

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

**Education of the society on disinformation:
Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia**

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EDITED BY
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Introduction

Arkadiusz Żukowski

This publication is the result of the implementation of the project entitled “Education of the Society on Disinformation: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia” as part of the “Public Diplomacy 2024” competition of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland and the priority “Public Diplomacy – Poland – II. – Counteracting disinformation and raising awareness of existing threats in this area by monitoring and disclosing incidents of disinformation, and building societal resilience to disinformation by developing competences to recognise and respond appropriately to fake news. Monitoring reports on Polish, identifying image opportunities and threats”.

The project was carried out by researchers from the Institute of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, composed of: principal investigator – Prof. Arkadiusz Żukowski, investigators: Prof. Marcin Chelminiak, Dr. Tomasz Gajowniczek, Prof. Katarzyna Maciejewska-Mieszkowska, Prof. Wojciech T. Modzelewski, Prof. Wojciech Kotowicz, Prof. Waldemar Tomaszewski, Prof. Krzysztof Żęgota. The main foreign partner involved in the project was Prof. Vladimir Sazonov from the University of Tartu in Estonia, who is an experienced researcher in the field of combating disinformation and fake news, especially in the context of Russia’s actions against Estonia (he also represents the Estonian Military Academy in Tartu). Moreover, researchers from Klaipėda University, Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, University of Latvia in Riga, and other universities of Lithuania

and Latvia, e.g., Prof. Rosita Vaičiulė, Prof. Mindaugas Jurkynas, Prof. Lilita Seimuskane, Dr. Sigita Struberga, and Prof. Ieva Bērziņa, were involved as partners in the scientific consultations. In addition, contact was established with other researchers such as Prof. Ieva Gajauskaite, from General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy in Vilnius, as well as with the Baltic Defence College (BALT-DEFCOL) in Tartu with the Dean, Prof. Col. Zdzisław Śliwa and Prof. Col. Eugeniusz Cieślak. During the implementation of the project, cooperation with the NATO Defence Education Enhancement Programme eAcademy, headed by Prof. Piotr Gawliczek, and the Polish Association for Security (Director Jarosław Tokarczyk) was deepened. Disinformation research issues in Estonia were the subject of an exchange of information and experience with the chargé d'affaires a.i. Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Tallinn Anna Pełka and Sławomira Borowska-Peterson, responsible for culture and education at the Embassy.

The publication consists of three parts. The first of them, entitled “Public Diplomacy and Education on Disinformation”, opens with an introductory chapter on the essence and challenges of public diplomacy, prepared by Wojciech T. Modzelewski. It was important to show the terminological diversity of the term “public diplomacy”. This concept is often identified with international public relations, branding, public affairs, soft power and smart power, and even propaganda and psychological warfare. The author emphasizes that in the scientific perspective, public diplomacy has an interdisciplinary dimension. He draws attention to an important aspect of it, namely the use of new communication technologies and open media systems, as well as counteracting disinformation.

The next chapter by Krzysztof Żęgota is included in the form of a general report of the project entitled “Educating the public in the field of disinformation: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia”. The assumptions of the project and its implementation were outlined in detail, emphasizing in particular its objectives, course (seven basic activities: Scientific consultations with partners from Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia; Surveys involving young people from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia; Exchange of information on educational programs on disinformation in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia; Creation of a database of researchers dealing with disinformation education in Poland, Lithua-

nia, Latvia, and Estonia; Organization of an international conference with the participation of researchers, specialists and young people from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia; Organization of the international Youth Round Table; Publication of the report in English in Open Access in the field of the title of the project) and detailed results. It was also pointed out that the implementation of the project contributed to the achievement of sustainable and at the same time concrete results and benefits.

An extremely important element of the scientific activities related to the project were surveys involving young people from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. They concerned knowledge about disinformation (its essence, types, recognition, effects and strengthening resistance to it), and to a lesser extent public diplomacy of the state (creating and consolidating its positive image, building a national brand – as part of soft means of influence). The results of these studies were developed by Katarzyna Maciejewska-Mieszkowska, Wojciech T. Modzelewski and Tomasz Gajowniczek. In addition to the analysis of the results, a catalogue of recommendations on education in the field of disinformation was formulated for the education systems of the project partner countries, i.e., Polish, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

The next chapter by Marcin Chelminiak concerns educational policy in the field of counteracting disinformation among children and young people in the Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) and Poland. Particular attention was paid to educational programmes on disinformation in these countries. Initially, the European Union strategies and programs for promoting digital literacy and countering disinformation among students and NATO's strategy in combating disinformation, as well as the organization's cooperation with the European Union, were discussed. Then, the characteristics and analysis of educational programs in the field of counteracting disinformation in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland were carried out. A catalogue of recommendations in this regard has also been prepared.

The next part of the study concerns disinformation and its various faces. Vladimir Sazonov in a comprehensive case study analysing Russia's informational influence using the concept of *Pax Russica* and through strategic narratives disseminated via pro-Kremlin channels to target audiences in Estonia, especially Russophone audience during 2014–2024. The research is primarily based on the qualitative media analysis of several pro-Kremlin media outlets in the Russian language through semi-structured expert interviews with opinion

leaders, political figures, security experts, media and communication, political science, defence studies) and several representatives of the Russophone community in Estonia. A detailed analysis of issues such as: *Pax Russica*, Russian information warfare and strategic narratives, including propaganda of *Pax Russica* in Estonia; Pro-Russian discourse in statements of some opinion leaders and politicians in Estonia as well as Russian strategic narratives during COVID-19 and Russophobia as a Tool for Pressure was conducted.

Wojciech Kotowicz, on the other hand, analyses the European Union's policy on disinformation in the context of its key documents in this area, such as the "Action Plan against Disinformation" (2018), the "Code of Practice on Disinformation" (2018) and the "Regulation on Digital Services Act" (2022). Through an analysis of the content of these documents and a review of the scientific literature, the main EU strategies in the fight against disinformation, their effectiveness and the challenges related to their implementation were presented. The conclusions of the chapter are aimed at indicating the directions of further research and policy actions in the area of counteracting disinformation at the EU level.

On the other hand, Waldemar Tomaszewski synthetically shows the phenomenon of disinformation in the Russian media in the context of Polish security. The specificity of the media policy of the Russian state authorities is characterized through the prism of disinformation and the image of Polish in the Russian media. It was important to show the possibilities of defending against the intensification of disinformation in the media in democratic countries, including the United States and Poland, and to encourage an in-depth discourse on disinformation in terms of the security of the Polish state.

The next part of the publication covers the issues of research on disinformation. An effort was made to prepare a preliminary list of researchers in the world dealing with disinformation, which was prepared by Wojciech Kotowicz. This list is the beginning of the creation of a database of researchers dealing not only with disinformation, but also with education on disinformation, primarily in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

The publication ends with a bibliography of scientific monographs on disinformation for the period 2000–2025 prepared by Wojciech Kotowicz. This bibliographic list is the result of preliminary research on this issue in the world. Scientific monographs in English, as well as in Polish, Italian, French, Finnish and German are included.

In the intention of the editor and the authors, this publication is to be a contribution to further research on the issue of disinformation. It is also intended to be a voice in the global discourse on disinformation, and to provide readers with general and specific knowledge as well as interesting reading.

PART I

Public Diplomacy and Education on Disinformation

CHAPTER 1

The Essence and Challenges of Public Diplomacy

Wojciech T. Modzelewski

The concept of public diplomacy is not unambiguous. It is often identified with international public relations, branding, public affairs, soft power, and even propaganda and psychological warfare. In the scientific dimension, public diplomacy has an interdisciplinary dimension, because it can be analysed using tools from the theory of international relations (mainly research on diplomacy), political communication, media studies, cultural studies or history. However, the dominant approach places public diplomacy in studying international relations, especially in diplomacy studies.

Public diplomacy is not uniformly defined. For example, it means the government's conscious efforts to promote understanding of its own culture, arouse interest among foreign audiences or gain support for policy goals¹. It is a way of communicating with a foreign audience in order to promote the ideas, institutions and culture of one's own nation². It is a bilateral, dialogic form of international political communication addressed to audiences abroad, carried out through the media and direct channels. It aims to shape or support a positive image of the state and its society abroad, among others, by influencing public

¹ M.T. Bond, *Public Diplomacy*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235188593_Public_Diplomacy (access: 28.12.2024).

² J. Melissen, *The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice*, [in:] *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, ed. J. Melissen, Basingstoke–New York 2005, p. 12.

opinion and shaping positive attitudes towards the broadcasting country³. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs defines public diplomacy as strategic, coordinating and executive activities which, by shaping social attitudes and public opinion abroad, are aimed at gaining understanding and support for the Polish *raison d'état* and the foreign policy of the Republic of Poland. The mechanisms of public diplomacy include: the promotion of Polish culture, history, science and innovation, the Polish language, education, sport, tourism, and the economy, which allows to build a positive image of Poland abroad and good international relations. Its activities are addressed to foreign institutions, organisations and societies⁴. Despite the differences in definitions, the basic conceptualisation of public diplomacy boils down to understanding it as a nation-state's attempt to favourably influence public opinion in other countries, which relies on and helps build national reputations⁵. Public diplomacy shapes public attitudes and opinions abroad, using tools and methods outside traditional diplomacy.

Therefore, public diplomacy is an essential foreign policy tool for governments to address audiences abroad. In the terminology of international communication, it is a form of dialogic political communication in international relations, influencing the attitudes and opinions of other societies. It is worth noting that states and other non-state actors in international relations undertake such a dialogue⁶. Thus, public diplomacy refers to activities carried out by the government, its agencies, and non-governmental entities, i.e., international organisations, transnational corporations, media conglomerates, local governments, private groups, and even individuals⁷. They also include, for example, territorial entities (regions and cities) that can influence public opinion by conducting foreign activity, i.e., paradiplomacy. In traditional diplomacy, the target audience for its actions is another government, while in public diplomacy, "the public as a target of influence"⁸. Activities of public diplomacy are directed at this public

³ B. Ociepka, *Dyplomacja publiczna jako forma komunikowania międzynarodowego*, [in:] *Dyplomacja publiczna*, ed. B. Ociepka, Wrocław 2008, p. 12.

⁴ *Dyplomacja publiczna*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/dyplomacja-publiczna> [28.12.2024].

⁵ C. White, D. Radic, *Comparative public diplomacy: Message strategies of countries in transition*, "Public Relations Review" 2014, no. 40(3), p. 461.

⁶ B. Ociepka, *Dyplomacja publiczna Polski i zagraniczna polityka kulturalna Niemiec w stosunkach wzajemnych*, Warszawa–Darmstadt 2022, p. 10.

⁷ E. Gilboa, *Diplomacy in the Media Age. Three Models of Uses and Effects*, "Diplomacy & Statecraft" 2001, no. 12(2), p. 4 et seq.

⁸ B. Hocking, *Rethinking the 'New' Public Diplomacy*, [in:] *The New Public Diplomacy - Soft Power in International Relations*, ed. J. Melissen, London 2005, p. 32.

to influence their opinions and beliefs and inadvertently recruit them as agents of internal pressure to actualise the goals that the source of the diplomacy has⁹.

The area of interest of traditional diplomacy is government policy, while the area of public diplomacy goes beyond this sphere, referring to the views, behaviours or attitudes present in society¹⁰. It affects classical diplomacy, which is changing by opening it up to the public – citizens who are both subjects and recipients of public diplomacy¹¹. In contrast to traditional diplomacy conducted by national governments, public diplomacy is more transparent and socialised¹². Public diplomacy aims to shape an external environment that would support a country's foreign policy by understanding, informing, and influencing an international audience¹³. By shaping public opinion, it is a tool for influencing foreign governments and local political decision-makers and consequently co-shapes their decisions in foreign policy. Public opinion can exert pressure on its own governments to force actions beneficial to the state using public diplomacy tools. The main goal of public diplomacy is therefore to influence opinion-forming processes.

Sometimes, the term citizen diplomacy is used for this type of activity, which combines the actions of individuals (citizens) and the state's actions, constituting an integral part of public diplomacy¹⁴. By developing public diplomacy, governments strive to improve a given country's perception in those social circles to which campaigns are addressed. At the same time, this diplomacy can potentially include wider groups and create effective communication channels. It is based on soft power, two-way communication, strategic public diplomacy, information management, creating the country's brand and electronic image (e-image), and aims to shape such an external environment that would support the foreign policy of a given country through understanding, appropriate information and influencing the international audience.

⁹ T.O. Wright, *Rethinking Public Diplomacy: A Synthesis of The Conceptualizations of Public Diplomacy in Public Relations and Diplomacy Research*, [in:] *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy and Governance*, ed. A. Farazmand, Cham 2019, p. 5.

¹⁰ C. Wolf, B. Rosen, *Public Diplomacy. How to Think About and Improve It*, p. 16, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2004/RAND_OP134.pdf (access: 26.12.2024).

¹¹ B. Ociepka, *Dyplomacja publiczna jako...*, pp. 11–12.

¹² A. W. Ziętek, *Dyplomacja publiczna Polski*, "Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska" 2010, sec. K: "Politologia", vol. 17 (1), p. 71.

¹³ N. Broś, *Znaczenie nowych technologii dla współczesnej dyplomacji*, "Dialogi Polityczne/Political Dialogues" 2017, no. 22, p. 167.

¹⁴ R. Bhandari, R. Belyavina, *Evaluating and Measuring the Impact of Citizen Diplomacy: Current Status and Future Directions*, U.S. Citizenship Diplomacy Summit, Washington 2010, p. 3.

Since non-state actors currently use diplomatic methods and tools to achieve similar goals, the term “new public diplomacy” emphasises its new dimensions, in which societies are the subject and object of influence¹⁵. Just as classic public diplomacy aims to reach foreign public opinion with the message of a given state, there are direct contacts between individuals living in other countries in the new public diplomacy. Considering the fact who is the sender and receiver in this type of communication, the “traditional” public diplomacy is abbreviated as g2p (government to people), and the “new” public diplomacy is abbreviated as p2p (people to people). In the second case, governments and other entities (e.g., local governments) directly or indirectly influence public opinion, shaping the image of the state and society¹⁶. The new public diplomacy breaks the state’s monopoly on defining the goals of diplomacy, enables the exercise of civic rights in matters that go beyond the internal affairs of a given state, and has the potential ability to reverse the vector of diplomatic activities and direct them towards the government of its own state¹⁷. Networking, dialogic and intermeticism are the basic features of the model of the new public diplomacy, based on the practice of open political and media systems. Formerly closed and secret diplomacy has transformed into an open form, assuming benefits for all its participants. As a result, the adjective “public” was added to the definition of this phenomenon¹⁸.

One of the important areas of public diplomacy is culture, which, like any other area of social life, is becoming internationalised and globalised. Countries use culture to build their prestige in the international arena, both in the strategic and tactical dimensions of responding to foreign recipients’ current needs and expectations. Through culture, they can also neutralise the negative image

¹⁵ A. W. Ziętek, op. cit., p. 68.

¹⁶ B. Bojarczyk, J. Olchowski, A.W. Ziętek, *Od dominacji kulturowej do soft power. Kultura w promocji państw*, [in:] *Międzynarodowe stosunki kulturalne. Podręcznik akademicki*, ed. A.W. Ziętek, Warszawa 2010, p. 134.

¹⁷ R. Zenderowski, M. Krycki, *Public diplomacy w miastach podzielonych granicą państwową. Przykład Cieszyzna i Czeskiego Cieszyzna (Český Těšín)*, “Pogranicze. Polish Borderlands Studies” 2014, vol. 2, no. 2, p. 214.

¹⁸ B. Ociepka, *Dyplomacja publiczna – oksymoron?*, [in:] *Oblicza współczesnej komunikacji. Konteksty – problemy – wyzwania*, ed. A. Stempińska, E. Jurga-Wosik, B. Secler, Poznań 2018, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327159896_Dyplomacja_publiczna_-_oksymoron_w_A_Stepinska_E_Jurga-Wosik_B_Secler_red_Oblicza_wspolczesnej_komunikacji_Konteksty-problemy-wyzwania_Poznan_Polskie_Towarzystwo_Komunikacji_Spolecznej_2018_s_19-30 [30.12.2024].

of the state¹⁹. Cultural diplomacy is a way for states to overcome various types of alienation and present themselves to others. Promoting native culture, significant cultural and sports events, scientific achievements, and finally, one's country as a tourist destination also has an economic dimension. In other words, it should be remembered that the sphere of culture, science and tourism – from the point of view of economics – are the fields of the national economy. Another area of public diplomacy is the economy, and economic diplomacy is an important foreign policy tool. It aims to raise the state's international position through the broadly understood promotion of its economic interests, particular interests of its subjective elements, specific industries or companies. It involves, for example, looking for foreign partners for domestic companies, promoting national exporters, gaining a competitive advantage in exports or protecting one's own market.

The mentioned types of diplomatic activities are part of the concept of the so-called soft power, i.e., soft means of influence in international relations, and public diplomacy is one of the instruments of the state's soft power.

Emphasising this aspect, public diplomacy can be defined as an instrument that the government uses to mobilise soft power resources to communicate and attract communities in other countries. The importance of informal channels and procedures is growing, determining flexibility and the ability to adapt to new challenges and influence others within the state's soft power framework²⁰.

Generally speaking, states can act with the help of hard and soft elements of power. Hard power is based on the ability to force another entity to act in a way that is expected by a given state, and most often, it includes military means (e.g., military intervention), coercive policy or economic sanctions (e.g., embargoes). Soft power, on the other hand, is the ability to influence other entities through a given country's broadly understood cultural, political, and economic attractiveness, allowing it to influence others without force²¹. Soft power is based on "the ability to shape the preferences of others", "the ability to influence others with arguments", "the ability to attract", "the ability to get what you want through attractiveness" (your culture, the politics of a given country and the values you con-

¹⁹ G. Michałowska, *Uwarunkowania międzynarodowej współpracy kulturalnej*, [in:] *Międzynarodowe stosunki kulturalne. Podręcznik akademicki*, ed. A.W. Ziętek, Warszawa 2010, pp. 44-45.

²⁰ J.S. Nye Jr., *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power*, "The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science" 2008, vol. 616, p. 95.

²¹ J.S. Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, New York 1990, pp. 182–183.

vey)²². Soft power resources include, among others, culture, information, technology, science, education, sport and innovation²³. It is necessary to agree that “the awareness of this dual purpose of the different types of state power, particularly its usefulness in foreign policy, is essential in the era of globalisation. This makes the deterritorialisation of the state progress, expands the scope of the state’s external relations, which escape its direct control and the possibility of implementation within its foreign policy”²⁴. Joseph S. Nye describes the combination of soft and hard measures as smart power²⁵.

In the use of the state’s soft power, it is important, among others, to shape the state’s brand, i.e., positive values associated with it, translating into positive attitudes towards it. Currently, many countries use soft power to promote their image, and the exposure of national heritage and the ability to “convince through culture, values, ideas” helps improve the state’s image and strengthen its political position. Countries use this form of diplomacy to create and consolidate their positive image, their national brand (nation branding) as part of soft power instruments²⁶. A state brand can be defined as positive values associated with a country, translating into positive attitudes towards it²⁷.

Public diplomacy focuses on communication with the societies of other countries and is conducted in many directions, covering a broad spectrum of informational activities. The ICT revolution of the 21st century has moved the world towards online relations, which also applies to politics and diplomacy, and the use of digital connections has become a common practice in building international relations. Dynamically changing communication processes inevitably affect how foreign policy and diplomacy are conducted. The role of classical diplomacy has been expanded, and its new form in the form of digital diplomacy (digital diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, e-diplomacy) turns out to be one of the most adequate and effective diplomatic methods in the modern world.

²² J.S. Nye Jr., *Soft power: jak osiągnąć sukces w polityce światowej*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 34–35.

²³ For more information, see: B. Ociepka, *Miękka siła i dyplomacja publiczna Polski*, Warszawa 2013.

²⁴ T. Łoś-Nowak, *Polityka zagraniczna – stale i zmienne komponenty procesu formułowania i realizacji*, [in:] *Polityka zagraniczna: aktorzy – potencjały – strategie*, ed. T. Łoś-Nowak, Warszawa 2011, p. 55.

²⁵ J.S. Nye Jr., *Soft power...*, p. 6.

²⁶ B.J. Hurn, *The role of cultural diplomacy in nation branding*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289687104_The_role_of_cultural_diplomacy_in_nation_branding [19.07.2016].

²⁷ B. Ociepka, *Miękka siła i dyplomacja...*, p. 101.

Therefore, an important aspect of public diplomacy is the use of new communication technologies and open media systems. The development of the mediation of politics, as well as all spheres of social life, strengthens the importance of new media, especially social media. Technological changes in communication have enabled greater activity of social media users, not only as passive recipients, but also as active stakeholders in political communication relations²⁸. On the other hand, public diplomacy, developing in the era of mass communication, is assimilating the logic of the mass media, and in recent years also social media. The functioning of this form of outward-facing political communication in social media takes place as part of a phenomenon called public diplomacy 2.0. Presence in social media not only provides countries with greater visibility, but also gives them the opportunity to influence opinion-forming processes²⁹.

