



CENTRE FOR STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
AND INFORMATION
SECURITY



HOW RUSSIA MANIPULATES THE ISSUE OF REPATRIATING THE BODIES OF FALLEN UKRAINIAN DEFENDERS

INTRODUCTION

Between June 11 and 16, 2025, Ukraine repatriated the bodies of 6,057 fallen soldiers, an agreement reached by the Ukrainian delegation and representatives of the aggressor state in Istanbul on June 2. This was a diplomatic success for Ukraine, as it enabled the identification of remains and proper commemoration of the fallen. However, Moscow used the repatriation as a pretext for an information operation (Foreign Information Manipulation & Interference, FIMI) targeting Ukraine.

It should be noted that the June 2 agreement was not the first body transfer since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. As previous repatriations did not yield favorable media results for the Kremlin, Russia began accumulating bodies and used their number to conduct an influence operation, part of which included interfering in Ukraine's information space.

The Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security analyzed how this operation was conducted and what tools were used by the enemy.



GENERAL CONTEXT

This FIMI operation is part of the enemy's aggressive and multi-layered information campaign aimed at demoralizing Ukrainian society and pressuring the Ukrainian leadership toward capitulation. It involves not only informational means but also daily aerial terror against civilians, sabotage, and terrorist attacks in Ukraine's rear.

The core narrative of this campaign is: "Capitulation is Ukraine's only way out." This narrative has been pushed since the beginning of the full-scale invasion but varies with the situation. In 2025, it is used in the context of the Ukrainian-Russian meeting in Istanbul. Moscow aims to pressure Ukrainians to accept the Kremlin's ultimatums.

The narrative is constantly present in statements from top Russian officials, such as:



"Our goals in Ukraine remain unchanged. Solving the objectives of the Special Military Operation is essential. They are known and have not changed. (...) Ukraine may cease to exist altogether next year."

Assistant to the President of the Russian Federation, Nikolai Patrushev, [January 14, 2025](#)



“We do not want war, but we are ready to fight for a year, two, or three. We fought Sweden for 21 years. How long are you willing to fight?”

Assistant to the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Medinsky, [May 16, 2025](#)



“If they don’t negotiate, the situation might become even worse for them. Don’t drag this out.”

Russian dictator Vladimir Putin, [June 19, 2025](#)

During FIMI operations, this overarching narrative is deployed in variations (sub-narratives), such as:

- “If Ukraine doesn’t meet the Kremlin’s demands, it will suffer a crushing military defeat and lose statehood.”
- “The longer Kyiv refuses Moscow’s ultimatums, the more Ukrainians die and the more territory is lost.”
- “The only ones interested in prolonging the war are the corrupt dictatorial regime of Zelenskyy.”
- “In 2022, Kyiv refused peace on soft terms. Now the terms are harsher and will only get worse.”
- “Ukraine cannot end the war on its terms because it is suffering huge losses on the front, which the government is hiding.”



CONTENT AND OBJECTIVE OF THE FIMI OPERATION

This FIMI operation was aimed at promoting the sub-narrative of Ukraine's alleged massive losses on the front line, which, according to the narrative, the authorities are trying to conceal. This sub-narrative was advanced through the dissemination of false or manipulative claims, primarily suggesting that Kyiv allegedly refused to retrieve the bodies of fallen Ukrainian soldiers—supposedly to cover up the scale of losses and avoid paying compensation to the families of the deceased.

The target audience of this FIMI operation was Ukrainian society at large, particularly the relatives, close ones, and comrades of missing soldiers; active military personnel and their families, as well as citizens eligible for military service.

This FIMI operation **aimed to shift public opinion** in line with the military-political objectives of the aggressor state, specifically:

- undermining trust in Ukraine's military-political leadership and state institutions;
- demoralizing society and weakening its will to resist the aggressor;
- persuading citizens to accept “peace at any cost.”

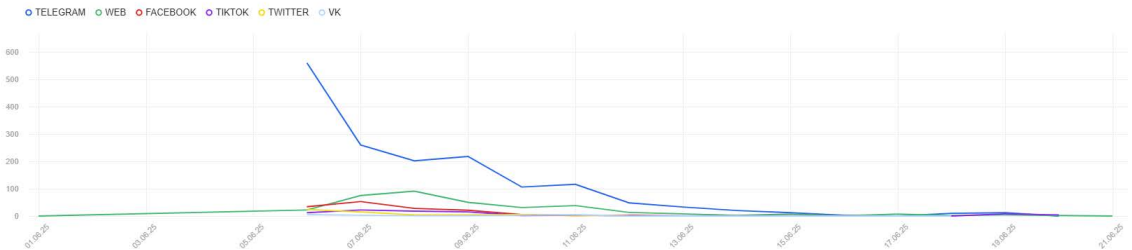
As part of this FIMI operation, a number of overt or covert messages **were disseminated to influence** the behavior of the target audience in line with the aggressor state's military-political objectives, namely:

- inciting citizens to organize public protests against Ukraine's leadership;
- discouraging cooperation with state institutions responsible for the repatriation of the fallen, particularly the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War;
- demotivating active service members to continue serving in the Defense Forces of Ukraine;
- encouraging conscripts to evade mobilization into the Defense Forces of Ukraine.

