

Marek Świerczek

## The “Matryoshka System”<sup>1</sup>, or the perfect disinformation. Introduction to the topic

### Preface

In order to understand the principles on which the Russian system of disinformation is based, one must precisely define this phenomenon. Recently the disinformation concept has taken on an extremely wide meaning. However, borders of the term definition are vague and above all, they have practical consequences in the form of “detecting” by homegrown investigators of Russian conspiracies ever new manifestations of “disinformation evil”, most often understood as any information activity aimed at influencing the people attitudes. In this way, the disinformation means both propaganda (in all its variants, including propaganda that is openly made by Russian state media), as well as so-called *fake news*, that are constantly detected and analyzed as a very serious risk to the security of the state, although as yet there are no convincing studies indicating the long-term effectiveness of using them.

But the main result of expanding the meaning of the notion of disinformation is shifting attention from an extremely dangerous phenomenon to phenomena of marginal importance. Figuratively speaking: a real disinformation drowns in the cacophony of media reports about the fake messages and manifestations of brazen propaganda of the Kremlin, which makes the actual disinformation, devoid of protective measures on the part of counter-intelligence, become even more harmful. It is therefore necessary first of all to define more precisely the concept of the disinformation phenomenon. In the author’s opinion, the following definitions of the phenomenon are representative for most of the works devoted to this problem:

1. (...) an extremely complex method of operational work, by influencing the current or potential opponent state, hostile special service or specific groups or social strata in another, but sometimes also own country. The term was invented by German special services during World War I; at the headquarters of the German army until the end of the war, there was a disinformation unit controlled by the military intelligence service. Later, the special services of other countries introduced this form of action as a methodological method of influencing the opponent, undertaken with the intention of creating a targeted influence on the formation of opinions and the course of foreseeable events. Disinformation is a secret action based on a unified concept consisting

---

<sup>1</sup> A matryoshka doll (Russian: матрёшка, a diminutive form of Russian female first name “Matryona”) – is a set of wooden dolls of decreasing size placed one inside another.

of preparing, developing and, in consequence, transferring to an opponent (its special service) or publicly disseminating, but with hidden goals, in the society of the opponent's country partially or completely false information, documents (letters, publications, manuscripts, etc.), photographs or other forms of false data intended to create a seemingly true picture or opinion and shape an opinion about a person, event or phenomenon in accordance with the operational interests of a special service undertaking disinformation and/or political activities of the state, in whose interest the given service implements them, usually for causing direct or indirect damage to the current or future interests of the opponent. The effect of such actions is influencing the decision-making processes of one state by another state (government, parliament, economic organs), which may use such information pieces to make decisions that harm the vital interests of that country.<sup>2</sup>

2. Intentionally false information that should affect a specific group of people or the entire population. This is one of the basic methods of operational intelligence work, serving to influence the behavior of the opponent, to make the opponent's intelligence service's work easier. (The opponent may be a hostile intelligence or another organization or person against whom the service's activities are directed). Disinformation is divided into strategic, long-term plans and intentions, as well as operational disinformation, which is created depending on the momentary situation. Disinformation in terms of form can be linguistic, pictorial or demonstrative (presentation of physical objects).<sup>3</sup>
3. Creating and spreading the misleading or false information, to distort the opponent's image.<sup>4</sup>
4. Disinformation (...) it is a deliberate dissemination of false data by means and methods of operational work in order to mislead an opponent, to obtain planned results.<sup>5</sup>
5. (...) the essence of disinformation is provocation, not a lie (...) states use their secret services, to create a provocative image, to make the opponent make erroneous judgments.<sup>6</sup>
6. (...) disinformation aims at the implementation of a consistent program aimed at replacing in consciousness, and above all the sub-consciousness of the masses that are the subject of these activities views considered as disadvantageous to them, but beneficial to the disinformator.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> J. Larecki, *Wielki leksykon służb specjalnych świata: organizacje wywiadu, kontrwywiadu i policji politycznych świata, terminologia profesjonalna i żargon operacyjny*, Warsaw 2007, pp. 159–160.

<sup>3</sup> *Encyklopedia szpiegostwa*, Warszawa 1993, pp. 72–73.

<sup>4</sup> N. Polmar, T.B. Allen, *Księga szpiegów. Encyklopedia szpiegostwa*, Warszawa 2000, p. 151.

<sup>5</sup> H. Lewandowski, *Podstęp, inspiracja i dezinformacja w działalności służb specjalnych*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 81–82.

<sup>6</sup> E.J. Epstein, *Podstęp. Niewidzialna wojna między KGB a CIA*, Krosno 1993, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Dezinformacja – oręż wojny*, V. Volkoff (ed.), Warszawa 1991, p. 8.

