

POLICY BRIEF



**‘I still trust the Russian media more’
Narratives and perception of Russian propaganda in Kyrgyzstan**

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Author¹

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Control over media in Russia has moved from strict to absolute. New laws and amendments to existing legislation have made it impossible for media to report truthfully. The information provided via traditional media (TV, radio, and newspapers) and online media (websites, mobile applications, and social media platforms) is actively used to distribute propaganda at home and abroad. Kyrgyzstan is a country where Russian propaganda resonates particularly well, as there are strong political, economic, and historical ties between the two countries; the Russian language is broadly used; and competition from local and international alternatives to Russian media is modest at best.

This policy brief assesses the impact of Russian propaganda on audiences in Kyrgyzstan. It does so by addressing the scope of Russian media outlets available in Kyrgyzstan; analysing the narrative of Russian propaganda; and assessing the on-the-ground perception of audiences across Kyrgyzstan.

Key points:

- Russian media is massive and dominant in Kyrgyzstan. This is encouraged by the Kyrgyz authorities and accepted by international donors.
- The Russian news narrative hovers around notions of a confused Ukraine, an evil West, a holy Russia, and a dependent Kyrgyzstan.
- Russian media in Kyrgyzstan is regarded as of high quality, familiar, trustworthy, and a stable middle ground between the poor-quality local media and the amoral Western media.

¹ The author would like to thank the research teams in Kyrgyzstan that collected, categorised, and analysed content and that conducted the focus group discussions. This policy brief and subsequent report build on their work and active engagement.

The study finds that the scope of Russian propaganda in Kyrgyzstan is massive. It includes all traditional media and is omnipresent online via social media platforms. It ranges from the traditional Channel One and *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* to YouTube streaming to *Vkontakte* and *Telegram messaging*. The sheer volume of Russian media and daily messaging dwarf any local Kyrgyz or other media.

The narrative of Russian propaganda targeting audiences in Kyrgyzstan, centres on four main issues: Ukraine, the West, Russia itself, and Kyrgyzstan. Ukraine is portrayed as confused. On the one hand, it is an artificial state that has no reason to exist, while, on the other hand, it is an inseparable part of Russia that is being ruled and ruined by Western-supported Nazis. Russian propaganda creates a broad enemy image of a collective and evil West that interferes in other countries out of self-interest and stirs problems worldwide. It is holy Russia that stands up to the West's immoral policies. In that sense, Russia was forced to react to Western aggression in Ukraine. Kyrgyzstan is portrayed as an extension of the Russian world, heavily dependent on Russia for its economy (labour migrants) and its security.

Local media in Kyrgyzstan is weak in numbers and resources, and is seen as being run by corrupt politicians. Western media, which has little traction in the country, is seen as amoral, and is alien to most Kyrgyz. The Russian narrative is seen as familiar, trustworthy, and a stable middle ground between the poor-quality local media and the amoral Western media.

As a result, the report concludes that a series of steps and investments are necessary to counter Russian propaganda and develop Kyrgyz media. The Kyrgyz authorities should move from pressuring local media to supporting Kyrgyz journalists and investing in professionalising media that is more independent. International donors should step up support for capacity-building, and, at the same time, not take Russian media influence for granted. Journalists need to come together and build an association that is inclusive and professional. Universities and civil society need to conduct more research, teaching, and awareness-raising activities.

This policy brief is based on a full IWPR and EUCAM report. The research for this study analysed Russian propaganda in Kyrgyzstan from 24 February 2022 to 1 December 2022. First, a research team in Kyrgyzstan mapped the major Russian media outlets in the country. In a second stage, the researchers collected, categorised, and analysed news items from six Russian TV channels, three newspapers, and one online news portal, and established a content database. All this is presented here as 'message sent'. At the same time, six focus group discussions were held across Kyrgyzstan (two per location in Bishkek, Naryn, and Osh) to assess how Russian propaganda is consumed and regarded. The latter is presented here as 'message received'.