Public diplomacy is therefore an important force used in the information society. Digital diplomacy offers a number of opportunities, including much greater access to information that can be shared in real time and which can be used to exert public pressure on the government. The development of the Internet as a universal global medium, and especially the great popularity of social media, have made diplomacy, understood as a dialogue between the government of state A and the government of state B, a highly insufficient tool for international communication. In today's multi-vector world, there is a need to enrich traditional diplomacy with two additional channels for the dissemination of information: the government of state A – the society of state B and the society of state A – the society of state B. These two forms of communication are constituted in public diplomacy. The intensification of the flow of information on a global scale and the facilitation of access to information have also forced changes in state diplomacy, e.g., by increasing its transparency. In addition, the development of new media, the multiplication of new communication channels, has allowed to generate a dialogue between official diplomats and the international audience, whose feelings and indications are beginning to be taken into account in decisions in the field of foreign policy. Through direct communication, as well as forums, social networking sites or instant messengers, it is easier to reach the recipient in order to carry out the tasks set for diplomats. It is also easier to achieve intermediate goals, such as: objectivisation of the coun-

²⁸ Eadem, *Dyplomacja publiczna – oksymoron?...*

²⁹ Ibidem.

try's image abroad, creation and updating of an integrated system of information about one's own culture in global network resources, creation, collection and sharing of information and promotional materials³⁰.

The Internet, including social media, due to its accessibility and ease of use, has now become the main source of information exchange and the basic tool of influence. They are an important platform and at the same time a communication tool and an important link in public diplomacy. Their use in diplomatic activities is a derivative of noticing and appreciating the changes taking place in communication processes, in which media users more and more often obtain knowledge and information about the current international situation from social media. Nowadays, the speed of communication, its directness and impact in real time, the universality of the spread content and the ease of access to information play an important role. Understanding the dynamics of digital media and implementing strategies for their use is one of the greatest challenges facing all actors of contemporary international relations.

The multiplication of information sources combined with the constantly increasing number of active participants in this process means that the provision and sharing of information and analyses is taking place on an increasing scale. The Internet is a space where there is an "overproduction" of information, and its huge amount causes information chaos. The society is not able to verify all the data that reaches it, which is conducive to disinformation, manipulation and propaganda. It also fosters psychological operations using the Internet, affecting emotions and motives of action, manipulating reality by creating specific narratives, etc. Social media, in particular, is an effective applicator for reproducing false and unverified content. In the Internet reality, especially young people (most often using the Internet) are susceptible to disinformation, "information smog", conspiracy theories, "post-truth", simplification and shallowness of the message, "memisation", strengthening stereotypes and prejudices, etc. Hence the important educational role, including the acquisition of the ability to recognise, select and verify information, raising awareness of existing threats in the area of information, and consequently building social resilience to disinformation.

³⁰ A.W. Ziętek, *op. cit.*, pp. 65–82.

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CHAPTER 2

Education of the Society on Disinformation: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia – General Report

Krzysztof Żęgota

Scientific Assumptions and Project Implementation

One of the project's main objectives was to diagnose the state of education and social perception of threats from disinformation, particularly concerning representatives of the young generation, who often learn about current events from the Internet, including social media.

Specific objectives and results:

1. identification of the state of knowledge of young people in the field of disinformation and propaganda as well as solutions in the field of combating disinformation functioning in the countries covered by the project;
2. initiating discussion on various aspects of disinformation, improving young people's skills in recognising disinformation, building resilience to disinformation, critical thinking and recognising false information, promoting information hygiene,
3. exchange of information, knowledge and good practices between the project partners aimed at making a diagnosis and developing postulates and solutions in the field of recognising disinformation and strengthening resistance to false content, which can become model solutions for other countries,
4. publicising the project in the media, organising conferences and the Youth Round Table, issuing a report – all this has an impact on public opinion, increasing awareness of the existing threats in the field of disinformation,

5. activating young people within the project and deepening cooperation between the project partners is an element of strengthening the interdependence between Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia and serves the implementation of the goals of Polish public diplomacy.

The Internet, through its availability and ease of use, has become the main information exchange source. However, it is a space where there is an “overproduction” of information, and its huge amount causes information chaos, increasing susceptibility to disinformation and manipulation. Technological revolutions have changed the face of modern disinformation and propaganda. Young people use the Internet, where a lot of information is false, so they must know how to recognise and verify it. Society cannot verify all the data that reaches it, which is conducive to disinformation, psychological operations using the Internet, affecting emotions and motives of action, manipulating reality by creating specific narratives, etc. In the Internet reality, young people are susceptible to disinformation, “information smog”, conspiracy theories, “post-truth”, simplification and shallowness of the message, “memicisation” of the Internet, reinforcement of stereotypes and prejudices, etc. Especially social media, which young people use most willingly, are an effective applicator for duplicating, for example, false and unverified content.

It is particularly important in the context of Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine and Russia’s information war. Young people are most exposed to fake news and manipulation and, therefore, most vulnerable to disinformation. Technological revolutions have changed the face of modern disinformation and propaganda. Young people use the Internet, where a lot of information is false, so they must know how to recognise and verify it. Therefore, a fundamental role should be assigned to educating young people and teaching them critical thinking so that they can verify the information that reaches them.

In order to diagnose the state of public education in the field of disinformation, social research was carried out covering issues related to disinformation and forms of counteracting it. The research on young people from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia was used to diagnose the state of education of the societies of these countries on disinformation. The exchange of experiences, e.g., on educational programmes on disinformation or solutions functioning in individual countries – all this is to educate in the field of recognising disinformation and strengthening young people’s resilience to false content. The activities carried out under the project (scientific consultations, surveys, educational pro-

grammes, creation of databases, organisation of conferences and Youth Round Tables, and publication of the final report) contribute to the achievement of the project's objectives through the exchange of experiences and good practices, initiation of discussions and development of recommendations.

The implementation of the project contributed to the achievement of lasting benefits in the form of:

- building international partnerships among young people,
- activation of young people, development of competencies in the field of recognising false information and appropriate response to it,
- developing solutions to strengthen resilience to fake content.

The educational and promotional value of the project was achieved, e.g., by creating a database of researchers dealing with disinformation education in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The data from the database will be available to other researchers and interested parties.

Education and promotion were also supported by the organisation of an international conference with the participation of researchers, specialists, young people from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and representatives of NATO on "Disinformation and public diplomacy". The conference aimed to show the role of disinformation in shaping contemporary public opinion and the importance of public diplomacy in counteracting it. Young people are most exposed to fake news and manipulation and, therefore, most vulnerable to disinformation. Technological revolutions have changed the face of modern disinformation and propaganda. Young people use the Internet, where a lot of information is false, so they must know how to recognise and verify it. Especially social media, which young people use most willingly, are an effective applicator for reproducing false and unverified content. Therefore, a fundamental role should be assigned to educating young people and teaching them critical thinking so that they can verify the information that reaches them.

The conference was also attended by: Prof. Vladimir Sazonov (University of Tartu) – paper entitled "Russian strategic narratives and disinformation against Estonia in the context of Russian military aggression against Ukraine", Dr. Damian Szacawa (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin) – paper entitled "Contemporary Information Security Threats from Russia Against Baltic Sea Region Countries", Prof. Katarzyna Maciejewska-Mieszkowska (University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn) – paper entitled "Between polemics and riposte. Radosław Sikorski's speeches at the UN forum", Prof. Waldemar Tomaszewski

(University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn) – paper entitled “Disinformation in the Russian media. The context of Polish security”, and Prof. Wojciech Kotowicz (University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn) – paper entitled “The European Union policy towards disinformation”.

The Youth Round Table, organised as part of the conference, was an opportunity to exchange thoughts and experiences, discuss, and formulate recommendations. The event aimed to discuss contemporary threats to information security and the risks associated with disinformation, considered from the perspective of representatives of the young generation. The Round Table was also intended to achieve the set goals by exchanging experiences and good practices, initiating discussions and developing recommendations. In addition, the Youth Round Table was an opportunity for an intensive exchange of thoughts and experiences, discussion and formulation of recommendations.

The round table discussed:

- Students’ experiences of disinformation and propaganda.
- Main threats to the infosphere.
- Examples of propaganda and disinformation in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland.
- How to counteract disinformation and propaganda?
- Are we safe from the dangers of propaganda and disinformation?

Prof. Arkadiusz Żukowski moderated the discussion, and its participants were:

- Domantas Mickeliūnas (Klaipėda University, Lithuania),
- Arnas Murauskas (Klaipėda University, Lithuania),
- Nojus Katkauskas (Klaipėda University, Lithuania),
- Lūcija Ceicāne (University of Latvia in Riga, Latvia),
- Rebecca Vilande (University of Latvia in Riga, Latvia),
- Rodion Krupin (University of Tartu, Estonia),
- Ren Yashiro (University of Tartu, Estonia),
- Ramz Fattaleh (University of Tartu, Estonia),
- Konstancja Bohdanowicz (University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland),
- Martyna Jurczak (University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland),
- Bartosz Cylwa (University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland),
- Natalia Urbańska (University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland),
- Adrian Bogdan (University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland),

– Krzysztof Gołębiowski (University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland).

The main conclusions and recommendations resulting from the discussions within the Youth Round Table are related to the growing threats resulting from the impact of propaganda and fake news. The discussion participants noted that Russia's neighbouring countries are particularly vulnerable to propaganda. Moreover, the impact of propaganda and fake news via the Internet and social media exposes the young generation to the negative impact of propaganda. At the same time, some of the participants of the Round Table emphasised that the diversity of opinions and cultural perspectives on the world of information is an important element of global dynamics, and ignoring it can only exacerbate existing contradictions and lead to the conflicts that the world is currently experiencing.

An important research element of the project were study visits carried out during the project. On May 25–29, 2024, employees of the Institute of Political Science of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the UWM: Prof. Waldemar Tomaszewski, Prof. Wojciech Kotowicz, and Prof. Krzysztof Żęgota, visited the Klaipeda University. During the visit, employees of the Institute of Political Science conducted scientific consultations with Lithuanian researchers dealing with cross-border threats and the fight against disinformation and fake news, among others, meetings with Prof. Rosita Vaičiulė and Prof. Jaroslav Dvorak were held.

On June 20–25, 2024, employees of the Institute of Political Science of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the UWM: Prof. Waldemar Tomaszewski, Prof. Wojciech Kotowicz, Prof. Krzysztof Żęgota, and Dr. Tomasz Gajowniczek visited the University of Latvia in Riga. The visit programme includes scientific consultations with Latvian researchers: Prof. Lilita Seimuskane, Dr. Sigita Struberga, and Prof. Ieva Bērziņa.

From July to August 2, 2024, employees of the Institute of Political Science of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the UWM: Prof. Arkadiusz Żukowski and Dr. Tomasz Gajowniczek visited Estonia for research purposes. At the University of Tartu, the delegation conducted fruitful scientific consultations with dr Vladimir Sazonov, a Professor of the University, who specialises in contemporary threats and disinformation. Cooperation and scientific projects were also discussed at the Baltic Defence College (BALTDEFCOL) in Tartu with the Dean, Prof. Col. emeritus Zdzisław Śliwa and Prof. Col. emeritus Eugeniusz Cieślak.

BALTDEFCOL was founded in 1999 by the three Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) and is a NATO-accredited education and training facility offering courses (levels 3 and 4) to officers, non-commissioned officers, and civilian personnel from the Baltic states, their allies and partners. At the end of their stay, the scientists from the Institute of Political Science visited the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Tallinn, where they met with the Head of Mission, chargé d'affaires a.i. Anna Pełka. Sławomira Borowska-Peterson, who is responsible for culture and education at the Embassy, also participated in the talks.

On November 18–22, 2024, employees of the Institute of Political Science of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the UWM: Prof. Waldemar Tomaszewski, Prof. Krzysztof Żęgota, and Prof. Wojciech Kotowicz, took part in a study visit at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. The visit's agenda includes scientific consultations with Lithuanian researchers on regional security and cross-border threats.

All activities undertaken under the project aimed to promote Polish solutions in Internet security and build social resilience to disinformation. They also serve to shape a positive image of Poland in the international arena and strengthen it – by increasing awareness of existing threats in the area of information and disinformation, building social resilience to disinformation, among others, by developing competencies in the field of recognising false information and responding appropriately to it.

It should be emphasised that the project partners have a rich track record in the research on disinformation, mainly Russian. The leader is Estonia, the Baltic pioneer of digitisation, which has consistently raised the level of digitisation in the country since the 2007 Russian cyberattack. Estonia treats this area as a strategic security dimension and seeks to strengthen it at the EU level. However, Estonia's high dependence on IT systems entails its significant vulnerability to cyber threats, hence the need to introduce many solutions that may be useful in other countries.

Public diplomacy and propaganda used to evoke specific emotions can be treated as a tool for building the strength and position of the state in the international arena. Unlike traditional diplomacy, public diplomacy is not carried out only by diplomats, and the ubiquity of social media has made it possible for anyone to carry it out. At the same time, everyone can be the subject of its influence. Public diplomacy is, in a way, an element of building and implementing the state's international political marketing strategy. Building relationships be-

tween young people and deepening cooperation between project partners is one of the elements of strengthening the interdependence between Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. That, in turn, is the fundamental goal of the so-called new public diplomacy, understood as a symmetrical form of international political communication, which aims to support the achievement of the state's goals abroad by influencing public opinion.

The choice of tools and methods used in the project was dictated by the need to effectively diagnose, monitor and educate in disinformation and public diplomacy. Considering the diversity and complexity of disinformation, these tools have been selected to ensure maximum effectiveness and accuracy in achieving the set goals. The following tools and methods have been used to ensure a comprehensive approach to the issue of disinformation and to achieve the project's intended goals. Their selection was made considering the specificity of the topic and the context of the participating countries, as well as to effectively engage and educate young people from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The research methods – surveys and scientific consultations – were selected for their proven effectiveness in collecting empirical data and the possibility of obtaining various perspectives from different target groups (youth, experts, teachers). They allow for a deep understanding of the problem and identification of specific challenges and needs in each partner country. The project's information technologies – platforms for data sharing and social media analysis – enabled the effective tracking, analysis and presentation of disinformation trends and patterns. These tools are essential to monitor the dynamics of online disinformation, especially on social media, which are the main source of disinformation for young people. Educational methods – workshops, conferences and round tables – are proven formats for the interactive exchange of knowledge and experiences. These methods were aimed at transferring knowledge and developing the participants' critical thinking and analysis skills. It allowed for direct interaction and discussion, which is crucial in education about disinformation. Communication and promotion – websites and social media – were chosen for their wide reach and accessibility, which is crucial for effectively promoting the project and distributing its results. The Internet and social media are also the main platforms for spreading disinformation. Hence, their use in the project also has an educational dimension.

It is worth noting that the implementation of the project contributed to the implementation of priorities related to counteracting disinformation and

increasing awareness of existing threats in this area by monitoring and disclosing disinformation incidents and building social resilience to disinformation thanks to developing competencies in recognising false information and responding appropriately to it.

The implementation of the project contributed to the implementation of the following priorities:

- Highlighting examples of activities in the infosphere that may affect democratic electoral processes or destabilise the internal situation of the country and reduce citizens' trust in public institutions – the activities undertaken in the project contributed to learning about the risks associated with the disruption of democratic processes, e.g., through the dissemination of fake news and disinformation;
- Developing and implementing tools to support civic education in recognising disinformation, assessing its impact, and strengthening resilience to fake content. Building awareness of the use of artificial intelligence techniques in traditional and social media (e.g., deepfake) – the implementation of the project contributed to the development of tools for recognising disinformation and models for introducing these tools, e.g., into school curricula;
- Monitoring the public debate on Poland, identifying image opportunities and threats: using the opportunity to build a positive image of Poland and Poles and responding to cases of reproducing harmful simplifications and negative stereotypes – the project contributed to shaping a positive image of Poland as a country fighting against Russian disinformation and fake news;
- Counteracting disinformation about the history of the 20th century, especially in relation to German and Soviet crimes committed during World War II – one of the goals of the project was to counteract disinformation about the history of the 20th century, including primarily in relation to the historical narrative conducted by the current Russian authorities;
- Preparing attractive messages about historical events and disseminating them among foreign recipients – the project contributed to building positive messages about the cooperation of Central and Eastern European countries;
- Showing Poland as an open and tolerant country, opposing anti-Semitism and other forms of racism and discrimination – the project aimed

to deepen cooperation between young people from Poland and the Baltic States, which contributes to overcoming negative stereotypes and fighting discrimination.

It should be emphasised that the implementation of the project would not have been possible without the in-depth cooperation and partnership between the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn and the University of Tartu. The University of Warmia and Mazury (UWM) in Olsztyn was established in 1999. In the academic year 2022/2023, about 16 thousand students studied at the UWM, including about 13 thousand full-time students, and 123 doctoral students as part of the Doctoral School. The university is entitled to confer doctoral degrees and the title of habilitated doctor in 24 scientific disciplines. The University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn consists of 17 faculties. 14 faculties have full academic rights, i.e., the right to confer postdoctoral degrees (in 16 disciplines). On the other hand, 16 faculties in 24 disciplines can award the doctoral degree. These 17 faculties currently educate about 20 thousand students, including about 19 thousand full-time students, 600 doctoral students and about 1 thousand people in postgraduate studies. The University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn has the appropriate research infrastructure and technical conditions. Researchers have modernly equipped studios, laboratories, office space, computer equipment and access to national and international scientific databases. The university continuously obtains funds for the modernisation of its research infrastructure. Thanks to the most modern equipment, scientists from the UWM offer a wide range of research services. The UWM has in its administrative structures a specialised Research and Project Centre, a Centre for Cooperation with the Social and Economic Environment, a Project Settlement Department, and a Public Procurement Department, which will play an important role in the management control over the correctness of the project work carried out. The Centre for Research and Projects is a university-wide unit that supports employees, doctoral students and students in obtaining funds for scientific research and development works and implementing national and international research projects. Implements the strategy and policy of the University in the field of conducting and settling teaching and research projects in cooperation with the socio-economic environment co-financed from external funds. Appropriate technical infrastructure and experience of the University of Warmia and Mazury employees in Olsztyn in the implementation of research projects guarantee the proper and professional implementation of new projects.

The Institute of Political Science is important in the University's organisational structure and research activities. In recent years, the Institute of Political Science of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn has implemented, among others, the following projects:

1. Social and political issues and developing megatrends in contemporary world, Ministry of Science and Higher Education,
2. Eastern Policy of Poland and international cooperation of Warmia and Mazury Region, a research grant of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
3. Close neighbours in the 21st century – new communication and perception, a research grant of Lithuania-Poland-Russia Cross-Border Cooperation Programme,
4. Local border traffic in the conditions of crisis in Polish-Russian relations. Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding.

The University of Tartu (Estonia) was also substantively involved in the project. The university was founded in 1632 by King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden as *Universitas Gustaviana* and was founded on the foundations of the Jesuit Gymnasium *Dorpatense*, created by Stephen Bathory in 1583, which existed until 1601. In 1898–1918, it was called *Yurievsky University* (in connection with renaming Dorpat to Yuriev). The language of instruction was German, and from 1882, the Russification of subjects began, and finally, it came into force by 1898. From 1919 to this day, the language of instruction is Estonian, although during the Soviet occupation, some subjects were taught in Russian. In Soviet times, the University was known primarily as a centre of Soviet semiotic thought (*Tartusk School of Cultural Semiotics*). It is currently the national university of Estonia and the centre of the academic spirit in the country. It is a strong research university that promotes education and research worldwide. More than 17,000 people work and study at the university. The University of Tartu is developing intensive research on the impact of Russian information warfare on public discourse and the fight against fake news and disinformation. Estonia's experience in cybersecurity and defence against information warfare is also particularly valuable. This justified the substantive participation in the University of Tartu project. In addition, the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn has well-established scientific contacts with the University of Tartu: among others, joint project "Strengthening the identity of the Baltic Sea Region borderland. Building cooperation for the benefit of youth" co-financed under the Project Support Instrument of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. The tasks of the University of Tartu in the project were:

- substantive support for the project;
- help in reaching scientists dealing with disinformation and information warfare;
- assistance in conducting scientific consultations in the Baltic States;
- help develop a database of researchers dealing with the fight against fake news in the information space.

The person who was directly involved in the project on the part of the University of Tartu, i.e., Prof. Vladimir Sazonov, is an experienced researcher in the field of fighting disinformation and fake news, especially in the context of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. His main role in the project was to provide substantive support to the project, especially in the context of the organisation of scientific consultations in the Baltic states (Klaipėda University, Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, University of Latvia in Riga, University of Tartu) and the preparation of a database of scientists dealing with the fight against disinformation and fake news.

In addition, partners from Klaipėda University, Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, and the University of Latvia in Riga were involved in the scientific consultations.

The project carried out many promotional and information activities about the project, its objectives and implemented activities. Information about the project was posted on the UWM and partners' websites. There was also information promoted in the local media – information in the “University News” and the “Gazeta Olsztyńska”. These activities included promoting the project and the research results, conclusions, and recommendations from the conference and the Youth Round Table.

The project envisages the implementation of the following direct results of the project:

1. Result – increasing knowledge about disinformation among the project participants. Rate: Percentage of participants who improved their knowledge of disinformation after the end of the project. Assumed value: 70% – the indicator was achieved.

Source of verification: pre- and post-knowledge tests carried out at the beginning and end of the project.

2. Result – development of critical thinking skills and media analysis. Indicator: Number of participants who improved critical thinking and media analysis skills. Assumed value: 200 – the indicator was achieved.

Source of verification: Expert opinions after the end of workshops and educational sessions.

3. Result – creation and dissemination of a database on disinformation education. Rate: The number of entries created and shared in the database. Assumed value: 40 – the indicator was achieved.

