

## **Guide to Kremlin's disinformation & influence operations in Europe**

**Summary of what every policy-maker should know**

---

**Kremlin Watch Program Team**

Kremlin Watch is a strategic program which aims to expose and confront instruments of Russian influence and disinformation operations focused against Western democracies.

1	Europe	
a.	<a href="#"><u>How do Russian-speaking media portray European leaders?</u></a>	2
b.	<a href="#"><u>How the EU countries responded to Russian aggression in Ukraine?</u></a>	3
c.	<a href="#"><u>What can international organizations, governments and civil society do to oust Kremlin hostile influence out of Europe?</u></a>	6
d.	<a href="#"><u>What are the EU countries already doing to counter Kremlin's subversive operations?</u></a>	10
e.	<a href="#"><u>What can be done for the protection of a democratic electoral process?</u></a>	18
f.	<a href="#"><u>What can be done to counter hate speech and fake news on online platforms?</u></a>	20
2	Central and Eastern Europe	
a.	<a href="#"><u>What is the capacity of the Russian Federation to have impact on the information space of Central and Eastern European countries?</u></a>	23
b.	<a href="#"><u>What far-right groups operate in Central and Eastern Europe and what is their connection to the Kremlin?</u></a>	24
c.	<a href="#"><u>What are the vulnerabilities of Central Europe towards the influence of the Kremlin?</u></a>	26
3	Czech Republic	
a.	<a href="#"><u>Do Czech citizens believe Kremlin's narratives?</u></a>	28
b.	<a href="#"><u>How did the Czech Republic become of the leading countries in countering Russian disinformation?</u></a>	30

## How Russian propaganda portrays European leaders

Full study is available [here](#).<sup>1</sup>

Instead of the representatives of the European Union, the leaders of the big European states, especially the German Chancellor and the French President, are perceived by the Russian-speaking media as the voices of Europe worthy of dealing with the Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The most respected adversary is without a doubt Angela Merkel. By number of mentions in the Russian-speaking media as well as by her share of space in important topics and areas she many times exceeds Jean-Claude Juncker, Donald Tusk, Federica Mogherini, but also the other Heads of States.

The Kremlin disinformation campaign works very hard to portray the European leaders accordingly to their inclination to support Russia. The more favourable those personalities are to Vladimir Putin's regime, the stronger voice in the international community they have according to the Russian-speaking outlets.

This phenomenon leads to a large overrepresentation of Central European leaders like Miloš Zeman, Viktor Orbán or Robert Fico in the Russian media space. Together with Matteo Renzi, those politicians are Russian-speaking media favourites, some of them disproportionately to the weight backed by their population or even to the competencies and powers they have on their domestic scene.

*Joint analysis of Semantic Visions & European Values Think-Tank*

---

<sup>1</sup> Semantic Visions and European Values Think-Tank, 22/06/2016, [http://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/How-Russian-Propaganda-Portrays-European-Leaders\\_v4.pdf](http://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/How-Russian-Propaganda-Portrays-European-Leaders_v4.pdf)

## How do European democracies react to Russian aggression?

Full study is available [here](#).<sup>2</sup>

Russian aggression against Ukraine has led to EU28 sanctions, while Kremlin aggressive policies such as militarily threatening specific EU countries, or using hostile influence tools such as disinformation, and support of European extremists & radical leaders has alienated many European countries.

- Today, we can see:
  - **six countries which have held concerned views of Russian foreign policy and now are at the forefront of the European response to its aggression** (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, United Kingdom, Denmark)
  - **five countries have significantly shifted their policies** and concerns after the Russian aggression against Ukraine (Finland, Sweden, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Germany).
  - three countries are below-radar supporters of countering Russian aggression (Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria)
  - three states have virtually no relevant relations with Russia (Portugal, Malta, Ireland)
  - six countries are trying to stay away from the issues (Austria, Belgium, France, Luxemburg, Spain, Slovenia)
  - two governments are using the Russia-card for domestic reasons (Slovakia, Hungary)
  - and **three states still act Kremlin-friendly** (Greece, Italy, Cyprus)
- **13 EU countries are highly concerned with the Russian disinformation threat**, and are therefore participating in at least one of the three allied projects (EEAS East STRATCOM, NATO STRACOM COE, Finnish COE on Countering Hybrid Threats).
- **The game-changer in this situation will be the next German government coalition** which can shift European efforts to counter and mitigate the Russian aggression in both ways – it can either appease the Kremlin and effectively kill the EU28 response (potentially, if a “red” coalition is in place), or follow-up on the principled position held by the Chancellor Angela Merkel to devise a full-government policy on every level of the Kremlin aggression (from Ukraine to disinformation threats) and become the full-time prime defender of the liberal international order.
- **The group of 14 countries clearly concerned with Russian aggression is missing a leader.** The United Kingdom is on its way out, Germany still does not feel as an openly hawkish defender of the principled response, and Poland is missing out on the chance to be a genuine,

---

<sup>2</sup> Jakub Janda, Ilyas Sharibzhanov, Elena Terzi, Markéta Krejčí, Jakub Fišer, 22/4/2017, <http://www.europeanvalues.net/vyzkum/european-democracies-react-russian-aggression/>

legitimate and a well-respected leader of this pack because of the unconstructive behaviour of its government.

➤ The position of the most reliable Kremlin friendly is now held by Italy, expressed for example by openly vetoing expansion of sanctions following Russia-sponsored atrocities in Syria. It might change after the French presidential elections, where Moscow might get a highly influential ally.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **The aggressiveness of the Russian Federation is based on internal factors**, while the kleptocratic regime needs to feed domestic audience with perception of the external threat. For this reason, Kremlin-orchestrated hostilities will continue until it implodes. It is important to **understand that this is not going to disappear overnight**, nor by European politicians being nice to Vladimir Putin.
2. Most of diplomatic efforts of the **concerned countries should focus on silently assisting Germany with adopting the position of the prime defender of the liberal international order**. German military is already assuming that role; now it is time for concerned allies to support Germany in assuming more assertive role against the ones who openly and systematically attack the rule-based order.
3. Given the amount and intensity of Russia-sponsored atrocities and the almost non-existent shift in approach of Kremlin' friendlies, **it is reasonable not to expect positions of Greece, Italy and Cyprus to significantly move**. There apparently is not much else Russia would have to do for them to change their long-term views.
4. European debate should **focus on how Russia uses energy to increase dependence of individual countries on Moscow's energies and to lure influential current or former politicians to lobby on its behalf**. European intelligence agencies openly warn against this tool Russia buys influence with.
5. Given the evidence and urgent warning by many European intelligence agencies and security experts, **European countries should develop their own national defence mechanisms & policies against hostile foreign influence and disinformation operations**. Many countries are now facing prospects of Russian hostile interference in their elections and it is most probably not going to disappear during the upcoming years. Elections should be considered a part of the national critical infrastructure as they are a cornerstone of sovereignty.
6. **13 EU states** clearly concerned with Russian disinformation **should ask EU HRVP Federica Mogherini to strengthen and reinforce the EEAS East STRATCOM Team**, which still consists almost only from seconded national experts, not from EEAS-funded specialists.
7. It would be in the great interest of countries concerned with Russia's aggression if **Polish government was able to act constructively in the allied structures and would become a respected leader** in spearheading actions to deter and mitigate the threat. So far, it has been a politically wasted opportunity by Warsaw.

*Jakub Janda, Head of the Kremlin Watch Program*

*Ilyas Sharibzhanov, Kremlin Watch Analyst*

*Elena Terzi, Kremlin Watch Analyst*

*Jakub FIšer, Kremlin Watch Analyst*

*Markéta Krejčí, Kremlin Watch Analyst*

## Full-scale democratic response to hostile disinformation operations

Full study available [here](#).<sup>3</sup>

An aggressive disinformation effort by the Russian Federation and its allies have been very visible within EU member states since 2013, the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis. The Kremlin uses this vehicle as part of its hybrid warfare to achieve its strategic objective vis-a-vis to disrupt the internal cohesion of NATO, the EU and its willingness to react to aggressive policies of the Russian Federation. It also aims at change of policy – in cases of sanctions, Dutch referendum on EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, or the Brexit debate. Chief of the Armed Staff of the Russian Federation, Valery Gerasimov, [calls it](#): *“Information confrontation aimed at the reduction of the fight potential of the enemy”*.

