

# “SOMETHING IS IMMENSELY ROTTEN IN THE MEDIA REPUBLIC”. THE INFORMATION DIMENSION OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS IN EUROPE

*Iurii Melnyk*<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*The article analyzes the reaction of German media to the assaults on women in Cologne and other German and European cities on New Year's Eve 2015/2016. Nationwide TV channels and newspapers, with rare exceptions, did not report about the events till January 4 or even 5, causing outrage in social networks. This is serious evidence of deep problems in German and Western journalism. Due to the abundance of information resources, the mainstream media hold no monopoly on news delivery anymore. If they continue to compromise themselves, there is a danger of reorientation of the Western audience towards alternative sources of information: extremist Internet resources and foreign media, first of all the Russian ones.*

**Key words:** media concealment, silence strategy, German journalism, Cologne attacks, migrant crisis, Russian influence, right-wing rising, anti-fascist discourse, tolerance.

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During the 2015/2016 New Year's Eve celebrations, a wave of collective sexual assaults against women (including robberies and few cases of rape) was reported across Germany and Europe, mainly in Cologne. Similar incidents were reported in Hamburg, Frankfurt, Dortmund, Düsseldorf, Stuttgart, Zürich, Wien, Helsinki and other European cities. This is a phenomenon known in the Arab World as 'taharrush gamea' in Arabic, translated as "group sexual harassment in crowds".

Synchronicity and coordination of immigrants' actions in different cities of Germany and Europe leaves no doubt that it was a planned and deliberately organized action. There were reports in the press about unrealized plans of similar attacks. As "International Business Times" wrote, "Police in Finland also revealed they had learned of plans by migrants to sexually assault women in Helsinki" [1]. The scandal effect was reinforced by the fact that the police for several days hid the true scale of what had happened. The mayor of Cologne Henriette Recker advised the German women to change their behavior in public places, to "walk in groups" and "to keep a certain distance that is longer than an arm's length", which caused a storm of criticism and jokes. Not only did police and politicians react to the Cologne assaults in such an inadequate way, but also the German media did not report immediately about them, adopting the silence strategy.

The objective of the article is to elucidate the causes and consequences of silencing of the Cologne events in the German media (trying to put the incident into a wider context). To get a complete picture of the situation. The content of both local and nation-

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<sup>1</sup> Associate professor of the department of Foreign Press and Information, the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (Ukraine).

wide German newspapers, magazines and TV channels were taken into consideration. A number of qualitative research methods were applied in this article, such as induction, deduction, description, observation, reconstruction, content analysis, narrative analysis, comparative analysis and generalization.

### **The Reaction of the German media**

On January 1 the events were actively discussed in social networks, particularly in the facebook-group "Netzwerk Köln". On the same day the local newspapers "Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger" [2], "Kölnische Rundschau" [3] and "Express" [4] reported about the events in Cologne. Those newspapers cited the testimonies of victims, from which a reader could get only a rough idea of the scale of the events. There was nothing about ethnicity of the criminals in the reports, with an exception that the first of these Cologne newspapers hinted at "an anti-foreigner tendency" and "xenophobic comments" in discussions within the facebook group Netzwerk Köln. The same information was disseminated by the nationwide "Focus" [5].

Already on January 2 "Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger" reported that there were dozens of both victims and criminals ("Victims and witnesses spoke to the police about men of North African appearance") and that, according to the police, "they have nothing to do with refugees" [6]. Information about the events continued to be spread, the reports by "Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger" and "Express" were republished by "Short News" [7], "NRW.jetzt" [8], "Kopp Online" [9] and some marginal xenophobic sites. Some blog posts by eyewitnesses made their appearance [10]. While in social networks and in local newspapers people were expressing their outrage and explaining the circumstances of the event, the nationwide media chose the silence strategy, to which they adhered until the avalanche of outrage on the Internet deprived this strategy of sense. As a result of pressure from social media, on January 4-5 the leading German media were forced to inform the public about New Year's events in Cologne and in other German and European cities. In the first days and weeks after the failed attempt to silence those events, the German media showed their desire to rehabilitate themselves.