Source of verification: Reports on the progress of work on the database.

4. The result – increased international cooperation in the fight against disinformation. Indicator: Number of partnerships established between institutions from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Assumed value: 5 – the indicator was achieved.

Source of verification: minutes of international meetings.

5. Result – publication of a report with the project results. Indicator: Issuance of a final report in English available in Open Access. Assumed value: 1 – the indicator was achieved.

Source of verification: Digital version of the report.

6. Result – increasing public awareness of disinformation. Metric: The number of audiences reached through promotional activities, including social media, conferences, and publications. Assumed value: 300 – the indicator was achieved.

Source of verification: Statistics from websites, list of conference participants.

7. Result – introduction of recommendations on education in the field of disinformation in the education systems of partner countries.

Rate: The number of educational institutions that have implemented the recommendations. Assumed value: 10.

Source of verification: Education surveys and implementation reports.

Timeline of the Implementation of the Activities Provided in the Project

1. Scientific consultations with partners abroad: from Estonia (University of Tartu – the main centre for research on Russian disinformation), Lithuania (Universities in Klaipeda and Kaunas) and Latvia (University of Riga). They were used to diagnose the state of public education on disinformation, particularly on the young generation.

The task was completed between May and November 2024.

2. A survey of young people from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia on knowledge about disinformation (its essence, types, recognition, effects, strengthening resilience, etc.), as well as public diplomacy of the state (creating and consolidating its positive image, building a national brand – as part of soft means of influence).

The task was completed between June and October 2024.

3. The exchange of information on educational programmes and disinformation in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

The task was completed between July and August 2024.

4. Creating a database of researchers dealing with disinformation education in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia; making this database available to other researchers.

The task was completed between August and October 2024.

5. Organisation of an international conference with the participation of researchers, specialists and young people from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, as well as representatives of the European Union and NATO (among others, from the Defence Education Enhancement Programme eAcademy) on “Disinformation and public diplomacy”.

The task was completed on 15.10.2024.

6. Organisation of the Youth Round Table (as part of the above-mentioned conference) and workshops on strengthening immunity to false content.

The task was completed on 16.10.2024.

7. Publication of a report in English on the project subject.

The task was completed in December 2024.

CHAPTER 3

Education of the Society on Disinformation: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia – Survey Research

Katarzyna Maciejewska-Mieszkowska, Wojciech T. Modzelewski, Tomasz Gajowniczek

The project aims to raise knowledge about disinformation among the project participants (pupils, students, teachers, and academic teachers) from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Another goal of the project is to develop the ability to analyse contemporary media and think critically about the importance of information in the modern world, as well as to increase public awareness of disinformation.

An important result of the project is the development of recommendations on education in the field of disinformation for the education systems of partner countries. On the other hand, the long-term result of the project is an increase in international cooperation in the fight against disinformation and the formation and manifestations of public diplomacy.

In the draft, public diplomacy is defined as – actions taken by a state as part of international communication, which, by shaping social attitudes and public opinion in other countries, are aimed at gaining support for this state and its policy. Disinformation in the draft is defined as – false, manipulated or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to deliberately cause public harm or for benefit (political, economic, ideological, etc.).

Analysis of Research Results on the State of Knowledge in Disinformation and Public Diplomacy

The survey concerned the identification of the state of knowledge in the field of disinformation and public diplomacy. The survey questionnaire contained 12 questions and a metric. The anonymous survey was conducted in 2024 on a sample of 168 respondents from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The study was conducted under the principles of ethics in conducting scientific research. It respects the principles contained in international documents such as the “Declaration of Helsinki”, the “Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union”, the “Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine of the Council of Europe” and the relevant documents of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland in this regard.

The questionnaire was published on electronic platforms.

For the Polish website at: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Ar0j7Zi79Fch-oXTbkNvkj9Sp5eyq1U2Kgh54R6FGOdA/edit>

For foreign countries at: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Rk2mfx-6_8kivKAijYwhVH_DHLXBJNcHN3KoRvdXjb0A/edit?pli=1

Sample data (n=168 people):

	Poland	Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia
Sex	Women 52.3% Men 47.7%	Women 53.6% Men 46.4%
Age	Under 18 years 2.3% In the 19-29 age range 91.7% Over 30 years 6%	Under 18 years 10.7% In the 19-29 age range 67.9% Over 30 years 21.4%
Domicile	Rural 32.6% City up to 10 thousand inhabitants 10.6% City 10-100 thousand inhabitants 21.2% City with more than 100 thousand inhabitants 35.6%	Rural 10.7% City up to 10 thousand inhabitants 25% City 10-100 thousand inhabitants 28.6% City with more than 100 thousand inhabitants 35.7%
Education	Basic 0.8% Average 78.9% Higher 20.3%	Basic 0% Average 46.4% Higher 53.6%

Responses

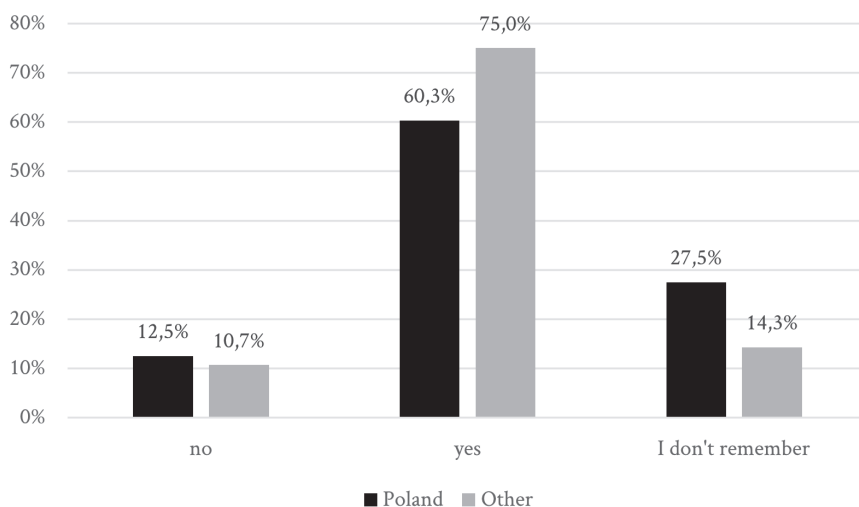
1. Have you encountered any manifestations of public diplomacy of your country?

Polish side:

- 60.3% of respondents chose “yes”;
- 27.5% of respondents chose the answer “I don’t remember”;
- 12.2% of respondents chose “no”.

Abroad:

- 75% of respondents chose “yes”;
- 14.3% of respondents chose the answer “I don’t remember”;
- 10.7% of respondents chose “no”.



Therefore, the answers to this question were in the affirmative (as many as 75% abroad and 60% in Poland), proving the high percentage of recognition of activities falling within the scope of public diplomacy, including forming public attitudes and public opinion in other countries. Only 12% of respondents in Poland and 11% abroad did not encounter any signs of such activities.

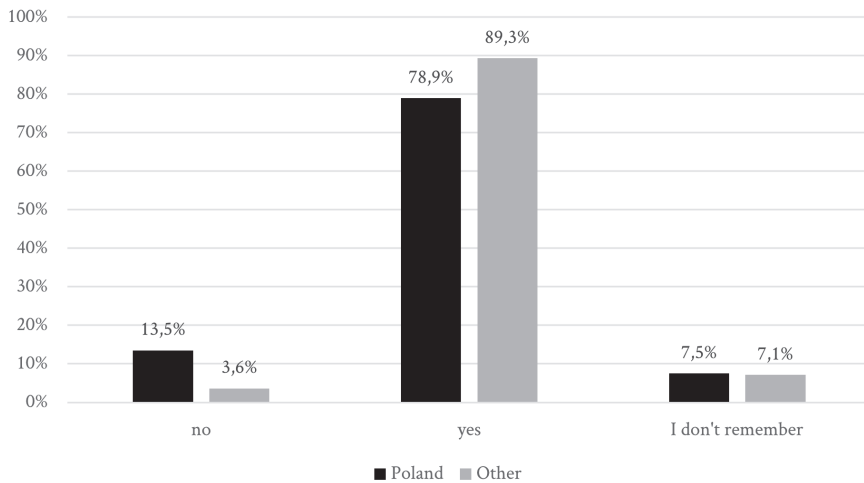
2. Have you encountered any signs of shaping a positive image of your country (building a national brand/national branding)?

Polish side:

- 78.9% of respondents chose “yes”;
- 13.5% of respondents chose “no”;
- 7.5% of respondents chose the answer “I don’t remember”.

Abroad:

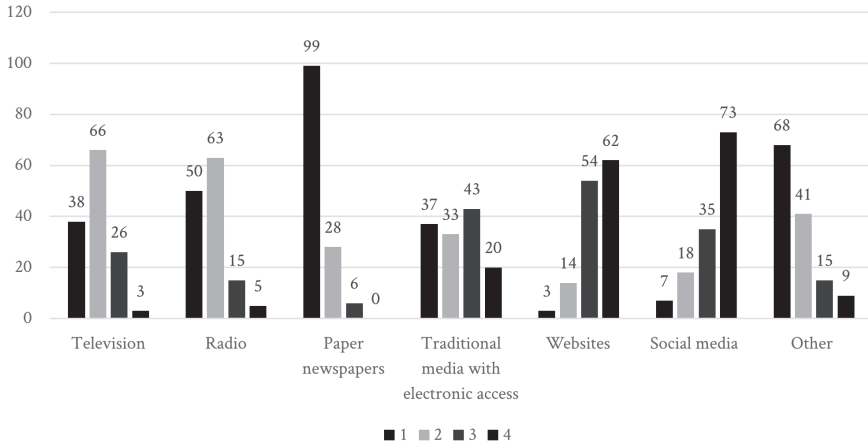
- 89.3% of respondents chose “yes”;
- 7.1% of respondents chose the answer “I don’t remember”;
- 3.6% of respondents chose “no”.



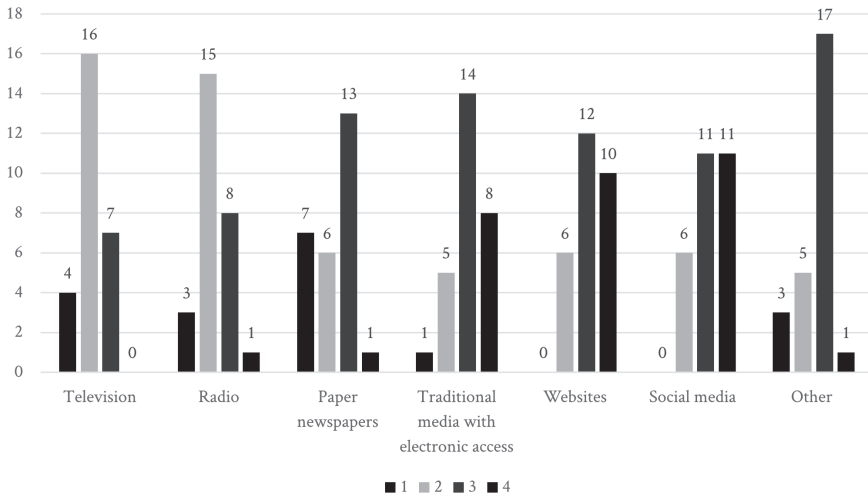
In the supplementary question concerning the manifestations of shaping a positive image of one’s country, most respondents noticed this type of activity (over 89% of respondents abroad and almost 79% in Poland). On the other hand, 13.5% of respondents in Poland and only 3.6% abroad say that they have not encountered their country’s actions in this area.

3. Indicate the media you use to obtain information, according to the frequency of use (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = often, 4 = very often)

Poland



Other



Respondents obtain information mainly from websites and social media, to a lesser extent from traditional media with electronic access (e.g., online editions of newspapers), and this regularity applies to Poland and foreign countries.

Television and radio were rarely indicated as sources of information, both in Poland and abroad, and even less often paper newspapers.

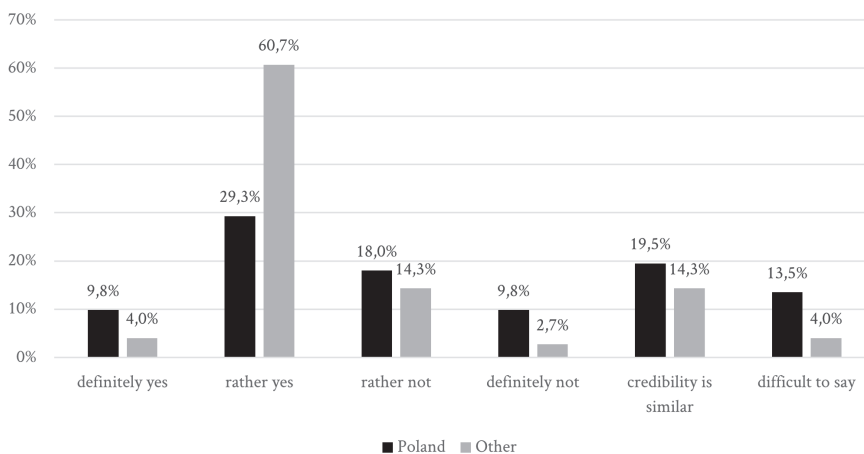
4. Do you think traditional media (press, TV, radio) are more reliable than social media?

On the Polish side, the following answers dominated:

- 29.3% of respondents chose the answer “rather yes”;
- 19.5% of respondents chose the answer “credibility is similar”;
- 18% of respondents chose the answer “rather not”;
- 13.5% of respondents chose the answer “hard to say”;
- 9.8% of respondents chose the answer “definitely yes”.

Abroad, the following answers dominated:

- 60.7% of respondents chose the answer “rather yes”;
- 14.3% of respondents chose the answers: “rather not”;
- 14.3% of respondents chose the answer “credibility is similar”.



A much larger percentage of respondents abroad than in Poland consider traditional media more reliable than social media. On the other hand, traditional media consider a larger percentage of respondents in Poland to be “less” or “rather less” reliable. The credibility of traditional and social media was assessed at a similar level by 14% of respondents abroad and slightly more, 19.5% in Poland.

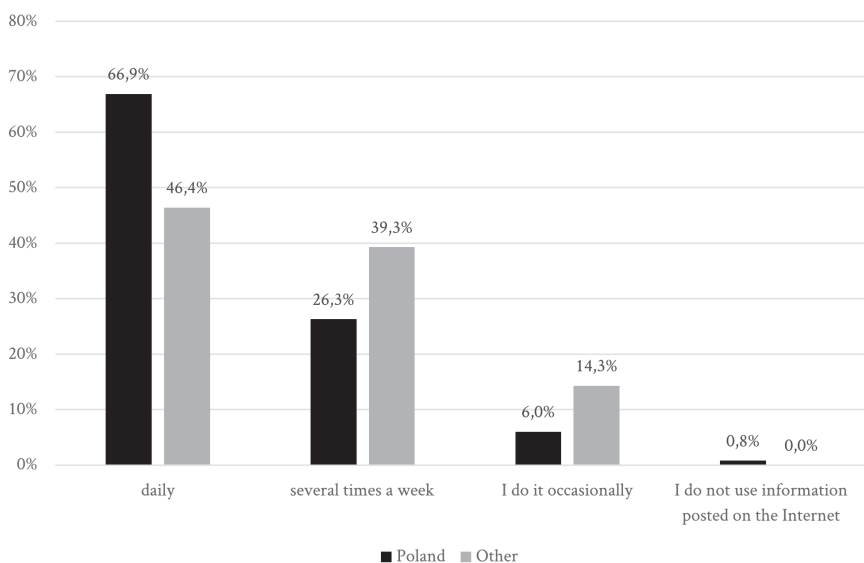
5. How often do you use information posted on the Internet?

Polish side:

- 66.9% of respondents chose the answer “daily”;
- 26.3% of respondents chose the answer “several times a week”;
- 6% of respondents chose the answer “occasionally”;
- 0.8% of respondents chose the answer “I do not use information posted on the Internet”.

Abroad:

- 46.4% of respondents chose the answer “daily”;
- 39.3% of respondents chose the answer “several times a week”;
- 14.3% of respondents chose the answer “occasionally”.



Most respondents use the Internet: every day (almost 67% in Poland, over 46% abroad) or several times a week (26% in Poland, 39% abroad). Combining the intensity of use: “daily” and “several times a week”, the values are more or less equal and are 93% in Poland and 85% abroad. On the other hand, only 6% of respondents in Poland and over 14% abroad “occasionally” use the Internet as a source of information. In Poland, less than 1% of respondents do not use information posted on the Internet, and there are no such people abroad.

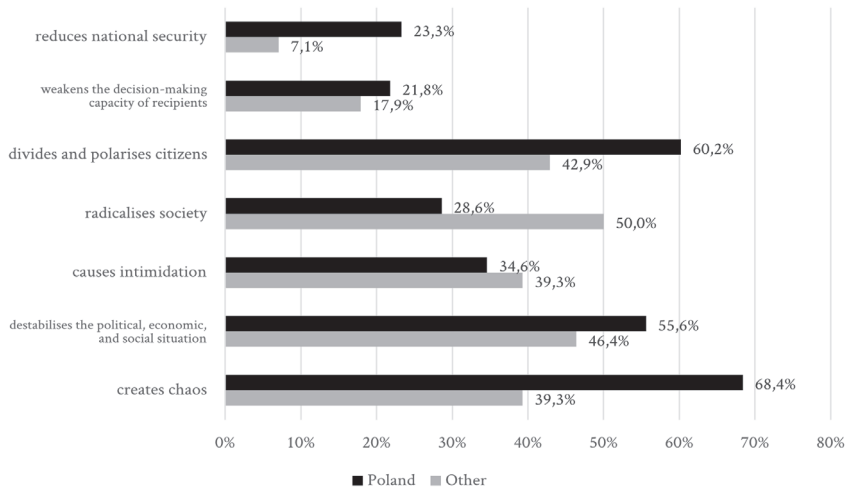
6. What are the risks of disinformation in cyberspace? (you could choose max 3 answers)

On the Polish side, the following answers dominated:

- 68.4% “creates chaos”;
- 60.2% “divides and polarises citizens”;
- 55.6% “destabilise the political situation”;
- 34.6% “causes intimidation”.

Abroad, the following answers dominated:

- 50% “radicalise society”;
- 46.4% “destabilise the political situation”;
- 42.9% “divides and polarises citizens”.



In this question, the majority of respondents on the Polish side claimed that it “introduces chaos”, “divides and polarises society”, and “destabilises the political situation”. Different answers prevailed abroad: “radicalises society”, “destabilises the political situation” and “divides and polarises society”. Thus, Poles associate disinformation mainly with the introduction of chaos, while abroad, they associate it with the radicalisation of society.

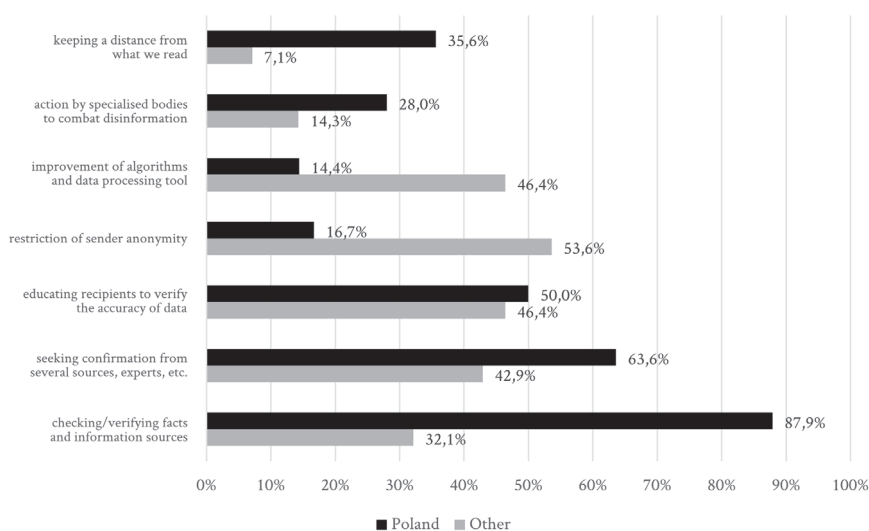
7. What do you think are the most effective ways to counter disinformation?

On the Polish side, the following answers dominated:

- 87.9% “checking/verifying facts and information sources”;
- 63.6% “looking for confirmation of information”;
- 50% “educating audiences on disinformation”.

Abroad, the following answers dominated:

- 53.6% “restriction of anonymity”;
- 46.4% “educating audiences on disinformation” and “improving algorithms”;
- 42.9% “looking for confirmation of information”.



When asked about the most effective ways to counteract disinformation, the Polish side was dominated by the following answers: “checking/verifying information” and “seeking confirmation of information”, while abroad, the following were mainly indicated: “limiting anonymity” and “educating recipients in the field of disinformation” and “improving algorithms”. Abroad, only the 4th position was taken by “seeking confirmation of information” (in Poland position 2), and the 5th position was taken by “checking/verifying information” (in Poland position 1).