These disinformation efforts employ a multi-layer strategy. Where an authentic grievance or setback is present, the Kremlin disinformation machinery tries to explore and exploit it<sup>4</sup>. On EU and NATO level, it tries to use pro-Kremlin attitudes of selected politicians<sup>5</sup> to undermine collective efforts. Within the EU, it aims to widen the already existing gaps, for example, between the South and the East, or new and old member states on the West versus the East. At the member state level, the goal is to undermine the trust of citizens towards their governments, allied organisations and states, democratic political parties, mainstream media or state institutions (such as judiciary or police) in general. Another goal is to promote pro-Kremlin politicians and parties, such as Alternative For Germany, the Front National in France, Jobbik in Hungary, Marian Kotleba's LSNS in Slovakia, and UKIP in the UK.

There are four clusters of steps which need to be taken:

1. Firmly put hostile disinformation efforts on the **foreign & security policy agenda**.
2. **Publicly challenge** supporters of Kremlin-sponsored disinformation efforts, especially among politicians and public figures.
3. **Disclose** disinformation campaigns substance and vehicles.
4. Systematically **build resilience** within free societies.

---

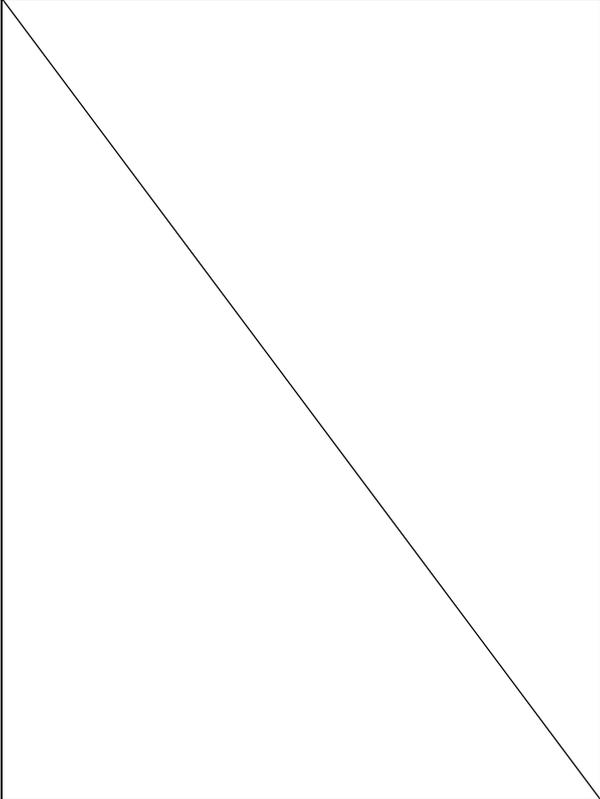
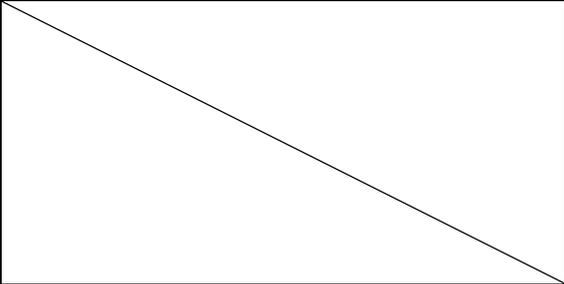
<sup>3</sup> Jakub Janda, 20/06/2016, <http://www.europeanvalues.net/vyzkum/full-scale-democratic-response-hostile-disinformation-operations/>

<sup>4</sup> Generally: in case of European debate on migration and Islam by implanting disinformation in form of fake stories. Specific example: German „Lisa Case“ in January 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Such as governing Greek Syriza, some tendencies among governing German Social Democrats, sitting Czech President Miloš Zeman, or selected radical but relevant parties such as French National Front.

<b>Framework of Kremlin disinformation &amp; influence efforts</b>	<b>Intelligence &amp; influence operations</b>	<b>Disinformation efforts</b>	<b>Cooperating with relevant political allies already in the institutions</b>	<b>Orchestrating NGO allies &amp; GONGOs</b>	<b>Supporting European radical and extremist groups</b>	<b>Using ethnic minority in targeted state</b>	<b>Kremlin-run economic operations for political gain</b>
<b>Characterization of specific instrument</b>	Foreign - state agents and local collaborators are used to get sensitive & classified information of the targeted state. Those means are also used to influence – bribe, intimidate or blackmail specific figures of the targeted state.	Kremlin funds and runs specific disinformation projects (RT, Sputnik). Dozens of pro-Kremlin disinformation online projects have dubious funding and personal structures and act as Kremlin allies and multipliers.	Kremlin supports political allies in European political groups by personal connections, financial, disinformation and ideological means. They help to spread pro-Kremlin influence in the institutions.	Kremlin orchestrates an NGO in EU member state to have representation of its interests. Other NGOs who share Kremlin objectives are indirectly supported.	European far-right and far-left radicals and extremists get supported by the Kremlin. Apart from ideological connections, they participate in the legitimization of elections via electoral monitoring procedures.	Portion of ethnic Russian minority in EU member state is vulnerable to Kremlin-run intelligence and influence operations. Part of it can be activated for active measures in moments of need or crisis.	State-run companies are often used to lobby for political interest – including decisions on strategic energy sector.
<b>Model examples</b>	Kremlin intelligence operations in Nordic states (mapping local landscape) or in Baltic states (kidnapping local citizen).	Targeted disinformation campaigns into Dutch referendum on EU-Ukraine AA in April 2016. Numerous fabricated disinformation stories aiming at poisoning European migration debate.	Constant advocacy of pro-Kremlin narratives by Nigel Farage, Marine Le Pen, representatives of Alternative fur Deutschland.	Activities of some Kremlin-funded Russian-compatriot organizations in Baltic states.	Ideological and quasi-media support for European far-right and extremist groups who get often invited to Russia to coordinate and showcase support.	Anti-governmental demonstrations of German Russians in Germany as part of disinformation operation Lisa in January 2016.	Influence of Gazprom to German or Serbian politics, Lukoil in Czech politics.

Brief overview of suggested counter-measures if framed in the four response areas:

<b>Measures overview</b>	<b>RESPONSE AREA ONE: Firmly put hostile disinformation efforts on the foreign &amp; security policy agenda.</b>	<b>RESPONSE AREA TWO: Publicly challenge supporters of Kremlin-sponsored disinformation efforts, especially among politicians and public figures.</b>
<b>EU &amp; NATO INSTITUTIONS:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Codify disinformation efforts to European Global Strategy</i></li> <li>2. <i>European diplomacy should address disinformation aggression</i></li> <li>3. <i>EEAS should triple capacity of the East STRATCOM team</i></li> <li>4. <i>AFET should conduct a report and numerous public hearings on disinfo</i></li> <li>5. <i>EP should adopt a resolution on counter-measures and 2017 budget requirements</i></li> <li>6. <i>NATO STRATCOMCOE &amp; EEAS East STRATCOM need to create common analytical framework for disinformation</i></li> <li>7. <i>Disinfo must become one of key priorities for EU Representations &amp; Delegations, NATO should speak national languages</i></li> <li>8. <i>Eurostat should conduct polls on vulnerability of European societies</i></li> </ol>	
<b>NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. <i>Codify disinformation efforts to national security documents</i></li> <li>10. <i>Concerned EU governments should make their case.</i></li> <li>11. <i>FAC should task HighRep to conduct report on disinformation efforts</i></li> <li>12. <i>Monitor &amp; name connections between Kremlin and extremist groups</i></li> <li>13. <i>Financial Snap Unit should be established and trained for crisis</i></li> <li>14. <i>NATO STRATCOMCOE should be supported and used by more member states</i></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15. <i>Financial and personal connections of politicians to Kremlin must be investigated</i></li> <li>16. <i>Special parliamentary committees should investigate &amp; scrutinize</i></li> <li>17. <i>Pro-Kremlin politicians should be voted out of posts related to national security</i></li> <li>18. <i>Counterintelligence should conduct detailed review reports for their governments</i></li> <li>19. <i>Real transparent financing of political parties is a key preventive tool</i></li> <li>20. <i>Allies need to cooperate on joined trainings &amp; support of NGOs</i></li> </ol>
<b>CIVIL SOCIETY:</b>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21. <i>Civil society should scrutinize &amp; watchdog politicians &amp; institutions</i></li> <li>22. <i>Public challenging of disinformation narratives must be strong &amp; regular</i></li> <li>23. <i>Debates mainly in regions with citizen need to be conducted</i></li> </ol>