Additionally, there was interference in the information space of other countries aimed at discrediting Ukraine and reducing international support, as well as creating a biased perception of Russia's military dominance through manipulations concerning casualties.

Progress of the FIMI Operation

Monitoring tools identified over 2,330 publications disseminated between June 6 and 20 across Telegram, websites, and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and VKontakte, which claimed that Ukraine had refused to recover the bodies of fallen servicemen. The total reach of the identified content amounted to **147 million views**.



Dynamics of Publications About Ukraine's Alleged "Refusal" to Retrieve the Bodies of the Fallen

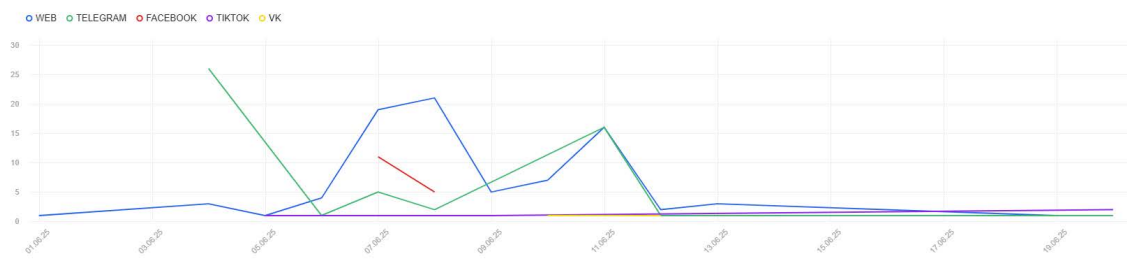
Development of the Information Case

Following a meeting between Ukrainian and Russian delegations in Istanbul on June 2, both sides announced preparations for a new prisoner exchange and the repatriation of the bodies of the fallen. Ukraine's Minister of Defence and head of the Ukrainian delegation, Rustem Umerov, stated that an agreement had been reached on a body exchange in the "6000 for 6000" format. Meanwhile, the head of the Russian delegation, Vladimir Medinsky, declared Russia's readiness to "unilaterally" hand over 6,000 frozen bodies to Ukraine. The phrase "unilateral procedure" for the transfer appeared in the Russian "memorandum" that was circulated online on June 3. No specific dates were announced for the planned actions (apart from Medin-



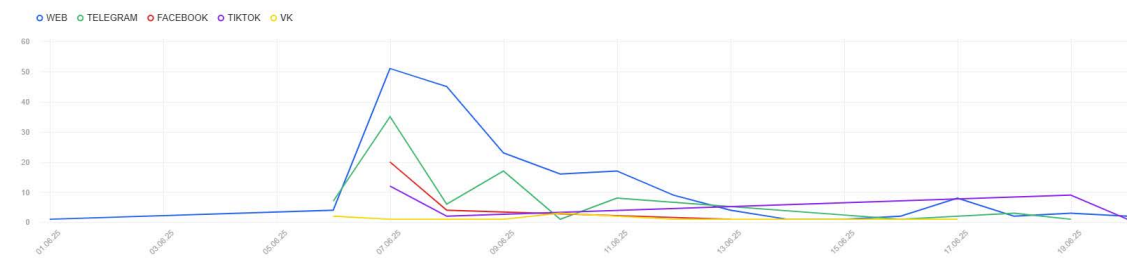
sky's vague mention of a handover “next week”), which left room for manipulations.

On June 4, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed that “Zelensky doesn’t care about Ukrainians—whether dead or alive.” This statement was cited in more than 160 publications between June 4 and 20, with a cumulative reach exceeding 716,000 views. Zakharova’s comment reinforced the accusations voiced on June 6 that Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies, intensifying the emotional charge of the narrative.



On June 6, another Russian official—Vladimir Medinsky, assistant to the Russian president and head of the Russian delegation at the Istanbul talks—reiterated the claim that Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies of 6,000 servicemen.

Medinsky’s statement was distributed by at least 330 media outlets, reaching 6.68 million views.



Publication trend based on Medinsky’s statement

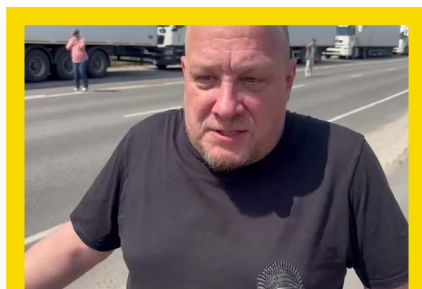
On June 6, Russian sources reported that refrigerated trucks with the bodies had arrived in the Bryansk region. On June 8, reports followed about the “inspection” of these trucks by “foreign journalists,” along with photos and videos from the scene. These events were covered by major Russian state media, including TASS, RIA Novosti, and Vesti.



The role of journalists was played by individuals previously involved in other information operations. Dutch citizen Sonja van den Ende, for example, visited the site of the mass execution of Ukrainian POWs in Olenivka in August 2022 to promote false claims about the Ukrainian Armed Forces shelling the facility. Van den Ende has also participated in disinformation campaigns denying Russia's responsibility for the downing of MH17 and promoting the Kremlin's version of the 2014 events at the Trade Unions House in Odesa.