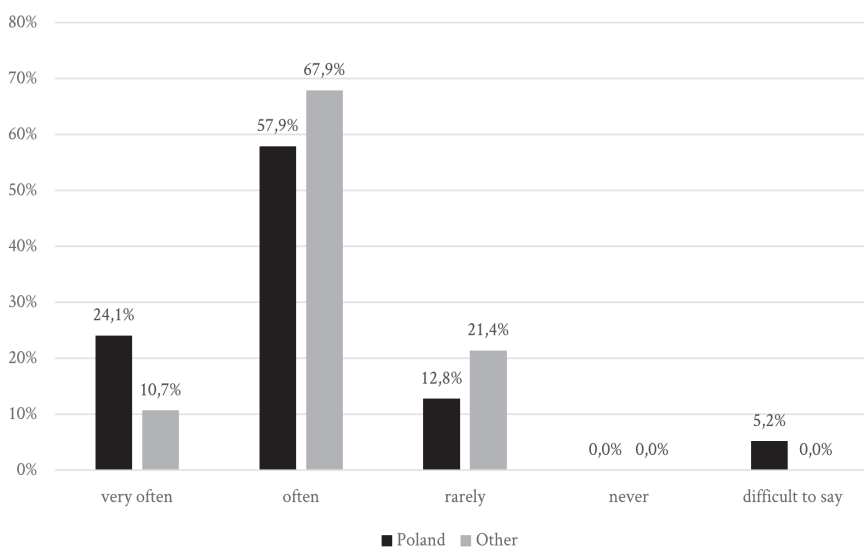
8. How often do you think you come across disinformation?

On the Polish side, the following answers dominated:

- 57.9% of respondents chose the answer “often”;
- 24.1% of respondents chose the answer “very often”;
- 12.8% of respondents chose the answer “rarely”.

Abroad, the following answers dominated:

- 67.9% of respondents chose the answer “often”;
- 21.4% of respondents chose the answer “rarely”;
- 10.7% of respondents chose the answer “very often”.



It is clear that the vast majority of respondents feel that they encounter disinformation “often” or “very often” (a total of 79% abroad and 82% in Poland). On the other hand, over 21% of respondents abroad and almost 13% in Poland say that they rarely encounter disinformation activities. None of the respondents in Poland and abroad chose the answer “never” and encountered disinformation.

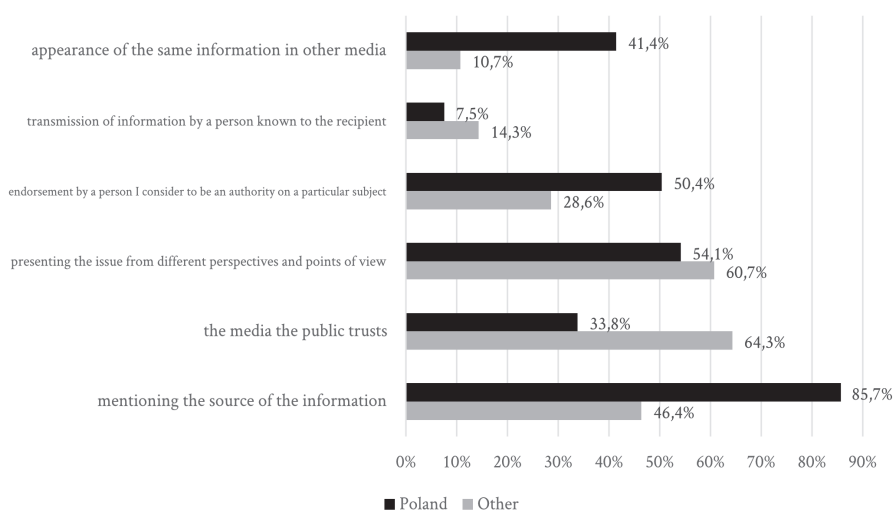
9. What do you think increases the credibility of information posted in cyberspace? (a maximum of 3 answers could be indicated)

On the Polish side, the following answers dominated:

- 85.7% “indication of the source of information”;
- 54.1% “presenting the issue from different perspectives and points of view”;
- 50.4% “support by a person I consider an authority in a given field”;
- 41.4% “appearance of the same information in other media”.

Abroad, the following answers dominated:

- 64.3% “media trusted by the recipient”;
- 60.7% “presenting the issue from different perspectives and points of view”;
- 46.4% “providing the source of information”.



On the Polish side, the credibility of information is increased primarily by providing the source of information and abroad by using trusted media. In the second place, “presenting the issue from different perspectives and points of view” was chosen on both sides.

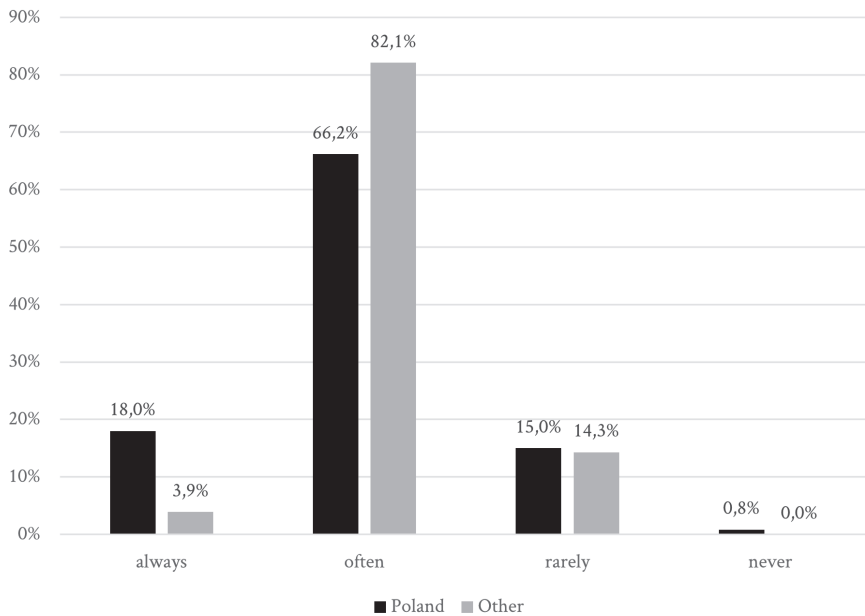
10. How often do you verify the information obtained?

Polish side:

- 66.2% of respondents chose the answer “often”;
- 18% of respondents chose the answer “always”;
- 15% of respondents chose the answer “rarely”;
- 0.8% of respondents chose the answer “never”.

Abroad:

- 82.1% of respondents chose the answer “often”;
- 14.3% of respondents chose the answer “rarely”;
- 3.6% of respondents chose the answer “always”.



In Poland and abroad, the respondents often or always verify the information obtained, while the percentage of people who “never” verify the information obtained in Poland was 0.8% and did not occur abroad.

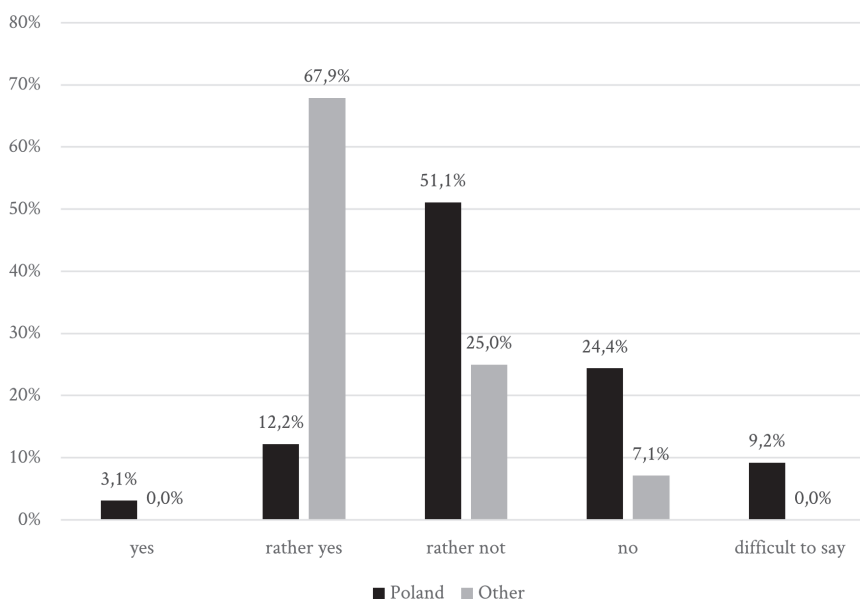
11. Do you think education about disinformation in your country is sufficient?

On the Polish side, the following answers dominated:

- 51.1% of respondents answered “rather not”;
- 24.4% chose “no”;
- 12.2% answered “rather yes”.

Abroad, the following answers dominated:

- 67.9% answered “rather yes”;
- 25% of respondents answered “rather not”;
- 7.1% chose “no”.

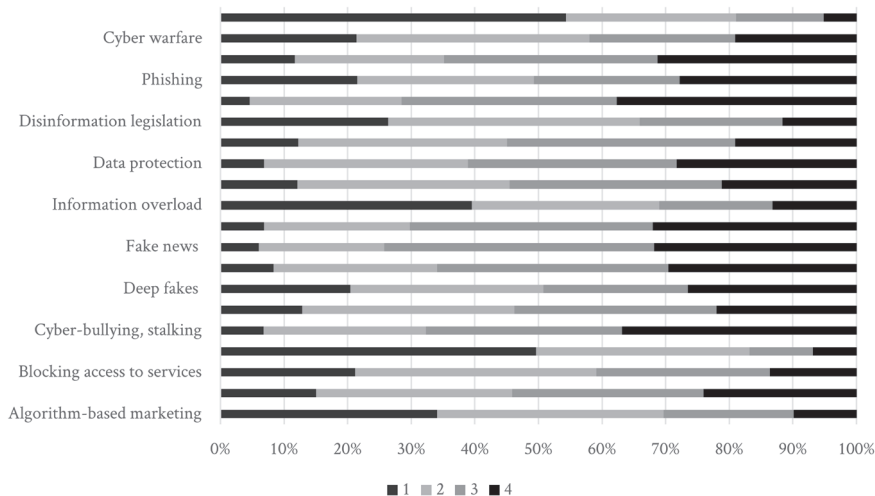


To the question: do you think that education about disinformation in your country is sufficient? As many as 68% of respondents abroad and only over 15% in Poland responded positively. Similarly, 32% of respondents abroad and over 75% in Poland considered education in the field of disinformation to be insufficient. This list clearly shows that Poles assess the state of education of Polish society in disinformation much worse.

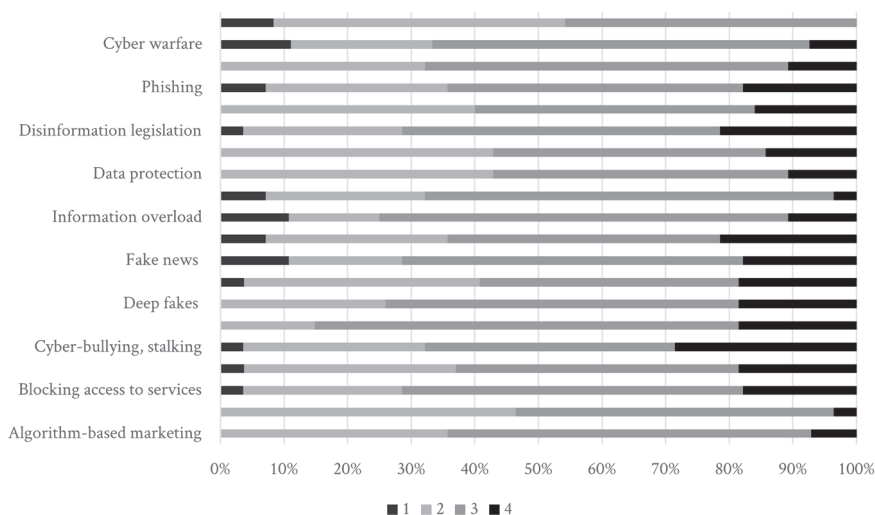
12. Please rate your knowledge of disinformation and threats on the Internet.

19 topics (entries) were proposed, which had to be evaluated by assigning points on a scale: 1 = I have no knowledge about this topic, 2 = I know this topic a little, 3 = I know this topic well, 4 = I know this topic thoroughly.

Poland



Other



In the question assessing the respondents' knowledge of disinformation and threats on the Internet, abroad in each of the 19 topics, the dominant answer was "I know this topic well". Only a few people indicated their lack of knowledge regarding: 1) information overload and 2) cyber warfare.

On the Polish side, the answer "I know this topic thoroughly" concerned: 1) cyberbullying and stalking, 2) spam.

Equally highly rated were their knowledge of: 1) fattening intelligence in digital services (tracking and recommending), 2) fake news, 3) political propaganda, 4) malware (viruses, trojans, ransomware), 5) data protection, 6) spying and activity monitoring, and 7) attention management.

The knowledge of 1) big data and 2) information overload was rated the worst.

To sum up, based on the presented research results, it should be stated that for most respondents, both from Poland and abroad, websites and social media are the main sources of information. Thus, the issue of education in obtaining information obtained in this way and verifying its sources is important. First of all, public diplomacy activities aimed at young citizens should be carried out in this communication space.

The high rate of use of online messages leads to the conclusion that young citizens are primarily exposed to disinformation in online communication. If we compare this with the results of research that showed that Poles assess the state of education of Polish society in disinformation much worse compared to the other three countries (75% considered it insufficient, and only 15% were of the opposite opinion) – this gives a basic recommendation for further, in-depth education of Polish society.

The survey showed that the respondents not only have frequent contact with disinformation messages but are also aware of its effects, which have slightly different intensities depending on the declarations of respondents from Poland and abroad. In Poland, it was most often pointed out that disinformation in cyberspace introduces chaos and divides and polarises society. Abroad, on the other hand, the radicalisation of societies and the destabilisation of the political situation were primarily mentioned as a result. This assessment may result from the perception of changes taking place in the societies of individual countries,

which does not change the fact that all the effects indicated by the respondents affect destabilisation within countries. In order to limit the negative effects of disinformation messages, it is therefore important to increase the monitoring of the network in terms of the content published there. Equally important are immediate actions to prevent the further spread of disinformation by, for example, blocking websites and profiles that generate false information, revealing the actual senders of these messages, flagging disinformation messages, and correcting false news online and in traditional media.

The main result of the project, i.e., raising the level of knowledge about disinformation among the project participants, was verified by conducting verification tests consisting of 13 closed questions with three answers to choose from. According to the project's assumptions, these tests were carried out twice: at the project's beginning and end (e.g., after training). The research covered 203 students who have completed a total of 406 tests. The test results have proven that 72% of students improved their knowledge about disinformation and fake news. A percentage of survey participants showed an improvement in their knowledge of disinformation, thus achieving the project's knowledge improvement rate among project participants.

Recommendations on Disinformation Education for Partner Countries' Education Systems

There are the following areas of recommendation:

1. Raising awareness: about the existing threats in the area of information, disinformation, and other threats occurring in traditional media, but above all, social media and the broadly understood Internet. It is important to monitor and expose disinformation incidents, their sources, methods and how they are conducted. It is equally important to identify and diagnose attempts to influence social divisions and election results, as well as opportunities to counter propaganda and disinformation. It is recommended that the various risks associated with the transmission of false information and disinformation be further raised, as well as in activities defined as public diplomacy of the state.
2. Skills development: to increase societal resilience to disinformation, by developing competencies to recognise and respond appropriately to fake news. It is crucial to educate young people on how to recognise disin-

- formation and assess its impact, strengthen their resilience to fake content, and promote the need to verify sources of knowledge and obtain data. Moreover, it is recommended that young people be further activated, their competencies be developed to recognise and respond appropriately to disinformation, and further solutions be developed to strengthen resilience to fake news.
3. Enhanced collaboration: jointly monitoring the information environment to identify threats and emerging new opportunities. It is recommended that international partnerships among young people be further built and cooperation between the project partners (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) deepened. Actions should be aimed at joint monitoring of the media for disinformation and support for international research in this area. The actions taken will provide space for the comprehensive and complementary introduction of effective solutions for youth activation and participation, which, in the long run, serve to strengthen international cooperation in the fight against disinformation. Ultimately, this is to build international cooperation platforms to counter fake news and disinformation.
 4. Building a model of cooperation in disinformation education: It is recommended that action be taken to develop and implement a specific model of cooperation between Poland and the Baltic States in the fight against disinformation among the young generation, primarily at the level of education on disinformation. The proposed model could be based on cooperation and coordination of state institutions' activities responsible for preparing and implementing curricula in schools. An important element of cooperation could be the permanent monitoring and verification (e.g., based on in-depth social research) of the state of knowledge of young people in the fight against and counteracting disinformation. Another proposed element of this cooperation could be the creation of mechanisms and institutions responsible for better understanding between representatives of the young day camp in Poland and the Baltic States, e.g., through the development and implementation of pupil and student exchange programmes.

CHAPTER 4

Educational Programmes on Countering Disinformation in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland

Marcin Chełminiak

Introduction

Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, as EU and NATO member states, take part in the programmes and projects of these organisations to counter and combat disinformation.

On September 30, 2020, the EU adopted the Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027. It sets out a vision for digital education in the Member States. The plan is intended to support the adaptation of EU countries' education and training systems to the digital age requirements. It provides for close cooperation at the EU level in digital education to jointly respond to the challenges and opportunities that have arisen in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. It also involves presenting the education and training community (teachers and students), policymakers, academia and researchers at the national, EU and international level with improvements that could be made. It has two priorities:

- Supporting the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem (Action 1: Structured dialogue with Member States on digital education and skills; Action 2: Council Recommendation on Key Enablers of Digital Education and Training effectiveness; Action 3: Council Recommendation on blended learning approaches for quality and inclusive primary and secondary education; Action 4: European Content Framework

for Digital Education; Action 5: Connectivity and digital equipment for education and training; Action 6: Digital transformation plans for education and training institutions; Action 7: Guidelines for teachers – ethical use of AI and data in teaching and learning),

- Improving digital competencies and skills needed for the digital transformation (Action 1: Common guidelines for teachers and teaching staff to support the development of digital skills and fight disinformation through education and training; Action 2: Updating the European Digital Competence Framework to include AI and data skills; Action 3: European Digital Skills Certificate (EDSC); Action 4: Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills education and training; Action 5: International data collection and EU target for digital skills of students; Activity 6: Traineeships “Digital Opportunities”; Action 7: Increase women’s participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

As part of this plan, the European Commission has already published guidelines for teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy through education and training. They are to be used in primary and secondary schools throughout the European Union. The handbook was created by a group of experts, including people dealing with education, media and civil society issues. The guidelines are intended to help teachers develop critical thinking skills in students and give them the necessary tools to teach the identification of false information published online.

In 2008, NATO established the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence based in Tallinn. It has been fully accredited by NATO and granted the status of an International Military Organisation. The NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence is an international military organisation whose mission is to enhance capabilities, cooperation and information sharing between NATO, its member states and cyber defence partners through education, research and development, lessons learned and consultations have been drawn. In 2019, NATO adopted a regulation that has been regularly updated and includes a package of measures and instruments to fight disinformation. In 2020, as part of the Action Plan Issued to Allies, the NATO Secretary General published Response to Disinformation on COVID-19. This document aimed to merge various instruments and programmes to counteract hostile disinformation about COVID-19. In 2021, NATO’s Toolbox for Countering Hostile Infor-

mation Activities was released. The Alliance adopted a model of multi-pronged action based on the principles of ‚understand’, ‚engage’ and ‚coordinate’.

NATO’s strategy is to work closely with the EU in the fight against disinformation, in particular on:

- strengthening resilience to disinformation through education on democratic values, improving electoral standards and intensifying the monitoring of electoral processes;
- improving media education, e.g., developing competencies in critical thinking, and in the case of secondary school and university students, curricula should teach methods of confirming or refuting the truth of information, claims appearing in the media or the Internet;
- implementing media policies aimed at strengthening trust in the media, including better funding and support for media independence and investigative journalism or fact-checking;
- an assertive policy towards social media owners in the context of user identification, ensuring neutrality and diversity of algorithms, managing content selection and ensuring transparency in the way of advertising.

Latvia

In Latvia, study programmes related to disinformation are offered, especially in the context of social and media communication or national security fields. In response to the growing role of disinformation in the public space, some Latvian universities have started offering courses and programmes that cover topics related to recognising, analysing, and countering disinformation. Institutions that provide such courses include, for instance, the University of Latvia (Latvijas Universitāte), which can offer courses on disinformation, its impact on society, and countermeasures as part of its communication and media study programmes. Riga Technical University also offers classes related to digital security. In Latvia, as in other Baltic countries, disinformation is becoming increasingly present in education, especially in the context of media, digital technologies, and information security. In response to the growing threats of misinformation, some secondary schools have begun incorporating elements of identifying fake news and critical thinking into their curriculum.

However, it is worth noting that although counteracting disinformation does not yet function as a separate subject at the secondary school level, in subjects such as Latvian language, literature, media or civic education, students are gradually introduced to issues related to analysing information sources, fact-checking, and understanding the mechanisms of disinformation. In secondary schools, in particular, the emphasis is on the development of media competencies, which include skills such as: analysis and verification of information sources (students learn how to recognise reliable information and how to avoid manipulation in the media); critical thinking; developing the ability to evaluate information from various sources and the ability to recognise disinformation narratives; digital education, i.e., programmes on Internet safety and recognising fake news and analysing the impact of social media.

Moreover, various educational campaigns are carried out as part of various government initiatives or non-governmental organisations to raise awareness of disinformation. Such activities include workshops, training, and educational projects, which also reach high school and university students.

It is worth noting that education about disinformation is important in Latvia because, according to the law in force there, the dissemination of false information is classified as an act of hooliganism if it has caused a gross disturbance of public order, disturbance of the peace of people or the work of state institutions, organisations or enterprises. Disinformation is defined in this case as the deliberate dissemination of false messages in society and the digital space.