<b>Measures overview</b>	<b>RESPONSE AREA THREE: Disclose disinformation campaigns substance and vehicles.</b>	<b>RESPONSE AREA FOUR: Systematically build resilience within free societies.</b>
<b>EU &amp; NATO INSTITUTIONS</b>	<p>24. EEAS should fund NGO network around its Disinformation Review</p> <p>25. Do EU comparative study of legal frameworks on quasi-media projects</p>	<p>38. The Commission should appoint 15 million EUR starting 2017 for NGO projects</p> <p>39. The Commission should conduct a study on vulnerabilities of European institutions to hostile foreign influence</p>
<b>NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS</b>	<p>26. National Disinformation Analysis Teams need to be established</p> <p>27. Appoint national governmental coordinator for countering disinformation</p> <p>28. Conduct national review of available legal tools against disinformation operations</p> <p>29. Prioritize exposing Kremlin influence for domestic counterintelligence</p> <p>30. Transparency of ownership &amp; financing of media is a must</p> <p>31. Definitions &amp; media legal framework should be debated</p> <p>32. Media &amp; civic society need to be protected by national security apparatus</p>	<p>40. States should conduct regular and detailed sociological research on grievances</p> <p>41. Politicians, diplomats &amp; bureaucrats should be trained against influence operations</p> <p>42. Public broadcasters could dedicate special attention to covering disinformation</p> <p>43. States need to support university degrees in Eastern European/Russian studies</p> <p>44. Russian minorities need to be studied, talked to and supported to avoid grievances</p> <p>45. 10 million EUR allied fund should fund disinfo studies &amp; countering</p> <p>46. States should pay close attention to influence of disinformation to their security forces</p> <p>47. Special strategic communication studies programs should be developed</p>
<b>CIVIL SOCIETY</b>	<p>33. Daily myth-busting &amp; challenging of disinformation narratives</p> <p>34. Disinfo-countering NGO initiatives need to be financially supported</p> <p>35. Public exposure of companies paying to advertise on pro-Kremlin conspiracy outlets &amp; official Kremlin "media"</p> <p>36. Detailed and regular polling on disinformation impact must be conducted</p> <p>37. Journalistic associations need to educate &amp; check their members</p>	<p>48. Journalistic schools should teach about disinformation technics</p> <p>49. Civic &amp; media education should be taught at primary &amp; secondary schools</p> <p>50. Think-tanks should present scenarios of future development to make their states prepare for them</p>

## Overview of the EU28 counter-measures to Kremlin subversion operations

Full study available [here](#).<sup>6</sup>

### Overall Ranking of EU28 countries

	EU28	Political acknowledgement of the threat	Government counter-activities	Counter-intelligence activities <sup>7</sup>	Total
<b>GROUP "F"</b> "Kremlin collaborators"	Cyprus	0	0	0	0
	Greece	0	0	0	0
<b>GROUP "E"</b> "The ignorants"	Hungary	1	0	1	2
	Austria	1	1	1	3
	Croatia	1	1	1	3
	Luxembourg	1	1	1	3
	Malta	1	1	1	3
	Portugal	1	1	1	3
	Slovakia	1	1	1	3
	Slovenia	1	1	1	3
<b>GROUP "D"</b> "The hesitants"	Ireland	2	1	1	4
	Italy	1	2	1	4
	Bulgaria	2	1	2	5
<b>GROUP "C"</b> "The mildly concerned"	Belgium	2	2	2	6
	France	3	2	1	6
	Spain	2	2	2	6

<sup>6</sup> Jakub Janda, Veronika Víchová, Monika Richter, Ilyas Sharibzhanov, Jakub Fišer, 16/05/2017, <http://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Overview-of-countermeasures-by-the-EU28-to-the-Kremlin%E2%80%99s-subversion-operations-1.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> We acknowledge that most of the counter-intelligence work needs to be done in a non-public manner. However the argument we hold is that it is principally right for the national intelligence and counter-intelligence agencies to publicly warn about the urgent national security threats – for example in their public annual reports or public statements of their leadership.

<b>GROUP "B"</b> "The awoken"	<b>Denmark</b>	3	3	2	8
	<b>Netherlands</b>	3	3	3	9
	<b>Romania</b>	3	3	3	9
	<b>Finland</b>	3	4	3	10
	<b>Czech Republic</b>	4	3	4	11
	<b>Germany</b>	4	3	4	11
	<b>United Kingdom</b>	4	4	4	12
	<b>Poland</b>	4	3	5	12
<b>GROUP "A"</b> "The full-scale defenders"	<b>Sweden</b>	4	4	4	12
	<b>Estonia</b>	5	5	5	15
	<b>Latvia</b>	5	5	5	15
	<b>Lithuania</b>	5	5	5	15

## General Conclusions

- 1) Kremlin aggressive policies in the form of using hostile influence tools such as disinformation, and support of European extremists & radical leaders has **strongly alienated at least 12 out of EU28** countries. (*groups A & B*)
- 2) We can identify **two clear “Kremlin collaborators”** amongst European countries – **Greece and Cyprus** (*group F*) – which has shown no relevant resistance to Russian subversive activities
- 3) Based on analysis their national strategic and policy documents, we identify a group of **8 EU states which still largely ignore or deny** the fact that the Russian hostile influence exists. (**Hungary, Austria, Croatia, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia** – *group E*)
- 4) There are **three states half way to acknowledgment** of the existence of the threat. Their hesitation is given either by **geographic distance and historical neutrality** (**Ireland**) or relevant openly or indirectly **pro-Kremlin forces** in the political representation which suppress any efforts to put the threat on the agenda (**Italy, Bulgaria**). (*group D*)
- 5) **Three states** (*group C*) **were capable of acknowledging the existence of the threat** of disinformation and influence operations, but they do not show understanding of the threat. Often, they are not geographically approximate to the Russian Federation.
  - **Belgium** realizes that there is a threat of Russian disinformation operations abroad, especially in the Eastern neighbourhood, but it **does not consider this to be a problem for its internal security** and therefore does not think of it as a priority. Its security institutions are dominantly focused on the urgent Islamist threat.
  - **Spain and France** consider the Islamist propaganda a bigger issue and **mostly attribute disinformation campaigns only to terrorism**. In France, incoming President Macron might slightly change this position, but it remains an open question given the long-term French soft position on Russia in general.
- 6) We identify a strong group B of member states, which managed to not only to acknowledge the existence of the threat, but also seek to understand it, analyse it and come up with relevant and effective counter-measures.
  - **Eight of these actors** went through a policy shift or “awakening” after the annexation of Crimea but they are **getting to the forefront of the fight** against Russian hostile influence operations. However, their practical **strategies towards Russian subversion are still under development**, or they have some **weak spots** they still need to cover (**Denmark, Netherlands, Romania, Finland, Czech Republic, Germany, United Kingdom, Poland**). There are clear differences in the depth and complexity of their national strategies.
  - **Four states** (*group A*) are showing the **highest level of activity, resilience and preparedness**, given their historical experience: **Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania**

## Trends and setbacks

- 7) As we can see in many EU28 countries, there is a **long distance between the acknowledgment** of the threat and coming up with practical and **specific counter-measures**. Action on the state level needs at least a partial consensus on the political scene, support of some parts of the civil society and strong democratic principles and traditions in order to implement an effective strategy. To have several tough speeches on Russian interference is relatively politically cheap, but coming up with full-government approach takes a strong dedication of major political parties, which needs to work hard against local obstacles and Kremlin-linked counter pressure.
- 8) The **Scandinavian EU countries** (Denmark, Sweden, and Finland) implemented **strategies targeting the overall resilience** of their societies against any kind of contingencies, disinformation or subversive operations. Their programs are focused on **prevention, crisis management** and the **government, intelligence agencies and non-governmental sector are all engaged**.
- 9) Also the **Baltic region** (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia) stands in the forefront of the fight against Russian hostile influence, partly because of their geographic proximity, historical experience and significant Russian minorities within their societies. These countries were forced to take **strong measures**, often **restricting Russian pseudo-media**. They are also actively working with their Russian-speaking minorities with more or less success. The **Baltic experience with Kremlin-linked subversion tactics is the most developed one** and shall be taken as major lessons-learnt.
- 10) Apart from these two regions, there is a **significant lack of cooperation between governments (G-G) and civil society (G-NGO)**. In many countries, the approach of the state administration and the non-governmental sector significantly differs.
- In some examples, like Slovakia, the civil society is the main actor trying to tackle Russian subversive influence, but fails to persuade the government of the importance and danger of the threat as the local governing elite seems to be pretty much ignoring this topic so far.
  - In other countries, like Hungary, there are small parts of civil society exposing the threat, but given the internal political struggles, very little is done on the governmental level so far.
  - In countries such as France or Germany, we can see very limited work of organized civil society on this matter. The local knowledge on this topic is often limited to very few individuals in think-tanks and in several media outlets, but no coordinated or robust civil society response on the national level so far exists.
- 11) There is a **strong correlation between the level of Russian subversive influence and the state of media literacy and press freedom** in the member states. There are countries with decreasing freedom of the press, imposing measures limiting serious journalism, where the level of submission to Russian influence increased in recent months (for example Hungary or Croatia). On the other hand, Scandinavian countries or the United Kingdom with stronger democratic tradition of independent journalism and (to some extent) media literacy show higher level of resilience towards Russian hostilities and disinformation campaigns.

