," as recently diagnosed by the French President Macron.

The notion of being the second most powerful military force on the planet has been completely shattered, and in the meantime, after the intervention of NATO countries' military logistics, the Russian army has only proven to be the second most powerful force in Ukraine. Ultimately, the spoils of 2014 are also in question, as it remains uncertain whether the internationally unacceptable annexation of another country's territory will hold in the post-Putin era, which will inevitably come.

**The Russian public supports Putin through his absolute, we could say totalitarian control of media, but that doesn't mean the Russians are all buying. Da je Rusija demokratska zemlja..... Jedno od zadnjih područja otpora, baš kao u Staljinovo vrijeme, ostaje humor... This is the last year's joke from the virtual streets of Moscow:**

- This is our war against NATO.**
- And how's it going?**
- We've lost 8 generals, 15,000 soldiers, 100 planes, and one ship.**
- And NATO?**
- They haven't arrived yet.**

NATO hasn't arrived even today, though the tally has multiplied immensely. Yes, there's no doubt Russia has lost the conventional war in Ukraine. However, that doesn't mean Putin has been completely militarily defeated, nor does it mean that the "Collective West," as it's (un)popularly called in the Kremlin, actually wants to see Putin's Russia brought to its knees, all in fear of even more irrational suicidal military moves or potential successors worse than Putin, of which there is no shortage in Russia. Unfortunately, much more Ukrainian and Russian blood will have to be spilled to force Putin to publicly accept the fact that no matter how opportunistically changeable the goals are, they won't be achieved through military escalations.

But no less significant is the fact that alongside the conventional war in Ukraine, a hybrid war is being waged on a global scale. In

other words, we could, with a touch of pretension, say that the prelude to World War III is already underway, although it's clear that for a definitive assessment, it would still be necessary for China to become more actively involved on Russia's side, alongside proxy allies such as Belarus, Iran, and North Korea. Fortunately, such a scenario isn't yet visible on the horizon. Of course, there's still a possibility that must never be ignored, however naive it may seem that even the Russians themselves understand how unreasonable it is: the use of nuclear weapons, which would inevitably have global repercussions.

Putin's hybrid war, with all the military and political fronts in the Middle East and Africa, and the ongoing efforts to align with BRICS countries to create a geostrategic counterbalance to the US and its allies, is primarily focused on the media and daily political space of all EU and NATO countries. The political battle in these countries is waged on a daily basis between those who believe that Europe and the values of the Western civilization are being defended in Ukraine and that material support of all kinds for the clear victim must continue as long as there is a need, and those who propagate the idea that Western elites are attempting to drag the EU and the US into a war, at the expense of the common man, European and American. "It's not our war," they persistently repeat, and it's not always easy to discern to what extent they are members of the Russian fifth column in Europe, and to what extent they are "useful idiots" unconsciously working for Putin's mafia state.

Of course, there are those who are genuinely full of fear, who physically feel the consequences of the global energy war and rampant inflation on their own skin, those who feel completely unprotected by their elites and are therefore more willing to turn a blind eye to Russian crimes in Ukraine and succumb to Putin's mafia racket. They are Putin's wild cards, because he knows that these wavering individuals are his crucial allies – as long as they exist, time potentially works in his favor. In Putin's view, Russian citizens will eat grass if he convinces them that it's a matter of the survival of Mother Russia, while the average citizen of the pampered West is not willing to sacrifice for others until he himself is directly threatened.



But is it really so? This calculus could as easily be fundamentally wrong in the long run, as we have already seen in the case of the Kremlin's misguided estimates that Kyiv would more or less quietly fall before a determined Russian blitzkrieg, and that the majority of Ukrainians would greet their Big Russian Brother liberators with flowers. Research shows that despite the significant financial hardships many of them feel, the inhabitants of the European Union still largely support active military and financial aid from their governments to Ukraine. However, Russian connections of certain political actors are still active, and Moscow will continue to try to amplify feelings of insecurity that theoretically could lead to more Russia-friendly governments in some countries.

In such circumstances, the constant responsibility of journalists and their media not to fall into the trap of alleged professional equidistance toward the aggressor and the victim, or into false neutrality that is essentially nothing more than support for a criminal aggressor, is crucial. When various crypto-Putinists attack us for not picking up arms and going to fight in Ukraine if we care so much about it, we can respond that it's quite obvious that democracy needs us more here, just as it's clear that they themselves are more needed by Putin here in their clash with democracy, rather than going to fight in Russian trenches on the Eastern Front.

The primary goal of this text, of course, is not to dissect military tactics or strategies on the battlefields of the Eastern Front in Ukraine, but rather to address the state of the virtual battlefield on the Western Front, specifically within the EU and North America, regarding how to cope with the daily challenges that present a false "Peace for our time," instead of preserving the values of Western civilization.

We must deal with all kinds of stubborn lies every day anew, and here we will list some of the key fakes of Russian agit-prop that some European actors persistently repeat through their megaphones.

**FAKE: EXPANDING THE NATO MEANS ATTACK ON  
RUSSIA**  
**"THERE WILL BE NO INVASION. PUTIN IS AN  
OLDER MAN, HE WILL BE GONE TOMORROW"**

*Zoran Milanović, president of the Republic of Croatia, February 2022.*

It is completely logical that the Baltic countries were among the first to raise the alarm due to massive Russian military exercises in western Russia and Belarus, which should have been clear in advance as preparation for an invasion of Ukraine and a threat to the security of the entire Europe. Nothing is more understandable than the fact that it was Poland, not only as an extension of the U.S. but also out of self-preservation, that sounded the warning to the EU that it must not remain passive again, as it did in the case of Serbian aggression against Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the early 1990s. Just as it was clear that Vučić's Serbia, regardless of what happened and whatever sanctions were imposed, would remain firmly in the grip of the Russian bear.

However, despite all the visible and easily recognizable Russian connections in some other countries of the Warsaw Pact, and their acute energy interests, it was still hard to imagine that Orban's Hungary would remain such a consistent ally of Putin with such a stubborn anti-Ukrainian rhetoric. A nation that surely hasn't forgotten the Russian tanks on the streets of Budapest, which caused decades of iretrevable loss of democratic and economic progress. Not to mention the lost lives and suffering under the totalitarian regime.

Perhaps even harder to imagine was that in Croatia, which felt the killing edge of that same rhetoric and soviet era armament, just as Ukraine did during Putin's time, a loud pro-Putin opposition would emerge countering active military aid to Ukraine, and that the President of the Republic himself would be so willing to lead it.

**This is an excerpt from a conversation that the author of  
this overview had with Zoran Milanović, the President of the Re-**

**public of Croatia, in the week before Putin's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.**

**Milanović:** So, they say that the best defense is a good attack. Maybe in soccer, but this is basketball. Here, the best defense is defense!

**IH:** What attack are you talking about?

**Milanović:** I'm talking about NATO expansion!

**IH:** That's an attack?

**Milanović:** That's an attack! Absolutely!

**IH:** So, you're justifying what Putin is saying!

**Milanović:** It's a figurative attack! It's a figurative attack. So, while I'm the President of Croatia, I'll be against NATO expanding anywhere! Do you understand me?

**IH:** Should Croatia then return to the positions of 1997, as Putin is demanding? Should Croatia leave NATO? What does that mean? Why are you justifying this?

**Milanović:** What am I justifying?

**IH:** You are justifying the Russian threat at this moment, by saying that NATO attacked Russia or Russian interests?

**Milanović:** So, according to you, NATO should expand to Ukraine and Georgia? OK, good luck with that! ...

**IH:** Well, are you aware of how these words will resonate worldwide? Everyone will talk about this tomorrow.

**Milanović:** Well, everyone is already talking about that, for heaven's sake!

**IH:** But no one except you is saying it so openly!

**Milanović:** Well, the commander of the German Navy resigned because he spoke about things everyone talks about. The German Navy, not the Horthy Navy! So, these are completely clear truths! Don't compare me to Putin, those are very cheap and down-to-earth tricks. So, Putin is Putin, Hitler is Hitler. Munich is Munich, and these things have no connection to each other. Putin is an older man, he'll be gone tomorrow. Russia won't go away... At some point, we need to say enough. Where is the end of NATO?!? NATO has come far enough to the East, that's enough! Enough is enough! I've been doing this my

whole damn life! Enough is enough!

**IH:** You will be a hero in the Moscow press tomorrow, that's for sure! You were the last time you talked about this, and your words were triumphantly echoed.

**Milanović:** Triumphantly?

**IH:** Yes, it was a small victory for them!

**Milanović:** The difference is that I have no contacts or ties with Moscow, much less than with Washington. What I'm saying is common sense, based on experience. And as the Croatian President, not the Lithuanian! Not the American! Not from Downing Street, but as the Croatian President! So, our little rifle and our little wallett, that's our interest. We can be global heroes. And die on the Volga.

So, it must be noted that Zoran Milanović has very limited executive powers as the President of the Republic. They still mostly remain in the hands of Andrej Plenković's government, which is strongly pro-Ukrainian. However, Milanović still is the individual who, in times of both war and peace, according to the Constitution nominally bears the title of the Supreme Commander of the Croatian Armed Forces – one of the components of NATO forces. And he publicly and without any hesitation vocalizes all the key cornerstones of Kremlin's propaganda.

He certainly isn't the only one of the western leaders who, at that moment, made a completely incorrect assessment that Putin wouldn't execute an invasion. On one hand, he stated the obvious truth that Russia doesn't have enough soldiers for an efficient invasion, but on the other hand, he completely underestimated the political – and criminal – will of the Russian leadership to achieve a historical goal when the "windows of opportunity" might be closing irrevocably.

At the moments like this, you can only watch and listen in disbelief, but persistently asking questions that will completely expose the powerful politician in front of you. Everything should have actually been clear already at that moment of Milanović's outing from the closet, but over the next few months, he will go much, much fur-

ther than this undiplomatic outburst, confirming that this wasn't an accidental uncontrolled excess, but rather a consistent pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian stance.

## **FAKE: YOU CANNOT WIN AGAINST THE NUCLEAR SUPERPOWER**

### **The postponed D-Day: Why Didn't Putin's Invasion Start on Wednesday, but on Thursday?**

Putin postponed his invasion by a single week after Western governments had already referred to a certain Wednesday as the imminent D-Day. Has any war ever started on a Wednesday? There were probably some, but military experts say that sudden, unexpected attacks usually happen on weekends when the enemy is most likely to be caught off guard, distracted, or unprepared – maybe while having a barbecue, enjoying a beer or a brandy, or after sex. If you ask doctors, they will tell you that heart attacks most commonly occur on Mondays. But, as the best Stalinist disciple (the one from the Balkans) once said, the law is not like a fence to lean on like a drunkard. For example, Hitler attacked Poland on Friday, September 1, 1939, just one week after he secretly agreed with Stalin on the invasion of that country and its division.

Stalin, on the other hand, wisely waited for two more weeks until Sunday, September 17, 1939, to attack Poland from the east, thereby destroying the Poles' chance of any meaningful defense. After their forces jointly overran Polish territory, Hitler's and Stalin's troops held joint military parades along the new demarcation line in Poland. For the Poles, it was *déjà vu*, as they had been partitioned multiple times by their neighbors within a few centuries. At that time, Poland stretched almost to today's Belarusian Minsk, and the city of Lviv, which is now in Ukraine, was deep within its territory. After the war, Stalin did not return those areas to Poland, and the Poles had to compensate for the lost territory with their own territory. In accordance with the agreement with Hitler, he also took Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia, while Romania lost Bessarabia to the Soviets, and Finland

ceded Karelia. Hitler, too, waited for a nice Sunday, June 22, 1941, before stabbing his unsuspecting comrade Stalin in the back and launching Operation Barbarossa, much like the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on Sunday, December 7, 1941.

However, while the world order was still in place, not even Hitler invaded Poland without any pretext. A series of fabricated incidents served that purpose. It all began when German saboteurs in Polish uniforms received a code message, "Granny has died", and carried out sabotage operations in what then was German Gleiwitz. This sentence marked the beginning of World War II on August 31, 1939! In case you're wondering, it was a Thursday. Some will argue that the world's greatest bloodshed actually began two years earlier on July 7, 1937, when the Japanese emperor's armies began invading China. And, if you're not interested in the day of the week, I'll tell you: it was a Wednesday.

So, anything is possible except for a surprise attack on the day that such an attack has been announced, with the hosts already preparing a warm welcome with guns at their windows. Of course, this still doesn't mean that every attack must be a surprise, especially if you have been amassing forces and publicly signaling your intention to invade for months, or even announcing it, making the element of surprise less critical. But while allegedly some of the Russian forces were retreating to their bases, Russian media were seizing the opportunity to mock Western media, who have been announcing the invasion for days. Some of them boldly claimed that Wednesday to be the ultimate D-Day.

Putin himself joked, asking if Zelensky set his alarm clock to ensure he wouldn't sleep through the invasion. However, even the Ukrainian president was making fun of such predictions, with crystal ball forecasts, and he obviously wasn't convinced that an open war with Russian armies would start on that particular Wednesday, rather than the (poorly) concealed war that has been ongoing in Donbas since 2014, in which Ukraine has lost over 14,000 lives. For him, the war didn't "start" on any of the days in 2022, because it had already begun several years ago, and despite ceasefires, it had never really

ended. Yes, it would all be somewhat amusing if we didn't know that Putin had already attacked Ukraine (Poland), annexed Crimea (the Sudetenland), and is preparing to annex two more breakaway "republics," i.e., Donbas (Czechoslovakia).

Could anyone have concluded that the threatening military exercise show was over, that Putin would be content with the perception that it was all just his bluff that the West naively fell for? That would have really been naïve. Because Putin had not actually achieved any of his publicly proclaimed goals. Ukraine was not on the brink of joining NATO, so he couldn't claim to have prevented that. From Washington and Brussels, he received rejections to all demands to return NATO to its "original positions" from 1997. Putin sought a Chamberlain-like response from NATO, but received the opposite. He got Chamberlain not from the times of Munich but from the times after the German-Russian invasion of Poland. Despite expectations that he would deepen divisions between Germany, France, and the U.S., Putin's war games have actually given new meaning to and justified the existence of NATO. Even countries like Sweden and Finland have begun thinking that they were exposed too much to the nervousness and caprices of the Russian bear, whether it was a bluff or a genuine threat. Putin's war decision was actually helping NATO to recover from the "brain death" that the French President Macron has diagnosed not long ago.

From the beginning, it was clear that 130,000 soldiers were not enough for a general invasion, let alone the occupation of Ukraine. We all remember, the U.S. has transported 700,000 troops across the ocean to liberate Kuwait. But for the invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam, only 190,000 American and British soldiers were sufficient. Ukraine and Iraq are comparable in size, and Russia is not across the ocean. This number of troops was enough as the spearhead to enter the already occupied Donbas and possibly territorially connect it with Crimea. Of course, it was hard to believe that Putin would be satisfied with that. In Russian national consciousness, the entire New Russia, the Ukrainian coastline from the mouths of the Danube and Dniester to the Dnieper and Donetsk, was always considered

Russian territory that they had bloodily liberated from the Turks or Tatars and which had unjustly been ceded to Ukraine.

