

Russian disinformation undermining Western democracy

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EU Member States are facing an unprecedented threat to their democratic societies. Russian propaganda, disinformation campaigns and continuous support for anti-European political forces are undermining the European project, transatlantic cooperation and Western democracies in general: in terms of liberal values, political independence and sovereignty.

This crisis has in fact reached an alarming level. Russia's constant, meticulous efforts to distort facts, manipulate reality, foster distrust in the democratic process and even interfere in Western elections are absolutely unacceptable.

Information warfare is an integral part of Putin's assault on Europe. This strategy uses military, criminal, intelligence, business, diplomatic, media, cyber and political techniques to achieve the Kremlin's goals. While the EPP aims at maintaining good relationships with all its neighbours, including Russia, the EU cannot permit Russian interference to erode its democratic societies and to incite hatred and fear. The annexation of Crimea, hybrid warfare against Ukraine, the invasion of Georgia, Russian campaigns against the Baltic States, Belarus, Moldova or even Poland: all these pose challenges for Russia's neighbours and undermine the peace and stability which Europe has enjoyed for decades.

The EU must put in place an effective and detailed strategy to immediately, robustly counteract Russian information warfare. We need to design an appropriate institutional framework, to allocate necessary resources, to find the right messages and messengers. The sooner the EU reconciles itself to the reality that the Kremlin has been engaged in an undeclared war against the liberal values underpinning the peace and prosperity of Europe, the sooner it can find the right policy responses.

Given the gravity of this threat and the urgency of countering it, the EPP:

- **Expresses** deep concern over the highly dangerous nature of Russian propaganda, which has grown even more sophisticated since the fall of the Soviet regime;
- **Highlights** a special concern regarding the cyber threat emanating from Russia, which far exceeds that from China; and recognises that the cyber realm is viewed by Russia primarily as a battlespace for waging information warfare;
- **Recognises** the Kremlin's threat to Western democracies, as has been proven in cases of US and European elections;
- **Underlines** the importance of NATO's involvement in strategic messaging, using a more coherent narrative and set of arguments in refuting myths cultivated by Moscow;
- **Stands** firmly with Member States and with pro-European forces in Eastern Partnership (EaP) and Western Balkan countries, in the United States and around the world in denouncing Putin's attempts to undermine liberal democratic governance and values, in general, and the European project itself, in particular;
- **Calls** for unity among EU Member States and within NATO in standing proudly and unequivocally for liberal democratic values: for basic human rights and personal freedoms, the rule of law, an independent judicial system and transparent, democratic governance;
- **Welcomes** recent EU initiatives — particularly with regard to the European External Action Service's (EEAS) East Strat Com Task Force, created in September 2015 to communicate and promote EU policies in EaP countries, support free and independent media

and counter disinformation; and the November 2016 European Parliament resolution on countering anti-EU propaganda – to galvanize an effective EU response to the threat posed by the Kremlin’s multifaceted disinformation campaign;

- **Urges**, however, that the EEAS East Strat Com Task Force be greatly enhanced in terms of increased funding and personnel; urges, ultimately, the establishment of an effective, well-targeted and tailor-made strategy of communication and promotion of EU policies and values in the Eastern Neighbourhood, in order to increase public awareness of disinformation activities by external actors;
- **Calls** for a greater, more coordinated European response on the part of Member States and EU institutions; for the creation of a coordination unit within EU institutions to facilitate this response; and for increased capacity-sharing and counterintelligence efforts;
- **Calls** for the establishment of agencies in all Member States – as has recently been done in the Czech Republic – to identify and counter disinformation and propaganda;
- **Highlights** the need to forcefully condemn Kremlin disinformation with factual evidence;
- **Stresses** the importance of the identification and tracking of Kremlin-supported spokespersons, officials, NGOs, intellectuals, activists and businesspersons involved in corruption;
- **Recognises** the extensive, ongoing work being done by think tanks and civil society organisations in highlighting the full nature and extent of this threat to liberal democracy; welcomes innovative solutions by both the private and public sectors in finding ways to expose ‘fake news’ and disinformation and to helpfully distinguish between credible and non-credible sources;
- **Calls** on the EU and its Member States to ensure greater transparency for NGOs, lobbyists and political parties, especially with regard to funding;
- **Encourages** the establishment of media monitoring systems, based on credible methodologies, to enable media regulators to identify breaches of law, including hate speech and state propaganda, as well as warn companies against advertising on propaganda-like web pages;
- **Re-affirms** the essential need for professional, independent, ethical and facts-based journalism – in particular, via Russian-language media – in order to counter lies and misinformation; and highlights the need to train and educate journalists in this area;
- **Underlines** the importance of providing alternative sources of information to outlets such as Russia’s state-funded television channel RT (Russia Today); underlines the importance of creating an EU- and EaP-wide Russian-language TV channel; and encourages the cooperation and exchange of high-quality content between independent media professionals in the Eastern Neighbourhood and in Russia;
- **Underlines** the importance of awareness-raising, education and online media for citizens of both the EU and the EaP and Western Balkans regions in order to enable them critically to analyse media content and to identify propaganda;
- **Calls** for the creation of an annual forum bringing together high-level politicians, think tankers and other experts to counter Kremlin propaganda;
- **Calls** for increased exchanges between EU experts and experts from Eastern Neighbourhood and Western Balkan countries who have a broad specialization on Russia and former USSR countries; calls for the organisation of study visits for journalists and experts to EaP countries.

**If you have any question
you would like to ask
please contact us.**

Rue du Commerce 10
1000 Brussels

T +32-2-2854140

E connect@epp.eu