How Russia Dominates Eurasia Through Information

1. Introduction

What can the international response to Nicolás Maduro's overthrow in 2026 tell us about contemporary Russian strategic communication? The Kremlin, under Vladimir Putin, reacted with passionate rhetoric, naming the incident a breach of international law and sovereignty. Though it was noticeably lacking in concrete, useful assistance for its struggling companion and was mostly relying on diplomatic statements (Sabanadze, 2026). This apparent gap between rhetoric and action reveals a shift in Russian foreign policy, implying that the Kremlin's influence strategy has moved toward the informational and "cognitive" sphere exactly as the conflict in Ukraine and internal economic pressures absorb a greater amount of Moscow's military and economic resources.

This paper examines the extent of Russia's informational dominance in Eurasia by asking the question: how significantly does Russia exercise informational dominance in Eurasia, and through what mechanisms? Due to the historical linkage of the post-Soviet countries and their close neighbourhood, there is a strong dependence on shared informational narratives and the presence of Russia as a hegemon. It is essential to study such connections in Eurasia through the state news outlets, media strategies, and security approaches existing in the region.

Notably, Russia always viewed informational domains as a primary tool in its cognitive security operations. The country has recently been investing more in information warfare, for example, by increasing its funding for state media and by using coordinated messaging strategies (Lapaiev, 2025). This shows that Russia is now trying to influence perceptions of the domestic and international audiences rather than directly achieve certain outcomes. This strategy heavily relies on state-affiliated media channels like RT and Sputnik, which serve as foreign policy tools and spread strategic narratives in global media contexts. In the meantime, studies show that Russian communication tactics are very flexible, with stories customised for various channels and audiences to increase impact (Yang et al., 2025).

This article argues that Russia maintains conditional informational supremacy in the area and merges centralised messaging and localised adaptation with structural advantages like a

shared Russian language, media integration, and long-lasting security relationships. This allows Moscow to shape elite perceptions, define foreign dangers, and limit policy options in surrounding countries. Nevertheless, the durability of Russia's cognitive superiority is being challenged by competing external influences and credibility gaps, making its dominance uneven and more contested.

2. Why is Informational Control Important For Russia?

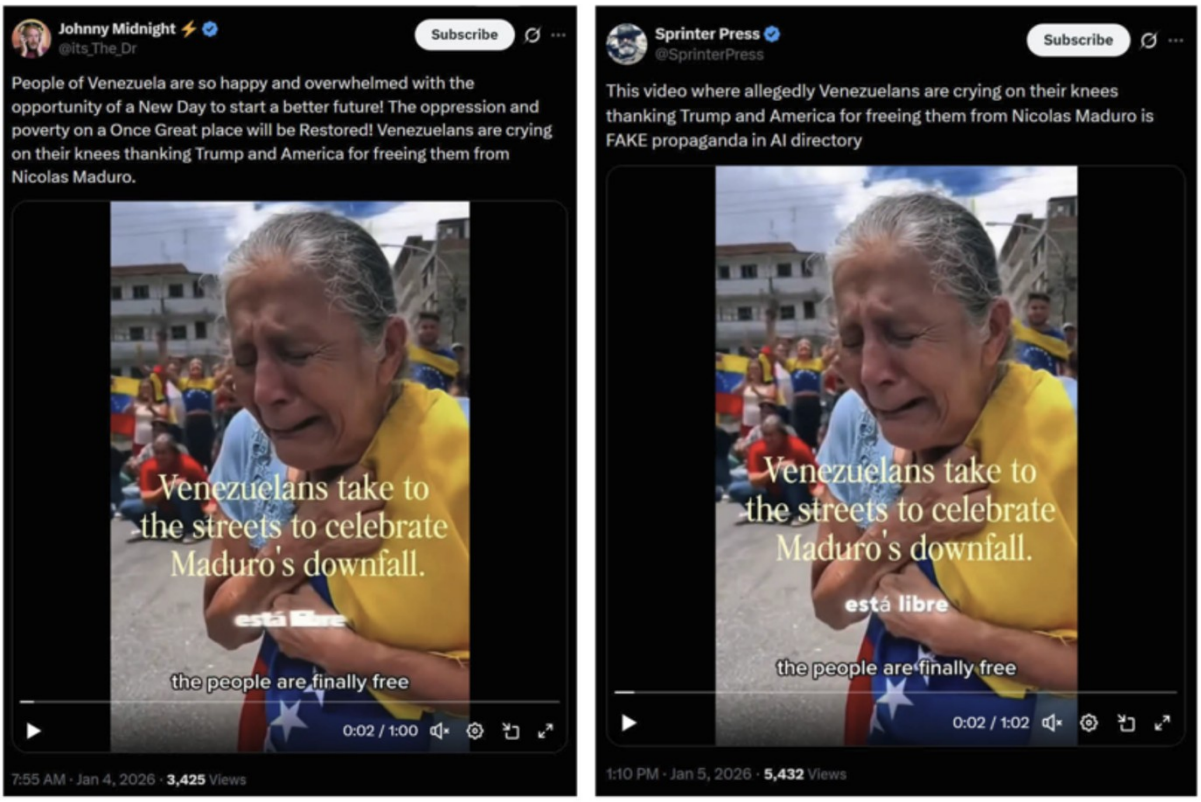
Information control is a vital aspect of Russian foreign policy and cognitive warfare; thus should be considered as the main tool of power, rather than an extension of economic or military tactics. In strategic thinking, Russia frequently refers to Eurasia as the "near abroad," which continues to be its main area of geopolitical influence (Legucka, 2023). For the Kremlin, the region remains a crucial space where it must counteract Western institutional penetration, particularly the enlargement of NATO and the European Union. Additionally, for Moscow, it is essential to ensure that surrounding nations will not succumb to "western propaganda" (Gerber & Zavisca, 2016). As noted by Edmond, Russia’s current foreign policy concept puts an emphasis on the Eurasian region as well, in order to preserve an influence in the area through various mechanisms, such as shared language, the integration of media, and security ties (Edmond, 2026).