7. This term means systematic efforts to spread false information and to falsify or block information about the actual situation and policy of the communist world. As a consequence, disinformation practices were to lead to confusion, misleading and influencing the non-communist world, to undermine its policies and to persuade the opponent from the West to unwittingly contribute to the realization of communism's goals.<sup>8</sup>
8. Disinformation is a special type of "black" propaganda which is supported by false documents.<sup>9</sup>

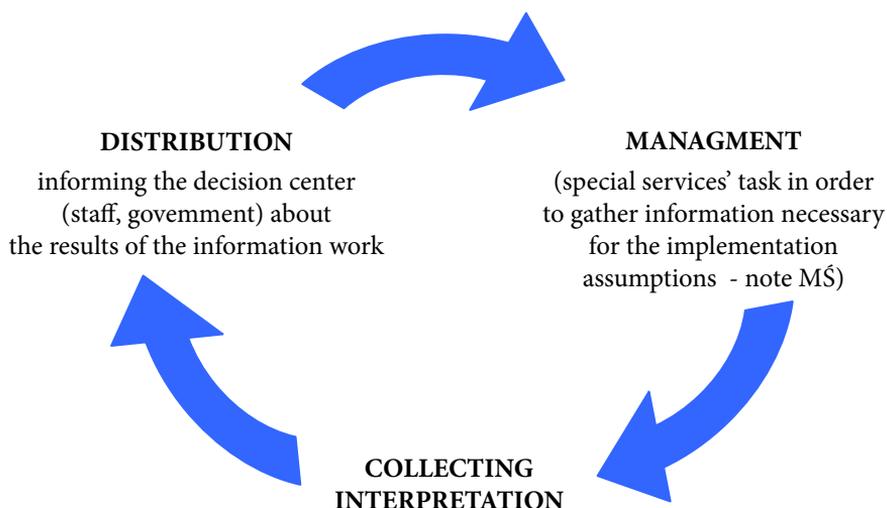
It can be easily noticed, the above-cited definitions of the concept of disinformation have several elements in common. These include declaring that disinformation is the domain of special services and that it consists of creating a false image of reality in the opponent mind, which is to lead to making erroneous decisions. That requires keeping the process secret, above all, a source of the distorted information, to deprive the victims any possibility of the verification (because then they can not only falsify distorted data, but also - on the principle of *cui bono* – mark out a probable disinformator). In connection with the above, the above-mentioned elements of disinformation disqualify both propaganda and so-called *fake news* (and other forms of information war carried out with the help of the mass media and the Internet) from being disinformation *sensu stricto*, because, although in their case it is difficult to identify the actual source of information, but it is impossible to deprive the victim of the possibility of data verification. Moreover, the thesis that the conduct of the wider form of the information war is the domain of special services, is highly questionable, since the secret services usually do not have the means to carry out the scale propaganda activities.

In order to avoid the logical problems that occur while too wide definition of the concept of disinformation is used, one should start from a simple assumption based on understanding, how - in general terms - decision-making processes in the centers of state power are conducted. The simplest illustration of such a process is the so-called intelligence cycle (presented below), showing the close connection of political and military decisions with information provided by specialized state agencies, including intelligence and counterintelligence services:

---

<sup>8</sup> A. Golicyn, *Nowe kłamstwa w miejsce starych*, Warszawa 2007, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> V. Marchetti, J.D. Marks, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*, New York 1974, p. 173.



Scheme: Intelligence cycle showing a close relationship between the politico-military decisions and the information provided by specialized government agencies, including intelligence and counterintelligence.

Source: J. Hughes-Wilson, *Największe błędy wywiadów świata*, Warszawa 2002, p. 13.

Slightly simplifying the above diagram, it should be said (though it borders it with a truism) that the vast majority of governments make politico-military decisions basing on the verified and analyzed information provided by state institutions established for the purpose of collecting, verifying and processing of intelligence and not on the basis of opponent's propaganda, misinformation, mass-media fake news, etc.

Of course, influencing public opinion by disseminating false media reports may in the long run affect the functioning of the state, e.g. by gaining voters support for specific political parties or activates dynamics of large social groups (provoking riots etc.) to what governments must react in some way. However, in general, it must be assumed that in most situations the state centers of mature democracies operate on the basis of the information considered reliable, i.e. from certain sources, such as the state services usually specialized obtaining and analyzing the intelligence. From this point of view, one can therefore - for the purposes of this article - adopt the following definition of disinformation: **disinformation is a process of influencing the behavior of a subject disinformed by distorting its perception of reality, leading the victim of disinformation to undertaking actions consistent with a deformed image, and at the same time corresponding to the interests of the misinforming entity. It is a process planned and carried out by specialized state institutions that have adequate resources to do this and to try to control the any channels used for obtaining information by the disinformed object.**<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> V. Marchetti, J.D. Marks, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*, New York 1974, p. 173.