12) There is an important phenomenon notable in Western Europe – **generally strong European actors only start to be interested in countering Russian hostile influence during, soon before or even after major domestic elections** when they start to experience problems or are anticipating them soon:

- **France** widely ignored the threat until recent presidential elections. The newly elected president Emanuel Macron experienced Russian meddling during his campaign and his official foreign policy adviser recently said that “We will have a doctrine of retaliation when it comes to Russian cyber-attacks or any other kind of attacks.”<sup>8</sup>
- The government of the **Netherlands** barely reacted when Russian disinformation spread during the 2016 referendum about the Association Agreement with Ukraine. During the 2017 parliamentary elections, it decided not to use electronic voting in order to prevent the Kremlin from meddling and the Dutch intelligence agency AIVD concluded that Russia tried to influence the 2017 elections by spreading fake news.<sup>9</sup>
- The **United Kingdom** has been supporting many strategic-communications projects in the Eastern Partnership region, but the debate on Kremlin subversion in the UK was very limited before the Brexit referendum in 2017. The fact that the UK is also being used for Kremlin-linked money storing has not been on the agenda until recently. The current British government has announced major programs to counter Russian influence in Central and Eastern Europe. For example, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson decided to launch the Empowerment Fund aiming at countering Russian influence in post-Soviet countries, boosting their defences against propaganda and cyber warfare.<sup>10</sup>
- First ever concerns about the problem of disinformation and influence operations in **Italy** were raised during the constitutional referendum in December 2016, when the rising anti-establishment Five Star Movement spread clear disinformation and pro-Kremlin propaganda.<sup>11</sup> But the government is still doing almost nothing to counter these attempts. Italy also serves as one of Kremlin allies when it comes to stopping additional sanctions related to Moscow-sponsored atrocities in Ukraine and Syria.<sup>12</sup>

13) These realizations usually lead to some efforts to **manage the crisis**. The governments of states in question often seek help of corporations like Google or Facebook in order to protect their democratic elections, but these companies have very limited options how to help them. Eventually, most of the measures taken in the last minute turned to be “**too little, too late**” and lacked any kind of coordination. It is clear that policies against hostile foreign interference need to be tailored and planned in the long-run.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macrons-foreign-policy-doctrines/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.politico.eu/article/russia-spread-fake-news-during-dutch-election-report-putin/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4219004/700million-foreign-aid-quell-Putin-s-influence.html>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/02/world/europe/italy-fake-news.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/02/world/europe/italy-fake-news.html?_r=1)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.europeanvalues.net/russia/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.europeanvalues.net/election-interference>

14) **Position of Germany could be the game-changer.** With the federal elections in September 2017, Germany is currently concerned with Russia's meddling. It has started to take the threat posed by Russia more seriously over the past months. Germany actively tries to boost its cyber defence and promote cyber security internationally, creating new Bundeswehr command.<sup>14</sup> **If the next German government takes on this threat with the known German precision and intensity, it will spill over to the EU policies and the real democratic counter-pressure will be present.** Until now, mostly smaller EU member states in the Eastern flank are concerned.

**Policy Recommendations:** Opportunities & best practices to be followed

**On country practices:**

- **Recommendation 1:** Follow and learn from experience of the **Scandinavian countries in media literacy and overall resilience building.**
- **Recommendation 2:** Follow and learn from experience of the **Baltic countries with the Russian interference methods** and crisis management scenarios.
- **Recommendation 3:** Follow and learn from experience of **Finland in strategic-communications coordination** between governmental ministries and agencies.
- **Recommendation 4:** Follow and learn from experience of the **Czech Republic (CTHT) and Sweden (MSB) in dedicating multi-level expertise teams** to countering hostile foreign influence and protection of the elections.
- **Recommendation 5:** Use the **Czech experience with conducting in-depth National Security Audit**<sup>15</sup> to identify weak spots in national security infrastructure<sup>16</sup>.
- **Recommendation 6:** Follow and learn from experience of **Baltic intelligence agencies in their methods of public-awareness raising** by publicly exposing some of their cases. Only 6 out of 28 EU member states has done so.

**EU level:**

- **Recommendation 7:** **Use & support the EEAS East STRATCOM Team** on the weekly trend analysis of disinformation campaigns ("Disinformation Review"). Concerned EU states need to send their experts in the team.

---

<sup>14</sup> Nina Werkhäuser: "German army launches new cyber command". *Deutsche Welle*. 1 April 2017. Available at: <http://www.dw.com/en/german-army-launches-new-cyber-command/a-38246517>

<sup>15</sup> National Security Audit was conducted by the Czech Republic in 2015 - 2017. One of the chapters has been devoted to the influence of foreign powers. It includes a SWOT analysis summarizing the strong and weak aspects of the country's vulnerability and presents specific recommendations for enhancing resilience. It is an important step for the development and implementation of a sophisticated and effective strategy.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.europeanvalues.net/vyzkum/policy-shift-overview-czech-republic-became-one-european-leaders-countering-russian-disinformation/>

- **Recommendation 8:** Already at least **13 out of EU28 countries** are highly concerned about this threat. Despite this large group of member states, **almost nothing policy-wise is done on the EU level.** The EU HRVP Federica Mogherini keeps ignoring and downplaying this threat<sup>17</sup> and therefore the specialized EEAS East Team is compiled almost only from member state experts while the EEAS does almost nothing, despite repetitive calls from the member states or the European Parliament. Given this situation, the **13 concerned countries shall form a coalition, which would demand real policy** measures to be done on the EU level, because that is precisely what is the EU for. So far, very little coalition building have been done.

#### Policy development:

- **Recommendation 9:** **Start sharing experience on hostile interference in national elections** what can be done to mitigate the threat. Use the framework guide on how to make elections part of the national critical infrastructure<sup>18</sup>.
- **Recommendation 10:** Protecting the elections is not enough. **Long term strategy for mitigating hostile foreign influence need to be developed** and tailored for the local environment. Here is a framework 50-measure strategy<sup>19</sup>.

#### Working towards the game-changer:

- **Recommendation 11:** The concerned EU countries shall **assist Germany in taking politically assertive role** on this threat. **If Berlin takes on this threat seriously, it will be the game changer for EU28** – Russia relations and the Russian will to aggressively interference in EU domestic affairs. Advocacy and lessons-learn visits shall be performed to Berlin by the concerned EU governments.

#### Best NGO practises:

- **Recommendation 12:** Each country needs to have in-depth research & investigations on the pro-Kremlin outlets, their structures, level of collaboration, content-related trends, financial ties. Good examples: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland.
- **Recommendation 13:** In-depth investigations of the Kremlin ties need to be performed. Good examples to follow: Die Zeit (Germany), Respekt (Czech Republic), Re:Baltica (Latvia).
- **Recommendation 14:** Government-NGO partnership needs to be build to share experience, provide voluntary briefings and trainings, or knowledge and capacity sharing. Good example: Propastop.org is an anti-propaganda blog operated by volunteers, mostly members of the Estonian voluntary Defence League (Kaitseliit)<sup>20</sup>, which itself works under the Ministry of Defence.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> [www.europeanvalues.net/mogherini](http://www.europeanvalues.net/mogherini)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.europeanvalues.net/vyzkum/framework-guide-tools-counteracting-hostile-foreign-electoral-interference/>

<sup>19</sup> [www.kremlinwatch.eu/strategy](http://www.kremlinwatch.eu/strategy)

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.kaitseliit.ee/en/edl>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.propastop.org/eng/>; <https://www.propastop.org/eng/2017/03/06/what-is-propastop/>

