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# ИСТОРИЯ МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ И ВНЕШНЯЯ ПОЛИТИКА

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## HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND FOREIGN POLICY

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### INFORMATION COVERAGE OF THE FOREIGN POLICIES OF BELARUS, RUSSIA, UKRAINE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 2010s: NEW RESOURCES AND INSTRUMENTS

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The article considers the main resources and instruments for information coverage of the foreign policies of the Republic of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. They are used in the second half of the 2010s to promote national interests in the context of the active development of information and communication technologies and their more increasing use for the implementation of foreign policy tasks. The relevant approaches to realization of the digital diplomacy are identified and characterized, including an expansion of presence in the leading social networks, key features of broadcasting organization of the international satellite TV channels and use of the anonymous political *Telegram* channels for working with foreign audiences.

**Keywords:** foreign policy information coverage; foreign public opinion; digital diplomacy; social networks; international satellite TV channels; anonymous political *Telegram* channels.

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## ИНФОРМАЦИОННОЕ ОБЕСПЕЧЕНИЕ ВНЕШНЕЙ ПОЛИТИКИ БЕЛАРУСИ, РОССИИ, УКРАИНЫ ВО ВТОРОЙ ПОЛОВИНЕ 2010-х гг.: НОВЫЕ РЕСУРСЫ И ИНСТРУМЕНТЫ

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Рассмотрены новые ресурсы и инструменты информационного обеспечения внешней политики Республики Беларусь, Российской Федерации и Украины, которые стали применяться во второй половине 2010-х гг. для продвижения национальных интересов в условиях активного развития информационных и коммуникационных технологий и их все более масштабного использования для реализации внешнеполитических задач. Выявлены и охарактеризованы современные подходы к осуществлению цифровой дипломатии (включая расширение присутствия в ведущих социальных сетях), особенности организации вещания международных спутниковых телеканалов и применения анонимных политических *Telegram*-каналов для работы с зарубежной аудиторией.

**Ключевые слова:** информационное обеспечение внешней политики; зарубежное общественное мнение; цифровая дипломатия; социальные сети; международные спутниковые телеканалы; анонимные политические *Telegram*-каналы.

### Introduction

A formation and effective implementation of the national foreign policy strategies in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is impossible without a consistent and adequate response to the rapid development and applying of relevant information and communication technologies into political, economic and social processes in different states. The revealing and characteristics are the goal of this article. For this reason, it is necessary to realize some important tasks. Firstly, to define new and more effective instruments, forms and methods for influencing foreign public opinion. Secondly, to consider the effectivity of their using in the present international conditions. Thirdly, to evaluate wherefore they could be able to compete successfully with traditional sources and formats of information policies, to overcome any borders and barriers, and to penetrate even the most close and isolated countries and regions. Such technologies have acquired a particular relevance in all states located in the Eastern Europe region faced a process of systemic geopolitical transformation since 2014. It forced Belarus, Russia and Ukraine to use the most topical technologies and methods for effective information coverage of their foreign policy strategies and consistent influence on public opinion abroad. The main directions and trends of the information policy of these three countries abroad will be considered in this article.

**Russia** has become an indisputable leader of this process. After the Russian-Georgian conflict in 2008 its government acknowledged that the information resources used at that time and their implementation were ineffective, and it resulted in the domination of critical assessments regarding Russia in the foreign mass media. This evaluation led to a formation of a flexible and integral complex of relevant media resources for systematic and regular work with foreign

public opinion, and namely from international satellite TV channel “RT” with billions of budgets to anonymous *Telegram* channels with influence on specific target groups in neighboring countries. Nowadays it is necessary to admit that Russia is able to carry out active, relevant and efficient information coverage for its foreign policy working systematically and consistently with foreign public opinion. At the same time, facing some restrictive measures against its mass media provided by the US and European authorities, the Russian government began to introduce the same measures to control foreign resources within its own territory. In the future, such restrictive steps could revive and repeat a situation from the late Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s. When in some cases the Western sources of information, first of all, the legendary US radio stations for foreign audiences “Radio Freedom” and “Voice of America” were perceived as more reliable and attractive “forbidden source” of precise information than official Soviet mass media.