The Cologne events significantly reduced the threshold of politically correct self-censorship and journalists were no longer afraid to ask essential questions, such as: "Who were the perpetrators and where did they come from?" (Simone Müller, ZDF [11]); "Why did the local police fail so miserably?" (Georg Restle, ARD [12]); "Must we be interested in the origin of perpetrators?" (Alfred Schier, "Phoenix" [13]); "Who should be protected? Victim or perpetrator?" (Hannelore Crolly, "Die Welt" [14]).

There was a series of angry protests in the press. The sharp rejection of the situation with immigrants was expressed by bloggers, whose names were hidden behind nicknames: "At the latest since Merkel's border opening on 5.9.2015, taboos have been set up, which lead to the prohibition of thinking and stifle the open discussion about culture in the germ over the Nazi club and other clubs" [15]. But even in respectable media one could come across a strong discontent with the actual immigration situation. Sebastian Antrak ("The Huffington Post Deutschland") allowed himself to sharply criticize the government for its immigration policy and to compare the refugees to "moles": "They are moles that are coming. Since the chancellor and the ministers did not want to get their hands dirty in the undermining of the German nation, they borrowed some forces from abroad" [16].

In "Der Spiegel" in the afternoon of January 5 the first journalistic commentary of the situation matured. Jan Fleischhauer raised the problem of media coverage of the events in Cologne. The point the author started from was the society's distrust of the media: "41 percent of Germans have the impression that the critical voices about the refugee crisis fall short". That gave him grounds to criticize the German media (partic-

ularly television ARD und ZDF) which were aimed at smoothing and depreciating the negative sides of immigration. Jan Fleischhauer rightly observed that the current media discourse, repressing very strictly even innocent allusions to the objectification of women, treated the attacks on women in Cologne as an ordinary event. "The 'Tagesthemen' devoted a little over a minute to the attacks, but not without a warning voice, that one had to be careful not to play now into the hands of wrong people", Jan Fleischhauer noted [17].

ZDF gave the floor to prof. Christian Pfeiffer who urged not to conceal the true state of affairs and "to say frankly: there is a problem with the young men who live alone in Germany without their families" [18]. "Deutsche Welle" gave feminist Alice Schwarzer an opportunity to speak in connection to the events in Cologne: "It is time that we stop with wrong tolerance. The Islamists are the fascists of the 21st century, and we have to deal with them the same way we deal with right-wing extremism" [19]. "Spiegel TV" made a high-quality, impartial investigation, interviewed victims of the attacks in Cologne and Hamburg, North Africans who carried out these attacks and the representatives of the law enforcement authorities [see: 20]. At the same time, the audience had no reason to suspect the authors of the investigation to extrapolate the responsibility for the crimes of individuals on all immigrants /Muslims/ refugees.

However, an unsuccessful attempt to silence the events did not become the turning point in ultra-cautious media policy in dealing with interethnic issues. After January 4-5 there were desperate attempts to justify the behavior of the media.

The editors of "Tagesschau" (ARD) hypocritically explained their four days silence by the absence of corresponding police reports<sup>2</sup>. Equally ridiculous was the excuse of another leading channel ZDF, whose editor-in-chief Elmar Theveßen explained the absence ("the transfer") of news about the events in Cologne in "heute-Nachrichten" on January 4 (when almost all German media had informed about it already) by the need "to gain time for additional interviews". In one of the first reports about the events in Cologne on ZDF presenter Norbert Lehmann said that five days later "a picture of what happened gets clearer"[22], hinting that the previous silence derived from the need to understand the situation.

Manipulation in the German media which were designed to conceal from the public the very fact of the Cologne events (and some of their aspects later) including the migrant nature of the violence, gave rise to the characteristics of the German media as 'Lügenpresse' ('liepress'), the validity of which is confirmed in a thorough research by Matthew Karnitschnig in "Politico" [23] and in a less ambitious study published in "Breitbart" [24].

In response, there were attempts to rehabilitate the German media, to explain their silence, to hush up the questions and complaints of the community with arguments about the search for "a balance between security and freedom" and the threat of the strengthening of the right-wing forces. They rejected with disdain the label 'Lügenpresse', but instead of giving counterarguments against it, they denounced the use of a Nazi term by the accusers (see e.g. "Deutsche Welle" [25]).