Message sent

Russian media outlets penetrate audiences in Kyrgyzstan through many channels with a large volume of news items. *Channel One* and *VGTRK's RTR*, which include major propaganda shows and news, are available to Kyrgyz audiences free of charge as the Kyrgyz government subsidises their broadcasts. *MIR* television and radio company products are subsidised through the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) agreements. The three newspapers – *Agrumentii Fakti*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, and *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* – have local branches in Kyrgyzstan, but publish in Russian and are focused on the Russian information agenda. Newspapers are available online and in print. *The Sputnik News Agency* also has a local branch in Kyrgyzstan, is available online, and publishes in both Russian and Kyrgyz. These and other Russian media outlets in Kyrgyzstan differ in style, repertoires, thematic focus, and propaganda techniques.

Russian propaganda can be structured into four clusters, offering a view of Ukraine, the position of the West, Russia's objectives, and Russia-Kyrgyzstan relations.

Confused Ukraine

Ukraine is portrayed as an artificial state where Nazis have taken over parts of the country. According to the Russian narrative, one could argue that Ukraine is 'confused', ignoring its Russian heritage and looking westward. Russia is not fighting against Ukrainians, but against different groups that pose a threat, such as nationalists and Nazis. If the Ukrainian armed forces are mentioned, they are portrayed as weak, while the Ukrainian government is said to pose a threat to the Ukrainian people. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is characterised as a clown, a drug addict, and a hysterical figure.

The portrayal of Ukraine, its people, and its political leadership has undergone an evolution in the Russian media discourse. While the main narrative of accusing Ukrainians of Nazism remains a constant factor, the justification of the invasion has changed over time. Initially, it was about protecting Russians and those who affiliate themselves with Russia from the aggression of the Kyiv regime. As the war progressed, the 'Russia had no choice' narrative became stronger, with Ukraine being presented as a threat. Finally, the justification of the invasion was framed as a mission to save Ukraine from the 'colonial invaders', the latter being the West represented by the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), NATO and the European Union (EU).

The evil West

The West is portrayed as the underlying problem in Ukraine; it is an 'evil', 'collective' power that is in moral decay and oppresses people worldwide. Western powers, led by the United States, are accused of manipulating Ukraine into becoming an enemy of Russia. Europe is also often portrayed as a victim of US manipulation, although it is discursively included in the collective West. The collective West is present across all of the identified themes and incorporates NATO and even United Nations (UN) institutions such as the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). The collective West is blamed for imposing its values on other states to achieve global dominance. While war is presented as beneficial to the US, anti-Russian sanctions are reported to be hurting Europe, especially amid the 'energy crisis'.

Outside of the Ukraine context, the West is framed as immoral, actively promoting homosexuality and drugs. Feminist ideas are presented as a tool to destroy families; people living alone are detrimental to national development; and soft-drug legalisation is a way of keeping the population docile and obedient.

Holy Russia

Russia is portrayed as the defender of moral values, standing up to the West, offering help to those in need, and 'showing the way' to others (Ukraine, for instance). A major tool of Russia's soft power and influence in former Soviet countries is the Russian language, which is framed as unifying. Whenever attempts are made to use the local languages instead of Russian, there is an emotional counter-reaction in the Russian media.

In most cases, explaining Russia positively goes hand in hand with framing the West as the enemy. The West is accused of interfering in other countries' internal affairs, while Russia respects sovereignty. The West promotes immorality, while Russia stands up to this and defends Christian norms and values. There is also the argument of 'you have done it, so why can't we'. For example, reference to Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine or the threat of nuclear weapons are often accompanied by references to NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia, or the US use of nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Dependent Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan is portrayed as an extension of the Russian world, and the notion of 'dependence' is regularly stressed. Most Russian media outlets systematically use '*Kirgiziia*' as a colonial version of the name of the country, which has been sparking outrage among civil society representatives in Kyrgyzstan. Russia is presented as a helping hand, a guiding elder and a superior entity that can both support and punish when necessary. Russia is presented as Kyrgyzstan's key trade and economic partner, as well as security guarantor; Russia is the centre to which Central Asian states gravitate.

Russian media is not very vocal about Russian mobilisation dodgers in Kyrgyzstan. Sometimes, highly-qualified Russians are mentioned as arriving in Kyrgyzstan without any explanation; in other reports, it is said that Russia has been cleansing itself of traitors. When reporting on Central Asians in Russia, Russian media does not shy away from linking labour migrants to crime, even though, recently there has been a slight shift in tone due to an increasing need for labourers and soldiers amid the exodus of Russian citizens and Russia's war economy.