- Recommendation 15: National audits of electoral rules and practises need to be done. Good practise: LSE (UK)<sup>22</sup>
- Recommendation 16: Detailed sociological analysis of vulnerabilities need to be conducted. Good examples: [GLOBSEC Trends Report.](#), [Vulnerability study by Latvian Defence Forces Academy.](#)
- Recommendation 17: [Projects looking at who and why is advertising on disinformation outlets are highly needed. Good examples:](#) The Slovak project [www.Konspiratori.sk](http://www.Konspiratori.sk) which made 1400 Slovak companies *to take down their advertisement from disinformation outlets.*
- Recommendation 18: Boost solid policy assessment & policy development needs to be based on shared knowledge & experience in concerned countries which can be used and implemented into reality in other states. Very limited work has yet been done in this field. Good examples: [CEPA: Winning Information War](#), [Full-Scale Democratic Response to Hostile Disinformation: A 50-measure policy toolbox](#)

*Jakub Janda, Head of the Kremlin Watch Program*

*Veronika Vichová, Kremlin Watch Analyst*

*Ilyas SHaribzhanov, Kremlin Watch Member*

*Monika Richter, Kremlin Watch Member*

*Jakub Fišer, Kremlin Watch Member*

---

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/apr/01/dark-money-threat-to-uk-elections-integrity>

## A framework guide to tools for countering hostile foreign electoral interference

Full study available [here](#).<sup>23</sup>

This brief Report aims to enumerate the tools that are nowadays used for hostile electoral interference and how they can be countered. The paper focuses on the European situation, with use of known examples from recent years, for example, in the United States. The aim of this Report isn't to discuss the historical path or to provide in-depth analysis of the cases.

The objective of this exercise is to lay out a general framework, which can be used by security and intelligence practitioners when setting up a national defence system against hostile foreign interference, with a special focus on the electoral process. This paper doesn't discuss all the known tools, but focuses on the major ones. This Report discusses the expected scenarios and situations that are most likely to happen, so that specific policies and measures can be taken by national authorities in advance of or during the electoral process.

It is clear that democracies need to set up national policies for countering hostile disinformation operations, which are going on constantly, not only during the electoral period. In addressing these policies, our 50-measure strategy<sup>24</sup> is available as a framework. However, this Report focuses specifically on the vulnerable electoral period.

Voters can be bribed	1. Electoral NGO monitors to report on such incident
	2. Enhanced counter-intelligence monitoring activities
Voters can be directly or indirectly intimidated	3. Enough law-enforcement entities on the ground
	4. Detailed knowledge of local extremist groups and diasporas
	5. Postponing the elections/referendum
	6. Pushing back on the source of intimidation
Voters can be a target of disinformation campaign(s)	7. Clear and detailed understanding of the local disinformation community
	8. Rapid digital forensics investigation
	9. Present findings to the national media in real time
Online voting can be hacked or a perception that it has been hacked can be created	10. Perception of a compromised election rapidly mitigated by the expert community
	11. Extensive audit of the complete voting process
Perception that regular voting has been compromised can be created	12. Rapid digital forensics investigation
Sensitive files of the campaign can be published	13. Training and consultations on cyber security

<sup>23</sup> Jakub Janda, 22/05/2017, <http://www.europeanvalues.net/vyzkum/framework-guide-tools-countering-hostile-foreign-electoral-interference/>

<sup>24</sup> 50-measure strategy: [www.kremlinwatch.eu/strategy](http://www.kremlinwatch.eu/strategy)

	14. Decoy email addresses
	15. Private cyber experts providing authoritative explanations to the media
	16. Appropriate offensive cyber tools against the perpetrators
Disinformation operations can be employed against the candidate	17. The content, nature and origins of the narratives can be tracked and exposed publicly
	18. Informal networks of private investigators can be supported in their activities in order to enhance resilience
	19. Forecasts of expected trends and scenarios prior
Candidates, their teams, and their relatives can become targets of online active measures, blackmail or intimidation	20. Political parties can declare and pledge that they will not use any kind of automatized online bots
	21. Clear executive and coordination authority to one central should be responsible for protection of the elections
	22. Prepared and standardized communication system on how candidates and their teams can share information
	23. General guidelines created by government authorities
	24. In-depth analysis of legal tools available for protecting the electoral process
Candidate may be directly provided with campaign financing or media support	25. Legislation prohibiting foreign financing of political activities and campaigns
	26. Forcing the candidates to release their tax returns
	27. Legal requirement for 100 % transparent financing
	28. NGO and journalistic watchdogs scrutinize the candidates
Candidate can be supported through his team receiving financial benefits	29. NGO and journalistic watchdogs scrutinize the candidates
	30. Precise checks and balances inside the government
Candidate can receive intelligence support on its opponents from abroad	31. NGO and journalistic watchdogs scrutinize the candidates
	32. Rigorous rules for candidates
	33. Precise and legal surveillance
Candidate can be getting in-kind support by being invited to Russia or Russian-occupied territories in Ukraine	34. NGO and journalistic watchdogs scrutinize the candidates
	35. Process of the visit needs to be publicly scrutinized

## Making online platforms responsible for news content

Full study available [here](#).<sup>25</sup>

Online platforms such as Facebook, Google or YouTube have successfully capitalized on the digital revolution by providing people space through which they can share posts, send messages, offer their services or search for information. They have accumulated an unprecedented global audience, took over the majority portion of the digital advertising market and profoundly changed the patterns of news distribution and consumption. Despite repeatedly claiming their neutrality of mere technological transmitters, online platforms make conscious editorial choices of what news content their consumers see and how it is presented to them, even though these choices are predominantly made by algorithms instead of human editors. The algorithms propose people news that best fit their profile, using the same basis as for consumer products. Traditional media are meanwhile struggling to adapt to the new digital environment. Both their traditional sources of revenue, advertising and readers, are now uncertain, as the advertising market was taken over by digital platforms while people, increasingly distrustful to traditional media, are looking for information elsewhere.

Free, pluralistic and independent media are the cornerstone of any democracy and the ongoing revolution in news consumption consequently poses important challenges to the Western societies, specifically in the form of fake news and hate speech. Recent global events, ranging from the 2016 US presidential elections and Brexit referendum to the 2015 migrant crisis, Islamic radicalization or the Kremlin's disinformation campaigns in Ukraine and wider Europe, lead to the final acknowledgement of these challenges beyond expert circles. In their attempt to fight fake news and hate speech, governments, businesses and civil society have recently stepped up the pressure on online platforms to accept greater responsibility and legal liability for news they display.

Pressure on online platforms is mounting from the side of governments, political parties, the private sector and civil society and these parties occasionally succeeded in pushing platforms towards greater responsibility for content without legal intervention. The two most influential platforms Facebook and Google respond to the pressure by proposing measures targeting malicious effects of online news distribution, notably through partnering with fact checking organizations, clamping down advertisements on untrustworthy websites, modifying algorithms and launching their own media supporting projects. These initiatives have generally been praised by media experts, but remain controversial: Firstly, employing human editors or fact-checking organisations to recognize authoritative and "low quality" stories will inevitably stir accusations of political bias, especially since algorithms used by these firms remain trade secrets and platforms have defined their value commitments to the society only vaguely. Secondly, by enhancing their filtering and editorial features, Facebook and Google may further assimilate themselves to media companies and become de facto monopolistic media companies on the global market, without actually having to pay for news production. Lastly, the online platforms can hardly do enough in a situation when their very business model was built around providing their customers with content that they like and does not incentivize the production of quality news.

---

<sup>25</sup> Klára Votavová, Jakub Janda, 25/07/2017, <http://www.europeanvalues.net/vyzkum/making-online-platforms-responsible-news-content/>

While these are rather strong arguments for democratic governments to regulate platforms in order to promote content respecting basic democratic principles, such as the rule of law and human rights, this paper also shows that regulation has serious pitfalls on its own. In both the US and the EU, platforms are currently protected from legal liability for illegal user generated content through the Communications Decency Act and the E-Commerce Directive respectively (in the EU, the safe harbour only applies when the platform is not aware of the content). None of these blocks is planning to amend regulatory status of the platforms. However, the European Commission has proposed several regulatory amendments in order to boost platforms' responsibility for content (the Audiovisual Media Services Directive and the Code of Conduct on Fighting Illegal hate Speech Online) and to provide a level playing field between publishers and platforms in negotiations over royalties (the copyright directive). Germany pioneered attempts to extend platforms' liability by proposing laws according to which platforms can be heavily fined for not removing illegal content fast enough.