The most important for the above definition is understanding that for **conducting of disinformation activities it is necessary to control the channels of obtaining information by the victim of these activities** - in short, it means blocking the victim's activities regarding the reliability checks of information channels. One can not conduct the effective disinformation operation, when the victim can verify the acquired data from other, reliable sources. Therefore, neither *the fake news*, nor fundamentally false or manipulated content or propaganda pronouncements, placed in the media by influence agents or so called resonance boxes can not have a real impact on decision-making processes of any mature state organisms. They can certainly lead to social problems, decision-making uncertainty or information noise, but ultimately, they must make the authorities verify and correct the originally incorrect assessments. Moreover, providing credible information in the media space about such practices of the entity responsible for spreading the untruth, weakens its credibility also in cases where it is the source of real information.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, if disinformation operations are to be effective, it must as completely as possible cut off the victim from alternative sources of information. If it succeeds, the object of disinformation attack - in accordance with the basic principles of syllogism - having false premises **must** come to false conclusions, even if it applies the most stringent logical procedures.

The best illustration of this disinformation scheme were the actions of the British The XX Committee (i.e. counterintelligence body), which, during the operation known as the *Double Cross System*, in order to deceive the German Abwehr, managed to intercept practically all German spies, put them against the alternative: the cooperation with MI5 or being hanged (which, incidentally, gave practically 100% effectiveness of recruitment) and control the results of their disinformation activities thanks to the effective Enigma decryption.<sup>12</sup> The British counterintelligence, however, had the task facilitated by the geography of the United Kingdom, whose insular position meant that they were able to catch Abwehr agents almost immediately after landing in England.<sup>13</sup>

Continental services, especially of large countries, unable to effectively control not only borders, but also the whole of its own territory, are usually not able to implement this type of action, because it can not prevent an opponent from receiving information from sources not controlled by the counterintelligence. This problem was solved by the Soviet (now Russian) service in the early 1920s, when the Soviets adopted the principle

---

<sup>11</sup> The Russian Federation ran into a trap like this. After numerous media campaigns recognised as spreading manipulation or false information it could not oppose in no way Western narration also in cases when the accusations against Russians had no substantial basis. Former proved manipulations of the Russian media undermined their credibility, which, in the end, led to serious losses in their information war.

<sup>12</sup> This operations was described by its co-author in: J. Masterman, *Brytyjski system podwójnych agentów 1939–1945*, Warszawa 1973.

<sup>13</sup> Similar situation took place in case of Cuban services which carried out a disinformation operations under the supervision of the KGB against the CIA. The Americans were deceived by double agents for almost 25 years.

of conducting so called offensive counterintelligence, which consisted in **actively** providing to foreign intelligence services with soviet agent as objects of recruitment and through it – disinforming the opponents (so-called *opierativnaja nastupatielnost*).

But the activity of counter-espionage double agents was not enough (for a misled espionage agency was still able to make contact with other sources, searching for some verification), so the Russians (or actually so called *Internacyonalny*, as the Cheka/GPU were created mainly by Poles, Jews and Baltic nationals) came up with a brilliant idea: they offered their victims **a possibility to verification** of the obtained **information**. The core of the idea was the assumption that if you give a victim an apparent choice of sources, even if the victim does not trust one source, would be likely to trust the second one, or the third one and so on. This is the principle extremely similar to the rules used by the commercial television, which, apparently offering multiple channels tailored to specific audiences, in fact, serve only as a source presenting ads, and therefore making money on advertisers.

The Soviet version of running disinformation can be figuratively called “matryoshka system”, because any attempt to verify the information through looking for reliable sources always drove to the appearance on the scene of another “matryoshka”, that is, the source completely different than the previous one, but offering still the same content, matched to the needs of the recipient.

An excellent illustration of such a model of Soviet service activities was the activity of the OGPU counterintelligence unit against Russian emigration after exposing in April 1927. the supposed monarchist organization MOCR-Trust (in fact the cover-body of OGPU, which since 1921 effectively misled the leadership of “white-immigrant “ and Western intelligence).

The following sequence and the OGPU actions should serve as a perfect illustration of the above outlined “matryoshka system”.

### **Case study of the “matryoshka system”**

On April 12, 1927 an OGPU agent who was also a member of the management board of the so called MOCR-Trust organization, Eduard Opperput, along with the messenger of General Aleksander Kutiepow Maria Zacharchenko-Shultz crossed the border from the USSR to Finland. Almost immediately after the acquisition of refugees by the Finnish Border Guard and the transfer to the Finnish II Division (intelligence - also bearing the name “Branch II”) A. Opperput gave extensive testimony, which showed that the underground organization MOCR-Trust, with which the white-armed organizations and most of the Western intelligence agencies cooperated, was a legend of the OGPU, used to disinform the governments and general staffs of the West. Theoretically speaking, it was the end of the disinformation operation carried out by the Soviets from 1921, because E. Opperput’s enunciations have discredited the Trust. However, apart from the fact that the Trust structures in the West remained unchanged,

the Soviets reached for the outlined above “matryoshka system” replaced the Trust with alleged verification alternatives.

