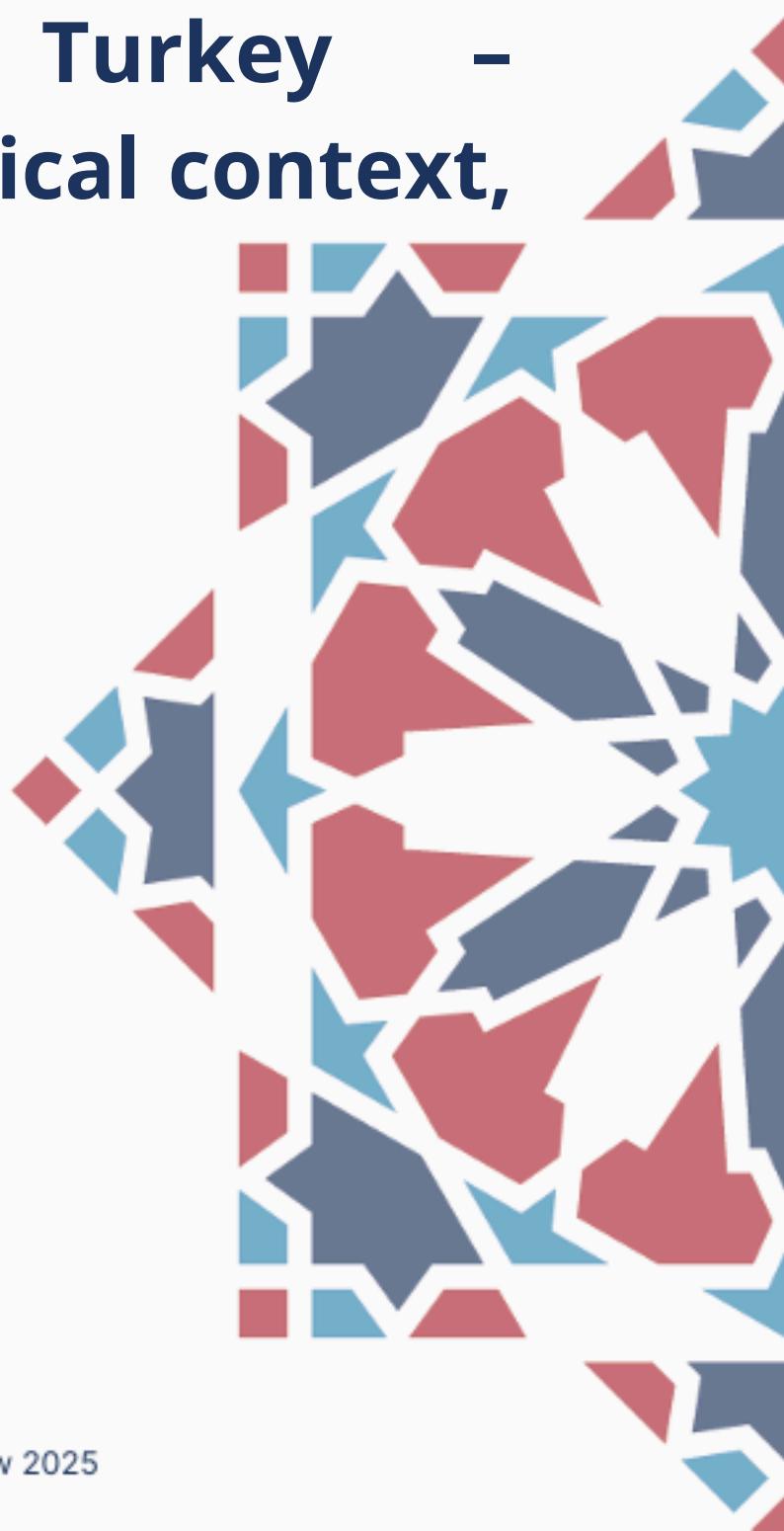


## Report

# Russian propaganda efforts directed at Turkey – objectives, political context, narratives



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## About the project



Instytut Badań  
nad Turcją



Disinformation  
in MENAT



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The publication solely reflects the views of the author and should not be regarded as representing the official position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland.

