

The media on the “warpath”

Swiss mass media: a transatlantic transmission belt?

by Thomas Scherr

Even though today we are holding one's breath in suspense by military operations and the question of the aggressor seems to be determined, the responsibility of the media for the tensions towards Russia, which they have actively built-up in the past months and years, must be broached. They have hunted down politics and thus serve as a kind of transmission belt of transatlantic military strategies.

Although it is hardly possible today to reflect on the one-sidedness of media coverage against Russia *before* and *during* the military invasion, given the aggravated mood, this becomes all the more necessary. The sentiments towards Russia did not fall out of the sky. Its antecedents are documented.¹ Here, the focus is on the past months. The more recent construction of a hostile image of Russia began with the so-called colour revolution in Kiev in 2004. Shortly before that, Russia and *Vladimir Putin* were “targeted”. Ten years later, Western coverage intensified during the Maidan coup which was prepared by the US with 5 billion US dollars.

How about Russian missiles in Canada?

Politically speaking, it was clear from the outset that Russia could not accept Ukraine's Western affiliation to NATO. For that would ultimately mean US nuclear missiles stationed directly in front of Moscow. Conversely, the madness becomes clear: the USA would never tolerate Russian missiles in Canada. But US policy sticks to its agenda against Russia.² There are no compromises these days either.

Mainstream news

During the Maidan coup, the majority of Western media veered uncritically towards the US course. They concealed the fact that the coup had been prepared by US intelligence agencies, that \$5 billion from US “foundations” had been invested in the preparations for the coup, that the *Biden* family is involved in dubious business dealings in Ukraine (Hunter Biden) and that it was an unconstitutional coup. They also kept quiet all these years about the new regime's reliance on massive help from neo-Nazi gangs, some of which are embedded in the Ukrainian army, and they kept quiet

about the Ukrainian government's sabotage, with US backing, of the internationally binding Minsk agreements.

Since 2014 – severe bias

This information would have damaged the US approach to engage European states and their populations in the eastward enlargement. It would not have suited the spin and it has therefore hardly been discussed. Anyone who wanted comprehensive information at the time was forced to rely on the internet. The serious bias in the reporting of the so-called leading media such as “Der Spiegel”, the “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” the “Süddeutsche Zeitung” or the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” became more and more obvious.

Pack behaviour of the media

The media researcher *Uwe Krüger* investigated this pack behaviour of the Western European media. In his remarkable work, “*Meinungsmacht. Der Einfluss von Eliten auf Leitmedien und Alpha-Journalisten – Eine kritische Netzwerkanalyse*” (2019) (“Power of Opinion. The influence of elites on leading media and alpha journalists – a critical network analysis”), he worked out in detail the *entanglements of big European media houses with US elites*.³ Although these linkages were already known,⁴ Krüger's analysis contributes significantly to a more precise understanding of the processes in big European media houses.⁵

News directly from the CIA?

Apart from the “pack behaviour” of the editorial offices and the financial entanglements of the media houses, the increasing uniformity of news about Russia has been striking since 2014. The spectrum of information from news portals like *Keystone-SDA* or *RND.de* is strikingly narrow and one-sided. Yet this information is processed further by the editorial offices.⁶ For some time now, it has been suspected that disinformation strategies from the orbit of intelligence organisations play a greater role in this levelling than has generally been assumed. In 2016, for example, the *East StratCom Task Force* started its subversive work in response to the Ukraine crisis. Such organisations are commissioned with strategically

feeding “information”.⁷ In plain language: *disinformation* is systematically spread.

Switched to war propaganda

In the late 2020s, mainstream media coverage began to escalate to a higher level.⁸ The “Navalny case” is representative of this.⁹ Negative sentiments towards Russia were pushed. In the political sphere, the *Selensky* government simultaneously sabotaged the negotiations set out in the Minsk format in violation of international law, with the result that the situation in the Donbass continued to escalate militarily.

Faced with the geopolitical consequences, Russia finally insisted on its security interests and on 17 December demanded that the USA provide written guarantees. Moscow’s political demand was hushed up in the media or only presented in a truncated manner. NATO did not respond to the security demands and reckoned with a military escalation, which has now occurred at the end of February.