It must be said: Were Putin's regime not a rigid police state, the average Russian would have never condoned an unprovoked general attack on Ukraine, which they still mostly considered a fraternal country. To conduct an open invasion, Putin was not looking for the element of surprise as much as for the legal and emotional justification that would be somewhat convincing, at least within Russia itself, where he controls all the key media. It's somewhat akin to how Bush and Blair audaciously fabricated the threat of Saddam's chemical weapons to the global security and then attacked Iraq, igniting a fire that still engulfs much of the Arab world today.

But it was actually the Russian media, not the Western media, that had been preparing the ground for an invasion for weeks by pumping justifications for Russian intervention into the Russian public. The Moscow newspaper Pravda published various scenarios for such an intervention for days. One of them materialized just before the invasion, providing legal grounds for the Duma to recognize the "independent" republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. This rendered any discussions on the implementation of the Minsk agreements completely irrelevant. Everything was set up as justification for the invasion, for the open entry of Russian tanks, which were already in Donbas under "rebel" flags, and for the subsequent annexation of the regions where everyone already had Russian citizenship. Essentially, Putin's Ukrainian recipe does not differ much from Milošević's Krajina recipe. And the deception of the opponent is one of the key factors. Even Zelensky himself made statements that he didn't believe the invasion would happen. He did not have much choice in that matter; he certainly couldn't leave any room for Moscow to claim that he had provoked the intervention with a military move.

In this regard, an old Galician joke, from today's Ukraine, which was retold by Sigmund Freud, is quite relevant. Two Jews met at a train station, and one asked the other where he was traveling. To Krakow, the other replied. The first one said, *"You're such a liar! You say you're going to Krakow, and I would have thought you're going to*



*Lviv, but I happen to know that you're really going to Krakow! So why are you lying to me?"*

Chronic mistrust in these parts of the world certainly is a matter of a healthy survival instinct, borne out through a thousand years of written history. So, if we were pondering the best possible day for Putin's attack, considering the missed D-Day, the answer might be: the day after. Any day but Wednesday. Or maybe the very next Wednesday – or Thursday, while everyone is still having fun with Putin's "bluff."

## **FAKE: IF YOU POKE THE BEAR, THE BEAR WILL TURN ON YOU**

### **The Last Russian Czar: Why Even Some Croats Admire Putin's Icon on the Wall?**

Will history indeed remember the scene from the Kremlin, much like it remembers British Prime Minister Chamberlain at the feet of Hitler and Mussolini in Munich, followed by the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact in Moscow? Let's rewind the tape. Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, in a vast white imperial hall under a dome reminiscent of the Roman Pantheon, gathers his political nobles like little first graders - HE behind a dominant white table lined with gold, they uncomfortably perched on stylish chairs, evidently aware that at that moment, they'd be wiser to be somewhere else. Even in Siberia.

The social distance between them and Putin, however, is three times the length of the table where just a few days ago the so far unrealized Russian Napoleon hosted the President of the French Fifth Republic. Still, it won't help them, whether vaccinated three times with Sputnik or not. Putin's Security Council meeting could easily become part of the evidence for a new Nuremberg, once – should it ever happen – Putin is no longer present in this world. The script of Putin's play leaves nothing to chance; his advisors will shoulder their share of blame; he singles them out one by one, demanding each to express their position on recognizing the Russian "republics" on Ukrainian territory. Diplomatic evasion is not an option. A "MAYBE,"

let alone a "NO," simply isn't an option. Otherwise, the boyars would be in trouble.

Particularly nervous was Sergey Yevgenyevich Naryshkin, the head of Putin's intelligence service. At first, he tries to suggest that the Ukrainians and Americans should be given some time to respond, and then only "otherwise..." However, Vladimir Vladimirovich smugly interrupts Naryshkin, mocking him and suggesting that he is now initiating a new round of negotiations. After stumbling, Naryshkin reluctantly suggests that he supports the recognition of the Russian "republics," and Putin immediately takes away even that tiny conditional concession. There's no escape; Naryshkin is forced to state, without hesitation, that he supports the immediate recognition. But here comes a Freudian "slip," or perhaps he was trying to make amends to Putin for his initial ambiguity. He goes further and suggests that he supports these republics joining the Russian Federation. That is, of course, the underlying agenda of this scenario, inscribed between the lines of the official public statement. Putin quickly interrupts him, stating that this is not (yet) on the agenda. BUT, following the script, the Duma then, with applause, votes to recognize the Donetsk and Luhansk "republics" and to send Russian forces across the border in the role of "peacekeepers." In this role, they would be about as convincing as the JNA units during the siege of Vukovar.

It's clear that Putin has no interest in negotiations, even if a new discussion with the U.S. president was scheduled just two days later. "Why would we give them another two days?!" Putin asks angrily. Clearly, the date and outcome of this play have been predetermined and announced in the Russian press, and the negotiations are merely to maintain the illusion that Russia still cares about some international order. Putin is not literally Hitler, but he consciously risks igniting the world in both the selfperception and the illusion of his own greatness. Hitler's speeches about Austria, the Sudetenland, or Danzig, and Putin's statements about Crimea, Donbas, and Novorossi-ya are essentially the same. He denies Ukraine in its present form, invoking an invented genocide of local Russians. It's a fairy tale for the most naive and ardent Putin admirers. They are not in short supply

in Croatia and the rest of once communist European East, even on the West, among those who pretend not to see that Putin's "U-kraina" recipe is essentially the same as Milošević's "Kraina" recipe.

For those who believed that Putin was only bluffing in some geostrategic game, they were left speechless. It is clear even to them that Putin has just lit the fuse under a powder keg, potentially measured in megatons. Of course, there are reasons, not entirely incomprehensible, for some in Croatia to admire Putin's icon on the wall. It could even be said that it's not a bad thing that an alternative to the West exists, which is equally capable of making serious mistakes. It's not Putin who has fabricated reasons for waging wars worldwide; he has mainly stayed within what he considers his own backyard. We can even say that he played a more positive role in Syria than those who created ISIS. However, in the early 1990s when Russia played a positive role in Croatia, it was not Putin's Russia at the time. Today's Putin would likely have opposed the dissolution of the USSR to the detriment of Russia, and almost certainly the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Would he let go of the Baltic states, Poland, Czechoslovakia? Luckily, we do not have to bet on that.

Milanović's claim that he will prevent Croatian children from dying as they did on the Volga for foreign interests is a severe distortion of reality. Even Joe Biden constantly reiterates that he will not send Americans to Ukraine, which is not a NATO member and is not protected by Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. So there's no question of Croatian or any other NATO soldiers dying on the banks of the Dnieper or Donetsk. Gradual sanctions against Russia this time, however, could be more decisive and far more damaging to Russian interests than after Putin's annexation of Crimea, which was then on a symbolic Chamberlain-like level.

Milanović's "threat" to oppose NATO expansion "anywhere" (!!!) and his statement that "enough is enough" (!!!!!) should have been an unbelievable scandal. He is the nominal Supreme Commander of the army, one of NATO's components, which became a member because it was Croatia's objective national interest. Croatia joined NATO in 2009, five years after the Baltic states, just before Putin started the war in

Donbas and annexed Crimea. So, was Croatia the one that pushed Putin over the edge? Of course not, Ukraine was not even close to joining NATO at the time, just as it isn't now, and there were no grounds for such a war. This is, of course, a heavy distortion from Putin's kitchen. The key reason for the war in Ukraine is not geopolitics but a relic of imperial feelings in the era of imperial Russia, a desire to re-conquer what is still considered "inalienably Russian" – Novorossiia from Donbas to Odessa.

Another distortion lies in the question of "what would Americans do if Putin entered into a military alliance with Cuba or Venezuela." Of course, the Cuban missile crisis did not happen solely because of the arrival of Russian military instructors (who were there all along), but because of an attempt to install Russian ballistic missiles with 2-megaton nuclear warheads. And no matter how much NATO expanded in Europe, American nuclear missiles did not get closer to Russia – not by a millimeter.

## **FAKE: DO YOU WANT TO RISK A NUCLEAR WAR? Will Putin Meet the Fate of Ceausescu or Gaddafi?**

***"Once, I spotted a large rat and, armed with a stick, I chased it into a corner of the hallway. But when it had nowhere else to go, it jumped at me, and I had to flee from it!"***

This is one of the formative stories that the Russian czar Vladimir Vladimirovich told us about his childhood in the rat-infested alleys of Leningrad. The First and the Last. Fortunately, he was a bit quicker than the rat and managed to slam the door shut in its face.

***"I received a quick and enduring lesson about what it means to be backed into a corner!"*** Says Putin, and his story is retold in Russian schools. Putin's first lesson: When you're backed into a corner, the only way out is to be the first to launch a swift counterattack.

After initiating an unstoppable wheel of destruction in "brotherly" Ukraine, Putin himself might be pondering this as he observes the resistance of the Ukrainian people who refuse to yield to him.

However, what sends chills down the spine is the thought - what if Putin himself soon finds himself in the role of a Rat, with a capital R? The would-be Russian Liberator, savior, and restorer of the once rotten Russian Federation, however immensely powerful, could soon feel cornered. A bizarre claustrophobia, considering the continental proportions of Russia! And in that (ir)Rational moment, absolutely anything is possible. Putin is already getting edgy; his index finger demonstratively dancing above the red button of universal destruction.

When Putin bluffs, we've probably all learned by now, it's only a half-bluff. If he pushes the button, it will be the end of human life on Earth. Or at least the end of civilization.

There's no doubt, Putin has gravely miscalculated. He believed that \$650 billion in foreign exchange reserves would be his golden parachute in the case of ,mild sanctions, but most of that money is not in Russia and was immediately frozen by the western govnrnments. In the West, despite an open nuclear threat, there's was a literal competition to see who can impose more severe sanctions on Russia, from Eurovision music contest to a almost complete trade blockade! These sanctions are not Chamberlain-like cosmetic ones this time; they have the power of a nuclear option. A chain reaction has already been set in motion, but one that shouldn't eventually result in an uncontrolled explosion but rather in the very gradual but systematic dismantling of the Russian economy and a complete cessation of all financial flows and trade relations, almost as if at war. Although NATO won't admit that word, Putin could very well interpret it as a declaration of war. And then, may God help us all, not only the Ukrainians.

Putin has already lost the political aspect of the war, even if he eventually wins militarily. The blitzkrieg has suffered an immediate setback, and if he starts systematically destroying cities deep into the Ukrainian hinterland, which he has avoided so far, his victory would be Pyrrhic. If someone had asked the average Russians about bombing Kyiv sometimes in January 2022, they surely wouldn't have raised their hands for it. Russian media is under strict wartime censorship, but in the age of the internet, the extent of destruction is impossible to hide.

With each passing day, Putin gets closer to some Operation Valkyrie, reminiscent of the one launched by German generals against Hitler. The only question is whether anyone can even physically approach him. And whether the Ukrainians can endure this long. Sadly or not, no Russian von Stauffenberg can place a briefcase under Putin's table. Audiences with Putin are already somewhat surreal - no one can get closer to him than a few meters. He's at one end of a massive table, with generals at the other, like a scene from Looney Tunes cartoons. Old man Putin is no longer in the physical shape of a pocket-sized KGB commando, he's obviously quite concerned about his own now fragile health and doesn't trust anyone except his personal food taster. And if he was still afraid of the coronavirus and not trusting Sputnik V, that suggests that doubts about his health probably are not baseless.

Is there an alternative at all? If we're not willing to take up arms to defend Ukraine and the EU from the delirious Russian emperor - and we are obviously not - it's high time to prepare for the Russian winter again, because Europe will sooner or later have to relinquish every drop of Russian oil and every cubic meter of Russian gas. Not a single penny should go toward financing Putin's death machine. This time, the curtain, whether it's iron or another type, must be lifted by the EU itself, until the Russians themselves overthrow the false czar Vladimir the Little, like the Romanians did with Ceausescu, the Arabs with Saddam and Gaddafi, or until the devil naturally takes him away. Listening to Tchaikovsky, watching Tarkovsky, and admiring Russian culture while simultaneously sending a clear message to the usurper Putin and the Russian boot should be clear: Nyet!

## **FAKE: IT'S ONLY BUSINESS AND THE OPEN MARKET**

### **The case of Hajduk Split: How Hajduk Fans Became Putin's Puppets**

It seemed absolutely unbelievable: at a time when Putin ruthlessly tramples over Ukraine, with the blood of hundreds of thousands of

Ukrainians and Russians on his hands, leading an energy war against the EU, the Split football club Hajduk signs a sponsorship agreement with Lukoil, the second-largest Russian oil company!

And they claim it's nobody but their business only, because Lukoil Croatia isn't under sanctions, and everything is legitimate. However, it may be legal, but it is anything but legitimate. The previous year, German Schalke, drowning in debt, gave up sponsorship from Russian Gazprom, and even the corruption-riddled UEFA had to extricate itself from that embrace. It's hard to recall a similar example, excluding Serbia, where a European club rushes into a sponsorship deal with Russian giants at a time when everyone is fleeing from such agreements, which they could possibly need to escape from sometimes in the near future. Anyway signing it would mean to bear a permanent mark of shame.

While everyone is trying to disembark from the sinking Russian tanker, Hajduk has boarded it! True, Lukoil's oil Titanic hasn't yet hit the iceberg of sanctions, but that's only a matter of time, no matter how skillfully they steer, lobby, and grease. However, Lukoil itself is not the essential issue; the question is – who does this company actually represent now? Of course, not its majority owner, Vagit Alekperov, but the Moscow mafiaocracy led by Putin. Every oligarch owes their wealth to the Kremlin's favor and must be at its disposal whenever the Kremlin boss demands. Any disobedience, let alone political ambition, is very costly. Every one of them has been warned from a young age that Russia has numerous open windows at all times, and a simple air draft can take their life away in an instant.

This applies to Lukoil as well. Let's make it clear: Believe it or not, the management of the "freedom-loving" Hajduk has signed a sponsorship agreement with a company whose CEO ended his life by jumping from a sixth-floor window in a Moscow hospital. Ravil Maganov coincidentally tried to fly like Icarus on the same day when Vladimir Vladimirovich secretly visited that very hospital, allegedly to lay a rose next to the recently deceased Mikhail Gorbachev, whom he hadn't even visited at his funeral.

Coincidentally, this happened six months after Maganov bravely advocated for a swift end to the war in Ukraine. Coincidentally, the hospital's surveillance cameras were turned off. Before him, in May of the same year, another Lukoil executive, Aleksandr Subotin, died of a heart attack – or perhaps a stronger Russian tea. At the time, it was reported that he was the seventh Russian oligarch to die under mysterious circumstances. We soon stopped counting the victims of the Russian sudden death syndrome among businessmen.

Do you think Hajduk is paying tribute to Maganov with this sponsorship? Or to his killers? From now on, whether they like it or not, Hajduk's players could have "Putin" written on their chests instead of Lukoil. Because, yes, it's true that Lukoil hasn't yet faced EU sanctions, but Alekperov had to step down after the U.S., Canada, and the UK have imposed sanctions against him. It's far from business as usual for Lukoil in the EU. The Italian government forced it to withdraw from a refinery in Sicily, and a similar mechanism was prepared in Bulgaria. This is just the beginning.