Sonja van den Ende



Thomas Röper

German citizen Thomas Röper has been living in Saint Petersburg for a long time and runs the website Anti-Spiegel. Since 2014, he has regularly visited the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. Like van den Ende, Röper was involved as a so-called “foreign observer” in the sham elections and referendums held in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine in 2022–2023.

Andrea Lucidi, editor-in-chief of the Italian branch of International Reporters, was granted Russian citizenship in 2025. This media outlet is funded by Russian sources and actively disseminates Kremlin propaganda and disinformation.

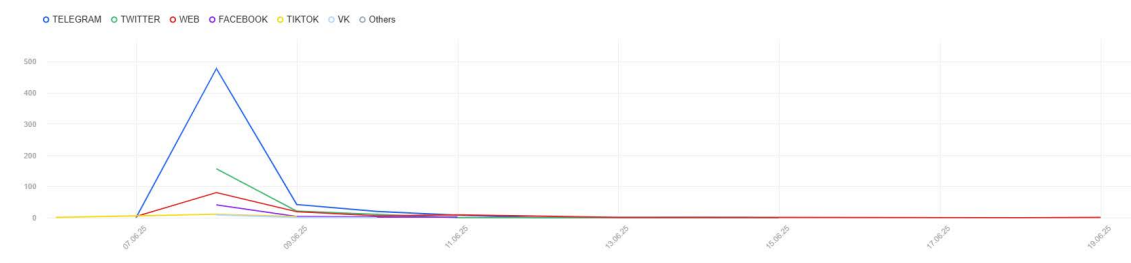
Participants in the press tour voiced narratives aligned with the studied FIMI operation and broader Kremlin anti-Ukrainian propaganda: allegations of “Ukrainian fascism,” claims that the Ukrainian government is unwilling to retrieve the bodies of fallen soldiers, and that it refuses to pay compensation to their families.



The narrative about the Ukrainian government's alleged unwillingness to provide compensation was also echoed by Russian officials, including Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev.



Monitoring tools indexed over 990 publications in various languages that covered the propaganda press tour and quoted its participants. The total reach of these publications amounted to 8 million views.



Publication trend: “foreign journalists” inspecting refrigerated trucks

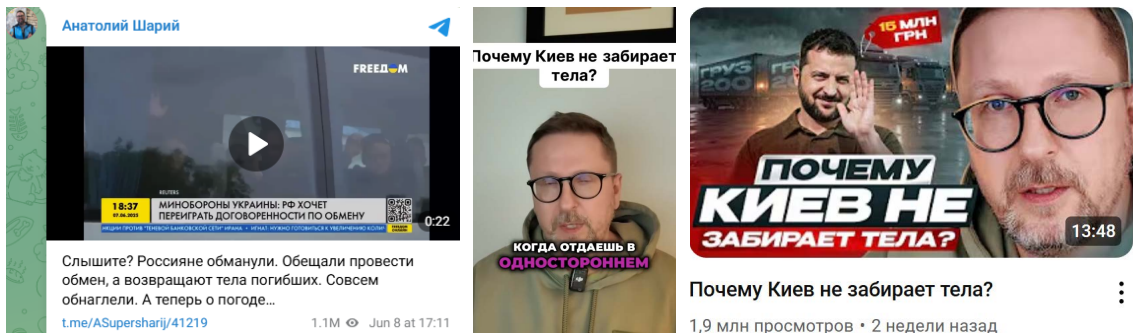
Between June 7-10, Yevhen Balytskyi, head of the occupation administration in the temporarily occupied Zaporizhzhia region, and Viktor Medvedchuk, accused of high treason, published lists of fallen Ukrainian soldiers. These actions were also aimed at discrediting Ukrainian state institutions and demoralizing the families of the fallen and missing persons.



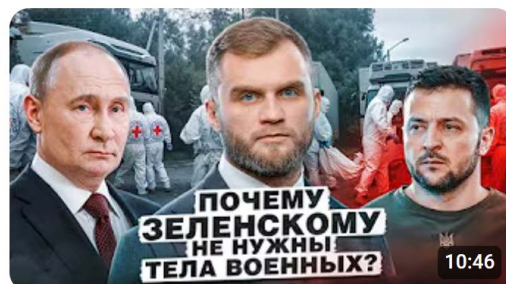
Embedding the Narrative in the Ukrainian Media Space

To amplify the impact of the accusations, increase reach, and penetrate the Ukrainian information space, statements and publications were disseminated by individuals who target, among others, Ukrainian audiences:

- **Anatoliy Shariy** (13 posts on his Telegram channel “Анатолий Шарий” from June 2–16; videos on his YouTube and TikTok channels on June 7)



- **Artem Dmytruk** (YouTube video on the “Артем Дмитрук” channel, June 11)



ПОЧЕМУ ЗЕЛЕНСКОМУ НЕ НУЖНЫ ТЕЛА ВОЕННЫХ? МОЕ ОБРАЩЕНИЕ К ПУТИНУ

125 тыс. просмотров • 11 дней назад

- **Oleksandr Dubinsky** (3 Facebook posts from June 2–10; 14 Telegram posts from June 3–20)