**Ukraine** began to spend significant resources for promotion of the national interests in the global media space after the systemic political changes in 2014 and beginning of the conflict with Russia. A notable step to this direction was a creation and development of the satellite TV channel “UATV” organized to bring the Ukrainian position to the public opinion abroad. Besides the Russian-language versions of the main Ukrainian mass media web sites also play an important role to provide their information to the target audience in all former republics of the Soviet Union. As Russia, Ukraine tended toward some restrictive measures against foreign media after 2014. Most Russian mass media and social networks were declared a threat to the information security of Ukraine, but many users from this country still use them actively, by passing all

prohibitions and limitations by means of various web technologies.

**Belarus** is mainly based on the experience from the 1990s and the 2000s using traditional but still quite effective instruments to influence the foreign public opinion. Nonetheless new information challenges as for example the fake news determined a need to explore the best ways to use more relevant tools and forms for these tasks. It concerns the resources of digital diplomacy, implemented actively and consistently by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic missions, as well as a digitalization of the Belarusian mass media for foreign audiences. Unlike Russia and Ukraine, Belarus did not

implemented any restriction or block of foreign mass media, taking the course to effective and fair competition with foreign information sources. Oleg Makarov, the director of the established on 12 February 2019 Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, underlined in his interview to Belarus 1 TV channel, a “balanced and responsible attitude to media content is the best way to challenge fake news”. In his opinion, providing balanced and responsible content, and using credible and professional sources of information will help overcome the fake news, other risks and challenges, raising a public awareness of the things that are happening, without imposing one “true” opinion for all [1].

### **Evaluation of the effectiveness of new information resources and instruments as a research issue**

The problem of a comprehensive assessment of effectiveness of both traditional and innovative information resources and instruments used for coverage of the foreign policies of all three countries acquired a significant relevance in the second half of the 2010s due to increased competition in this area and the emergence of new topical risks and threats. It predetermined a lack of detailed and complex researches of this process, received its greatest dynamics exactly in 2017–2019.

A solid theoretical basis for such study could serve fundamental works of two leading representatives of the Network Society concept Jan van Dijk (Netherlands) and Manuel Castells (Spain). At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they substantiated that the further development of social networks and electronic communications will have a decisive influence on the evolution of social, economic and political relations [2; 3].

Primarily it happens in the most industrially and technologically developed countries. A basis of their economy is already production, keeping, processing and distribution of different types of information, as well as generation, systematization and introduction of innovations. Some entire regions, like the Silicon Valley in California, specialize in the software industry and the new information technologies development. Their imposing professional communities have al-

ready not only their own economic and social, but also political interests. Moreover, they are able to influence both formation and implementation of foreign policy decisions, first in the spheres of trade, migration, information and cultural exchanges.

Therefore, a definition and characterization of the influence of common trends in the global development of information and communication technologies on the foreign policy of different states and primarily Belarus and its closest neighbors and key partners in the region, namely Russia and Ukraine, are of obvious interest for the research. Its results will be in demand during the process of implementing various aspects of the Information Security Concept of the Republic of Belarus adopted in 2019. This document first defines an “information sovereignty as an inalienable and exclusive supreme right of the state to determine independently rules of ownership, usage, and management of national information resources, to pursue an independent foreign and domestic state information policy, to shape the national information infrastructure, and ensure information security”. Among the ways to achieve this goal, the policy of information neutrality is called. It “provides for recognition of universally acknowledged and accepted rights of any state in this sphere and rules out interference with the information sphere of other countries” [4].

### **The main preconditions for strengthening the role of information coverage in foreign policy**

The most significant technological and social factors predetermined a strengthening of the role of information and communication technologies during formation and implementation of the foreign policy strategies of all states, including Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, include such as:

- simplification and cheapening of technology for searching, systematizing and mass distribution of information using different web resources, widely available software, volunteer labor, remotely and tempo-

rarily employed personnel, that made it possible to increase an audience of new networked mass media to numbers, which are comparable to the ratings of the world’s leading newspapers or TV channels;

- a facilitated access to data on web resources in different countries and regions of the world, that provides an opportunity to overcome effectively all political and language barriers for obtaining a necessary information to form their own vision and to evaluate independently domestic and international events and processes;

- raising the educational level and developing computer literacy in particular among users in not only the most technologically advanced countries, but also in the developing countries, that leads to a further expansion of the global web resources and an increasing competition with national mass media;
- a rapid growth of different transnational networks in the spheres of economy and finance, education, science and culture, including specific projects created for information support on a temporary basis, which are not controlled by governments, operate in

many countries or regions simultaneously, and capable to produce and support their own high-quality information production;

- a gradual rooting in the national and global information communities the newest forms of political activity, which use the most relevant communication and information technologies, social networks and other tools to counteract the national policies, or to discredit systematically their domestic and foreign policy, or to hinder realization of economic projects and exports promotion [5, p. 99].