Yes, no one at the gas station can be sure how much Russian oil they're pumping into their car, and it's a sobering thought that with every fill-up, we're financing Putin's war machine. But that's a reality that the free world is trying to change. We're not so foolish as to boast about it! No one who is not a public or secret Putinophile would even consider putting the logo of a Russian company on their foreheads, even if they offered us free fuel.

Of course, unless we're from Serbia, Republika Srpska, or Belarus. GazpromNeft is still the main sponsor of the Belgrade football club Red Star. Hajduk could now freely reintroduce the red five-pointed star into their crest. Serbia refuses sanctions against Russia, so it's still legitimate and legal there. And UEFA, for now, looks the other way. Nothing strange, as Alexandr Dyukov, the longtime head of GazpromNeft, is still a member of the UEFA Executive Committee. Football sponsorships have been following Russian geopolitical interests for decades."



## **FAKE: THE ONE WHO DEFENDS ITSELF FROM THE NUCLEAR SUPEROPOWER IS THE ONE TO BE BLAMED FOR HIS OWN MISFORTUNE**

**Are we already at war with Russia? Did they just forget to tell us?**

Vladimir Vladimirovich is right about one thing: the sanctions imposed on Russia by the EU and the USA are akin to a declaration of war. They are designed to quickly bring Russia to its knees, and, economically, it's just a matter of time.

There's no doubt that we are already in some form of a "proxy" war with Russia, through intermediaries, in which Ukrainians are dying en masse not only for their homeland but – for us too. And that we don't actually have a sustainable alternative. Just like Europe didn't have one after September 1, 1939, when Hitler and Stalin fraternally divided Eastern Europe between themselves. Putin hasn't just threatened Ukraine, but all of Europe, and his upside-down adventure will overturn the global order. Yes, the Americans shook up that order too, by inventing reasons to invade Iraq, but what passed under a series of American presidents will not pass with Putin. And Ukraine is not Iraq. Zelensky is not Saddam. Drunk on his success in Syria, Putin, once considered a savior, has bitten off more than he could chew and he put the future of the Russian Federation at stake, which, after he is once gone, will no longer have the status of a superpower, and the question is whether it will survive at all. The headline in Novaya Gazeta perfectly predicted it: ***"We will be like Venezuela but with a nuclear arsenal!"***

It is the civilized world that rightfully tells Putin "Enough!" and that the free nations won't bow to threats, no matter how terrifying they may be. No, Putin is not crazy, he's "just" extremely corrupt. It doesn't really matter whether his nuclear threat is a bluff or not. In fact, a nuclear threat cannot be a bluff – it already is a form of nuclear terrorism, regardless of intent. If we've learned anything so far, it's that Putin doesn't bluff – not even when he bluffs. When he "bluffs," he's actually stating what he's willing to do and it's an integral part of

Russia's officially published military doctrine. That doesn't mean he really wants to do it. But no one should doubt that it's a very tangible possibility. As Putin himself says, a rat backed into a corner has an innate instinct to strike first.

The sounds of Prokofiev's melody in Sting's rendition and the lyrics immediately come to mind: *"Believe me when I say to you, I hope that the Russians love their children too."*

Does Russia love its children? We know what the mothers of Russian reservists, whose children Putin is taking away and sending to their deaths, say. But in the hands of the Russian czar, Russian children are just pawns on the chessboard. Disposable and interchangeable, just like Ukrainian children. And he certainly isn't interested in Croatian children. Or Polish children. Or any children.

It's incredible how many Putin lovers in Croatia are urging Zelensky to accept all the dirty ultimatums that Putin is imposing – recognition of the independence of Russian "republics," recognition of the annexation of Crimea, demilitarization, and permanent renunciation of the EU and NATO – at a time when Putin's military adventure falls apart in front of our eyes. Probably just so that Putin wouldn't "completely lose it" and be set off on the path of total conventional destruction, while his finger dances around the symbolic red button of nuclear cataclysm.

Like the Croatian actor Đuro Utješanović in the popular "Večernja škola," wearing a Tito cap on his head: *"There would never be a war if you don't defend yourself! The one who defends is to blame, not the one who attacks! Don't defend yourself! If you don't defend yourself, there would never be a war! The occupier leaves sooner or later, the liberator never leaves!"*

However, it's well-known that those liberated by the Russians in Europe had the worst of it. One wonders if those clever individuals also thought the same during the Croatian Homeland War? Did Croatia provoke the aggressor? Should it have surrendered? Where would the Croats be today if they had followed that logic? Indeed, how do they not see that Putin's war rhetoric is completely identical to Milošević's: Croatia and Ukraine as Nazi creations! Today, as evidence,

they bring up the Ukrainian Azov Battalion, just as they used to bring up the Croatian HOS and their symbols. Well-known agitprop!

Of course, it wouldn't be the first time that, in peace negotiations, the conqueror gets what they've already lost militarily. Like when the Republika Srpska was established in Dayton, even though the army of the Bosnian Serbs had previously been defeated, essentially brought to its knees by the Croatian Army. However, Putin simply doesn't have enough soldiers or modern military equipment to truly conquer Ukraine. Ukraine just needs help long enough for it to become completely evident on the ground. Putin could theoretically resolve this with a general mobilization, but it would be in unsustainable contradiction with the official narrative that Russia isn't waging war, just a "special operation." Russian media under censorship is not even allowed to mention the word war! Russian soldiers leave their equipment in mass, often in perfectly working condition, because they feel logistically cut off, without support, and abandoned by their command, especially the reservists who were taken there in violation of Russian law and by deceit, realizing that they were by no means peacemakers but bloody conquerors, greeted by determined defenders.

On the other hand, it's worth noting that at the beginning of the war the Russian SpecNaz forces were advancing madly and sometimes suicidally in their long columns, deep behind the Ukrainian defenders, beyond any military logic and common sense, leaving their logistical support far behind. All of this indicates that key decisions were not being made by Russian generals, but by politics that set unreasonable goals and don't want to hear any "No" from military professionals.

The tops of the Russian columns sometimes succeeded in creating an impression of omnipresence, with the illusion that key cities were surrounded and already on the brink of falling. However, the maps published in the media did not show the actual situation, which was extremely fluid because there were no real front lines, and the Russians were actually holding only the roads on which they were advancing on or which they were stuck on, bypassing large pockets of

defenders. In reality, a significant portion of the Russian forces was actually in a similar fluid "encirclement" all the time.

Of course, we faced a major dilemma – should NATO impose a no-fly zone in Ukraine, which would take away the crucial advantage from the aggressor? Unfortunately, this way, it would be difficult to avoid getting into an open armed conflict. Before that, however, we should have complete a total energy embargo on imports from Russia, which would have already been imposed worldwide – if only the Americans were to decide. After all, while Ukrainians were dying, Russian gas was traveling through Ukraine to the EU and is still coming, through intermediaries. Maybe you brewed your coffee on it this morning!

The civilized world must not shy away from this undeclared war and must carry it through to the end. The resistance of some European leaders needed to be broken, some were on the right side of history from the beginning, and we can certainly highlight the Prime Ministers of Poland and Croatia. However, Poland, along with the United Kingdom, educated by historical experience, was undoubtedly a leader among European nations, one of those that broke the resistance of certain European governments that had been strengthening ties with Russia for decades along with their countries' energy dependence on Russia.

## **FAKE: SENDING WEAPONS TO UKRAINE ONLY PROLONGS THE WAR**

### **President is naked: Milanović seeks swift defeat for Ukraine and concessions to the Russians**

All masks have fallen. On the anniversary of the already mentioned conversation, Zoran Milanović completely revealed himself, stating that we should not send weapons to Ukraine so that it is defeated as soon as possible and forced to negotiate and make concessions to the Russians, thus saving lives. Don't believe he said that? Here is the transcript of that part of our painful conversation, down to the last word:

**IH:** Ukraine is defending itself, shouldn't it defend itself?

**ZM:** I didn't say it shouldn't defend itself! The question is just how much we will help them in this way, because this is not help. I don't see help!

**IH:** So, should we let it be defeated?

**ZM:** No, we should force them to the negotiating table! And it won't be pleasant!

**IH:** So that the Russians defeat them?

**ZM:** Yes!

**IH:** And take what they want?

**ZM:** I'm afraid that's the starting position at the moment. Yes! Should three hundred thousand Ukrainians die? I can't watch that as a human!

Believe it or not! Those are the words of the President of Croatia! It was worth enduring 40 minutes of verbal chaos and ad hominem insults, because in the end, Milanović said much more than he intended. Everything should have been clear back in February '22, but now all the cards are on the table. We watched in amazement as Milanović responded, peeling away layer by layer of himself. Someone had to shout it out: The President is naked!

No one has been exposed like this on camera for a long time. All in the name of saving the lives of the unfortunate Ukrainians. We shouldn't send them weapons; that only prolongs the war, says Milanović. But to any reasonable person with sincere intentions, it's clear that so many Ukrainian lives weren't lost because we sent them weapons but because we didn't send them when we should have! And when we do send them, it's all on an overly long leash.

***"I won't give it for free!"*** Milanović raged, but it's clear that the value of the equipment is not the issue; it's about preventing us from sending any weapons to Ukraine at all. If he had the authority, he would do what his comrade Orban did – not send a single bullet to Ukraine.

***"If we're sending tanks now, why didn't we send them earlier?"*** Milanović asks. That's the only correct question. However, it undermines his fundamental thesis: this is a war between the U.S. and

Russia over the backs of the Ukrainians, to the last of the Ukrainians. If that were truly the case, Ukraine would have received everything it needed a long time ago, and it wouldn't have waited two years for the first Abrams or F-16s. No, Ukrainians are not the victims of those in the West who want war, but of those, like Milanović, who constantly sow fear of escalation. No, we didn't provoke Putin; he's the one who could have - and still can - stop the war at any moment. And the whole world would breathe a sigh of relief after that. Joe Biden among the first.

***"Do you know how nuclear powers end wars they are losing? With an atomic bomb!"*** Milanović asks and answers his own question, although, when asked, he doesn't manage to provide the examples. This fear-mongering comes from the Kremlin's arsenal itself – the paranoia that Putin's nervous right hand will twitch like Dr. Strange-love's hand and hit the self-destruct button.

***"Who is to blame for so many deaths in Ukraine - Ukrainians or those who incited them to it?"*** We thought nothing could surpass the horror of that Milanović's statement. Soon, we realized it could get even worse. According to Milanović, we need to save Ukrainians not from the Russians but from themselves, from their hopeless, futile, senseless battle for their own homeland. To push them into the Russian trap, so they surrender as soon as possible, at least make concessions and pay for peace with their own territory.

But what do such calls remind you of? Yes, Milanović likes to talk about "a few good people" who saved Croatia, but that's just to justify himself being among those who did not defend it. There weren't actually as few of them as Milanović would prefer. Weren't some "wiser" people warning Croats that there's no point in fighting against a much stronger enemy? Didn't they impose an embargo because it "only prolongs the war"? Didn't they offer peace that we would pay for by giving Serbia parts of Croatia like the Danube region, Dubrovnik, and Konavle? Just ask one question: what would have become of Croatia if Croats had listened to those in 1991?

## **FAKE: IT'S NOT OUR WAR!**

### **Putin-lovers of all countries, who puts you on his paying list?**

*"For heaven's sake, that man must not remain in power!"* So cried Joe Biden, the man elected for four years to be the most powerful resident of the Third Rock from the Sun. And he immediately provoked a barrage of angry attacks, from Seattle to Vladivostok. Of course, in the direction the Sun travels. Another gaffe, they shout, how dare he, does that senile old man even know what he's saying?

But whatever people may think of him otherwise, or differ ideologically, Biden was just being Biden in the best sense of the word and what his life's work means. Whatever someone may think of his political legacy from the time he was the Vice President of the United States, this is the same man who, a quarter of a century ago, stood in the heart of Belgrade and told Slobodan Milošević to his face that he was a war criminal, accusing him of genocide. This is the same man who unhesitatingly called for the bombing of Serbia in order to stop the genocide in Kosovo! Was he senile back then?

Today, at a time when Vladimir Putin brutally kills in Ukraine, who are these political Lilliputians who believe that Biden should deal with him with diplomatic gloves instead of speaking the only language the fake Russian czar understands: the language of force, even coercion if necessary. All those who, in the process, threaten with fear of the Russian nuclear arsenal or World War III are actually Kremlin megaphones, conscious or unconscious agents of the KGB, GRU, FSB, or whatever acronym is currently still relevant. Putin lovers of all countries, who is paying you? Are you receiving in euros and dollars, or only in rubles from now on?

The most shameful critics of Biden's statement come from the EU, which over the past decades, despite warnings from the administrations of a whole series of American presidents, has done nothing to reduce its energy dependence or exposure to the whims and appetites of the Siberian bear waiting on their eastern borders. On the contrary, the EU, as an old and worn-out addict, only increased

its orders for hydrocarbon drugs from its Russian dealer. How is it possible that someone would even think about building Nord Stream 2 after the annexation of the Crimean Sudetenland? Seeing all the former European political power brokers who sat on the boards of Russian energy companies, it can be surmised why this is so.

Where are all those who claimed that fighter planes are unnecessary, and air defense is a waste of money? Because, in the 21st century, they said, there is no longer any real enemy, and the Americans have all the planes we need. When we need. IF we need. Where are they now when we can only watch what is falling from the sky with our own eyes? Where are all those who fought against the LNG terminals in the Mediterranean and the Baltics, claiming that that was too expensive, unprofitable, unnecessary, and useless because, look, Mother Russia has all the gas we need? And for cheap, no (visible) strings attached. Where are they now when Vladimir Vladimirovich threatened to turn off the valves of his pipelines, while taking aim with barrels of all calibers at the very idea of Europe?

Of course, the Americans encouraged the construction of LNG terminals throughout the EU primarily for their own interests. But nothing is more mistaken and laughable than the claim that the EU, by switching from one natural gas supplier to another, would only replace its dependence on one dealer with dependence on another dealer. More than once, America has saved Europe from its own weaknesses. And it never enslaved Europe in the process. While all those liberated by Russia know why they curse that day.

With his failed blitzkrieg, Putin primarily wanted to prevent Ukraine from slipping out of his steel embrace, fighting with all his might against the possibility of Ukraine becoming a full member of the European Union. No, he doesn't fear NATO as a threat to Russia, because he knows that NATO would never directly attack Russia. He just dreads the establishment of a border out of the extent of his reach. His fear is not of the military power of the West, but of its democracy, and that's why he has spent billions undermining the western democracies it for decades, infiltrating activists, journalists, and politicians. Just as Slobodan Milošević rode the wave of Serbian



nationalism, Putin surfs on the wave of Russian nationalism, fulfilling the ideas from the likes of Dugin. But to him personally, the most important thing is to prevent Ukraine from becoming what it would be predisposed to be without Putin's deadly embrace: the largest and one of the wealthiest countries in the Union. The Ukrainian cruel fate comes from the fact that such a scenario would expose all the malevolence and ineffectiveness of Putin's kleptocracy to every Russian.

