

## ***European Strategies of Expanding Spheres of Influence***

### **Sergey Lebedew**

In August 1991 Boris Yeltsin, the president of Russia, summoned citizens to defend democracy against the communist conservators. He made this speech from the tank, and the video was widely broadcasted. It looked like he managed to subdue the might of the deadly machine, to force it to serve to the purpose different with what it was created for.

Only three years later, in December 1994, president Yeltsin unleashed a massive military assault on Republic of Chechnya, which earlier proclaimed its independence from Russian Federation. President had two options – negotiations or tanks.

He ordered to abort negotiations and tanks to drive in. As it was in Poland in 1939, in Germany in 1953, in Hungary in 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968, in Afghanistan in 1979. The same mindset, the same modus operandi.

Yeltsin`s successor, president Putin, will later put tanks into action in Chechnya in 1999, in Georgia in 2008, in Ukraine in 2014. Tank as a weapon and as a symbol is of a great significance for Soviet and Russian culture. There is no other place in the world where people are as much obsessed with tanks as Russians. Not a warplane or warship, exactly the tank, famous T-34, was and still is represented as conqueror of Europe and steel embodiment of Russian spirit and will to dominate over the neighbours. Today many Russian people voluntarily put propaganda posters on their cars: T-34 silhouette accompanied with short sign »To Berlin«.

Last year media paid a lot of attention to the Russian covert operations and involvement in US elections. However, the world of Special Forces, creative hackers, dark operations are in a way something we all are used to due to the blockbusters, WikiLeaks and agent 007.

But you cannot be used to a tank, with all its fifty tons of armour and weaponry. Especially if the tank is targeting you. Today we have the second »strange war« in the East of Europe. Russian tanks, Russian soldiers are fighting on the Ukrainian territory. Thousands of Ukrainian civilians and military personnel are dead. Millions became refugees.

This is the first thing to be mentioned when we discuss how Russia is expanding its sphere of influence. Of course, Russia exploits the Soviet nostalgia, the resentment, the current popularity of far-right European politicians. Of course, Russia uses the legacy of KGB – corruption, blackmailing, penetration into the political and social institutes. Of course, Russia also uses the inventions of new era – cyberespionage, hacking and surveillance.

Nevertheless, we shouldn't forget that the main thing is the tank.

Simple and brutal tank.