Derek Scally ("Irish Times") believes that concealment as such did not take place, citing examples of reports in local newspapers [26], as if the Cologne attacks were the events of local significance and the news in the Cologne local newspapers annihilated the claims against ZDF, ARD and other leading German media. Although, in reality the availability of the information in the local press from January 1, 2016 only aggravates the responsibility of mainstream media, because the news was on the surface but it was not

2 Stefan Winterbauer ridiculed this excuse of "Tagesschau": "After all, the WDR is located in Cologne, the largest broadcaster of the ARD and the second largest broadcasting corporation in Europe after the BBC"[21].

picked up and raised to the nationwide level. "If something as monstrous happens as in Cologne, in the middle of Germany and it takes four days to report on it nationwide, then something is immensely rotten in the media republic. This cannot be explained away", Stefan Winterbauer rightly observed [27].

As for the belated Cologne assault coverage, despite rare anti-immigrant invectives and few honest attempts to understand the situation, most of the texts intended to suppress, subdue and condemn the angry questions instead of answering them.

It is significant, that "Der Spiegel" did not leave any possibility to comment the Cologne events under the majority of publications on this issue (in contrast to many other articles on Spiegel online), denying readers a voice: "Unfortunately, we have so many inappropriate, insulting or unjustified comments to the topic ..." [28]. Moreover, the German government, Facebook, Google and Twitter were engaged in controlling and censoring users who criticized the influx of refugees in the country, which Reuters called "a new step in the fight against rising online racism following the refugee crisis" [29]. However, the fight against the uncontrolled Internet element, as it has been already clarified [30], leads rather to the opposite result.

The covering of the Cologne incidents and its consequences without naming the problem was a popular decision for many German media. "Süddeutsche Zeitung" reported on a flash mob, organized by activists to protest against violence towards women in connection with the events in Cologne, but did not mention the circumstances and the actors of that violence [31]. In the article which was 3900 characters long there was not a single word about the perpetrators of the crime.

The famous German RTL presenter Nazan Eckes, who lobbies for the interests of immigrants and talks about their integration in a positive manner [32], after Cologne events made a call for the rights of women. "Generations of women have fought hard for this and we should not move an inch away", the journalist is quoted by the media, including "Die Welt" [33]. Again, there was not a word about immigrants.

Feminists' stubborn concealment of the events in Cologne is a representative phenomenon, which was condemned by, among others, German journalist of Romanian origin Birgit Kelle in Focus. She referred to the radical feminists (magazines "Missy Magazine", "Emma") as "Guarantors of acute indignation reflexes", who are disposed to launch nationwide campaigns against sexism or chauvinism if a man allows himself a compliment or a bad joke. Birgit Kelle also protested against the policy of double standards and made it clear that she was not going to give up her principles: "If the perpetrators had been German hooligans for example, we would all have known their first names, the Tagesschau would have reported and Justice Minister Maas would have convoked a round table"; "The accusation of sexism, usually quickly at hand, deviates from the call for understanding of other cultures, I do not want to have any understanding and will not bring it up" [34].

Those feminists who decided not to remain silent and to speak out, did so in a very distinctive way. Muslim blogger and activist of Turkish origin Kübra Gümüşay in her Twitter immediately raised "against sexualized violence and racism" [35], leaving no chance to link the brutality against women and the ethnic origin of those who committed it.

In her "Der Spiegel" column Margarete Stokowski condemned not criminals who had carried out the attacks on women, but the "racists", "becoming wild – if not always being wild", who also dared to accuse feminists of derogation of the Cologne crimes. The victims of the Cologne attacks were "good enough reason for them as worried citizens to become noble knights and protectors of women". The author resented that "the perpetrators are hardly considered as individuals, but are only a diffuse mass of horny foreigners who are described with animal vocabulary". Not that Margarete Stokowski refused to talk about the violence in Cologne. She wrote about it as a precedent worthy of condemnation, but agreed to consider it solely from the perspective of masculine

violence against women, without ethnic characteristics of criminals. For biases against immigrants she condemned even a balanced article by Heinrich Wefing Under shock in "Die Zeit", in which it was stressed, "that we must not condemn the refugees on a general basis, for acts that they have not committed" [36].