Message received

Focus group discussions have revealed that social networks are the primary source of information and news in Kyrgyzstan. Television comes in second. Only a few people listen to the radio or read newspapers, and both are in continuous decline. People receive news passively, by opening their phones. *'I'm not looking for it [news] on purpose. But if it appears in my feed, I read it'*. People find the algorithms behind social media convenient: *'What I like about TikTok is that it selects all the relevant news for me based on my interests.'* Algorithms create an

echo-chamber in which consumers' beliefs are confirmed through the options offered by search engines. Often, search results are perceived as a source in itself. Meanwhile, TV remains relevant and even serves as a fact-checking tool; some focus group participants reported that they check the accuracy of what they have seen online by watching regular news on TV.

How Russia's war in Ukraine is viewed

The Kyrgyz population has mixed feelings about the war. Many try to avoid the large volume of news about the war. The terms 'conflict' and 'war' are more frequently seen and used than 'special military operation'. As in many places, views on the war divide families and friends. *'I don't follow Russian news. We all know that there is a conflict between Ukraine and Russia. In the beginning of this conflict, I felt sorry for the Ukrainians, because innocent people were being killed on both sides. I really wanted them to come to a truce. And, for some reason, my husband supports Russia. At first, it really seemed to me that civilians were dying [...]. But my husband still believes that Russia is doing the right thing. And we argued about it. He said that I didn't understand anything; he said that Putin was doing the right thing. And now I don't know which side I'm on.'* In Russian media, reports on the war against Ukraine are often connected to other issues such as the West's negative role or, in Kyrgyzstan's case, the country's dependence on Russia.

How the West is perceived

US and European media are often perceived as channels for spreading Western values, which are seen as either counterproductive to Kyrgyzstan's development or alien and not applicable. People occasionally watch the *BBC, Deutsche Welle or Euronews* in Russian. *'I believe that European countries have developed at the expense of other countries. It also seems to me that these are countries opposed to the religion of Islam.'* These views are often accompanied by weariness of negative portrayals of Putin and Russia. Western media faces credibility challenges in Kyrgyzstan.

How Russia is regarded

'We look up to Russia. But this is inevitable [...] after all, it is our strategic partner [...] the CSTO, the SCO; we are dependent and look up to them. Thanks to Russia, neither China nor America touches us.' This is a broadly-shared sentiment that resonates especially among the older generations. People grew up with Soviet media and continue to consume Russian media today as it is familiar and feels like home. *'I have never made a divide between local and Russian television. I never considered it to be foreign. In my subconscious, Russia and Kyrgyzstan are still together. I still have this, so I never treated [Russian media] as foreign and always watched it, like our news. I trust it.'*

'It's just that I'm either used to it [Russian media] or I understand it more. Let's say if I watch Ukrainian news, I still believe the Russian ones. Someone says this or that, that there is a level of fake news, but I still trust the Russian media more.'

Russian media products are also praised for their high quality. The perception of Russian media as trustworthy and reliable is further strengthened when compared with local media outlets, which people see as corrupt and weak, or with Western media, which is viewed as amoral and alien.

How Kyrgyz media are seen?

For many, Kyrgyz media offers either inferior quality or simply copies Russian programmes. *'For some reason, I associate the Kyrgyz media with helplessness. No matter what information is there, it seems so insignificant and small.'* At the same time, Kyrgyz media is associated with corrupt local politics. People do not trust local media, as it is believed to be riddled with misinformation and serving a particular local group. Whereas Kyrgyz TV and newspapers seem marginal, many (younger) people follow bloggers online. *'For me, journalists have become secondary, that is, they lag behind bloggers. Now, bloggers have a very strong influence on society, even on the country. Today, as soon as a blogger publishes some information, society reacts to the publication, and then the authorities react. Journalists no longer play such a role; they are lagging behind.'*

Urging action

A series of steps and investments are necessary to counter Russian propaganda and develop Kyrgyz media:

To all stakeholders

1. Collaborate more

There is an urgent need for the Kyrgyz authorities, international donors, media, and civil society to jointly counter Russian propaganda and develop Kyrgyz journalism. This is easier said than done. The Kyrgyz authorities have restricted Kyrgyz media instead of developing it, and local journalists and civil society actors suffer from reputational damage, often due to government defamation. International donor support to countries where Russian narratives dominate needs to be stronger. As these stakeholders are all partly dependent on each other in terms of resources, collaboration and political will, it makes sense to bring them together in different settings to exchange views and set up mechanisms for cooperation and to reduce Kyrgyz dependency on Kremlin-led propaganda.