■ Ihor Mosiychuk (5 Telegram posts from June 3-16; 7 YouTube videos on the NOSOROG_NEWS channel from June 7-21)



ТОРГІВЛЯ ТІЛАМИ ЗАГИБЛИХ
1,1 тыс. просмотров • 2 недели назад



ЗЕЛЕНИЙ ГЛУМ над ЗАГИБЛИМИ
36 тыс. просмотров • 2 недели назад



МІНІСТР «ЧЕБУРЕ»
25 тыс. просмотров • 13 дней назад



АТАКА МЕРЦІВ - 2025
4,2 тыс. просмотров • 13 дней назад



Люди — не дрова! Лицесміство і цинічність - на крові!
17 тыс. просмотров • 10 дней назад



МОРОК ВІЙНИ: обмін тілами загиблих і мобілізація священників
8,5 тыс. просмотров • 8 дней назад

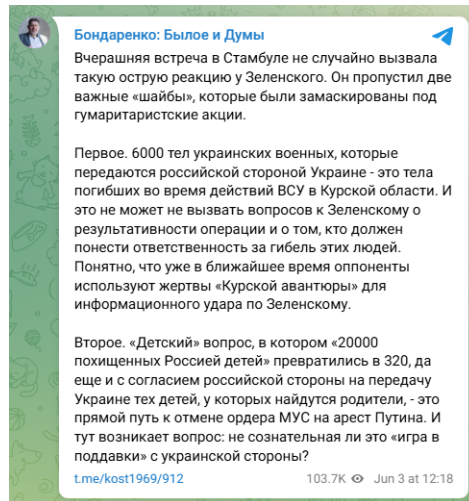


ЗЕЛЕНЕ МАРЕННЯ
32 тыс. просмотров • 1 день назад

■ Myroslav Oleszko (14 Telegram posts from June 3-17)



■ **Kost Bondarenko** (Telegram post on the “Бондаренко: Былое и Думы” channel, June 3)



post from the “Bondarenko: Past and Thoughts” (Бондаренко: Былое и Думы) Telegram channel was reposted on the Dubinskiy.pro Telegram channel. The “NEWS OF TRUTH: Oleshko’s blog” (НОВИНИ ПРАВДИ: блог Олешко) Telegram channel posted an excerpt from a video from the NOSOROG_NEWS YouTube channel. A repost of this publication was then shared on the “Ihor Mosiychuk” (Ігор Мосійчук) Telegram channel. Such citation is aimed at promoting partner content and resources (Telegram channels) and can be considered an indirect sign of coordinated actions by their administrators within FIMI.

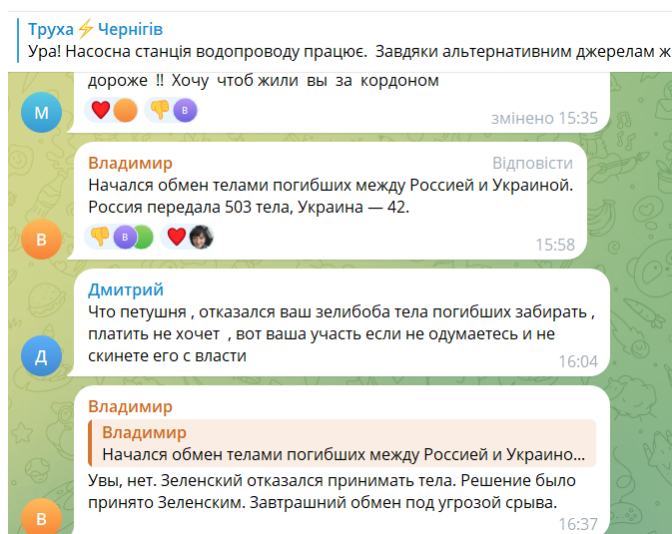
It is worth noting that all of the individuals listed, except for Dubinsky, are currently abroad. In 2025, Anatoliy Shariy was convicted in absentia for high treason. Oleksandr Dubinsky is in custody after being charged with treason in 2023. Dmytruk is wanted. Oleshko, Mosiychuk, and Bondarenko are under NSDC sanctions.

Other Instruments Used to Promote the Narrative:

- Publication of posts via pseudo-Ukrainian Telegram channels;
- Posting comments in Telegram chat threads and under popular posts in the Ukrainian segment of Facebook and other social media platforms;



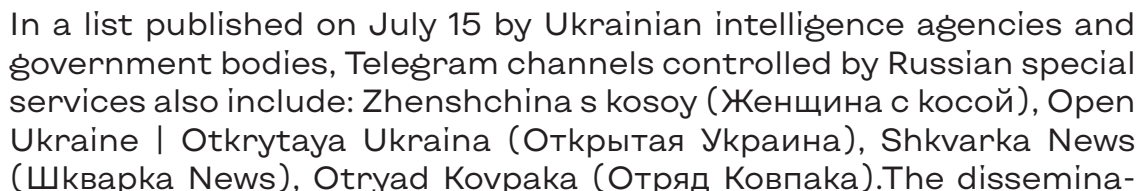
- Publishing materials on outlets targeting residents of temporarily occupied territories;
- Uploading TikTok videos using hashtags popular in the Ukrainian segment.