A green politician Claudia Roth also tried to reverse the situation from "immigrants against local population" to much more comfortable for the modern feminist discourse "men vs. women": "It is not that we can now say that it is typical for North Africa, that it is typical for refugees... This is about male violence..." [37].

In contrast, let's take into account the interpretation of the Cologne precedent offered by Nina Burleigh, an American journalist, known for her interest in women's rights issues. In her publication on the pages of NewsWeek she contemplated on reasons of such behavior of men in Cologne city center: "It's not hard to understand what happens to young men, raised in households where men have total physical and economic control – and, in fact, the power of life or death over wives, sisters and daughters – when they step out on the streets of European cities...". Nina Burleigh is also a feminist and she also interpreted the situation from a feminist point of view, but unlike Claudia Roth, she had no political reason to ignore the ethnic component of the Cologne events.

If some German newspapers did not consider it appropriate to follow the tactics of concealment and of not naming things by their names, they showed a tendency to blame any other passions around Cologne. The slightest hints about the ethnicity of the violators were perceived as manifestations of intolerance: "But whoever concludes from the events in Cologne that 'the migrants' are a danger, who in fact calls for restriction of the refugees influx because of the acts of violence, falls into crude racism" (Hannah Beitzer, "Süddeutsche Zeitung") [38].

Many German commentators expressed the view that similar infringements of law were an objective reality of Germany itself, rejecting the immigrant factor: "As if there were no thefts, no rapes and no murders in Germany without immigrants", Daniel Bax wrote ("taz.de" [39]). As "Süddeutsche Zeitung" published, Cologne was already "the city of thieves" in which "there had been more and more offenses for years" [40].

Some journalists recognized that "the much acclaimed welcome culture is exploited by somebody" and that it was "fundamentally wrong" to obscure the origin of the perpetrators, though they made an emphasis on the threat of right-wing populism, as Anja Reschke (ARD [41]) or Dirk Schümer ("Die Welt" [42]) did.

When it comes to the malcontents of the German government's immigration policy, one of the main methods to fight them is to conduct obvious and veiled parallels with National Socialism<sup>3</sup>. "Die Zeit" published a major study on xenophobia and violence against immigrants by those who "adhere to right-wing ideology" [44]. Andreas Rossmann in "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" drew parallels between attacks on women on January 1, 2016 near the Cologne Cathedral and the demonstration of the far-right movement Pegida a year before on January 5, 2015 at the same place [45]. "Right-wing commentators, being far from precise, took the incidents to use them in a hurry for their purpose, to foment hatred against refugees", "Süddeutsche Zeitung" wrote [46]. "Der Spiegel", writing about the Cologne New Year incidents, mentioned the excesses of anti-immigrant minded football hooligans who in October 2014 had demonstrated against Salafism and pelted police with bottles and stones [47].

Journalist Sascha Lobo's logic of thinking deserves special remarks. Rising in de-

3 Interestingly, hunted representatives of the extreme right also do not avoid historical parallels with the Second World War. For example, AfD board spokeswoman Frauke Petry in her facebook compared the events in Cologne with the rape of German women by Red Army soldiers in the spring of 1945: "Massive abuse in Cologne is the reminiscent of the rightless conditions at the end of the war" [43].

fense of immigrants in his article published on January 6 in “Der Spiegel”, he likened ‘the crowd’ which had been involved in the excesses of New Year’s Eve with the ‘counter-crowd’ mobilized online, which had commented these excesses. Moreover, he exposed the ‘counter-crowd’ (Internet commentators) to much more consistent and thorough criticism comparing to the ‘crowd’ (rapists). Sascha Lobo gave his understanding of civilized being: “To be civilized means to meet nine black-haired men who all turn out to be assholes and still do not punch in the face the tenth blackhaired”. This is a seemingly humane and Christian statement, but one of the author’s following statements casts a shadow on it and smacks of a totalitarian peremptoriness: “Whoever in the light of the Cologne attacks is thinking, whether racist generalizations perhaps are okay, was already racist before and did not dare to say it”. The desperate defenders of women are mercilessly exposed by Sascha Lobo: “The sudden interest in women’s rights is feigned and is nothing but a pre-emptive argument to legitimize one’s racism” [48]. On the example of the Sascha Lobo’s article one can see a typical manipulation, which mechanism consists in a skillful offender–victim interchange.

