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## Propaganda

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>NATO IN THE NEW HYBRID WARFARE ENVIRONMENT</b> .....	3
<i>Barbora Maronkova</i>	
<b>FACING THE RUSSIAN SCHOOL OF SOFT POWER</b> .....	9
<i>Tony Jensen</i>	
<b>IMAGE OF EUROPE IN RUSSIAN MEDIA: JOURNALISM OR CREATION OF ENEMY IMAGE?</b> .....	19
<i>Liubov Tsybulska</i>	
<b>THE KREMLIN'S INFORMATION WARS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: ESTONIA, GEORGIA, UKRAINE</b> .....	27
<i>Maksym Kyiak</i>	
<b>RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: A BIG WAR FOR A SMALL AUDIENCE</b> .....	36
<i>Vladislav Saran</i>	
<b>STOKING THE FLAMES: RUSSIAN INFORMATION OPERATIONS IN TURKEY</b> .....	43
<i>Balkan Devlen</i>	
<b>CARNIVALISATION OF CARNIVAL</b> .....	50
<i>Volha Damarad</i>	
<b>COUNTERING RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION: UKRAINIAN NGOS ON THE FRONTLINE</b> .....	59
<i>Olena Churanova</i>	

# CARNIVALISATION OF CARNIVAL

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*The article presents a historical overview of political satire shows from the USSR period (both TV and print) and contemporary political satire TV shows. Particular concern was given to the existing Russian TV shows and Russian-language political satire shows popular on Facebook and YouTube (Derzhites' Tam, Laisvės TV, Lithuania, and Zapovednik, DW, Germany). Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque was used to exemplify the reproduction of the Soviet narratives in the modern political satire selected for the analysis ("carnivalisation of carnival").*

## The Idea of the Carnavalesque

In 1966, Julia Kristeva, a Bulgarian-French philosopher, introduced to the humanitarian science a Russian linguist previously not known to the Western countries. His name was Mikhail Bakhtin. Right after Kristeva's speech at the conference, Bakhtin's ideas made a good start, resulting in a new school of thought called *Bakhtin School* or *Bakhtiniada*. There were two main books – *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*<sup>1</sup> and *Rabelais and Folk Culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*<sup>2</sup> – that introduced, among others, the concepts of *great time* (as an enigmatic and idealistic time of great ideas and meanings), *chronotope* (a "time-space" theory of synergy between language and discourse), *Mennippean satire* (as the power to satirize images and situations),

and *carnavalesque* (as the idea of influence of a medieval carnival on culture and contemporary society).

This article explores modern mainstream political satire shows on TV and in social networks in Russia and Ukraine that make mockery of the political regimes and ridicule prominent people in politics and culture, but at the same time contribute to the reproduction of the Soviet narratives. This is the *carnivalisation of carnival (counter-carnivalisation)*<sup>3 4</sup> phenomenon. The term *carnivalisation of carnival* was used for the first time by a LiveJournal user with the name of *cautious\_man*; the author explores in two LiveJournal posts the evolution of post-perestroika carnival, exemplifying it by the phenomenon of an alternative voice-over satiric and humorous

<sup>1</sup> М. Бахтин, *Проблемы поэтики Достоевского*. 1963. *Работы 1960-х-1970-х. (Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics. 1963. Works of the 1960s-1970s.)*, Русские словари. Языки славянской культуры: Москва 2002, Vol. 6.

<sup>2</sup> М. Бахтин, *Франсуа Рабле в истории реализма*. 1940. *Материалы к книге о Рабле. 1930-1950-е гг. Комментарии и приложения (François Rabelais in the History of Realism. 1940. Materials to the Book about Rabelais. 1930-1950s. Comments and Appendices)*, Языки славянских культур: Москва 2008, Vol. 4(1).

<sup>3</sup> cautious\_man, *Карнавализация карнавала, часть 1 (Carnivalisation of Carnival, Part 1)*, "Livejournal", 2013, [https://eot-su.livejournal.com/865442.html].

