

**PROTOCOL ON DIPLOMA THESIS ASSESSMENT  
(Reviewer)**

Name of the student: Mgr. Tomáš Mareš

Title:

*The Effectiveness of Mass Media Instrumentalization in Offensive Foreign Policy Strategies*

Reviewer: Dr. Dr. Vladimir Sazonov, Associate Professor at University of Tartu, Research-Professor at Estonian Military Academy

**1. TOPIC AND OBJECTIVE (short information on the thesis, research objective):**

This very important and interesting doctoral thesis written by Tomáš Mareš focuses on the highly topical problem of the effectiveness of the use of mass media at the information-psychological level in offensive foreign policy strategies.

The author declares that the aim of his thesis (Mareš 2024, Abstract) is to construct a comprehensive definition of effectiveness in context and to use it to create a new and unique analytical model that can be applied to a qualitative assessment of the "effectiveness potential" of offensive foreign mass media campaigns conducted in the information-psychological dimension (Mareš 2024).

In the opinion of the reviewer, this PhD is a quietly innovative approach and a very useful analytical and in-depth study. Noteworthy are the analytical ideas of the author of the thesis and the methods used, the interesting results of which could also be used in future scientific studies. The author made the right choice and approach when he implemented the following approach - a focused case study was conducted within the framework – Russian media in Ukraine in 2013 – before annexation of Crimea by Russian Federation in early 2014 (so, under research was the period of formation of the Russian media network starting from the first presidency of Putin and its use during several phases of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict) (see Mareš 2024). It is good that this analytical model is used to test how the derived analytical model works in practice.

**2. CONTENT (complexity, original approach, argument, structure, theoretical and methodological backing, work with sources, appropriateness of annexes etc.):**

Mareš's doctoral thesis is divided into 6 different parts (introduction, 4 chapters and conclusion), all together ca 200 pages. First, authors presents an introduction to the subject of his research in a calm and very detailed way. As a reviewer, I would like to emphasise that although the introduction is rather long, i.e. the first part of the doctoral thesis, it is a very important part and of the whole doctoral thesis, which helps to understand the context of the whole work. Tomáš Mareš succeeded in presenting the aims of his research and explaining the structure of his work.

After „*Introduction*“, author present first chapter of his PhD thesis entitled „*Literature review*“, which is also profound and useful part and which consist from several subchapters „1.1 Research Area Delimitation“, 1.2. 1.2 The Offensive Instrumentalization of Mass Media in Russian Foreign Policy – The Soft Power Modality“, 1.3.The Offensive Instrumentalization of Mass Media in Russian Foreign Policy – The Information Warfare Modality and 1.4. „Current State of Knowledge, Gap, and Problem Statement“. This also helps to understand context and explains literal basis of research.

The second chapter „*Methodological Context and Research Design*“ is focusing on methodological issues and also aims and dising of research. P. 30 author posed the right and

relevant questions: „Hence, to push our knowledge ahead we have to concentrate our further research activities on the following questions: (1) How should we define the ‘effectiveness’ in terms of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in purpose-driven strategies? (2) What factors directly influence the (level of) effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization on the information-psychological level in offensive foreign policy strategies? (3) Under what conditions is the instrumentalization of mass media on the information-psychological level in offensive foreign policy strategies feasible?“ (Mareš 2024, p. 30). On the same page (p. 40) author presents also very clearly the aims of his PhD dissertation which is according to him is „to generate and test a general analytical model that can be applied to assess the ‘efficiency potential’ of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns (on the information-psychological level) carried out by the RF (or by any other state at hand) targeting foreign audiences within diverse countries in various geopolitical directions“ (Mareš 2024, 40) and thereafter authors list PhD thesis objectives.

Perhaps it will be useful to combine the two parts mentioned above (*Introduction* and *Methodological Context* ...) into one chapter called "Introduction", then the work will be more clearly structured, but it is not obligatory, only reviewer's suggestion.

The third chapter called „*Theoretical-Analytical Background: The Effectiveness of Mass Media Instrumentalization in Offensive Foreign Policy Strategies*“ consist of several subchapters as well: 3.1. Conceptual Framework, 3.1.1 The Power of Information, 3.1.1.1 Cognitive Effects and Memory Performance, 3.1.1.2 Attitude Forming and Behavioral Activation, 3.1.1.3 The Conceptual Layer Referring to the Power of Information, 3.1.2 The Power over Information, 3.1.2.1 Agenda-Setting and Media Messaging, 3.1.2.2 First-Level Agenda-Setting: Salience Management, 3.1.2.3 Second-Level Agenda-Setting: Framing Management, 3.1.2.4 The Conceptual Layer Referring to the Power over Information, 3.1.3 The Conceptual Framework Constituting the Effectiveness of Mass Media Instrumentalization in Purpose-Driven Strategies, 3.2 Variables and Conditions.

Last but not least, the heart of this thesis is definitely Chapter 4. "*Case Study: Russian Media and the Case of Ukraine*", which is the most interesting and one of most significant parts of PhD thesis which also contributes to a new knowledge about Russian influence activities in Ukraine. Chapter 4 was followed by Conclusion and Summary.