Despite the apparent motivation of both the Commission and Germany to address important problems, there are several pitfalls in their regulatory approach. Notably, it is unclear how the governments of the EU member states can make online platforms protect citizens from illegal content without having the possibility to penalize them (forbidden according to the E-Commerce Directive). As a general rule, any regulation of online platforms threatens to sow uncertainty into digital businesses and complicate the position of small media companies and startups especially. It may also decrease the access of public to information and possibly restrain the freedom of speech. The current EU definition of hate speech is often criticized for being too broad. In light of the fact that existing media laws (e.g. libel) are already used by the powerful to silence their opponents and that the "fake news" term has quickly been taken up by politicians aiming to discredit the media (e.g. by Donald Trump), it is easy to imagine a government using the often blurred fake news/hate speech discourse to censor inconvenient views. Such result can only be avoided by using precise definitions in legislation.

According to the Commission, a soft law approach represented by the 2016 Code of Conduct is already bearing fruit, as online platforms are gradually improving their performance in removing harmful content within the due date. Despite this, Germany chooses to go further and introduces fines to platforms. Even when using a soft law approach, delegating responsibilities (e.g. to recognize and remove hate speech) to platforms themselves threatens to further empower "privatized governance" whereby platforms rule everyday conduct of their billions of users through their terms of service and non-transparent editorial practices. Therefore, taking down of illegal content should be subjected to proper judicial oversight or transparency and reporting obligations.

As this discussion demonstrates, regulation of online platforms – private entities with unprecedented global presence and economic power – is an extremely complex issue. Western societies have only recently started to realize the profound consequences of the digital revolution for their democracies, and appropriate responses will remain a hot topic of discussion for years. The existing measures are very recent and thus difficult to evaluate. Nevertheless, we dare to propose the following recommendations based on our key observations, which may serve as preliminary indicators to governments, the private sector and the civil society wishing to mandate a more responsible behaviour of online platforms for news:

### **To executive bodies (European Commission, governments):**

- Examine the use of algorithms by online platforms in order to reveal potential errors and biases. Consider to which extent the employment of such algorithms can be understood as a conscious editorial choice and how this should effect the liability regime of platforms
- Provide guidelines on editorial and take down practices of online platforms. Install dedicated bodies overseeing and reporting on their conduct
- Apply properly the existing legislation on platforms, notably from the realms of copyright, audio-visual and competition law
- When outsourcing responsibility for recognizing and taking down illegal content to online platforms, make sure rules for taking down such content are transparent and in line with principles of freedom of speech, as well as the human rights law
- When proposing legislation about hate speech or fake news online, develop as specific definitions of this content as possible. This way, such legislation will not bring uncertainty to digital businesses and people, and will restraint possibilities these restrictions will be used for censoring inconvenient views
- Ensure platforms install appropriate redress mechanisms through which users of platforms can complain if their content had been unjustly removed

### **To platforms**

- Be transparent about your editorial practices and report them, especially when it comes to taking down content
- Continue partnering with journalists and fact-checkers, in order not to become the world's arbiters of truth
- Differentiate graphically news content and other types of posts (e.g. in the News Feed)

### **Civil society and the private sector**

- Push online platforms towards embracing transparency standards of their editorial practices
- Promote a discourse according to which fake news and hate speech are not “cool”, just like eating unhealthy food.

*Klára Votavová, Kremlin Watch Program Member*

*Jakub Janda, Head of the Kremlin Watch Program*

## Kremlin Influence Index

Full study is available [here](#).<sup>26</sup>

The KII is to measure the capacity of the RF's Government to have impact on the information space processes in other countries. The KII is a figure rated for each country separately. The higher the figure, the more opportunities the Kremlin has to influence the information processes in the country.

The KII is determined, on the one hand, by its capacity and resources and, on the other hand, by the response of democratic countries. So the KII has two blocks: the **influence** and the **response** to this influence. The influence and response were measured in three dimensions: political, media, civil society (including the church).

A questionnaire of 33 questions was elaborated for measurements. The KII was calculated based on the expert survey.

### Key findings:

**The amplest opportunities for the Kremlin influence were identified in Hungary (KII is 61), the lowest in the Czech Republic (48).** Kremlin enjoys strong position due to the pro-Russian rhetoric government; and the Hungarian society did not offer efficient countermeasures. The Czech Republic is demonstrating strong political resistance (despite the pro-Russian president) to and active civil society action against the Kremlin's information aggression.

**In Georgia, after the war of 2008, the Kremlin information influence opportunities are growing stronger:** mainly by means of political parties, the Orthodox Church and Russia media. The government keeps stalling to take information security actions. Though the civil society is rather active in its resistance to the Kremlin information influence, the KII in Georgia is 54.

In all countries, **the media environment is favorable for the Kremlin's influence.** The oligarch ownership of media, decline of confidence in the central media outlets create good opportunities for the Kremlin. Usually, media outlets are very slow to join the anti-propaganda action, they do not teach people to see manipulations and propaganda, even worse, they may spread fakes, Kremlin myths etc.

**Civil society turns to be the most resistant to the Russian influence.** Though the Kremlin is doing its best to use the puppet civil society for its propaganda, these actions are efficient in Ukraine only (with the Orthodox Church and military groups controlled by Moscow). In other countries, the Kremlin hasn't found successful influence means in this dimension, and this is the civil society that often becomes a guide of the Russian information aggression resistance.

**Ukraine is a leader in Kremlin propaganda counteraction.** While other countries are searching for ways to restrict the Kremlin's information capacities, Ukraine has already introduced legislation, and the NGOs are region leaders in propaganda studying and informing citizens about its harm. But the magnitude of Russian pressure and the Kremlin's free reign in the occupied areas make the Ukraine's KII almost equal to the Czech (49).

*The research has been carried out with the financial support of the Black Sea Trust within the project implemented by the NGO Detector Media in partnership with European Values (Czech Republic), Media Development Foundation (Georgia), and Political Capital (Hungary).*

---

<sup>26</sup> Detector Media, 16/05/2017, [http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/trends/1411978127/kremlin\\_influence\\_index/](http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/trends/1411978127/kremlin_influence_index/)

## The activity of pro-Russian extremist groups in Central-Eastern Europe

Full study is available [here](#).<sup>27</sup>

Political Capital's recent research covering Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland is the first research project that focuses mainly on the *violent* ramifications of Russia's regional influence. The country case-studies describe how the Kremlin's strategy supports fringe, extremist or paramilitary organisations in order to undermine bilateral ties with Ukraine and the United States, and destabilise the region after 2014.

The research highlights that these organisations are posing a national security threat throughout the region by keeping their secessionist, revisionist, and ultranationalist cross-country historical grievances dating back to World War Two alive. Bargaining with the territorial disintegration of states and supporting secessionist movements is not something new in the Kremlin's playbook: Russia has been involved in similar activities all over the Western world, assisting actors ranging from the Italian Lega Nord to the Californian secessionist movement.

The five case-studies and the comparative regional study are all prepared with the involvement of local experts and investigative journalists in the respective countries. We are grateful to the authors and institutions listed below.

### What should be done?

In order to challenge this threat, we recommend the following steps:

1. Russian influence in the region should be treated as a security threat. Ministries of interior and counterintelligence agencies must have the staff, resources, and political support to reveal these malevolent links.
2. Politicians in Central-Eastern Europe should not ignore the elephant in the room anymore in bilateral discussions with Russia: obvious attempts by Russia to influence their political landscape should be mentioned – along with the Kremlin's attempts at instrumentalizing violent organisations. These issues should be discussed on the bilateral level.
3. The financial links between extremist organizations and Russia should be officially investigated, recently leaked information should be scrutinised in the coming months (Surkov-files, Usovsky e-mails, "Laundromat" investigation, etc.).
4. A widespread lustration in law enforcement agencies is urgent. Law enforcement agencies and secret services (especially in post-communist countries) are still infiltrated by the Russian secret services, which deteriorates the chances for countering these threats.

---

<sup>27</sup> Political Capital Institute, 28/04/2017, [http://www.politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article\\_read=1&article\\_id=933](http://www.politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article_read=1&article_id=933)

5. The threat of Russian information warfare and political influence should be included in the countries' public national security documents and assessments, which is the case in the Czech Republic, though no other country has so far done this in the region.
6. The pro-Kremlin attitudes find fertile ground in Euroscepticism and anti-Americanism. Political forces wanting to restrict Russian influence should also abandon anti-Western rhetoric.
7. More integrated secret services are needed. To overcome the reluctance of some member states, such as Hungary, to reveal the potential dangers of Russian influence and to acknowledge the pan-European nature of these threats, the European Union should push for more integrated intelligence services in the EU under the umbrella of the European Council or even the European Commission.
8. More transatlantic political investment by the United States is a must. We could see in the last few years that the "soft isolationist" stance of the previous administration encouraged the malevolent economic and political influence in the broader Central-Eastern European region. In order to counter this tendency, the United States should increase its commitment to the Central European region, the breeding ground for both World Wars in the 20th Century.