Already on April 12, 1927 gen. Aleksandr Kutieпов, the head of Russki Obszczewoinski Sojuz<sup>14</sup>, received a letter from an OGPU agent, an alleged member of the Trust’s Board, general Nikolai Potapov.<sup>15</sup> In that letter Potapov accused Opperput of being still an OGPU agent (and earlier of VChK)<sup>16</sup> and of (...) *financial machinations* (...) standing behind his escape. At the same time, he gave a lot of information magnifying the information chaos of the enemy (in the OGPU jargon so called *putanica*<sup>17</sup>).

However, the main Potapov’s message was the suggestion that part of the organization MOCR-Trust survived and was ready to keep on acting, and the escape of E. Opperput was merely a result of his financial frauds. It was the first consistently implemented *new line of the OGPU*, which was to replace the Trust offering the new hope for the white emigration.

On April 20, 1927, the Soviet news agency TASS provided information re-published a day later in “Izvestiya” and “Pravda” about the breakup of a monarchist group dealing with (...) *military espionage and financial machinations*.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, interestingly enough, both the Parisian “Vozrozhdenie” and the Berlin “Rul” were in the position that this piece of information was not true.<sup>19</sup>

The multiplicity of press reports on the escape of E. Opperput (initiated by the publication from April 24, 1927 in the Helsinki-based “Hufvudsadsbladet”<sup>20</sup>) did not change the attitude of emigration to the leaders of the Trust (in fact - organization of covers for the OGPU) operating in Central and Western Europe. At least so can be assumed after the command of A. Kutieпов to the Trust proxy in Warsaw, Yuri Artamonov, to maintain contact with the Polish Division II (military intelligence) somewhat apart from the Trust board in Moscow.<sup>21</sup> This was surprising, considering

---

<sup>14</sup> The Russian All-Military Union – an organization that was founded abroad by General Pyotr Wrangel in 1924. Its purpose was provision of aid to the veterans of the Russian White movement, who lived outside the USSR and maintaining a Russian military organisation which emigrated from Crimea in 1920; more: see S.J. Rybas, Генерал Кутепов, Moscow 2010.

<sup>15</sup> The content of the letter in: L. Flejszman, В тисках провокации. Операция Трест и русская, зарубежная печать, Moscow 200, pp. 140–142.

<sup>16</sup> Clearly, E. Opperput used it later to reject allegations from the Savinkov followers as a Soviet disinformation – see: „Siegodnia” of 17 May 1927.

<sup>17</sup> Usually in OGPU activities it was gained due to mixing suggestions with true information. N. Potapow, inter alia, (truthfully) accused E. Opperput of being an agent of the then CheKa; He described drunken escapade of G. Radkiewicz of 5 April 1927, hysterical reactions of his wife and attempt at blackmail by E. Opperput who wanted money for silence.

<sup>18</sup> This information was immediately re-published by the migratory press, inter alia, in „Последних Новостях” and „Возрождению”.

<sup>19</sup> L. Flejszman, В тисках провокации..., p. 144.

<sup>20</sup> By the way, surnames were written in a wrong way in the text, which suggested that the editorial office could get an oral information or in a form of someone’s handwritten note.

<sup>21</sup> S. Wojciechowski, Трест. Воспоминания, Canada 1974, p. 111.

that general A. Kutieпов in conversation with the head of the “East” Division of Branch II, major Michał Talikowski, hinted that the ROWS lost its confidence in the Division II, as the staff and the Polish government should be infiltrated by the OGPU and that therefore ROWS would move the center of its activity to Finland.<sup>22</sup>

On May 18, 1927 Pavel Arapov (OGPU agent) wrote a letter to his uncle general Piotr Vrangel<sup>23</sup>, in which he discredited the Trust. He wrote that E. Opperput, contrary to what is said, (...) *was not the only provocateur* (...) that the operation was used to discredit gen. Kutieпов and that the fall of the Trust could only strengthen another structure associated with the Trust - Eurasia.<sup>24</sup> It should be presumed that, where the OGPU figured out that emigration had ceased to believe in the credibility of the Trust structures in the West, it offered so called Trust’s *dvoinik* (a copy) in the form of Eurasia. Because gen. P. Vrangel from the beginning the Trust was mistrustful to the Trust and E. Opperput’s public pronouncements spoke of provocation of the OGPU to the embarrassment of gen. A. Kutieпов, the OGPU gave him a relative who confirmed the original conviction of P. Vrangel of the Trust as a Soviet provocative organization. Vrangel’s kin, P. Arapov, as a Eurasian representative, was a perfectly prepared lure: he conveyed the same opinion as the general’s about the Trust’s plot and represented Eurasia, which was allegedly uncontaminated by Soviet infiltration (as opposed to the MOCR- Trust organization) though - as we remember - in accordance with the letter of N. Potapov. Trust was supposed to be still active, though weakened by the arrests.

On July 10, 1927 P. Arapov sent another letter to gen. P. Vrangel, in which he wrote openly that regardless of the failure of the Trust, it was necessary to maintain contact with the Soviet Russia.<sup>25</sup> By implication, of course, through the Eurasian structures.