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# Introduction

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For years, the Russian Federation has pursued an active information policy towards the international community aimed at advancing its political objectives. Its most aggressive efforts are directed at the West (EU and NATO member states), which the Kremlin sees as its main adversary. However, its information campaigns also target countries Russia considers allies or neutral — including states in Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Moscow aims to shape the global information landscape to its advantage; its ambitions in this sphere are global rather than regional.

According to Russia's own political declarations and doctrinal documents, information activities are regarded as a natural tool for achieving political goals and as a means of supporting other diplomatic and military measures. They are part of the wider array of hybrid actions—known in Russian terminology as active measures. In collaboration with the security services, the state employs these methods to promote its objectives domestically, regionally, and internationally. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 triggered an unprecedented intensification of these efforts, as Russia views this conflict as absolutely essential. Its outcome will shape not only the country's international reputation but also the future of the political regime and of Putin himself, who has depicted the conflict as existential.

Turkey is also a target of Russia's information campaigns, and Moscow's attitude towards Ankara is particularly complex. On one hand, Turkey is perceived as a pragmatic trade partner—especially in energy cooperation—and in aiding the circumvention of Western economic sanctions. On the other hand, as a NATO member and a regional rival, it provokes caution and sometimes outright hostility from the Kremlin. This mix of cooperation and rivalry makes Turkey, despite its alliance commitments, a potential mediator through which Russia might pursue its interests against the Western alliance. Moscow's main strategy in this regard is to foster divisions and existing tensions among NATO members. The Kremlin's long-term aim remains to weaken—and eventually dismantle—the Alliance while simultaneously strengthening its own position within the European security framework.

# Chapter 1

## The Kremlin's information activities abroad – tools and aims

Russia's informational operations are planned and centrally coordinated by the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation, executed comprehensively through what are called active measures. Their objectives include, among others, disorienting and intimidating states and societies perceived as hostile, as well as pressuring them into decisions favourable to Russia. Another key task is promoting Russia's own point of view and persuading partners of its arguments to ensure their political decisions align with Moscow's aims. Alongside outward-facing actions (towards the international environment), the Kremlin employs indoctrination and censorship at home to foster public support for aggressive decisions and prevent outbreaks of discontent.

To influence the international environment, Russia employs a comprehensive, well-organised, and generously state-funded system of influence that integrates political, media, cultural, religious, economic, and intelligence tools. The Kremlin's main instrument is its foreign-language media outlets designed specifically for international audiences. The most prominent of these is the television station RT (formerly Russia Today), established in 2005, which broadcasts news programmes, political talk shows, and documentaries around the clock. The station and its online platform of the same name are owned by the Russian international news agency Rossiya Segodnya, funded from the state budget. Since its inception, the editor-in-chief of RT has been Margarita Simonyan, one of the Kremlin's leading propagandists. The station produces content on a broad range of topics, occasionally subtly integrating Russian narratives. According to journalists familiar with RT's internal environment, one of its strengths lies in its specific operational approach: it reportedly offers very high salaries and relative journalistic independence, allowing journalists to develop their skills and pursue their preferred topics most of the time, while being required to produce content aligned with the editorial policy (and thus the Kremlin's) only occasionally.

Another important tool in the Kremlin's toolkit is Sputnik, a government news agency launched in 2014, along with a network of radio stations and a multilingual news website—all of which are owned by the state-run Rossiya Segodnya agency. Sputnik provides content in over 30 languages and has regional offices in many countries, including the United States (Washington), China (Beijing), France (Paris), Germany (Berlin), Egypt (Cairo), and the United Kingdom (London and Edinburgh), as well as in Turkey (Istanbul). Its editorial headquarters are located in Moscow. Following Russia's aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, Sputnik was designated by the European Union as a source of Russian disinformation just days after the attack and was banned from operating within EU territory.

An institution that plays a significant role in Russia's propaganda and international influence system is the state-funded agency Rossotrudnichestvo. In its current form, the agency—officially named the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation—has been operating since 2008. Officially, its mandate is to conduct what is known as cultural diplomacy, meaning the promotion of a positive image of Russia and the Russian language abroad, as well as supporting cooperation with Russia on the international stage. This model of activity continues long-standing Soviet and Russian traditions of using language, culture, religion, and diplomatic relations to achieve political aims. The agency carries out its work through a network of official representations abroad—the so-called Russian Houses. Today, nearly 90 such facilities operate worldwide[1].

