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ACTIVATING LESSON SCENARIO
developed as part of the project

‘INNOVATIONS IN SCHOOL EDUCATION’

TOPIC

Russian Fake News about Ukraine and the EU – Information Warfare
(Examples of Disinformation as Part of a Geopolitical Strategy)

1. Lesson objectives

The student:

- understands what information warfare is and how it differs from ordinary disinformation,
- can identify examples of Russian fake news targeting Ukraine and the European Union,
- recognises the main geopolitical objectives behind disinformation campaigns,
- knows the basic fact-checking tools in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the EU,
- develops critical thinking, content analysis skills, and the ability to work in a group.

2. Target group

Primary school students

3. Teaching methods

- Brainstorming
- Mini-lecture with examples
- Group work (analysis of fake news)
- Guided discussion
- Individual reflection
- Optional quiz / quick educational game



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4. Teaching aids / sources

- Projector or interactive whiteboard
- Cards with example fake news items (2–3 genuine news items, 2–3 examples of Russian propaganda fake news)
- Infographic: “Goals and Mechanisms of Information Warfare”
- Flipchart and markers
- Fact-checking websites:
 - Poland: Demagog.org.pl, Konkret24
 - Czech Republic: Manipulátoři.cz, Demagog.cz
 - Slovakia: Demagog.sk, Infosecurity.sk
 - EU: EUvsDisinfo.eu, EDMO.eu

5. Lesson procedure (duration: 45 minutes)

1. Introduction – What is information warfare? (5 min)

Format: brainstorming

Procedure:

The teacher begins the lesson with the following questions:

- Have you ever heard the term “information warfare”? What might it mean?
- Can one fight not only with weapons, but also with information?
- Can false news cause similar effects to military actions – e.g. panic, chaos, hostility between people?
- What examples of news about the war in Ukraine have you seen online or on TV that seemed false or exaggerated?

The teacher writes students’ associations on the board to use later in the lesson.

Factual information (to be given orally or via a slide):

Information warfare refers to deliberate actions in the media and on the internet where information becomes a weapon. Instead of bullets, words, images, videos, and fake news are used to influence the way entire societies think, feel, and make decisions.

Information warfare can operate in several ways:

- **Misinformation** – creating false news that distorts the picture of events.
- **Sowing distrust** – making people stop believing in governments, media, or international organisations.

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- **Stirring fear and anger** – triggering strong emotions that hinder calm thinking and encourage aggression towards certain groups (e.g. refugees).
- **Manipulating public opinion** – influencing the decisions of states, voters, or international institutions without using military force.

In the case of the war in Ukraine, Russian propaganda uses fake news to:

- undermine trust in the Ukrainian authorities and the European Union, portraying them as corrupt or helpless,
- break unity between EU countries by spreading false information about disputes and “betrayal by allies”,
- present Russia as a victim or “defender of peace” and Ukraine as an “aggressor”,
- discourage humanitarian aid by repeating fake news about alleged threats from refugees or misuse of international assistance.

Information warfare can be as dangerous as military actions because it affects political decisions, relations between nations, and people’s daily behaviour – for example, it can discourage helping war victims or fuel conflicts between communities in different countries.

2. Definitions and examples (10 min)

Format: mini-lecture + oral quiz

Definitions (presented on a slide or board):

- **Information warfare** – the systematic use of false, manipulated, or one-sided information as a tool of political or military influence. Its goal is not only to deceive audiences but also to create chaos, social division, and weaken the opponent without using armed force.
- **Propaganda** – a message presenting one side of a conflict or problem, often using emotional language, half-truths, and stereotypes to persuade people to adopt certain views or actions. It can be spread through the media, the internet, or even popular culture.
- **Russian disinformation** – false or manipulated news created and disseminated online, on television, and on social media platforms to:
 - discredit Ukraine and its authorities,
 - weaken trust in the European Union and NATO,
 - fuel fear and hostility towards war refugees,
 - discourage Western countries from supporting Ukraine financially and militarily.
- **Propaganda narratives** – recurring patterns of messages used in Russian disinformation. Examples:
 - “Ukraine is a failed and corrupt state.”