<sup>4</sup> cautious\_man, *Карнавализация карнавала, часть 2 (Carnivalisation of Carnival, Part 2)*, "Livejournal", 2013, [http://cautious-man.livejournal.com/41906.html].

translation of popular Hollywood movies (known as Goblin translations), activities of a popular Russian rock band “Leningrad” led by Sergey Shnurov (known as Shnur), and a satirical fictional Russian blogger who parodies a former Soviet dissident (Natan Sharanski), named Lev Natanovich Sharanski. All those examples have the features of the *carnavalesque*, introduced by Bakhtin, but in a reverse sense. The idea of *carnivalisation of carnival* in political satire TV shows is underlined in the article.

### Characteristics of the Carnavalesque


The nature of the *carnavalesque* is multidimensional; it is mostly introduced in literature, aesthetics, cultural anthropology, and semiotics. Analysing the writings of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and François Rabelais, Bakhtin pointed out a dichotomy – tragic events stand alongside with fun and joy; death goes together with life, war with peace, and heavens with hell.

Historically, carnival opens the festive season before the liturgical season of Lent and involves all kinds of celebrations to give the sense of social unity (street parades, fashion and music shows, public performances, colourful decorations, costumes, dancing, body paintings, masquerades, circus, mockeries, confetti, etc.). Carnivals are traditionally popular in counties with a large Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Protestant, Methodist, Anglican, and Orthodox presence. From religious point of view, carnivals precede Lent (*Quadragesima*) with fasting (strict food and behavioural restrictions) and time “quietness” in which believers “replicate the sacrifice of Jesus Christ’s journey into the desert for 40 days”.

The anthropological explanation that carnival is a reverse ritual assisted by colours, sounds, emotions to welcome the spring and a new fertility season. Carnivals are usually celebrated in winter when

peasants are experiencing food shortage and this is the last opportunity to eat enough to survive before new food grows. Bakhtin characterizes carnival as an “upside-down world” where laugh conquered fear and the previous year’s fears are burned in carnival fires. Laugh plays the core element because it helps to release those fears (from the religious perspective – for the committed sins and not be released from them; and from anthropological – that there will be not enough food to survive, the fertile season will not come, the weather will be bad, etc.). Bakhtin concludes with two main elements of the concept of the *carnavalesque* – *spectacularity* (it should be an eye-catching show, attracting the attention of public) and the use of *special language* (usually it is a folksy language with vulgar and foul expressions). Political satire is intended to play the same role – upside-down political arena and society, pointing to the societal weakness and provoking the societal moral reform.

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***Political satire is intended to play the same role – upside-down political arena and society, pointing to the societal weakness and provoking the societal moral reform***

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During the Soviet time, political satire was strictly censored. It was prohibited to publish media cartoons presenting political leaders and the Party itself negatively, which might have destroyed their “sacral” image. The same rule was applicable to the TV when it became massively available for the “average Soviet household”. Satirical novels such as *The Twelve Chairs* (1928) and *The Little Golden Calf* (1932) by Ilya Iif and Yevgeni Petrov, *Three Fat Men* (1927) by Yuri Olesha were a completely new genre for the Soviet people and presented more societal satire. Later the Soviet dictatorship eliminated any public manifestation of

satire, even “toothless” and tolerant of the political regime. Social satire, involving any metaphors or allusions to criticize political leaders or the ruling regime, was a crime.

The political print cartoons by a famous Soviet art-band *Kukryniksy* published in the Soviet satirical magazine *Krokodil* were extremely popular. The band was composed of professional artists and graphic designers, lately distinguished by high governmental recognition awards. Their works mostly attacked foreign leaders – Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Heinrich Himmler, Joseph Goebbels, and Francisco Franco, and their caricatures were “sanctioned” by the party.

Extremely popular, then and now, *Klub vesolykh i nakhodchivych* (*KVN – Club of the Funny and Inventive*) for the first time was aired in 1961, during the Khrushchev Thaw. KVN is the Russian TV satirical show in the form of competition among different teams. Each team is evaluated for sketches prepared in advance and funny answers to the host’s questions. Another example is a *Fital*, a Soviet satirical TV show in the form of short movies, was aired for the first time in 1962. *Fital* was popularly known as the “official anecdotes from the Soviet government”, meaning that all jokes went through censorship. Both – KVN and *Fital* – satirized in a very soft manner the Khrushchev time, societal issues, and with more affection the “decaying West” and “international imperialism”.

The NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence published in March 2017 the policy report titled *StratCom Laughs: In Search of an Analytical Framework*<sup>5</sup> where KVN sketches were analysed closely. The scholars concluded that the KVN series was used as the targeted

instrument of population manipulation in virtue of using the techniques such as *groups’ victimization; conservative, sexist, and ethnically-biased stereotypes; in-group and out-group messages* (Russia vs. the others), and *glorification of “Father of the State” image* (represented by the Russian president in power).

In the mid-1980s, political satire on TV got some freedom in comparison with the previous years. KVN turned more open in their political jokes and mocking, but it was not a peppery satire in comparison with *Spitting Image* (the UK, 1984-1996), *That Was the Week That Was* (the UK, 1962-1963), *Extra 3* (Germany, 1973 – present), *Hurra Deutschland* (Germany, 1989-1991), or *Le Bébête Show* (France, 1982-1995). The first Soviet stand-up comedians were Arkady Raikin, Roman Kartsev, Viktor Il’chenko, and Mikhail Zhvanetsky, who started careers in the 1960s and by the beginning of the 1980s became widely popular in the USSR. Mikhail Zadornov started his comedian career at this time. Satirical sketches by individual comedians or group performances were characterized by soft satirization of societal and political issues. Domestic politics was criticized cautiously. At the same time, their humour was in such high demand that they sold out concert halls and became extremely popular in the late Perestroika and early period of the newly independent states. Politicians used to attend their concerts; they were highly welcome on TV and had generous tours around post-USSR countries and abroad (mainly in the countries with a prominent number of Russian-speaking emigrants, such as the Baltic States, Israel, or the US). Some of them were distinguished by the governments and became “court jesters”, entertaining politicians during corporate celebrations. Mikhail Zadornov

<sup>5</sup> Ž. Ozoliņa, I. Austers, S. Denisa-Liepniece, J. Šķilters, S. Struberga, M. Kyiak, *StratCom Laughs: In Search of an Analytical Framework*, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (NATO StratCom COE): Riga 2017.

left many strongly chauvinist and anti-Semitic aphorisms, and became famous by his monologues starting from “Americans are really stupid...”

To sum up, there is an absence of a longstanding tradition of real political satire in the former Soviet countries. The Soviet satire was rather the “continuation” of the Party program, aimed to “send out” messages acceptable by the Party.

### Contemporary Political Satire on Russian TV

It may seem that the collapse of the USSR brought media and political environment to a new era of political satire. In fact, it did not. Comedians who were popular during the late Perestroika period became even more valued. There were some new political satire TV shows, but their humour repeated the same old Soviet time’s pattern – do not touch domestic politics or treat gently home politicians, and put the satirical focus on attacking foreign leaders and countries.

The first widely known weekly political satire TV show was *Kukly* aired on the Russian NTV channel from 1994 to 2002, then closed because of the Kremlin’s pressure (the famous NTV case took place in 2000-2003 and symbolized the end of independent media in Russia). *Kukly* was inspired by the British TV show Spitting Image, the satirical puppet show, caricaturing politicians and celebrities. Victor Shenderovich, a popular Russian comedian and writer, was writing the scripts for *Kukly*. The scripts were full of folk jokes and parallels with mass culture, both current and Soviet. Shenderovich says that after Putin took office, the presidential administration



*their humour repeated the same old Soviet time’s pattern – do not touch domestic politics or treat gently home politicians, and put the satirical focus on attacking foreign leaders and countries*

met with NTV’s team and required from the channel’s administration: (1) to stop discussing political corruption; (2) to change the information politics about the Chechen war; and (3) to remove “the first person” (meaning President Putin) from *Kukly* show<sup>6</sup>. After several episodes without “the first person”, but about “the first person”, the show was closed.

