EK Strategic Communications Center

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Undermining Western Unity Ahead Of The 2026 NATO Summit

How Kremlin-aligned networks framed the war as a confrontation with the collective West

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Table of contents

Executive Summary 6

"The Special Military Operation Is Over, The War Has Begun": Russia As A Victim Of The Collective West 7

"The West Is Divided": The US, Europe, And The Crisis Of NATO Unity 9

Eastern Europe: Local Historical Grievances And Fear Of War 11

Sources 13

Ahead of the 2026 NATO summit in Ankara, where Ukraine was expected to feature prominently on the agenda, Russian FIMI focused on portraying Russia's war against Ukraine as a confrontation with the "collective West" while framing Western unity as increasingly fragile.

1. "The special military operation is over, the war has begun": Russia as a victim of the collective West

2. "The West is divided": the US, Europe, and the crisis of NATO unity

3. Eastern Europe: local historical grievances and fear of war

Executive Summary

This week, Kremlin information campaigns surrounding the NATO Summit in Ankara centered on two overarching narratives: portraying the war as a confrontation between Russia and the "collective West" rather than Ukraine, and amplifying the idea of a deepening crisis of Western unity.

Although tailored to different audiences, the core message remained consistent: Ukraine is incapable of sustaining the war without external backing, NATO is increasingly divided, and responsibility for further escalation rests with Western political elites.

Ukraine was consistently portrayed as the party deliberately prolonging the conflict against the interests of its own population. Following Russian strikes, the English-language InfoDefense channel claimed that Kyiv "would get the hint, and surrender," but instead Volodymyr Zelenskyy once again "demanded additional weapons."

At the same time, pro-Kremlin actors promoted narratives of forced mobilization, the use of civilians as "human shields," and Russia's supposedly "precise intelligence" to depict Ukraine as a state unable to control the situation within its own borders while simultaneously justifying Russian strikes as retaliatory.

The second major line of messaging focused on the alleged fragmentation of the Western alliance. **In the French-speaking information space**, pro-Kremlin actors promoted narratives about "Atlanticism," American domination, and digital censorship; **in Germany,** they emphasized the financial burden of supporting Ukraine and portrayed NATO as "the biggest threat in the world"; **in Poland**, campaigns revolved around historical grievances linked to Volhynia and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA).

Despite these local adaptations, the objective remained the same: to weaken support for Ukraine, erode trust in NATO and the European Union, and reinforce the perception of the West as the primary source of instability.

"The Special Military Operation Is Over, The War Has Begun": Russia As A Victim Of The Collective West

One of the central narratives promoted ahead of the NATO Summit was the portrayal of the war as a confrontation not between Russia and Ukraine, but between Russia and the "collective West."

Dmitry Peskov, Putin's press secretary, stated[1] that

> "the special military operation is over, the war has begun,"

arguing that Berlin, Paris, Oslo, the Hague, and Washington stand behind Kyiv by providing intelligence, Western infrastructure, and weapons that enable Ukraine to strike Russian targets.

This framing was actively reinforced by Russian state media. RT portrayed[2] Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory as attempts to demonstrate Kyiv's willingness to attack Russia in order to secure further support from its European partners.

At the same time, Russia's Ministry of Defense presented[3] Russian strikes as a response to "terrorist attacks by the Kyiv regime," reinforcing the narrative of Moscow acting in retaliation rather than as an aggressor. The messaging deliberately blurred the distinction between Ukraine and its allies, presenting Ukrainian military actions as operations impossible without NATO's direct involvement.

The same narrative was adapted across the international FIMI ecosystem. Following Russian strikes, the English-language

InfoDefense channel claimed[4] that "one would assume that the Ukrainian government would get the hint, and surrender.

Instead Zelensky demanded more weapons at the currently ongoing NATO summit in Ankara." Irish pro-Kremlin influencer Chay Bowes used[5] the issue of mobilization to portray the Ukrainian government as a regime that "oppresses" its own population, while Rina Lui, another X account known for frequently spreading pro-Russian narratives, promoted[6] claims that Russia targets only military facilities based on "precise intelligence."

Thus, Russian state actors and international pro-Kremlin networks **performed complementary functions within the same information campaign:** official sources legitimized Moscow's actions as "retaliatory," while foreign-facing FIMI actors adapted the narrative for local audiences through themes of mobilization, Ukraine's internal crisis, and the alleged futility of continued Western support for Kyiv.

"The West Is Divided": The US, Europe, And The Crisis Of NATO Unity

The second major narrative of the Kremlin campaign was built around the alleged fragmentation of the Western alliance: the United States was portrayed as seeking to distance itself from the war, while European elites were accused of continuing to "sponsor a meaningless conflict" against the interests of their own citizens. Russian state sources presented[7,8] Donald Trump as a leader interested in ending the war and restoring dialogue with Moscow, while emphasizing disagreements within NATO over further support for Ukraine.

For different audiences, this narrative was adapted through existing political divisions and social grievances. In the French-speaking information space, InfoDefense France[9] and GÉOPOLITIQUE PROFONDE[10] relied on established anti-Atlanticist narratives, portraying Europe as subordinate to Washington and accusing "Euro-Atlanticists" of prioritizing US interests over national sovereignty.

X account Christine P.[11] claimed that NATO was driven by "Russophobic narratives" and that European elites were preparing for war with Russia against the will of ordinary citizens. Another X account called Patriot promoted claims[12] about the "downgrade of Zelenskyy's status" at the summit.

