

Kremlin Watch Reader 2017



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

The Kremlin Watch Team monitors on weekly basis scientific publications in the field of disinformation and hostile Russian influence. The following reader brings you the most interesting analyses in this area, which we read in the year 2016/7. The reader can serve as a tool for acquiring a broader view on the subject, though of course, it is not complete or exhaustive

I. Russian hybrid warfare and its methods and impacts

Russian think tanks and soft power,

by the Swedish Defence Research Agency

Russia uses many different tools to boost its international influence some of them, like disinformation or the use of cyber warfare, attract a lot of attention, while others are largely overlooked. One of these latter mechanisms is trying to influence expert communities and wider public opinion in the West using the help of think tanks and similar government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs), which is exactly what this report by the Swedish Defence Research Agency focuses on. The report offers a comprehensive overview of this issue and also contains nine case studies of specific think tanks.

What is remarkable about Russian think tanks is their high dependency on the Russian government. Although it is normal for think tanks in the West to cooperate with or receive funding from their respective governments, the independence of think tanks in Russia is much more limited. All of the think tanks examined in the report also seek in varying degrees to promote the country's official message. Moreover, it is evident in various Russian security documents that the Russian government wants to use think tanks and GONGOs to achieve its foreign policy goals.

Overall, the extent to which the think tanks and GONGOs tend to promote the country's official agenda varies, with the ones that have the widest interface with reputable Western researchers being less propagandistic. The ones that convey the Russian official message more obviously often create networks with less mainstream (and sometimes more extremist) organizations in the West. To find out about specific think tanks and more, have a look at the report.

Russia and Central and Eastern Europe: Means of Pressure and Channels of Influence

by Pavel Baev, published by the Russie.Nei.Visions

Since the annexation of Crimea, Russia has been shifting its influence operations from Western Europe towards East-Central Europe, where it has increased its economical, political and military pressure. Russia has used various instruments in order to boost its influence in the region, but none of them can be marked as successful.

Using energy as leverage is not a functional policy for Russia anymore due to the shifts in the global energy market and Russia's lack of success in negotiations. As for strategic allies, Putin did find new friends in the region recently, however, they are not so interested in breaking the EU apart as he would like them to be. On top of that, it has become harder for Russia to use money as a way of influence given its bad economic situation. The massive propaganda and disinformation campaigns caught Europe by

surprise, but it managed to propose effective countermeasures. Russian military pressure, especially in the Baltics, met with NATO's determined stance to protect its allies.

Active measures: Russia's key export

by Jolanta Darczewska and Piotr Żochowski, published by OSW – Centre for Eastern Studies

The special services have always played a crucial role in the Soviet Union and in modern Russia, and have become notorious for serving the interests of their country by employing so-called "active measures", which include a variety of methods ranging from propaganda or espionage to actions involving violence. Nowadays, we can very well observe how Russia is using active measures to achieve its geopolitical goals, which is why it is important to have both the historical perspective and current information about Russian covert mechanisms.

As for the present situation, we can understand a lot about the role of the of the so-called "force sector" in Russia and its methods by analysing Russian strategic documents. Very important here is the notion of the aggressive West that perpetually violates Russia's vital interests. While in the 1990s, more "superficial" topics were emphasised, at present the civilizational and spiritual threat is in the foreground: the West is considered to be a threat to Russian culture and traditional values. The idea of the West as a threat grants the special services the role of defenders and justifies many of their actions. Today's active measures focus more on the information space, aim mainly to create crises in other countries, and are primarily being conducted in most European countries.

Fellow travellers: Russia, anti-Westernism, and Europe's political parties

by Gustav Gressel, published by ECFR

According to a narrative of "anti-Westernism", there is important common ground between Russia and many European political parties, both fringe and mainstream. This study offers a clear summary of the attitudes of individual parties – it divides 181 political parties in 22 EU countries into four groups according to their ranking on the 'anti-Western' scale. It is also worth looking at the issue from a broader perspective, which is why the paper also applies the same method for evaluating the national political systems of these countries.