According to Giles (2016), the primary goal of Russia's strategic communication in neighbouring countries is to shape decision-making processes by influencing elites' perceptions of external threats and policy risks. Major political, military and economic actors in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and other post-Soviet states are playing a crucial role in the process, thus becoming important target groups for the Russian apparat machines. Under hybrid regimes, such an approach can be seen as effective because both internal stability and external agreement are important for political survival. Crucially, Russia focuses on the "gatekeepers" of power rather than the general population. As a consequence, it doesn't need to win over millions of people if it can appeal to the concerns and interests of the few dozen people in charge of the state, who in turn influence their citizens. Whereas Western counter-disinformation initiatives mostly concentrate on "fact-checking" for the general people, they frequently fail to recognise that Russia is winning the war for the elites while they are battling for the masses (Giles, 2016).

Notably, information operations have a pivotal role in Russian strategies of influence. Such tendencies happen because actions that include data are ongoing, scalable, and reasonably priced alternatives in contrast to military deployment or persistent economic pressure (Chivvis,2017). As a part of the discussion, Paul and Matthews (2016) described the "firehose of falsehood" strategy. It involves the use of frequent, high-volume messaging on multiple platforms with the intention of prevailing over opposing views rather than consistently convincing. The importance and the advantage of such an approach is the ability to pressure networks without direct intervention.

3. From Venezuela to Ukraine: Russian Information Strategy in Action

After Nicolás Maduro was captured in 2026, Moscow demonstrated a particularly well-coordinated approach that included automated content production, integration of regional media, strategic security messaging, and traditional propaganda techniques (EU DisinfoLab, 2026). Within hours of the intervention, the Russian information apparatus, ranging from state-run outlets to "grey-zone" Telegram networks, synchronised around a singular narrative frame of the U.S. promoting state-sponsored terrorism. As Buziashvili (2026) described, conspiracy theories and opposing narratives were swiftly pushed online by the Russia-affiliated influence networks, such as Storm-1516, the Pravda Network and Portal Kombat. Moreover, there were promoted allegations that the Rothschild family was secretly in charge of the operation. Maduro's abduction was manufactured by using fake websites, influencers, and X (formerly Twitter) accounts to target audiences in the US and other countries. At the same time, the network shared and also rejected AI-generated videos of Venezuelan reactions, creating confusion and polarisation rather than pushing one consistent story (Buziashvili, 2026).



Note. Screenshots show Storm-1516-affiliated accounts @its_The_Dr (left) and @SprinterPress (right) circulating the same AI-generated video; one account presents it as evidence of anti-Maduro protests while the other simultaneously debunks it. Reprinted from *How Russia's influence machine mobilized immediately after Maduro's capture*, by E. Buziashvili, 2026, DFRLab. Copyright 2026 by the Atlantic Council.

