



Information Warfare in Hungary

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INTRODUCTION

According to the US Department of Defense the traditional way of resolving conflicts, especially by military means becomes less and less viable due to social, economic, and information related developments. Non-state actors now have access to inexpensive way of information technology (IT), and can influence perception-based operations. In [Western terms information warfare](#) (IW) is primarily a theory focusing on the use and management of information and communication technology in search of competitive advantage over the opponent. [Information warfare](#) may involve collection of information, assurances that one's own information is true, "spreading of propaganda or disinformation to demoralize or manipulate the enemy and the public, undermining the quality of opposing force information." We can mention also that blocking of information-collection possibilities to adversary forces is also an aim. Information warfare is close to psychological warfare.

Dmitry Kiselev, head of the official Russian government-owned international news agency *Rossiya Segodnya*, stated that "information war is now the main type of war, [preparing the way for military action](#)."

In the past decade Hungary became gradually a battleground of global information warfare due to the elementary changes in our region:

- resurrection of Russian political ambitions in the post-Soviet space;
- clashes of Russian and American energy and security interests in Central and Eastern Europe;
- the many-folded crisis in the EU;
- the emergence of migration;
- turbulences in regional political relations.

These processes have a more profound cause, the basic challenges of the 21st century – including global warming, population growth, the problem of water and energy, the reform of the financial system, and the dawn of information economy – are met with different strategies by the great powers. In this geopolitical struggle Central Europe is a territory of clashing interests. The stake of the geopolitical struggle in our region is dominance over the financial system, energy, IT, but in the core of this competition it is energy policy which cannot be separated from security policy. The easiest method to understand the mechanism of IW in Hungary is to analyse energy policies in our region, because the biggest challenger of the status quo here – Russia – depends on her energy exports. By all means IW is a more complex phenomena, but for the understanding of the IW mechanism this study starts with explaining the links with energy policies.

THE STANCE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

After 9/11, targeted economic sanctions have been in the focus of the US security operations. In the fight against terrorism, weapons of mass destruction proliferation and territorial aggression, sanctions are often used as the tool in crisis management and in generally managing risks. Although sanctions themselves can be developed rapidly, it remains hard to assess their effectiveness and minimize their undesirable consequences. [The result is that](#) the financial and energy sanctions are often not incorporated into the overall strategic approach to foreign policy issues.

According to the "Statement for the Record Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community," [a 2016 report](#) presented to the Senate Armed Services Committee, one of the top threats is information warfare, but other sources of security risks are increasingly important, like terrorism, Iran, North Korea. In this field the biggest global challenges come from China and Russia. In coping IW, the United States focuses on technology, and tends to use electronic and cyberwarfare, and computer network operations, attack, and defense. Low petrol and gas prices contribute to the fall behind of responses to security provocations.

The imbalance for Hungary is that Central Europe has not been a priority of the global American IW, though Central Europe is a major confrontation theater for energy policies. That is why we can say the Atlantic IW response to the challenges is lagging behind in Central Europe.

Up till now the USA and NATO enhanced IW capabilities on the Eastern flanks of the Alliance (Baltics, Romania), but the July 2016 NATO summit showed a more coherent strategy on this domain.

THE CHALLENGERS OF THE WEST

Romanian political scientist [Julian Chifu stated rightfully](#) that due to the recent Russian invasion in Ukraine, many political experts worked on analysing Russia's strategic approach to modern warfare. Some of them also claimed that the Russian takeover of Crimea and the involvement of Eastern Ukraine indicate the emergence of the Russian hybrid warfare doctrine. After a closer examination of the current processes of modernization and transformation in Russia, it becomes clear that the Kremlin does not only want to improve the quality and standard of the military, but also wants to achieve Western standards in terms of adapting to the new reality of modern warfare. Russia recognizes that the relatively low level of investment in military and economic modernization makes it impossible to meet the



Western military and economic power. Russia intends to compensate underfunding by making significant efforts to develop non-military means to influence enemies. This is shown recently in enhancing capacities of information warfare technologies to ensure domestic support for the government and prevent the West in an attempt to provide support to countries that oppose Russia.