### The current digital diplomacy instruments in promoting national interests abroad

An increasing complexity of the tasks faced the foreign policy institutes of all countries today have led to an active use of the most advanced and relevant digital diplomacy instruments, which are most adapted for systematic and consistent work with foreign public opinion. First of all, it concerns the key target groups important for international cooperation, and namely decision makers, as well as specialists and experts, who are able to influence preparing and implementation of foreign policy decisions, journalists, social researchers and civic activists, businessmen and other representatives of the finance and commerce communities.

A regular interaction with all these target groups in different states, their blocs and associations, and international organizations is of undoubted interest for the implementation of foreign policy strategies of all three considered countries. It predetermines an increasing use of social networks and other digital diplomacy instruments to ensure a necessary level of interactivity and impact.

Describing their growing role in the diplomatic activity Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergey Lavrov stated at a meeting with students and faculty staff at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University) on 3 September 2018 “the Foreign Ministry has been actively using social media networks over the past few years. We have accounts in leading social networks, including *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Instagram* and *Vkontakte*. The Foreign Ministry’s Information and Press Department has a special section which deals with digital information technology” [6]. The head of the Russian diplomatic service noted also an importance of preparation and distribution of content in foreign languages. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) supports its website in all official UN languages, including Russian, English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic and German, has accounts in Russian, English and some other languages in the most popular social networks. The Minister pointed to the demand for further expansion of the used foreign languages number, which nevertheless requires more resources [6].

At the beginning of 2019, most of the Russia’s diplomatic missions had their own accounts on *Twitter* and

*Facebook*, but not all of them. The Russian Ambassadors to the United Kingdom, Australia, Serbia, Austria, as well as the Russian Consuls General in Gothenburg (Sweden) and Karlovy Vary (Czech Republic), the First Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN, the Foreign Ministry’s Special Representative for Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law supported their personal accounts on *Twitter* or *Facebook*. Such divisions of the Russian MFA as the Press center, the Consular, and the History and Records Departments, the Crisis Management Centre, the First CIS Department, the Council of Young Diplomats have also their own accounts in leading social networks. In addition to *Facebook* and *Twitter*, the Russian diplomats use *Vkontakte*, *Odnoklassniki*, *Instagram*, *YouTube*, *Periscope*, *Flickr*, *Google+*, *SlideShare*, *Soundcloud*, *iTunes*, *Telegram*, as well as *Weibo* and *WeChat* in China [7].

The resources of digital diplomacy used by the MFA and diplomatic missions are complemented successfully by no less effective information activities abroad of the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rosotrudichestvo) established in September 2008 after the Russian-Georgian conflict immediately. The Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund created in February 2010, and some other state institutes realize similar objectives of the Russia’s foreign policy.

The information instruments and possibilities of the MFA and diplomatic missions are the main resources for present digital diplomacy of Ukraine, given its much less significant resources, especially compared to Russia. It predetermines not only an obligatory support of accounts in the most popular social networks by all diplomatic missions of Ukraine, but also a very high level of their interactivity. In the beginning of 2019, *Facebook* and *Twitter* are used by the embassies of Ukraine and consulate institutions around the world, as well as its missions to the International Organizations. Some missions work also with *Google+*, *YouTube*, *Storify*, *Medium*, *WordPress*, *Blogger*, *Instagram*, *Vine*, *Soundcloud* and *Flickr*. The MFA Team *Twitter* accounts include Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Pavlo

Klimkin personally, as well as the State Secretary, Deputy Minister, Political Director, Head of Press-Service, Executive Secretary of the Exporters and Investors Council under the MFA of Ukraine and the Spokesperson for MFA [8]. In terms of the foreign policy strategy, aimed strictly at promoting Ukrainian national interests abroad, such concentration and centralization of its diplomatic service information resources could be evaluated as quite effective and timely.

A significant progress in the use of topical digital diplomacy technologies has been declared in the Annual Review of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Belarus and Activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2018 [9]. The “effective information coverage of home and foreign policy events, as well as initiatives in the international arena” was named as one of the MFA’s priorities. The report noted also that the Ministry’s *Twitter* account was included in the Top 50 World Leaders and took the 13<sup>th</sup> place according to the analyti-

cal center Twiplomacy. In 2018, a number of all social accounts subscribers increased: on *Twitter* – by 24 %, *Facebook* – by 1.5 times, *Instagram* and *Periscope* – by more than 40 %. Some bloggers and social networks activists participated in eight press-tours in Belarus organized last year for foreign journalists from Russia, China, Latvia and other countries [9].