Sympathy towards Russia and its ideology, existing within many European political parties, is more than beneficial for the Russian government, which can profit from these attitudes both at home and abroad. In response, European politicians who are pro-Western must actively counter the ideological threat that Russia and its apologists represent. Strengthening counter-intelligence services, tightening anti-corruption legislation and supervision, strengthening anti-trust laws and strictly implementing the third energy package would make it more difficult for Russia to develop and exploit its various channels of influence.

[Computational Propaganda in Russia: The Origins of Digital Misinformation](#)

by Sergey Sanovich, published by the University of Oxford

Russia could be on a mission to restore its Soviet or imperial glory and to prevent liberal democratic values from taking root in the Russian political system. Yet the tools used are precisely the ones that emerged during the liberal 1990s and until recently was not subject much to government interventions: the online media and tech sectors. Nowadays, the Russian government build up many sophisticated tools of online propaganda. It uses, for example, the ability of bots to jam unfriendly and amplify friendly online content, it also utilizes online tracking and measurement tools to make sure that the content it pays for reaches and engages the target audiences. Last but not least, Russia invested in the hacking capabilities that allow for the quick production of compromising materials.

Therefore, entities that might become a target of Russian online propaganda campaigns should invest in their cyber defence. It is very important for the mainstream media to build up their reputation so they are trusted by the public, which would then be more resilient towards Russian propaganda. Educating the public in this topic, exposing how the propaganda machine works and finding technological means of disrupting its activity are another thing that should be done.

Another reading suggestion:

[Russia's Role as an Arms Exporter The Strategic and Economic Importance of Arms Exports for Russia](#), by the Chatham House

[Spirituality as a political instrument: The Church, the Kremlin, and the creation of the 'Russian World](#), by the Finnish Institute of International Affairs

[The Eurasian Economic Union Deals, Rules and the Exercise of Power](#), research paper by the Chatham House, Russia and Eurasia Programme

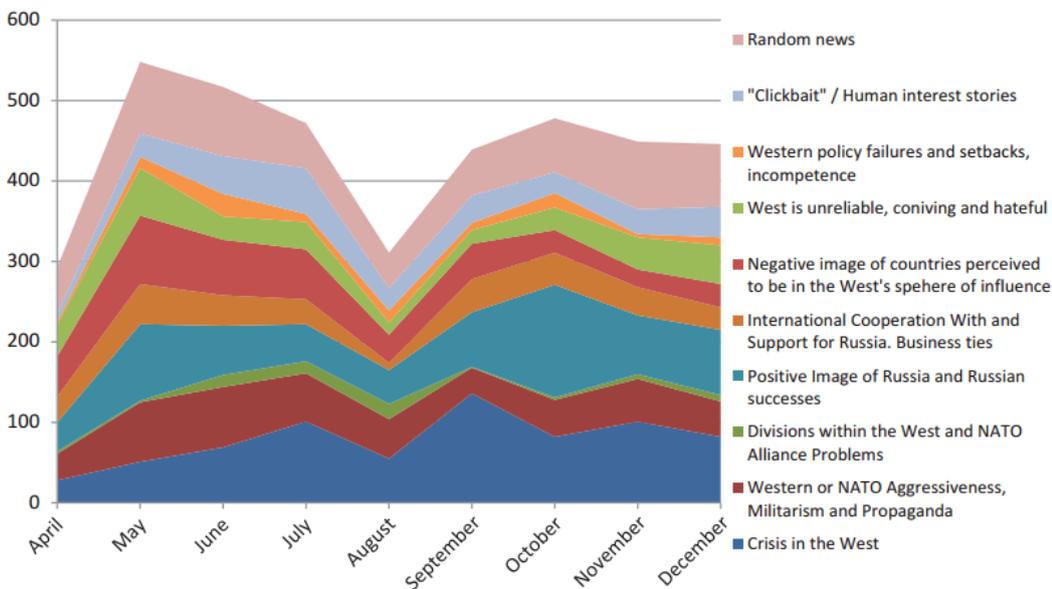
[The militarization of Russian policy](#), prepared by the Transatlantic Academy

II. Case studies and reports from individual countries and institutions

Russia's strategy for influence through public diplomacy and active measures: the Swedish case

by Martin Kragh and Sebastian Åsberg, published by the Journal of Strategic Studies

The Swedish version of Sputnik, the news website directly financed by the Kremlin, has been functional during 2015. According to its content analysis, the dominant metanarratives were: the crisis in the West, positive image of Russia and Western aggressiveness. The most frequently appearing targets were the EU, depicted as being in decline, and NATO, portrayed as encircling Russia, both organizations being under the shadow rule of the United States. Swedish domestic topics were not the priority, criticism of the EU and NATO constituted around 60 % of all articles.