In practice, however, Rossotrudnichestvo is involved in spreading Russian propaganda and exerting political influence, and—as has been demonstrated in the case of Ukraine—in supporting operations carried out by intelligence agencies. Occasionally, Rossotrudnichestvo employees become embroiled in espionage scandals. For instance, in 2013, U.S. authorities accused Yuriy Zaitsev, the head of the Russian Center of Science and Culture in Washington (a Rossotrudnichestvo facility), of using a scholarship programme organising trips to Russia as a cover for recruiting young Americans. Rossotrudnichestvo was alleged to have arranged and funded trips for 130 U.S. citizens, offering language courses, stays in luxury hotels, a rich cultural programme, and, in some cases, the prospect of further cooperation[2].



*The Rossotrudnichestvo logo indicates that the organisation has an international presence and advocates for peace. Source: [Исполнительный комитет Содружества Независимых Государств](#)*

[1] "Что такое Русский дом и как работают представительства Россотрудничества", 23.04.2025, [Русский дом: что это, значение, как работают представительства Россотрудничества за рубежом — РБК](#)

[2] M. Redden, "FBI Probing Whether Russia Used Cultural Junkets to Recruit American Intelligence Assets", 23.08.2013, [FBI Probing Whether Russia Used Cultural Junkets to Recruit American Intelligence Assets – Mother Jones](#)

As a result, in 2016, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on countering propaganda, recognising Rossotrudnichestvo as one of the tools of Russian propaganda. Following the outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine, on 21 July 2022, the Council of the European Union imposed sanctions on the agency for actively supporting or implementing policies that undermine Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence.

A function similar to Rossotrudnichestvo is performed by the Russkiy Mir Foundation (Russian World). Launched in 2007 on the Kremlin's initiative, it serves as a tool of Russian soft power. Officially, it promotes the Russian language and culture. In practice, its activities are varied: it funds educational, cultural, and academic projects; it also supports ideological narratives—such as the concept of the "Russian World" (russkij mir)—which help justify Russia's international influence; and it creates networks of influence aligned with the Kremlin's interests, especially among intellectual circles, diaspora organisations, and educational institutions abroad. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the EU concluded that the organisation's activities had gone beyond traditional cultural diplomacy and had become a tool of hybrid warfare used by Russia against the West. Consequently, the Russkiy Mir Foundation was subjected to EU sanctions in July 2022.

Another institution active in carrying out Russia's international information policy is the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, which is the most influential religious organisation in Russia and throughout the post-Soviet space. Church representatives have supported the war and justified Russia's aggressive policies since the start of the invasion, sacralising the conflict in Ukraine and depicting it as a religious struggle. As a religious organisation, the Church maintains parishes and representations in many countries and participates in cultural activities that promote Orthodoxy, Russian culture, and "traditional values". Around these facilities abroad, the Kremlin aims to mobilise Russian-speaking diasporas and Russia-friendly communities to establish networks of supporters. These structures have been used to carry out hostile actions and intelligence operations, as evidenced by information obtained by the Ukrainian authorities concerning preparations for the annexation of Crimea. Some diversionary activities were undertaken through Church-related structures, including claims of organising pilgrimages to Orthodox relics[3].

The influence toolkit used by Russia also includes working with local media outlets that focus on domestic issues and broadcast in national languages. From the Kremlin's perspective, their importance lies in the fact that they do not have obvious links to Moscow (being seen as local and trustworthy by their communities) and have a deep understanding of the immediate socio-political environment. The Kremlin seeks to identify such outlets and form commercial partnerships with them, providing content created by its own media. These so-called proxy media can reach audiences who would never access RT or Sputnik content and can subtly promote viewpoints aligned with Russia's interests.