In 2002-2003, *Kremlevskiy Kontsert* had been transmitted on the Russian TVS channel, a private network that was shut down by the Russian Press Ministry in 2003. The editor-in-chief Evgeny Kiselyov announced the lack of funding and the channel suspended broadcasting. *Kontsert* was an animated satirical and comic TV music show making fun of Russian domestic and international politics. The show’s heroes – mostly Russian politicians – sang the old war, Soviet, and modern pop songs with changed texts. Their song texts recalled events and political developments of that time. The texts were rather toothless in comparison with the highly politicized content of *Kukly* and the show rather did not make any difference in the media space and social attitude. Russian journalist Kachkaeva in a radio program on Radio Svoboda in 2002 assessed *Kontsert* as a “less satirical, but more trivial show”<sup>7</sup> and said there is not so much satire in “mocking Lukashenko.

<sup>6</sup> Д. Гордон, Шендерович о причинах закрытия программы “Куклы” (*Shenderovich on the Reasons behind Closure of “Kukly” Show*), 2007, [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97zeajCyGS4>].

<sup>7</sup> А. Качкаева, Как телевидение подсказывает нам, какие проблемы считать острыми, а какие - не стоящими внимания? (*How TV Suggests to Us Which Problems to Consider Important and Which – Unworthy of Attention?*), “Радио Свобода,” 2002, [<https://www.svoboda.org/a/24204081.html>].

**Mult Lichnosti** is a Russian animated mocking TV show aired on *Perviy Kanal* (First Chanel) from 2009 to 2013. The episodes were about 3-4 minutes each and usually involved up to four main characters. The list of characters was rather extensive and included domestic and foreign politicians, sports stars, celebrities, businessmen, artists, public figures, as well as fictional characters such as the secretary of former president Barak Obama or personal guardians of Queen Elizabeth. The episodes were not always connected with a particular political event and satirically depicted rather made-up situations. *Mult Lichnosti* was a more engaging version of *Kremlevskiy Kontsert*. Victor Shenderovich commented<sup>8</sup> that *Mult Lichnosti* was not a “satire show” because it did not “touch any political pressure points”; moreover, it was rather “a direct PR” of the ruling regime. Shenderovich said that *Mult Lichnosti* was only “technically” satire – there are the features of satire, but it is not political satire as a form of societal protest. Such satire is created to glorify domestic characters (Russian politicians) and satirize international politicians, with particular attention to the Ukrainian and Belarusian heads of states.

The Russian version of **Comedy Club** – a stand-up comedy show – has been broadcasted since 2005 by the Russian TNT channel, one of the most popular channels in Russia and owned by Gazprom media group. There are political satirical vignettes about the current domestic and international state of affairs and political

leaders, but as Shenderovich said it is only “technically” a satire. For example, in one of the episodes released in September 2017, the comedians presented a vignette that the majority of the international world leaders (such as Angela Merkel and Kim Jong-un) are Russian security services agents like the former KGB agent President Putin<sup>9</sup>. It should be noted, Russian President Putin is known as a fan of the actor Dmitry Grachev, who used to impersonate President Putin himself; even more so, President Putin “has been seen on television howling with laughter at his performances”.<sup>10</sup>

**Prozhektorperiskhilton** is a Russian satirical TV talk show aired on *Perviy Kanal* since 2008. There are four hosts who invite one guest every show to discuss current political, economic, and societal issues from newspapers, magazines, and the Internet. The talk show is half improvised. The humour is strictly censored and does not touch on serious political issues. The analysis of the latest episode (released on 23 December 2017)<sup>11</sup> shows that the hosts, in the company of the comedian and TV presenter Maksim Galkin, discussed rather apolitical issues that will not have “political consequences” such as the internationally growing demand for Russian inflatable tanks, the new logo of the World Chess Championship, and the rules of conduct in Moscow. The show ends with the adaptation of the song *Pjat' Minut*, which first appeared in *Carnival Night* (1956) movie and became popular. This shows the cultural bonds, non-intentionally or intentionally, that bind the show viewers with the Soviet cultural

<sup>8</sup> Т. Фельгенгауэр, *Особое мнение с Виктором Шендеровичем* (*Dissenting Opinion with Viktor Shenderovich*), “Радио Эхо Москвы”, 2010, [https://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalno/646853-echo/].

