

Hot Issue – Lies, damned lies and Russian disinformation

By Paul Goble

HRWF (20.08.2015) - On 13 August 2014, The Jamestown Foundation published an interesting paper about Putin's Propaganda Machine targeting political decision makers and agents of influence inside the EU. The executive summary can be found below and the full paper at: <http://bit.ly/2dKjs4f>

The Russian Federation uses extensive propaganda, outright lies, and—most importantly—disinformation as part of the hybrid warfare it is waging against Ukraine and the West. Disinformation combines truth, what people want to be true, and cleverly disguised outright falsehoods. Moscow has been actively using such disinformation as part of a conscious broader policy on Ukraine, and it readily changes or rejects elements of the false narrative it has been spinning as political events on the ground shift. Russian disinformation has landed on fertile soil domestically because it plays on Russians' deep rooted emotions and serves to turn people's attention away from more immediate political and economic concerns. Abroad, Moscow's message is given undue exposure and lack of questioning due to some Western journalists' misunderstanding between balance and true objectivity, as well as the existence of a large constituency whose jobs rely on the West maintaining strong relations with Russia. In order to limit the spread and impact of disinformation, Western governments will need to recognize the difference between simple lies and actual disinformation, acquire expertise to identify disinformation and parse the truths and falsehoods within it, as well as develop methods to answer and counteract such disinformation both at home and abroad. The policy changes necessary to achieve this will require political will and some costs, but the costs of doing nothing may be even greater.