Lithuania

In Lithuania, the National Cybersecurity Centre was established in 2015. Moreover, in 2017, the Cybersecurity Act was amended, aimed at centralising information security management and integrating the monitoring of national electronic communications networks. In this country, some regulations allow authorised state authorities to temporarily block the servers of an entity used in a cyberattack or to spread fake news. For instance, the possibility of broadcasting Russian television in Lithuania was temporarily blocked. The Lithuanian authorities are also striving to raise public awareness of the threats. An important role is also played by non-governmental or social organisations and grassroots initiatives, such as the “elf movement” established in 2014. Today, this group con-

sists of several thousand people, is dedicated to unmasking fake online accounts to prevent the spread of false information.

In Lithuania, educational offers related to the fight against disinformation have been developing for years, especially in fields of study related to journalism, mass media, security, and information technologies. Subjects in this field are offered, e.g., by Vilnius University (Vilniaus Universitetas) as part of educational programmes in the field of information security or international communication, which include issues related to cybersecurity, disinformation, and the impact of the media on society. In addition, Kaunas University of Technology offers courses related to digital security. The Lithuanian Military Academy, as part of various study programmes related to national and international security, offers courses on issues related to disinformation and information warfare.

It is worth noting that in Lithuania, the number of postgraduate courses and specialist training related to digital media and disinformation, organised by various educational institutions and non-governmental organisations is also growing. In secondary schools, students learn about the dangers of disinformation and fake news as part of the curriculum. The key elements of education are media education (students learn how to assess the credibility of information sources and recognise manipulation in the media. Media and digital classes also include learning how different online platforms can be used to spread fake news) and digital safety (topics related to online safety, including recognising online fraud and protecting privacy).

In Lithuania, protecting children and young people from fake news is part of a broad educational strategy to develop media literacy, critical thinking and safe Internet use. Lithuania pays a lot of attention to the topic of disinformation, especially in the context of younger generations, who can be particularly vulnerable to the impact of fake news. Various educational projects and workshops for children and young people are being carried out in Lithuania to raise their awareness of disinformation. They are often organised by schools, non-governmental organisations and government institutions. These initiatives aim to teach children how to effectively verify information and show them how to recognise disinformation, both in traditional media and on the Internet, including on social media platforms. Moreover, there is cooperation with non-governmental organisations and government institutions. The Lithuanian government and NGOs are conducting educational campaigns to raise awareness of disinformation (fact-checking to provide children with tools to recognise fake news; in-

formation campaigns aimed at young people and teachers to help them recognise and fight disinformation in various forms; teacher training – teachers are trained in digital and media education; so that they can educate young people about the dangers of fake news).

Estonia

Estonia is one of the first countries to successfully develop strategies to defend itself against cyber threats and disinformation, and recognises the importance of education in this area. As a result, universities and organisations offer various programmes that help professionals better understand and counter disinformation threats. As one of the leaders in digitalisation and cybersecurity, Estonia focuses on education about disinformation, especially in the face of the growing threat of disinformation campaigns. In 2017, Estonia adopted The National Security Concept, which updated national security policy objectives, principles, and strategies. The document includes strategic communication in one of the six broad areas of national defence development, defining it as planning the state's political, economic, and defence activities, preparing a comprehensive information policy on their basis and transferring it to society.

In Estonia, studies that cover disinformation are offered, especially in the context of social communication, mass media, national security or digital technologies. For example, the University of Tartu is one of the leading universities in Estonia, offering programmes related to social sciences, communication, and media. In these programmes, students can learn about disinformation, its impact on society, and methods to detect and combat it. The university conducts master's degree programme: Disinformation and Societal Resilience. The study programme is designed for professionals who recognise information manipulation in a global context, work in the strategic communication sector, deal with risk management in organisations. The programme combines theoretical knowledge with a practical approach and focuses on the problems of disinformation. Another example is Tallinna Ülikool (Tallinn University), which offers studies in communication, AI, information society technologies, human rights in the digital society, which cover issues related to disinformation, propaganda and media analysis. This university is active in terms of education about digital security, recognising fake news, and verifying information.

Estonia also has courses and postgraduate programmes focusing on disinformation and information warfare. They are run by universities, government organisations, and national security institutions.

Disinformation is not a separate subject in schools, but students in Estonia are educated on how to recognise fake news and think critically about different subjects. Key aspects of this education include: media and digital education, critical thinking, and online safety. Various educational initiatives are organised in Estonia, such as workshops, online courses and projects to make students aware of disinformation. These include, for instance, cooperation with non-governmental organisations and government institutions dealing with digital security and media education.

Cooperation projects: Estonian NGOs and government institutions are working with educational institutions to carry out educational campaigns on disinformation. An example is cooperation with digital security organisations that offer training for students and teachers.

Practice-based learning programmes: Students participate in interactive projects that help them better understand the mechanisms of spreading misinformation online. Young people gain practical skills through these initiatives to verify information and identify fake news. Support for schools in this area is also provided by the Estonian Information System Authority and other bodies dealing with digital security.

Poland

In Poland, the education of children and young people in disinformation takes place at the pre-school and school level, as well as at universities and as part of various educational initiatives.

The youngest children are already exposed to disinformation and digital safety education in kindergartens. Classes are carried out on how to protect children from disinformation, recognise fake news, and protect them from negative effects.

In the Polish educational system, topics related to disinformation, media and critical thinking appear in schools as part of several subjects, e.g., the Polish language (during lessons of this subject, students learn to analyse texts, which also includes recognising manipulative techniques in the media), computer science

(as part of learning how to use computers and the Internet, students learn how to recognise reliable sources of information, how to take care of online privacy and how to avoid the dangers of disinformation). This subject is also discussed in other subjects in social education, civic education, and educational lessons.

The #FakeHunter – Edu project is aimed at high school students, which aims to raise awareness of the dangers of disinformation, fight fake news, teach young people to verify content published on the Internet and consolidate safe behaviour. As part of this project, the #FakeHunter service prepared video training on countering disinformation, which teachers used during school classes with students. The content includes: how to recognise fake news, what the phenomenon of disinformation is, what is the role of social media in spreading false content, and we give tips on how to wisely and consciously navigate in virtual reality. In addition to the video training, all secondary schools also received a set of exercises and a lesson plan. The project was implemented by the Polish Press Agency, the Ministry of Education and Science, the GovTech Poland Centre, and the Educational Research Institute. Many initiatives in this area are implemented and promoted by the regional Education Offices (e.g., Kielce – Free webinar for teachers and parents on cyber threats “#MEDIACHallenge: The Young Generation and the Challenges of the Infosphere”; Szczecin – Free training for teachers, as part of the “Lesson: Enter” project. Teacher Training Centres also conduct classes for teachers, e.g., Don’t give in to disinformation – or how to teach critical reading of media texts. The Ministry of Education and Science disseminates, for example, information materials entitled *The Role of Cooperation in Combating Disinformation*. It is an educational series on fake news, disinformation, and manipulation in the media. It concerns, e.g., the role of media education in shaping the awareness of recipients and joint activities of institutions conducting this type of activity.

In Poland, studies that cover disinformation are offered, especially in the context of social communication, mass media, national security, international security, political science or digital technologies. In addition, The Krakow University of Economics offers postgraduate studies in *Digital Media, Fact-checking and Disinformation*. They are to educate specialists who will not only have interdisciplinary knowledge of digital media, disinformation and fact-checking, but will also be specialists who will be able to apply this knowledge in practice, as part of their professional and social activities. Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań educates at postgraduate studies in the field of *Behavioural Analysis and*

Lie Detection, where students are shown practical problems resulting from disinformation and data analysis on the Internet; they learn to train practical skills that create a substantive workshop of behavioural analyst (behavioural analysis, typology of behaviour, non-verbal and intercultural communication, psychopathology, ethics, behavioural economics, disinformation, assessment of the sincerity of testimony and lie detection, analysis of the credibility of statements, as well as behavioural technologies and artificial intelligence). The University of Białystok offers students classes entitled History of Conducting Disinformation and Inspirational Operations, The Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, entitled Disinformation and Propaganda in Contemporary Media. Collegium Civitas runs the Centre for Disinformation Research – a research and teaching, analytical and, advisory and educational unit that focuses on the threats associated with disinformation. The main tasks of the Centre include identifying, investigating, and describing narratives and messages of a disinformation nature, in particular those present in the media (mainly social media), which may influence social views and pose a threat to the security and stability of states; conducting educational and training activities aimed at building awareness and knowledge about the threats associated with the phenomenon of disinformation, the most commonly used methods and means of transmitting content of this nature; creating strategies for counteracting disinformation and methods of combating its impact in various areas of life. SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities (SWPS) in Warsaw conducted webinars in the series “How, What, and Why to Teach about Disinformation?” on the so-called everyday disinformation – a phenomenon of seemingly minor importance, which, however, clearly harms, deepens social conflicts and destroys social trust. SWPS also conducts journalistic workshops “Fighting Disinformation. Technologies, Tools, Competencies”. The Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin conducted a workshop on the fight against disinformation and propaganda “Disinformation: Diagnosis and Counteraction”. During the workshops, participants learned about various methods of counteracting disinformation, i.e., prebunking, meaning a psychological vaccine against disinformation, fact-checking – the process of verifying information by activists, editors, and experts, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the controversial anti-fake legislation created in many countries around the world, the need to introduce media education into schools and IT tools for detecting disinformation.

National Research Institute (NASK), established in 1992, plays an important role in disinformation and cybersecurity education. Since 2005, the Polish Centre for the “Safer Internet” Programme has been operating within NASK, established as part of the programme initiated by the European Commission. The Polish Centre comprises NASK and the Nobody’s Children Foundation. It aims to promote the safe use of new technologies and the Internet among children and young people and to act to combat illegal content and spam on the Internet. The programme includes issues related to the threats resulting from using mobile phones, online games, P2P file exchange, and other forms of online communication in real time (chats and communicators). The Polish Centre for the “Safer Internet” Programme undertakes many comprehensive activities for the safety of children and young people using the Internet and new technologies. NASK offers a range of training and educational materials for children, youth, parents, guardians, teachers and lecturers.

Recommendations for state and local government institutions and offices:

1. Cooperation and consultations between the Baltic states on educational programmes for children and youth in the fight against disinformation, considering each country’s social, national, and geopolitical specificities.
2. Intensification of cooperation on educational programmes for children and youth in the fight against disinformation between relevant ministries, universities, schools, and non-governmental organisations.
3. Synchronisation of educational programmes aimed at children and young people from different age groups.
4. Support from public and international funds for the creation of modern tools for education in the fight against disinformation, e.g., phone applications.
5. Introduction of mandatory content on combating disinformation into education and study curricula for secondary schools and universities.
6. Increase the number of training courses for teachers and lecturers on the fight against disinformation.
7. Supporting and training parents and carers in the fight against disinformation.

8. Offering teachers and lecturers easily accessible materials (primarily digital) for immediate use in teaching about disinformation.
9. Greater use of the most popular platforms and social networking sites among children and young people in the context of disinformation education.
10. Encouraging media companies to take action to equip young people with the critical analysis of sources skills necessary to navigate the digital world.

Recommendations for schools and universities:

1. Providing students with information on what disinformation and fake news are.
2. Providing students with information on the mechanisms of disinformation.
3. Communicating to students why disinformation is a threat.
4. Providing students with information on how to counter disinformation.
5. Providing students with information on the responsible use of traditional media, the Internet and social networks.
6. Teaching children and young people critical thinking.
7. Familiarising teachers and lecturers with educational programmes in combating disinformation in Poland and abroad.

PART II

Disinformation and its Various Aspects

CHAPTER 5

***Pax Russica* and Kremlin's Influence Activity: Russian Strategic Narratives and Propaganda Disseminated for Estonian Audience**

Vladimir Sazonov

Introduction¹

Putin's authoritarian regime tries to take into account the characteristics of each country in the Western world and, even more broadly, tries to damage the democratic and liberal system as a whole² with harmful disinformation by trying to influence Western societies, including political, cultural and economic circles in the West, including far-right forces³, far-left forces⁴ and even some liberal circles in the Western world.

¹ This chapter is updated and revised version of article published in 2022 (V. Sazonov, *The Concept of Pax Russica, Russian Strategic Narratives and their Possible Impact on Populist Movements*, "The International Scientific Journal of Humanities" 2022, no. 1, pp. 142–152). Current work was supported by reserach grants of the Estonian Military Academy [R-019 Strategic communication in the context of the war in Ukraine: lessons learned for Estonia] and Ministry of Foreign Affairs [PROF4 "Russia's historical and political narratives in the Kremlin's influence activities targeting Western and Ukrainian audiences in context of Russo-Ukrainian war" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)] and PSF 2022/05 Strengthening the identity of the Baltic Sea Region borderlands. Building cooperation for the youth.

² G.H. Karlson, *Divide and rule: ten lessons about Russian political influence activities in Europe*, "Palgrave Communication" 2019, no. 5(19), pp. 1–14.

³ A. Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the European Far Right*, A thesis submitted to University College London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, 2018; T. Kuzio, *Russia and the Western Far Right Tango Noir*, "Europe-Asia Studies" 2018, no. 70(10), pp. 1715–1717.

⁴ A. Paier, V. Sazonov, *From the Comintern to Putin: Russian Ties with Italy*, "Diplomaatia" 24.10.2020, <https://icds.ee/en/from-the-comintern-to-putin-russian-ties-with-italy> (ac-

For this reason, Putin's regime considers the characteristics of each state and nation targeted by information warfare⁵.

What is the goal of Russia? The answer is simple – Russia's goal is to divide the West (EU and the U.S.) and, in particular, the Kremlin tries to destabilise the Western world by using manipulative methods, messages and other tools of destabilisation⁶, including hostile propaganda⁷, psychological influence⁸, cyber-attacks, and many other hybrid means, e.g., organised crime, political blackmail, money-laundering, espionage, energy dependence, facilitated migration, etc.⁹ This chapter focuses only on Russian information influence activity against Estonia.

The Aim of the Chapter

The current study focuses on analysing Russia's informational influence using the concept of *Pax Russica* and through strategic narratives disseminated via pro-Kremlin channels to target audiences in Estonia (especially Russophone audiences, but not only). Strategic narratives have been disseminated by Rus-

cess: 10.01.2024); K. Weyland, *The Threat from the Populist Left*, "Journal of Democracy" 2013, no. 24(3), pp. 18–32.

⁵ H. Mölder, *Hirmukultuuri loomine moodsas hübriidsõjas Venemaa ja õppuse Zapad 2017 näitel*, "Sõjateadlane" 2018, no. 8, pp. 64–85; E. Lucas, P. Pomerantsev, *Winning the Information War: Techniques and Counter-strategies to Russian Propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe*, Washington 2016; A. Ventsel, S. Hansson, M.-L. Madisson, V. Sazonov, *Discourse of fear in strategic narratives: The case of Russia's Zapad war games*. "Media, War & Conflict" 2021, no. 14(1), pp. 21–39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635219856552>; J. Darczewska, P. Żochowski, *Russia's "activity" toward the West—Confrontation by choice*, "Russian Analytical Digest" 2017, no. 212, pp. 2–5.

⁶ M. Winnerstig (ed.), *Tools of Destabilization. Russian Soft Power and Non-military Influence in the Baltic States*, Report FOI-R-3990-SE, 2014, <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/mike-winnerstig-edtools-destabilization-russian-soft-power-and-non-military-influence-baltic-states> (access: 19.10.2021).

⁷ I. Sprinģe, *How Russian Propaganda Becomes Even Nastier in Baltic News*, "Re:Baltica" 29.03.2018, <https://en.rebaltica.lv/2017/03/how-russian-propaganda-becomeseven-nastier-inbaltic-news> (access: 24.04.2020); H. Mölder, V. Sazonov, *Kremlin's information campaign in the Baltic States during the COVID-19 pandemic escalation of spring 2020*, "Modern Management Review" 2020, no. 7(4), pp. 83–97, <https://doi.org/10.7862/rz.2020.mmr.30>.

⁸ U. Arold, *Infosõja mõistatus. Kaja*, "Journal of Communication and Public Relations" 2015, no. 18, pp. 9–14.

⁹ A. Radin, *Hybrid Warfare in the Baltics: Threats and Potential Responses*, Santa Monica 2017; H. Mölder, V. Sazonov V., *Kremlin's information campaign...*, op. cit.;

sia for many years since 1991, but in the current research, I focus only on those that Russia has discriminated against since 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and created terrorist puppet republics DNR and LNR on occupied territories of Ukraine, during COVID-19, and during the full-scale Russian military invasion of Ukraine that started on February 24, 2022¹⁰.

Data Sample and Methodology

This research is primarily based on the qualitative media analysis¹¹ of several pro-Kremlin media outlets in the Russian language through 13 semi-structured expert interviews with opinion leaders, political figures, security experts (law, media and communication, political science, defence studies) and several representatives of the Russophone community in Estonia as well¹². These expert interviews revealed several issues and threats to Estonian society in the informational environment. Dozens of articles from various Russian media sources (Baltia.eu, Baltnews.ee, RuBaltic.ru, Sputniknews, REX Information Agency, Regnum, Komsomolskaya Pravda, Inosmi.ru, TV Zvezda, Interfax and others) were analysed, covering 10 years of Russian war against Ukraine from early 2014 when Russian annexed Crimea until early 2024. The criterion for selecting these articles was that their target audience should be Russophone people in Estonia. Qualitative content analysis¹³ was used in the current study to analyse the empirical data (interviews and articles published in mainstream media) by using a hidden pilot sample¹⁴. Five articles from four publications and different media outlets were used for primary coding.

¹⁰ V. Sazonov, A. Saumets, *Putin's War in Ukraine. Volume I. The Background and Anatomy of Russian Aggression*, "Sõjateadlane (Estonian Journal of Military Studies)" 2022, vol. 20.; V. Sazonov, A. Saumets, *Putin's War in Ukraine. Volume II. Different Aspects and Challenges of the War*, "Sõjateadlane (Estonian Journal of Military Studies)" 2023, vol. 23.

¹¹ H.-F. Hsieh, S.E. Shannon, *Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis*, "Qualitative Health Research" 2005, no. 15(9), pp. 1277–1288.

¹² U. Flick, *An introduction to qualitative research*, Los Angeles 2006.

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ U. Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis: A Guide to Methods. Practice & Using Software*, London 2014.

***Pax Russica*, Russian Information Warfare and Strategic Narratives**

This subchapter gives a brief overview of the concept of *Pax Russica* and Russian information warfare. It explains the concept of strategic narratives, which Russia has used very actively as a tool of influence against the West, especially against Estonia.

One of the most powerful tools of Russia's influence activity abroad is *Pax Russica*, which is also directly linked to Russia's compatriot policy, which is reflected in various organisations in its own time. During his presidency, Vladimir Putin revived the concept of the 'great nation', recalling the historical achievements and glories of the tsarist and Soviet eras and feeling responsible towards the nations within Russia's sphere of influence. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, *Pax Russica* became an effective tool of influence and manipulations used by the Russian political elite to unite Russian-speaking movements in neighbouring countries and to create a Russian-influenced cultural, ideological, social, political and informational space in the post-Soviet space and beyond. By 2006, at the latest, Vladimir Putin had reintroduced the concept of *Pax Russica*, which had its origins in the Russian Empire. This basic idea of *Pax Russica*¹⁵ has been energetically used by the Kremlin for expansionist and imperialist purposes, most recently in the context of Russian large-scale military aggression against Ukraine. Before 2022, it was also used as a propaganda tool to justify the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the Russian invasion of the Donbas region of Ukraine in 2014. The idea of *Pax Russica* has been promoted through numerous information campaigns in the mass media, social media, etc. In 2007, Russian authoritarian leader Vladimir Putin founded the Russkiy Mir Foundation led by Viacheslav Nikonov (Member of the State Duma)¹⁶. In April 2007, Russian authoritarian leader Putin declared the following about *Pax Russica*:

¹⁵ M. Laruelle, *The "Russian World" Russia's Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination*, Center of Global Interest 2015, https://globalinterests.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/FINAL-CGI-Russian-World_Marlene-Laruelle.pdf.

¹⁶ The grandson of Viacheslav Molotov was a famous Soviet politician and diplomat, Minister of Foreign Affairs (1939–1949 and 1953–1956).

The Russian language not only preserves an entire layer of truly global achievements but is also the living space for many millions of people in the Russian-speaking world, a community that goes far beyond Russia itself. As the common heritage of many peoples, the Russian language will never become the language of hatred, enmity, xenophobia, or isolationism. In my view, we need to support the initiative put forward by Russian linguists to create a National Russian Language Foundation, the main aim of which will be to develop the Russian language at home, support Russian language study programmes abroad and generally promote Russian language and literature around the world¹⁷.

The idea of *Pax Russica* was officially introduced in Putin's Russia in 2006–2007, promoted by numerous public relations firms and information campaigns for Russian-speaking internal and external audiences in mass media, social media, as well as in Russian popular and scientific literature (especially historical, political, economic)¹⁸.

One of Russia's hybrid warfare dimensions is Russian information activity, which could be designated as Russian Global Knowledge Warfare. As Eric Shiraev and Holger Mölder correctly pointed out, Global Knowledge Warfare (GKW) "is the purposeful use and the management of knowledge in pursuit of a competitive advantage over foreign opponents. Knowledge is information that has a purpose or use and requires the awareness or a form of understanding of the subject. Knowledge warfare is about what people know, how they interpret it, and how they use it"¹⁹.