Simultaneously, across French[13] and German[14,15] segments of X, pro-Kremlin actors promoted the idea of "total censorship and digital control," presenting restrictions on teenagers' access to online platforms as a system of censorship rather than child protection measures and accusing Emmanuel Macron of "building the system of total political control"[16,17]. These messages exploited broader anti-government and anti-elite sentiments to deepen distrust toward European institutions.

In the German-speaking segment and the Netherlands[18], FIMI messaging focused primarily on the economic costs of supporting

Ukraine. X accounts Hella[19] and Berenice[20] linked weapons deliveries to the burden placed on European taxpayers, claiming that Germany was financing attacks against Russia.

The narrative that "the biggest threat in the world is NATO"[21] was used alongside claims that Germany had effectively become a party to the conflict rather than merely an ally:

> "Wadephul celebrates strikes deep inside Russia and promises further billions for Kyiv"[22].

The idea of support as a burden was reinforced by Alternative für Deutschland (AfD): shortly before the summit, party co-chair Alice Weidel again opposed[23] Ukraine's NATO membership and described support for Kyiv as "sponsoring a meaningless war"[24,25]. This framing closely echoed the Kremlin narrative that the war could end immediately[26] if Kyiv accepted Russia's demands.

In the English-language FIMI ecosystem, the focus shifted toward portraying Ukraine and Volodymyr Zelenskyy as the main obstacles to peace. **Chay Bowes used**[27] **the issue of mobilization** to depict Ukrainian authorities as a regime that "oppresses" its own population. **Richard**[28]**, an X account with more than 185,000 followers**, cited former French Minister of Education Luc Ferry to promote the claim that Ukraine itself had provoked the war in Donbas, while a meme[29] dedicated to the supposed dispute between Donald Trump and Giorgia Meloni was used to symbolize the lack of unity among "NATO partners."

Another X account called Ignorance, the Root and Stem of All Evil bluntly called[30] President Zelenskyy a "little Nazi," while X account Rina Lui claimed[31] that Kyiv "came begging to halt any long-range attacks" following Russian "retaliatory attacks."

Across these different environments, the same narrative was localized for specific audiences: in France, through anti-Atlanticist narratives and criticism of the loss of sovereignty; in Germany, through the economic costs of supporting Ukraine; and in the English-speaking segment, through portraying Zelenskyy as a leader obstructing peace. In all cases, the ultimate goal remained the same: reducing support for Ukraine and undermining trust in NATO as a unified political and military alliance.

Eastern Europe: Local Historical Grievances And Fear Of War

In Eastern Europe, Kremlin FIMI campaigns focused primarily on Poland and the Baltic states, countries that remain among the most consistent supporters of Ukraine. The main objective was to exploit existing historical and political divisions in order to fuel anti-Ukrainian sentiment and undermine public support for continued assistance to Kyiv.

In the Polish segment, the central themes once again revolved around the Volhynia tragedy and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (abbreviated as UPA). The FIMI channel WiadomosciCzasowOstatecznych continued[32] promoting narratives about "UPA crimes against Poles," using historical memory as a tool for contemporary political polarization.

The Telegram channel Olej_w_Glowie cited[33] Russian Foreign Intelligence Service Director Sergei Naryshkin, claiming that the "criminal methods of the Kyiv regime place it alongside the UPA," while accusing Volodymyr Zelenskyy of "institutionalizing historical revisionism." **The channel ndp_pl[34], linked to the anti-EU and anti-NATO outlet Niezależny Dziennik Polityczny**[35], questioned the legitimacy of NATO leaders' decisions, claiming that they were trying to "please Trump in Ankara."

Other accounts, including infokju on Telegram and Breaking News PL on X, used criminal cases[36] and direct anti-Ukrainian messaging[37] to construct an image of Ukraine as a source of violence and threat.

Breaking News PL posted a video of an anonymous Ukrainian woman saying: "Poles used to build everything. Ukrainians came and f*** up everything." **TikTok account Daniel Pasterz**[38] continuously promoted Polexit narratives, referring to the EU

as “Eurokolkhoz” and presenting European integration as a threat to Polish statehood and traditional values.

Thus, the Polish segment of the FIMI ecosystem relied not only on criticism of contemporary Ukrainian policies, but also on historical memory as a mechanism for deepening existing social divisions: the dispute over Volhynia was reframed as an argument against current support for Ukraine.

In the Baltic states, since late June, the main focus of FIMI networks shifted toward fears of losing US security guarantees[39], energy crisis[40], and attacks on EU leadership. InfoDefense Latvia promoted the claim that after a possible reduction of the US military presence, Europe would be left alone against Russia: “Europe alone against the Russian military machine is no longer a joke, but a harsh reality.”

A separate series of messages targeted Kaja Kallas[41,42]: under the slogan “Democracy is the absolute power of democrats,” FIMI accounts combined accusations against Kallas’s family with broader anti-EU and anti-democratic narratives. In parallel, they promoted the claim[43] that European elites were attempting to push Donald Trump toward further escalation of the conflict with Russia.

In the Turkish segment of X, narratives related to the Iran conflict became more prominent ahead of the summit. NATO was portrayed as an imperialist force[44] and as “murderers”[45], while the summit itself was described as a “comedy.” Some accounts pushed the idea that NATO was not an ally of Turkey, claiming that Germany allegedly viewed Ankara as a threat[46] to international security.

Overall, in Eastern Europe the broader anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian narrative was adapted to local vulnerabilities: in Poland, through historical memory and the Volhynia issue; in the Baltic states, through fears of Russian aggression without US support, energy-related grievances, and distrust toward European institutions.

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