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REVIEW OF «RUSSIAN POLITICAL WARFARE. ESSAYS ON KREMLIN PROPAGANDA IN EUROPE AND THE NEIGHBOURHOOD, 2020–2023» BY ANTON SHEKHOVTSOV / Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2023. 202 p.

РЕЦЕНЗІЯ «РОСІЙСЬКА ПОЛІТИЧНА ВІЙНА. НАРИСИ КРЕМЛІВСЬКОЇ ПРОПАГАНДИ В ЄВРОПІ ТА СУСІДСТВІ, 2020–2023» АНТОНА ШЕХОВЦОВА / Радянська та пострадянська політика та суспільство. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2023. 202 с.

The research of the Kremlin propaganda in Europe has not been considered holistically in domestic political science, therefore this publication is relevant both for the science of international relations in general and for the activities of the Ukrainian state in the context of strengthening informational resistance to the enemy.

In its structure, the issue includes a preface, seven essays, conclusions, and a list of used sources, which provides a gradual and logically organized clarification, characterization, analysis, and solution of a specific problem.

At the beginning of the edition, the author conceptualizes what is the essence of «malign influence» comparing with «hard power» and «sharp power». He defines malign influence of Russia as a specific type of influence that directly or indirectly subverts and undermines European values and democratic institutions (p. 12). The main effect of malign influence is erosion and decline of European values, as well as deepening distrust of democratic institutions (p. 13). According to Shekhovtsov, disinformation plays a big role both in political war and high-order war, but «only when crimes appears to be part of political warfare...can we talk about malign influence deriving from crime» (p. 26). Then Shekhovtsov describes us the tools of Russian malign influence, among them election interference, agents of influence, cyber warfare, think-tanks, disinformation, corruption, paramilitary groups, and historical revisionism (p. 32).

Russian interference in Africa is an example of importance of elections that was described in the second essay. In 2018 AFRIC, the network of agents of influence, start to work with its website and different activities. Behind the scene there were Prigizhin's employee Yulia Afanasyeva and international trader Catherine Terekhova. There were several main operations of AFRIC from 2018 Malagasy presidential election to 2019 Mozambican general election. Among other activities there were conference «Africa 2040: Vision of the Future» and the Russia-Africa Summit in 2019. The main narrative was: «unlike Western countries, Russia has

never been a colonial power and respect the sovereignty of African countries» (p. 68). Apart from the falsity of the thesis that Russia was not the metropolis for numerous internal colonies such as Ukraine, there is also the question of respect for African countries, especially on the part of the USSR, whose long-term official policy was to recruit developing countries to strengthen their position in the Cold War.

The next two essays describe the Russian aid delivered to Italy and Serbia during pandemic Covid-19. Shekhovtsov concludes that the main goal of it was demonstration to the peoples that Russia rather than the EU or NATO was a true friend in hard times (p. 88). But this tactics was only partly successful. «By attacking the EU the Kremlin was mostly engaged in pro-Chinese propaganda, which could naturally be considered as indirectly pro-Kremlin, but was nevertheless primarily pro-Chinese» (p. 106).

Interesting, in our opinion, is the essay 5 of the issue in which the author's attention is focused on Putin's «Foot Soldier» in the political war against France (the case of Kadyrov and terrorist attack of Abdoullakh Anzorov). Anzorov was called a hero by Kadyrov and buried in Chechnya. This operation was quite successful because Chechen youth in Europe is susceptible to illiberal propaganda. On the one hand, by empowering Islamists in France, Kadyrov contributes to religious polarization and undermines social cohesion in France. On the other, Kadyrov helps Moscow covertly fight another political war, with Istanbul, consolidating its positions in the region and competing with Moscow in different areas (p. 127).

The last two essays describe two agents of Russian malign influence in Poland (Janusz Niedzwiecki) and Germany (Manuel Ochsenreiter) first of all with the goal to undermine the post-Maidan authorities in Ukraine. Their deep ties with the Russian Peace Foundation and its head Leonid Slutsky were revealed. Among the information that causes the greatest emotional disgust are the pages about: 1) the participation of the Party of Regions in the Kremlin games, especially in the Odesa tragedy of 2 May 2014; 2) the arson of the Hungarian Cultural Centre in Uzhhorod (2018), where the main objective was to present the arson as a result of the attack of Ukrainian neo-Nazis. And one of the saddest conclusions of the essay: despite the proven connections of these criminals with the far-right party Alternative for Germany, this party continues to remain popular in FRG and useful for Russia in its efforts to undermine the EU from within.

In the publication you can find a number of polemical provisions which are caused by the novelty of such a complex problem as Russian malign influence. At the same time, familiarization with this issue makes it possible to conclude that it is one of the first comprehensive theoretical studies of the nature and specific features of Kremlin propaganda in Europe and the so-called 'near abroad'.

The provisions set forth in the edition are scientifically based and balanced, which creates a comprehensive picture of the problem of Kremlin propaganda in the reader. In general, the issue is written at a high level, is distinguished by the depth of research and can make a relevant contribution to the science of international information.