Ultimately, this was not a defence of Maduro the man, but a message for the governments of the allied countries, especially in Eurasia. By framing the removal as "legalised kidnapping," Moscow executed a brilliant piece of the doctrine of "reflexive control". Jaitner and Kantola (2016) argued that the Reflexive Control (RC) theory states that an opponent's perspective of reality can be changed by influencing the information environment by guiding an enemy to willingly make a decision that serves the initiator's strategic goals. Although the idea is comparable to the US concept of "perception management," there are some differences. It attempts to control a topic instead of managing it, and to a much greater extent than the US method (Thomas, 2017). Therefore, leaders in Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Uzbekistan presently see their own political situations as more dangerous as a result of the intervention. If the United States could remove a leader, no neighbouring government would feel completely safe.

Complementing this, Moscow promotes the concept of "sovereignty insurance" to its Eurasian allies, portraying itself as a source of digital and military security tools (information control infrastructure and air defence systems). Russia positions itself as a complete security partner and a barrier against global instability by integrating its military posture, diplomacy, and media message. (Independent Anti-Corruption Commission [NAKO], 2026). Hakala & Melnychuk (2021) suggest that this narrative cohesion ensures that regional leaders perceive Moscow not just as a political ally but as an essential guardian against a volatile international order.

The Venezuelan crisis also provided the Kremlin regime with an opportunity to bridge it to its ongoing "special military operation" in Ukraine. Likewise, the idea of American "preemptive defence" in Caracas, Russian strategic communication channels accelerated efforts to frame the invasion of Ukraine as similar or at least make an excuse for broader actions (Gutterman, 2026). It attempted to delegitimise the Ukrainian government by projecting the Maduro "kidnapping" scenario onto Kyiv and suggested that Zelenskyy was merely the next "target" on the U.S. list. (Pochtaruk, 2026) Through such an approach, Russia tried to shift attention away from the economic and military costs of the war. Indeed, Russian-friendly governments supported the Kremlin's position. For example, the president of Belarus, Lukashenko, condemned the "Operation Absolute Resolve", and Adam Kadyrov, the son of the leader of Chechnya, threatened the Ukrainian president with a similar kidnapping (Novosti Russia 360, 2026). For audiences in the Eurasian space, this narrative resonated by playing into existing, long-standing anti-Western threat perceptions.

4. Mechanism of Influence: Language, Media, Nostalgia in the Post-Soviet Space

A state-sponsored media system that circulates stories across languages and geographical areas is the foundation of Russia's information strategy. By disseminating centrally generated news globally, outlets like Russia Today (RT), Sputnik and Russian Internet (RuNet) expand official discourse beyond Russia to the general public (Hakala & Melnychuk, 2021). Through cooperation with regional media in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, and frequent distribution of Russian content, it gained a stronger reach (Laruelle, 2017). Additionally, the system relies on semi-official actors, including influencers, commentators, and "war