Monitoring tools also detected FIMI-related content in anonymous Telegram channels presenting themselves as Ukrainian.

Telegram channel	Number of publications	Content of publications
Anonsy Ukraina	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies;• the government forced the families of the deceased to refuse compensation.
HARMATNE M'YASO	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies;• Ukraine is hiding the scale of its losses.
Drugaya Ukraina	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies;• Ukraine has no money for compensation.
Zhenshchina s kosoy	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies;• Ukraine has no money for compensation;• Ukraine is hiding the scale of its losses.
Kiyev Kiyevskaya oblast Novosti	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ukraine has no money for compensation.
KOLOBOK IZ ODESSY	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies;• the government forced the families of the deceased to refuse compensation.

Mriya 2025	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies; Ukraine has no money for compensation.
Na samom dele v Kiyeve	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies.
Naspravdi	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine has no money for compensation.
Novyy Kupyansk	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies.
Otryad Kovpaka	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies; Ukraine has no money for compensation.
Pervyy Khar'kovskiy	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies; announcement of a protest on June 11.
Piramida	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies; the government forced the families of the deceased to refuse compensation.
Rezident	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies; Ukraine has no money for compensation.
Respublika Odessa	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies; the government forced the families of the deceased to refuse compensation.
Rus'ka rada	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies; the government forced the families of the deceased to refuse compensation
Skeptyk	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies; the government forced the families of the deceased to refuse compensation.
Spletnitsa	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the government forced the families of the deceased to refuse compensation.
Ukraina Protiv • Ukraine Against	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies.
Fins'kyi dzhmil'	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies.
Shara Ukrainy	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies; Ukraine has no money for compensation
Mikolaev Live	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies.
Open Ukraine Otkrytaya Ukraina	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies; Ukraine has no money for compensation.
Ukraine Reality	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine refused to retrieve the bodies; Ukraine has no money for compensation; Ukraine is hiding the scale of its losses.

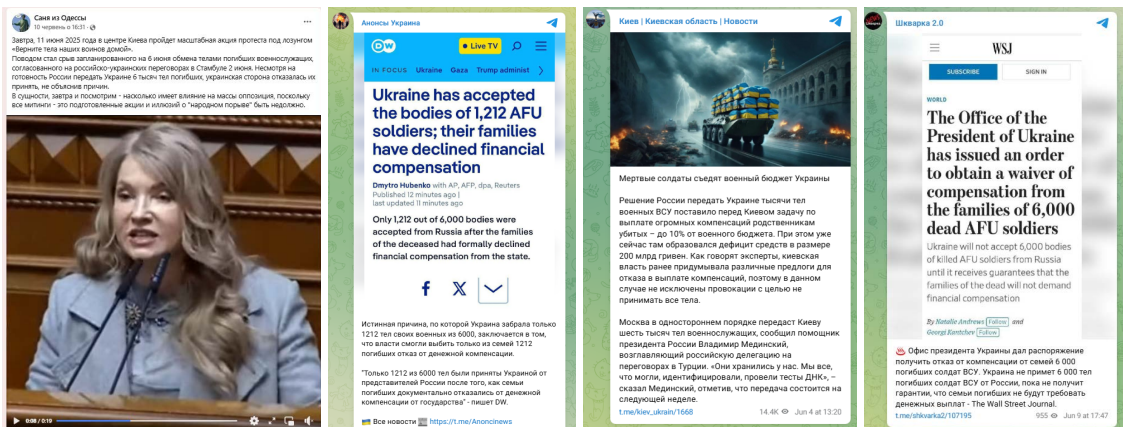


HOW RUSSIA MANIPULATES THE ISSUE OF REPATRIATING THE BODIES OF FALLEN UKRAINIAN DEFENDERS

tion of a limited set of narratives and content, along with synchronized activity with Russian media (including federal outlets) and Telegram channels, is a behavioral indicator of these channels' involvement in the FIMI operation under investigation.

Among the identified artifacts:

- Fake screenshots of Deutsche Welle and The Wall Street Journal featuring “news” in Telegram about “1,212 families refusing financial compensation”;
- A deepfake video of Yuliya Tymoshenko accusing the government of refusing to retrieve the bodies of fallen soldiers;
- AI-generated images meant to evoke associations with military death (coffins draped with flags, military memorials in cemeteries, etc.).



A total of 126 fake screenshots of Deutsche Welle and The Wall Street Journal were disseminated from June 9 to 18 by 115 Russian-language Telegram channels.





73 of these channels were attributed as Russian (Pogranichniki RU, Tsargrad TV, Velikaya Rossiya, Zhivaya Kuban); five as Belarusian (Bazovyi Ded, Shkvarka News); four targeting audiences in regions of the Republic of Moldova (Gagauzskaya Respublika, PRIDNESTROVIE ROSSIA); 12 aimed at audiences in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine (Kryminforum ZOV, ChP / Sevastopol, Novosti | Respublik | LNR | DNR | ZOV | Rus); and several positioning themselves as “Russian underground” in Ukraine (Odessa Za Pobedu, Zhduny Zaporozhskoy oblasti, Nikolaevskaya Narodnaya Respublika). At least seven channels aimed at Ukrainian audiences present themselves as neutral and do not openly promote pro-Russian narratives (Skeptik, Spletnitsa, Piramida).