Some journalists tried to shift responsibility to the police, as Georg Restle (ARD) [49], or the authors of *Die Nacht, die alles verändert* (“Die Welt” [50]) did. Christian Geyer-Hindemith (“Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”), did not condemn, but explained the police actions [51]. In June 2016 Yassin Musharbash (“Die Zeit”) examined the situation from the time distance and made a scapegoat of police, criticizing its passivity and lack of communication [52]. Federal and local authorities were also not against criticizing the police [53]. Some police officers who participated in the Cologne events, claimed anonymously that the mass abuse of women had been planned [54]. Saying so, they denied and compromised the mainstream media’s version about spontaneity of the incidents. It seems that, in the triangle of the authorities, the police and the media, everyone was trying to shove the responsibility on the others.

German authorities of various levels, as expected, expressed outrage about the Cologne events and condemned the crimes. The issue of bringing offenders “regardless of their origin and religion” to justice was repeatedly raised (Federal Minister of Family Affairs Manuela Schwesig). “Perpetrators and their acts are investigated and punished in our state of law irrespective of religion and origin” (SPD politician Malu Dreyer). The perpetrators must pay “with all harshness of the law”, “regardless of whether German citizens, foreigners or asylum seekers are behind the criminal offenses” (Green Party politician Katrin Göring-Eckardt [55]). “It is clear that this must be done independently of the origin” (Minister President of North Rhine-Westphalia Hannelore Kraft [56]). The irony is that this rhetoric implies equality before the law and in practice, but politicians, police and media used double standards, forgiving immigrants what they would not forgive Germans.

Another popular refrain in the German media was to ensure that the responsibility could not be extended to all refugees / immigrants / Muslims. Stefan Kuzmany (“Der Spiegel”) recognized that after the Cologne events there was a “seething anger” in social networks and warned the Internet community of “rash conclusions” and “generalized condemnation of refugees”. In any case, he said, criminals, even if they were immigrants, they were “a small fraction of ones” [57].

Asad Noori is a good example of a refugee who condemned the Cologne events in “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” [58]. In an ARD story intelligent refugees from war-torn Syria, Abad Al-Masri and his brother Imed “did not correspond to the clichés about criminal refugees”. On the contrary, they were moderate and civilized men who differed from the brutal German right-wing radicals “insulting police officers and journalists” [59]. All this to prevent any negative generalization at its source.

In passing, it should be noted that German TV had been long making efforts to promote a positive image of refugees. Long before the Cologne events it began to cultivate a positive legend, a ‘success story’ of someone from a poor, dangerous country

who enriched German society. One of the examples of such success story was a model, designer and writer Zohre Esmaeli. In 1999 she and her family fled Taliban's Afghanistan, traveled 10,000 kilometers and settled in Germany. On the talk show "Hart aber fair" she criticized Germany's services (which, in her view, did not treat newcomers well) and showed herself as a living example of the benefits Germany had from immigrants [60].

A very interesting phenomenon is that successful people from Muslim countries often take uncompromising stance regarding new waves of immigration and the accompanying problems. In Germany, immigrants from Muslim countries are perhaps the only category of journalists entitled to defend relatively painlessly (without risk of being accused of Nazism) the interests of indigenous Germans. They exercise their exclusive right quite often<sup>4</sup>.

A German professor of Syrian origin Dr. Bassam Tibi on "The Huffington Post Deutschland" brought up the concept of the "tyranny of welcome culture" (Die Tyrannei der Willkommenskultur)<sup>5</sup>. Bassam Tibi, reflecting on the peculiarities of German democracy, noted "the lack of debating culture in [Merkel's] Germany", "particularly during the refugee crisis". In Bassam Tibi's opinion, "in Germany under a large-scale coalition of the Merkel's CDU, the SPD, the Greens and the Left flanked by the media, the 'welcome culture' becomes a tyranny suppressing any 'dissenters' with clubs". Moreover, the author made it clear that he meant no figurative tyranny, but the tyranny in its literal sense, which is not different from other tyrannies of modern times: "Despite my ability to differentiate, I find it difficult to distinguish between a country like Egypt with its constitutional standard, according to which Islam is the state religion, and Germany with its state mantra of the welcome culture" [61]. So said, let's note it again, a Syrian ("I am a Syrian, not a German") and a Muslim ("my holy book is the Koran") Dr. Bassam Tibi.