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[3] Разведка с иконами в руках. Как в 2014-м Россия «работала» в Крыму под прикрытием Московского патриархата”, 1.03.2021, <https://ru.krymr.com/a/razvedka-krym-2014-russia-okkupatsiya-pod-prikrytiem-tserkvi/31124680.html>

Additionally, Russia utilises networks of sympathetic experts, journalists, and local influencers who collaborate with the Kremlin on commercial terms—sometimes receiving significant compensation. Such cooperation may be initiated by Russian intelligence services. Recently, however, these relationships have more often been established through seemingly Kremlin-unrelated commercial companies operating in the PR and new-technology sectors, giving the collaboration a more "innocent" and business-like appearance. The mechanisms behind this kind of partnership are described in detail in testimony from a U.S. FBI agent who investigated Russian information operations in the United States as part of Operation Doppelgänger.

The Kremlin also employs troll farms and bot networks, whose online influence is amplified by AI tools. These technologies allow Russia to optimise both costs and reach; when narratives are propagated in this way, traditional limitations such as national borders and foreign languages become less distinct. Most of the tools mentioned above are universal and are widely used by Russia on the international stage. They also target Turkish political elites and society — a country that is important to Russia but a demanding partner.

# Chapter 2

## Relations between Russia and Turkey – the Context of Information Operations

For Russia, Turkey is a significant political and economic partner whose goodwill—despite differences in interests and regional rivalry—the Kremlin is currently eager to secure for pragmatic reasons. This stance has been reinforced by the war Russia has initiated against Ukraine. Its outcome is of utmost importance to the Kremlin, as it will influence the future internal stability of the regime and Vladimir Putin's standing among both the elite and the wider public.

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Western nations, led by the EU, imposed a series of sanctions on Moscow, leaving the Kremlin somewhat isolated on the international stage. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been the sole NATO leader who, since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion, has routinely met with Vladimir Putin. Additionally, Turkey made several efforts to mediate between the conflicting parties, with some meetings between Ukrainian and Russian delegations held in Istanbul. Turkey also participated in the Black Sea Grain Initiative and acted as an intermediary in prisoner exchanges.

For Russia, it is crucial that Turkey, despite its close cooperation with the West and its status as a NATO member, did not join the sanctions imposed on Moscow following the invasion. Ankara's stance undermines unity within the North Atlantic Alliance, which Moscow considers an opportunity to further its political aims and extend influence. Disrupting Western alliances such as NATO and the EU, stopping Western support for Ukraine, and forcing Kyiv's capitulation are currently among Russia's main objectives on the international stage.

Equally important is the partial alignment of values and the personal relationship between the two leaders. Erdoğan's model of governance—regularly criticised in the West—is entirely accepted by Putin, who himself heads an authoritarian regime. Putin does not criticise his counterpart; on the contrary, he offered explicit support to Erdoğan during the 2016 coup attempt, a fact he has repeatedly emphasised during bilateral meetings<sup>[4]</sup>. At the diplomatic level and within Russian propaganda, the narrative of shared values between the two countries is frequently promoted. These values are broadly defined, encompassing traditional social norms, "strong-handed" governance, and scepticism towards the liberal West. Both states are convinced that international relations should shift towards multipolarity and that the West's role in the global system will inevitably decline.

[4] "Путин сказал, что первым поддержал Эрдогана во время мятежа", 9.08.2016,  
<https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-37023340>



*Photo of the meeting between Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan during the SCO summit in China in September 2025. Source: [Photo of the meeting between Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan during the SCO summit in China in September 2025. Source: http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/77893](#)*

A key area of cooperation is economic relations, particularly the export of energy resources, for which Turkey is an important recipient. Following Western sanctions imposed on Russia after the 2022 invasion, Turkey became Russia's second-largest trading partner, as Moscow lost access to key European markets. Ankara has also become a major intermediary in re-exporting Russian energy resources to global markets. At the same time, it plays a crucial role in importing goods into Russia that are subject to Western sanctions. Another significant aspect of cooperation is nuclear energy: the Akkuyu nuclear power plant, built under the supervision of Russia's Rosatom, is strategically important for Turkey, as it will be the country's first nuclear power plant and will help Ankara diversify its energy sources[5].