Since 2014, Russia has moved towards a preference for active measures towards Sweden. Forgeries in Swedish information space have been amongst various tools Russia has used there, for example false evidence of misbehavior or incompetence of the West or the Swedish politicians and decision makers. The level of detail suggests that the originators of the documents have access to comprehensive intelligence on Swedish society. As we have seen in different parts of Europe, Sweden also has its far-right and far-left populist movements and projects with connections to Russia, for example the Nordic Resistance, a fascist organization which has cooperated with Rodina party and the Russian Imperial Movement, or the interlocutor of a pro-Kremlin left narrative, tabloid called Aftonbladet. The Russian authorities have also applied other types of active measures, from military threats to agents of influence. The overarching goal of Russian policy towards Sweden seems to be the preservation of the geostrategic status quo identified with a security order minimizing the presence of NATO in the region.

How do European democracies react to Russian aggression?,

prepared by the Kremlin Watch Program of the European Values Think Tank

Review of shifts in strategic & policy documents of EU28 following Russian aggression against Ukraine. This report maps out the EU member states' positions on Russia based on the latest national strategies, reports and official statements on foreign and security policy. Each country file was compiled according to a similar structure and drawing from comparable sources. The section Relationship Parameters highlights several dimensions that determine the member states' different approaches to Russia: history, geography and culture (a range of experiences that vary in nature and importance) energy, trade and investment military and security normative dimension of foreign policy (relative importance of the European orientation, commitment to multilateralism, international law, human rights and democracy promotion, etc.) public opinion and internal political situation.

According to the report, six countries are at the forefront of the European response to its aggression (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, United Kingdom, Denmark). Another 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 finally three states still act Kremlin-friendly (Greece, Italy, Cyprus).

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, 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.

Overview of countermeasures by the EU28 to the Kremlin's subversion operations

Report by the Kremlin Watch Program of the European Values Think Tank

How do the EU28 perceive and react to the threat of hostile influence and disinformation operations by the Russian Federation and its proxies? This Report aims to summarise how individual EU member states are reacting to this growing threat in three separate domains: 1) the government and political establishment, 2) the counterintelligence community, and 3) the non-governmental (civic) sector. The Report thus provides a comprehensive comparative overview of the current state of play in Europe, identifying common strengths and weaknesses between countries and, most importantly, providing concrete policy recommendations for security and defence enhancement based on specific regional and group trends.

According to the report, the Kremlin's use of aggressive hostile influence tactics like disinformation, together with its support for European extremists and radical leaders, has strongly alienated at least 12 countries out of the EU28. Two outright "Kremlin collaborators" within the EU28 were identified, namely Greece and Cyprus, who have shown no meaningful resistance to Russia's subversive activities. Another group of 8 EU states largely continue to ignore or deny the existence of Russian disinformation and hostile influence operations - Hungary, Austria, Croatia, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia. Three states half-acknowledge existence of the threat their hesitation is attributable either to geographic distance and historical neutrality (Ireland) or to the presence of pro-Kremlin forces in the political domain that suppress any efforts to place the threat on the agenda (Italy, Bulgaria). Three states acknowledge the threat of disinformation and hostile influence operations but do not demonstrate adequate understanding of that threat often, they are not geographically proximate to the Russian Federation. These are Belgium, France and Spain.

On the other hand a large group of member states not only acknowledges the existence of the threat but also seeks to understand and analyse its particularities, as well as to develop relevant and effective countermeasures. Eight of these states experienced a strategic shift or "awakening" after the annexation of Crimea and are now nearing the helm of the fight against Russian hostile influence operations. However, their practical strategies for countering Russian subversion are still under development, and some have weak spots that require redress (Denmark, the Netherlands, Romania, Finland, Czech Republic, Germany, the United Kingdom, Poland). However, there are noticeable differences in the depth and complexity of their national strategies. The highest levels of activity resilience, and readiness with respect to the threat is shown by four states, given their historical experiences with Russia: Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania.

