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Oleksii Plastun, Inna Makarenko, Tetiana Berger-Hrynova

► **To cite this version:**

Oleksii Plastun, Inna Makarenko, Tetiana Berger-Hrynova. Potemkin village of Russian science: The case of Editorial Boards. Sumy State University; CNRS. 2024, pp.11. hal-04686316v2

HAL Id: hal-04686316

<https://hal.science/hal-04686316v2>

Submitted on 6 Sep 2024

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ANALYTICAL REPORT

Potemkin village of Russian science: The case of Editorial Boards

Alex Plastun

Sumy State University

Inna Makarenko

Sumy State University

University of Helsinki

Tetiana Hryn'ova

LAPP/IN2P3/CNRS, Annecy France

August 2024

This note presents the results of research conducted on the editorial boards of Russian journals following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The findings reveal that 70.9% of international members of these editorial boards were either unaware of their membership ("fake members"), or did not fulfill their editorial duties ("silent members"), or were retired, or were deceased ("dead and retired members").

Introduction

On February 24, 2022, the Russian Federation launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine. This triggered a wide-range of responses in the academic publishing community, which is well summarized in Ref. [1].

We are publishing a set of reports aimed to overview the current situation two and a half years since the start of the invasion. Our first report in the series [2] investigated how the publications from the institutes in the occupied territories of Ukraine were used to normalize the annexation of the Ukrainian territories. The current report is focused on the membership of the editorial boards of journals which were founded and are usually still published and owned by the Russian academic institutions. We call them “Russian journals” thereafter. Many of those journals now have an English-language version indexed in leading databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, or published by international publishers like Springer or Taylor & Francis.

Many scientists worldwide have chosen to distance themselves from Russian institutions following its invasion of Ukraine. To evaluate the impact it had on the composition of the editorial boards of the Russian journals, we conducted a survey of their members presented in this report.

A Brief Overview of Methodology

We analyzed Russian journals that are actively involved in the international academic sphere, focusing on those published by international publishers and/or indexed by leading databases such as Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). There are 800 Russian journals indexed in Scopus, up to 500 in WoS, and over 200 journals published by Springer alone.

Given the large initial dataset, we focused on the most extreme cases using the following selection criteria: the Russian journal is published by an international publisher, or the journal was newly added to the Scopus database in 2022 or 2023 (we chose Scopus instead of WoS because of data availability). Among the 300 journals that met these criteria, we selected those with two or more international members on their editorial boards. This resulted in a final dataset of 140 journals.

Next, we examined the editorial boards of these journals and created a database of international board members. Russian journals typically do not provide contact information for editorial board members, such as email addresses or personal web pages. Despite this, we managed to collect 709 names of

international members on the editorial boards of these 140 Russian journals. Where available, we used academic email addresses.

Each of the 709 scientists received an email from us inquiring whether they are still members of the editorial board of the specified Russian journal (example is provided in Appendix B). Although our inquiry contained a single question, the typical responses allowed us to expand our analysis based on several criteria:

- Availability of a reply to our inquiry (yes/no);
- Professional activity status (active/retired or deceased);
- Confirmation of editorial board membership (yes/no);
- Involvement in editorial activities for the journal (yes/no);
- Decision regarding editorial board membership (withdrawal/stay).

To provide additional information regarding the related Russian Journal, we have incorporated several facts based on the results of our investigation. Such information includes:

- Facts of propaganda in the journal (for example, the journal marked Ukrainian territories as Russia) [2];
- Publisher of the Journal is active supporter of Russian aggression against Ukraine (for example, signed so-called Rector's letter or is affiliated with the Russian academy of Sciences) [1];
- The Editor-in-Chief is affiliated with the Russian academic organization – an active supporter of Russian aggression against Ukraine [1].

An example of Inquiry letter Regarding Editorial Board Membership is presented in Appendix A.

Results

Between May and August 2024, we sent emails to 709 members of the editorial boards of Russian journals. As of 20 August 2024 the total number of received confirmations of actual membership status in editorial boards is 165, which corresponds to a 23.3% reply rate.

The survey results are grouped by country. Core focus of the research is on the results based on the responses of the interviewed scientists and external confirmation of their status (deceased, retired).

Countries

A geographical breakdown of the survey is presented in Annex B.

The most significant number of letters were sent to the USA, Germany, UK, Italy, France, Ukraine, Poland, Israel, Spain and Switzerland (Figure 1). 72.8 % of the letters were sent to these 10 countries.

Figure 1 indicates that the editorial boards of the Russian journals used for the survey involved most American, German, and British scholars (42.3% of the number of letters sent). Ukrainian scientists were involved in 4.4% of cases.