2. Promote Kyrgyz content

For Kyrgyz media to attract readers and viewers, it will need to produce more content that is of high quality. To achieve that, it is necessary to modernise the education of journalists and professionalise Kyrgyz media outlets by making them economically viable businesses that attract funding through advertisement. Concrete actions could include increasing the number of Kyrgyz language editors to support local content creation and coverage of diverse perspectives; setting up 'local Kyrgyz departments' in media outlets to ensure the production and promotion of content in the Kyrgyz language focused on specific regions of the country; or introducing online business models that can make Kyrgyz language media outlets attractive to companies wanting to advertise online.

3. Offer Ukrainian news as an alternative to Russian propaganda

Instead of Western media explaining Russia's war in Ukraine, broadcasting Ukrainian television and making Ukrainian media produced in Russia more accessible to audiences in Kyrgyzstan could be a direct way of countering Russian propaganda. Whereas Western media cannot compete with Russian media in offering a sense of belonging and a shared past, Ukrainian media outlets could potentially adhere to the Kyrgyz people. There are efforts in Ukraine to produce content in Russian, specifically with the aim of reaching Russophone audiences with alternative messages. Some content produced in Russian and Ukrainian could also be translated and subtitled in Kyrgyz (including sign language), making it even more accessible.

4. Empower women through media

Russian broadcasting promotes 'traditional values' that are used for normalising gender-based violence – a compelling reason for countering Russian propaganda and developing balanced home-grown media. Through education, projects and awareness-raising, Kyrgyz media should develop the capacity to depict the diverse roles that women play and devote more attention to the views of women on all matters of consequence. This is not about portraying women in a Western way, but about giving space to the female voice (whatever the view might be). Both women and men should be capable of offering opportunities to women in shaping debate and the news.

5. Counter Russian propaganda that targets LGBT rights

Russian propaganda is detrimental to LGBT rights in Kyrgyzstan. Negative attitudes in Russian media and inflammatory language resonate well with 'traditionalist' groups in society and with the Kyrgyz authorities. The best way to support the LGBT community in Kyrgyzstan is to counter Russian propaganda. LGBT-focused projects that are supported and advertised by Western donors can have adverse effects and even create additional risks to different groups. Smart actions that begin and end with civil society insight into local circumstances can be supported. Ideally, such projects would engage LGBT groups as part of society and not as a specific group.

6. Make local media more economically resilient

There are many short-term possibilities that could be developed to support local media. Providing funding and opportunities to bring together media and civil society organisations to advocate for media reform and support media development is one. Together, they can develop projects for local content studios to encourage the creation of high-quality Kyrgyz content and develop business models for media to become economically viable. Another worthwhile initiative is content sharing, whereby a network that is easily accessible online offers the best content of several media outlets. Overall, training is necessary for young journalists to gain experience from seasoned Kyrgyz and Western journalists. Opportunities for traineeships at Western media outlets in Europe should increasingly become available.

To the Kyrgyz authorities

7. Stop curtailing Kyrgyz journalists

The 2021 'fake news law' is damaging to media producers and consumers alike in Kyrgyzstan. It also runs counter to the country's state-building ambitions and, in the short term, to the government's stability. The Kyrgyz authorities should stop countering independent journalism and, instead, render support to Kyrgyz media and journalists to professionalise the sector. The current situation, in which people barely use local media, and where there is a disconnect between pro- and anti-government outlets and between classical newspaper/television and activist online bloggers, is detrimental to the people's view of their country and the people that run it.

8. Stop offering primetime space to Russian programming

Several Russian media outlets are part of the Kyrgyz public broadcasting system. It is hard to grasp why Kyrgyz people should be exposed to Russian propaganda via the public channels. This practice should be ended by the Kyrgyz authorities. At the same time, Kyrgyz media should be given a chance to take up more space in the public broadcasting system. This is not about excluding the Russian language, but about promoting Kyrgyz as a language of news consumption, next to Russian. Offering the possibility for Russian media to broadcast on a vast scale also runs counter to the interests of the Kyrgyz government that seeks to develop the Kyrgyz identity.