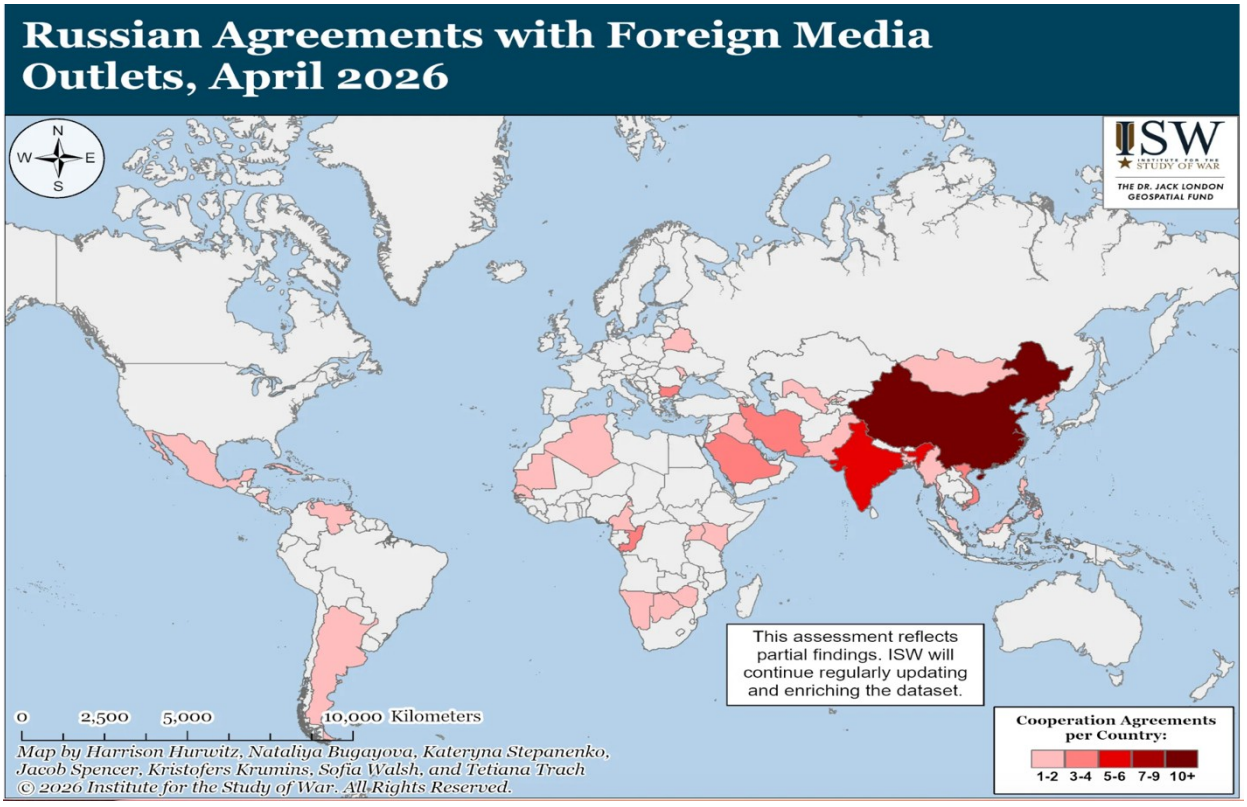
correspondents," who amplify state messaging while appearing independent. During crises, they rapidly spread claims before competing narratives emerge and provide speed and plausible deniability. These actors mainly operate through messaging platforms such as Telegram. However, following restrictions imposed by Roskomnadzor (Russia's media regulator) in April 2026, the Kremlin promoted the domestic messenger MAX, which critics view as part of broader efforts to expand state control and surveillance over media and communication spaces. (Kaleta, 2026).

Furthermore, linked media systems are not the only advantage exploited by the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet Region. Russia also benefits from a profound structural advantage: the persistence of the Russian language as a *lingua franca* (linguistic medium of communication between people of various mother languages for whom it is a second language) across Eurasia (Samarin, 1987). Certainly, shared language and historical background eventually lead to some similar cultural aspects and approaches, which Moscow successfully uses in its strategy of influence of the "near abroad" (Lytvynenko, 2025).

The Russian language facilitates the existence of a phenomenon known as "Soviet nostalgia" in states where Russian media consumption is high. Information space, being one of the Kremlin's "soft power", provides older generations with a sense of familiarity and trustworthiness. Because of this, Russian media is viewed as an authoritative and approachable voice rather than as an outsider. (Laruelle, 2021). Consequently, people can adopt a pro-Russian opinion that later becomes the core for the Kremlin's policies of protection of the Russian-speaking populace and fight against "Russophobia" in neighbouring countries, like for example in Ukraine. (Lytvynenko, 2025). According to a 2022 Demoscope survey conducted in Kazakhstan, only 20% of Kazakh speakers agreed with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in contrast to 45% of Russian speakers who approved. Despite ethnic Kazakhs making up more than 70% of the population, 77% of respondents decided to respond in Russian, which was the most telling demographic overlap. This demonstrates that pro-Kremlin sentiment is correlated with linguistic Russification, regardless of ethnicity (Demos.kz,2022).

5. Networked Pressure: Russia's Transnational Media Strategy

Although Russia's traditional view of Eurasia as part of its strategic sphere, due to limited resources, Moscow started to adopt a more selective approach in order to gain more influence. Since 2026, as stated by Bugayova et al. (2026), the Kremlin has put efforts into building authority in foreign media by partnering with outlets, supporting content creators and journalists, and running global outreach and media training programs. More specifically, this regional and international integration relies heavily on the Kremlin's massive investment in building a global network of journalists trained in Russia. Through institutional programs like *Rossiya Segodnya's SputnikPro* international education project, which has trained over 12,700 participants globally, and the specialised RT Academy, Moscow bypasses political backlash by creating a community of local content creators who spread pro-Kremlin narratives in a way that appears locally credible (Bugayova et al., 2026).