The content of the work is of good quality level and the work is interesting to read, it is well structured as a whole, author thesis presented original approach. Discussions are well-conceptualised, well-balanced and the generally whole approach is competent, well-considered and substantial, including some innovative aspects of this scientific analysis. Methods used in the thesis are relevant and well justified.

### **3. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE (quality of language, citation style, graphics, formal aspects etc.):**

The linguistic quality of the thesis is quite good, there are no errors, mistake in body of text or in citations or in footnotes, and all formal aspects seem to be correct. The thesis is well formatted. The few typing errors and mistakes in the thesis are not noticeable, are few in number and do not interfere with the reading of the text.

### **4. STATEMENT ON THE ORIGINALITY OF THE THESIS**

This PhD thesis is an original and profound work. No plagiarism or suspicious parts of the text have been detected by reviewer and plagiarism detection programs used by reviewer.

## 5. SHORT COMMENTS BY THE REVIEWER (overall impression, strengths and weaknesses, originality of ideas, achievement of the research objective etc.):

As reviewer I got a very good impression about PhD thesis of Mgr. Mareš. Doctoral student Mareš presents in his thesis a strong argumentation, solid analytical work, relevant theoretical approach and methodology, as well as literature base and deep understanding of Russian harmful information influence activities in Ukraine, how the Russian "ecosystem" of the Russian propaganda system works. These all are definitely strengths of this thesis.

Page 6 author rightly claims *“As a result, we also lack the ability (given by suitable analytical instrument) to systematically analyze actual situational settings in different media markets, anticipate future flashpoints (represented by those national media markets that are prone to the media attacks launched by hostile states), and assess the potential effects such malign media strategies can have in individual cases. For these reasons, the dissertation thesis suggests that the thorough understanding of ‘effectiveness’ in the given context should become a new hot spot attracting subsequent research efforts”*.

PhD thesis shows very coherent analysis of Russian media sources operating in Ukraine before 2014, used by the Kremlin for influence campaigns targeting Ukrainian audiences. Empirical data is impressive and solid, and analysis of this data is relevant and adequate. I think the author succeeds in his work by showing how malicious media strategies can work (using Russian example, i.e. how Russian influenced Ukraine).

Therefore, as a reviewer, I will see some parts of analysis or overview of events that followed 2014 in Ukraine, especially trends and developments of Russian influence activities and hybrid war against Ukraine after annexation of Crimea until full-scale war was started by Russia on 24 February 2024. But this is not critics, but suggestion for future scientific work.

## 6. QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS THAT SHOULD BE ADDRESSED DURING THE DEFENCE:

As reviewer I have several questions, suggestions and some critical remarks as well. There are following:

- What are the main factors of effectiveness of mass media instrumentalisation at the information-psychological level in offensive foreign policy strategies?
- Why did the author not focus on the period 2014-2024 or 2014-2022? Why did the study not focus on the period that began on 24 February 2022, when the Russian Federation launched its indiscriminate military aggression against Ukraine (the Kremlin went to war, of course, in 2014)?
- P. 3 author write: *“The importance of mass media and media-based information manipulation in political and military conflicts has significantly increased during the past two decades, mainly as a consequence of the Russian efforts to develop innovative ways of mass media instrumentalization in (its) foreign policy strategies that have become particularly evident from the first presidential term of Vladimir Putin (since 2000)”*.
- Yes, I agree with this statement, but the phenomenon of media-based information manipulation in political and military conflicts is not new and was used long before Putin in USSR and Tzarist Russia (see e.g., Асташов, А. 2012. Пропаганда на Русском фронте в годы Первой мировой войны, Москва: Спецкниг). Already during the Tsarist and Soviet times, Russian military theorists General V. K. Triandofillov (1894-1931), General M. N. Tukhachevsky (1893-1937), General A. A. Svetchin (1878-1938) dealt in their works with aspects of info-psychological influence (see e.g., Триандафиллов В.К. 1926. Размах операций современных армий. Военный вестник, Москва; Свечин, А. 1927. Стратегия. Военный вестник, Москва). The Russian and Soviet strategist and

military theoretician A. Svechin, whom Russian General V. Gerasimov also quotes in his famous text (2013), was paying special attention to the role of strategic aspects of info-psychological influencing (J. W. Kipp, 'General-Major A. A. Svechin and Modern Warfare: Military History and Military Theory', in K. D. Lee (Ed.) Aleksandr A. Svechin. Strategy (Minneapolis, Minnesota: East View Publications; Свечин, А. 1927. Стратегия. Военный вестник, Москва). Svechin argued: "war is not only an arena of armed forces" and in his work *Strategy* in 1927 he accentuated the role of information and psychological influence in Soviet warfare: "It is necessary to be a psychologist, to know the opponents" (Свечин, А. 1927. Стратегия. Военный вестник, Москва).