To Kyrgyz media outlets and journalists

9. Build an inclusive and professional association of journalists

Journalists need to come together to develop a professional association or guild of Kyrgyz journalists that is inclusive. Investigative journalists, bloggers, think tankers and NGO representatives should increasingly work together on journalistic projects. Today, many journalists and bloggers have not necessarily obtained a degree in journalism or gone through a process of training on journalistic values, tools, and skills. Developing a place where journalists can exchange experiences and information would help develop cohesiveness in Kyrgyz media. Interaction should go beyond the existing labour unions. An association or guild could, for instance, also organise meetings with Kyrgyz editors to provide exchanges on best practices in media management, content creation, and audience engagement.

To local academia and the research community

10. Pay attention to online literacy in all-around education

Whereas internet penetration is on the rise and more people have access to smartphones, there is a lack of understanding of the effects of digitalisation on people's daily lives in general and, more specifically, concerning disinformation and its related risks. There is a continued need for Kyrgyz schools and universities to familiarise their students with digital tools. Whereas children easily navigate the internet and discover the possibilities of digitalisation, they also need to become aware of the risks that social and digital media bring with them

in terms of propaganda, dis- and misinformation, and the power of algorithms. Existing initiatives and projects that seek to address media literacy need increased and long-term support, starting by addressing the matter at an early age through the school system.

11. Modernise the study of journalism

Building on earlier projects, Kyrgyz universities should further modernise their education in journalism and media studies to prepare journalists to work in a fast-changing (online) environment. Teachers in journalism faculties should receive on-the-job training. Improved curricula should become more attractive to young people. Curricula need to become less dependent on Russian or Western teaching through the creation of material also in Kyrgyz. Young journalists should learn to function in both the local Kyrgyz setting and in an international environment. Clearly, the centre of attention will need to move to online journalism, while focusing on visual and text content. Besides the craft of research and writing, more effort needs to be devoted to developing media outlets as businesses. Local media in Kyrgyzstan's regions should be supported to offer attractive short-term internships to students of journalism.

12. Invest in applied and data-driven research and independent analysis

Research communities in Europe, but also in Central Asia itself, know little about Central Asia media consumption and public opinion, and how these are shaped by local and foreign actors. Research relevant to policy-making should be expanded in the sphere of countering Russian propaganda and developing Kyrgyz media. Regarding the former, suggestions include an assessment and comparison of similar countries' situations and policies that are affected by Russian propaganda (Moldova, South Caucasus countries or other Central Asian countries). In the latter case, one can think of research on the consumption of Kyrgyz media or developing an action plan for local media development in Kyrgyzstan.

13. Better analyse the link between media and external influence in Kyrgyzstan

This study has shown that Russian propaganda is Russia's primary tool to impact Kyrgyz society. Next to Russian media, and to a much more modest extent, there are other external actors active in Kyrgyzstan's media landscape such as Chinese, Turkish, and Western media. Whereas there is much insight into the geopolitical influence of Russia and China in Central Asia, much less is known about the role of (online) media that external actors use in obtaining societal impact and economic and political influence. Turkey is a case in point, as it has the possibility to use Turkic languages as a tool in reaching out to Kyrgyzstan (as well as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). Another case is China's capacity to influence online media via social platforms that can be instrumentalised to further its interests.

To international donors and Western policy-makers

14. Do not accept the status quo and characterise support to the Kyrgyz media as urgent

The EU, UK, and the US – as large donors that are keen to work with Kyrgyzstan – need to step up in using their leverage to address the negative impact of Russian propaganda with Kyrgyzstan’s government. Whereas Kyrgyzstan seeks to stay neutral between Russia and Ukraine, the largest share of its public opinion is formed by Russian propaganda. Western partners should not accept the role of Russian propaganda in Kyrgyzstan as normal and, instead, make this clear to the Kyrgyz authorities, while offering cooperation and financial support in return for concrete reform and space for media development.