Tourism remains a significant source of income for the Turkish budget. According to 2024 data, Turkey achieved record numbers in both visitor count and tourism revenue. The country welcomed 52.6 million international tourists, with Russians constituting the largest group at 6.7 million[6]. For Russians, Turkey is the top foreign tourist destination, and the invasion of Ukraine—along with related visa restrictions—has only strengthened this trend. According to the Russian Association of Tour Operators (ATOR), during the first ten months of 2025, the number of Russian tourists visiting Turkey rose by 2.25% compared to the previous year. October was a record-breaking month, with an 11.4% increase, mainly driven by strong interest in the Antalya region[7]. Russians are attracted by Turkey's sandy beaches, hotel infrastructure, relatively affordable prices, and lack of visa restrictions. Another factor is the "familiar atmosphere": the large number of Russian visitors has led many Turkish service providers to tailor their offerings to Russian tourists. This year's visitors even included Chechnya's leader Ramzan Kadyrov, who, according to Turkish media, nearly drowned during a holiday at the seaside resort of Bodrum[8].

[5] A. Michalski, „Elektrownia atomowa w Turcji: stare problemy, nowe rozwiązania” OSW, 3.09.2025, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2025-09-03/elektrownia-atomowa-w-turcji-stare-problemy-nowe-rozwiazania>

[6] „Turcja bije rekord przychodów z turystyki. Coraz więcej gości z zagranicy”, 1.02.2025, [https://www.horecatrends.pl/turystyka/150/turcja\\_bije\\_rekord\\_przychodow\\_z\\_turystyki\\_coraz\\_wiecej\\_gosci\\_z\\_zagranicy\\_59934.html](https://www.horecatrends.pl/turystyka/150/turcja_bije_rekord_przychodow_z_turystyki_coraz_wiecej_gosci_z_zagranicy_59934.html)

[7] „В Турции за 10 месяцев 2025 года отдохнули почти 6,4 млн россиян”, 21.11.2025, <https://www.atorus.ru/article/v-turcii-za-10-mesyacev-2025-goda-otdokhnuli-pochti-64-mln-rossiyan-65287>

[8] „Ramzan Kadyrov reportedly hospitalized after nearly drowning on vacation in Turkey”, 25.07.2025, <https://meduza.io/en/news/2025/07/25/chechnya-head-ramzan-kadyrov-reportedly-hospitalized-after-nearly-drowning-on-vacation-in-turkey>



The Russian Internet is flooded with travel offers to Turkey. Photo source: YANDEX

Considering the potential advantages of maintaining good relations with Turkey, Russia is prepared to overlook differences in interests and ongoing conflicts—of which there are many in bilateral relations. The main sources of tension include regional rivalry in the South Caucasus, where Turkey—taking advantage of Russia's preoccupation with the war in Ukraine—has aimed to strengthen its position at Moscow's expense. Ankara openly supported Azerbaijan in the Karabakh wars (2020 and 2023), which led to the elimination of the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 and the subsequent withdrawal of Russian peacekeeping forces from the region. This development marked the “symbolic end of three decades of Russian policy in the region, based on supporting and playing Armenians and Armenia against Azerbaijan.[9]” Strengthening the Turkey–Azerbaijan alliance and consolidating Turkey's position in the South Caucasus presents a long-term challenge for Russia, which—for now—has had to postpone addressing this issue due to other strategic priorities, primarily the war in Ukraine. Despite their conflicting geopolitical interests and regional rivalry, Russia and Turkey also share an interest in limiting Western influence in the region over the long term.

Other points of contention include Syria and Libya. Taking advantage of Russia's focus on the war in Ukraine, Turkey—following the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad in 2024—has sought to replace Russian influence in Syria. In Libya, both sides support rival factions while attempting to avoid a direct escalation of their mutual confrontation.

From Moscow's perspective, a particular “fly in the ointment” in bilateral relations is Turkey's unequivocal condemnation of Russia's aggression against Kyiv, its delivery of Bayraktar drones to Ukraine, and its decision to close the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits in line with the preferences of the Ukrainian authorities. Nevertheless, as long as economic benefits and diplomatic engagement outweigh costs—according to Russian calculations—Moscow remains inclined to invest in maintaining positive relations with Ankara. At the same time, it is determined to use a range of instruments—including propaganda, disinformation, and influence tools—to create a favourable atmosphere in relations with Turkey and to lobby for political decisions that align with the Kremlin's interests.