Shining a Light on the Western Balkans: Internal Vulnerabilities and Malign Influence from Russia, Terrorism, and Transnational Organized Crime,

prepared by the CAN

In the last decade, the Western Balkan countries have become particularly unstable due to internal vulnerabilities and external influence. Based on the research and semi-structured discussions with experts in the US, Serbia and Macedonia, this paper stays that the Western Balkans countries are likely to become a playing field for the competition between Russian and the West. Russia is already paying a significant role with the aim to discredit Western institutions such as NATO and the EU, but also the foundations for Western democracy in general. But there are also other factors impeding stability of the Western Balkan such as terrorism, including radicalization, violent extremism, flow of foreign fighters or transnational organized crime. The seriousness of these factors is assessed in the CAN’s schema:

Figure. External influence and internal vulnerabilities in the Western Balkans

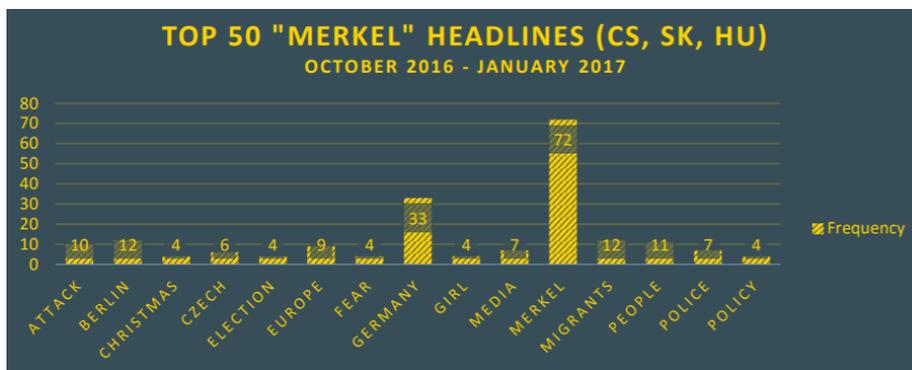
Countries	Influence			Internal Vulnerabilities					
	I1	I2	I3	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6
Bosnia and Herzegovina	♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦	♦	♦♦♦	♦♦	♦♦♦
Macedonia	♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦
Albania	♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦	♦	♦♦	♦♦	♦♦	♦♦
Serbia	♦♦♦	♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦♦
Montenegro	♦♦♦	♦	♦	♦	♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦
Kosovo	♦♦	♦♦	♦♦♦	♦♦	♦♦	♦♦	♦♦	♦	♦♦♦
Croatia	♦	♦	♦	♦♦	♦♦♦	♦	♦	♦♦	♦

I1: Russian Influence I2: Terrorism, including radicalization, violent extremism, and the flow of foreign fighters I3: Transnational organized crime	♦ Least severe ♦♦ Moderately severe ♦♦♦ Most severe
V1: Nationalism V2: Historical grievances V3: Corruption V4: Weakened state institutions V5: Weak media V6: Economic instability	

Coverage of Angela Merkel in Some CEE Media

Prepared by the Beacon Project Insights

The IRI together with GLOBSEC Policy Institute, Political Capital Institute, and European Values think-tank conducted a three-country survey (Czechia, Slovakia and Hungary) of the top narratives on Angela Merkel and the German elections in disinformation media. Analyzing the produced histograms and word clouds revealed the employment of hyperbolic, disingenuous or disinforming tools to stoke fear. While in Czechia the narrative focused on the migrant crisis, Slovakian outlets were more concerned with the US and anti-establishment themes. Hungarian articles concentrated on Merkel's failure and emphasized AfD's prospects. The survey found prevailing practices of cross-posting, copy-pasting of paragraphs and recurring titles.