On July 13, 1927 in the Parisian “Vozrozhdenie”, the obituary of Maria Zacharchenko-Shultz was published, which was the beginning of her later glorification as “the martyr of the white matter”. The publication was an attempt to stop the rumors persistently circulating among the emigrants that the **whole** E. Opperput’s “Troika”, which allegedly had to carry out an attack in Moscow as part of a rematch for misleading

---

<sup>22</sup> L. Flejszman, В тисках провокации..., p. 149.

<sup>23</sup> Hoover Institution Archives (HIA), Vrangell Coll., Box 151, file No 44, pp. 366–367.

<sup>24</sup> Eurasia – philosophical and political movement in Russia that points out the succession and cooperation of the Russian-speaking culture with Nomadic empires of Euro-Asiatic steppes. It originated in a migrant environment in the 1920s. The organisation was taken over by agents and thus became the next disinformation channel for the GPU (more: T.K. Gładkow, Аргун Аргунзов, Moscow 2008). Just before self-exposure of the Trust, the GPU abstracted the Eurasia organisation from its structure to stay in contact with emigration through it (see: G. Bailey, *The Conspirators*, London 1961, p. 82). After the MOCR-Trust exposure the Division II had no idea that/was unaware that Euroasia can be another GPU legend. It was proved by the letter of the General Command of the Polish Army col., T. Schaetzl to the military attaches in Paris, Prague, Belgrade and Moscow with a request for a discrete explanation, which of the powers was financing the movement – see: AAN, sygn. A.II.23, MSWojsk, SG, Oddział II, No 15567/II.inf./Ros. of 7 December 1927.

<sup>25</sup> (...) Что бы то ни было, я по прежнему считаю, что опасно терять связь с противником; Hoover Institution Archives (HIA), Vrangell Coll., Box 151, file, nr 44, k. 368.

emigration through the Trust, consisted of OGPU agents<sup>26</sup> and Maria herself with her lover E. Opperput survived.

From the end of July 1927, information about the activity of the *Bratstvo Russkoi Pravdy* (Brotherhood of Russian Truth) - a group previously marginal and cooperating with the Trust<sup>27</sup>, issuing a low-circulation anti-Soviet writing *Russkaya Pravda*<sup>28</sup> appeared in the emigration press.

According to the leaders of the BRP, an anti-Soviet uprising was to break out in Russia, especially in the southwest and the Far East of the USSR.<sup>29</sup> Gen. P. Vrangell initially soberly recognized this organization as another OGPU legend<sup>30</sup>, but after meeting with the leader of BRP Sokolov ( in November 1927 ), under the influence of documents presented to him by Sokolov, he unexpectedly changed his attitude. Then he published a memorandum in which he stated that BRP was not a OGPU legend, and the head of the BRP “Brother No. 1” served the motherland well.<sup>31</sup> What is more, he maintained that members of the BRP were participants in the terrorist small groups, *Troyki* (including the one directed by E. Opperput and M. Zacharchenko-Shultz ) sent to the USSR. This interpretation was then picked up by the émigré press, which first claimed that the member of the BRP was M. Zacharchenko-Shultz herself<sup>32</sup>, but then - under the influence of a letter sent to the editor of the journal: “Rossiya” by her husband Grigori Radkievich, who denied it<sup>33</sup> - it began to claim that a member of the Brotherhood was another participant of the *Troyka*, named Yuri Vozniesienskii, who was to die with Maria in the manhunt carried out by the OGPU.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See. L. Flejszman, *W tiskach prowokacji...*, p. 222.

<sup>27</sup> By the way, BRP was active in the Republic of Poland and assisted from our country further Trust operations – see: Когда в июле 1924 года возник «Русский Обще-Войсковой Союз» (РОВС), почти все члены пинской монархической организации и БРП вошли и в РОВС. Пинская полиция не могла тогда разграничить БРП и РОВС: «Деятельность «Братства Русской Правды» и «Русского Обще-Войскового Союза» так взаимно переплетена, что трудно отличить, где кончается деятельность одной организации и начинается – другой, и наоборот. Обе эти организации работают солидарно на территории советов, а разделение труда является таким, что БРП, главным образом, занимается сбором денег на нужды двух организаций, однако руководство принадлежит РОВС». Пинские монархисты (Семен Бродович, Дмитрий Копацинский, Станислав Мацкевич, Николай Котович и др.) были вовлечены в знаменитую чекистскую операцию «Трест»: поддерживали контакты с её активными участниками – евразийцами Юрием Мукаловым и П. Демидовым (Орсини). See. Петербургский и пинский архитектор *Николай Котович*, <http://brama.brestregion.com/nomer24/artic16.shtml#> [access: 20 XI 2015]

<sup>28</sup> A. Dobkin, С.А. Соколов-Кречетов: От «Золотого Руна» к «Русской Правде» *In memoriam: Исторический сборник памяти А. И Добкина*, S.-Petersburg–Paris 2000, pp. 91–99.

<sup>29</sup> See. Ataman Kreczet, Там, где еще бьются. Из записной книжки повстанческого атамана, „Возрождение” of 31 July 1927.