At present, the Belarusian MFA and diplomatic missions are represented on *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *YouTube*, *Periscope*, as well as on *Weibo* and *WeChat* in China. Ambassadors of Belarus to Indonesia, China and Sweden Valery Kolesnik, Kirill Rudy and Dmitry Mironchik support their own *Twitter* channels [10]. Regarding an increasing interest to the foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus as one of the key actors of the security and stability promoting in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, it is possible to predict a further growing of the users and subscribers number for all digital diplomacy resources used by the Belarusian diplomatic service.

### Development of satellite TV and radio broadcasting for abroad

In 2010s, the international satellite TV channels for broadcasting to foreign audiences funded from the national budgets and reflected the foreign policies interests, have become one of the most effective instruments for influencing foreign public opinion. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such TV channels replaced finally the radio stations for foreign listeners, which shaped an arena of information confrontation during the Cold War. Among the undisputed leaders of this process, the US “Voice of America” and “Radio Freedom / Free Europe”, as well as the British “BBC”, the West German “Deutsche Welle”, and undoubtedly the Soviet “Radio Moscow” could be named. Their activity was an important part of the Cold War and predetermined largely its outcome.

The technological innovations and higher consumer requirements transferred this role to international satellite TV channels. The flagships among them in the 1990s and 2000s became the US “CNN International”, the British “BBC International” and “Sky News”, the French “France 24”. Overtaking and surpassing the Western TV impact turned into an ambitious and large-scale goal for their competitors from China, Japan, Turkey, some influential Arabian, Latin American, South and Southeast Asian emerging powers and, of course, for the contemporary Russia.

Satellite TV channel “RT” (“Russia Today”) began its broadcasting to foreign audiences on 10 December 2005. In the first half of 2019, it includes four independent TV channels working for more than one hundred countries in four languages, and namely English, Spanish, Arabian, and French. It broadcasts day and night for 700 TV-users globally. “RT” owns its studios in Washington and London [11]. Its content is focused primarily on the English-speaking audience. For effective interaction with such TV viewers, “RT” staff

includes the citizens of the US, the UK and other countries. This approach increases significantly a cost of broadcasting, but makes its format more familiar for the target audience outside Russia. “RT” is funded directly from the Russian state budget.

In 2017, for example, the channel received 18.74 billion rubles. 1.22 billion rubles additionally compared with the previous year was intended to organization of broadcasting in French [12]. Such decision was quite understandable taking into account the presidential and parliamentary elections in France scheduled then.

Besides the TV-covering in English, Spanish, Arabian and French, implemented on the resource base of “RT”, the main and popular Russian TV channels “Channel One Russia Worldwide”, “RTR-Planeta”, “NTV Mir” continue to remain the most important instruments for influencing public opinion within other former Soviet republics. They broadcast in Russian so it could be estimated as a key source of news and formation of public perceptions and views for many dwellers of the Post-Soviet area and the Russian-speaking diasporas around the world. This situation is still maintained despite all measures to restrict their broadcasting applied by the governments of the Baltic countries, Ukraine and some other states.

An establishment of the national News agency and “Radio Sputnik” on 10 November 2014 should also be mentioned in this context. It began to work based on resources of the largest Russian news agency “RIA Novosti” and the “Voice of Russia” radio company for a foreign audience founded in the Soviet Union in 1929 under the name “Radio Moscow”. The emerging mass media company “Sputnik” began to work in more than 30 languages and has its offices in many countries, including the US (Washington, DC), China (Beijing), France (Paris), Germany (Berlin), Egypt (Cairo) and the UK (London and Edinburgh) [13].

All of these media resources allowed Russia to pursue a very effective and consistent policy aimed at information promoting and support of its policy abroad. However, a growing confrontation in relations towards the US and their allies led to increasing hostility in the public sphere, and the TV channels, news agencies and other resources for foreign audiences began to be evaluated as guides of “soft power”, or rather “sharp power”, according to the assessment of a famous political scientist Joseph S. Nye Jr. [14]. Moreover, in recent years, experts from the US and their allied countries have focused strongly on critical assessing the Russian information policy abroad, identifying its main elements and approaches, as well as determining the most effective methods to counter those [15; 16]. As a result, “RT” and “Sputnik” activities have already faced legal successive restrictions in the US, the UK and some other countries.