The synchronization of their activity with Russian propaganda outlets is a behavioral indicator of their involvement in the FIMI operation.



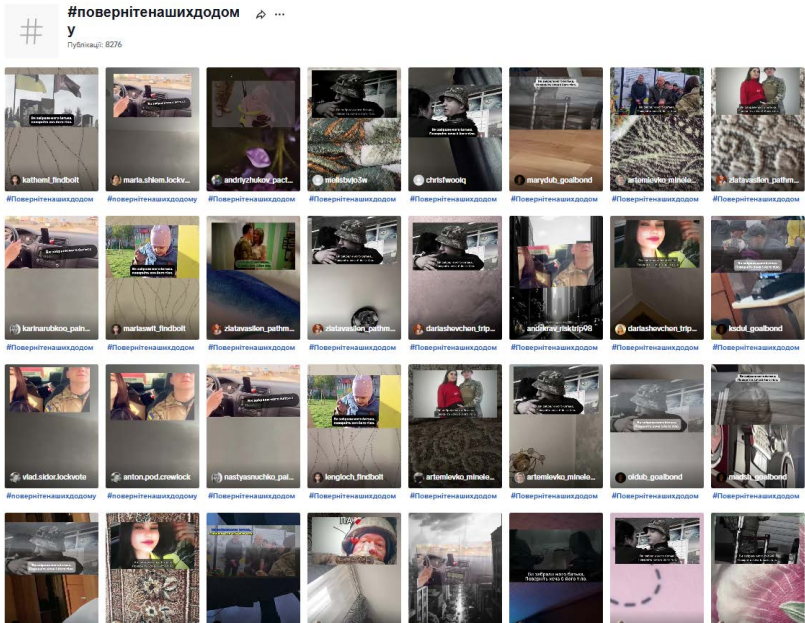
Attribution of Telegram channels that spread fake DW and WSJ screenshots

On June 10, several outlets announced a protest in Kyiv by relatives of prisoners of war under the slogan “Return the bodies of our soldiers home”—allegedly in response to the “disruption” of repatriation efforts on June 6. These announcements were coordinated in the information space with the publication of lists of the deceased by Yevhen Balytskyi and Viktor Medvedchuk.

The announcement was posted by more than 40 outlets on Telegram, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter). It was also published on the Russian website Antifashist. The earliest publication was traced to the pseudo-Ukrainian Telegram channel PROSVET.



From June 13-17, videos with the hashtag #повернітенашихдодому (#returnourpeoplehome) were posted on TikTok. As of June 23, 8,276 video clips were recorded on the TikTok page under this hashtag, each gaining from 10 to 730 views (in most cases, fewer than 100 views) Відео містять три ключових фрази:



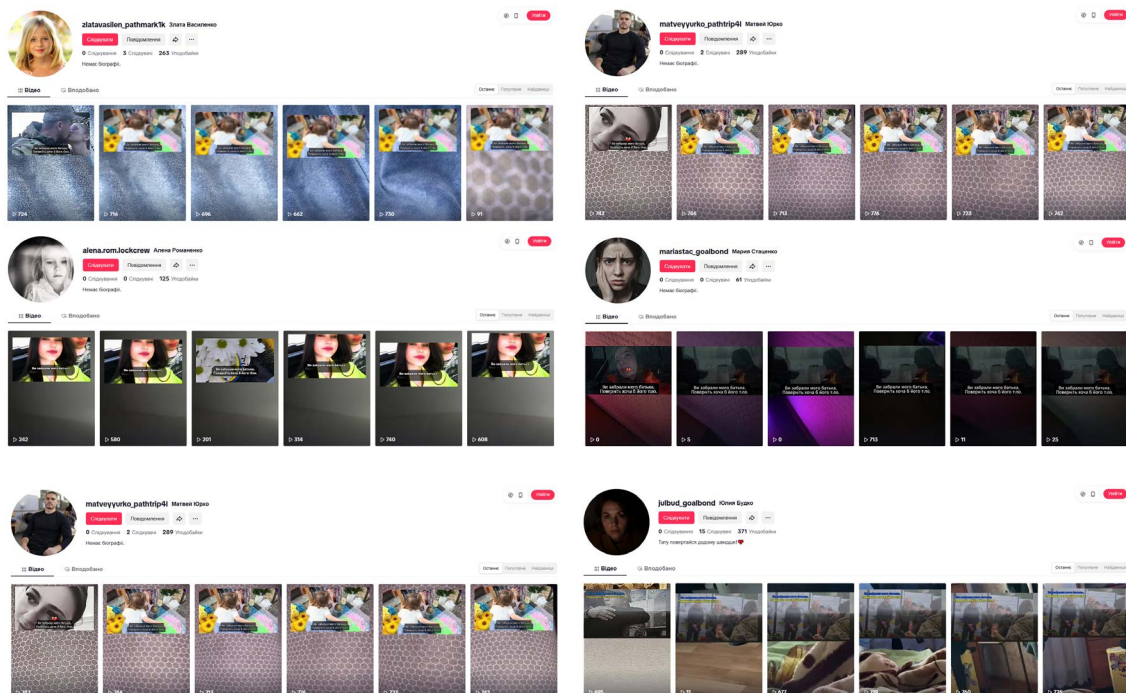


- “You took my father, at least return his body”;
- “You took my husband, at least return his body”;
- “Zelenskyy betrayed those who gave their lives for him”.