<sup>9</sup> Камеди Клуб, *Гарик Харламов, Дмитрий Грачев – Путин, Ким Чен Ын и Ангела Меркель* (выпуск 13, серия 31), 2017, [https://rutube.ru/video/997e4afbbf36e2625034a8362b36a03a/].

<sup>10</sup> A. Ferris-Rotman, *Primetime Politics: How the Kremlin Shapes Russian Television*, “Foreign Affairs”, 12 October 2017, [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2017-10-12/primetime-politics?cid=int-lea&pctype=hpg].

<sup>11</sup> *Прожекторперисхилтон* (выпуск 2, серия 9), 2017, “Первый канал”, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Rfx-Ap\_88E].



heritage. At the same time, the hosts comply with the societal request for such kind of songs.

Moscow-based journalist and analyst of modern Russian youth culture and media, Yuri Saprykin, noted that “there is no political satire in Russia. If you ask me to remember any names, I can hardly do this”.<sup>12</sup>

### Russian-speaking Political Satire outside of Russia

Each of the Baltic countries has a substantial Russian-speaking minority since Soviet time. The Russian speakers who are not linguistically proficient enough to watch national Lithuanian, Latvian, or Estonian TV tend to watch the Russian TV channels that used to be retranslated in those countries. The Kremlin-backed TV channels such as the most popular ones – *Russia 24*, *RT*, *Perviy Kanal*, *REN TV*, *TNT*, *NTV* – tend to violate the international code of journalism standards, using techniques of manipulation and physiological influence (Ukraine<sup>13</sup>, the Baltic States<sup>14</sup>). To prevent the influence of the Russian TV narratives (such as “the Balts are fascists”, etc.) from fuelling tensions among the supporters of the pro-Kremlin narratives and those who support liberal agenda (both citizens or residents) in those countries, each country found its own way to communicate with the Russian speakers and engage them in public life.

A Russian language channel called *ETV+* was established in Estonia as “the independent public information and entertainment TV channel”<sup>15</sup>. Some 25% of the airtime of the public TV in Latvia (*LTV7*<sup>16</sup>, the channel that replaced Russian TV channel *RTR*) is in the Russian language; financially they cannot allow being on air longer than several hours per day. The public TV in Lithuania went the same way as the Finnish public national broadcaster *YLE*, who also have to broadcast in the Russian language, but in the very beginning their international content was mostly re-produced from international media and press agencies. Lithuanian public broadcaster – *LRT Televizija* – has Russian content, but it is mostly retranslating<sup>17</sup> from international media, such as *Deutsche Welle*, *BBC*, *Radio Polsha*, *Radio Svoboda*, etc. The deputy director of *LRT Televizija* Rimvydas Paleckis says that there are “no plans to extend Russian language broadcasting”.<sup>18</sup>

*Derzhites’ Tam* is a “satirical show with the Baltic accent” made in Lithuania. The first video was released in February 2017 on YouTube and shared on Facebook (31K views as of 10 January 2018). The show is produced by *Laisvės TV*, the “first independent and live viewer-based online television in Lithuania”<sup>19</sup>. Andrius Tapinas, the anchor of *Derzhites’ Tam* show, explains that it is the first entirely crowdfunded TV channel whose viewership is almost equal

<sup>12</sup> Э. Ибрагимова, *Есть ли политическая сатира в России, или чем запомнился Михаил Задорнов* (*Is There Political Satire in Russia, or What Is Mikhail Zadornov Memorable for*), “Deutsche Welle”, 2017, [https://goo.gl/9jq].

<sup>13</sup> D. Dutsyk, R. Shutov, P. Burkovskiy, S. Chernenko, *Counteraction to Russian Information Aggression: Joint Action to Protect Democracy*, Telekritika: Kyiv 2015.

<sup>14</sup> *Fortress Russia: Political, Economic, and Security Development in Russia Following the Annexation of Crimea and Its Consequences for the Baltic States*, The Centre for East European Policy Studies: Riga 2016.