Does Russia interfere in Czech, Austrian and Hungarian elections?

a study by Political Capital, European Values Think-tank in cooperation with DöW

“In the Czech Republic, Austria and Hungary, the Kremlin clearly has its own preferred candidates who all have a different kind of relationship with Moscow. Given the fact that in Austria and Hungary pro-Russian forces are highly likely to become members of the future government (Fidesz in Hungary, FPÖ in Austria), the Czech Republic is expected to be the most intense battleground for Russian meddling efforts, especially during the presidential election. The stakes are high considering the fact that Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Austria are in the vicinity of Ukraine, and they have an important role in the region’s and Ukraine’s stability. The three countries under review demonstrate different levels of vulnerability when it comes to Russia’s global and local strategy: Hungary being the most, while the Czech Republic the least susceptible to Russian influence.”

According to the report, the Kremlin aims to sustain the political “status quo” in Hungary that is represented by the Viktor Orbán. In the Czech Republic it tries to maintain its influence by supporting pro-Putin political players, e.g. Czech President Milos Zeman. Finally, in the Austria it will push the far-right pro-Kremlin Austrian Freedom Party into a government position. CEE countries provide perfect place for Russian meddling considering the high number of pro-Russian actors, as well as distrust in liberal democracy and attraction to strong leaders among some part of society. However, countries shown different levels of vulnerability when it comes to Russia’s influencing activities.

International Security and Estonia

prepared and published by the Estonian Information Board

In Estonia, Russia is seen as the most significant threat to Estonian security – mainly due to the following factors. Russian foreign policy goal is the restitution of its global importance which diminished with the fall of the USSR. It portrays the EU and NATO as organizations hostile to Russia and thus making Russian aggressive actions appear as mere reactions. Maintaining its sphere of influence is also an important objective for Russia. As for the EU, Russia tries to create tensions both between the member states and within them. In order to do so, it uses measures such as influence operations, propaganda, disinformation, or support for extremist and populist parties with an anti-EU stance. In the cybersphere, Russia poses a significant threat not only because of the "information confrontation" but also because of the direct cyber-attacks, which aim to damage the target or to obtain some information.

On the domestic level, Russia is experiencing economic hardship (caused mainly by the low price of oil and the Western sanctions) which results in other problems as well. In order to secure its position, Putin is centralizing the power in Russia even more and has made a lot of high-level personnel changes lately. Despite the country's economic problems, the military is still the second largest expense in the Russian budget and Russia maintains a powerful military potential.

Populism in Europe and Its Russian Love Affair

by Dalibor Rohac, Edit Zgut and Lóránt Györi, published by the American Enterprise Institute

The rise of left and right populism in Europe is an obvious phenomenon in recent months. No matter on which edge of the political spectrum they stand, populists tend to share not only the criticism of political elites, but also leaning towards authoritarianism. In countries where populists managed to get significant influence like Poland or Hungary, we can observe their efforts to push the boundaries of democratic governance.

Another characteristic which far-right and far-left movements and parties have in common is that their interests are close to the ones of the Russian federation. The undermining of Western institutions, supporting nationalism and promoting protectionism in Europe suits the Kremlin because it can influence individual countries way more easily than a united Europe. Also, populism provides space for pro-Kremlin propaganda and disinformation campaigns.

The links between the Kremlin and the populists can be financial, like in the case of the most influential right-wing pro-Russian party – the French National Front, which received several loans from the First Czech-Russian Bank, but also political, as we have seen in the case of Austria's FPÖ, which signed an agreement of cooperation with the United Russia party in December. Ideological and political consonance with Vladimir Putin can be also seen on the far-left side. For example, Czech Communists consistently defend Russia's political and military actions and Germany's the Left and other leftist populists from Poland and Greece became observers to the "referendum" on Crimean independence, together with parties like FN or Jobbik. The European Parliament is not spared either. The ENF group led by Marine Le Pen voted in line with the positions of the Kremlin 91 % of the time and the far-left GUE-NGL and the anti-EU EFDD stand close behind.

Meanwhile, mainstream politicians are trying to deal with the situation, often by accepting parts of populist agenda in order not to lose voters or get them back. But such a call might soon backfire. More useful solution would be the less popular one – to launch structural reforms and liberalize trade in order to restore economic dynamism, growth and job creation.

[A Second Look at the Steele Dossier](#)

John Sipher for Just Security

It has been eight months since the leak of the so-called Steele Dossier, a **private intelligence report containing allegations of ties between Donald Trump and Russia**. The dossier was a past topic of interest in the American media. Now, a new [article](#) by a highly respected former member of the CIA's Senior Intelligence Service, John Sipher, offers a second intriguing look at it from an intelligence perspective.