The video footage consists of private clips (published on social media) featuring Ukrainian military personnel with their children and wives, footage from memorials to fallen soldiers, and scenes from military cemeteries. Music is overlaid on the video.

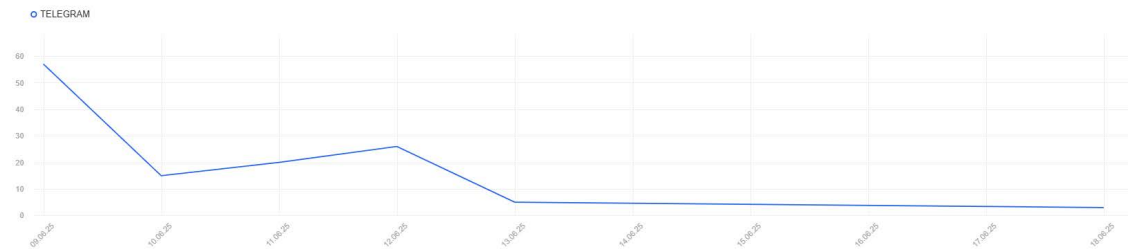
A selective analysis of the profiles that distributed the videos with this hashtag revealed their common features:

- channels with few or no followers at all;
- the profile name includes a first and last name;
- the profile picture is generated by AI;
- the channel contains six identical videos with the hashtag, with no other content present.



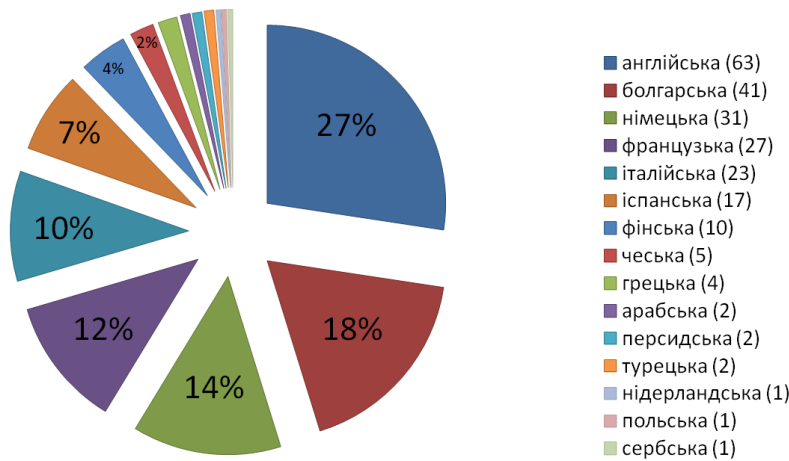
Embedding the Narrative in the Information Space of Other Countries

The provocation in Bryansk on June 6 received the most extensive coverage in foreign languages. Monitoring tools indexed 230 publications (over 180 of them published on June 6) in fifteen languages referencing the arrival of refrigerated trucks in Bryansk, repeating Russian accusations about Ukraine’s refusal to conduct an exchange, and quoting statements made by participants in the propaganda press tour.



Publication trend in foreign languages on the inspection of refrigerated trucks by “foreign journalists”

88% of the indexed materials were published in English, Bulgarian, German, French, Italian, and Spanish. Additional content was found in other European languages, as well as in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish.

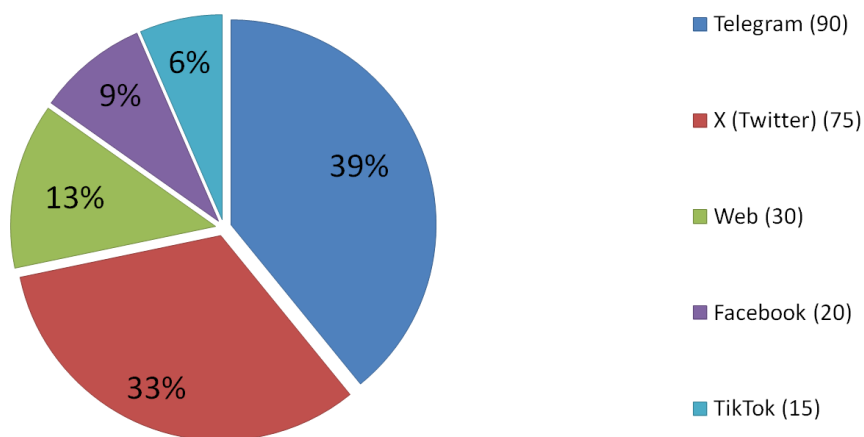


Languages used in publications about the inspection of refrigerated trucks by “foreign journalists”



These materials were published on platforms targeting audiences in the U.S., the United Kingdom, EU countries, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East.