<sup>15</sup> *О нас* (*About Us*), “ETV+”, 2018, [https://etvpluss.err.ee/l/moi\_etvpluss].

<sup>16</sup> *Русское вещание* (*Russian Broadcasting*), “LTV7”, 2018, [https://ltv.lsm.lv/lv/ltv7\_ru/].

<sup>17</sup> *Novosti*, “LRT”, 2018, [http://www.lrt.lt/ru/novosti].

<sup>18</sup> О. Антоненко, *Литва: прибалты, которые снова любят русских* (*Lithuania: The Balts Who Like Russians Again*), “BBC”, 09 January 2018, [http://www.bbc.com/russian/features-42607671].

<sup>19</sup> *Laisvės TV is creating TV Show*, 2018, [https://www.patreon.com/laisvestv].

to that of a state TV channel (currently *Laisvės TV* is at the 4th position in the Lithuanian media market). The Russian-language *Derzhites' Tam* show targets both the local population and Russian speakers living in the Baltic states and in countries where the Russian language is popular. The average TV show lasts about half an hour and has at least 20K viewers on YouTube. The show widely uses references to the Soviet jokes, movies, and visuals, and, rarely, vulgar expressions.

The analysis of the latest episode (released on 28 December 2017<sup>20</sup>) of the show demonstrates the visuals of the Soviet animated fairy tale by Alexander Rou, mixed with Putin's old statements, the old Soviet song *Uchat v shkole* (Taught at school, 1973) by Soviet songwriter M. Plyatskovsky that used to be sung during the Knowledge Day; *Cheburashka* cartoon (1969), etc. The anchor of *Derzhites' Tam* presents the state of affairs (if there is something particular happening) in all post-Soviet countries. In the case of this episode – in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine, and a small piece about the US president Donald Trump. The show presents the post-Soviet countries as still unified, satirizing particular events or persons.

On 01 January 2018, Andrius Tapinas presented a mock New Year's presidential speech<sup>21</sup> to the Russian speakers in Estonia on the Russian-language TV channel *ETV+*. In the address, Tapinas satirized the societal issues of the Russian speakers in Estonia, referring to the left-behind compatriots who live in the industrial cities of Sillamäe, Kohtla-Järve, Jõhvi, and grouped in the historically Russian-speaking districts of

Tallinn – Lasnamäe and Kopli. The humour targets very specific issues, understandable only to Russian speakers or Russians who live in Estonia and recall the Soviet past. For example, Tapinas says, "Let's make a wish now and make it true, but before let's drink some Soviet sparkling wine, to add something even stronger, chase it down with tangerines and try not to fall asleep in Russian salad"<sup>22</sup>. This was the most typical scenario of celebrating the New Year's Eve during the Soviet and early post-Soviet period.

Germany's public international broadcaster – *Deutsche Welle* – in November 2017 presented a new satirical show *Zapovednik*, available in Russian and Georgian languages. The show is released on YouTube and shared on Facebook. As of 10 January 2018, eight episodes have been released. Each episode lasts up to 13 minutes and involves conversations in a magic forest between the politically involved animals – Veronika the Crow, Seva the Hare, Garik the Wolf, and an Owl. The average viewership of each episode is about 40K-50K; the first episode, released on 05 November 2017, was watched by almost 90K of people. The characters of the episodes are usually international political leaders, most frequent among them – Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump, Angela Merkel, Teresa May, Petro Poroshenko, Aleksander Lukashenko, Emmanuel Macron, and Kim Jong-un. The scriptwriters use a lot of vulgar expressions (particularly depicting the Russian minister of foreign affairs, Sergei Lavrov) and constant recollections of the best and widely recognized Soviet movies, cartoons, songs, jokes, and anecdotes. For example,

<sup>20</sup> *Итоги года и универсальное поздравление (Year's Results and Universal Congratulations)*, "Держитесь там", 2017, Season 2, Episode 17, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TE7s-iA71u8&feature=youtu.be].