Strategic narratives, which are the most crucial and existential tools in the GKW, are, according to Mölder and Shiraev, built on effectively visualised images and strategic narratives which can influence wide target audiences; they can influence the decision-making process of political or economic elites or shape public opinion²⁰.

What are strategic narratives? Why are they so powerful tools of influence? The concept of strategic narratives has been actively adopted in international re-

¹⁷ See Russkiy Mir Foundation.

¹⁸ See, for example, the philosophical, propagandistic book series "Projekt Rossiya" (Project Russia). The Administrative Department of the President of the Russian Federation recommended reading this book to statesmen and politicians of the Russian Federation. Project of these books started in 2005, see e.g., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_Russia

¹⁹ H. Mölder, E. Shiraev, *Global Knowledge Warfare, Strategic Imagination, Uncertainty, and Fear*, [in:] *The Russian Federation in Global Knowledge Warfare. Influence Operations in Europe and Its Neighbourhood*, eds. H. Mölder, V. Sazonov, A. Chochia, T. Kerikmäe, Springer 2021, p. 16.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

lations and also used in political communication²¹. Strategic narratives consider stories that exist in people's collective memory and other factors that frame interpretation, including political agendas and ideological views²². As Roselle et al. rightly argue, our era's soft power is a strategic narrative²³. The strategic narrative began with a starting point similar to Nye's idea, based on understanding fundamental change in the international system and the question of how to influence international relations. Already, Antoniadis et al. argue that strategic narratives are representations of a sequence of events and identities, a communicative means by which the political elite seeks to give a meaningful significance to the past, present, and future to achieve political goals²⁴. Roselle et al. argue that strategic narratives can affect the following areas²⁵:

- an international system that expresses how political actors shape perceptions of the organisation of international relations,
- identity, meaning how political actors want to project their identity in international relations,
- policies, for example, the desire of political actors to influence international negotiations.

Thus, if political actors can align narratives of the international system, politics, and identity with their own strategic orientations and goals, the opportunity becomes greater for them to increase their influence in the international arena²⁶.

Strategic narratives created by Russia are aimed at various target groups. Creating narratives exploits several populist political movements as well as politicians. To this end, various strategic narratives were created that amplify or shape perceptions of the world in line with the goals of Russia²⁷.

The next subchapter of this chapter deals with analysing how Russia propagates *Pax Russica* using it as a tool of influence in Estonia.

²¹ L. Roselle, A. Miskimmon, B. O'Loughlin, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*, Routledge 2013.

²² A. Ventsel, S. Hansson, M.-L. Madisson, V. Sazonov, *Discourse of fear...*, op. cit.; H. Mölder, V. Sazonov, *Kremlin's information campaign...*, op. cit., p. 85.

²³ L. Roselle et al., *Strateegiline narratiiv: pehme jõu uus käsitus*, "Sõjateadlane" 2021, no. 17, pp. 13–32.

²⁴ A. Antoniadis et al., *Great Power Politics and Strategic Narratives. Global Political Economy*, Centre for Global Political Economy, University of Sussex Brighton, UK 2010, p. 5.

²⁵ L. Roselle, A. Miskimmon, B. O'Loughlin, *Strategic Narratives...*, op. cit.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

²⁷ V. Sazonov, *The Concept of Pax Russica...*, op. cit.

Propaganda of *Pax Russica* in Estonia

What does *Pax Russica* mean for the Estonian security environment? In Estonia, the concept of *Pax Russica* was exploited through compatriot policy and the Kremlin's strategic narratives, which were used to undermine and discredit the Estonian government, Estonian state and society, and EU and NATO. In an interview conducted in 2019, Expert C added one interesting example about the narrative "Estonia exit EU" (#ESTexitEU)²⁸ used on social media, which was promoted with anti-EU purposes: "Can we say that #ESTexitEU was a centrally-planned and executed operation? I do not know. In this new paradigm, the telling indicator is the use of big numbers. Many desired effects become possible if the operation achieves a critical mass of messages. A targeted person may then perceive that everybody around him thinks a certain way, and those messages are massively repeated. For the analyst, it means that if you can record growth in the number of posts or accounts that carry certain narratives, then we can really talk about serious interference" (Expert C, 2019). The Kremlin does this through promoting pro-Kremlin propaganda narratives like Russophobia²⁹, discrimination against the Russian-speaking population, and flourishing Nazism in Estonia, to name but a few.

Before 2022, when Russia started the full-scaled war against Ukraine, Russia's uses for promoting *Pax Russica* its governmental TV channels like RTR, NTV, PBK (Russian First Channel), several Russian newspapers, and even some Baltic Russian-language channels transmit information in line with the compatriot policies of Russia, and very often producing disinformation and the huge number of different types of fake news (Expert H, 2020). The presence of the whole range of Russian media in Estonia until February 2022 was one more cause for concern. Russian TV channels like NTV or RTR, newspapers like *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, and some Baltic Russian-language media (*Baltnews.ee*, *RuBaltic.ru*) give information in line with the Kremlin's policies (negative views on NATO and the EU)³⁰. The Estonian government stopped in 2022 broadcasting several Russian TV chan-

²⁸ Propastop, *Over one hundred fake accounts are connected with #ESTexitEU!* Propastop, 8.01.2019, <https://www.propastop.org/eng/2019/01/08/over-one-hundred-fake-accounts-areconnected-with-estexitu> (access: 12.03.2022).

²⁹ P. Baburin, *Даже во время эпидемии страны Балтии верны русофобии*, "Ритм Евразии" 6.04.2020, <https://www.ritm Eurasia.org/news--2020-04-06--dazhe-vo-vremjaepidemii-strany-baltiiverny-rusofobii-48323> (access: 11.05.2020).

³⁰ *Baltnews*, *The Independent: учения «Запад-2017» выставили НАТО фабрикой «fake news»*, *Baltnews.ee*, 23.9.2017, <http://baltnews.ee/mir/20170923/1016308913.html> (access: 21.11.2021).

nels in Estonia, among them Rossiya 1, Rossiya 24, NTV, REN TV and some others. Many dangerous and harmful pro-Kremlin online portals and websites were also banned, including RuBaltic.ru, ntv.ru, ren.tv, 5-tv.ru, 78.ru, 1tv.com, lenta.ru and tass.ru³¹. Several pro-Russian organisations that have been active for a long time in Estonia are also worthy of attention because of their anti-governmental actions. The so-called media club *Impressum*³² was also worth special attention because of its anti-Estonian actions and activities associated with the Kremlin³³.

Estonian opinion leader Expert D (2020) pointed out that the homogenous Russophone diaspora in Estonia is a myth. According to him, many opinions are covering a large variety of different points of view. Nevertheless, many Russian-speakers in Estonia have problems with integration into Estonian society, often remaining nostalgic about Soviet times, and Moscow uses that to further its own interests, especially in propaganda. Several Russians living in Estonia are not politically educated, do not believe in democracy and do not consider that participation in elections can change anything. Many are disappointed in the Centre Party (Keskerakond) and do not participate in elections. The Centre Party, however, used before 2022 the resources of Tallinn media channels such as the newspapers Pealinn.ee, Stolitsa.ee³⁴, Vceherka.ee, sometimes in addition to the Russian TV channel PBK, to promote their views (Expert D, 2018; Expert D, 2020; Expert E, 2019; Expert F, 2019; Expert G, 2021).

Moreover, threats could also come from social media. Social media such as VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, and Telegram, which are very popular among the Russian-speaking residents of Estonia, are also important instruments of influence, but Facebook, Twitter, and others play an important role³⁵. Robotrolling was used before elections (e.g., European Parliamentary elections in May 2019)³⁶.

³¹ Err.ee, "TTJA bans Russian sites for naming Ukrainians Nazi" TTJA keelab Vene saidid ukrainlaste natsiks nimetamise eest, Er.ee, 16.03.2022, <https://www.err.ee/1608533743/tjakeelab-vene-saidid-ukrainlaste-natsiksnimetamise-ees> (access: 11.07.2023).

³² Impressum, *International Media Club*, <http://www.impressum-club.eu>.

³³ A. Makarychev, *Russian "cognitive propaganda": The case of Impressum Club in Tallinn*, "Post-Soviet Affairs" 2021, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 45–64.

³⁴ Newspaper Pealinn and its Russian version Stolitsa, which was for years supported by Centre Party which was several years in power in Tallinn. But recently Centre Party lost power in Tallinn and new coalition decided to close Pealinn and Stolitsa (Küisler 2024).

³⁵ Robotrolling, *NATO Strategic Communications Centre for Excellence*, 3.2018, <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/robotrolling-20183> (access: 7.9.2021); Robotrolling, *NATO Strategic Communications Centre for Excellence*, 2.2019, <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/robotrolling-20192> (access: 7.11.2020).

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

In the following subchapter, I present some examples of pro-Russian discourse and close to pro-Russian ideas and narratives in statements of some Estonian (mainly Russian-speaking) opinion leaders and politicians of Estonia.

Pro-Russian Discourse in Statements of Some Opinion Leaders and Politicians in Estonia

It is often very difficult to make clear and thus claim that some politicians and opinion leaders share the views or narratives of the Kremlin³⁷. At the same time, it is known that such politicians exist. According to Expert D, Estonia has never had as close relations with Russia as Ukraine or Georgia, but the Russian Federation is nevertheless trying to influence the political situation in Estonia and trying to harm it (Expert D, 2020). In Expert D's opinion, this work of the Russian Federation is quite successful:

In the beginning, Russia tried to create ethnic (Russian) parties that received some funding from Russia. At one point, it was realised in Russia that it was not working. There were more serious attempts to use existing political force to influence the situation in the country (Expert D, 2019; Expert D, 2020).

Cases where populist ideas, right or left³⁸, coincide in some places with the Kremlin's narratives or are somewhat similar to Kremlin discourse are likely to be more frequent. The Kremlin's interest in the European political landscape is not confined to the far left and far right. Moscow is even targeting liberals (both left and right) and centrists, with whom the Putin regime has tried to build good relations and even tried to cooperate³⁹.

Nevertheless, I pick out some examples where we can find some similarities with the Kremlin's strategic narratives that Russia disseminates.

Some politicians or members of the Centre Party partially showed before 2022 (some even after 2022) their indirect or sometimes even direct sympathy with

³⁷ A. Makarychev, *The Russia Discourses of Estonian Populists: Before and After the War in Ukraine*, [in:] *Producing Cultural Change in Political Communities. Contributions to Political Science*, eds. H. Mölder, C.F. Voinea, V. Sazonov, Cham 2023.

³⁸ R. Wodak, *The politics of fear: What right-wing populist discourses mean*, London 2015; K. Weyland, *The Threat...*, op. cit., pp. 18–32; A. Paier, V. Sazonov, *From the Comintern...*, op. cit.

³⁹ A. Paier, V. Sazonov, *From the Comintern...*, op. cit.

the pro-Kremlin discourse, such as the politician Mikhail Stalnuhkhin, a former member of the Centre Party until 2022 (expelled from the party). In 2022, Stalnuhkhin called Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas and other members of the Estonian government fascists after a Soviet tank was removed from Narva⁴⁰. There are also some other politicians and Russian-speaking opinion leaders in Estonia who promote Kremlin discourse⁴¹. Among the left-wing parties, I also mention the Estonian United Left Party, known for its pro-Kremlin orientation⁴².

An example of how ideas similar to *Pax Russica's* are promoted in Estonia are some articles written by Aleksandr Chaplygin, former Editor-in-Chief of *Stolitsa* and an active Centre Party politician, currently a member of the Estonian Parliament. Chaplygin has for years shared various ideas and narratives, e.g., that there is no war in Ukraine but a crisis, or that there is no need for the European Union to get involved in the Ukrainian crisis, where two superpowers – the United States and Russia – are clashing, and that it is not Europe's business what happens in Ukraine. It is what he wrote, for example, on May 5, 2014, two months after the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. For example, Chaplygin highlighted, "The United States continues to prepare new sanctions against Russia, persistently persuading the European Union states to support this initiative. Meanwhile, European businesses are calculating their losses if economic relations with Russia are disrupted"⁴³. According to him, in 2014, these were the realities: in the modern global economy, no sanctions can be unilateral, and any blow to Russia will boomerang back to the European Union. Chaplygin highlights that the Europeans have nothing to ponder in this mat-

⁴⁰ Err.ee, *Keskerakonna juhatus heitis Mihhail Stalnuhkhini erakonnast välja*, Err.ee, 6.09.2022, <https://www.err.ee/1608706942/keskerakonna-juhatus-heitis-mihhail-stalnuhkhini-erakonnast-valja> (access: 3.04.2024).

⁴¹ D. Klensky, *Эстония: Замесь патриотизма с русофобией даёт национализм*, "REX Information Agency" 22.12.2016, <http://www.iarex.ru/articles/53412.html> (access: 3.12.2019); D. Klensky, *Эстонский плевок в ответ на непонятный визит Швыдкого*, "Regnum" 14.11.2017, <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2345222.html> (access: 3.11.2019); P. Grigoryan, *Григорян: интеграция по-эстонски обречена на провал*, "СКПКПСС" 2.12.2014, <http://skpkpss.ru/02-12-2014-novosti-estonii-rafikgrigoryan-integraciya-po-estonski-obrechena-na-proval> (access: 26.10.2021).

⁴² A. Makarychev, V. Sazonov, *Populism, popular geopolitics and the politics of belonging in Estonia*, [in:] *Multifaceted Nationalism and Illiberal Momentum at Europe's Eastern Margins*, ed. A. Makarychev, Routledge 2021, pp. 23–42.

⁴³ A. Chaplygin, *Пока Россия и США дерутся за Украину, Европа пусть постойт в стороне*, "Stolitsa" 05.05.2014, <https://stolitsa.ee/index.php/mnenie/poka-rossiya-i-ssha-derutsya-za-ukrainu-evropa-pust-postoit-v-storone> (access: 3.04.2024).

ter: although geographically, Ukraine is a European state, the events around it are not directly related to the European Union. The Ukrainian crisis is a direct consequence of the clash of interests between the two superpowers – the United States and Russia – and Europe will neither be cold nor hot about who will prevail in this clash. After all, nothing has changed for Europe because Crimea went to Russia”⁴⁴. Chaplygin also promoted the ideas that were promoted by Russian propaganda, e.g., Ukraine is a poor country, which is full of nationalists:

Of course, Europe's interest in Ukraine can also be explained by the desire to promote some “Western values” like democracy and freedom of speech to the East. But, excuse me, what does Dmytro Yarosh, the official presidential candidate and leader of the Right Sector, whose battalions march around Kyiv under black and red Bandera banners, have to do with democracy? And what does Ukraine's ban on Russian TV channels have to do with freedom of speech? From an economic point of view, a poor Ukraine cannot be of much interest to Europe either⁴⁵.

Among other things, Chaplygin has written that Estonia's policy towards ethnic minorities (especially Russian-speaking people) in Estonia makes him envious of African people in the apartheid era in the Republic of South Africa⁴⁶. As then Editor-of-Chief of Russian-speaking local newspaper “Stolitsa” and opinion leader Aleksandr Chaplygin often promoted narratives which are close to pro-Kremlin narratives, e.g., that national minorities (Russian-speaking people) in Estonia are discriminated by Estonian government, and according to Chaplygin in Estonia, there is no apartheid, but there is a desire of Estonian nation that forms the state to comb all national minorities into its own mould⁴⁷. He also highlights that the Estonian state acts with the grace of a bulldozer, an example of which is the so-called reform of Russian schools in Estonia when Russian-speaking children are forced to study in the state language (Estonian language) without providing any conditions for this, whether it is normally trained teachers or a well-developed curriculum⁴⁸. Chaplygin accentuates that the bulldozer behaves the same way. Additionally, Aleksandr Chaplygin declares that the bulldozer breaks and crushes everything that does not fit the project, and

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ A. Chaplygin, *Чаплыгин: апартеид лучше эстонских реалий*, “Postimees” 30.05.2011, <https://rus.postimees.ee/453426/chaplygin-aparteid-luchshe-estonskih-realiy> (access: 3.04.2024).

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

it does not matter whether the project is bad or good. Chaplygin concludes that segregation (like it was in South Africa during the apartheid era) is even better than this kind of coexistence⁴⁹.

Thus, Chaplygin's ideas are a good example of how local Russian-speaking opinion leaders and politicians from the Centre Party promoted pro-Russian narratives aimed at blackening and disparaging the Estonian state, government and Estonian people.

It should be noted here that Estonian left-wing politician from the Centre Party, Oudekki Loone, is famous for her Soviet nostalgia and some positive attitude toward the Soviet Union and Russia: "Estonia would provide Ukraine with missiles and artillery, which are rationally expected to victimise the people of Donbas" (Loone's Facebook post, end of 2021). She was later quoted in pro-Kremlin media. Loone also accentuates that it "is clear to everyone that these weapons will be used to kill the Russians". Loone explained that sending Javelin ammunition to Ukraine would emphasise the need for a military solution to the conflict, which is not in line with the Minsk agreements. She considers that the Russian army has been on the Ukrainian border for quite some time and does not see any significant increase in the threat. Loone also stated: "When Ukraine stopped supplying water to Crimea, I was seriously worried that stronger steps could be expected from Russia". According to Oudekki Loone, Putin has always been looking for an agreement with the West, and he has not succeeded: "Rather, we could support win-win situations such as a more general gas agreement with the launch of Nord Stream 2"⁵⁰. Loone was also among some other Centre Party members in the Estonian Parliament who, on February 22, 2022, did not join in supporting Ukraine in the face of the upcoming Russian invasion.

A good example of pro-Russian activism in Estonia is Aivo Peterson⁵¹ (nee Krylov) from the United Left Party of Estonia and the movement "Koos" (Vmeste). Aivo Peterson openly praised Russia's imperialist and aggressive policies and actions, and in 2023, Peterson took part in the elections to the Riigikogu (Estonian Parliament) but was not elected. In 2023, he travelled to

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ K. Paris, *Oudekki Loone hoiatab: Ukrainasse relvi saates hakataks neid kasutama venelaste vastu*, "Eesti Päevaleht" 6.01.2022, <https://epl.delfi.ee/artikkel/95577941/erisaade-oudekki-loone-hoiatab-ukrainasse-relvi-saates-hakataks-neid-kasutama-venelaste-vastu> (access: 22.04.2022).

⁵¹ Aivo Peterson worked for the Estonian Border Guard 1992–2004, he was a member of the Estonian Centre Party in 2002–2008 and he was a member of the Social Democratic Party in 2008–201.

Moscow and the Ukrainian city of Mariupol, which is now occupied by Russian forces. Aivo Peterson blames the Estonian press for its one-sided coverage of the war in Ukraine: "We have all heard about the uprising in Donbas, that the uprising itself has bombed its own town, its own residential districts, its own kindergartens, schools, hospitals, etc."⁵² Besides, Aivo Peterson visited Moscow with his party colleague, another pro-Russian activist, Oleg Ivanov⁵³. They also took part in the popular Kremlin propaganda show "Solovyov Live", which is one of the most well-known YouTube channels in Russia for spreading pro-Kremlin propaganda, where Peterson stated: "There is a feeling that all pro-Western Estonian parties are fighting against us. You can't imagine the pressure we're under"⁵⁴. Aivo Peterson also claimed an uprising or guerrilla war should be organised to change the situation in Estonia⁵⁵. On March 10, 2023, Aivo Peterson was arrested in Estonia together with Dmitri Rusti (another pro-Russian activist from the Koos/Vmeste movement) and Russian citizen Andrei Andronov. The Estonian Minister of Interior Lauri Läänemets said that Peterson's activities could threaten Estonia's security, and Peterson had to cooperate with Russian special services to get to the front line in Donetsk⁵⁶. According to the indictment, Peterson and Rusti also organised non-violent activities against the Republic of Estonia's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity from October 2022 to March 10, 2023, based on instructions from the Russian Federation. On September 7, 2023, the State Prosecutor's Office submitted the criminal case to the court⁵⁷.

⁵² E. Voomets, M.A. Lind, *Riigikokku pürgiv Aivo Peterson käis Moskvas ja jõudis okupeeritud Donetskisse "eestlaste süüd" otsima*, Delfi, 26.02.2023, <https://www.delfi.ee/artikkel/120148892/riigikokku-purgiv-aivo-peterson-kais-moskvas-ja-joudis-okupeeritud-donetskisse-eestlaste-suud-otsima> (access: 3.04.2024).

⁵³ In 2023, Oleg Ivanov, a businessman involved in the affairs with cryptocurrency, moved to Russian Federation, but continues to get involved in the activities of movement Koos/Vmeste.

⁵⁴ E. Voomets, M.A. Lind, *Riigikokku pürgiv...*, op. cit.

⁵⁵ K. Hussar, *Kremlis propagandakanalis eestlasi ülestõusule kutsunud Aivo Peterson ei saanud riigikokku*, "Delfi" 5.03.2023, <https://www.delfi.ee/artikkel/120152744/kremlis-propagandakanalis-eestlasi-ulestõusule-kutsunud-aivo-peterson-ei-saanud-riigikokku> (access: 12.02.2024).

⁵⁶ I. Landeiro, *Kohus võttis Aivo Petersoni kuni kaheks kuuks vahi alla*, "Postimees" 11.03.2023, <https://www.postimees.ee/7730324/kohus-vottis-aivo-petersoni-kuni-kaheks-kuuks-vahi-all> (access: 21.01.2024).