## **FAKE: WAR IN UKRAINE IS AMERICA'S WAR AGAINST RUSSIA – TRO THE LAST OF THE UKRAINIANS**

### **Biden's Slap to Putin: Showing Who the Real Leader of the Free World Is**

The world remembers as if it were today when John F. Kennedy, in 1963, 22 months after the Berlin Wall was erected, sent out the historic four words from the city encircled in space: ***"Ich bin ein Berliner!"*** I am a Berliner! It is only a popular myth in the West that Berliners laughed at Kennedy because in one part of Germany, "Berliner" means a jelly-filled doughnut. No, Kennedy did not make a mistake, and even though Berliners don't call themselves that, they have a completely different word for a doughnut.

The enormous symbolic value of those words in that historic moment was clear to everyone, perhaps most literally to Nikita Khrushchev himself, the same man who gave the green light to the construction of that Anti-Fascist Protective Wall, as it was officially called. Twenty-four years later, in Ronald Reagan's megaphone, Kennedy's message was amplified into even more powerful four words: ***"Tear Down This Wall!"***

Twenty-six years later, the USSR itself would begin to collapse in the shockwaves of the wall's collapse. Like Truman before him, who mocked Stalin's Berlin blockade with an airlift, Kennedy made it clear to Khrushchev that the West would resolutely defend these 480 km<sup>2</sup>, just a little more than the Gaza Strip, where more than 2 million people lived.

Joe Biden in Kyiv and Warsaw may not have said something as memorable, but his words will echo for decades to come. The 46th President of the United States didn't compete with the 35th, but his spirit surely hovered over the teleprompter: Autocrats understand only one word: NO! NO! NO! NO, you will not take my country, NO, you will not take my freedom, NO, you will not take my future; a dictator trying to restore an empire will never erase the love of people for freedom, brutality will never wear down the will of the free, Ukraine will never be a victory for Russia, NEVER!

And there is a message for the people of Russia, if anyone can hear it: the USA and the EU do not want to destroy Russia; it is Putin who chose this war, each day of its continuation is his choice, he is the one who can stop the war with a single word. The power of Biden's message is even greater when compared to Vladimir Vladimirovich's fidelica in Moscow. Two hours of absolute nothingness, a tedious tirade that Putin apparently wrote letter by letter himself, even exhausted his most loyal associates, as their eyelids betrayed. Sergei Lavrov, for decades welcomed with open arms in the world, now more than ever resembles a man whose face has been surgically transplanted from the victim of some terrible tragedy. How did such a man turn into the court jester of a dictator with hands covered in blood up to his elbows? How can anyone even consider standing behind Putin's logical absurdity: ***They started the war, and we used force to stop it?***

But as Hannah Arendt once said, all that needs to be said about that has already been said: the banal normality of criminals is more horrifying than all their crimes combined. Equally horrifying are those among us who, despite their experiences with Hitler and Milosevic, want to negotiate "***Peace in Our Time***" with Putler. Like the Croatian president, who, without blinking an eye, in the position of a righteous man, has been leading a special campaign for the cessation of arms exports throughout all twelve months of the "special military operation". To whom? To the victim, of course, so that it quickly gives in to the aggressor and pays for peace with a part of its own homeland! Because, he explains, fewer Ukrainians will die that way.

Even more powerful than Biden's words was his act of coming to Kyiv amidst the blaring sirens of alarm. He spent 10 hours traveling by train to Kyiv and 10 hours back, to send the strongest possible message. After this, no American president can withhold support from the suffering people.

***"He traveled on the back of the train car at night, it's humiliating!"*** That's probably something the Croatian president would say! Because that's what he said when Blinken visited Kyiv in the same way. However, the banal truth is that Milanović, alongside Orban, is the only EU statesman who would not travel to Kyiv. Not ever. He doesn't want to be America's pawn, he says. But America, once again, is saving Europe from itself. Without Biden's determination, initially followed only by the Poles and the British, Putin would have overrun Ukraine long ago. Donald Trump claims that if he had remained in the White House, there wouldn't have been a war. Maybe, but that doesn't mean there wouldn't have been an invasion. It's quite possible that Trump would have miscalculated just as Biden did, thinking that Ukrainians wouldn't resist, and that a deeper state would have quickly forced him to do the same as Biden.

In this crisis, Joe Biden has proven himself as a leader of the free world. Maybe he can't remember two numbers without a teleprompter (but can we?), and his micro-orientation, in the threshold of his ninth decade of life, is not the same as in his prime, but aside from having more hair now than a few decades ago, his geopolitical instincts are entirely his own, sharp as they were in the best days when he unyieldingly demanded the bombing of Belgrade.

## CONCLUSION

There will be no World War III, and don't let them scare you with it because Russians love their children as much as we love ours. The fact that Russia is currently controlled by a mafia clique ready for anything by no means implies that we, no matter how small and powerless we may feel, must or should continue to coddle the dictator, that Putin doesn't need to be called Putin – that is, a killer and war criminal.

And there's no way to appease the criminal. Even Pope Francis fell for it. He has been criticized worldwide for sending positive feelings about Russia's imperial past during such an aggressive time for Russia, sending a message to the world from Mongolia, a vast country with only three million inhabitants and a few thousand Catholics. He called on people of all religions to live in harmony and avoid ideological fundamentalism because it fosters violence. That part is nice. BUT...

***"May heaven grant that today, in this land ravaged by countless conflicts, there will be a renewal of the conditions of what was once Pax Mongolica, respecting international laws - in other words, the absence of conflict. To quote one of your proverbs, 'clouds may pass, but the sky will remain.' May the dark clouds of war be dispersed, removed by a firm desire for universal brotherhood in which tensions are resolved through meetings and dialogue, and the fundamental rights of all people are guaranteed! Here, in this land with such a rich history and atmosphere, let us pray for this gift from above and strive together to build a future of peace."***

Controversial once again! Because it was the Mongol invasion during the 13th century that destroyed Kievan Rus, a vast state that included present-day Ukraine, Belarus, and Western Russia. However, Francis has chosen to bypass this historical fact and instead emphasize Pax Mongolica, the Mongol Peace, a period of imperial peace and stability during the first half of the 14th century that prevailed over a significant part of the Eurasian continent following the brutal conquests of Genghis Khan and his successors, ending only with the outbreak of the Black Death pandemic, which allegedly originated - in Crimea. And then decimated the population of Europe at the time.

Not the best of omens.

# **Skewed Civilization: Disinformation, Structurally Poisoned Infosphere, and CyberLords<sup>25</sup>**

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<sup>25</sup> In the text, we have used some of the results of research conducted by the Centre for Studies on Civilisational Challenges of the Centre for Security Research of the War Studies Academy, where A. Zybertowicz works. The views presented in the text do not express the official position of ASzWoj. We would like to thank Klaudia Rosińska for her comments on the earlier version of the text.

## **Abstract**

The main thesis of this paper is signaled by its title: the study and counteraction of disinformation, to be effective, should take into account the key contexts in which these phenomena occur, namely:

- the phenomenon of Structurally Poisoned Infosphere (hereinafter: SPI);
- beneficiaries of the SPI, among which the American Big Tech plays a crucial role.

The SPI is a newly introduced concept in the text, aiming to illustrate an important yet poorly recognized phenomenon that has been forming a powerful systemic context in which significant portions of humanity undergo informational, cognitive, and decision-making processes in the last few decades. The article argues that the SPI significantly degrades all these processes.

Without adequate recognition of the SPI as a somewhat autonomous phenomenon, many other important trends of recent years, including the crisis/dusk of liberal democracy, the dynamics of the development of the Covid19 epidemic and inconsistent attempts to deal with it, as well as the flawed strategies of NATO and the EU towards Russia, which made impossible to prevent Moscow's aggression against Ukraine, cannot be understood. This situation also means that the awareness of the public, experts, and political decision-makers lags behind the constant emergence of new socially harmful fields of action, such as disinformation.

## **Introduction**

In recent years, especially since the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine in 2014, disinformation and information warfare have been widely perceived as a serious threat to democratic societies. This has led to a vast amount of publications and the establishment of numerous institutions aimed at monitoring and countering

disinformation<sup>26</sup>. However, as we will try to show in this text, the issue of disinformation is rarely understood in the proper context, making proposed remedies ineffective.

Too rare attention is paid to the fact that both the effectiveness and scope of disinformation, as well as the efficiency of counteracting it, depend on the technological and cultural contexts specific to the overall increasingly digital infosphere, and especially on the new power structure over humanity's cognitive processes that has formed within the digital revolution. One of the tasks of this paper is the analytical reconstruction of these contexts.

The structure of the text is as follows: after outlining key concepts, we consider the issue of trust deficit in public communication. Then, using a three-layer model of the digital revolution (scene, backstage, unintended consequences), we contemplate from when we can speak of structurally poisoned infosphere and what level of this contamination depends on. This leads to the consideration of beneficiaries of SPI. To capture the mechanisms and consequences of SPI more deeply, the concept of 'epistemological crisis' is introduced, referring to certain insights of Hannah Arendt. We also ponder whether the primary consequence of this crisis is not cognitive disorientation not only for broad social groups but also for experts and political decision-makers. The text concludes with a summary and recommendations.

## **Key Concepts**

Let's start with the most general concept for our considerations, namely information. By information, we mean any stimulus reaching the human mind that alters the image/model of an object contained in that mind. This relates to the notion that information signifies a difference introduced into a system. In this context, the rank and caliber of information – disinformation being a particular case – de-

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<sup>26</sup> See, e.g. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation_en); Read: 10.03.22.

pend on the kind of change, difference in the system that the information reaching that system induces.

In turn, the **infosphere** means the entirety of information reaching human minds and social systems<sup>27</sup> – whether its flow is consciously perceived, memorized, controlled by entities, or not. We treat the infosphere as a concept synonymous with the term **informational space**<sup>28</sup>.

The concept of the **digital infosphere** is a introsphere's subset covering information that, unlike analog, is encoded and transmitted digitally. At the current stage of the digital revolution, a socially significant characteristic of the digital infosphere, in addition to the speed of information circulation and low cost of reproduction, is that in the space where information flows, 'human-computer' interactions are increasingly replacing 'human-human' interactions.

Meanwhile, the **mediosphere** is the part of the infosphere created by institutions (organizations) involved in professional, including commercial, dissemination of messages. It's crucial to note: messages, not information. In this sense, traditional newspapers, television, and platforms like Facebook belong to the mediasphere, but not telecommunication companies operating in Poland, such as Orange or Plus.

Now we can introduce the concept of disinformation. Literature – both research and popular – on disinformation is vast and of varied quality. Our goal is not to review it<sup>29</sup>, so we'll limit ourselves to the definitions necessary for presenting the main theses of this discourse.

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<sup>27</sup> Distinguishing human minds and social systems is necessary because more and more information influencing social life is collected by automatic systems – e.g. monitoring of weather, pollution, car traffic, air traffic, etc. This information often cannot even be acquired by the human perceptual apparatus, but once it has been processed, human decisions are made based on this information.

<sup>28</sup> The literature on this concept and related topics is vast and, as is usually the case in the social sciences, incoherent. A good insight into the situation in this field gives Kisilowska-Szurmińska 2011.

<sup>29</sup> From the Polish studies, we point to the following items: Bąkiewicz 2019 and Rosińska 2021; cf. Lazer et al. 2018. Recent empirical reports show that the European Commission has prepared a "Code of Practice on Disinformation" 2023.



**Disinformation** refers to false or misleading information spread with the intention of deceiving or causing harm<sup>30</sup>. **Misinformation** occurs when information is false or misleading but is transmitted without malicious intent. When intentionally shared information is true but of a private nature or without the consent of its legal owner (e.g., stolen corporate emails), we refer to it as **malinformation**<sup>31</sup>.

**Fake news** is untrue information that pretends – especially in its form – to be a content from professional media<sup>32</sup>. **Spam** occurs when we receive unwanted information from someone, particularly when sent en masse – regardless of whether it is true/false, accurate/inaccurate, sent with good or bad intentions.

Increasingly present in the infosphere are **scam and phishing**. Scam involves misleading someone to gain their trust, enabling them to, for example, extort money. Phishing is an attack using emails or text messages where cybercriminals, posing as courier companies, government offices, telecom operators, or even our acquaintances, try to obtain our login details for bank accounts, social media, or business systems<sup>33</sup>.

An important yet often overlooked concept in the analysis of disinformation is **bullshit**. In his booklet 'On Bullshit,' American philosopher Harry G. Frankfurt<sup>34</sup> argued that bullshit poses a much greater threat to interhuman communication than lies. He justified this thesis by pointing out that both a liar and someone spreading bullshit share the desire to convince someone else that the speaker is right. However, while the liar, knowing the facts, hides them from

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<sup>30</sup> In the context of this definition, see below the notes on the report of the Special Committee of the British House of Commons.

<sup>31</sup> See.: <https://pl.hive-mind.community/blog/169,dezinformacja-i-7-najczestszych-sposobow-zniekształcenia-informacji>; Read: 27.02.22. This page discusses the different contexts in which disinformation in the broadest sense occurs.

<sup>32</sup> Lazer et al. 2018: 2.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.gov.pl/web/baza-wiedzy/czym-jest-phishing-i-jak-nie-dac-sie-nabrac-na-podejrzane-widomosci-e-mail-oraz-sms-y>; Read: 14.10.23.

<sup>34</sup> Frankfurt 2005.

the recipient of the message, so he knows where the truth is (he behaves unethically, but is not cognitively confused), for the preacher of bullshit the truth is irrelevant; he may not be interested in it at all. What matters to the bullshitter is solely convincing someone that they are right, and the relation of their 'rightness' to reality is irrelevant to them.

Bullshit, especially when spread on a massive scale, is more dangerous than lies. After unmasking a liar, we can essentially establish the truth, but after potentially unmasking a bullshitter, we still don't know what the truth is. And what is the widespread dissemination of bullshit if not the daily practice of a considerable part of infotainment – e.g., by many popular YouTubers.

## Communication in conditions of decreased trust

The mere introduction of the broadly characterized group of concepts related to the disturbance of public communication, although by no means exhaustive of the subject, can be interpreted as a sign that serious damage has already been done to this crucial cultural asset, which is **trust**, for every society. In particular, the natural assumption, prevalent throughout much of human history and especially present in everyday life, that we can trust most human communicative acts has been strained. That is, we can accept incoming messages into our minds without verifying them.

The new, contemporary situation, beyond its numerous other unfavorable consequences, as discussed below, means that participating in communicative practices – whether in a casual conversation, reading newspapers, text messages, or watching videos sent by friends – **requires much more mental resources and time than before**. At least if we want to avoid being misled. In other words, human daily communicative practice, which for centuries usually flowed smoothly and with little effort, suddenly must take on a highly reflective and controlled character<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Reaching for the categories of the Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman, we will say that the

In psychological terms, this means, among other things, that a significant part of the human everyday world loses its familiarity, naturalness, and friendliness. Communication increasingly transforms into something akin to walking through a minefield. Note that the metaphor of stepping on a mine seems highly appropriate in the case of scam and phishing – lack of vigilance in the face of these deceitful methods can lead to the loss of wealth and reputation.

Even without conducting separate studies, one can intuitively assume that living in a minefield produces negative psychological social effects, creating a substrate for the development of various social fears and neurotic attitudes. In other words, **communication saturated with misinformation means a deterioration of social well-being.**

The situation becomes particularly serious – not only in the realm of individuals' subjective sense of security but also from the perspective of national security – when the infosphere becomes structurally poisoned. "Structurally" here means deeply, extensively, and persistently. The structural nature (one could also speak of systematicity) of the poisoning of the infosphere in this context also means that neither individual human beings nor individual social institutions have the ability to deal with this poisoning: they cannot systematically avoid it or neutralize it. This is because they lack the resources necessary for the correction of the appropriate, i.e., structural-institutional caliber.