Maksym Beznosiuk, an international relations specialist from Kyiv describes that in order [to cause disorganization](#) among the ranks of the adversary, one of the main objectives is informational superiority. To put this plan in function involves the simultaneous use of intimidation, disinformation and deception techniques. IW experts consider the nation-states as organisms, composed of different systems, each of which can be targeted in different ways.

The style of the Russian IW techniques can be understood in Ukraine. The Kremlin cleverly used them in the Crimea issue to target three different audiences: Russian-speaking residents, the Ukrainian authorities, and the Western audience. In the so-called hybrid war the Russian soldiers in uniform (a part of the Russian military forces stationed close to the Ukrainian border to frighten the enemy) or in civilian clothes (mingling with the local population), together with the pro-Russian Ukrainian separatists, the Russian media and diplomacy (with disinformation, hoax, and manipulation), performed effective and coordinated actions – without declaration of war – against the most important Ukrainian institutions. Russia has been able to better anticipate and influence the behavior patterns of the local people to achieve annexation of Crimea. It also managed to hide its true intentions.

Outside the United States and NATO, the broader term “information operations” is used as a concept which, although making use of technology, has a priority on the human-related aspects of information use. As a proof of this situation, we can mention the fact that [Hungarians have access](#) on the internet to more than 100 Russian state-sponsored news and social sites, with hundreds of bloggers, while info sources linked to the USA government have diminished during the last quarter of century.

Despite being the main supplier of energy to Central Europe, Russia’s political influence in the region is fastly diminishing. The Kremlin’s basic answer to this process is to regain influence, and ensure gas, petrol, and nuclear energy interests with a new type of IW. A number of areas are vulnerable to Russian economic influence, this is one of the directions in which the Kremlin may try to exert his influence over the region. Ultimately, the Kremlin is seeking to create disunity in NATO and the European Union and to negotiate with each country individually. To that end, Russia is using a range of different soft and hard techniques, of which information warfare is the most important. The energy component has become a tool of Kremlin propaganda to apply psychological pressure on Ukrainian society and the international community. In the early period of the Ukrainian–Russian conflict, Russia repeatedly accused Kyiv of the [unauthorized extraction of transit gas](#). The goal was to create the accusations for European partners that Ukraine is an unreliable supplier and cultivate distrust toward the Ukrainian authorities.

The Polish Internal Security Agency (*Agencja Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego*, ABW) claimed in a 2013 (and also in 2014) report that [the main interest of Russian intelligence](#) in the country was focused on the energy sector, specifically shale gas and the diversification process. In June 2014, former NATO Secretary-General [Anders Fogh Rasmussen expressed](#) his belief that Russia was behind the campaign against shale gas exploration in Central Europe. Unlike usual protests in the region, those that took place in Poland, Romania, and Lithuania were well organized and financed. [According to an investigation](#) in November 2014 by *The New York Times*, suspicions were raised that protesters were not always local people, and in some cases appeared to be from groups that had no previous environmental interest.

In 2014, Russia partially [closed its gas pipelines](#) again, not just toward Slovakia and Hungary, but also toward Poland. Moscow may have been trying to [warn countries](#) that had started to supply Ukraine with Russian gas via reverse flow. In both cases, the gas supply cut took place during the colder winter months of peak demand, a move intended to intensify pressure. The region responded to the threat by enacting gas supply diversification, and the countries connected via a modified network supply.

THE WEAKNESS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION ON FORGING A COMMON INFORMATION POLICY

The European Council, in a meeting in March 2015, gave its full support to an upcoming Energy Union, which could provide some leverage for the EU Member States against Russian influence in their energy supplies. Presently, this plan is not functional, EU interests are too divergent, and are lacking the political will of the main EU powers. As an example, Germany was providing only [lukewarm support for the Nabucco](#) pipeline. The main supply for Nabucco was to be the Azeri Shah Deniz gas field through the proposed Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline (TANAP). In the meantime, [North Stream pipeline](#) supplying gas from Russia has been functional from 2012, and there are plans to extend its capacity after 2016.

As a response to EU policies, Russian Ambassador to Hungary Vladimir Sergeyev stated in March 2015 that he wanted [Hungary to become the strategic hub](#) for the distribution of Russian gas to Europe. Despite the fact that Hungary never promoted an alternative exclusive Russian energy hub status, Budapest became a main actor in global IW, mainly because there was an interest to undermine Western energy policies – and, from the other side, to block Russian policies in the region.