⁵⁷ Err.ee, *Riigireetmises süüdistatav Peterson astus kohtu ette*, Err.ee, 7.11.2023, <https://www.err.ee/1609157461/riigireetmises-suudistatav-peterson-astus-kohtu-ette> (access: 2.02.2024); H. Mölder, V. Sazonov, *Estonia, [in:] Russia's Information Influence Operations in the Nordic – Baltic Region*, NATO STRATCOM COE, Riga 2024, pp. 34–44.

In January 2023, the Estonian newspaper *Eesti Ekspress* wrote that in Estonia's largest Russian-language social media group, Facebook "Tallintsy", member of Estonian conservative party EKRE⁵⁸ Vsevolod Jürgenson⁵⁹ claimed that President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi was a drug addict and he also claimed that 99% of Estonia's aid to Ukraine was being stolen⁶⁰. According to Jürgenson, helping Ukraine is pointless because it is the most corrupt country in the world. Vsevolod Jürgenson claimed that: "The president of Ukraine is a drug addict!". "Our aid won't get there – maybe it will be stolen in Latvia, maybe in Poland". EKRE's response to Jürgenson's statement was quick. EKRE reached out to the Estonia press to state that "EKRE unequivocally supports Ukraine's fight for its state, its people and its independence" and that they have voted in favour of all the resolutions for supporting Ukraine. "Many party members are making personal efforts to support Ukraine by collecting donations and taking them to Ukraine themselves". EKRE also officially highlighted that Jürgenson does not represent the EKRE in any elected representative body and that he has never been a candidate for the EKRE and will not stand for the upcoming elections as a candidate on EKRE's list for the State Assembly⁶¹. Therefore, shortly afterwards, EKRE expelled Vsevolod Jürgenson from the party⁶². It should be noted here that the EKRE mainly supports Ukraine in the Russo-Ukrainian war, and many members of the EKRE send or help send humanitarian aid, equipment, etc., to Ukraine. For example, among the members of EKRE, some of the biggest supporters of Ukraine in connection with the Russian military invasion in the Ukrainian war are the European Parliament, Jaak Madison⁶³ and Anti Poolamets, the Estonian Parliament, and others⁶⁴.

⁵⁸ Estonian Conservative People's Party.

⁵⁹ Jürgenson joined the EKRE in November 2021. Before that, he belonged to the Centre Party for two decades.

⁶⁰ E. Kusma, *EKRE viskas erakonnast välja Zelenskõid narkomaaniks nimetanud*, "Õhtuleht" 18.1.2023, liikme<https://www.ohhtuleht.ee/1078309/ekre-viskas-erakonnast-valja-zelenskoid-narkomaaniks-nimetanud-liikme> (access: 8.03.24).

⁶¹ E. Kusma, *EKRE viskas erakonnast...*, op. cit.

⁶² Err.news, *EKRE expels party member over Ukraine aid claims*, "ERR News" 18.01.2023, <https://news.err.ee/1608854633/ekre-expels-party-member-over-ukraine-aid-claims> (access: 22.12.2023); I. Ploom, V. Sazonov, N. Foster, *The Impact of War in Ukraine on the Political and Ideological Agenda of European Post-communist State Conservative Populists: The Case of EKRE*, [in:] *Producing Cultural Change in Political Communities. Contributions to Political Science*, eds. H. Mölder, C.F. Voinea, V. Sazonov, Cham 2023, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-43440-2_11#, p. 244.

⁶³ Madison was member of EKRE until June 2024, now he is member of Centre Party.

⁶⁴ Uued Uudised, *Anti Poolamets: "Me peame ukraina rahvast aitama, see on ka eestlaste võitlus"*, "Uued

In addition to such “opinion leaders” and local Estonian (mainly Russian-speaking, but not only) but pro-Russian politicians, Russia uses agents of influence and pro-Kremlin activists against Estonia. One such example is Sergei Seredenko, a Estonian United Left Party member and an activist in the pro-Russian group “Immortal Regiment”. For years, Sergei Seredenko spread anti-Estonian messages and narratives, accusing the Estonian government and people of Russophobia and Nazism⁶⁵. Sergei Seredenko actively collaborated with Russian propaganda channels, in which he constantly alienated Estonians from Russian-speaking people and claimed that Estonia was a Russophobic country. He was arrested on suspicion of anti-Estonian activities and, in 2022, was convicted of treason against Estonia and sentenced to prison⁶⁶. According to the indictment, from November 2009 to March 2021, Seredenko actively cooperated with pro-Russian forces and assisted persons acting on behalf of the Russian government authorities in non-violent activities against the constitutional order, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Estonia, and supported their anti-Estonian intelligence activities, providing information, writing and publishing articles under their instructions⁶⁷.

In the following sub-section, I examine the Russian strategic narratives presented to Estonia and the West in recent years during COVID-19.

Uudised” 10.03.2022, <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/eesti/video-anti-poolamets-me-peame-ukraina-rahvast-aitama-see-on-ka-eestlaste-voitlus> (access: 14.03.2023); I. Ploom, V. Sazonov, N. Foster, *The Impact of War...*, op. cit., p. 239.

⁶⁵ RuBaltic.ru, *Середенко о восстановлении памятника эсэсовцам в Эстонии: ЕКРЕ надо признавать нацистской партией*, RuBaltic.ru, 8.08.2019, <https://www.rubaltic.ru/news/08072019-seredenko-o-vosstanovlenii-pamyatnika-esesovtsam-v-estonii-ekre-nado-priznavat-natsistskoj-partiej> (access: 3.01.2024); S. Seredenko, *Эстония, окончательный диагноз*, 2014, <https://infosila.ee/main/1182-sergey-seredenko-estoniya-okonchatelnyy-diagnoz.html> (access: 20.01.2024).

⁶⁶ Err.ee, *Riigikohus jättis Sergei Seredenko süüdimõistmise muutmata*, Err.ee, 16.06.2023, <https://www.err.ee/1609009751/riigikohus-jattis-sergei-seredenko-suudimoistmise-muutmata> (access: 2.02.2024).

⁶⁷ A. Einmann, *Kohus mõistis Surematu Polgu aktivisti*, “Postimees” 22.09.2022, <https://www.postimees.ee/7610908/kohus-moistis-surematu-polgu-aktivisti-suudi-eesti-riigi-vastases-tegevuses> (access: 2.02.2024); H. Mölder, V. Sazonov, *Russian influence...*, op. cit.

Russian Strategic Narratives during COVID-19. Some Examples

A characteristic feature of Russian strategic narratives is that they are destructive. They aim to destroy their potential adversary. Beside the Russian-speaking community, the Kremlin very often targets various populist movements and groups in Europe (including Estonia), from left to right, etc. Interestingly, Russia claims to protect and promote religion against liberalism and tries to promote the idea that Russia protects conservative and family values⁶⁸. Therefore, in this subchapter, I briefly look at the Russian strategic narratives that the Kremlin creates and uses as tools to influence target audiences in the West, and especially in Estonia, before and during the waves of COVID-19. One of the tactics they use is the dissemination of strategic narratives as a soft power tool⁶⁹, which the Kremlin deploys with Western audiences in mind, including the Baltic states and particularly Estonia⁷⁰.

In one of our studies, Holger Mölder and I⁷¹ examined pro-Russian media outlets during the escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020. In this chapter, we showed that strategic narratives created and disseminated by the Russian Federation in early 2020 for target audiences in Estonia tried to emphasise three things. Firstly, they evoked political and economic motives related to government policies in all three Baltic states, including Estonia. Secondly, they used status-related motives to disrupt the international system and Western-led political institutions (e.g., NATO, EU, etc.) throughout the Baltic states. Thirdly, conflictual motives were highlighted, indicating opposing identities between the Russian and Baltic nations, identities that have often emphasised a perceived Russophobic context in Baltic identity building. These Russian strategic narratives were created and spread by the Kremlin, and they are part of the Kremlin's strategic aim to destroy the unity of the Western world. Its goals are the creation of ideological and political tensions within the European Union, NATO, the EU, and the United States. The Baltic states have become important targets of information operations conducted by the Russian Federation due to their geopolitical location (close to the Russian border) and, last but not least, strategic importance⁷².

⁶⁸ V. Sazonov, *The Concept of Pax Russica...*, op. cit.

⁶⁹ L. Roselle et al., *Strategiline narratiiv...*, op. cit.

⁷⁰ A. Ventsel, S. Hansson, M.-L. Madisson, V. Sazonov, *Discourse of fear...*, op. cit.

⁷¹ H. Mölder, V. Sazonov, *Kremlin's information campaign...*, op.cit.

⁷² Ibidem.

During the first wave of COVID-19 in 2020, pro-Kremlin channels actively transmitted anti-European hysteria and fears related to coronavirus and its impact. Several topics were circulated, e.g., that the European Union would not help the Baltic states and, that COVID-19 had destroyed the unity of the European Union⁷³ or that the economy would soon collapse⁷⁴. These were promoted alongside the old topic of Russophobia in Estonia and the other Baltic states⁷⁵. In our recent article, Holger Mölder and I showed that Russia's official strategic narratives no longer speak about Estonia and the whole Baltic region as a part of the Russian state. However, they are certainly still interested in their connection with the sphere of influence of the Russian Federation in which the Baltic states would possibly become a "window to Europe", allowing the Kremlin to put pressure on the EU and NATO⁷⁶. It is probably the reason why the Kremlin is interested in fostering instability and chaos in this region using quite visible and strong Eurosceptic and anti-NATO ideas⁷⁷. As Holger Mölder and I argue, "the main goal of Russia's information activities and influence operations is to widen the political gap between Europe and the United States and to reduce the U.S. contribution to NATO and European security. The second purpose is to shape public opinion and to mobilise populist movements in the Western societies that oppose the liberal democratic principles and are sceptical about the constitutional guarantees of minorities and the protection of individual rights on behalf of the Kremlin strategic interests"⁷⁸.

The Kremlin's disseminated strategic narratives that describe the West and its democratic institutions as very corrupt and in need of reform are why Moscow supports and promotes alternative formats of international cooperation ex-

⁷³ A. Piatrinis, *Захват ЕС. Как коронавирус убил единую Европу и показал, кто есть кто*, "Sputniknews" 21.03.2020, <https://lt.sputniknews.ru/columnists/20200321/11659770/Zakhvat-ES-Kak-koronavirus-ubil-edinuyu-Evropu-i-pokazalkto-est-kto.html> (access: 20.1.2021); T. Armazanova, *Коронавирус разделяет Евросоюз*, Inosmi.ru, 31.03.2020, <https://inosmi.ru/politic/20200331/247165844.html> (access: 11.05.2021).

⁷⁴ И. Krugley, *Коронавирус "схлопнул" Шенген: куда теперь податься приблудийским гастарбайтерам*, "Baltnews" 1.04.2020, https://lv.baltnews.com/ekonomika_online_novosti/20200401/1023795618/Koronavirus-skhlopnul-Shengen-kuda-teper-podatsyapribal-tiyskim-gastarbajteram.html (access: 2.02.2021).

⁷⁵ P. Baburin, *Даже во время эпидемии...*, op. cit.

⁷⁶ H. Mölder, V. Sazonov, *Kremlin's information campaign...*, op. cit., p. 89.

⁷⁷ Ibidem.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, p. 84.

cluding the West and its representatives – such formats as BRICS⁷⁹. The Baltic states are, in general, portrayed by Russian strategic narratives as failed states, a poor and unsuccessful periphery of the EU, abandoned by their new Western hosts. According to these Russian strategic narratives, the Baltic states are currently facing very serious issues and deep problems in the economy, social system, demography, etc., that appeared and became more and more serious after leaving the Soviet Union. The political strategic narratives which were constructed and disseminated by the Kremlin emphasise the role of the Russian Federation as holder of traditional conservative (e.g., family, Christian, etc.) values, rescuing the world from the bad influence of Western liberal ideology and democracy, which exists in the declining West⁸⁰. As we can see, the strategic narratives disseminated by Russia are an integral and important part of the Russian information war that Russia is conducting against the West.

In the next subchapter, I briefly focus on Russophobia, which the Kremlin actively uses in its information warfare.

Russophobia as a Tool for Pressure

One common topic in Russian influence activity is Russophobia⁸¹, which is a strategic narrative related to identity. Russia has promoted Russophobia for decades for both domestic and foreign policy purposes, and historically, Russia's elite has concentrated much of the negative flow of information on Russia under the narrative of Russophobia⁸². This quite popular narrative of the oppression of the Russophone community in Estonia and the Baltic states generally presents local Russian-speaking people “as a hated minority deprived of many fundamental rights because of their national identity”⁸³. The topic of Russophobia is still very actively used by the pro-Kremlin media and by pro-Krem-

⁷⁹ R.S. Hinck, R. Kluver, S. Cooley, *Russia re-envisioning the world: strategic narratives in Russian broadcast and news media during 2015*, “Russian Journal of Communication” 2018, no. 10(1), p. 27.; H. Mölder, V. Sazonov, *Kremlin's information campaign...*, op. cit., p. 87.

⁸⁰ Ibidem, p. 87.

⁸¹ J. Darczewska, P. Źochowski, *Russophobia in the Kremlin's Strategy. A Weapon of Mass Destruction*, “Point of View” 2015, no. 56.

⁸² H. Mölder, V. Sazonov, *Kremlin's information campaign...*, op. cit., pp. 87, 92–93.

⁸³ Ibidem, p. 87; E. Lucas, P. Pomerantsev, *Winning the...*, op. cit.

lin opinion leaders and authors⁸⁴, including promoting the idea that journalists are oppressed in Estonia⁸⁵.

I now present one illustrative example of how pro-Russian-oriented opinion leaders try to use and promote the topic of Russophobia in the context of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. In October 2020, pro-Russian Dmitri Klensky, an Estonian Russian-speaking opinion leader, ex-politician and journalist (during the Soviet period, he worked in "Pravda") published an article entitled "Coronavirus exposed the Russophobia of the Estonian media or the technology of manifestation of mild xenophobia" in which he highlighted how some Russian-speaking Estonian opinion leaders use Russophobic ideas for their own benefit. Pro-Russian activist Klensky accentuates:

Let us compare two news headlines about the same event: "Popov does not rule out that COVID-19 is spreading more in the Russian-speaking community" and "Popov: there is a tendency for an increase in the incidence of COVID-19 in Tallinn and Harju County" Feel the difference! It turns out that something is wrong with the Russians; they are dangerous to Estonia. The first news was published by the portal rus.postimees.ee, the second by rus.err.ee. The first was published by a private media outlet, the second by public and legal, practically state-owned. Both appeared immediately after the broadcast of the Russian-language ETV+ "Who will win?" on the topic "Is there a negative attitude towards certain nationalities in the Russian media in Estonia?"⁸⁶.

Dmitri Klensky uses the issue of Russophobia in the context of COVID-19 to paint the then Editor-in-Chief of the portal Rus.postimees.ee O. Lagashina in a negative light, accentuating that she "almost swore on air" that the Russian editorial office she headed was the ideal place for covering issues involving an

⁸⁴ A. Varanov, E. Afonina, *Прибалтийская русофобия и её истоки*, "Комсомольская Правда. Северная Европа" 08.04.2016, <https://www.kp.ru/radio/26511/3531281> (access: 22.11.2020); Baltnews, *В Эстонии проходит саммит "Инициативы трех морей" под сенью коронавируса и русофобии*, Baltnews.ee, 20.10.2020a, https://baltnews.ee/Estonia_politika_novosti/20201020/1019006439/V-Estonii-prokhoditsammit-Initiativy-trekh-morey-pod-senyu-koronavirusa-i-rusofobii.html (access: 22.11.2020).

⁸⁵ Baltnews, *Ямичик пошел за хлыстом: Балтия серьезно рискует, преследуя русских журналистов*, Baltnews.ee, 7.12.2020b, https://baltnews.ee/Russia_West/20201207/1019141217/Yamschik-poshel-za-khlystom-Baltiyaserezno-riskuat-presleduya-russkikh-zhurnalistov.html (access: 22.11.2020).

⁸⁶ D. Klensky, *Коронавирус разоблачил русофобию СМИ Эстонии или Технология проявления мягкой ксенофобии*, Baltia.eu, 8.10.2020, <https://baltija.eu/2020/10/09/koronavirus-razoblachil-rusofobiyu-smi-estonii-ili-tehnologiyaproyavleniya-myagkoj-ksenofobii> (access: 16.12.2020).

ethnic motive. Nevertheless, this belies the headline of the news in question. The headline already provocatively states that the “Russian community” of Estonia is objectively more prone to the infection than the rest of Estonia. At the same time, such an assessment is attributed to Arkadiy Popov (head of the ambulance service of Tallinn North Estonian Regional Hospital and the medical headquarters for combating coronavirus created under the Health Department). He said this on the morning program *Terevisioon* of the Estonian-language channel ETV⁸⁷. As we can see, the Russophobic topics promoted and disseminated by the Kremlin and pro-Kremlin opinion leaders, such as Klenksy and others, were created to show that there are serious issues with discrimination against the Russophone community in Estonia. Thus, the Kremlin tries to create a negative image of the Estonian state and its people for Western and Russian-speaking audiences alike. The next issue that should be discussed is conspiracy theories, which Russia uses as a tool of disinformation to influence its target audience (Expert K, 2020; Expert L, 2020).

The narrative about Estonia’s Russophobia was strongly promoted by Russian propaganda also after 2022 when Russia invaded Ukraine. Recently, on January 16, 2024, Russian propaganda channel Baltnews tried to present Russian spy Viacheslav Morozov former Professor of international political theory at the University of Tartu was arrested in January 2024 in Estonia⁸⁸ and presented as a victim of the Estonian repressive system. According to this narrative, Estonia is an anti-Russian and Russophobic state. Baltnews promoted the idea that the “Estonian authorities continue to carry out political repression. Today, it became known that the Security Police (KaPo) detained Vyacheslav Morozov, a professor at the University of Tartu, who is a Russian citizen. He is accused of “conducting intelligence activities”. In June 2024 Harju County Court (Estonia) found Morozov guilty of activities against the Republic of Estonia and he was sentenced to 6 years and 3 months in prison⁸⁹. Propaganda of pro-Kremlin portal Baltnews claimed that “Until 2010, Morozov worked at St. Petersburg State

⁸⁷ Ibidem.

⁸⁸ A. Roth, *Russian professor arrested in Estonia on espionage charges*, “The Guardian” 16.01.2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/16/russian-professor-arrested-in-estonia-on-espionage-charges> (access: 31.01.2024).

⁸⁹ *Venelaste jaoks luuranud Tartu ülikooli professor Vjatseslav Morozov saadeti kuueks aastaks vangi*, Reporter.ee, 18.06.2024, <https://reporter.kanal2.ee/8043436/venelaste-jaoks-luuranud-tartu-ulikooli-professor-vjatseslav-morozov-saadeti-kuueks-aastaks-vangi> (access: 22.11.2024).

University. Note that this is not the only case of political persecution in Estonia. Both Russian and Estonian citizens are subjected to them⁹⁰.

Last but not least, in the last subchapter, I briefly present some old and new topics which Russia promoted in its propaganda for Estonian and, more broadly, Western audiences in 2022–2024.

Some Notes on Trends in Russian Information Influence Activities after 2022

During the large-scale war in Ukraine that Russia launched on February 24, 2022, the Kremlin has not changed much in its strategy of conducting information war, except for some details and messages in the strategic narratives, which will not be examined in this chapter. Like before 2022, Russia is still trying to influence the Western world and harm the Euro-Atlantic security environment. To this end, pro-Kremlin forces have created various strategic narratives that shape world perceptions and policy preferences based on Russia's objectives and imperialist policies. Recently (as also previously), the Kremlin has placed particular emphasis on Russophobia and Nazism. The propaganda of the terrorist puppet republics, the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics, consistently tries to claim that Ukraine is carrying out genocide in Donbas and that Ukrainians are bombing kindergartens in the process. It is spread, for example, by the Telegram group „Donbas rešajet”⁹¹. Other narratives are also being spread on Russian propaganda channels on Telegram, such as “Ukraine is becoming the main springboard for armed confrontation between Russia and Europe” and Russia's “denazification mission is becoming international”. The same propagandist group claims that there have been British troops in the Donbas for years, who are now taking part in the war on Kyiv's side. Another narrative circulated on Telegram was that 150 civilians in Mariupol were used as human shields by Ukrainian nationalists⁹². The same narrative was also spread in the mainstream media in Russia. The propaganda channel Interfax wrote on March 7,

⁹⁰ Err.news, *Propastop examines Russian media's dissemination of Viacheslav Morozov case*, News.err, 23.01.2024, <https://news.err.ee/1609230378/propastop-examines-russian-media-s-dissemination-of-viacheslav-morozov-case> (access: 29.03.2024).

⁹¹ Telegram, *Donbas rešajet*, 2022, <https://t.me/s/donbassr/9268> (access: 18.05.2023).

⁹² Ibidem.

2022, that, according to Igor Konashenkov, an official representative of the Russian Defence Ministry, fighters of the Donetsk People's Republic clashed with an armed Ukrainian nationalist unit in the town of Mariupol on March 6, 2022⁹³.

Such fake news and propaganda narratives are widely circulated in Russian and social media. One of the results of the information war could be the spread of a culture of fear and panic in society. A culture of fear creates insecurity and instability, as well as heightened anxiety in social discourses and relationships, which is the result of emotional reactions⁹⁴. Fearmongering is also widely used in strategic narratives created by Russia in connection with military exercises (e.g., Zapad), as well as genocide and terror against the Ukrainian people. As Brzezinski has aptly pointed out, a culture of fear obscures causes, inflates emotions, and allows demagogic politicians to use public opinion more easily to support their policies⁹⁵. Thus, the genocide and other war crimes committed in Butcha and other places, in which Ukrainian civilians were brutally killed by Russian soldiers, are not only genocide against Ukrainians but also an information operation aimed to scare civilians and create fear among people in Ukraine and Europe.