<sup>30</sup> Все это, думается, такая же ловушка для доверчивых дураков, как в свое время пресловутая „монархическая организация” Фёдорова; НИА, Vrangell Coll., Box 147, file 34, k. 390.

<sup>31</sup> L. Flejszman, В тисках провокации..., pp. 279–281.

<sup>32</sup> A. Amfitieatrow, Листки, „Возрождение” of 8 November 1927.

<sup>33</sup> „Россия” of 19 November 1927.

<sup>34</sup> A letter of an alleged member of the BRP, Wasiljew, to the editorial office, published in

On July 30, 1927 gen. P. Vrangl received a letter from another Soviet unconscious agent (resonator), Alexander Guchkov, in which he called to cease all activities in Soviet Russia (i.e. carrying out terrorist activities that the OGPU feared<sup>35</sup>). It should be assumed that A. Guchkov was influenced by his daughter Vera, who was recruited to work with the GPU by her lover Konstantin Radzevich<sup>36</sup> who in 1926 came from Riga to Paris (he lived in the same house as another Soviet agent, known writer Sergei Efron).

On August 7, 1927, gen. P. Vrangl informed gen. A. Shatilov in the letter<sup>37</sup>, that gen. A. Lukomski (who had not spoken to him for more than a year, then suddenly began to write several letters a week) suggesting, among others, that the Trust continued to operate because only part of the organization had been exposed.

In September 1927, in turn, G. Radkievich sent a letter to the officer of the OGPU Wiktor Steckiewicz<sup>38</sup>, in which he proposed cooperation with the OGPU in return for the delivery of letters from Maria Zacharchenko-Shultz<sup>39</sup> which was believed to stay in the inner prison of the OGPU. It was a piece of intrusive rumors spreading among the emigration and suggesting that Maria, like E. Opperput, was actually a Soviet agent and that she was not killed in the forests of Smolensk. Missing data on the reaction of the OGPU, but considering the fact that Mr Radkievich was then a combat branch manager of gen. A. Kutieпов organization in Finland, responsible for the implementation of further terrorist attacks on the territory of the USSR, should be taken for granted that the letter was received by the OGPU with great interest. Perhaps this piece of information is closely related to the fact that two more *Troykas* sent to Russia by gen. A. Kutieпов were immediately liquidated (the first - already when crossing the border - all members killed, the second one - captured and used for the demonstration process, in time which its members repented and gave evidence, used later in the Soviet press accusations against the Finnish government, as well as in the note sent by the Soviet government to the government of Finland accusing Finns of involvement in terrorist activities<sup>40</sup>. As a result of this *demarche* Finland expelled the organization of gen. A. Kutieпов, including G. Rakievich, who moved to Poland.<sup>41</sup>

---

„Возрождению” on December 9, 1927.

<sup>35</sup> (...) после провала „треста” (...) приходится, конечно, приостановить всякую активную работу в России (...); HIA, Vrangl Coll., Box 151, file No 44, k. 265.

<sup>36</sup> The fact that both OGPU agents stopped hiding their political affection in the 1930s can suggest how big the number of agents must have been among the Russians in Paris. Vera was a member of the French communist party and Radziewicz took part in the civil war in Spain as an officer of the Military Brigades.

<sup>37</sup> See the Lukomski's letter of 2 August 1927: (...) одна из линии связей (sic!) была открыта и передана. Но из этого далеко ещё до вывода, что провалились все; see. HIA, Vrangl Coll., Box 147, file nr 33, k. 346–349.

<sup>38</sup> It should be stressed once again that this means maintaining active channel of communication with the trust although there is no information on the sorts of channel the correspondence was being passed.

<sup>39</sup> L. Flejszman, В тисках провокации..., pp. 232–233.

<sup>40</sup> See. W. Ulrich, Необходимо разрушить гнездо террористов в Финляндии, „Izviestija” of 4 October 1927.

<sup>41</sup> L. Flejszman, В тисках провокации..., p. 272.

On September 11, 1927 the Berlin "Rul" posted *Pis'mo s Gielsingfors*, in which it was reported that the killed member of the E. Opperput Troyka, J. Vozniesiński, was actually named Peters and came from a family of well-known communists.

On October 22, 1927 an anonymous letter titled *Triest and GPU. Pokazaniya nieposredstwiennogo uczestnika* appeared in another émigré newspaper "Bor'ba za Rossiyu", in which a rational (and truthful) assessment of the goals set for the Trust by the OGPU was made. Above all but it stated, that not all of the Trust consisted of OGPU agents, and even - that part of his activists had conspired within the organization, resulting in that the elimination of this organization did not mean the discontinuation of some of its parts, uncontaminated by the infiltration.<sup>42</sup> Presumably, the author of this magazine was G. Radkievich, who was also responsible for sending next *Troykas* to the USSR. It is worth noting that the analysis of the objectives of the Trust presented in the letter was so logical and written in such a clear language that it did not correspond to the level of written expressions of G. Radkievich stored in the Polish Division II archive. One can infer that if he was hiding under the anonymous letter, then he was only the channel of somebody's thoughts. This letter was then reprinted by most of the emigration newspapers.<sup>43</sup>