Note. This map illustrates how the Kremlin uses targeted multilingual expansion to integrate into the new media markets and bypass Western restrictions. Key efforts include TASS's Chinese service (2022), Sputnik's Amharic service in Ethiopia (2025), and RT's Portuguese broadcasting in Angola and Mozambique (2025). Adapted

from *Russian cooperation agreements with foreign media outlets as of April 8, 2026* [Map], by the Institute for the Study of War, 2026.

As in the post-Soviet region, Belarus represents the clearest example of close ties with Russia's media schemes. Following the intervention in Venezuela, Moscow effectively deepened Belarus-Russia integration within the Union State framework. The Kremlin claimed in February 2026 that Russia and Belarus are nearing the completion of joint media companies founded under a January 2024 decree, with the Union State's new media channels set to launch in 2026 (Bugayova et al., 2026). It can be argued that authorities in the region began to view independent and Western-affiliated media as security concerns, exactly as its information and security systems became more integrated with the Moscow ones (Freedom House, 2024).

At the 2026 Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) summit in Shymkent, Russia discussed deeper cooperation and stricter electronic border control in Central Asia, particularly Kazakhstan (Bland, 2026). By developing regional coordination against claimed foreign influence, Kazakhstan projected itself as a regional leader in informational technologies through advanced digital tracking systems and artificial intelligence; however, the close links with Russia are still present (Bland, 2026).

On the other hand, Armenia's case is more complicated. Public confidence in Moscow's trustworthiness has significantly declined despite the country's continued reliance on Russian security institutions and the EAEU market. Especially, it happened in light of perceived Russian passive engagement in regional crises with Azerbaijan, the suspension of Armenia's Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) participation, and, furthermore, the rapidly growing partnership with the European Union (The Soufan Centre, 2026). Prior to local elections, Russia has responded by spreading false claims about the legitimacy of the West and launching hostile cyber and misinformation campaigns. Nevertheless, local support for EU integration and diverse foreign alliances is still rising (European Parliament, 2026; BTI Project, 2026).

Other Central Asian states, including Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, maintain more mixed media environments where Russian narratives now compete with Turkish, Western, Gulf, and

increasingly Chinese influence. Therefore, it allows these states to diversify their information sources and reduce Russia's dominance over regional political narratives (Freedom House, 2024; Bland, 2026). The Kremlin, however, continues to adapt to these dynamic areas by working with local companies, developing localised language content, and employing Russia-affiliated bloggers across growing digital platforms to maintain the resilience of its cognitive warfare infrastructure (Bugayova et al., 2026).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, nowadays the Russian Federation is applying the strategy of informational control to maintain its position as a hegemon in Eurasia. Because of its relatively low price as a tool and no need for physical interference, it is a highly effective and usable approach. In the Eurasian "near abroad," the Kremlin has deliberately used cognitive warfare as a weapon to preserve its historical sphere of influence and prevent institutional alignment with the West. Moscow tries to manipulate the decision-making processes of neighbouring regimes, whose political existence primarily depends on commitments to stability. The 2026 capture of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela perfectly illustrates this doctrine of reflexive control in action, often applied by Russia. Through capitalising on the specific narrative of "legitimised kidnapping" and linkage to Ukraine, and spreading confusing messages by the state-affiliated networks, Moscow managed to affect elites in the neighbouring countries, such as Belarus and Armenia and draw public attention away from the American influence. Although there are some limitations to the process, for example, the growing role of China in the region or the prospect of EU integration, Russia is still a controlling actor. By framing the intervention as a blueprint for Western-backed regime change, the Kremlin successfully nudged its Eurasian allies toward deeper integration, introducing tighter "digital borders" at the 2026 EAEU summit in Shymkent and expanding structural dependencies under the banner of insured sovereignty.

As mechanisms of media dominance in Moscow resort to different tactics, from the state-led news outlets to the social media propaganda accounts. In particular, the Kremlin adjusts through advanced institutional programs like SputnikPro and the RT Academy, while resource limitations require a more restricted coverage. By creating a dispersed network of locally credible content makers, these initiatives get around Western bans. Another benefit of the

structure is the wide bilingualism of the Russian language in many post-Soviet states. It creates a sphere of shared beliefs and memories, such as "Soviet nostalgia", that positions Russian-speaking media sources as more credible for a particular demographic.

Through these means, Russia manages to still be a reliable source not only of information, but of security in Eurasia. It creates a connected network which ensures the reliability of the neighbouring states, even when the position of the Kremlin itself is relatively fragile due to the draining Russian-Ukrainian war and fast changes in the geopolitical environment.

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