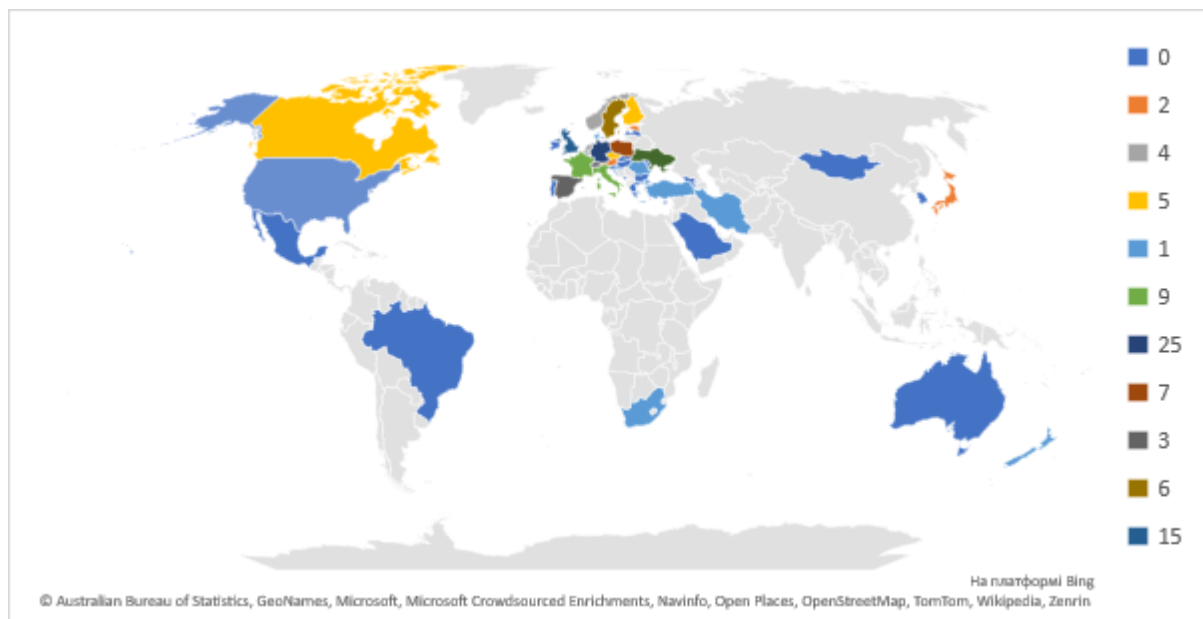


Figure 1 Geography of the survey: by number of letters sent, letters

The same sample of countries is kept in terms of the number of respondents (Figure 2), which is evident from the number of letters sent.

The United States, Germany, and Ukraine account for 41.2% of the responses received, while the top 10 countries to which we sent the majority of letters represent 71.5% of the responses. At the same time, the responses of Ukrainian scientists are about 12.1% of the total number of responses received.

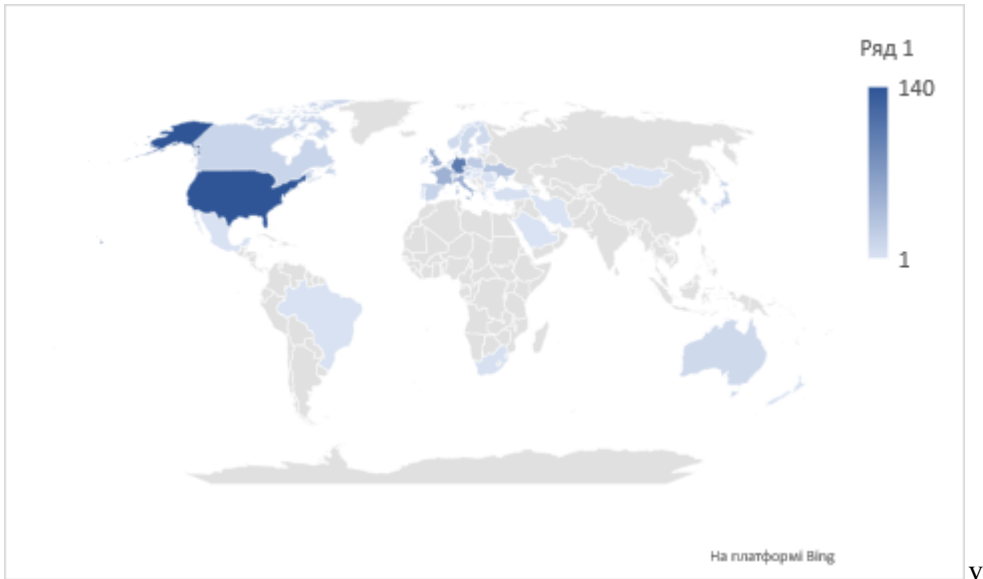


Figure 2. Geography of the survey: by the number of confirmations received, letters

The distribution of countries by the ratio of received confirmations to sent letters is shown in Figure 3. The overall response ratio is 23.3%.