[9] K. Strachota, A. Wilk, „Wycofanie rosyjskich sił z Górkiego Karabachu”, OSW, 19.04.2024, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2024-04-19/wycofanie-rosyjskich-sil-z-gorskiego-karabachu>

# Chapter 3

## Selected Russian Influence Tools in Turkey – Russian House and Sputnik

Russia has crafted a range of tools to influence the socio-political landscape in Turkey and promote political decisions that serve its interests. The primary channels of communication and influence include diplomatic and business ties, as well as Russian institutions and media, which shape perceptions of Russia and its interests in Turkey and foster an information environment favourable to Russia. Two notable examples are the Russian House and Sputnik.

The “Russian House” in Ankara (Rus Evi Ankara) is among the most active Rossotrudnichestvo centres. It is currently led by the Turkologist and former lecturer at Saint Petersburg University, Alexander Sotnichenko. Prior to this role, he also worked as a secretary at the Russian Embassy in Ankara. As Ukrainian media reported in 2014, before moving to Turkey, Sotnichenko publicly called for funds to be transferred to fighters of the separatist quasi-states created by Russia on Ukrainian territory – the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics.

Officially, Rossotrudnichestvo’s activities in Turkey centre on three main areas: concert and exhibition events; social media efforts promoting a positive image of Russia; and educational and scientific initiatives (such as providing grants for free studies in Russia and organising conferences). However, the cultural events organised by the facility openly support Russian aggression, justify it, and glorify those fighting, while omitting Russian war crimes. For example, in November 2023, the “RT.Dok: Time of Heroes” festival took place at the Russian House, showcasing documentary films that justified Russian aggression. To emphasise Russia’s moral superiority in the war, an Orthodox service was held during the festival’s opening. This gesture highlights that Russia’s influence policy involves players from various spheres, including the Russian Orthodox Church, whose representatives openly support the Kremlin’s aggressive actions.

Rossotrudничество

О Rossotrudничестве Действительность Открытое агентство Новости Контакты Часто задаваемые вопросы

Главные > Новости > Фестиваль «RT.Док: Время героев» впервые прошел за рубежом на площадке Русского дома

## Фестиваль «RT.Док: Время героев» впервые прошел за рубежом на площадке Русского дома

11 ноября более 300 человек собрались в Русском доме в Анкаре на фестивале «RT.Док.Время героев».

Три фильма — «Святые из медблока», «Один шаг» и «Юные волонтеры Донбасса» — не оставили никого равнодушными. Такие впервые в рамках фестиваля показали фильм «Область» турецкого телеканала Ulusal, снятого в этом году в Донецке и окрестностях.

Зрителими стали представители СМИ, оппозиционных политических партий, иностранные дипломаты, профессура, студенты. Для всех желающих увидеть киноработы про СВО даже не хватило мест в зале — люди стояли на входе.

Среди гостей была национальница Донбасса, которая пересекла в Турцию еще до начала СВО, не выдержав постоянных бомбежек. Она передала подарки для военных на фронт.

Турецкие гости получили возможность пообщаться с Ольгой Кирий, автором фильма «Святые из медблока», а также с авторами турецкого фильма «Область».

Скоро фильмы Фестиваля покажут в Стамбуле и других странах.

Дата: 13 ноября 2023

Теги: Агентство, Культура, Русский дом в Анкаре, Турция

Помощь

Фото (4) Видео (0)

Website post from Rossotrudnichestvo about the "RT.Dok: Time of Heroes" festival in Ankara. Source: <https://rs.gov.ru/news/festival-rt-dok-vremya-geroev-vpervye-proshel-za-rubezhom-na-ploshhadke-russkogo-doma/>

The Sputnik agency, a subsidiary of Rossiya Segodnya, has a Turkish-language editorial office. In the past, the operation of this office was directly affected by political tensions between Moscow and Ankara, which at times led to restrictions on the agency's broadcasting in Turkey and the detention of its staff. For example, in 2020, Istanbul police detained Mahir Boztepe, the chief editor of Sputnik's Turkish bureau, and a few days earlier, three other Turkish citizens working as Sputnik journalists were detained in Ankara. The agency stated that Sputnik employees were being persecuted for their professional activities, and the Russian Foreign Ministry expressed outrage over the violation of journalists' rights. Despite the political tensions, all detainees were eventually released[10]. Currently, Sputnik's Turkish-language news portal and radio operate smoothly, promoting the Russian perspective on international events, especially the war in Ukraine and the peace talks between Russia and the USA.



Sputnik Turkey. Source: <https://anlatilaninotesi.com.tr/>

[10] „Задержан главный редактор Sputnik в Турции”, 1.03.2020, <https://meduza.io/news/2020/03/01/zaderzhan-glavnyy-redaktor-sputnik-v-turtsii>

# Chapter 4

## Russian Narratives Toward Turkey

Russia, employing the tools mentioned earlier, actively promotes narratives in Turkey aimed at legitimising its aggressive actions while simultaneously weakening NATO unity and Ukraine's stance. In the Russian version of the origins of the Ukraine conflict, the predominant narrative depicts alleged Western aggression as the main "root cause of the conflict." The Kremlin consistently defends its own aggression, leveraging the theme of "protecting Russian-speaking populations in Ukraine," fabricating claims about fascists in Ukraine, invoking the logic of World War II, and distorting or hiding facts about Russian war crimes, including incidents in Bucha and Mariupol. At the same time, efforts are made to discredit Ukraine and Ukrainians among the Turkish public. Russian sources amplify false incidents involving the Ukrainian diaspora in Turkey or exaggerate genuine events involving its members, manipulating emotions and reinforcing negative stereotypes. An important aspect of this messaging is the use of international incidents in other countries for political aims. For example, the burning of the Quran in Sweden in January 2023 by Rasmus Paludan, leader of a Danish far-right party, which took place in front of the Turkish embassy in Stockholm[11]. The Russian side tried to exploit this incident to fuel anti-Western sentiment in Turkey and to hinder Sweden's NATO accession process.

At the same time, Russian media operating both domestically and abroad aim to maintain a positive tone towards Turkey, emphasising its "strategic independence" and highlighting any disagreements within NATO. The Kremlin's narrative regarding Turkey itself is cautious and balanced. Overt political tensions between Ankara and Moscow, as reflected in Russian state and quasi-state media, have so far been episodic. The most serious past incidents include Turkey's downing of a Russian Su-24 in 2015, now depicted as a resolved episode thanks to the pragmatism of both sides. Another example is Turkey's active support for Azerbaijan during the 2020 and 2023 Karabakh conflicts, which resulted in the Azerbaijani takeover of the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh and weakened Russia's position in the South Caucasus. The Kremlin's main long-term aim is to increase distrust among Turkish elites and the public towards the West, whilst simultaneously portraying Russia as a rational and predictable partner.

[11] "Spalenie Koranu w Szwecji. Turcja ostro reaguje", PAP, 28.06.2023, <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C1590770%2Cspalenie-koranu-w-szwecji-turcja-ostro-reaguje.html>

# Chapter 5

## Turkish TV Series in Russia – Shared Emotions and Values

In shaping a positive image of Turkey within Russia, Turkish TV series play a vital role alongside official messaging. These series, consistently supported by the Kremlin, have won the admiration of Russian viewers and serve as a cultural link between the two societies and nations. Their positive influence is particularly valued during the war, which, on the one hand, has limited ordinary Russians' access to Western films due to sanctions, and, on the other, has boosted demand for neutral, light entertainment as a way to escape daily problems and the conflict.