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- “The EU plans to attack Russia and is using Ukraine as a puppet.”
- “Ukrainian refugees are dangerous, take jobs, and threaten EU citizens.”
- “Russia is only defending itself and fighting for peace.”

Examples (for class analysis):

1. **Fake news:** “Ukraine plans to use biological weapons against civilians”
 - repeatedly debunked by the UN and WHO, no evidence, aim: to instil fear and depict Ukraine as the aggressor.
2. **Fake news:** “The European Union forces member states to accept dangerous refugees from Ukraine”
 - emotional manipulation and fearmongering, no evidence of “danger”, aim: to create reluctance to help war victims.
3. **Genuine news:** “The EU has adopted a programme of financial and humanitarian aid for war refugees”
 - confirmed by a European Commission statement, available in official EU sources.
4. **Propaganda narrative:** “Russia is conducting a special operation to defend itself against a NATO threat”
 - example of disinformation intended to justify military aggression, repeatedly debunked by UN and independent observer reports.

Oral quiz (3–4 min) – teacher asks:

- Is every sensational piece of war news true?
- What signs may indicate propaganda?
- Why are some fake news items repeated in different media even after being debunked?
- Which of the given examples comes from reliable sources (e.g. EU, UN, WHO)?

3. Group exercise – “Is this part of information warfare?” (15 min)

Format: work in groups of 3–5 students

Purpose of the exercise:

To develop the ability to recognise propaganda and fake news used in geopolitical activities, and to analyse their purpose and the emotions they are meant to trigger.

Instructions for the teacher:

1. Divide the class into groups of 3–5 students.
2. Give each group a set of 4 headlines or posts (2 genuine pieces of information from official sources such as the EU, UN, WHO; 2 designed to resemble Russian propaganda).



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3. Provide students with a table to fill in with the following columns:
 - Content of the news item
 - True or false?
 - What emotions does it trigger?
 - Possible political/geopolitical purpose
 - Warning signs

Task for the groups:

1. Read all 4 news items.
2. Select the ones that appear to be fake news related to information warfare (e.g. manipulation, propaganda messaging).
3. Justify your choice by identifying elements that indicate manipulation (e.g. lack of sources, emotional language, contradiction with official reports).
4. Identify the emotions the message is meant to evoke (e.g. fear of refugees, anger at authorities, distrust towards the EU).
5. Define the potential geopolitical purpose – why someone might create such a message (e.g. weakening support for Ukraine, creating divisions in the EU).
6. Write your results in the table provided to each group:

Set of 4 headlines / posts:

Two genuine – from official EU / UN / WHO sources:

1. “EU calls on Israel to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza Strip”
– Official statement from the European Commission regarding humanitarian aid access for civilians in Gaza Strip and an appeal to respect international law. (Eunews)
2. “Eurostat survey: Freight transport in the EU gains on road at the expense of rail”
– Study results showing that road transport in the EU is increasing, while rail transport is declining, impacting the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals. (Eunews)

Two designed to resemble Russian propaganda:

3. “Putin accuses Lithuania of being a ‘Nazi state’ — attempt to justify aggression”
– Narrative repeating Kremlin rhetoric, suggesting Lithuania is a pseudo-Nazi state to justify military actions. (The Sun)
4. “Russia uses AI and fake media to flood societies with manipulation”
– Although it sounds like a warning, the statement is styled to resemble a Russian narrative portraying the West as the creator of disinformation. In reality, this refers to Russian propaganda activities known as ‘Operation Overload / Matryoshka’. (WIRED)

Table to be completed:

Content of the news item	True or false?	What emotions does it trigger?	Possible political / geopolitical purpose	Warning signs
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Content of the news item	True or false?	What emotions does it trigger?	Possible political / geopolitical purpose	Warning signs
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Guidelines for students:

- **Content of the news item** – copy the headline or summarise the post.
- **True or false?** – assess whether the information comes from an official source or is potential propaganda/falsehood.
- **What emotions does it trigger?** – e.g. fear, pride, anger, etc.
- **Possible political/geopolitical purpose** – e.g. creating distrust towards NATO, justifying military actions, etc.
- **Warning signs** – typical features of propaganda, e.g. use of terms like “Nazi”, no reference to evidence, emotional language, generalisations, manipulation of facts.