15. Help Kyrgyzstan develop quality media legislation

The 2021 ‘fake news’ law is damaging to the development of Kyrgyz media but does not seem to affect Russian propaganda. Donors should help (and where needed push) Kyrgyzstan to develop new media related legislation that creates opportunity instead of curtailing media outlets. Newly-developed legislation should meet international standards, especially those of the OSCE, of which Kyrgyzstan is a participating state. Donors could also seek the involvement of the Venice Commission (of which Kyrgyzstan is a member without being part of the Council of Europe), which could help through opinions and advice. Meanwhile, continued support should be rendered to existing civil society programming that addresses legal reform of media provisions.

16. Help develop Central Asian TV and online streaming components

Whereas Central Asian countries share few home-grown regional cooperation formats and each of the countries is building its own national identity, there is also a lot that binds the people of these countries – a shared history, language, and culture. Externally-funded but locally-developed entertainment in the form of amusement programmes, music shows, sports broadcasting, and perhaps also soap operas or thrillers, could potentially attract audiences in all five countries. Larger streaming services could potentially play an advising or guiding role for local production firms. Central Asian programming would recognise the increased use of local languages (subtitles should be provided for Uzbek programmes in Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyz shows in Kazakhstan, and so on) and help slowly steer away from a Russian media-dominated media landscape.

17. Treat media support as a cross-cutting issue

The issues of media development and countering Russian propaganda should be addressed both as stand-alone subjects as well as cross-cutting matters. The role of media should play a part in many donor-funded research, training, and awareness-raising projects that deal with education, social and economic issues or security and governance. For instance, projects on gender equality could include a component that addresses media, either as a beneficiary by including training for journalists on gender issues or as a stakeholder in getting project results across through media cooperation. With regard to countering Russian propaganda, education and training projects could increasingly include aspects of resilience against disinformation.

18. Measure success and failure through better monitoring

While government sectors often initiate monitoring initiatives, non-governmental organisations, media outlets, and the education sector should also be equipped to implement and sustain high-quality monitoring and evaluation of propaganda at the local, national, and regional levels. Collaborative efforts among these stakeholders – for instance, through a propaganda measurement index – could lead to greater efficiency, enhanced analysis, and increased influence, while avoiding duplication of efforts.

Conclusion

Russia remains influential in Kyrgyzstan's security, economic, social, and cultural domains. Russian media ties this influence together. The scope of Russian media messaging in Kyrgyzstan is massive and dwarfs any local Kyrgyz or other media.

The narrative of Russian propaganda can be discerned into four main messages in which Ukraine is portrayed as a 'confused' country run by Nazis, but which is historically part of Russia; the West as an 'evil' conglomerate that is manipulating Ukraine, is aggressive towards Russia, and is immoral; Russia as 'holy', leading resistance against the West; and Kyrgyzstan as a country that is 'dependent' on Russia and, at the same time, an extension of the Russian world.

With regard to perception, Russian media is considered professional and resonates well as it is linked to people's heritage. While many either see through Russian propaganda or are wearisome of war news, others support Russia unconditionally. At the same time, Western media is seen as too anti-Russian and amoral. Kyrgyz media is not taken seriously and is regarded as part of local politics. Changing this course depends on Kyrgyzstan itself, although donors could and should help.



Established in 2008 by FRIDE as a project seeking to monitor the implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia, EUCAM has grown into a knowledge hub on broader Europe-Central Asia relations. As part of CESS, EUCAM will continue to raise the profile of European-Central Asian relations in general, and more specifically to:

- Critically, though constructively, scrutinize European policies towards Central Asia;
- Enhance knowledge of European engagement with Central Asia through top-quality research;
- Raise awareness on the importance of Central Asia and Europe's engagement, as well as discuss European policies among Central Asian communities;
- Expand the network of experts and institutions from Europe and Central Asia and provide a forum for debate.



The Centre for European Security Studies (CESS) is an independent institute for research and training, based in Groningen, the Netherlands. CESS seeks to advance political development, democracy, human rights and in particular security, by helping governments and civil society face their respective challenges.

CESS is an international, multidisciplinary and inclusive institute. Its work is part of the European quest for stability and prosperity, both within and outside Europe. CESS encourages informed debate, empowers individuals, fosters mutual understanding on matters of governance, and promotes democratic structures and processes.

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