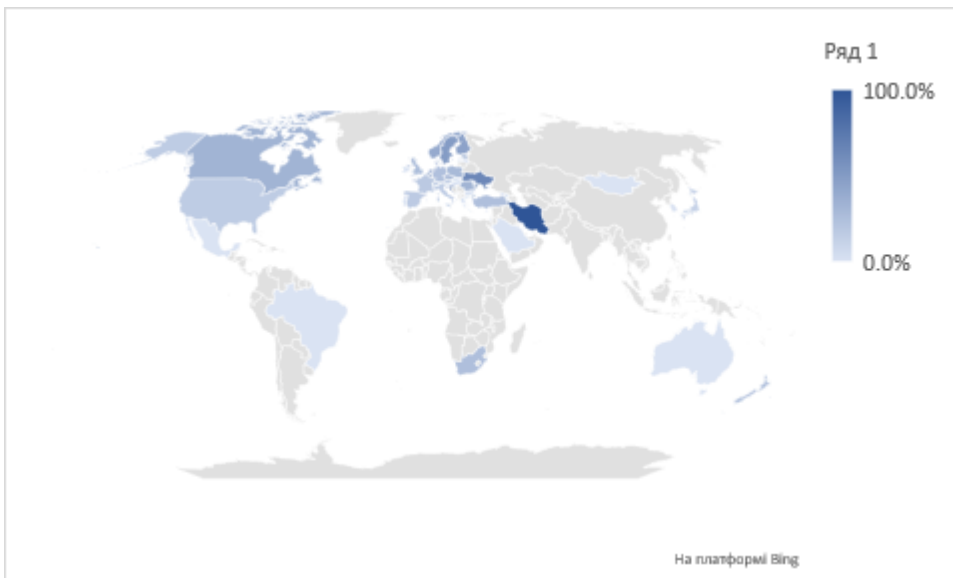


Figure 3 Geography of the survey: share of responses, %.

Observations

Among the 709 emails sent, we identified 8 cases of deaths and 9 cases of retirement of scientists who are still listed as members of the editorial boards of Russian journals. These cases were classified as “dead and retired members.” The share of such cases is 2.4%. Their names continue to be used on journal

websites and journal pages in Springer, which misleads the global scientific community.

Regarding the involvement in editorial activities in Russian journals, 100 scientists did not fully perform their duties, formally served on the board, knowing about their affiliation, or were not asked to review articles and perform other membership duties at all. In addition, the editorial board membership with these Russian journals came as a surprise to 45 of these 100 respondents. They were unaware of the existence of such a journal or of their affiliation with it. These 45 scientists can be classified as “fake members”.

Among the responses received, 22 scientists continue cooperating with Russian journal editorial boards. 5 scientists made no clear statement on their position regarding membership in Russian journals or considered academic sanctions and boycotts of Russian science inappropriate. Meanwhile, 89 members announced their intention to resign or have already written resignation letters to the editorial boards (Springer).

This information is summarized in Tables 1-2.

Table 1 Overview of scientists contacted in this study.

Category	Share of replies, %
Total Contacted	709
Dead	8
Retired	9
Other replies received	148

Table 2 Categorization of 148 replies received in %.

Category	Share of replies, %
Continue to participate	14.9%
No clear position	3.4%
Plan to withdraw	60.1%
Fake members	30.4%
Silent members	67.6%

Position of international organizations

We have contacted international publishers and databases to comment on the fictitious editorial boards of Russian journals they publish or index. Their replies are summarized in Table 1. They do not plan to take any action to ensure scientific integrity of the journals they reference.

Table 1 Positions of publishers on fictitious editorial boards of Russian journals

Journal/Publisher	
Elsevier (Scopus)	<i>“Scopus cannot interfere with the editorial autonomy of journals and concerns that are related to scientific content and quality of individual items.”</i>
Clarivate (WoS)	<i>“Clarivate is not a primary publisher and does not become involved in the editorial management of individual journals, or in the business practices of any publisher.”</i>
Springer	We have received no reply to questions related to fictitious editorial boards of Russian journals published by Springer.
Taylor & Francis	<i>“The Portfolio Team has advised that we cannot comment on T&F’s contractual relationships publicly.”</i>

Conclusions

This note highlights how Russian journals falsify the international part of their Editorial Boards.