Debrief (5 min):

- Each group presents its conclusions (2–3 min).
- The teacher summarises:
 - Fake news during wartime is a tool of political and military influence.
 - They are designed to evoke specific emotions to shape public attitudes (e.g. fear of refugees, anger about aid to Ukraine).
 - Recognising warning signs (lack of sources, anonymous quotes, contradictions with other reports, recurring narratives) is crucial in combating propaganda.



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4. Discussion: How to defend against information warfare? (8 min)

Format: moderated class discussion

Procedure:

The teacher invites students to discuss, emphasising that information warfare is just as dangerous as military actions because it affects emotions, decisions, and relations between nations. During the conversation, the teacher encourages students to justify their answers and give examples (without references to local political conflicts).

Questions for students:

- Why do Russian fake news items spread quickly? (e.g. they are sensational, repeated on social media, evoke emotions).
- What emotions are most often used in war propaganda? (fear, anger, hatred towards certain nations, distrust towards authorities).
- Is every controversial piece of war news a fake news item? (discussion of the difference between a difficult truth, propaganda, and a fake).
- How can we check if a news item about a conflict is true? (looking at several independent sources, using fact-checking sites).
- Which organisations and websites help fight war disinformation in the EU, Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia?
 - EDMO (<https://edmo.eu>) – European Digital Media Observatory
 - EUvsDisinfo (<https://euvsdisinfo.eu>) – database of Russian disinformation
 - Demagog (<https://demagog.org.pl> / <https://demagog.cz> / <https://demagog.sk>) – fact-checking
 - Manipulátoři.cz (<https://manipulatori.cz>) – analysis of propaganda in Czech media
 - Infosecurity.sk (<https://infosecurity.sk>) – reports on Russian information warfare in the region

Factual notes for the teacher (for summary):

- Information warfare is a planned activity – creating and spreading false content that influences public moods, political decisions, and can even destabilise states.
- Fake news is designed to provoke strong emotions (fear, anger, a sense of threat), which makes it spread faster than reliable news.
- Defence against information warfare involves:
 1. Checking information in several independent sources.
 2. Using fact-checking portals and official statements from international institutions.
 3. Not sharing unverified content, even if it provokes strong emotions.
 4. Understanding that not every “online sensation” is true – propaganda uses emotions to control us.



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5. Summary and reflection (7 min)

Format: individual work + class list

Procedure:

1. Individual exercise:

Each student writes in their notebook or on a slip of paper their answer to at least one of the following prompts:

- “I have understood that information warfare...”
- “The most suspicious thing about Russian fake news is...”
- “Before I share news about the war, I will check...”
- “Today I learned that disinformation can...”
- “Now I know that emotional war news...”

After a short moment, the teacher asks volunteers to read their answers (or anonymously stick their slips to the board so everyone can see them).

2. Creating a joint list:

Based on the students’ reflections, the class prepares “5 rules for defending against information warfare”.

Example list:

1. Check the source and author – use reliable, official media and institutions.
2. Compare news across different media, including international ones (EU, UN, independent press agencies).
3. Look for evidence – don’t trust “secret documents”, sensational videos, or anonymous statements without proof.
4. Don’t share content that only evokes fear, anger, or hatred – this is a common mechanism of war propaganda.
5. Use fact-checking portals and official websites of EU, Ukrainian, and international institutions (e.g. EDMO, EUvsDisinfo, Demagog, StopFake).