The dossier, which was originally published by BuzzFeed, comprises a collection of reports produced by Orbis Business Intelligence, a private intelligence firm, of which the author of the dossier, Christopher Steele, is a co-founder. The reports, produced between June and December 2016, contain allegations of collusion between the Kremlin and key Trump campaign officials, as well as claims that Russians have compromising material on Trump that could be used to blackmail him. Even though the dossier's publication triggered an uproar, the media repeatedly pointed out that the reports were "unsubstantiated", and the topic slowly faded away. So, what news does Sipher's article bring us?

With a 28-year career in the CIA, Sipher looks at the dossier from the perspective of someone who is familiar with the procedures that lead to the creation of such a document and is able to assess the dossier using his expertise. After a thorough examination, which takes into account events that happened after the dossier was leaked, Sipher concludes that information contained in it is generally credible. He points out, for example, that a lot of information learned in past months support the narrative that was presented in the dossier. Even though Sipher also considers certain parts of the reports to be incorrect or questionable, the core of the dossier is, in his view, now more reliable than before.

[Policy shift overview: How the Czech Republic became one of the European leaders in countering Russian disinformation](#)

by the Kremlin Watch Program of the European Values Think Tank

Due to the communist-era legacy, the Czech public is historically sensitive to direct Russian (or any other foreign) operations on its territory. On the other hand, a considerable portion of population shares the pro-Russian sentiment. 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. This paper aims to bring a simplified overview of what has happened in this particular field in the Czech context since 2014. This paper does not focus on relations to the Russian Federation per se it rather narrows the scope to the specific issue of disinformation and (hostile) foreign influence. It points out specific strategic and policy government documents, which are the official position of the Czech government including the excerpts from the chapter of the National Security Audit focused on the Influence of Foreign Powers.

Another reading suggestion:

- [The Kremlin's Gas Games in Europe: Implications for Policy Makers](#), by the Atlantic Council's DINU PATRICIU EURASIA CENTER
- [The activity of pro-Russian extremist groups in Central-Eastern Europe](#), By the Political Capital in cooperation with partners from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland, as well as Austria



- [Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections](#), Intelligence Community Assessment by the National Intelligence Council of the U.S.

III. How to Face the Russian Disinformation Campaign

Meeting the Russian Hybrid Challenge

A Comprehensive Strategic Framework by Franklin D. Kramer & Lauren M. Speranza, published by the Atlantic Council

Russia's hybrid challenges continue to threaten security across the Euro-Atlantic community, which is why there is such a need for a comprehensive coordinated strategy that will engage both the nations of NATO and the EU, as well as the institutions themselves. Four key categories of hybrid threats can be laid out together with corresponding recommendations the categories are: low-level use of force, cyberattacks, economic and political coercion and subversion, and information warfare. There are many actions which should be undertaken regarding this issue:

As for the low-level use of force (which is a concern particularly of the eastern nations of the EU and NATO) allies and member states should work towards, for example, enhanced intelligence capabilities through the creation of an "Eastern Hub". Regarding cyber-attacks, the states should both establish their own cyber defence structures and coordinate their efforts internationally. Responses to economic and political coercion can be, for instance, establishing greater transparency on Russian actions, limiting Russian political activities and financial investment, and increasing emphasis on reducing key dependencies. In response to Russia's information warfare, the transatlantic community should develop a comprehensive response to election interference, discredit the sources of Russian disinformation, and cooperate with the private sector.

Moreover, a fully effective response would benefit from the establishment of a new transatlantic entity that would coordinate the efforts of NATO, the EU, and individual nations, as well as private sector – a "Euro-Atlantic Coordinating Council". More details about the recommendations outlined here are to be found in the paper.

Should Russia's RT register as a foreign agent?

by the Atlantic Council

With a claimed global reach of 700 million people in more than 100 countries, the Kremlin-funded news network RT (formerly known as "Russia Today") has an important place in the Russian media toolkit. RT, which operates as an independent news broadcaster, is in fact a mouthpiece for Russian propaganda, promoting the Kremlin's interests and undermining trust in mainstream media. In the USA, a new strategy for dealing with RT has recently been laid out.