Media with an edge

In mid-December 2021 – i.e. with Russia’s demand for security guarantees – the media campaign in the West took on a *war-preparatory* character with the entire spectrum of classic manipulation techniques (one-sidedness, omission of news, emotionalisation, black-and-white thinking, instilling opinions, spreading fake news, constantly repeating false assertions).¹⁰ In this process, the media houses outdid themselves with a warmongering acuity that would have been unthinkable six months earlier. Especially numerous editorials from the editors-in-chief displayed a severe edge.

Medial “black and white” thinking

Every level-headed voice that dared to call for de-escalation was suspected of pro-Russian partisanship and thus discredited by the popular media. Politicians had to apologise in the mass media if they advocated diplomatic solutions with Russia – and many Swiss media were no laudable exception. The medial “black-and-white thinking” had a direct impact on political debates. Quite sensible proposals were dropped from the public discussion from the outset: a malicious merit of the mass media!

Day after day: “evil Putin”

Since January 2022, for example, the Swiss “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” has left out hardly a day without

presenting a hostile image of Russia across the first three pages. This, almost painfully borders on brainwashing! At the same time, every possible argument that could help to build some understanding is twisted from the very outset.¹¹ – The “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” has seen better days.¹² But the other big media houses are not far behind the NZZ – with devastating consequences.

Swiss standards are different

In general, the Swiss media groups seem to be having a hard time with a distanced and differentiated view of the world¹³ – a far cry from the level of *Iren Meier* or *Ulrich Tilgner*¹⁴ or the world view of *Carl Spitteler*¹⁵ or that of *Jean Rodolphe de Salis*.¹⁶ The present time will go down in history as the lowest point of Swiss journalism – apart from a few positive exceptions.

Media hunting down politicians

If one looks back at reporting from mid-December 2021 to mid-February 2022, one must soberly conclude: “war propaganda” has been going on for some time. Even if this word sounds very unflattering, it applies by historical comparison. One consequence of this is that more and more people switch off news broadcasts or no longer read the front-page stories. They can no longer stand the uniform hate. But the poison of one-sided indoctrination is working. “Black and white thinking” is flourishing. A dream of every authoritarian regime.

The path to de-escalation and peace is blocked by the media

Since the Russian invasion of Ukrainian territory at the end of February 2022, further inhibitions have fallen in the media. The certainty of being on the “right side” with “allies” is visibly disinhibiting: false reports and distortions are now joined by speculative reports that appear to be descriptions of facts. Now one can count the hours until the first bloodthirsty reports of extremely “brutal” offences appear, in order to be able to engrave the given hostile image even deeper. – The way back to negotiations, to de-escalation and to peace is thus blocked by the media.

EU’s war-mongering path

With their escalating reporting, the mass media actively contribute to keeping political decision-makers on following a course of war. How much influence they had on the Federal Council’s decision to follow the EU’s warmongering path al-

most without resistance remains an open question. There were other options. Apparently, the media overkill: “Federal Council must fly the flag”, was enough to grossly tarnish cornerstones of federal foreign policy. (The archives will perhaps reveal in 30 years’ time what other pressures were exerted on the Federal Council).

Against the media war hysteria

The social-psychological mechanisms of war propaganda set in now are a kind of mass psychological war hysteria, as profoundly portrayed by the French Nobel Prize winner *Romain Rolland* in his novel “Clérambault”¹⁷ – The Story of an Independent Spirit During the War. People suddenly give away their wealth, their lives and the lives of their neighbour all too willingly. Rolland makes the media-enhanced affects, such as fear, violence, irrationalism and intolerance, tangible as mass psychological instruments that make war possible and keep it alive.

War only possible with mass media

It is simple: without war propaganda no war! Without a population “being keyed to”, no widely accepted war preparations or actions. This precedes emotional-mental “armament”. So banal, so murderous. How else could one justify the war victims calculated in advance, – if not through an aggressive concept of the enemy? And here lies the historical responsibility of the media in making use of mass-psychology. It is all the more important to restore reason and humanity. Society has accumulated too much knowledge to allow itself to be driven into a final nuclear war.