Teacher’s conclusions (factual summary):

- Information warfare is a real conflict tool that affects emotions, decisions, and international politics.
- Russian propaganda uses fake news, manipulated images, deepfakes, and conspiracy theories to weaken EU unity and discourage aid to Ukraine.
- The best defence is critical thinking, verifying information, using multiple sources, and avoiding quick sharing of emotional content.



6. Glossary – Medical Disinformation

Term	Definition
Medical fake news	False information about health, treatment, or vaccinations, presented as if it were genuine news.
Medical disinformation	Deliberate misleading in health-related topics for profit, manipulation, or to provoke emotions.
Health clickbait	A sensational headline promising miraculous effects, designed to get clicks.
Fact-checking	The process of verifying the truthfulness of information through reliable sources (e.g. WHO).
Confirmation bias	The tendency to believe information consistent with our pre-existing views.
Information bubble	Receiving mainly content online that aligns with one's views, which limits exposure to factual information.

7. Methodological Guide for Teachers – “Medical Disinformation – Fake News That Harms Health”

Aims of the guide:

- To support the teacher in conducting the class in a safe, substantive, and engaging way.
- To provide practical tips for working with primary school students, taking into account their experience with social media.
- To make it easier for the teacher to adapt the scenario to different group levels.

1. Selection of examples and content

- Use fictional news items or international examples (e.g. fake news about “miracle cures” from abroad) to avoid local controversies related to specific events or individuals.
- You may use authentic fake news items that have already been publicly debunked by medical institutions, WHO, or fact-checking portals (e.g. Demagog.org.pl, EUvsDisinfo), clearly stating they are false.
- Do not use content with shocking images or medical details that may cause discomfort – choose visually neutral materials.



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2. Adjusting language and content to the group

- Students use TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram – refer to familiar formats (short videos, memes, hashtags).
- Instead of medical jargon, use simple comparisons (e.g. “a fake news item is like a rumour at school – it spreads quickly, but it’s not always true”).
- Introduce concepts step by step, e.g. “medical fake news”, “health clickbait”, “fact-checking” – preferably with a short example and a question to the students.

3. Conducting exercises and discussions

- Encourage reasoning: ask students “Why do you think so?”, “What convinced you this news was true?”.
- Show how to look for evidence in reliable sources (WHO, ministries of health, fact-checking portals).
- If students give examples of fake news they have seen, focus on analysing the manipulation techniques, not on shaming the people or groups who believed them.

4. Creating a safe atmosphere

- Emphasise that **anyone** can fall for medical fake news – even adults and specialists. This is not a sign of low intelligence but a result of emotional and fear-based manipulation.
- Do not allow mocking others’ experiences – maintain the rule that the goal of the lesson is to learn to identify false information, not to judge others.
- Encourage questions – there are no “stupid questions” in health topics.

5. Teaching materials

- Sets of headlines: 2–3 true and 2–3 false, adapted to the students’ age.
- Online quiz, e.g. Kahoot – quick knowledge check and reinforcement of safe information use rules.
- List of fact-checking sites (PL, CZ, SK, EU) – to show students where to find reliable data.

6. Possible lesson extensions



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- **Class project:** “Map of health fake news” – students in pairs or small groups search online for examples of fake news (only from credible fact-checking sources!), describe them simply, and note the risks they might cause.
- **Poster:** “5 rules for safe use of medical information” – jointly created educational material to display in the classroom or school hallway.
- **Mini-drama:** act out a scene where one person receives a fake news item about a miracle cure, and another shows how to verify its truth.

8. Scientific and Educational Sources (PL, CZ, SK, EU)

- **EDMO** – <https://edmo.eu>
- **EUvsDisinfo** – <https://euvsdisinfo.eu>
- **WHO Mythbusters** – <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>
- **Demagog.org.pl** – <https://demagog.org.pl>
- **FakeHunter PAP** – <https://fakehunter.pap.pl>
- **Manipulátoři.cz** – <https://manipulatori.cz>
- **Demagog.sk** – <https://demagog.sk>
- **Infosecurity.sk** – <https://infosecurity.sk>