## The Vulnerability Index: Subversive Russian Influence in Central Europe

Full study is available [here](#).<sup>28</sup>

The Visegrad group countries in Central Europe (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia – V4) are often perceived as a regional bloc of nations sharing similar aspirations, aims and challenges. They share common history, communist past, Soviet occupation and all joined the EU and NATO to embed themselves in the western civilization and transform their post-communist societies. However, there are internal forces in each of the Visegrad group countries trying to subvert and undo this journey and change the cultural and geopolitical orientation of each country.

Such efforts are aided and strengthened also by foreign actors who use every opportunity to sow discontent, create divisions and provide alternative narrative for the whole region. Russia as the main regional actor operating outside of the EU-NATO framework is projecting its power in Central Europe region by means of diplomatic activities, energy and economic policy, information warfare and support to domestic political forces (both mainstream and fringe) sympathetic to the Russian narrative, with the overall aim of restoring its influence in the region and weakening the EU and NATO. Following the outcome of the U.S. presidential elections, the issue of Russian influence in Central Europe has become more important than ever.

**How vulnerable are the Visegrad four societies to such subversive foreign influence?**

**Where are the weak spots to be remedied and what are the examples of best practices in addressing these threats?**

Despite the wealth of available statistical data and existing research, no attempt was made, until now, to summarise these findings in a concise comparative analysis mapping the vulnerabilities of the V4 countries to such subversive foreign influences. In order to provide decision and opinion makers with an overview of such vulnerabilities, the GLOBSEC Policy Institute developed a methodology based on measurable set of societal and political indicators, analyses of opinion poll data, political landscape, structure of the media and the state of civil society. By pooling together data and insights from the Central European experts, we were able to rank the region's vulnerabilities.

As a result, a fact-based Vulnerability Index of Central European countries was developed to understand the on-going dynamics in Central Europe and attitudes towards the United States, Russia, the European Union and NATO, and to provide a comparative overview of what measures need to be implemented (and in which country) in order to make us more secure. The Vulnerability Index measures vulnerability of a given country on a scale of 0 to 100, where the higher score represents the higher vulnerability to subversive foreign influence.

Our Vulnerability Index shows, that **Hungary is the most vulnerable country in the Visegrad group to hostile foreign influence** with an overall **score of 57 out of 100**. This outcome confirms the growing rift between Hungary and Western Europe on many fundamental issues, which is largely a result of Hungary's sliding into illiberalism and the attraction of Hungarian political elites towards the Russian

---

<sup>28</sup> GLOBSEC Policy Institute, 11/04/2017, <http://www.cepolicy.org/publications/vulnerability-index-subversive-russian-influence-central-europe-0>

geopolitical orbit. However, this is in contrast with public opinion in Hungary, which, according to polls, clearly prefers a pro-western geopolitical orientation and shows a relatively stable support for NATO, the EU and the U.S.

**Slovakia ranked as the second most vulnerable country**, with an overall **score of 51 out of 100**. Transactional and opportunistic attitudes towards the EU and NATO, widely shared by the political elites and the public, persistent energy ties to Russia and political elites' naïve perceptions of the Kremlin's geopolitical goals in Central Europe put Slovakia in a very vulnerable position. A small push could change the course of the country in either direction.

**The Czech Republic ranked the third** among the Visegrad group with an overall vulnerability index of **38 out of 100**. Czech society, despite being quite euro-sceptic, simultaneously rejects a pro- Russian orientation. One notable exception is Czech President Miloš Zeman, who is regarded by many as the most important and visible pro-Russian political actor in the region. At the same time, the current Czech government is leading the way in addressing subversive foreign efforts by setting up a dedicated anti-hybrid threats task force at the Ministry of Interior and is in close cooperation with a very active civil society.

According to Vulnerability Index, **Poland is the least vulnerable country in the region to subversive foreign influence** with a **score of 30 out of 100**. Due to the hard lessons learned by Poland in its turbulent history and the contemporary geopolitical situation, Polish society is the most stable ally of the West in the Visegrad Group. Yet, despite having one of the most pro-European populations in Europe, last year Polish voters elected a conservative Eurosceptic government, which shares some common tendencies with the Hungarian regime. Despite its alignment with the EU, Poland rejects any criticism of its governance by Brussels. It holds the United States as its primary and strategic ally.

Daniel Milo, Katarina Klingová, Jakub Janda, Veronika Víchová, Csaba Molnár, Bulcsu Hunyadi, Kinga Brudzinska, Andriy Korniychuk and Lukasz Wenerski

## Disinformation operations in the Czech Republic

Full study is available [here](#).<sup>29</sup>

- A quarter of Czechs believe disinformation and disinformation projects. These people perceive threats differently, often see Russia as an ally and question or deny the geopolitical alignment of the Czech Republic to the West.
  - 25.5% of Czechs believe disinformation
  - 24.5% believe the alternative (disinformation, pro-Kremlin) media more than traditional
- Despite limited US involvement in Syria, half of Czechs believe that the USA are responsible for Syrian refugees coming to Europe. Creating this impression is the obvious aim of the pro-Kremlin disinformation operations.
  - 50.2 % of the public thinks that the hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees coming to Europe are the responsibility of the United States
  - 28.3% of Czechs think that the Russian military intervention in Syria helps to solve the Europe's migration crisis
- Manipulation of the public is successful in the case of disinformation about what is happening in Ukraine. Nearly four out of ten Czechs blame the USA for the Ukrainian crisis, although there are Russian troops occupying part of the territory of Ukraine.
  - 38% of respondents think that the Ukrainian crisis was caused by US and NATO
  - 30.6% of respondents believe that the fascist forces have a crucial influence on the Ukrainian government
- Only a fifth of the Czech population believe the Kremlin lie of that the organized Russian forces are not operating in Ukraine. Czech President Miloš Zeman still claims so.
  - 19.6% think that organized Russian forces do not operate in Ukraine.
- Roughly half the population wants the Czech Republic to be in position "between East and West." Four out of ten Czechs would prefer neutrality to the membership in NATO.
  - 48.3% chose a position between East and West.
  - When the respondents were asked whether membership in NATO is good or bad, only 17.3% chose the second option. But as soon as the word neutrality appeared strong 39.4% responded that neutrality would be better option than NATO. We expect the use

---

<sup>29</sup>Jakub Janda, Markéta Blažejovská, Jakub Vlasák, 13/09/2016,  
<http://www.europeanvalues.net/vyzkum/disinformation-operations-in-the-czech-republic/>

of this narrative by disinformation operations, in Slovakia it is already being used massively.

- Only less than one-third of Czechs consider EU membership a good thing. Four out of ten are undecided whether the EU is a good or bad thing, which means that in the case of a referendum on EU membership, we can expect that these people would decide only based on the experience during the campaign. The campaign can be strongly influenced by disinformation operations. Efforts to promote a referendum on leaving the EU come from the far right, far left, and the President of the Czech Republic.
  - Only 31.5% of respondents considered EU membership a good thing.
  - If there was a referendum on the withdrawal of the Czech Republic from the EU, 40.6% of people would most likely decide only on the basis of an ongoing campaign before the referendum as they opted for the “don’t know” option in the questionnaire.
- Membership in NATO has strong support, building of alliance infrastructure in the country is now rejected, however, four out of ten Czechs would have supported it.
  - 55.6% of the public does not agree with allowing NATO to build its infrastructure in the country, 39.1% agree.
  - 68.5% of respondents agree that NATO is important for the security of our country.

## Policy Shift Overview: How the Czech Republic became one of the European leaders in countering Russian disinformation

Full study is available [here](#).<sup>30</sup>

Over the last year, the Czech Republic has undergone a major policy shift on the topic of Russian disinformation. Many questions have been raised on how it has happened and what practically it means.

### CHRONOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

#### 2014

##### Czech position on sanctions

After the Russian attack on Ukraine in early 2014, the Czech government has agreed to support the EU sanctions against Russia. Several dissent voices have been heard publicly – Finance Minister Andrej Babiš and Trade Minister Jan Mládek argued that sanctions hurt the Czech economy, but nevertheless the Czech government has always voted for support of the sanctions.