A politician Ismail Tipi due to his Turkish origin could safely declare "the end of multi-culti-romanticism", could also stand up against "Salafists and extremists", could stand up against cloaks and hate preachers and Sharia judges, for "our freedom, our civil rights, our democracy and peace in Europe" [62]. A journalist of Kurdish origin Düzen Tekkal, defending German values, criticized "exaggerated political correctness", opposed taboo topics related to immigrants and negative aspects of interethnic relations. "The New Year's attacks have shown how important it is to leave the false taboos behind", she said [63].

"Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" translated and published sensational article by Algerian columnist Kamel Daoud "The Sexual Misery of the Arab World", in which the author explained the nature of the Cologne events by "sick relationship with women" and pathological taboos concerning sexual issues in the Arab world [64]. However, it goes without saying that one could not expect from a German respectable author a comparable criticism of Muslim orders.

### **The roots of media concealment**

Considering the situation in its entirety, the reassessment of silence strategy in the German mainstream media did not take place. Although the problems related to refugees became the subject of discussions, the media debate was characterized not only by tolerance and caution in judgments regarding immigrants who had broken the law, but also by prejudice, unilateralism and intolerance toward those who dared to establish this fact. The above-mentioned circumstances suggest that the major national and cultural taboos are still applicable in the German media space.

4 There is a similar phenomenon: Jews like Noam Chomsky or Norman Finkelstein criticize Israel as much as they want with no apparent damage to their public reputation.

5 It should be noted that this is another tyranny of the Westerners identified in XXI century publicism after The Tyranny of Guilt by French philosopher Pascal Bruckner and The Tyranny of Tolerance by American sitting judge Robert H. Dierker Jr.

The media consumers' verdict on the matter is that in Germany more than 40% described the reporting on refugees as "one-sided" [65]. There is another eloquent sociological study: according to John Stuart Mill Institute's opinion poll, only 57% of Germans "can freely express their opinion", while 28% believe that they should be "cautiously" speaking about their political views [66]. Comparing these figures with similar surveys done in 1990 and even in 2014, the negative tendency is visible with the naked eye. The survey results show that an undemocratic atmosphere has been created in the German media space that makes extremely unfavorable the raising of certain issues and the expression of certain opinions.

Attempts to understand the genesis of these problems will lead, sooner or later, to the tragedy of World War II, the responsibility for which Germany continues to bear. Hugo Hamilton back in 2004 wrote about "an unacknowledged loneliness in being German", he described the intellectually homeless people, who by exorcising the Nazi crimes lost compassion for themselves. Hugo Hamilton wrote "Germans, also denied their own heritage and severed an emotional link with their own people". Germany managed to rebuild itself physically after the war, but the psychological damage is much stronger: "the Germans are born with their heads turned backwards", "they have trained themselves to suppress any potential patriotic links to their own origins" [67].

A German journalist Anne Zielke also connected the behavior of the German media with politicians' longstanding complexes: "There is always an underlying assumption that Germans are racists. So they have to be educated by politicians and by the media. The worst fear that many journalists may have is that they are getting the applause from the right corner. So they are even prone not to publish facts that might help the extremists" [68].

On the other hand, a prohibition (mostly it is a self-prohibition) for the mainstream media to provide an adequate assessment of the problems related to immigrants is a reality not only of Germany, but to a greater or lesser extent, of all Western Europe and the USA. The concealment of crimes committed by immigrants is a stable trend in the Swedish media. Although Sweden lacks a historical burden similar to the German one, in this and in many other affluent countries of the Western world the ideology of political correctness has acquired dangerous, hypertrophied form, which is often outlined with the term "autofascism" [69].

Since the 1960s the leftist 'anti-fascist' discourse controlled the university environments and the media as well as defined the development of political theory and practice in the West. The disagrees with this regime were pushed to the margins where they stayed until principles of information distribution changed qualitatively and quantitatively.