In addition, Russia promised Hungary in April 2015 that [Budapest would be exempt](#) from Russian agricultural imports sanctions. This offer had little or no results, proving the promise was also a part of an IW operation.



INFORMATION WARFARE IN THE MEDIA

Russia's enhanced intention to influence the Hungarian media rose after 2012, with the issue of the North Stream and South Stream pipelines. This effort evolved with the crisis in Ukraine, and the recent migratory pressure which posed significant challenges for the European Union. A clear sign of Russian presence was the attempts on contacting, infiltrating, and influencing persons and organizations that influence public opinion, and by 2015 the region's media and politicians openly spoke about 'hybrid warfare.'

The Jobbik Movement for a Better Hungary (*Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom*, in short: *Jobbik*), the second largest party in the Hungarian parliament has a pro-Russian stance. Jobbik MEP [Béla Kovács is under investigation](#) for conducting espionage for Russia. Kovács on May 6, 2015 appealed to the European Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee to stop the suspension of his immunity; the hearing took place behind closed doors and its conclusion will be made public after a hearing by the Hungarian public prosecutor.

In the Central European region [IW manipulates mainly the media](#). One of the main techniques is to confuse reality with fiction, facts with opinion. A poll organized in March 2015 showed that 45 percent of respondents believed that the [reality was different](#) to what was presented by the media and that the World was controlled by secret societies. Almost half of all respondents were educated up to the university degree level. Russian-inspired websites have an indirect, yet important, impact on security risk in the region. For example, Hungarian websites *Hídfő.ru*, *Oroszhírek.hu*, *Napimigráns.com*, *Kuruc.info* threatened that the Ukrainian conflict would spread to Hungary, and the World is run by obscure societies. When reality and fiction are confused even a small provocation can influence public opinion.

The *Sputnik News Agency*, a Russian media outlet for foreigners shows [a distorted image of Hungarian official politics](#). According to this site, the Hungarian minister of foreign affairs and trade stated that international media started an information war against Hungary in regard to its stance on the EU quotas for resettling migrants. [In reality](#) Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó only said that "the international media, when reporting, did not pose a question whether it was right to throw any objects at the police, in order to illegally cross the border." The aim of *Sputnik International* is "to [establish alternative discourses](#) to confuse decision-making, and act as" a destabilizing force. This kind of disinformation on Hungarian politics was echoed also by Romanian sites (*Pagina de Rusia.ro*) proving that IW is used by regional players – not only the global powers.

But this kind of IW is not very efficient, e.g., polls show consistency of the Hungarian public opinion on Ukrainian topics. On this issue a good example is Poland, where citizen interest in [joining the country's military forces](#) has been

substantial following the Crimean annexation. Interestingly, Slovakia and Romania had a different reaction to Russian IW concerning Ukraine. In these countries public opinion supporting a confrontation with Russia dropped after Crimea's annexation. The constancy in [Hungarian public opinion](#) is given also by the large majority of the government in the parliament, but mainly that the country's historical experience with the Soviet Union looms large in the public psyche.

Russia-linked websites are not new in Central Europe, but the intensity of propaganda and its quantity increased after the Crimean annexation in early 2014. The aim seems to be the legitimization of the Crimean annexation and the undermining of Ukraine.

Overall Russian success in attempting to influence the region's public is limited. According to public polls organized in the region, the popular image of Russia is generally negative. [A 2015 report](#) by the US think tank, Pew Research Center indicated that 74 percent of the European population perceived Russia negatively in 2014. The worst result was recorded in Poland, where 81 percent of population perceived Russia negatively. The Hungarian [Nézőpont Institute](#) revealed in January 2016, that President Vladimir Putin is accepted only by 48 percent of the Hungarians.

Cyberwarfare is also [present in Hungary](#). The computer servers of the Ministry of Interior were blocked for a couple of hours last spring. The pro-Russian Ukrainian CyberBerkut and the globally operating anarchist Anonymous hacker groups are well known here. Islamic hackers are also present in our cyberspace: [they blocked a Hungarian commercial site](#) in protest of the government's stand on migration.