In 1928, the work of Nikolai Kichkasov was published in the USSR. *Belogvardieiski tierror protiv SSSR*, in which there was distorted information about the liquidation of the *Troyka* of E. Opperput. The information was illustrated with a photograph reportedly presenting M. Zacharchenko-Shultz, shown as a beautiful girl, without actual any similarity to M. Zacharchenko-Shultz. Probably it was supposed to confirm the emigration in the belief that the white activist, who had been killed in Smolensk, was not Maria Zacharchenko-Shultz.<sup>44</sup>

Shortly afterwards G. Radkevich carried out a bomb attack on the OGPU office in Moscow. His actual motive is still unclear to this day (it is not known whether Radkievich wanted to avenge his wife, or it was another OGPU provocation).

The above, short review of the OGPU actions against Russian emigration is, of course, only a piece of the OGPU's activities, which would soon move from disinformation and manipulation to kidnapping and physical liquidation of emigration leaders. From this description of events eventuates that OGPU, ending one legend, **at the same time** offered another one to the victims, hoodwinking the desperate white emigrants, who wanted to hope that this time they would deal with the true patriots fighting against communism. It is also easy to notice that in this game the planners from Lubianka were so brazen that they did not create new organizations or new characters, but to a large extent they used resources existing previously (probably due to pure pragmatics and laziness of officers supervising the operation). While eliminating

---

<sup>42</sup> The most ridiculed victim of the Trust, Vasiliy Shulgin, was a vivid example of the efficiency of this disinformation. For the rest of his life he believed that the MOCR-Trust members, whom he had met, were true conspirators, maybe even linked to Lev Trocki.

<sup>43</sup> L. Flejszman, В тисках провокации..., p. 273.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, p. 303.

the MOCR- Trust organization, the OGPU offered to the emigration Eurasia and the Bratstvo Russkoy Pravdy (both organizations were connected to the Trust, had been known to the OGPU and - at least - infiltrated by the OGPU or since the beginning established as cover organizations Trust type<sup>45</sup>). And the Russian emigres, disappointed and ridiculed, let themselves be caught in the next trap set up by Soviet manipulators playing on the most human feelings: hope, longing for their homeland and fear for the family.

Because each service operates on the basis of the applicable manuals it can be assumed that the above outlined mechanism of continuous provocations could take place in relation to other organizations cooperating with the Trust, including the Polish Division II. The two main activists of the Warsaw Trust organization, Yuri Artamonov and Sergey Voyciekhovski, remained in close contact with the officers of the Department "East" of the II Division, also after unmasking the Trust in 1927. Only written explanations about contacts with the Trust organization were requested from them and the cooperation proceeded without further discussions. Although S. Voyciekhovski, probably fearing that his correspondence had been read by the Division II, wrote openly about his spy analyzes of the political situation, which had been dispatched to Moscow.

Bratstvo Russkoy Pravdy worked in Poland probably like many other provocative or infiltrated structures of the Russian emigration. But the II Division did not carry out any serious investigation to verify the suspicions against its own officers cooperating with the Trust, although - as is clear from the above analysis - the GPU was accusing authentic agents, just to give credence to them and leaving others above suspicions. It can therefore be concluded that although the Trust as an organization was ended, causing an international scandal and compromising cooperating with the Western intelligence white emigration centers, but the large operation which the Trust was only a part of, was continued. The Soviets allowed their victims to open only the first layer of matryoshka, under which, unfortunately, there were other layers of deception.

## Conclusion

The above-outlined train of events - in the humble opinion of the author - perfectly illustrates the method of Soviet manipulators described in the introduction. As soon as one source of disinformation was compromised in the eyes of the victims, planners from Lubianka immediately offered another one, but often of a different political provenience. This method due to its simplicity was effective. The apparent multiplicity of sources of information gave the illusion of the possibility of verification and

---

<sup>45</sup> The problem of the true nature of the organisation – despite the efforts of Russian right-wing historians trying to prove its anti-Soviet nature – is still unclear. One is for sure though, the information passed by the Brotherhood to the West (for example on the alleged common anti-Soviet insurgency) were untrue and their tactics of contacts with the emigration was exactly the same as the tactics of the Trust.

the false comfort of making decisions based on the information allegedly from many sources, then the analysts from the disinforming countries – had to draw the conclusions which **had to be** convergent with the aims of the manipulators, who suggested shreds of information from reportedly many sources.