We have sent inquiries to 709 international members of Editorial boards of 140 Russian journals. We have received 148 replies, of which 67.6% (100 scientists)

mentioned that they have never performed editorial tasks or/and for the first time heard from our letters that they are editorial board members. Also, we have identified at least 17 cases of “dead souls” (retired or dead). After our inquiries, 60.1% of those who replied decided to withdraw from the editorial boards of the Russian journals under study. With this note, we would like to encourage scientists to make sure their names are not affiliated with Editorial boards of Russian journals by international publishers or scientific databases. Such affiliations are used by propaganda inside Russia to argue that the international scientific community approves actions of the associated Russian institutions, many of which are under sanctions for their support of war against Ukraine. At present, science databases do not rush to exercise control over the disinformation published on their platforms. We think that it is now time to have a serious conversation about their policies to ensure that no scientist's names can be published without the scientist's consent.

References

- [1] M. Nazarovets, J.A. Teixeira da Silva, *Learned Publishing* 2022; **35**, 658-670
- [2] O. Plastun, I. Makarenko, T. Berger-Hrynova. Science vs Propaganda: The case of Russia, 2024, [hal-04669865](#).

Appendix A

An example of Inquiry letter Regarding Editorial Board Membership

Subject: Inquiry Regarding Editorial Board Membership in “...”

Dear Professor “...”,

My name is Professor Inna Makarenko from Sumy State University in Sumy, Ukraine.

I am reaching out to you regarding your status as an Editorial Board member of “...”.

I have discovered a lot of instances where individuals listed as Editorial Board members in Russian journals are not actually affiliated, either having never been

members or having disassociated themselves following the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (“...”, “...”, “...”).

As part of my ongoing research into violations of academic integrity principles by journals associated with the Russian Federation, I have come across “...”, of which you are listed as a member of the Editorial Board.

Despite being published by Springer Nature, “...” is a translated version of the Russian journal “...”)

The journal is published by the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS). RAS is sanctioned by the USA (placed in SDN-list by OFAC - <https://sanctionslist.ofac.treas.gov/Home/SdnList>). Head of the RAS Gennady Krasnikov is a member of the Security Board of the Russian Federation (this Board has approved the start of the invasion and is responsible for the war against Ukraine - <https://ria.ru/20240115/sovbez-1921437833.html>). RAS officially supported the candidacy of Vladimir Putin in the presidential elections of the Russian Federation - <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/19855645>

Editor-in-Chief of the “...” professor “...” directly affiliated with the Russian Academy of Sciences (Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences).

I have also identified instance of propaganda by this journal promoting the annexation of Ukrainian territories - in the following papers (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.3103> and <https://link.springer.com/article/10.3103>) the Ukrainian city of Sevastopol is mentioned as part of the Russian Federation.

Another Ukrainian city of Simferopol is mentioned as part of the Russian Federation here: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.3103>.

Given these findings, I am reaching out to inquire about your current status as a member of the Editorial Board of “...”. If you are still affiliated, I would like to know whether you intend to continue in your current role or instead you are considering resigning from the Editorial Board.

Your response to this inquiry would be greatly appreciated. I am available to provide further details or discuss this matter in greater depth if needed.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely

Professor Inna Makarenko

Appendix B

Table B.1 Letters sent and responses received from members of the editorial boards of Russian journals in May-August 2024

Country	Responses received	Letters sent	Share of responses received, %.
Armenia	0	1	0.0%
Australia	0	11	0.0%
Austria	2	16	12.5%
Belgium	4	5	80.0%
Brasil	0	2	0.0%
Brazil	0	1	0.0%
Bulgaria	0	2	0.0%
Canada	5	15	33.3%
Croatia	1	1	100.0%
Cyprus	0	1	0.0%
Czech Republic	5	14	35.7%
Denmark	1	4	25.0%
Estonia	2	6	33.3%
Finland	5	11	45.5%
France	9	50	18.0%
Georgia	0	1	0.0%
Germany	25	103	24.3%
Greece	0	4	0.0%
Hungary	0	3	0.0%
Iran	1	1	100.0%
Ireland	0	3	0.0%
Israel	4	24	16.7%
Italy	9	54	16.7%

Japan	2	17	11.8%
Korea	1	3	33.3%
Latvia	0	2	0.0%
Mexico	0	2	0.0%
Moldova	0	1	0.0%
Mongolia	0	1	0.0%
Montenegro	0	1	0.0%
Netherlands	4	14	28.6%
New Zealand	1	4	25.0%
Norway	4	10	40.0%
Poland	7	24	29.2%
Portugal	0	4	0.0%
Romania	1	3	33.3%
Saudi Arabia	0	1	0.0%
Singapore	0	1	0.0%
Slovakia	0	3	0.0%
Slovenia	0	2	0.0%
South Africa	1	4	25.0%
South Korea	0	2	0.0%
Spain	3	17	17.6%
Sweden	6	12	50.0%
Switzerland	3	16	18.8%
Turkey	1	4	25.0%
UK	15	57	26.3%
Ukraine	20	31	64.5%
USA	23	140	16.4%
Total	165	709	23.3%