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SUPPORT AND COUNTERING RUSSIAN AGGRESSION OR DISCREDITING IMAGE OF UKRAINE IN SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

The relevance of the research topic is caused by the beginning of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Many countries have decided on their role and position regarding the russian-Ukrainian war, have made a lot of efforts and are helping Ukraine in various areas. Spain and Portugal condemned russian aggression in February 2022 and supported Ukraine's desire to become a member of the EU, supported all UN resolutions. Portugal is one of the countries that recognized the Holodomor as genocide and voted for the North Atlantic Council to recognize Ukraine as a member of the NATO enhanced capabilities program.

After the russian invasion of Ukraine, Spain became even more active in foreign policy and began to actively participate in the international politics of the day. In addition, there has been considerable revitalization in Spanish-Ukrainian relations. This is evidenced by two visits of Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez to Ukraine in a year. The latter took place on the eve of the anniversary of the beginning of a full-scale invasion. On February 23, 2023, Pedro Sanchez arrived in Kyiv to meet with President Volodymyr Zelensky and also visited Bucha and Irpen. Spain has joined the tank coalition of countries that will be able to provide Ukraine with tanks to fight the aggressor [4]. The Spanish prime minister tries in every possible way to support Ukraine's desire to join the EU, and of course, clearly expresses its position on the aggression of the russian federation. Spain was even included in the list of 18 countries that will help rebuild Ukraine. The Spanish Kingdom will provide financial assistance for the restoration of infrastructure and objects of Ukrainian heritage.

In 2022, the Portuguese government, together with the Armed Forces, sent weapons and ammunition, personal protective equipment and communications equipment, armored personnel carriers and unmanned aerial

surveillance equipment, medical equipment and first-aid kits to Ukraine. Portugal is part of the new European Union Military Assistance Mission to Ukraine.

As for the narratives of russian propaganda, the manipulation of opinions has occurred at all times, especially due to the emergence of social networks, and international and global media resources – the world's leading countries have more opportunities to influence various political processes. Often, the internal problems of the state come to the fore and shape foreign policy processes both within the country and in the region, involving other countries and international organizations in solving their issues.

As for russian propaganda in Spain and Portugal, the question remains open. For many reasons, discrediting the image of Ukraine through propaganda channels, *russia Today*, *Sputnik Mundo*, *RTVi* remains a problem. So, since the beginning of 2014, there has been an active deployment of information propaganda against Ukraine in Portugal, which has characteristic russian messages and narratives. Signs of targeted negative anti-Ukrainian information influence were noticed by *InformNapalm* volunteers from the Ukrainian diaspora in Portugal. Ukraine is called “the cradle of the world's modern Nazism” and “a training ground for neo-Nazis from all over the world.” Such publications were repeated and provoked a diplomatic scandal. Information attacks are carried out regularly, and sometimes the so-called “Immortal Regiment” provokes clashes on the streets of Lisbon. Propaganda channels often throw in disinformation about accusing Ukrainians of fascism, Nazism and neo-Nazism. One of the most striking examples is Mamadou Ba, known in Portugal for his racist statements, who heads the *SOS RACISMO* organization.

The public organization “Coordination Council of russian compatriots of Portugal” operates in Portugal. The chairman of this association points out that there are 50 thousand “russian speakers” in Portugal, although this is not the case. It framed all Ukrainians as the potential carriers of the “russian World”. The blog created on Facebook by the so-called “Council of compatriots” indicates a new spread of propaganda sources about the Ukrainian diaspora in Portugal to impose on foreign Ukrainians a discussion about the “tolerance” of Russians about to Ukrainians, about the absence of Russian aggression against an independent state [5].

The Ukrainian diaspora of Portugal has repeatedly appealed to the parliament to pay attention to the appearance of fake news and publications

that promote the narratives of the aggressor country-the Russian Federation, which pose a threat not only to Ukraine but also to Portugal itself, the political assets of Portugal itself, which provided and continues to provide political support to Ukraine in the struggle for sovereignty and independence.