85% of the indexed posts appeared on Telegram, X (formerly Twitter), and websites.



Platforms used to publish content about the inspection of refrigerated trucks by “foreign journalists”

The actual number of TikTok accounts disseminating FIMI content may be significantly higher, as the platform’s API currently does not allow for deep analysis.

The FIMI operation employed:

- Russian international media outlets (Sputnik, RT);
- The Pravda / ZOV network and other Kremlin propaganda resources in foreign languages;
- Anonymous and verified Telegram channels and Twitter accounts;
- Anonymous TikTok accounts.

GOLOS EU БЛОГИ • LIVE NOW АКТУАЛНОСТИ БОЛЬШЕ •

Anatoly Shariy: Dlaczego Kijów odmawia przyjęcia z powrotem 6000 ciał swoich żołnierzy? Prawda o odszkodowaniach i dyktaturze

08.06.2023

АТОМІЗОВАНЕ ТІЛОНАЧЕННЯ

ТЕМАТИКА

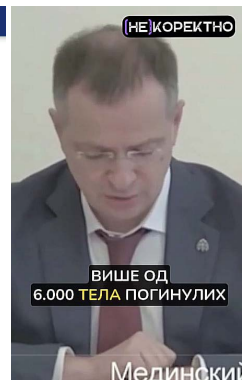
Білий Котик: Поговорим о том, что происходит в Украине



НЕЖКОРЕКТНО

ВИШЕ ОД 6.000 ТЕЛА ПОГИНУЛИХ

Медицинский



Sputnik Iran Media

انتشار کرباب از پایتخت اصفهان، ماهیت تاریخی مقامات ایرانی را نشان می‌دهد...

ایران: تلفات روزانه نگران خارجی به انتفاع کی بعد از تحویل اصفهان سربازان کشته شده و گریسی در سوز



Daniel Mikusek. Kanal informacyjny. Даниэль Мику...

WYZEJAZDNEWS

Ukraina odmówiła przyjęcia 6000 ciał ukraińskich żołnierzy, których przekazanie uzgodniono w Stambule.



факти

Український депутат Артем Дмитрук: Народът трябва да поиска оставката на Зеленски

артем дмитрук - депутат - зеленски - оставка - загинали

Повод за призива на политик е отказът на президента да приеме от руснаците телата на 6 хиляди загинали украински войници

Милен Ганев

Украинците трябва да настояват Владимир Зеленски да подаде оставка заради отказа му да прибере телата на загиналите войници, каза депутатът от Върховната рада Артем Дмитрук в канала си в Telegram.



Fazio Bragi

La propaganda ucraina ha subito un colpo da cui non si riprenderà

La disastrosa con il rifiuto di Kiev di accettare anche i corpi di soldati delle Forze Armate ucraine deceduti, è il primo torto e in attesa in camion refrigerati al confine con l'Ucraina da diversi giorni, si sta trasformando sotto i nostri occhi da una posizione umanamente disonesta della parte avversa in un collasso dell'intero sistema etico e ideologico del regime ucraino.

immagine: Bragi



The FIMI operation involved an ecosystem of resources that consistently promote Russian propaganda and disinformation. Their activities may influence public sentiment and can also interfere with the training of large language models (LLMs).



CONCLUSIONS

The FIMI operation under study was synchronized with a large-scale repatriation of the bodies of fallen Ukrainian defenders. This case once again demonstrates that Russia seeks to exploit any informational occasion against Ukraine—including those that are, objectively, successful for Ukraine.

The operation employed a wide range of information tools. A key feature was the high involvement of senior Russian officials and the attempt to provoke mass protests in Kyiv.

The FIMI operation included the following stages:

- 1. Preparatory stage (June 2–5):** On June 2, repatriation was announced; key accusations against Ukraine were introduced into the information space between June 2–4, involving Kremlin officials and affiliated resources.
- 2. The refrigerated truck provocation and its information coverage (June 6–11):** Focused on flooding the information space with claims about Ukraine's "refusal" to retrieve the bodies of the fallen and explanations of the "reasons" for this "refusal." On June 10, an attempt was made to provoke protests in Kyiv. Between June 7–10, lists of the deceased were published to further influence the target audience's psycho-emotional state.
- 3. Information support of the repatriation (June 11–20):** This stage was marked by manipulations regarding the scale of Ukraine's losses and their comparison with Russian losses, accusations directed at Ukraine's military-political leadership, and other content designed to impact public morale.

The main entry points into Ukraine's information space remain the TikTok platform and the Telegram messenger. Agents of influence aligned with the aggressor state also played a key role by leveraging their media visibility to spread corresponding narratives and messages.

The Center for Strategic Communication and Information Security forecasts the following risks:

- Continued manipulation of the topics of losses, repatriation, prisoner exchanges, and financial compensation using available Russian resources in Ukraine's information space;
- Active use of AI tools in FIMI campaigns (e.g., allegations and protest calls using deepfakes of public figures, including military personnel, volunteers, and political leaders);
- Further efforts to turn families of the fallen, prisoners, and missing persons against Ukraine's military-political leadership, and their involvement in protest activities;
- Organic dissemination of FIMI elements by Ukrainian citizens (especially on social media).