The core of it is to compel RT to register as an agent of foreign principal under the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938 (FARA), which was originally enacted to address Nazi propaganda and has proven useful since then. Many foreign media organizations have registered as agents of foreign principal, therefore, there is an established precedent. If the US government wished to do so, it would have to present evidence that RT acts "at order, request or under direction or control, of a foreign principal" and engages in "political activities" in the interest of its foreign principal. If registered, RT would not be restricted from distributing information (therefore, free speech would not be violated), however, it

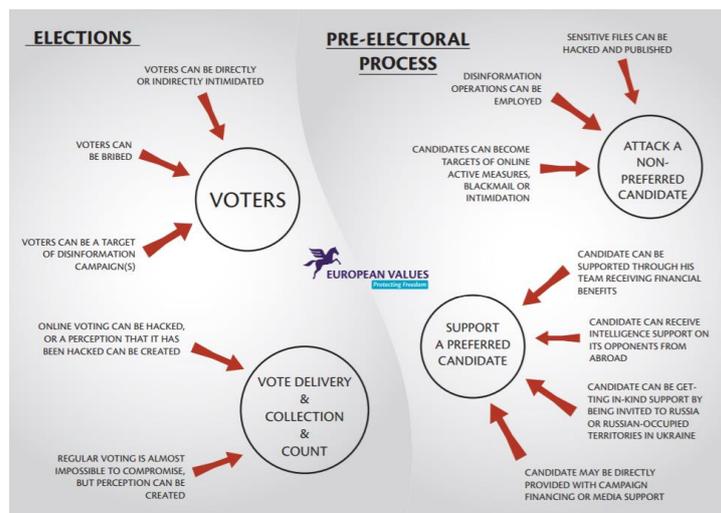
would have to (among other things) conspicuously label its information as "distributed by an agent on behalf of the foreign principal", which should warn the US public that RT is not a impartial news source.

Even though the Kremlin does its best to portray RT as an independent and impartial organization, there are many arguments that prove the opposite and would help this case, such as its reliance on the Russian state for 99% of its budget and its non-transparent governance structure. That and much more, including recommendations for the modernization of FARA and predictions of what might happen if the US were to enforce FARA against RT, can be found in [this report](#) by the Atlantic Council.

[A framework guide to tools for countering hostile foreign electoral interference](#)

by the Kremlin Watch Program of the European Values Think Tank

This brief Report aims to enumerate the tools that are nowadays used for hostile electoral interference and to offer 35 measures in 15 steps for enhancing the resilience of the democratic electoral process. It is focused on the European situation, with use of known examples from recent years, for example, in the United States. 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.



Another reading suggestion:

- [Getting Beyond Minsk: Toward a Resolution of the Conflict in Ukraine](#), by the German Marshall Fund of the United States

IV. Internet and technologies

Robotrolling

Prepared by the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence

The NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence published the first issue of *Robotrolling*, a publication dedicated to the activities of automated bots on social media. In the inaugural edition, they deal specifically with Twitter activities connected to NATO and four host countries of NATO troops – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland – in the period between March and August 2017, in both the Russian and English language. The study shows that 70% of accounts active in Russian on the given subject were automated. In the English language sphere, the number of automated accounts was smaller (28%), but was responsible for a relatively large amount of content.

How do Russian Twitter-bots operate? They are often distinguished by high levels of coordination, in contrast to the English-language accounts, which mostly consist of lone actors. Among the four host countries in question, Estonia has been targeted most frequently by Twitter-bots, while Poland and Lithuania the least. Most often, the bots talk to other bots, promoting third party content or incrementally building more believable profiles. Most commonly, they copy-and-paste headlines from online media outlets or serve as news aggregators.

The Many Faces of a Botnert

by Ben Nimmo Digital forensic Research Lab

Analysis how botnets operate on Twitter, demonstrating their behaviour on many real life cases. In his article for the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, he states that "despite all Twitter's attempts to weed out botnets, it is still relatively easy to create a network thousands strong."