In the XXI century there is no possibility of an information monopoly. An event, which is silenced by mainstream media, is not any more equivalent to the one which never happened, but rather becomes the subject of stormy debate on social networks and in the alternative media. "It is embarrassing and detrimental, however, that the so-called alternative media, such as the infamous Kopp Verlag and the unspeakable conspiratorial Compact much earlier than the supraregional media recognized the situation and reported on it online", Stefan Winterbauer wrote [70]. It is "detrimental", because such fraud with deliberate concealment of the important information compromises the traditional media, which without changing the strategy, risk losing public confidence and giving way to alternative sources of information. The Internet enables society not only to know what the traditional media try to hide, but also to hear each other and to get organized. A sixteen-year-old schoolgirl recorded a video in which she criticized asylum policy in Germany, and millions of viewers have watched it [71].

If a German citizen is not told by ARD and ZDF about the problems he faces every day on the streets, his/her information hunger will be satisfied by extremist Internet re-



sources and by foreign media (first of all by the Russian ones). The western citizens' perspective of reorienting themselves towards alternative sources of information requires deeper analysis.

### **Increased popularity of the extreme right**

The problem with migrants has played into the hands of the AfD, which is called "extreme right" by the liberal media. Renate Künast, thinks that it "challenges the premises of our democratic society" [72]. Chief editor of "Die Zeit" Giovanni di Lorenzo sees this process dialectically and connects the rise of the AfD with cultural hegemony of the Greens (i.e. the exaltation of political correctness or the belief in the educability of man up to the suppression of all evil). According to di Lorenzo, the AfD "also poses some questions that the established ones have to accept and which they have to answer if they want to return to their old strength" [73]. The German establishment has realized what kind of threats the policy of non-answering important questions can entail. The result has brought some change in the rhetoric of Angela Merkel and of German political leadership.

If we take into account a wider Western context, we can agree with the comments of James Traub ("Foreign Policy"): "Right-wing parties are rising both in countries that have behaved well toward refugees and in those that have behaved badly. And every terrorist attack in Europe gives another fillip to their popularity" [74]. But let's add that in both cases the immigrants were a factor that seriously contributed to the Trump's victory in the US and to the growing influence of right-wing parties in Europe. Poland and Hungary deal with the potential threat, while Germany and France face the real one. In both Eastern and Western Europe the right-wing agitators richly exploited "a useful 'told you so' moment" (Matthew Karnitschnig, "Politico" [75]) and earned political points at the expense of terror attacks and growing criminality.

The attempt to hush up the crimes uncovers a fundamentally different level of threat which provokes society to re-evaluate media, political and intellectual elite. Europe finds itself in a dangerous situation where the respectable mainstream politicians and the mainstream media refuse to defend the interests of the native peoples, and this function is taken on by the right-wing radicals.

French blogger Boris Le Lay wrote: "The instructions given by the German government, by the internal ministry and by the municipality tell the German women: »Do not go out, do not go out to the streets of your own country, your safety is no longer assured. Why? Because our absolute priority is not your well-being, ladies of Germany, it is not your security, it is to allow the invaders, presented as refugees, to feel at home in our home, to give them our land«. This is the Angela Merkel's great government program" [76]. This is what British video blogger Millennial Woes pointed out: "The German elite in politics, in the judiciary, in the media and in the church is gray, sad, sorry, depressed, lifeless, bureaucratic, passionless and intensely politically correct. But worst of all it is utterly ambivalent about the destruction of the people who supposedly represents and should love and protect" [77].

### **The growth of Russian influence**

European and American extreme right movements are usually Russian supporters. The image of Russia has been significantly improved in recent years, first of all due to a skillful media policy of the Kremlin. Created in 2005, the "Russia Today" TV channel now competes with Western media holdings, challenging their monopoly on the truth. The fact that the RT has become a serious problem is seen from a number of accusing materials against this channel [78] (after all, quite fair) and most notably from the European Parliament resolution [79], that is against the use of political mechanisms as a media competitor.