The Russian Federation, which was founded on the ruins of the Soviet Union, took over the main elements of the Soviet state system, including all the instruments of the special services invented long time ago and perfected by years of disinformation operations. Therefore, it is not surprising that the “matryoshka system”, i.e. the multiplication of fictitious information sources or seemingly different actors of social processes, who - at least on a strategic level - prefer the same solutions, beneficial to a specific political entity, is still used by Russians today. The methodological problem is only that - unlike historical sources - modern examples of the use of this system are not fully documented and are therefore difficult to accept in the scientific discourse. A good example of this thesis is never repeated information of RTR Planet TV stations from the first days of the Russian-Georgian war, claiming that counterintelligence service of the Russian Federation arrested several dozens of soldiers and officers of the Russian army of Georgian origin who, working for Georgian military intelligence, allegedly fell through the stupidity of their leading officers. The Georgian officers supposedly phoned their agents on using their mobile phones, to quickly get information about the movements of Russian armored columns. Later, this information has never been repeated, nor did the data appear about the mass trials of alleged traitors, what may suggest that Georgian intelligence may have been the victim of provocation using numerous agents reinforcing the primary message.

Accepting the fundamentals of the “matryoshka system” one can put forward the hypothesis that, in accordance with the methodology described above, Russian agents varied from regular “bites” offered to the Georgian intelligence to recruit to classic bidders openly proposing their services, but all of them of the different political background and motivations. The adoption of the perspective of multi-source disinformation, using a trick with an apparent possibility of verification data, explains both incomprehensible from a military and propaganda point of view the Mikhail Saakashvili’s decision to attack South Ossetia and Abkhazia, what ended with a loss by Georgia the both rebel areas and - if not for the intervention of diplomacy of the West – could have led to establishing in Tbilisi authorities fully submissive to the Russian Federation, as well as incomprehensible delay of President Dmitry Medvedev in providing immediate assistance to the peacekeeping Russian troops attacked by the Georgians.

It is worth noting that before the war began, Russian satellite TV channels had broadcast for almost a year a series of reports illustrating the tragic state of the Russian army, in which war ships rusted in the ports, pilots were unable to practice flights due to the lack of fuel, soldiers begging for cigarettes in the streets etc. Aggressive journalistic programs were aired until the outbreak of the conflict, despite the fact that they struck directly in the tandem ruling Russia, i.e. the Prime Minister Vladimir

Putin and President Medvedev. However, during the fights and after their end, the tone of the TV and press reports suddenly changed - they took on a triumphal character. In the context of the whole course of the conflict, which in the opinion of the majority of analysts was marked by the Russian provocation, these actions could indicate the use by Russians of multi-source, mutually reinforcing itself disinformation, which was to convince the Georgians of the inability of the Russian army to intervene decisively.

It is also possible - without a full documentary base – to draw attention to the use of the “matryoshka system” in the protection of the geopolitical interests of the Russian Federation after the breakup of the Soviet Union. The fact that most post-Soviet republics led (and continues to lead) policies in line with the interests of the post-colonial center in Moscow, regardless of the political background of the leaders, may indicate that the Russian agents could be evenly distributed throughout the whole political scene of the post colonial states, and to secure interests of the Kremlin without the risk of changing the pendulum’s political course.

Similar phenomenon may be observed also in Central and Eastern Europe, in which Russian intelligence services reaches both to leftist parties and people with nostalgic attitude towards the communist past and, at the same time, to movements representing traditional values, right-wing nationalists, sometimes with the clearly fascist tendencies. From the point of view of pure logic, money supplies to the ideological extremities on both sides of the political stage seems absurd. However, when accepting the assumptions “the matryoshka system” used for the post-imperial *Realpolitik*, it becomes an effective way of realizing the interests of the Russian Federation, immune to the swings of the political or economic environment.

“The matryoshka system”, despite its simplicity, is effective. The life of modern man is based on faith to a much greater extent than the life of our ancestors who at least usually knew their surroundings at first hand. Contemporary times meet reality through intermediaries: through mass media, scientific or false truths with no alternatives, so-called. dispersed authority, in a word - almost always second-handed information. Such a construction of reality implies faith in those who are the providers of information. The human mind needs support in order to be able to function. Human thought without faith in the truth is helpless, because the very nature of reasoning requires the acceptance of the truth of the premises. The creators of “matryoshka system” understood it well, and therefore gave (and give) victims an apparent multitude of choices, so that victims, revealing one lie, could not even guess that they are assisted with it by successive manipulators, who gain the victim’s trust by exposing the previous lies only to create new ones.

### **Abstract**

The author analyzes one of methods of manipulating with victims of disinformation operations carried out by the Soviet/Russian special services, consisting

of the inclusion of the disinformation agents during the operation, which seemingly offer the opportunity to verify the intelligence obtained by victims of disinformation from previous disinformation agents, but who may also - to win the trust of the victims - participate in unmasking and undermining trust in the agents previously used to deceive the victims. This method is described graphically as the “matrix system”. The article, although describes the use of the “matrix system” on the example of Soviet counterintelligence activities against the white emigration in 1927, simultaneously attempts to put forward hypotheses based on assumptions of the described method, referring to contemporary events like the war in Georgia or infiltration by Russian services of groups placed on opposing extremes of the political spectrum.

**Keywords:** disinformation, manipulation, political extremities, Russian intelligence, Russian emigration, the policy of the Russian Federation.