- Other Russia's military theorist Y. E. Messner's (1891-1974) contribution to the development of hybrid and information warfare ideas has also played crucial role in development of hybrid warfare in Russia. Messner's non-traditional view divides war into 4 different categories: war for the unconscious, war of rebellion (*mjatezhvoina*), war from a distance or non-contact war (Месснер, Е. 1960. Мятеж – имя третьей всемирной. Буэнос-Айрес; Месснер, Е. 2005. Хочешь мира, победи мятежвойну! Творческое наследие Е. Э. Месснера. Москва: Военный Университет, Русский путь). The importance of information in asymmetric conflicts has been addressed by several modern Soviet and Russian military scholars such as S. G. Chekinov, S. A. Bogdanov, General Makhmut A. Gareyev, they all have emphasized the role of information in modern Russian warfare. E.g., Gareev has argued that it is important to 'develop new tools related to "soft power" – wars must be fought not only with military means, but also with cybernetic, informational and others – this is our weakest point'. Gareev wrote in 2003 that „as far as the means of warfare are concerned, the distinction between direct and indirect actions in strategy is changing. Indirect (non-linear) actions, which are concerned with influencing, disarming and undermining the political, economic, moral and psychological opponent from within, have always played a major role“ (Гареев, М. 2003. Характер будущих войн. – Право и безопасность, № 1–2 (6–7) (See more on this issue Корѳтин, Igor; Sazonov, Vladimir (2023). The Russian military's use of history to create a post-Soviet identity: The Development of Conceptual Understandings from the 1990s to the Mid-2000s. The Journal of Slavic Military Studies, 36 (4), 410–434)
- P. 5. I also totally agree with authors statement that "despite the fact Russia's hybrid activities against Ukraine started almost after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991". But what was the main reason why Russian started with hybrid activity against Ukraine already in 1991 not later, e.g, in 1993?
- How author undrestand concept GKW - global knowledge warfare? GKW used e.g. by Holger Mölder and Eric Shiraev and in in Shiraev, E., & Mölder, H. (2020). Global Knowledge Warfare: Using Strategic Imagination to Harness Uncertainty and Fear. The Cypher Brief Mölder and in H., Sazonov, V., Chochia, A., & Kerikmäe, T. (2021). The Russian Federation in Global Knowledge Warfare: Influence Operations in Europe and Its Neighbourhood. Springer Nature).
- P. 51 author presents *Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework Constituting the Effectiveness of Mass Media Instrumentalization in Purpose-Driven Strategies*. Author should more clearly explain function and purposis of this figure? How he composed it? The same is with Figure 2 on pages 56 entitled „The effectiveness of mass media instrumentalization in offensive foreign policy strategies“ and with figure (p 58) as well (Figure (3): *General analytical model for the assessment of the 'efficiency potential' of (real or prospective) offensive foreign mass media campaigns (on the information-psychological level)*).
- P. 62 author write: „In that context, we should accentuate here, that the case study is oriented, above all, on the examination of the centrally implemented strategy through directly controlled mass media assets and thus it does not deal with decentralized media sources like YouTube, Telegram, Facebook, Twitter, other internet-based social networks, or individuals communicating through similar means“. But I understood that author was

analyzing Russia-owned social media platforms - Odnoklassniki or VKontakte, which is most probably controlled by Russian special services? About social media in hybrid activities see Thomas Elkjer Nissen 2016. Social media's role in 'Hybrid Strategies', NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence <https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/social-medias-role-in-hybrid-strategies/179>

- What is the author's suggestion on how to build a better resilience and countering strategy in the European Union to protect Europe from the hostile disinformation coming from Russia and China and other revisionist powers?
- P 155 author in conclusion made a very important and right observations based on his deep analysis: *"Finally, the thesis applied the generated analytical model to the case of the Russian mass media in Ukraine before the conflict outbreak in 2014. Precisely speaking, the case study provided a thorough and evidence-based assessment of the efficiency potential of the Russian state-controlled mass media network in the Ukrainian media market in the immediate pre-conflict period (2013 and early December 2014). In this context, the case study reviewed the changes initiated by the Russian state authorities in the domestic Russian mass media sector, interconnected these internal developments with the evolution of the Russian foreign policy strategies, and associated them with a purpose-driven transfer of the mass media influence into the Ukrainian media market. The results of the case study confirmed that, in 2013, the RF was perfectly prepared to launch a highly efficient offensive mass media campaign in Ukrainian media market as it was able to set a strong hierarchical control over the domestic news TV and Internet-based media outlets, manage a high level of centralized coordination among them in pursuing state interests articulated by the Russian political elites, reach an enormous level of expansion of the state-controlled mass media in the Ukrainian media market, and establish these information sources in Ukraine by gaining extensive viewer popularity and high confidence among Ukrainian audience."* (Mareš 2024, 155). What should have been done for Ukraine to avoid a situation like that of 2013-2014, when Russian information campaigns in Ukraine were effective and when Russia started massive hybrid war against Ukraine? What are the lessons for Europe from your PhD thesis, and are they applicable to improving the security (e.g., in informational environment) of the European Union in countering Russian harmful information activities against the EU and the West more broadly?

## 7. RECOMMENDATION AND SUGGESTED GRADE:

I recommend dissertation of Tomáš Mareš for defense

Date: 1.4.2024

Signature: