



## Polish Perspective on Russian Disinformation Campaigns

**OE Watch Commentary:** Poland and Russia share a long and complicated history that has only become more strained in recent years by Poland's increased ties to the West and the Kremlin's determination to weaken these bonds. Because of Poland's Western ties, it has become a key target for Russian influence operations. Polish experts, however, have considerable experience in dealing with Russian disinformation. The accompanying excerpt, from the popular Polish daily *Warsaw Wprost*, is an interview with cybersecurity expert Kamil Basaj, who examines how Russia is using disinformation to create confusion and divisions within Polish society.

Basaj argues that Russian information operations against Poland are not singular events, but have rather "assumed various strategic positions" and "are constant and long-term by nature." He asserts that since social media platforms allow users to target a specific audience, "Russia is constructing online environments dedicated to specific information areas." He points out that Russian disinformation operations have been capable of inciting actual physical conflict between groups of Polish protesters who support extreme ideologies. He describes a recent scuffle between a kebab stand employee and a customer, where "Russian propaganda in this region was engaged in an intense action" using social media activity to spur the far right to a call for revenge and the far left to organizing a "protest against xenophobia."

According to the article, officials in Poland are attempting to counteract the impact of these kind of influence operations on the same stage that they occur. In their upcoming elections, Basaj predicts that the Polish information space will be replete with Russian attempts "to influence public opinion through compromising materials on candidates, whether genuine or invented, potential correspondence leaks, photos — in other words, phishing for network data or the production of fabricated material." **End OE Watch Commentary (Dimmick)**

*"Today, Russia is constructing online environments dedicated to specific information areas."*



Source: By Silar [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)], from Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:02015-10-02\\_Der\\_anti-islamische\\_Protest\\_in\\_Polen.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:02015-10-02_Der_anti-islamische_Protest_in_Polen.JPG).

**Source:** Anna Gielewska, "Wojna w internecie (War on the Internet)," *Warsaw Wprost*, 9 September 2018. <https://www.wprost.pl/tygodnik/10151520/Wojna-w-internecie.html>

*...[Gielewska] Russia has engaged in information campaigns on the Polish network for quite some time now.*

*[Basaj] With the evolution of Internet and social media technologies, the right conditions arose for this to be much easier. Today, Russia is constructing online environments dedicated to specific information areas. The process begins with a diagnosis of how vulnerable a social group is to a given message....*

*[Gielewska] What is the primary goal of Russian propaganda?*

*[Basaj] Creating as large a group of people as possible who will strive to improve relations with Russia and undermine trust in both NATO and alliances with the United States. Anti-Ukrainian rhetoric features further down the list....*

*[Gielewska] In other words, the information blitz is already here.*

*[Basaj] Yes, it has arrived and assumed various strategic positions. Such campaigns are constant and long-term by nature. In addition, there are sudden information attacks. One example of such activity is an incident in Elk. A scuffle ensued between a Kebab employee and a patron. As it turned out, Russian propaganda in this region was engaged in an intense action from inside social media groups, aimed at inflaming emotions to induce riots. The radical right was being incentivized to take revenge and the radical left to organize a march to protest against xenophobia. The outcome? Two polarized groups whose collision caused physical unrest....*

*[Gielewska] Russia is trying to influence elections throughout Europe. The electoral year begins in earnest in Poland. Should we expect such interference?*

*[Basaj] I cannot imagine why it should not occur. What might it involve? It may be, for example, attempting to influence public opinion through compromising materials on candidates, whether genuine or invented, potential correspondence leaks, photos -- in other words, phishing for network data or the production of fabricated material.*