The new political campaigning

by D. Tambini, S. Labo, E. Goodman, M. Moore published by the LSE Media Policy Project

Increasing popularity and influence of social media have shaped our world in many ways in recent years and political campaigning is a field that has been affected a lot by this. Election communication in developed democratic countries has been subjected to regulation for a long time now, however, social media have changed the landscape significantly. This poses challenges for established institutions and principles of regulations for which they were not prepared. Whereas previously, traditional media played the most important role in political campaigning, social media have enabled the campaigners to target potential voters more directly and efficiently.

While this change has many positive consequences, it has many negative ones as well. Tech companies like Facebook or Twitter are not sufficiently regulated and do not operate under the same ethical standards as traditional media. Lack of transparency and supervision over campaign spending, spreading of fake news or so-called echo chambers are just a few examples of the currently debated negative impacts of social media on political campaigning. Therefore, the new environment needs new rules which would correspond with the age of social media.

A Field Guide to Fake News

compiled by Liliana Bounegru, Jonathan Gray, Tomasso Venturini & Michele Mauri published by Public Data Lab.

A collection of recipes for those who love to cook with digital methods – that is how this unique publication about fake news describes itself. Focusing on the character of online circulation and reception of fake news, the "field guide" offers its readers new ways of mapping and responding to this phenomenon. It contains a number of recipes, which can be used by everyone with basic computer literacy who wants to grasp comprehensively the topic of fake news circulation on the internet or simply put a specific fake news into broader context. Every recipe is well-described and illustrated with examples, which are very interesting by themselves. To get a better understanding of how it all looks, here you can see a recipe how to create a network of cross-references between pages mentioning a certain fake story, and the result as well.

One set of recipes maps fake news hotspots on Facebook and offers answers to questions such as "what publics does fake news animate", "how may the trajectory of a fake news story be traced" or "do fact-checking initiatives reach the publics of fake news" (on Facebook). As with the other recipes, one can use the methods described and apply them to fake news of their choice. Another set focuses on tracing the circulation of fake news on the web and proposes various ways how to find out more about where do fake news originate and how they spread. Finally, the third set of recipes provides instructions how to use tracker signatures to map the techno-commercial underpinnings of fake news sites.

Making online platforms responsible for news content

by the Kremlin Watch Program of the European Values Think Tank

This paper aims to contribute to the highly salient debate on fake news and hate speech by analysing possible ways of online platforms' regulation. The paper firstly outlines the main challenges currently posed by the rapid spread of hate speech and fake news to democracy. Secondly, it describes the sheer influence of online platforms on contemporary media consumption, the duopolistic position of Facebook and Google in the global digital advertising market and the vast legal protections these online platforms currently enjoy in both the EU and the US. The paper then proceeds to a comprehensive overview of relevant proposals and initiatives, put forward by governments, but also the civil society, the private sector and the platforms themselves. Based on its observations, the paper proposes the following measures to actors wishing to mandate a greater responsibility of online platforms for news:

Governments:

1. Examine the use of algorithms by online platforms in order to reveal potential errors and biases understand to what extent the algorithms are a conscious editorial choice and how this should affect platforms' liability.
2. Provide guidelines on the editorial and take-down practices of 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. Install dedicated bodies to oversee and report on their conduct.

3. Properly apply existing legislation on platforms, notably from the realms of copyright, audio-visual, and competition law.
4. When proposing legislation about hate speech or fake news, develop definitions for these terms that are as specific as possible.
5. Ensure that platforms install appropriate redress mechanisms that allow users to complain if their content had been unjustly removed

Platforms:

6. Be transparent about editorial practices and report them, especially when it comes to taking down content.
7. Continue partnering with journalists and fact checkers.
8. Graphically differentiate news content from other types of posts.
9. Publicly proclaim your intention to support media literacy and your trust in high-quality journalism. 10. Fund media literacy classes, particularly in those parts of the world that have recently democratized and whose media market does not have an established tradition (e.g. Central and Eastern Europe).

Civil society and the private sector:

11. Push online platforms toward being transparent about their editorial practices.
12. Promote a discourse that views fake news and hate speech as “not cool,” like eating unhealthy food.

Another reading suggestion:

- [The cyber-enabled information struggle: Russia's approach and Western vulnerabilities](#), The Finnish Institute of International Affairs
- [Digital Disinformation A PRIMER](#), by the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center,

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