The Ukrainian international satellite TV channel “UATV” started its work on 1 October 2015 based on the state TV and radio company “Ukrainian Television and Radio”. Currently, the channel works around the clock in five languages, namely Ukrainian, English, Russian, Arabic and Crimean Tatar. It broadcast within the cable networks of Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Israel, Canada, Germany, Latvia, Moldova, Poland, and the United States. Since the beginning of March 2019, the “UATV” is accessible within the cable networks in Belarus too. The tasks of the “UATV”, besides the distribution of relevant information on Ukraine, are called a counteraction to disinformation about this country. The website of the channel indicates also a special attention to cover the latest political, economic and social developments in the east of Ukraine (Donbas) and the Crimea [17].

The other concept of broadcasting determines a content of the Belarusian satellite TV channel “Belarus 24”, which functioned since 1 February 2005 under the name “Belarus-TV” in Belarusian and Russian. Nowadays, the channel is available in more than 100 countries with an audience of over 270 million people. The main its part is the dwellers of the post-Soviet states, primarily Russia, as well as inhabitants of countries with a significant representation of Belarusian diasporas. In contrast to the Russian and Ukrainian international satellite TV channels, the “Belarus 24” is focused more on comprehensive and complete information about a present life in Belarus avoiding informational rivalry with the media from other countries or foreign policy propaganda. The channel has its profiles in the main social networks, and namely *Vkontakte*, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Youtube* and *Instagram* [18]. Similar principles and priorities underlie the broadcasting of the “Radio Belarus International” worked since 11 May 1962 and focused initially first on Belarusians living outside the Soviet Union. Today the radio uses already 9 languages, and namely Belarusian, Russian, English, German, Polish, French, Spanish, Chinese and Arabic [19].

In general, it could be stated that despite the differences between concepts of broadcasting and their main target groups, the international satellite TV and radio broadcasting in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine is developing in one direction. It is aiming at expanding foreign audience due to using of the web broadcasting and social networking, additional foreign languages, increasing relevance and interactivity in covering the news from their own countries and around the world.

### **The anonymous political *Telegram* channels as instruments of influence on foreign public opinion**

A characteristic key feature of the information influence practice in the post-Soviet region is a use of anonymous political *Telegram* channels. It has become typical of Russian politics in recent years. An emergence of such new information resources is made possible due to the development of a new service *Telegram*. It is based on the innovative technology of a cloud-based instant messaging and voice over IP. This project was established and developed by the *Telegram Messenger LLP*. This privately held company is functioning in London now. It was presented in August – October 2013 by two businesspersons in the IT sector Pavel Durov and his brother Nikolai, who had faced an inability to provide a secure way of communication with each other safe and not be transparent for the Russian security services [20].

A number of service users grew rapidly. At the beginning of 2016, more than 100 million applied it successfully, that caused an increasing interest of the Russian state authorities to activities of this messenger, which turned into an uncontrolled communication

channel for many users both in this country and beyond. The *Telegram* administration stated in its turn that they did not intend to share any information about its users with the authorities. This fact has led to a quite predictable conflict with the Russian government. The creator of the messenger Pavel Durov was forced to leave his homeland and distribute business between several countries and processing centers.

In 2017–2018 the Russian government made repeated attempts to gain access to the decoding of messages send by some users. In April 2018, the resource was blocked in Russia legally. However, these efforts were unsuccessful, since the technical capacities and the core staff of messenger developers were already located in several states outside Russia, including the US and some European countries. Besides it, the administration of *Telegram* has made significant technological efforts to overcome or minimize the blocking measures. In addition, many Russian companies faced problems with functioning of other information resources, which used the same cloud-based services and therefore were

also affected by the blocking measures against *Telegram*. It led finally to losses for some Russian companies, as well as foreign branches operating in this country. Such result showed obviously those prohibitive measures are not effective regarding the popular information exchange tools in the technologically advanced countries like Russia, even under the condition of a well-functioning, strictly centralized and efficient state apparatus with highly equipped security services.