Hungarian politics are criticized also by Western partners, but these media materials do not reach the level of IW, for instance they tend [to separate facts from opinion](#). 90 percent of IW in Hungary is on the internet and it is linked with Russian sources. A very alarming fact is that news for Romanian readers from Russian sources have a high level of anti-Hungarian IW. Russian-backed Romanian sites like *Aflasitu.ro*, *InfoAlert.ro*, *Sputnik Moldova* have 70 percent disinformation on Hungarian topics. These Russian IW materials target the Romanian public with [disinformation](#) like: "Hungary prepares war against Romania," "The EU will collapse, states Prime Minister Orbán," "Hungarian police discriminates Romanian tourists."

HUNGARY'S ANSWER TO INFORMATION WARFARE

We expect that geopolitical tensions remain high between Russia and the EU/NATO owing to Russia's actions in Ukraine. This has the potential to open up tensions in the Hungarian society, particularly when combined with other recent problems like migration. The situation can be described as "hybrid warfare," a combination of propaganda and provocations.

Hungary started to respond to the potential dangers posed by IW in the region. It will take time for our efforts to bear fruit, but a regional cooperation is taking



shape. At the start of 2015, NATO opened a Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (StratCom) in Latvia, primarily charged with fighting against Russia's media campaign. Budapest also participates in a new EU initiative to battle Russian disinformation by creating a unit of public relations and communication experts in Brussels to fact-check and counter the output of Russian state media. The European Union created a strategic communications plan in June 2016. An EU vote in June 2016 on implementing the next tier of sanctions against Russia because of its involvement in eastern Ukraine proved decisive in the process of IW in Central Europe.

Nevertheless, the information war is gaining momentum. Foreign-owned media have an established presence in the region. Time is needed for the planned European cooperation to take root. We do not envisage that this period will lead to social instability or disrupt the political status quo, but we do expect the co-existence of conflicting views creating a division in social opinion and public discourse.

Based on the new NATO strategic concept, [steps have been already made](#) toward Hungary's IW and cyberdefence capabilities, and creating a [cyberdefence doctrine](#). A key point of this doctrine is that Hungary would like a harmonious, comprehensive cooperation in tackling IW, as the causes of the information warfare are also complex.

CONCLUSIONS

After more than two decades of the fall of communism in Central Europe, the West is once again worried about Russian influence over our region. The worry focuses on the challenge of the IW. We can witness populist rhetoric on all sides, so security risks are better understood by analyzing actions rather than statements. In the past years the countries in our region have succeeded to diversify their gas supplies, and increased in a modest way their storage capacity. Russia's worsening economic situation pressures Moscow to change its policy: in need of cash [Gazprom tries to increase its gas supply](#) to Europe. In our assessment IW will turn from Hungary to other countries in the region. The main cause of this is the growing European acceptance of Budapest's migration policy, the processes of energy politics, and the build-up of NATO structures in our region. A study of the independent *EnergyPost.eu* shows that in 2015 "Slovakia has become [the main gas trading hub](#) in the region as a result of these developments," the transited Russian gas doubled in the previous year. This underscores our assessment that IW will focus on other countries in the region, not Hungary, this year.

However, Russia remains the main supplier of energy and nuclear technology to the region, and we do not expect a quick change of this situation. Moscow will continue to counter also with IW the EU effort to decrease dependency on Russian gas, but there are many factors that block the spreading of Russian ideology and influence over the region.

The primary counterweight to Russian influence is the quality of life and freedom that democracy has provided since the fall of communism. Several hundred thousand citizens from the region work or study in Western countries, while moving to or working in Russia may be difficult to imagine, even for the strongest defenders of Russian policy in the region. This is reflected in the strength of public opinion against Russia, which can negatively affect local politicians who play the Russian card.

Despite some foreign efforts, the future of Hungary and our region will be in NATO and EU structures. However, the Central European countries will remain vulnerable. We envision that IW attacks will strengthen in midterm. The USA and NATO plan to help the countries of the region for a better cooperation. Already our region's countries has a better understanding of each other, the IW attacks against Hungary coming from regional countries decreased significantly in the last years, we can easily understand this if we follow the news. So with the enhancement of anti-IW potential of our region we expect that the effect of the IW will have moderate, diminishing effect. Our best friends and partners are in our region, ready to cooperate.