(Translation “Swiss Standpoint”)

¹ Cf. Hannes Hofbauer. *Feindbild Russland*. Vienna 2016

² In US military doctrines since 1944, one can find the constant goal of controlling or destroying the Soviet Union and Russia.
Cf. for example: Wolfgang Effenberger. *Is there a chance for peace in Europe?* <https://swiss-standpoint.ch/news-detailansicht-en-international/is-there-a-chance-for-peace-in-europe.html> from 8 January 2022
Extensive account with many sources, cf. *Schwarzbuch EU & Nato. Warum die Welt keinen Frieden findet*. Hör-Grenzhausen 2020, p.360ff
Cf. also: US-Kongress resolution against Russia. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/house-resolution/758/titles> from 12 April 2014

³ Cf. Uwe Krüger. *Mainstream. Warum wir den Medien nicht mehr trauen*. Munich 2016.
Cf. *Meinungsmacht*. Reihe des Instituts für Praktische Journalismus- und Kommunikationsforschung (IPJ) Volume 9. 2013.

⁴ Cf. e.g. Peter Scholl-Latour’s assessment. *Der Fluch der bösen Tat. Das Scheitern des Westens im Orient*. Berlin 2014. p.17ff

⁵ Cf. Udo Ulfkotte. *Gekaufte Journalisten. Wie Politiker, Geheimdienste und Hochfinanz Deutschlands Medien lenken*. Rottenburg 2014. The late FAZ journalist Ulfkotte exemplifies the mechanisms that Krüger elaborates in his analysis.

⁶ Exemplary or a reduced selection of reports are “sdaKeystone” or the “Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland”. In the news of the German-language mass media, there will hardly be any reports that fall outside this pre-defined narrow spectrum.

⁷ Cf. Wolfgang Bittner. “Die Eroberung Europas durch die USA”, p. 168 f., as well as the same in “Göttinger Tageblatt” from 24 February 2016, p.2
Cf. Marcus Klöckner: <https://www.heise.de/tp/features/Unabhaengige-Medien-und-Medienvertreter-im-Dienstes-Strategischen-Kommunikationsteams-Ost-3376363.html> from 30 October 2015
Cf. also Withney Webb: <https://www.rubikon.news/artikel/propagandakrieg-fur-big-pharma> from 24 November 2020
Cf. Robert Seidel. *Media in the information war*. <https://swiss-standpoint.ch/news-detailansicht-en-gesellschaft/media-in-the-information-war.html>

⁸ Cf. Wolfgang Effenberger, *Unscrupulous elites rush Europe and Russia into war* from 18 June 2021
<https://swiss-standpoint.ch/news-detailansicht-en-international/conscienceless-elites-rush-europe-and-russia-into-war.html>

⁹ Cf. Robert Seidel. *Media in the information war*. <https://swiss-standpoint.ch/news-detailansicht-en-gesellschaft/media-in-the-information-war.html> 15 March 2021

¹⁰ On the mechanisms: Jens Wernicke (Hg.). *Lügen die Medien? Propaganda, Rudeljournalismus und der Kampf um die öffentliche Meinung*. Westend. Frankfurt 2017

¹¹ Exemplary for spindoctering: Hannes Adomeit, *Putin beruft sich auf eine Zusage, die es nie gab*. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* from 21 February 2022, p. 3

¹² An example of what journalism from Switzerland can look like: Willy Bretscher. *Im Sturm von Krise und Krieg. Neue Zürcher Zeitung. 1933–1944. Siebzig Leitartikel von Willy Bretscher*. (Seventy Editorials by Willy Bretscher) published by *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. Zürich 1987

¹³ Cf. Christian Müller. *Was ist mit den Schweizer Medien los?* <https://www.infosperber.ch/medien/medienkritik/was-ist-mit-diesen-schweizer-medien-los/> from 14 February 2022

¹⁴ *Iren Meier* and *Ulrich Tilgner* worked for decades as foreign correspondents for the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation SRG. Their reporting is representative of the tradition of cosmopolitan, differentiated Swiss journalism.

¹⁵ Cf. Carl Spitteler. *Unser Schweizer Standpunkt*. Speech by Carl Spitteler delivered at the New Helvetic Society on 14 December 1914 in Zurich. <https://swiss-standpoint.ch/why-swiss-standpoint.html>

¹⁶ Cf. Jean Rudolph von Salis. *Kriege und Frieden in Europa. Politische Schriften und Reden 1938–1988*. Orell Füssli 1989

¹⁷ Romain Rolland. *Clérambault. Geschichte eines freien Gewissens im Krieg*. Reinbeck. 1988. (First publication in French 1920)