## ***Structurally poisoned – since when?***

At which stage of the transformation of the human infosphere, from what level of its pollution, can it be considered structurally poisoned? We do not claim that the human infosphere was ever completely "clean," i.e., completely free of misunderstandings, bullshit,

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contamination of interpersonal communication by disinformation and related phenomena means that more and more often we cannot rely on system 1 of our minds – operating automatically, quickly and with low effort – but we have to activate system 2, functioning consciously, slowly and consuming a lot of energy; Kahneman 2011/2012.

lies, manipulation, deception, etc. A certain level of its "contamination" has always existed. The vision of "communication free of disturbances"<sup>36</sup> proposed a few decades ago by the eminent German philosopher Jürgen Habermas is, at best, a kind of ideal type in Max Weber's sense. Such communication is a model situation that only a few societies have come close to in only certain areas of public communication.

Let's conduct a thought experiment. Suppose all people behave like angels and always communicate with each other in good faith, meaning they only convey to others what they believe to be true. This means that although there is misinformation in the infosphere, there is no disinformation, fake news, spam, scam, phishing, or misinformation. However, we cannot exclude the presence of bullshit, partly resulting from cognitive incompetence.

Let's also assume that the current situation of a constant surplus of information, i.e., a constant overload of our minds with it, does not occur<sup>37</sup>. Human minds would then face streams of information conveyed only in good faith. Even in such a super favorable situation, significant disturbances in communication are present. The reason is simple: by the very nature of human language, the nature of such relationships by which "language connects with the world,"<sup>38</sup>, however, due to the very nature of human perception, which is always highly selective, a systemic, i.e., irremovable, ambiguity of messages arises. These messages are always entangled in situational and social contexts that are interpreted differently by various individuals.

The openness of natural language to different interpretations is related to the possession of different cultural competencies by people. These competencies arise not only from different individual configurations of our neural minds but also from two irremovable social circumstances – the differentiation of human experience due

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<sup>36</sup> See. e.g. Abramowicz 2012; Raczyński 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. e.g. Piekarski 2014.

<sup>38</sup> How intricate this seemingly deceptively simple problem is shown by the abundant literature on the subject – see, for example, Kmita 1995.

to diverse class positions and other types of intercultural contacts, including inter-ethnic ones.

The practical dimension of communication, repeated routines of actions, removes a significant portion of the ambiguity of messages, but never achieves complete elimination of errors, i.e., communicative misunderstandings and, consequently, social misunderstandings.

Human infosphere is never fully "pure" from the point of view of logic – complex systems of beliefs always contain inconsistencies (perhaps stemming from Kurt Gödel's famous incompleteness theorem).

If this is the case and cannot be otherwise, if human communication, human infosphere has always been "imperfect," what has changed in recent years to assert that we currently live in conditions of structurally polluted infosphere?

The simplest answer is that statistically, it is clear that the **pollution** of the human infosphere has increased. The proportion of untrustworthy messages to relatively credible ones is becoming increasingly unfavorable. Negative phenomena such as lies, manipulations, and bullshit, present in the infosphere for millennia, originally situated more on the margins of human communication, have not only shifted to its central regions but have become so intensified and widespread in the last few decades that they are not only unavoidable but also permanently embedded in the communicative space.

While the above approach is accurate, it is conceptually pre-theoretical as it does not explain why this has happened. It does not reveal the mechanisms that SPI has triggered and sustained. Such an approach also does not meet one of the basic (though often ignored) assumptions of social analysis, which states: when a broader phenomenon, widely recognized as socially harmful, persists over time, regardless of the potentially spontaneous nature of the genesis of this phenomenon, better or worse organized interest groups benefiting from this phenomenon must also be actively involved.

We will take a step towards theorizing our approach when we recognize that the infosphere, as an ecosystem, part of culture that

has developed numerous, quite effective self-cleansing mechanisms over the centuries, has proven helpless in the face of growing pollution; it somehow disabled or, rather, these mechanisms simply ceased to be efficient. We propose the year 2007 as a watershed moment – the introduction of the first iPhone to the market, allowing millions and then billions to connect to the Internet 24/7. Facebook existed since 2004, but it was the constant carrying of "boxes with digital stimuli" by people that brought great dynamism to social media.

The protective and cleansing immune mechanisms of the information ecosystem were first weakened and then almost dismantled when two processes were coupled: the widespread access to smartphones, allowing 24 hours a day Internet contact, with the expansion of social media<sup>39</sup>. Only this coupling made mass communication tools available to individuals with very low competencies, not only culturally and linguistically but also morally – individuals to whom responsibility for words released into social circulation is foreign. One could say that the availability of technology significantly outpaced the development of cultural competencies inherent in a responsible, "enlightened" citizen. Incidentally, it seems that this type of desynchronization of social processes is rather typical than unique for the digital revolution.

Although the above approach is correct, it is conceptually pre-theoretical; it does not explain why this happened. It does not show the mechanisms that disinformation has triggered and sustains it. Such an explanation will be obtained when we answer the question of who benefits from the prolonged Structurally Poisoned Infosphere (SPI). Another theoretical step allowing for a deeper understanding of the nature of SPI and its consequences will be the use of the concept of **epistemological crisis** in this context. We will address this issue in more detail later; here, as a preview, we will say that such a crisis occurs when **substitutes for truth** (referring here to Hannah Arendt's concept) can replace **factual truths** extensively and over a longer period of time.

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Haidt 2021; Fisher 2023.

If SPI is, in our opinion, an essential context for studying disinformation, then a broader context necessary for grasping the nature and dynamics of SPI is **the digital revolution**. We will now dedicate some space to it.

## Digital revolution and its structure

We'll consider it the main transformative process in the contemporary world. It's a highly multidimensional phenomenon. To comprehensively grasp its dimensions, crucial for the tasks of this text, let's use a metaphor<sup>40</sup>: let's consider the digital revolution as an enormous vehicle transporting humanity into an unknown future.

We define the digital revolution as a process consisting of two main components:

- (1) transforming what is analog in social life into what is digital;
- (2) expansively infiltrating digital phenomena into various spheres of social life and coupling them – especially linking the development of different technologies that have evolved independently over the centuries<sup>41</sup>.

This goes beyond just globalization as a grand structural process that organizes hundreds of smaller processes. It's not coincidental that globalization and digitization have become deeply entwined – one providing the substrate for the development of the other.

For example, process (1) involves converting all previous forms of text, sound, and image recordings into digital forms and recording all traces of human activity – from the first use of a smartphone in a day to archiving the content of emails sent by an individual, including noting the moment they go to sleep – in vast databases.

Process (2), on the other hand, includes the development of the Internet of Things, where, for instance, a car's computer communicates with the service center's computer, orders parts needed for repair, and new artificial intelligence systems are trained in the back-

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. McGilchrist 2021, Volume I: 216-22.

<sup>41</sup> Suleyman 2023 writes about this dimension of the digital revolution in an interesting way.

ground in massive databases. It's essential to remember that processes like (2), i.e., coupling previously loosely or not at all directly related phenomena, generate a new, largely autonomous – independent of human intentions and will – dynamic of technological innovations, institutional adjustments, including those that carry the potential for systemic or regime-level transformations, as we mentioned regarding the crisis of liberal democracy earlier.

From a sociological perspective, both processes constituting the digital revolution can be analytically approached as comprising three layers:

(a) *The Stage* – what users of social media or specific applications see, for example, defining a workout and nutrition plan.

(b) *The Backstage* – behind the scenes of the stage, data gathered by millions of such applications are stored. These data are often collected without users' orientation and stored in vast databases (Big Data), along with ownership and power relations that have emerged in the development of companies collecting and exploiting this data. These databases are searched by artificial intelligence algorithms, enabling the creation of new types of applications and the formation of new areas of knowledge about individuals and society, often accessible only to the owners of large corporations.

(c) *Unintended Consequences* – unintended effects of human actions. This is the most exploratory research area, consisting of often long-term social effects of the functioning of the first two layers, which for a long time often go unnoticed by both societies and their elites. This includes events, processes, and structures not consciously initiated by anyone, emerging spontaneously, as well as those deliberately designed that brought unexpected effects. Various social, political, economic, and ecological consequences of the digital revolution come into play here<sup>42</sup>.

Remembering that all three distinct layers dynamically interweave, we want to emphasize that at the current stage of the digital

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<sup>42</sup> See Leslie 2019, Rosenbaum et al. 2021; cf. special edition of the journal *Business Strategy and Environment*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2021 on the topic: "Sustainability in the digital age: Intended and unintended consequences of digital technologies for sustainable development".



revolution, one of the unintended consequences is the emergence and solidification of SPI<sup>43</sup>.

As for the metaphor of the vehicle in the context of the digital revolution, what does it contribute? The vehicle as a whole was not structurally designed by anyone. It emerged through a lengthy process of layering successive phases of techno-cultural evolution. However, its spontaneous emergence does not mean that during this process, some entities – both individuals and institutional entities – did not succeed in gaining influence or even control over relatively broad areas of the digital revolution.

This vehicle is a powerful and continually reinforced entity with "engines" comprising new technologies, market competition, and consumer culture – essential elements of the dynamics of globalization. It can be said that this vehicle keeps expanding, "pulling" all Earthlings on board – regardless of whether they want it or not, regardless of whether they are aware of the mechanisms of the digital revolution<sup>44</sup>.

Even a person without a smartphone and not using email at all can be drawn into the online world – for example, by being captured by numerous city surveillance cameras and then identified by increasingly advanced facial recognition systems. Once drawn onto the vehicle, their behavior can undergo numerous modifications – for instance, by providing personalized psychological profiles to them and their surroundings for targeted advertising offers<sup>45</sup>.

Finally – this is crucial for our argument: **the vehicle that is the digital revolution lacks effective steering and braking systems**. This means, among other things, that this revolution, which is to some extent a consequence of the Enlightenment formation declaring human control over their destiny, is increasingly taking on a "blind" character. It is not humanity directing the digital

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<sup>43</sup> So does Haidt 2022.

<sup>44</sup> A. Zybortowicz (2022a) sketched some aspects of this process in his lecture "Venetian mirrors of Cybermasters from Silicon Valley".

<sup>45</sup> See e.g. Zuboff 2019/2020, 2021.

revolution; it is the digital revolution directing humanity and its transformations. This is, of course, a simplification but accurately reflects the general trend<sup>46</sup>.

In limited regions of technological development, certain steering and braking systems are operational (e.g., some mechanisms for financing innovations), but often, they have a character that, from the perspective of democratic standards, is completely non-transparent. This is related to the fact that the mentioned limited control over the digital revolution largely takes place in the previously mentioned layer (b) of the *backstage* – it concerns the ownership of the most powerful databases accumulated in the hands of the GAFAM group (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft). There is no need to characterize in detail the entities constituting this group, as there is extensive and continuously growing literature on this subject<sup>47</sup>.

Although it is not the main focus of our analysis, it is worth noting that the acronym BHATX is indicated as the Chinese counterpart to the GAFAM group, encompassing companies Baidu, Huawei, Alibaba, Tencent, and Xiaomi. While we do not address the current validity of this enumeration, it is important to mention the Chinese company ByteDance in this context, the owner of TikTok, as the impact of the latter on the processes of poisoning the infosphere cannot be underestimated. TikTok has over 1.6 billion users, including approximately 1.06 active users, with around 150 million in the USA<sup>48</sup>.

It must be added immediately that the existence of the mentioned layer (c) – i.e., phenomena from the area of *unintended consequences* – means that control over the processes constituting the digital revolution, although immense in some respects, is also and probably always will be far from complete. This is a circumstance that is too rarely emphasized. The existence of the phenomenon of

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<sup>46</sup> See Zybertowicz with a team 2015; Zybertowicz 2022.

<sup>47</sup> E.g. de Bustos 2019, Fontanel 2019, Zubof 2019/2020, 2021.

<sup>48</sup> Ruby 2023.

unintended consequences implies the thesis that **not only does not exist but cannot exist some systematic, globally error-free steering of the course of the digital revolution**. However, it is possible – and in our opinion, it occurs – to effectively manage certain phases and/or areas of the digital revolution. By whom? By entities that have the greatest financial, institutional, and cognitive resources – we conventionally refer to them as CyberLords<sup>49</sup>.

Until recently, serious debates were not being conducted in key institutions, leading to practical consequences, about whether certain areas crucial for civilizational security<sup>50</sup> of further advancement of the digital revolution should not be subject to international control, for example, by introducing a technological moratorium on research in the field of artificial intelligence<sup>51</sup>. Some positive changes have recently occurred in this regard following the surprisingly rapid progress in the field of AI, which was publicly recognized after the release of GPT-3 on November 30, 2022<sup>52</sup>.

The shock brought by the broad recognition of the great cognitive capabilities of so-called large language models AI (*Large Language Models*) enabled the realization that the vehicle, which is the digital revolution, is approaching a sharp turn, a kind of civilizational bend from which it may emerge, creating catastrophic consequences for humanity. Due to the partially unpredictable nature of the processes of creating and disseminating innovations, little is known about what humanity might encounter after the next technological turn. And currently, the vehicle is so fast, has so much inertia that it is impossible to quickly and smoothly change the trajectory of its movement, and at the same time, as mentioned, there are almost no braking systems. What do we get as a result?Poznawcze konsekwencje rewolucji cyfrowej

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<sup>49</sup> We use a term coined by Kacper Nosarzewski from 4CF.

<sup>50</sup> On the concept of "civilizational security", see Lewicki 2023.

<sup>51</sup> See. e.g. Johnson 2022.

<sup>52</sup> See. e.g. Suleyman 2023.

## Cognitive consequences of the digital revolution

Looking at the landscape of events and processes that interest us from a bird's eye view, we can say that the minds of millions of people – constantly overloaded with streams of attractive stimuli, often less valuable than cat videos – are systematically **getting lost**<sup>53</sup>. What does that mean? Truth disappears under the weight of fake news and the demands of media clickbait trying to stay in the market. The youth, immersed in the streams of digital present, turn away from the past, tradition, and faith, seeking personal success or succumbing to fashionable ideologies... Families seem to dissolve under the pressure of high mobility and hyper-individualism – in the West, supported by ideologies of political correctness<sup>54</sup> and now widely understood wokeism<sup>55</sup>. It is increasingly recognized that political, academic, expert, artistic, and religious elites – although they rarely admit it – cannot read the signs of the times<sup>56</sup>.

In such an informational and cognitive mess, it's not surprising that despite advanced information and enormous resources, the wealthiest Western countries – the EU, NATO, and their allies – could not prevent Vladimir Putin from aggression against Ukraine. On the contrary, with their economic policies for decades, they strengthened his regime<sup>57</sup>.

For years, the elites of liberal democracies have panicked in response to social reactions, labeled (for lack of better terms or due to ideological biases) as populist. Globalization collapses under the weight of the China/USA conflict – this was evident even before the Covid-19 pandemic. In the face of the pandemic, there is still no clarity on which strategy for dealing with it is the best, and the question of the natural or artificial origin of the virus is not explored with the

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Gawel 2021.

<sup>54</sup> See. Kacprzak 2012, Bock-Côté 2017.

<sup>55</sup> See Ramaswamy 2023, Zybertowicz 2023a.

<sup>56</sup> Bińczyk 2018; Bendyk 2020, Zybertowicz 2022.

<sup>57</sup> See. Zybertowicz 2022: chapter "Techno-wojna", p. 269-93.

thoroughness it deserves. And in October 2023, as this text is being concluded – a surprising attack by Hamas on the state of Israel is underway – it is clear that not only is the European security architecture crumbling under the influence of the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine since February 24, 2022. It is difficult, however, to identify someone who could apply the brakes.

## **Layer (a) of the digital revolution: What do we see in "social" media?**

On the stage, we see people communicating; expressing emotions, boasting, complaining, hyping each other up, relieving stress, showing off their knowledge. They engage in hate, conduct wars and skirmishes. They create memes and "share" them. They encounter ads, buy goods and services, play, play... They arrange dates or engage in virtual sex, sometimes experiencing romances. They believe they are finding out what is happening in the world. They create and/or spread fake news and live by them. They beautify their image. They co-create information bubbles and make sure they hold the right views. Students exchange homework and tips on how to easily pass something. The young believe they can test the sensitivity of others with impunity.

But, as someone pointed out: no one is as happy as they claim on Facebook; as attractive as they present on Instagram; as angry as they demonstrate on Twitter. On social media, billions of people see and experience a non-reality that is nevertheless the most tangible dimension of their daily experience. A Swedish writer puts it this way:

"The truth is, of course, that if people were really as happy as they seem on the internet, they wouldn't sit in it so damn long, because no one who's really having a good day spends half of it taking pictures of themselves. Now everyone can cultivate their myth, if they have enough manure, so if the grass on the other side of the fence seems greener, it's probably because there's a lot of shit there."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Backman 2019/2022.

Thanks to social media, although a more fitting term would be "antisocial media"<sup>59</sup> it can confidently be said that never in history have people engaged in so many bad conversations as they do now. And since ancient times we know: Bad conversations ruin good manners (1 Cor 15:33). Therefore, we should at least partially understand the negative effects it brings to social life. However, to roughly understand that the SPI brought by these media co-creates the digital revolution gripping human minds, we must go beyond the viewing horizon proper to "ordinary" Internet users, that is, move to layer (b).

## **Layer (b) of the digital revolution: Surveillance capitalism, or what we don't see**

Behind the scenes, our so-called behavioral data, the digital traces of our engagement with the internet and our activities there, are being collected – most people leave these traces unconsciously. Meanwhile, based on these traces, models of our personalities can be constructed with accuracy far exceeding what an experienced psychologist or psychiatrist can achieve through even longer, more thorough, and professional observation<sup>60</sup>.

In the background is the business model of companies providing social platforms: it's about maximizing user engagement achieved, among other things, through addictive digital technologies – these are what make people expect likes and comments in response to what they do on the internet<sup>61</sup>. For platform providers, it's about increasing the time users spend in front of the screen because this, in turn, increases the time ads are displayed, the number of clicks on them, and ultimately the scale of purchases. Social media has evolved in such a way that their goal is not to create communities, as

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<sup>59</sup> See. Vaidhyanathan 2018.

<sup>60</sup> See. e.g. Youyou, Kosinski i Stillwell 2015.

<sup>61</sup> See. e.g. Cemiloglu et al. 2022.

the founder and main owner of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg<sup>62</sup>. once declared. Although such communities sometimes emerge, the bonds formed are often shallow and fleeting<sup>63</sup>. The goal of Big Tech companies is, after all, to increase the profits of the owners and the market expansion of these firms. In the process of collecting a vast amount of behavioral data, the surveillance layer has become a significant part of today's infosphere. This layer was perhaps most thoroughly presented in the rightfully acclaimed book by Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*<sup>64</sup>. Renowned Israeli historian Yuval Harari adds to this context, stating that "no one really knows how we are already being monitored and what new things will appear in the coming years. Control technology is developing at a dizzying pace, and what seemed like science fiction ten years ago is yesterday's news"<sup>65</sup>. One aspect of the digital revolution, and therefore of SPI, is something that can be called the "war for privacy"<sup>66</sup>.

Most people are unaware that based on traces of their online presence, large databases have been created, algorithms have been built to search these data, and artificial intelligence systems have been developed, the main task of which is to optimize (read: maximize the profit of platform stakeholders) people's experiences with applications.

Harari also sees social benefits in all of this. In the context of the fight against the pandemic, pointing to positive examples from South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, he argues:

"Centralized monitoring and harsh penalties are not the only way to get people to follow guidelines that are beneficial to themselves. When people are given scientific facts and trust the authorities to convey these facts to them, they can behave, even if Big Brother

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<sup>62</sup> See Zuckerberg's 2012 letter to investors; <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE8102MT-20120201>; Read: 02.04.22.

<sup>63</sup> Fisher 2022/2023: 326-30.

<sup>64</sup> Zuboff 2019/2020.

<sup>65</sup> Harari 2020.

<sup>66</sup> Harari 2020.

isn't watching. **A self-motivated and well-informed population is usually much stronger and more effective than a controlled and uninformed population.**"<sup>67</sup>

The problem is that Harari seems to overlook the negative consequences of the phenomenon of SPI. In the current poisoned and deeply polarized infosphere, achieving just "good information" for the population becomes increasingly unlikely. How to achieve positive motivation for the community when SPI has significantly lowered the level of social trust? Rewolucji cyfrowej warstwa (c): unintended consequences – infoprzeciążenia, dezinformacja, wojny informacyjne...

### **Digital revolution layer (c): *unintended consequences* – information overload, disinformation, information wars...**

Much of what unfolds in the layer of *unintended consequences* has yet to be recognized – especially as new phenomena continue to emerge. It is widely known, however, that the internet, and even more so, social media, have killed or are killing high-quality media – once known as the guardians of discourse, where information was verified and prioritized before publication. The barriers/filters developed over centuries to protect human infospheres from an overflow of information, from an excessive onslaught of lies, and a flood of nonsense, have been corroded or almost completely dismantled.<sup>68</sup>

There has been a change in the conditions for transmitting, including selling, information and knowledge – for the worse. This has brought about the degradation of public debate – see the tendency to "spin" all kinds of messages to increase their so-called clickability or reach. On the way, more privacy fortifications are being destroyed – commercialized behavioral data allows for the precise decoding of our desires and fears, even based on data

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<sup>67</sup> Harari 2020.

<sup>68</sup> See e.g. Lazer et al. 2018: 2.



that is initially anonymized. This means that very few individuals, let's call them CyberLords, possess not only immense fortunes and vast knowledge – much greater than that available to secret services – about the intimate affairs of billions of people but also almost unchecked power that allows for the modification of human behavior on a massive scale.<sup>69</sup>

One of the cultural effects is that when a life problem is difficult to solve, the younger generation learns to cross the line – regardless of values. Not fully consciously, but universally and intensively, young people immerse themselves in a culture of *cheating* and irresponsibility.<sup>70</sup>

In a world of constant information overload, transparency – once considered one of the guarantors of the democratic character of political processes – has transformed into its opposite. Instead of enabling *the accountability* of power, it has brought about its theatricalization. As noted by the well-known political analyst Ivan Krastev: "We probably have more transparency in politics than ever, but conspiracy thinking is not disappearing"<sup>71</sup>

Another destructive effect of this entire situation is that people have never before applied manipulation techniques to each other on such a massive scale and at the same time so professionally. The social cost – but also the cognitive and moral cost – that a huge part of humanity pays for the digital revolution (or more cautiously: for the path of development taken by this revolution) includes deep political and cultural polarization of societies. Political and social strife, whose aggressive forms have invaded the lives of many families but also caused destabilizing effects on an international scale. According to Tristan Harris, this polarization is essentially part of the consciously developed business model of Big Tech<sup>72</sup>. The CyberLords are the main

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<sup>69</sup> See. Zuboff 2019/2020.

<sup>70</sup> Comprehensive approach to the changes in the attitudes of young people under the influence of the cyber world can be found in the book Twenge 2017/2019.

<sup>71</sup> Krastev 2013.

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.investmentwatchblog.com/the-polarization-of-our-society-is-actually-part-of-the-business-model-tristan-harris-on-the-power-of-social-media-companies/>; Read: 10.02.21.

beneficiaries of SPI and at the same time, entities that significantly manage this poisoned infosphere.<sup>73</sup>

Incidentally, enemies of freedom – not only authoritarian states – have been given free tools for conducting information warfare, sowing confusion. Thanks to social media, they have mass access to the deep layers of social imagination, consciousness, and subconsciousness.

We can therefore talk about – let's call it – secondary beneficiaries of SPI. These are entities, interest groups, that, in some way, thrive and benefit from the functioning of SPI, surfing in various ways through the ocean of disinformation. These are primarily states involved in conducting information wars – from the Polish perspective, Russia is the most important; then experts usually point to China, North Korea, and Iran. It's essential to remember that without the tools provided by American Big Tech – starting from the Internet itself, through Western social media, of which we highlight as the most important: Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, X (formerly Twitter), Pinterest, Reddit, LinkedIn, Quora, Discord – the order according to the decreasing number of users: FB over 3 billion, Discord 154 million (as of October 5, 2023<sup>74</sup>), these states could not develop their information wars on such a broad scale and conduct them so effectively.

Furthermore, beneficiaries of the existence of SPI are recently growing like mushrooms after the rain entities declaring a fight against disinformation: startups, institutes, think tanks. "It is estimated that the United States allocates \$1 billion annually to fight disinformation."<sup>75</sup>

One of the unintended consequences of the digital revolution, the importance of which cannot be overestimated, is that **as a result of the digital revolution, the complexity of social systems has increased to a level far beyond individual human and institu-**

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<sup>73</sup> See e.g. Zuboff 2019/2020, de Bustos 2019, Fisher 2023, Zybertowicz 2022.

<sup>74</sup> Lua 2023.

<sup>75</sup> Duszczuk 2023.

## **tional-organizational capabilities of understanding information processing.**

The information overload – even if limited to information from reliable sources – is currently such that even in the case of information that seems important, its verification is not only time-consuming but often exceeds the capabilities of **individuals qualified** in information processing. On the other hand, automatic information verification systems, capable of processing vast amounts of information in a short time, are usually also "biased," in other words, they are ideologically biased. It is a bias that either emerged spontaneously, seemingly infiltrated on its own, or one that was deliberately introduced to serve someone's interests – for example, to use a given information processing system as a tool in cultural or information warfare.

In 2018, a special committee of the British House of Commons<sup>76</sup> for its analyzes, adopted that disinformation is "the deliberate creation and dissemination of false or manipulated information intended to deceive or **mislead recipients** – with the aim of causing harm to someone or for political, personal, or financial gain<sup>77</sup>. Note that such a definition essentially means that almost everyone uses disinformation, including media aspiring to so-called *quality journalism*<sup>78</sup>. This is because in the SPI conditions, even the most serious media cannot resist the temptation of daily sensationalizing, if not the news themselves, then their announcements and headlines of texts. Often, they promise more sensations, discoveries, revelations, emotions than actually find in a given message – text, radio broadcast, film, etc. This means that almost everyone, willingly or unwillingly, participates in poisoning the infosphere – this is precisely one of the

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<sup>76</sup> A body of the House of Commons called "The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee".

<sup>77</sup> In the original: "disinformation as the deliberate creation and sharing of false and/or manipulated information that is intended to deceive and mislead audiences, either for the purposes of causing harm, or for political, personal or financial gain"; House of Commons Report; <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcumeds/1791/1791.pdf>; Read: 20.06.21.

<sup>78</sup> See. e.g. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/what-quality-journalism-and-how-can-it-be-saved>; Read: 30.09.20.

aspects of *the structural* nature of infosphere poisoning. Where did this come from?

It seems that one of the initial reasons is **the disruption of the proportion between the number of information channels and the number of recipients of messages**, more precisely, the amount of time recipients can spend getting acquainted with media messages.

Pluralism, which is the multiplicity conducive to reaching the truth, has been replaced by hyper-pluralism, a cacophony of impulses losing collective meanings and thus promoting the transformation of former cultural communities into hyper-individualistic associations. It began with the expansion of television, even before the construction of the Internet, and became a source of anxiety for such insightful analysts as Neil Postman in the early 1990s<sup>79</sup>, but was deepened with the development of the Internets and especially desocializing media.

To better understand the depth of this situation, it is worth recalling the concept of "*attention economy*". Its author is considered to be Herbert A. Simon (Nobel laureate in economics in 1978), who drew attention to the fact that in a world rich in information, human attention becomes scarce. His following observation is often quoted:

"In a world full of information, wealth of information means a deficit of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it."<sup>80</sup>

For example, a person standing in a square with many notice boards is only able to focus on some of them, and remember the message from an even smaller part of the noticed advertisements. That's why they become more and more colorful, flashy, and dynamic – from flashing neon lights to huge billboards. There are increasingly

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<sup>79</sup> Postman 1992/2004.

<sup>80</sup> Simon 1971: 41-2.

diverse stimuli and temptations – competing with each other for the audience's attention. In the background of this process was economic development, which, from our point of view here, can be seen as a transition from a scarcity economy that lasted thousands of years (it's harder to produce – easier to sell; advertising wasn't necessary) to an abundance economy (easier to produce – harder to sell; advertising is essential). For at least some customers, the mechanism of expecting constant novelties has emerged. When mass communication technologies began to spread in the context of the ideology of freedom of speech and free competition, a multitude of sources and channels of information emerged. When the digital revolution overlaid this, resulting in hyper-pluralism, there was, among other things, a constant information overload. This deeply changed the entire ecosystem of human infosphere<sup>81</sup>.

To reach the increasingly scarce good, which is the audience's attention, broadcasters began to change the nature of messages – making them more attractive, flattening, scandalizing, saturating them with violence, sex, and fear. All to make their signal stand out from the noise of other messages and thus reach the recipient's mind and attract their attention for as long as possible. It doesn't matter whether it's a market (marketing, advertising), journalistic (informative), or strictly political (persuasive) message. The goal is to reach the recipient's mind to change their attitude toward a product, service, idea, or political project. In these conditions, informational journalism, willingly or unwillingly, turned into entertainment – the information industry transformed into *infotainment*, a hybrid of informing and *entertaining*.

One could say that this was an introduction to the structural process of poisoning the infosphere – a process consisting of numerous links and layers that are a mixture of spontaneity and phenomena and processes that are consciously devised and controlled in their course. It is not the goal of our study to historically describe the intricacies of this process, so let's move on to the contemporary situation.

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<sup>81</sup> Cf. Babik 2014; Gawel 2021.

Even the availability of first dozens and hundreds of radio channels, and then television channels, and situations where first radio plays and then TV series already had some addictive power for viewers, cannot compare with the current situation brought about by personalized, i.e., individualized, digital communication channels. The main reason is probably as follows: before the era of smartphones, there were no technical possibilities that would first allow provoking and then forcing the involvement of the recipient in constant information overload. This happened when four additional conditions occurred:

1. The earlier high pluralism of analog media (dozens of radio and television channels) has multiplied into thousands of online information channels.
2. The ubiquity of freely available information from the Internet has deepened the degradation of paid media, leading to the professionalization of infotainment<sup>82</sup>.
3. Social media, and later a large number of smartphone apps, were reinforced by addictive technologies, with the famous Facebook "like" at the forefront.
4. The combination of a mobile phone (initially just a leash connecting to employers and loved ones) with the Internet transformed individuals, spending more and more time in front of screens, into beings addicted to stimuli, leaving behind a wealth of behavioral data, unknowingly assisting Big Tech's co-workers in manipulating them more effectively.

The "hooking" of numerous addictive technologies into the Internet caused, as Peter Pomerantsev writes about post-Soviet Russia, "People who thought they were tough enough to shrug off the torrent of TV content still seemed vulnerable to the social media message, creeping into the most personal online spaces and surrounding them from all sides, weaving into the fabric of life"<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> Pomerantsev 2020: 42.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Twenge 2017/2019.

The next step – and a breakthrough of civilizational magnitude – in the process of poisoning the infosphere was the formation of a new generation of digital natives, for whom, in many cases, contact with the Internet became not only an everyday but even a dominant form of interaction with "reality"<sup>84</sup>.

As a result, **billions of people were immersed in an ocean of dis/information, the nature of which they are unable to grasp.**

According to the previously adopted definitions, disinformation is sown by almost everyone:

- Citizens "sharing," often in good faith, billions of unverified messages;
- Thousands, or probably millions, of amateur trolls engaging in an unprecedented scale of human mischief;
- States – not only those hostile to Western democracy "tuning" their image;
- Hackers – independent and/or hired by someone;
- Criminal groups, including international ones;
- A significant part of the business, including *public relations*, marketing, and advertising industries;
- Even the most reputable media;
- Above all, Big Tech, which quickly realized that by developing algorithms that promote emotional, radical, even extreme, false, conspiratorial, polarizing messages, destroying social fabric, it achieves unprecedented market share growth rates and gigantic revenues in the history of humanity.

In this way, we are all conducting informational wars against each other! There is no need to find oneself in the crosshairs of someone's special operation to be subjected to brainwashing.

In this perspective, are information wars (e.g., Russian special operations) more than just a series of waves on the ocean of disin-

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<sup>84</sup> E.g., those related to the Cambridge Analytica activity and scandal – see Wylie 2020.

formation created by algorithms controlled by CyberLords? Since almost everyone, willingly or unwillingly – by spreading unverified but "super-certain" conspiratorial information, for example – contributes to the ocean of disinformation, actual, professionally planned quasi-military<sup>85</sup> information operations are taking place in a space that is already deeply and structurally deformed.

Moreover, it must be remembered, as has often been pointed out, that in the new technological context, the position of the aggressor, whoever it may be, is much more advantageous than that of the attacked:

- the production and dissemination of fake news are easier and cheaper than reaching credible information, verifying it, clarifying it, and spreading it;
- fakes can be multiplied without restrictions, just like creating countless fake accounts on Facebook or platform X (formerly Twitter);
- tools for creating fake news are developing faster than tools to combat them; studies have shown that false information on Twitter is usually retweeted by more people than true information, especially in politics<sup>86</sup>

**Social media have reshaped the entire ecosystem of interpersonal communication.** To understand how dangerous this is for the stability of our civilization's architecture<sup>87</sup> must realize that the infosphere is not just an "overlay," a descriptive addition to the existing social reality independently of it – a layer that only reflects this reality more or less accurately. The infosphere co-creates social reality. It provides opportunities for action in its own sphere and in all spheres of human life. Perhaps it should even be said that the infosphere, even if it does not co-create human nature (determining

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<sup>85</sup> Vosoughi et al. 2018.

<sup>86</sup> See. K. Zybertowicz i A. Zybertowicz 2021.

<sup>87</sup> Haidt 2022



its cultural dimension), defines the current condition of humanity. It's no wonder that not only voters but also experts and political elites lose the ability to understand the dynamics of events. It took some time, but in April 2022, the renowned bimonthly *The Atlantic* publishes an essay by Jonathan Haidt, a prominent American social psychologist, who directly states that the last 10 years have been a unique period in the history of the USA – a period of dumbing down the entire society, not just the youth<sup>88</sup>.

One of the problems in combating disinformation is that despite the growing number of studies, the mechanics of the current digitally modified information ecosystem is not transparent, and the contours of this system are not clear. Much indicates that when the infosphere becomes permanently poisoned, when "natural" cleansing mechanisms stop working, human ability to act rationally is limited or worsened. Daily erosion, through immersion in the digital infosphere, of intergenerational cultural continuity causes the loss of part of the historically acquired knowledge by humanity – both silent and conceptually articulated and systematized. Just as in formal institutions, a series of careless personnel moves can destroy their collective knowledge/memory, so in human civilization, our cultural immune system can be undermined or even destroyed<sup>89</sup>.

SPI is the aspect of the digital revolution that has already profoundly transformed many strands of human cultures. How did it do that? By flushing out the common cultural canon. The transmission of this canon took place over millennia as part of the so-called intergenerational cultural transmission. Meanwhile, SPI intensified the process, which can be described as the "abduction," or perhaps better the "interception," of the younger generation by the digital phase of the scientific-technical revolution. This process almost completely eliminated what educators call the so-called controlled educational environment. The old traditional educational environment consisting of family, neighborhood, school, and religious institutions first

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<sup>88</sup> I took the metaphor of the immune system of civilization from the work Ziemiański 2021: 178.

<sup>89</sup> See, esp. Postman 1992/2004.

lost its monopoly on transmitting cultural content and patterns that reached the younger generation – here the widespread dissemination of television probably had a breakthrough significance<sup>90</sup> The deepening of this process occurred with the spread of the Internet, computer games, and then social media. The "embedding" of numerous addictive technologies into internet content contributed to the habituation, a kind of "pinning," of the younger generation<sup>91</sup> to the forms of communication and content flowing from colorful screens. They became apparent "windows to the world" for young people, in reality playing the role of Venetian interrogation rooms and stimulation organized by companies of new digital technologies – under the leadership of the GAFAM group<sup>92</sup>.

## Cyber infiltrates and destabilizes reality

The decline of many traditional media outlets and the worsening quality of those that survived<sup>93</sup>, **have brought about a decrease in the number of people directly involved in obtaining information about the non-virtual reality.** Employing correspondents sent to the field costs much more than relying on interns who, working from home on a copy-paste basis, usually conduct internet searches quite superficially.

One could say that the digital infosphere has forced a shift in attention away from "traditional" reality. It has replaced and somewhat overshadowed it – an excellent example is the cult of YouTube and influencer celebrity – without considering the connection of their messages to the real world.

The overshadowing of reality by the cyber contributes to the destabilization of the former, with one of the more dangerous manifestations being the loss of geopolitical balance in the global system.

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<sup>90</sup> Twenge 2017/2019.

<sup>91</sup> See. Zybertowicz 2022a; the metaphor of the one-way mirror is used here after Zuboff 2021.

<sup>92</sup> See. e.g. Poulet 2011.

<sup>93</sup> Zybertowicz 2022.

There are several reasons for this situation, and let's focus on just one of them here.

Taking seriously, for example, by politicians and their PR specialists, the idea that if something is not on the Internet, it essentially does not exist, does not reach a large enough part of the electorate for the politician to take it into account. This means that certain significant phenomena and processes do not appear strongly enough on the radars of decision-makers and opinion-shaping elites. This must lead first to errors in assessing the situation and then to socially harmful decisions. It seems that this mechanism explains, at least partially, the surprise of some European elites, especially German ones, at the brutal, true face of Vladimir Putin's regime that unfolded since the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. It also appears that this situation could be an argument for the general thesis that analog geopolitics is collapsing under the weight of the complexity brought about by adding the digital domain, i.e., the cyber world, which is structurally cognitively poisoned, to the traditional analog world – reality<sup>94</sup>.

Therefore, it is worth considering whether the poisoning of the digital infosphere has already reached a level where there has been a – in philosophical terms – ontological change in the architecture of the social world. What could such a change entail? A cognitive disorientation so widespread and enduring that it deserves the name of an epistemological crisis.

## **Epistemological Crisis**

In 1967, philosopher Hannah Arendt published the classic essay "Truth and Politics." In it, she insightfully wrote about the struggle between political interests and the need for scientific exploration of the world and the establishment of truth. Aware of the destructive potential of politics towards the truth-seeking Academy, Arendt, in her analysis, nevertheless draws optimistic conclusions:

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<sup>94</sup> Arendt 2011: 311.

"With its persistence, facts outlast power; they are not as fleeting as pressure groups that arise when people come together for a purpose but disappear when the goal is achieved or thwarted. The fleeting nature of power makes it a very unreliable tool for achieving any permanence, and consequently, not only the truth and facts but also untruths and denials are not safe in its hands. (...)

Truth, although powerless and always losing in an open confrontation with power, has a certain kind of strength; **regardless of what those in power may devise, they cannot discover or invent a substitute for truth capable of functioning in the long run.** Persuasion and violence can destroy truth, but they cannot replace it" (emphasis added)<sup>95</sup>.

Arendt's conclusions align with common truths expressed in sayings like "The truth always comes out," "A lie has short legs," and the well-known adage: "You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time." However, note that the understanding of human cognitive mechanisms reflected in these sayings does not quite agree with another old observation often cited in the face of recent disinformation campaigns: "A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes." The accuracy of this latter observation is supported by studies indicating that false information moves much faster on the Internet than true information<sup>96</sup>.

Why do we believe that the optimistic conclusion of the German philosopher no longer applies today? One reason is the far-reaching autonomy of the media sphere from reality. In many respects, the media sphere has lost its secondary status to reality<sup>97</sup>; this is why we talk about mediocracy. Perhaps one extreme manifestation of this process is the situation where in political competition, for instance, one "wins not with a narrative but with a meme – its

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<sup>95</sup> Arendt 2011: 311.

<sup>96</sup> See, e.g. Bąkiewicz 2019:65-66.

<sup>97</sup> Ziemkiewicz 2021: 71.

emotions<sup>98</sup>. As commentator Rafał Ziemkiewicz notes: "The image, a captured frame, has ceased to be an illustration; it has become a message in itself, existing independently of the 'before' and 'after,' of any narrative. Its context is not a story but an emotional state. This is the essence of meme culture<sup>99</sup>.

In the previously mentioned communicative situation, where an increasing number of people prefer to acquire knowledge primarily from their smartphones rather than from other people or through direct observation of the world, the time period of staying in untruth for large social groups has been significantly extended compared to Arendt's times.

Let's also recall that, regardless of the speed of their circulation, the cost of producing true information (including the procedures for verification) is higher, sometimes significantly, than the cost of creating fake news. An additional dimension of this situation can be seen if we pay attention to the term "bullshit" introduced at the beginning of this text. Adding to this, in the context of the contemporary technological and cultural circumstances typical of the digital revolution, which unprecedentedly favor the creation and dissemination of bullshit, the infosphere becomes saturated with them, deepening the state of social disorientation. Beyond a certain level, this phenomenon can signify not only lasting cognitive but also moral degradation for numerous human groups.

The digitization of information and its almost direct transmission to human minds, coupled with various addictive technologies that almost prevent individuals and institutions from "unplugging" from the internet, have created a situation where, contrary to Arendt's hopes, **"substitutes for truth" are capable of functioning in the long term – on a mass scale.**

Entire societies may be shrouded in a fog of absurdity, lies, disinformation, and fake news for a long time (it's challenging to

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid: 82.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid: 84.

determine how long). It's worth noting that even before the Internet era, based on substitutes for truth, the Soviet communist system continued to function for more than twenty years after Arendt's essay was written, and the Chinese communist system still seems to have significant vitality.

These circumstances raise the need for reflection on the entities that are the main disposers of substitutes for truth, namely, the companies referred to as the GAFAM group.

Indeed, these entities significantly, perhaps decisively, contributed to the fact that we live in an era of fake news, disinformation, a post-truth culture, and social polarization. It is in this structurally co-created infosphere that Big Tech expands its reach and profits.

The invention and proliferation of cyberspace dethroned the world of old truths; it stripped old truths of the power they once had against authority and, to some extent, religion. Thus, cyberspace is the fabric in which "earthly" substitutes for truth are, contrary to Arendt, able to function in the long term.

This is partly because, on a mass scale, the Internet is not a perfect source of knowledge. It is a flawed dogma to claim that "in the era of the Internet, there are no more communication barriers"<sup>100</sup>.

In practice, the Internet has evolved to become a quadruple barrier.

1. As an ocean of disinformation, the Internet is a barrier between individuals and knowledge – throwing streams of fragmented information at us that do not coalesce into meaningful areas of knowledge.
2. As an ocean of always available attractive stimuli, it is a barrier separating one person from another.
3. For the same reason, it also separates us from nature.
4. Constantly bombarding us with notifications, it does not allow us to get bored, taking away the time for the reflection necessary for an individual to have contact with

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<sup>100</sup>Weiner 2019:11.

themselves, with their own soul – a contact essential for our cognitive and moral development.

Here, we suggest the hypothesis that constant information overload with digital stimuli leads many individuals, including those belonging to expert groups and political elites, to cognitive impairment characterized by tunnel vision. A related phenomenon has long been explored in aviation psychology and the work of drivers<sup>101</sup>.

Chronic infoglut and the stress it induces can cause individuals performing institutionally assigned tasks to focus so much on a specific goal that they ignore other stimuli appearing around them, leading to the loss of situational awareness. Of course, the phenomenon of tunnel vision/thinking existed in Arendt's time, but it only applied to individual entities performing stressful tasks. Nowadays, as mentioned at the beginning of the text, participating in digital social communication increasingly means walking through a minefield, a highly stressful situation conducive not only to cognitive errors but also to social neuroses.

Does the civilization-communication situation brought about by the digital revolution, involving the loss of the ability of significant social groups to distinguish good from evil, truth from falsehood, important from unimportant, urgent from non-urgent, friend from foe, deserve to be called an epistemological crisis? If we are correct, then a fairly deep restructuring of the architecture<sup>102</sup> (if not outright ontology) of human civilization has already taken place. It can be said that Arendt's "mistake" also lies in a somewhat insufficiently deep – at least in this text to which we refer – grasp of the cultural, structural frameworks of the human world<sup>103</sup>.

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<sup>101</sup> See e.g. Martens i Winsum 2000; Nicolic, Orr i Sarter 2004..

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Zybertowicz i Zybertowicz 2021.

<sup>103</sup> Constructive in the sense defined in the dissertation *Violence and Cognition: A Study in the Non-Classical Sociology of Knowledge* – Zybertowicz 1995.

## Big Tech Giants<sup>104</sup>

Key driving forces and major beneficiaries of the digital revolution, at least within the Western world, are companies referred to as tech giants, particularly those forming the so-called GAFAM group: Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft.

From the perspective of SPI, Google (along with YouTube as its subsidiary) and Facebook (including Instagram, as well as messengers like WhatsApp and Messenger as dependent entities) play a crucial role here.

It's important to note that these companies not only create informational (dominated by Google's search engine) and communicational (Facebook) platforms but are also the main co-creators of the so-called surveillance capitalism as a separate, still poorly recognized by the public, dimension of the digital revolution. With some delay, but increasingly, voices are heard stating that

"Algorithms in Silicon Valley are created only to addict us from the start. The IT industry no longer produces tools, only drugs. Two billion people on the planet have become addicted. (...) 'What significance do Russian injections have compared to the permanent, for decades ongoing disinformation offensive of American radio or TV stars like Fox News? Aren't the Russians just exploiting a vulnerable ground? As Joshua Yaffa notes in 'The New Yorker,' by amplifying micro-information thrown in by various players to the size of the news of the day, **media opposing propaganda actually contribute to it**. They build an exaggerated picture of the external threat – and that is precisely the strategy of Putin, Trump, and other autocrats"<sup>105</sup>. (emphasis added).

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<sup>104</sup><https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/tech-news/premium-idf-intel-unit-s-veterans-help-facebook-destroy-competition-1.9371061>; odczyt 29.12.2020.

<sup>105</sup>Jarkowiec 2020.



In our assessment, the highlighted observation is crucial: mainstream media with serious ambitions also contribute significantly to the poisoning of the infosphere. Even when they criticize Big Tech (which they usually do inconsistently), in essence, by participating in the pursuit of viewership, clickability, and quotability, they play according to the business plans of Big Tech itself. In September 2020, Madeleine Albright, former U.S. Secretary of State, rightly observed:

"Information plays a big role. Unfortunately, **we still lack a comprehensive understanding of what social media has done to us** in this regard. Because now it looks like the information disseminated there controls us. We need to do a lot against it, journalists too. We must make people believe again that the news media convey the truth" (emphasis added)<sup>106</sup>.

Here we are, several years after the founding of Facebook (in 2004), and a representative of the political and intellectual establishment of the country where the GAFAM group is located publicly admits to a lack of "comprehensive understanding" of what happened to the world of information. One might argue that at least part of the American establishment has been disoriented by ICI. While it recognizes that something needs to be done so that, attention! **"people believe again** that the news media convey the truth" (emphasis added), no effective remedies have been implemented<sup>107</sup>.

At this point in our discussion, it is worth asking: Have the informational poisoning and the associated epistemological crisis affected the perpetrators, beneficiaries, and surveillors themselves? We primarily refer to the American CyberLords, but also the Chinese Big Tech, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the environment of President Vladimir Putin, the environments of renowned intelligence services of various countries (including Israel), and other

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<sup>106</sup> Scholz i Aust 2020.

<sup>107</sup> Haidt 2022 provides sensible remedial proposals, but they are still far from being implemented.

entities with access to unique informational resources. The question is whether it can/must be assumed that, beyond the billions of social media users subject to various addictive digital technologies, there exists an elite group that possesses (or is basically able to possess) a relatively undistorted view of the world, a view of key processes transforming global civilization.

Perhaps slightly exaggerating, we will say that this is a question of whether, in all this information chaos, there is still any group of "wise men" on our planet with something like a "God's eye" view. A view that is as pure as the human mind allows and as impartial as the still perhaps considered the least fallible method of scientific knowledge allows. Unfortunately, attempting to obtain a detailed answer to this question would take us beyond the scope of this discussion. So, we will throw only a sociologically intuitive speculation here: beneficiaries of ICI, in essence, also undergo an epistemological crisis, meaning they are victims of processes to which they owe their power.

## **Paradoxes of SPI and the digital revolution**

It seems that one of the reasons for the delayed and incomplete recognition of SPI by science and the public is that it, like the entire digital revolution, is entangled in numerous paradoxes. Since human minds usually resist systematically considering phenomena that appear paradoxical (perhaps similarly to cognitive dissonances<sup>108</sup>), this characteristic of SPI may explain the weak awareness of the involved phenomena. Let's divide the paradoxes we've identified into two groups:

### **1. Paradoxes related to human individuals:**

\* You don't need to exercise memory because everything (information, photos, contact data, e.g., phone numbers) is available "at hand" on digital devices (especially smartphones).

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<sup>108</sup> Cf. what McGilchrist (2021) writes about the role of paradoxes in learning about the world

\* You don't need to acquire navigation skills – GPS systems and Google maps handle that.

\* You don't need to worry about spelling rules or orthography – text editors correct it.

\* You can be ignorant of foreign languages – there are translation tools.

\* Many tasks don't require preparation with effort and over a long period – online tutorials, summaries, and ready-made solutions are available.

\* You don't need to learn and cultivate sensitivity to other human beings – virtual assistants should suffice instead of conversation with a live person.

In light of the above, **new technologies seemingly strengthen humans but, in fact, weaken their cognitive abilities and moral competencies.**

It's often forgotten that the context in which all this unfolds is not only SPI but also a technologically stimulated artificial rush (now, immediately). However, for certain, particularly valuable things – knowledge, skills, resilience – one must invest time; otherwise, they won't anchor in the human mind. Artificially arranged, forced haste increases the susceptibility of our minds to confirmation bias, creating vulnerability and susceptibility to disinformation fitted into recipients' cognitive frameworks.

New technologies are often introduced with the promise of saving us time and effort. However, in practice, one still needs to constantly check something online, always react to something. The brain has no chance to rest and experience boredom, which is particularly harmful to children. From both experience and scientific research, we know that periods of boredom, a kind of intellectual and emotional standstill, "hanging," are necessary not only for recreation and regeneration but also essential for the creative processing of our experiences.

## 2. Social-structural paradoxes:

\* The democratization of the infosphere, enabling the shift from an asymmetrical/authoritarian model ("one speaks, the rest listen") to a democratic multiplicity of voices ("everyone speaks"), resulted in the effect of "no one listens." This ultimately contributed to a serious weakening of democracy.

\* Facebook's *global connectivity*<sup>109</sup> program – that is, connecting everyone with everyone – contributed more than anything else to the breakdown of common, culturally defined public infospheres into thousands of technologically regulated regional, environmental, group infospheres, and millions of personal/private ones. *Connectivity* did not lead to the building of lasting communities but to the emergence and growth of numerous mutually unfriendly information bubbles.

\* The lowering of the barrier to access agoras (understood as the public space of communication): the steep increase in the number of freely expressed opinions did not bring about better social understanding but, on the contrary, significant polarization and associated radicalization of attitudes. The surplus of voices and opinions makes only the more radical, sensational, emotional, and simplified ones visible in many contexts, causing more people to learn to "think" in such a way. As a result, democratization – perhaps not so much of knowledge as often the right to hate – creates a demand for authoritarianism as a means of reducing chaos.

\* The increase in social demand for logical analysis skills, allowing the differentiation between truth and falsehood, brought about by waves of disinformation, occurred simultaneously with the mass decrease in social cognitive competencies necessary for such analysis.

Summarizing the paradox thread, we propose to encapsulate the most significant threat to human civilization as follows: the increasing complexity of the social world brought about by the digital

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<sup>109</sup> Arendt 2011: 311.

revolution requires ever greater cognitive competencies from individuals and the institutions they create. However, the most alarming result of SPI is the systemic, it seems, reduction of human cognitive competencies and those institutions geared toward knowledge creation, such as academia. In other words, **threats are growing, and the ability to cope with them is diminishing**. In this context, the main threat posed by the development of artificial intelligence, a problem deliberately omitted in this text<sup>110</sup>, could be formulated as follows. The trajectories of two curves are on the best course to intersect: one signifies decreasing cognitive competencies, the other increasing possibilities of artificial intelligence. It is worth trying to imagine the fate of humans after these two curves intersect and the subsequent widening of the "scissors."

It is worth noting that, from the perspective of the current condition of democracy, the following mechanism is at play: if a basic set of values is not shared in a community, there are no obvious truths. And when such truths are absent, it is challenging to spontaneously generate social consensus on issues important to the community. If dialogic means do not determine consensus essential for social cooperation, they are imposed by threats of economic compulsion or institutional violence<sup>111</sup> *cancel culture* is an example<sup>112</sup>. One commentator, noting a similar mechanism, added: "Our civilization cannot agree on what a woman is"<sup>113</sup>.

Half a century ago, philosopher Leszek Kołakowski, in a insightful essay titled "The Revenge of the Sacred in Secular Culture," argued that undermining elementary conceptual distinctions would pose a threat to the stability of social order.

"There is no longer a clear distinction in political life between war and peace, between sovereignty

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<sup>110</sup> See, however, Zybertowicz 2023.

<sup>111</sup> See. Zybertowicz 1995.

<sup>112</sup> See. Ramaswamy 2023.

<sup>113</sup> On Twitter: @AuronMacintyre.

and slavery, invasion and liberation, between equality and despotism; nor any undisputed boundary between victim and executioner, between woman and man, between generations, between crime and heroism, between law and violence, between victory and defeat, between left and right, between reason and madness, between doctor and patient, between teacher and student, between art and buffoonery, between knowledge and ignorance"<sup>114</sup>.

The blurring of these fundamental dichotomies that underlie human cognitive orientation, observed by the Polish philosopher half a century ago, developed before the digital destruction of the infosphere began bearing its poisoned fruits, resulting, among other things, from the massive, technologically generated information overload.

The consolidation of SPI means the continuous exposure of human minds and institutions to at least three harmful processes: information overload and confusion on two fronts – faulty prioritization of perception (which, by its nature, is always selective) and the associated irrational selection of goals and means of action. Overloaded minds lose the ability to focus on important tasks for an extended period, drift, and struggle to direct their attention to tasks aligned with deep human needs. In the case of institutions, this includes fulfilling their mission, especially crucial tasks related to state security. Communication, and therefore social cooperation, becomes more challenging and laborious. This applies to workers at all levels, from the lowest to the level of governing a country.

Long before the war in Ukraine that began in February 2022, it could be observed that the old, centuries-old true formula, "Truth is the first casualty of war," became misleading. It did not require a traditional war, understood as kinetic conflict, for truth to become a casualty. The widespread use of social media brought about by the digital revolution was sufficient for this. The well-known American

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<sup>114</sup> Kołakowski 1973/2010: 225.

saying about *the fog of war* unfortunately applies not only to the digital infosphere but also to other areas – beyond the digital realm. The decreasing clarity of the image and the haziness of event contours began to encompass various aspects of social life even in times of peace, unrelated to conducting war. This is well illustrated by the concept of information *weaponization*, which emerged around 2014 – a systematic use of information as a weapon<sup>115</sup>.

Certainly, treating information as a tool of warfare has likely existed throughout human history, but it was only professionalized and institutionalized with the digitization of the infosphere. Today, every seemingly innocent smartphone application – whether related to nutrition, fitness (not to mention strictly news-related) – can be utilized as dual-use technology, collecting information about its user for later behavioral influence<sup>116</sup>.

The effects of SPI include the degradation of public debate, the paralysis of political will, the reduction of the rationality of public policies (including economic policies through the worsening of the accuracy of allocating common resources), or, more broadly speaking, the erroneous prioritization of tasks carried out by individuals and institutions.

## Summary

What does the epistemological crisis we have tried to capture above signify? In our view, it is nothing less than a strong questioning of the very foundations of the civilization built on the basis of Enlightenment philosophy<sup>117</sup>. Just as the Enlightenment formation questioned the foundations of earlier social orders built on religious thought, the digital revolution – with SPI at the forefront – is washing away the foundations of the order built on thought that identifies itself as rational<sup>118</sup>.

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<sup>115</sup> Pomerantsev i Weiss 2014. Por. Galeotti 2023.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Zuboff 2020, 2021.

<sup>117</sup> See. Zybortowicz with team 2015.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Pinker 2021.

Without considering the epistemological crisis produced by the digital infosphere, where facts are replaced on a massive scale by truth substitutes, we will not understand many irrational policies in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic or the Western democratic tolerance for the construction of an authoritarian – but co-financed and tolerated by the West – power system symbolized by Vladimir Putin. This, in turn, has led to serious consideration of the question: could the aggression against Ukraine lead Russia to resort to nuclear weapons?

This situation, which we refer to as SPI, has led a significant portion of humanity, including Western Civilization, to a state of lasting and deep cognitive disorientation. For a long time, this condition led to a more emotional (bordering on religious reactions rather than scientific) approach to climate change<sup>119</sup>, and now it manifests as an irrational aversion to pessimism (to use Mustafa Suleyman's term<sup>120</sup>), a reluctance to seriously consider realistic black scenarios in the face of threats that the development of artificial intelligence can pose to human civilization.

## Recommendations

Since the poisoning of the infosphere is *structural*, the proposed remedies must also be of a *structural* nature. At the most general level, we would say that an international consensus is needed to incorporate effective braking and control mechanisms into the vehicle that is the digital revolution<sup>121</sup>.

Commonly recommended techniques and strategies for responding to misinformation, such as those emphasizing media *literacy*<sup>122</sup>, are ineffective. On one hand, they overlook basic scientific knowledge about information processing by the human mind; on the

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. Bińczyk 2018.

<sup>120</sup> Suleyman 2023.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Zybortowiczowie 2017.

<sup>122</sup> See e.g., materials included in the Journal of Media Literacy Education; [digitalcommons.uri.edu/jmle/](https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/jmle/); read: 10.02.22.



other hand, the widespread use of digital technologies by Big Tech companies, which have already built huge fortunes by co-creating and sustaining SPI.

Comprehensive regulatory strategies are needed, directed at decisively civilizing the Wild West that the cyber world has become<sup>123</sup>. Citizens would likely be outraged if they were to be convinced that companies providing water to cities, producing food or drugs do not have to – due to trade secrets – provide state control entities with information about the chemical composition of water, food, and drugs. However, such a situation occurs with services and goods provided by the GAFAM group. Algorithms, through which this group manages the human information space, modifying human behavior every day, operate according to principles that are even invisible to democratic state control institutions. Without ending such knowledge asymmetry – and, of course, the associated power – negative effects of SPI cannot be overcome.

Systemic strategies undertaken by states or international organizations such as the European Union to comprehensively regulate the cybersphere, including establishing rules for Big Tech, are essential. However, it will be impossible to develop (not to mention implement) such strategies without rethinking the issue of freedom of speech. Without delving into this complex issue, we will only point out that one should seriously consider the dilemma, which, consciously simplifying matters, was formulated by Polish SF writer and thinker Jacek Dukaj: "Either democracy or freedom of thought"<sup>124</sup>.

For example, a reasonable and necessary proposal seems to be the suggestion from Facebook whistleblower Frances (adopted, for instance, by prominent American social psychologist Jonathan Haidt) to modify the "Share" function on Facebook so that after sharing some content twice, the next person in the chain would have to spend time manually copying and pasting the material into a new post. Such a solution would not be censorship; in relation to the con-

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<sup>123</sup>Cf. Pein 2017/2019.

<sup>124</sup>Dukaj 2021.

tent itself, it would be neutral, not preventing anyone from expressing any views<sup>125</sup>. However, it could play an important role in restoring human rationality – it would slow down reflexive content replication. This would be a step towards detoxifying our infosphere.

Of course, these are just ideas that dozens of which would have to come together to form a system of new infosphere regulations. Such regulations would have to significantly limit the power and probably also the income of the CyberLords. Here – in our opinion – is the actual focal point of the struggle against misinformation as a serious social ailment.

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<sup>125</sup>Haidt 2022.

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