The RT now gives podium to all kinds of dissatisfied and marginalized opposition representatives (both adventurers and truth-seekers), fights against censorship in Germany [80] and makes the voices of dissatisfied Cologne citizens heard, which calls into question “our state of law” [81]. The migrant crisis became the pretext for the Russian propagandists to make fun of spineless European bureaucrats, to tip in Russia’s favor the conservative-minded Europeans defrauded by media and politicians, who are unable to call a spade a spade: “New Year’s Cologne Attacks: Police Tried ‘to Get Rid’ of Complaining Women” (“Sputnik”).

In order to understand how different the Russian range of opinions from the German one is, let’s look at some headlines from Russian media of different political orientations: “The night of the long arms. What can we learn from the lesson of European ‘hospitality’?” (“Argumenty i Fakty”), “A new kind of Arab rape ‘taharrush’ came to Europe” (“RenTV”), “The ‘special path’ raped Germany” (“Svobodnaya pressa”), “Chronicle of Germany’s death: in order to appease refugees, the Catholic Church refused to baptize infants” (“Komsomolskaya pravda”), “A selfie on the background of ‘The Decline of the West’” (“Radio Svoboda”).

The Russian media are devoid of complexes regarding non-European nations, they do not adhere to political correctness, not only in its exaggerated forms, but also in its quite healthy and justified manifestations. Rudeness, cynicism and directness in the articulation of European problems inevitably put the Russian media in a winning position in the eyes of Western man. Not because the Russian sources of information are closer to the truth (on the contrary, their propaganda is rough, easily verifiable and disprovable), but because having aimed to become an influential player in the global information space, they report what Western mainstream media silent, exposing them in an unfavorable light.

## Conclusions

It is clearly visible that the New Year’s attacks on women in different German and European cities had been planned in advance. The aim of the organizers is unclear, but we can already talk about far-reaching consequences of the incident, including the media field.

1. The news coverage of the Cologne events is not an accident but a partial manifestation of the trend that is firmly inculcated in contemporary Western media. Long-term dominance of the left ideological models in politics, in the media and in the universities’ establishment resulted in hypertrophied forms of generally accepted principles of tolerance. The media prefer not to discuss the obvious problems in the hope that those problems dissolve themselves.

2. Concealment of ethnic conflicts, the attempts to gloss over them or interpret them in some other way, attempts to form a tolerant vocabulary which would erase and replace certain concepts in people’ brains (in the worst Orwell’s traditions), censorship and silencing of the crimes committed by individual migrants, denying society the right to blow the steam off – all of these do not solve the problem but intensify it, leading to accumulation of the associated with immigrants outrage at the bottom of society. It also spreads the responsibility for the crimes (in the eyes of local inhabitants) on the law-abiding migrants, innocent people who were forced to come to Europe escaping the war.

Paradoxically, the activities of radical ‘fighters against intolerance’ who, by shutting their eyes to the facts, only undermine public confidence in the media and strengthen prejudices against Islam instead of softening them. The silence strategy causes the opposite effect as desired. Lie and concealment as methods of propaganda have been unproductive at all times. Today, when many have learnt to conduct propaganda based on truth, a similar strategy results in collapse of the media which implement it.

3. The silencing of the Cologne events was organized. This is the evidence of hidden coordination among the mainstream media (at least on fundamental issues). Decisions about what to publish and what not to publish are made by someone outside of the editorial staff. This must raise a suspicion. Even if the traditional media can be controlled in countries with solid democracies like Germany, the Internet is uncontrolled and unpredictable, at least for now.

4. A reasonable compromise could seriously affect the public's confidence in the traditional media, which has been mechanically followed by society since pre-Internet times. In the XXI century in the face of unrestricted access to different sources of information, people will not long tolerate the media's injustice to them (injustice to others is more tolerable). As a result, the alternative media, alternative political elites and Russian influence get a good prospect.

5. Given the Internet factor and the information glut, "the public nowadays needs the media less than vice versa, but many do not seem to realize it yet", Stefan Winterbauer remarks [82]. In the view of this, those researchers who forecast that the control over the Internet will be strengthened are right<sup>6</sup>.

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6 See for example Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen: "Your online identity in the future is unlikely to be a simple Facebook page; instead it will be a constellation of profiles from every online activity, that will be verified and perhaps even regulated by the government" [83, P. 39].

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