However, the political consequences of these attempts could be estimated as the most impressive. After them, the *Telegram* presents itself, as an absolute independent broadcaster of uncensored information, which is not be distorted by state or any other structures. This image led to a rapid emergence of highly popular anonymous political *Telegram* channels positioned themselves as competent and independent sources of relevant information about some peculiarities of the formation and implementation of the current Russian domestic and foreign policies. A special attractiveness of their content was caused by such key factors, as:

- an anonymity, which allows to present and distribute a necessary information as exclusive and coming directly from decision-makers and their staff in Russia and other countries;
- a moderate critical interpretation of the official policy, which gives a clear opportunity to distant from the state-affiliated sources of information, like the TV channels or news agencies, and even to challenge an effectiveness of some measures taken by state institutions;
- a tolerance to all sources of information without verifying and confirming their origin and relevance, that makes it easy to create any desirable mix of true and fake information as well as to combine different views and evaluations on its content;
- an avoiding of legal responsibility for the fake news distribution due to an inability to identify clearly their authors, concerning especially the content created and supported by several anonymous authors or even entire professional teams;
- an image of the *Telegram* Messenger as an independent innovative way of communication chased regularly by Russian authorities allows denying any official responsibility for a content of the anonymous political *Telegram* channels.

All these factors determined their gradual and obvious transformation into an effective instrument for promoting some corporate or private interests of different elite groups in the Russian business, as well as federal, regional and local politics. The “anonymous and exclusive” messages from the leading Russian *Telegram* channels such as *Politburo 2.0*, *GosSovet 2.0*, *Politteh*, *Boston*

*Tea Party*, *kremlebezBashennik*, *boilerroomchannel*, *scienpolicy*, *postposttruth*, *Shadow policy*, *russica2* (*Nezygar*) and many others cover usually very relevant stories. Among them, there are causes and consequences of recent and planned personnel changes at different levels of Russian state power, relations between some groups of elites as well as influential figures in politics and business. Most of the *Telegram* channels authors cite each other constantly, exchange the information, evaluate and rate own activities. It is intended to provide their readers with an idea on the existence of a coherent and trustworthy system for searching, exchanging, verifying and distributing objective and unfiltered data.

At the end of December 2018, these anonymous resources reached a new level, becoming one of the factors influencing the political situation in Eastern Europe. At the turn of 2018–2019, a part of the popular *Telegram* channels with the most known *Nezygar* as an informal leader, started to spread actively an information about the coming unification of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation into one state. The reasons were named an acute situation in the Belarusian economy and plans of President Vladimir Putin to prolong its powers after 2024 as a head of new country. A significant number of mass media in Russia and beyond has distributed this fake news rapidly, despite its obvious unverified character. It has led to a big resonance in neighboring countries and first of all in Ukraine, which domestic and foreign policy is very sensitive to any Russian activities near its borders. At the final stage, this fake news got a response from politicians, experts and journalists outside the Eastern European area. One of them was former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen with his statements on Russia’s plans to annex the Republic of Belarus and move closer to the Western European borders. On 21 February 2019 Belarusian Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Makei characterized this declaration as nonsense, which is impossible to comment due to its lost touch with reality [21].

However, if such a statement of a politician or public person could be refuted openly, publicly and therefore quite effectively, the anonymity and non-transparency of political *Telegram* channels prevent the fake news from being exposed due to impossibility to identify clearly both their authors and sources of disinformation.

In this regard, it is possible to predict a further applying of the political *Telegram* channels as an especially effective way for informational promoting of foreign policy interests abroad, which would be used in the future not only in Russia, but also in other countries successfully.

## Conclusion

Further intensive development and usage of information and communication technologies for the promotion of foreign policy interests predetermines the

necessity of detailed and comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of different topical instruments, approaches and forms to realize successfully these interests

towards different states and regions in view of their distinctive characteristics. A potential choice of these advanced technologies is very large and includes currently both expensive projects, such as international satellite TV channels broadcasting for hundreds of millions viewers and simpler and cheaper, but not less effective relevant instruments of digital diplomacy targeted key groups of foreign audiences.

Regarding the information space Belarus, Russia and Ukraine have similar goals to ensure their national interests in relations with other countries as well as with each other, but they have chosen different strate-

gies, approaches and resources to achieve them. At the same time, all three states will seek a balance between national information security interests and enhancing their activity in the global information community for the successful realization of these goals.

A finding of such optimal balance requires a systematic revealing and evaluation of the interdependence between present political, economic and social processes and phenomena in different countries and world regions, and rooting of the most advanced information and communication technologies, which could affect significantly their essence, dynamics and development in the future.

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