<sup>21</sup> *Новогоднее обращение "Президента России В.В. Путина". Андрюс Тапинас (New Year's Address of the "Russian President V.V. Putin". Andrius Tapinas)*, "ETV+", 2018, [https://etvpluss.err.ee/v/meelelahutus/elkapluss/b467fa01-a607-4b89-89a8-266034c1cdfa/novogodnee-obrashchenie-prezidenta-rossii].

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

the latest episode, released on 24 December 2017<sup>23</sup>, brings back the memories of *Carnival Night* (1956), *White Sun of the Desert* (1970), *Three from Prostokvashino* (1978), and *Charodei* (1982) – all famous and high popular Soviet movies.

Supposedly, the Internet creates unlimited opportunities for diversified political satire. *Derzhites' Tam* and *Zapovednik* are non-Russian political satire shows in the Russian language and they are Internet-based. Moreover, *Derzhites' Tam* is created by a team of people who are entirely crowd-funded. That means that there is the demand for their entertainment product in the form they produce it. The secondary audience for *Zapovednik* is the Russian language speakers residing abroad. The quality of satire, use of language and visuals, constant reproduction of the Soviet movies and songs make them target either the Russians residing in Russia or the Soviet generation who remember those artefacts. The young and middle-aged generation (20+/45+ years old), either those residing in Russia or Russian speakers residing abroad, require more witty political satire; they do not have the positive or negative recollections.

## Conclusion

James Ballardie, a BBC journalist, in the article *Are We Living in a Golden Age of Satire?*<sup>24</sup> advocates that the current political turmoil in the US and UK fuelled the development of political satire at the all-time high. The most interesting satirical TV shows are made in the US and satirizing American domestic politics. The most popular ones are: *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* (5.7M YouTube subscribers),

*The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* (2.7M), *Saturday Night Live*, where Alec Baldwin mocks president Donald Trump (each episode has from 2M to 14M of views), *The Colbert Report* (viewership varies from 4K to 2M), and *Real Time with Bill Maher* (1.3M YouTube subscribers).



***In fact, there is an absence of sharp political satire in the Russian language either on TV or over the Internet***

The original article that became a prerequisite of this analysis, published in LiveJournal and mentioned above, introducing the concept of *carnivalisation of carnival*, argued that the post-Soviet politics created the conditions for “spontaneous carnivalisation that naturally opposed to the liberal western values”. The author (*cautious\_man*) characterizes *counter-carnivalisation* through abandoning the Soviet past, but at the same time, re-thinking and re-framing those who are in the opposition, the oligarchs, and the way to perceive the West.

In fact, there is an absence of sharp political satire in the Russian language either on TV or over the Internet. The analysed satirical TV shows are either contributing to the “good” (“we” – barbaric Russians or civilized Europeans) vs. “bad” (“the others” – the West, professional/non-qualified politicians, etc.) discourse or reproducing the “good, old, known” Soviet jokes and anecdotes. *Derzhites' Tam* and *Zapovednik* were meant to satirize the political regime in Russia with its deficiencies, such as

<sup>23</sup> *Новогодние ремейки с Путиным, Трампом, Меркель и другими (New Year's Re-makes with Putin, Trump, Merkel, and Others)*, “Заповедник”, Episode 8, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FagEgHtRNv4].

<sup>24</sup> J. Ballardie, *Are We Living in a Golden Age of Satire?*, “BBC”, 10 March 2017, [http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-39217855].

corruption, propaganda, numerous human rights violations, etc. Quite the opposite, these shows play the same role as the shows during Perestroika such as *Fitil* or early stand-ups by Zadornov. Keen satire attracts attention and provokes critical thinking; therefore, this is *carnivalisation of carnival* and not a carnival itself.

The article presents just an overview of the existing Russian-language political satire shows in the region; further research needs to be done using the methods of semiotic interpretation and coding to identify the narratives and messages presented in the shows. The production and reproduction of messages that heavily relay the nostalgia motives could have a dangerous effect. It can be hypothesized that the results of a detailed narrative research and discourse analysis might reveal that such

political satire TV shows are used as a strategic communication tool to construct the required image of a country, brand it in a defined way, and legitimize the governmental policy.

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