Russian Spanish-language channels are also active in Spain, for example, “Sur in Russian” is published as a paper application of the newspaper *Diario Sur*, published in southern Spain, aimed at Russian-speaking immigrants. Unfortunately, submitted articles related to Ukraine are biased, and often contain false information. In most Spanish-language media, news about Ukraine is made by correspondents based in the Russian Federation. It is positive that in Spain, for the first time, the Barcelona High Court issued the first sentence in Spain for spreading fakes, a person who spread false information received a suspended sentence and a fine for publishing fake videos about migrants. Each of these fakes aims to discredit Ukraine, weaken it, and make people believe in an unreal, fictional world imposed by Russian propagandists. In Ukraine, the website “Eastern version” («Східний варіант») has been created, which dispels fakes and shows the untruthfulness of Russian propaganda [2, 3].

Before the start of the full-scale Russian invasion, there was not a single high-level Spanish visit to Ukraine, so for Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, this was the first visit in April 2022 and the second on February 23, 2023. Spain provided Ukraine with military assistance worth more than 300 million euros during 2022. In general, Spain provides Ukraine with military assistance on an unprecedented scale: air defense systems, armored vehicles, ammunition and ammunition, humanitarian aid, etc.

Spain was one of the first countries to join the European Peace Facility (EPF), which was established in March 2021 to expand the European Union’s ability to guarantee security for its citizens and partners. This enabled the EU to provide all types of equipment and infrastructure to the armed forces of EU partners by international law, human rights and international humanitarian law. Spain’s share in the European Peace Fund is 9 percent or 2.5 billion euros [1].

The kingdom of Spain has accepted 160,000 Ukrainian refugees who have been granted temporary protection. Spain’s support is very important for our state in the international arena. On March 31, 2023, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez made an official visit to China to convince the country’s leader Xi Jinping to support peace on the terms of Ukraine. According

to Pedro Sanchez, this visit may reorient China to a pro-European position on Russia's war against Ukraine. Spain considers China's position decisive in ending the war. Also, Spain will preside over the Council of Europe during the second part of 2023, so Ukraine will always be on the agenda during the presidency of the Council of Europe.

Spain has become the last state to join Ukraine's lawsuit against Russia under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which is being considered by the International Court of Justice.

In March 2023, the 28th Ibero-American summit was held, which brought together 22 countries (19 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and 3 countries of the Iberian Peninsula – Spain, Andorra and Portugal). The Ibero-American summits are the highest-level meetings within the framework of the forum of international dialogue, known as the Ibero-American Conference [1].

Many issues related to the development of the region were discussed, but the agenda needed to include the issue of condemning Russian aggression in Ukraine. It was noted that Ukraine is in the focus of attention of the countries of the Ibero-American world, in particular, that Latin American countries could take a more active part in resolving and ending the Russian-Ukrainian war. There was no unambiguity on many issues, and on the development of a common position, but there was “the peace plan for Ukraine is an urgent issue” and “we must make efforts and not allow the Russian narrative to influence the development and decision-making” [6, 7].

So, it can be argued that Spain and Portugal are trying to increase the level of Spanish nationalism among the country's population and prevent the division of the territory into separate, independent regions. Spain has been and still is an active actor on the world stage, and Russian aggression has prompted the government to reconsider Spanish-Ukrainian relations. After a long pause, the Spanish Kingdom has stepped up relations with Ukraine and is fully providing tremendous support in terms of financial assistance, the supply of military equipment and the restoration of critical infrastructure. On this side, Spain becomes a reliable partner for Ukraine.

So, the support of Spain and Portugal is very important, since these geographically remote states are a powerful international actor in European security policy. The spread of disinformation and discrediting the image of Ukraine is actively promoted in Spanish-speaking and Portuguese-speaking countries. It is necessary to respond and take all possible measures to con-

vey truthful information both among Ukrainians living abroad and residents of these states.

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