

**UKRAINIAN WORLD CONGRESS INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATION MISSION TO  
UKRAINE'S 2019 ELECTIONS**

**PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN UKRAINE**

**INTERIM REPORT ON MEDIA-MONITORING**

**Kyiv, Ukraine, 24 April 2019** – In 2019, the topic of disinformation has entered daily conversations of the mainstream population in many countries of the world. The question is no longer about the existence of disinformation. Instead, the debate now revolves around the extent to which disinformation has contributed to shaping the political landscape of one's respective country.

Russian disinformation has throughout history been designed with the aim of blurring the lines between fact and fiction and thus creating confusion and doubt, and instilling in the audience a belief that the truth does not exist.

Campaigns are very targeted with disinformation sowing discord in society, creating division between groups or fabricating divisions that previously did not exist.

Moreover, Russian disinformation attempts to portray international institutions and various countries as hopeless, ineffectual, dishonest or corrupt with the goal of weakening them to further its own geopolitical and imperial aims.

In the case of Ukraine, the Russian Federation has been openly waging for the past more than five years powerful hybrid aggression to return Ukraine to its sphere of influence and complete domination.

This hybrid aggression against Ukraine includes:

- 1) military actions in the Donbas, the illegal occupation of Crimea, terrorist acts, cyberattacks, the capture of hostages in Eastern Ukraine and imprisonment in the Russian Federation of Ukrainian political prisoners; and
- 2) persistent efforts of the Russian Federation to portray Ukraine as a failed state in order to minimize financial, military, technical and humanitarian aid to Ukraine from the international community, and to eliminate the current sanctions regime against the Russian Federation.

The Russian disinformation machine, although not a novice in the realm of information warfare, has significantly increased its capabilities over recent years taking full advantage of traditional, social and digital networks at its discretion to reach an unprecedented number of people with its messaging. This includes the use of bots, trolls and methods uniquely tailored to each audience.

In view of this, the Ukrainian World Congress (UWC) International Observation Mission to Ukraine's 2019 Elections (UWC Mission) had 122 long-term observers who have been monitoring media in 15 languages since 4 March 2019 for evidence of disinformation with respect to Ukraine generally, and the Presidential Election specifically, in 28 countries, namely: Australia, Azerbaijan, Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Estonia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Moldova, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Ukraine.

The UWC Mission also registered with the Central Election Commission of Ukraine 249 short-term observers from 33 countries. They monitored the electoral process in Ukraine and in Ukraine's diplomatic missions in 25 countries during the two rounds of the Presidential Election. The UWC Mission presented its Preliminary Observations regarding both rounds of the Presidential Election and is preparing a Final Report which will be issued 8 weeks after the election.

Online training was provided for all long-term observers with the UWC Mission on 2 March 2019 that included a tutorial on the specifics of the media environment during the election period and instructions on submitting online reports.

The online reporting system was developed in partnership with Sterling Business School in consultation with representatives of StopFake and Kyiv Mohyla Academy School of Journalism.

The media-monitoring of the UWC Mission is being realized remotely and in two stages:

- 1) observers-volunteers complete online reports on a weekly basis, submitting information about questionable news items and analysis with elements of disinformation; they also carefully follow the portrayal of specific disinformation narratives that include among others: a) the elections in Ukraine were falsified and do not represent the will of the Ukrainian people; b) Ukraine is not capable of conducting fair, transparent and democratic elections; c) there are no candidates in Ukraine worthy of being President; and d) Ukraine, in essence, is a failed state; and then
- 2) a second team analyzes these reports and makes conclusions accordingly.

The UWC Mission and its volunteers identified the levels of disinformation in different countries with respect to Ukraine and its people. Effectively taking advantage of its multilingual network, the UWC Mission researches and establishes the breadth of Russian disinformation about Ukraine and its electoral processes, outside Ukraine.

The UWC Mission considers disinformation to be an important instrument in the arsenal of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine. All over the world in different media disinformation narratives are evident, some of them related to the elections and others to Ukraine's effectiveness as an independent state.

Although the work of the UWC long-term observers continues and will be presented in the Final Report 8 weeks after the election, the UWC Mission confirms widespread disinformation about Ukraine in general and the Presidential Election specifically.

Disinformation narratives were varied and disseminated through a wide spectrum of mass media including traditional, social and digital networks, and in various languages. The breadth of the disinformation demonstrates that the intended audience is not confined to the Ukrainian people but includes the international community with varying degrees of involvement with Ukraine.

During the Presidential Elections in Ukraine the following examples of Russian disinformation were discovered:

- 1) On 23 March 2019, the Strategic Culture Foundation online journal published in the English language "Three Neo-Nazis lead Ukraine's Presidential Contest: Gallup Finds Ukrainians Despise All the Candidates". A title as such slanders the main candidates as neo-Nazis in an attempt to convince the consumer of the information that the next President of Ukraine does not deserve respect, regardless who wins this Presidential Election. It also clearly does not

reflect the general attitude of the Ukrainian electorate taking into account that the winner of this election won 73% support.

- 2) On 25 March 2019, TASS Russian News Agency stated in an English-language article titled “Russia won’t send observers to Ukraine as part of OSCE human rights body’s mission” that: “Kiev’s illegal steps against Russian observers at the OSCE were reflected in the interim report of the ODIHR [Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights] monitoring mission released on March 15.” This sentence structure creates the impression that the OSCE referred to the law of Ukraine that prevented citizens of the Russian Federation from being observers as illegal, whereas the OSCE report informs about the existence of the law but does not deem it to be illegal.

This article also states: “By its steps, Kiev has again discredited itself, and in particular, it seriously violated the spirit and letter of the Copenhagen Document and other OSCE’s commitments on elections. Kiev’s decision not to open polling stations in its diplomatic missions in Russia also stripped of their constitutional rights to vote millions of Ukrainians who are currently in Russia.” This assertion inaccurately cites the Resolution of the Central Election Commission of Ukraine № 274 from 31 December 2018 which foresees that citizens of Ukraine living on the territory of the Russian Federation can vote in Ukrainian diplomatic missions in Georgia, Kazakhstan and Finland.

- 3) On 31 March 2019, the online journal Strategic Culture Foundation published an English-language article titled “Chaining America’s Destiny to the Chaos of Ukraine” which states the following about the Presidential Election in Ukraine: “Whichever one of them wins, the United States and the entire NATO alliance are mortally committed to supporting an extremist, out-of-control and desperate failing regime that would not hesitate to pull America into a thermonuclear war for its own selfish ends.” This blatant disinformation not only presents Ukraine as a completely failed state but foresees that US and NATO cooperation with such a country will lead to thermonuclear war.

The UWC Mission sincerely thanks all of its observers-volunteers, as well as all experts and analysts with whom it cooperated.

The UWC Mission will present all of its findings with respect to media-monitoring in its Final Report 8 weeks after the conclusion of the electoral process.



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**About UWC**

The UWC is the international coordinating body for Ukrainian communities in the diaspora representing the interests of over 20 million Ukrainians. The UWC has a network of member organizations and ties with Ukrainians in 62 countries. Founded in 1967, the UWC was recognized in 2003 by the United Nations Economic and Social Council as a non-governmental organization with special consultative status and obtained in 2018 participatory status as an international non-governmental organization with the Council of Europe. Since 1999, the UWC has deployed election observation missions to monitor all Presidential and Parliamentary elections in Ukraine.