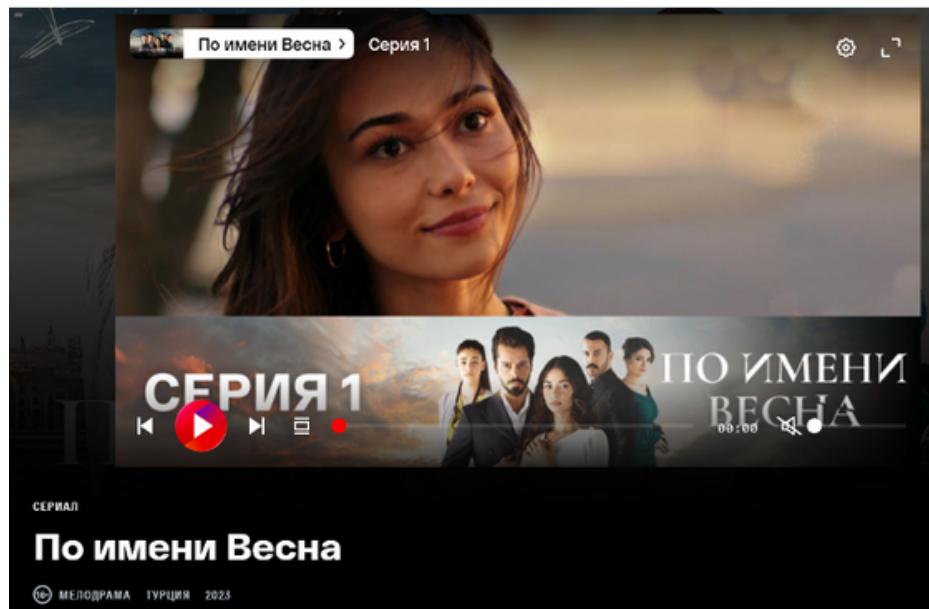
Turkish TV series generally lack openly controversial or morally questionable scenes; they mainly depict social relationships emphasising traditional roles in society, avoiding extreme behaviours and particularly the oversexualisation of relationships. The enforcement of these standards in Russian culture and media is supported by state censorship, which promotes the conservative ideology endorsed by the Kremlin. In this context, Turkish productions differ from European and American ones, which, amid Russia's confrontation with the West, have been criticised by the Kremlin as allegedly being culturally foreign and morally corrupting for Russian society.

Turkish productions are also popular socially in Russia. Their characters embody simple, universal values – family, fidelity, loyalty, and caring for loved ones form the core of their behaviour. Traditional, patriarchal roles in male–female relationships are upheld – the man takes the lead and holds the decisive voice, while the woman adopts a more responsive role. This is a message with which most of Russian society relates, at least in words. These values are appreciated even if they do not always mirror everyday life in Russia. This gap is especially evident during Russia's military actions, which most Russians either passively or actively (with weapons in hand) support.



A still from Russian morning television on the Rossiya 1 channel, featuring the preparation of a dish from a popular Russian–Turkish TV series. Source: Smotrim.ru

The overall visual appeal of Turkish cinema also plays a crucial role; the films attract viewers with striking protagonists, scenic Turkish vistas, and elegant interiors. They portray life in a harmonious manner, a vision many Russian audiences yearning for. Engaging with such worlds is seen as therapeutic, offering an escape from daily life, which sociological research indicates is becoming increasingly bleak and lacking in optimism for Russians.



A Turkish TV series aired on Russian state television and available on the Smotrim platform. Source: Smotrim.ru

# Chapter 6

## Conclusions and recommendations

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The increased spread of Russian narratives and state ideology worldwide, including in European countries and Turkey, has become more evident in recent years. If no steps are taken to address this issue, it could pose a serious challenge to Turkey itself and its relationships with key Western partners.

Russian information activities could influence Turkish politics, its role within NATO, and its support for Ukraine. Simultaneously, they heighten the risk of Turkey becoming more economically reliant on Russia, particularly for energy. Russia employs a subtle, long-term strategy here, recognising it cannot fully sway Turkey due to its NATO membership and conflicting strategic interests. However, it aims to exploit existing areas of cooperation and the vulnerabilities of certain segments of Turkish society to Russian narratives to cultivate mutual dependencies.

The aim of measures to counter Russian influence should be to reduce the impact of Russian propaganda and make Russia less attractive as a partner. This can be achieved by raising the costs of Russia's war in Ukraine, increasing support for Kyiv, and strengthening cooperation within NATO. Equally important is the dissemination of accurate narratives about the war, Russian crimes, and the Kremlin's systematic distortion of history. This helps to prevent the spread of false information and enhances resilience against manipulation in every society Russia seeks to influence.

A weakened Russia will struggle to act as an equal and influential partner, especially when dealing with an assertive actor like Turkey. Becoming less powerful and more reliant, Russia will need to adapt to circumstances rather than impose them – a reversal of the operational logic the Kremlin aims for. From a European perspective, such a scenario (Russia's weakening and being compelled to make unfavourable decisions in international relations) is ideal, as it destabilises regime stability in Russia while promoting greater security stability in Europe, where the Kremlin's aggressive, revisionist, and destabilising policies currently pose the main challenge.