#### 2015

##### Policy shift in the strategic documents

- In the 2015 **Concept of the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy**, the Czech government argues that „Russia currently severely destabilizes the European security architecture” and that “Czech policy towards Russia will depend on the Russian Federation’s respect for international law and for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of its neighbours”.<sup>31</sup>
- In the 2015 **Security Strategy** of the Czech Republic, Russia is not directly mentioned by name, but it is clear that most developments are linked to its actions. It is argued that “*declining security and stability in Europe’s flank regions and immediate neighbourhood could pose direct threat to NATO or the EU*”. Hybrid warfare is also mentioned, plus “*Attempts of some states to carve out spheres of influence or to achieve a revision of existing international order through a military as well as non-military tools (including disinformation intelligence operations, unmarked military personnel, etc.) may be considered a threat.*”<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup>Jakub Janda, 13/05/2017, <http://www.europeanvalues.net/vyzkum/policy-shift-overview-czech-republic-became-one-european-leaders-countering-russian-disinformation/>

<sup>31</sup>[http://www.mzv.cz/file/1574645/Concept\\_of\\_the\\_Czech\\_Republic\\_s\\_Foreign\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.mzv.cz/file/1574645/Concept_of_the_Czech_Republic_s_Foreign_Policy.pdf)

<sup>32</sup>[http://www.army.cz/images/id\\_8001\\_9000/8503/Security\\_Strategy\\_2015.pdf](http://www.army.cz/images/id_8001_9000/8503/Security_Strategy_2015.pdf)

## Russian intelligence activities against the Czech Republic

Russian spies are thought to be the most active foreign agents operating in the Czech Republic. According to the Czech counter-intelligence agency (BIS), most of them operate under a diplomatic cover of the overstuffed Russian embassy in Prague numbering almost 140 employees<sup>33</sup>.

Czech counter-intelligence has changed its usual practise of being very general in its public annual reports and described the Russian activities in great detail.

### EEAS East STRATCOM Task-Force

In March 2015, the Czech Government joined all EU28 countries to call for a European response to “on-going Russian disinformation campaigns” at the European Council Conclusions<sup>34</sup>. Following the establishment of the EEAS East STRATCOM Team in September 2015, a Czech seconded national expert joined the team.

### Czech think-tanks respond

In 2015, two leading Czech think-tanks launched specialist programs on Russian influence and disinformation.

## 2016

### National Security Audit

In early 2016, the Czech government launched “National Security Audit”<sup>35</sup> which was supposed to assess readiness of the Czech security infrastructure against top ten threats to the internal security. Two specific chapters were relevant to this issue: *Influence of Foreign Powers* (a chapter run by the Interior Ministry) and *Hybrid Threats* (a chapter run by the Defence Ministry)

In April 2016, The Czech Minister of Interior Milan Chovanec announced a future launch of “Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats”, which subsequently became operational in January 2017<sup>36</sup>. The Report of the National Security Audit was approved by the Czech government in December 2016<sup>37</sup>. Below as appendix, you will find declassified excerpts from the chapter.

### NATO STRATCOM COE

In fall 2016, the Czech Defence Ministry sent its expert to NATO Centre of Excellence on Strategic Communications in Riga, Latvia.

---

<sup>33</sup> Number can vary by several employees.

<sup>34</sup> European Council Conclusions, March 2015, WWW: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2015/03/european-council-conclusions-march-2015-en\\_pdf/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2015/03/european-council-conclusions-march-2015-en_pdf/)

<sup>35</sup> MVČR, Audit národní bezpečnosti zahájen, WWW: <http://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/ridici-vybor-audit-u-narodni-bezpecnosti-zahajil-svou-cinnost.aspx>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/clanek/centre-against-terrorism-and-hybrid-threats.aspx>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/media-centrum/aktualne/audit-narodni-bezpecnosti-151410/>

## **STRATCOM SUMMIT conference**

In October 2016, the Czech Interior Ministry and the European Values Think-Tank hold a first STRATCOM SUMMIT conference, bringing together 150 specialists from 15 nations on this particular issue<sup>38</sup>.

## **Countering disinformation is slowly becoming part of Czech foreign policy**

Czech diplomacy has supported StopFake.org or Memo98 projects on monitoring propaganda in the Eastern neighbourhood.

## **The Czech Republic is considered one of European leaders on this issue**

was visited by many allied specialist delegations, who came to look at what the Czech entities are doing about this particular threat. The Czech Republic is now considered to be one of the European leaders on this issue:

## **Non-governmental activities**

It is not only the government who reacts to this threat. “*The Czech Republic has a well-established and active civic society,*” according to the Vulnerability Index Report<sup>39</sup>.

## **2017**

### **Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats**

On 1 January 2017, the Centre became operational.

### **National Security Audit’s Action Plan**

In the first half of 2017, a non-public phase of the National Security Audit continues by adoption of a Action plan to implement the recommendations of the Audit. The policy recommendations are being planned out and it is expected that most of them will be implemented from mid 2017 on.

### **Protection of the elections**

The Czech Interior Ministry has launched a special task force on protection of the elections in early 2017<sup>40</sup>. The group works in a classified regime and it reviews any vulnerabilities the Czech electoral process might have.

### **The Czech Republic’s Defence Strategy**

In April 2017, the Czech government approved a new Defence Strategy

---

<sup>38</sup> [www.europeanvalues.net/kremlinwatch/stratcom-summit-2016/](http://www.europeanvalues.net/kremlinwatch/stratcom-summit-2016/)

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.cepolicy.org/publications/vulnerability-index-subversive-russian-influence-central-europe-0>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/clanek/na-mv-se-poprve-sesla-skupina-na-ochranu-voleb.aspx>

## Open Call to Federica Mogherini

In March 2017, the European Values Think-Tank has launched an Open Call of 150+ European security experts to Federica Mogherini, calling on her to start taking Russian disinformation seriously<sup>41</sup>. The move was featured in 10+ national newspapers, including CNN<sup>42</sup> or Politico<sup>43</sup>.

## Central European Vulnerability Index

In April 2016, a group of Visegrad think-tanks launched *The Vulnerability Index: Subversive Russian Influence in Central Europe*. Comparatively to other Central European countries, the research shows that the Czech society, despite being quite euro-sceptic, simultaneously rejects a direct pro-Kremlin orientation. One notable exception is the Czech President Miloš Zeman.

---

<sup>41</sup> [www.europeanvalues.net/mogherini](http://www.europeanvalues.net/mogherini)

<sup>42</sup> [edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2017/03/20/intv-amanpour-federica-mogherini-trump.cnn/video/playlists/amanpour/](http://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2017/03/20/intv-amanpour-federica-mogherini-trump.cnn/video/playlists/amanpour/)

<sup>43</sup> [www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-opponents-pile-onto-federica-mogherini-eaststratcom-sandra-kalnite-jakub-janda-estonia-atlantic-council-ben-nimmo-fake-news-russia-putin-europe-foreign-policy/](http://www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-opponents-pile-onto-federica-mogherini-eaststratcom-sandra-kalnite-jakub-janda-estonia-atlantic-council-ben-nimmo-fake-news-russia-putin-europe-foreign-policy/)

## Like what we do? Support us!

Use the form at: <http://www.europeanvalues.net/o-nas/support-us/>

Or send your donation directly to our transparent account: 2300405420/2010.

### © Evropské hodnoty z.s. 2017

The European Values Think-Tank is a non-governmental policy institute defending liberal democracy.

Our vision is that of a free, safe and prosperous Czech Republic within Central Europe that is an integral part of the West.

We help to face aggressive regimes, radicalisation within the society, the spread of authoritarian tendencies and extremist ideologies including Islamism.

We provide decision-makers with expert recommendations and we systematically watch and evaluate their performance. We consider active citizens, accountable politicians, political parties that fulfil their role, as well as cohesive society that shares the values of individual freedom, human dignity and equal rights to be the principle elements of a functioning liberal democracy.

Since 2005, as a non-governmental and a non-profitable organisation which is not linked to any political party, we have pursued research and educational activities. In addition to publishing analytical papers and commentaries for the media, we organise conferences, seminars and training sessions for both experts and the wider public. Our events provide a platform for dialogue amongst politicians, experts, journalists, businesspeople and students.

### EUROPEAN VALUES THINK-TANK

Na baště sv. Jiří 260/11, CZ-160 00 Praha 6 – Hradčany

[info@evropskehodnoty.cz](mailto:info@evropskehodnoty.cz)

[www.europeanvalues.net](http://www.europeanvalues.net)

[facebook.com/Evropskehodnoty](https://facebook.com/Evropskehodnoty)