Russian propaganda channels also promote narratives which aim to dehumanise Ukrainian people. For example, during the Russo-Ukrainian war, several Russian propaganda channels claimed that there were a lot of Satanists in Ukraine; among them, there were some in Mariupol (the town that the Russian Armed Forces fully destroyed), but also in other towns of Ukraine⁹⁶. This narrative has become popular on several Russian propaganda channels. For example, TV Zvezda, a propaganda channel run by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, has claimed that there is a conflict in Ukraine and that it is not a war but that this conflict is being fuelled by the United States, Canada, Poland, the UK, Germany, and the Baltic states, that it has become a laboratory

⁹³ Interfax, *Российские военные сообщили о тяжелом положении жителей Мариуполя*, "Interfax" 7.02.2022, <https://www.interfax.ru/world/826831> (access: 3.11.2019).

⁹⁴ H. Mölder, *Hirmukultuuri loomine moodsas hübriidsõjas Venemaa ja õppuse Zapad 2017 näitel*, "Sõjateadlane" 2018, no. 8, pp. 64–85.

⁹⁵ Z. Brzezinski, *Terrorized by 'War on Terror'*, "The Washington Post" 25.03.2007, https://www.cair.com/cair_in_the_news/zbigniew-brzezinski-terrorized-by-war-on-terror (access: 4.11.2023).

⁹⁶ V. Sazonov, J. Sägi, *Some notes about the nature of russian influence activities and strategic narratives in the context of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine 2022–2023*, "Sõjateadlane, Estonian Journal of Military Studies" 2023, no. 23, p. 173.

for right-wing extremist terrorism, where thousands of Nazi-backed Satanists from 35 Western countries are preparing for a global war⁹⁷.

In December 2023, pro-Kremlin propaganda channels began to promote a new strategic narrative, claiming that Ukrainian President Zelensky's visit to the U.S. will neither help nor save Ukraine while the Russian army has gone on the offensive and that the U.S. no longer has the hubris to support Ukraine or to support it sufficiently to withstand Russian military attacks. In December 2023, Zelensky visited Washington and tried to lobby Congress of U.S. and the U.S. administration to continue supporting Ukraine with military aid and financial assistance in the Russia-Ukraine war. According to this narrative, Zelensky's visit to the U.S. is another attempt by Joe Biden to secure funding for Ukraine. The author of this article, published on December 13, 2023, in the Russian propaganda portal "Inosmi", promoted the idea that then U.S. President Joe Biden is pushing hard for additional funding for Ukraine and is strongly resisting Republican demands for tighter border security in return for their support for Ukraine. However, even if Kyiv is allocated billions of dollars from Washington, it will not change the war's course. The author of this propaganda article is keen to point out the idea that Russian troops are advancing and strengthening. At the same time, it is much harder for the Ukrainian armed forces to achieve this, even with American help and support⁹⁸.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have only mentioned some examples of the Kremlin's channels and tools of influence used in Estonia, especially for Estonia's Russophone community during 2014–2024. The Kremlin's propaganda uses all opportunities and possibilities, and COVID-19 is a good example of how it works. Russia's influence operations have been spreading strategic narratives to promote narratives of *Pax Russica* among the Russophone community in Estonia for years,

⁹⁷ TV Zvezda, *Украина. Сатана там правит бал*, "TV Zvezda" 16.12.2023, <https://zvezdaweekly.ru/news/202212131824-x7oAW.html> (access: 22.12.2022).

⁹⁸ V. Sazonov, J. Sägi, *Some notes about...*, op. cit., p. 179; С. Брайен, *Деньги для Украины: не в коня корм?*, "Inosmi" 13.12.2023, <https://inosmi.ru/20231213/finansirovanie-267040252.html> (access: 22.12.2022).

trying to influence the whole Estonian society, to divide it, to harm it, but also to influence the political and economic environments.

Therefore, we should also consider that the Russophone community in Estonia is not homogeneous, as it is sometimes portrayed in some research or media; it is visibly fragmented, with several Russian-speaking minorities made up of different people with different views. However, large parts of this group belong to the field of Russian media discourse, as they are the target of Russian information activities and could potentially be influenced by the Kremlin in promoting *Pax Russica*. Russian strategic narratives also shaped world perceptions and political preferences in line with the Kremlin's foreign policy goals during COVID-19 and the Russo-Ukrainian war.

Last but not least, it should be noted that the Kremlin's strategic narratives are aimed at potential target audiences, including populist movements, radical (but also non-radical) political figures and forces, various international target groups, alternative or anti-establishment groups, anti-US, anti-NATO movements, anti-EU, etc.

Interviews:

- Interview with Expert A, Tallinn, 08.05.2019.
- Interview with Expert B, Tallinn, 13.05.2019.
- Interview with Expert C, via e-mail, 26.06.2019.
- Interview with Expert D, Tartu, 28.02.2019 and 15.05.2020.
- Interview with Expert E, via e-mail, 17.06.2019
- Interview with Expert F, Tallinn, 21.05.2019.
- Interview with Expert G, 18.08.2021.
- Interview with Expert H, via Skype, 22.05.2020.
- Interview with Expert I, 15.03.2021.
- Interview with Expert J, 13.10.2020.
- Interview with Expert K, 22.09.2020.
- Interview with Expert L, Tallinn, 17.08.2020.
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CHAPTER 6

The European Union's Policy on Disinformation

Wojciech Kotowicz

Introduction

In today's globalised world, disinformation has become one of the most important challenges facing European Union countries. The widespread spread of fake news, data manipulation and deliberate misrepresentation of the public can have serious consequences for the political and social stability of the continent. The chapter aims to analyse the European Union's policies in the face of threats from disinformation and to assess the actions taken to build the resilience of Member States to this type of phenomena. The research hypothesis assumes that the existing EU initiatives, although important, are insufficient to effectively combat disinformation and require further development. In the digitalisation era and social media's growing influence, disinformation has seriously challenged democracy and information security. The chapter focuses on the discussion of key EU documents, such as the "Action Plan against Disinformation" (2018), the "Code of Practice on Disinformation" (2018), and the "Regulation on Digital Services Act" (2022). Through an analysis of the content of these documents and a review of the scientific literature, the main EU strategies in the fight against disinformation, their effectiveness and the challenges related to their implementation will be presented. The article's conclusions are aimed at indicating the directions of further research and policy actions in counteracting disinformation at the EU level.

Disinformation as a Challenge for Democratic Countries

Disinformation is the deliberate spread of false or misleading information to manipulate public opinion, create chaos, and political or social instability, and influence the outcome of elections¹. With the dynamic development of digital technologies and the growing importance of social media, this phenomenon has become one of the key challenges for modern democracies². In the era of the digital revolution, disinformation has become an inseparable element of the media landscape. The rise of social media and the Internet has contributed to the rapid spread of fake news, which can profoundly impact politics and societies worldwide³.

By definition, disinformation differs from simple misinformation, which includes unintentional miscommunication, in that it is an intentional action to the recipient's detriment⁴. Therefore, disinformation is a subcategory of misinformation, except that it is deliberately spread. In other words, both of these concepts describe false claims, but while misinformation can be shared haphazardly and without malicious intent, misinformation is intended to mislead⁵.

Disinformation has a particularly dangerous impact on democratic processes, as it undermines trust in institutions, undermines the authority of the media, and fosters social polarisation. It is emphasised that through algorithms promoting controversial content, social media are becoming an ideal tool for spreading disinformation. As an example, the presidential elections in the United States in 2016 and 2020 can be indicated. At that time, false information on social media was used to undermine trust in the electoral system and promote or discredit candidates⁶. Disinformation has become a tool to influence voters'

¹ C. Diaz Ruiz, T. Nilsson, *Disinformation and Echo Chambers: How Disinformation Circulates on Social Media Through Identity-Driven Controversies*, "Journal of Public Policy & Marketing" 2023, vol. 42, p. 18.

² Y. Sato, F. Wiebrecht, *Disinformation and Regime Survival*, "Political Research Quarterly" 2024, vol. 77, p. 1010.

³ M. Hellman, *Security, Disinformation, and Harmful Narratives: RT and Sputnik News Coverage about Sweden*, Cham 2024, pp. 3–5.

⁴ L. Hunter, *Social Media, Disinformation, and Democracy: How Different Types of Social Media Usage Affect Democracy Cross-Nationally*, "Democratization" 2023, no. 30, pp. 1050–1052.

⁵ D. Fallis, *What Is Disinformation?*, "Library Trends" 2015, no. 63, p. 422.

⁶ J. Křiška, B. Kováčik, *Post-truth Era of Political Marketing: Manipulation Techniques and Their Impact on Public Opinion and Electoral Integrity in the USA*, "Politické vedy" 2024, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 136–139.

decisions, especially in key states with small differences in votes. Research indicates that fake news can influence perceptions of candidates and their policies and can also contribute to political polarisation⁷.

Disinformation undermines citizens' trust in democratic institutions, including the media, the government and the electoral process. The spread of false information, such as conspiracy theories or manipulated news, undermines the credibility of traditional sources of information and leads to so-called reality apathy. Consequently, citizens may become more vulnerable to manipulation and their ability to make informed political decisions is weakened⁸.

Disinformation can also result from online trolls, bot farms and information campaigns organised by state actors, notably seen during the 2016 US elections and other European political campaigns. This phenomenon is a "side effect" of the development of the Internet, which, on the one hand, democratises access to information, but on the other hand, facilitates the dissemination of false content. On a global scale, authoritarian states such as Russia are actively using disinformation as a foreign policy tool to destabilise Western democracies and weaken NATO and the European Union⁹. They also conduct disinformation campaigns to influence elections and referendums in democratic countries¹⁰.

The dangers of disinformation are not only in the political sphere, but also in security, public health and the economy. An example is disinformation related to the COVID-19 pandemic, where false information about vaccines was widely spread, which affected the decline in trust in health measures and made it more difficult to fight the pandemic. The main source of disinformation were social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram¹¹. It is noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, social media was the main platform for sharing knowledge but at the same time spreading false information about vaccines, which sig-

⁷ L. Teruel-Rodríguez, *Increasing political polarization with disinformation: A comparative analysis of the European quality press*, "Profesional de la información" 2023, vol. 32, no. 6, pp. 3–4.

⁸ C.S. Vincent, A. Gismondi, *Fake News, Reality Apathy, and the Erosion of Trust and Authenticity in American Politics*, [in:] *Democracy in the disinformation age: influence and activism in American politics*, eds. R. Luttrell, L. Xiao, J. Glass, New York 2021, pp. 79–80.

⁹ M. Birnbaum, C. Timberg, *European Union reports Russian disinformation campaign in its elections*, "The Washington Post" 06.15.2019, p. A15.

¹⁰ B. Lilly, *Russian Information Warfare: Assault on Democracies in the Cyber Wild West*, Annapolis 2022, pp. 130–144.

¹¹ J. Alieva, D. Robertson, K. Carley, *Localizing COVID-19 Misinformation: A Case Study of Tracking Twitter Pandemic Narratives in Pennsylvania Using Computational Network Science*, "Journal of Health Communication" 2023, vol. 28, pp. 76–85.

nificantly impacted vaccination coverage. One study found that misinformation on social media increased belief in conspiracy theories, resulting in scepticism about vaccination. Even a small increase in misinformation could have led to significant declines in vaccination rates in society¹².

Understanding its mechanisms is key to recognising the risks associated with disinformation. Disinformation preys on the human tendency to consume information quickly and superficially, often under the influence of emotions, which leads to the dissemination of false content without prior verification. Studies show that disinformation spreads faster than real news, making its effects difficult to reverse¹³. Through their algorithms, social media platforms also unwittingly contribute to this phenomenon by promoting content that engages users emotionally, increasing their chances of further sharing. Emotional engagement of users, especially in the case of content that evokes fear, anger or awe, significantly accelerates the spread of misinformation¹⁴.

Disinformation seriously threatens modern societies' functioning, undermining democratic foundations, trust in institutions and shared public discourse¹⁵. Tackling this phenomenon requires coordinated action, including media education, strengthening media transparency and better regulation of social media platforms.

Due to these conditions, the European Union has been undertaking numerous initiatives to counter disinformation and its negative effects for years. In response to the growing threat to democracy and social cohesion, the EU institutions are developing strategic documents and legal regulations. They aim to strengthen the resilience of citizens and the media to fake news and create a legal framework for more transparent functioning of digital platforms.

¹² S. Xiaohua Chen, F. Tian-fang Ye, K. Lam Cheng, J.C.K. Ng, B.C.P. Lam, B.P.H. Hui, A.K.Y. Au, W.C.H. Wu, D. Gu, Y. Zeng, *Social media trust predicts lower COVID-19 vaccination rates and higher excess mortality over 2 years*, "PNAS Nexus" 2023, vol. 2, no. 10, pp. 1–10.

¹³ E. Aïmeur, S. Amri, G. Brassard, *Fake news, disinformation and misinformation in social media: a review*, "Social Network Analysis and Mining" 2023, vol. 13, pp. 2–3.

¹⁴ A.N. Desai, D. Ruidera, J.M. Steinbrink, B. Granwehr, D. Heun Lee, *Misinformation and Disinformation: The Potential Disadvantages of Social Media in Infectious Disease and How to Combat Them*, "Clinical Infectious Diseases" 2022, vol. 74, Supplement 3, pp. 34–39.

¹⁵ M. Ahmed, S.D. Bachmann, C. Martin, T. Walker, J. Rooyen, A. Barkat, *False Information as a Threat to Modern Society*, "Journal of Information Warfare" 2022, vol. 21, no. 2, p. 105.

Action Plan against Disinformation (2018)

The “Action Plan against Disinformation” was adopted by the European Union on December 5, 2018¹⁶. This document was developed by the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to strengthen the Union’s capacity to counter disinformation, particularly in the context of the upcoming European Parliament elections in 2019.

The main reason for adopting this document was the growing threat to democracy from disinformation campaigns by third countries, especially Russia¹⁷. Russia’s information operations were aimed at manipulating public opinion both in the European Union countries and in the United States¹⁸. Disinformation was aimed at weakening trust in democratic institutions, polarising societies and political manipulation in the interests of the Kremlin. Their aim was not only to destabilise democratic processes in the European Union countries, but also to arouse social divisions. This problem has been particularly exacerbated during the crisis in Ukraine and during the election period in the United States and Europe, when false information and manipulation of public opinion could have affected the election results. Disinformation has therefore become an important tool of political influence, and the European Union’s response to these threats has been the “Action Plan against Disinformation”, which aims to reduce this type of threat.

The document points out that disinformation campaigns, particularly those conducted by third countries, are often part of hybrid warfare, including cyber-attacks and network hacking. Evidence shows that foreign state actors increasingly use disinformation strategies to influence public debates, create divisions, and interfere in democratic decision-making. It is noted that actors spreading disinformation can operate inside or outside Member States, and can be both state (or government-sponsored) and non-state actors. More than 30 countries use disinformation and conduct activities to exert influence in var-

¹⁶ Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Action plan against Disinformation, Brussels, 5.12.2018 JOIN(2018) 36 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018JC0036&qid=1727540976809>.

¹⁷ J. Bayer, *The European response to Russian disinformation in the context of the war in Ukraine*, “Hungarian Journal of Legal Studies” 2024, vol. 64, no. 4, pp. 592–594.

¹⁸ M.J. Kelley, *Understanding Russian Disinformation and How the Joint Force Can Address It*, “Parameters” 2024, vol. 54 no. 2, pp. 39–52.

ious ways, including on their own territory. The use of disinformation by actors in Member States is a growing problem across the Union. There have also been cases of disinformation by non-state actors within the Union, for example in relation to vaccination. As for external entities, it was pointed out that there is strong evidence of such activities carried out by Russia¹⁹.

According to the European Commission, only comprehensive actions can be effective in the fight against disinformation. These include four key principles:

1. Increase the transparency of information, which allows citizens to better assess its credibility.
2. Promoting content diversity, which supports the formation of opinion based on critical thinking.
3. Increase trust in information with the support of authoritative sources and flaggers, making assessing how much content can be trusted easier. It is also important to improve the ability to identify sources of information.
4. Introduction of inclusive solutions, such as education in disinformation and modern media. These activities should involve all stakeholders: public institutions, online platforms, advertisers, journalists and the media²⁰.

According to the document, the European Union intends to take many actions aimed at a coordinated response to the threat of disinformation. The plan is based on four main pillars. The first pillar focuses on improving the capacity of the EU institutions to detect, analyse and expose disinformation. To this end, it is planned to strengthen the Strategic Communication Teams and EU Delegations by hiring additional staff and implementing new analytical tools. The second pillar is to strengthen coordinated and joint responses to disinformation by setting up a rapid alert system that will allow data to be shared and the situation to be assessed in real-time. Member States should designate contact points to cooperate with this system. The third pillar mobilises the private sector to fight disinformation, particularly online platforms, which should implement the Code of Practice on Disinformation. The European Commission intends to monitor its implementation and take further action if necessary. The fourth pillar focuses on raising public awareness and increasing society's resilience to disinformation through information campaigns, training and support

¹⁹ Joint Communication, *op. cit.*

²⁰ *Ibidem.*

for independent media and quality journalism. Member States should further support creating teams of independent fact-checkers and researchers²¹.

The document highlights the need for united action by the EU institutions, Member States, the private sector and civil society to effectively counter disinformation. It also calls for the swift implementation of the proposed actions and continuous monitoring of their effectiveness.

Following the publication of the above document, the studies highlighted its positive aspects, such as its reliance on the principles of transparency and accountability. The plan to increase financial outlays on identifying and exposing disinformation is also considered valuable. A real-time alert system has also been created, and digital companies such as Google, Facebook, Twitter and Mozilla have signed the voluntary EU Code of Practice, which sets some standards for fighting disinformation. It is emphasised that although the implementation is slow, it is a step in the right direction and offers a solid basis for further action²². It is important to realise that democracies may not be able to stop all disinformation, but they can reduce it and, importantly, do so within democratic norms. The answer cannot be censorship or making governments the arbiters of truth, but rather developing standards for the transparency and integrity of the Internet and limiting the space for misinformation, urging social media to develop common standards.

Code of Practice on Disinformation (2018)

The Code of Practice on Disinformation, published in October 2018²³, is a pioneering attempt to involve tech giants in the fight against fake news. The Code was created in response to growing concerns about the impact of disinformation on democratic processes, particularly in the context of elections. Its main goal is to increase the transparency of online political advertising and reduce the spread of fake news online. This voluntary set of guidelines is aimed at platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, Meta or Google and aims to curb the spread of disinformation online. This Code aims to set out actions that signatories can take to address the challenges posed by disinformation.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² A. Polyakova, D. Fried, *Democratic Defense Against Disinformation 2.0*, Washington 2019, pp. 4–5.

²³ *Code of Practice on Disinformation*, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/2018-code-practice-disinformation>.

The main objectives and principles of the Code²⁴ are as follows:

1. Providing mechanisms to protect against disinformation. The signatories commit to implementing policies and processes limiting disinformation actors' revenues and improving ad placement control.
2. Transparency of political and thematic advertising. The Code emphasises the importance of transparency in political advertising, allowing users to understand why an ad is targeting them and to disclose the identities of sponsors of political ads.
3. Service integrity. The signatories commit to shutting down fake accounts and introducing clear rules for bots to avoid confusing their actions with human interactions.
4. Empowering consumers. The Code promotes investment in technologies that prioritise reliable information and provides users with the tools to report disinformation and discover different sources of information.
5. Supporting the scientific community: Signatories commit to supporting research on disinformation, making fact-checking data available, and collaborating with academics and civil society organisations.

The Code also highlights the importance of collaboration between signatories, governments, educational institutions, and other stakeholders to improve critical thinking and digital media literacy. The document also obliges platforms to take several key actions. First, they are intended to increase the transparency of political ads, which will allow users to better understand who is trying to influence their views and why. Secondly, platforms should cooperate more closely with fact-checkers, i.e., independent fact-checkers. Third, they commit to removing fake accounts, often a misinformation source²⁵.

It should be noted that the Code is undoubtedly a step in the right direction, but there is no shortage of voices critical of this solution. The main accusation is the lack of mechanisms for enforcing its provisions, which in practice means that platforms can be selective in their approach to the implementation of commitments, and this significantly limits the effectiveness of the fight against disinformation. For example, one study noted that the qualitative information platforms provide is often imprecise or irrelevant, and the quantitative data is incomplete or uncertain²⁶. The Code is part of a wider EU effort to fight disin-

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ S. Mündges, K. Park, *But did they really? Platforms' compliance with the Code of Practice on Disinformation in review*, "Internet Policy Review " 2024, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 3–21.

formation, including other initiatives such as the Rapid Alert System and support for independent journalism. However, it is pointed out that self-regulation alone may not be sufficient to effectively tackle online disinformation.

Another questionable issue is the liability of platforms and the voluntary nature of their participation in implementing the Code. Critics argue that without the legally binding obligations in the Code, tech giants can treat these actions as a PR tool rather than a viable instrument for change²⁷. To sum up, the Code is undoubtedly an important, but imperfect initiative. While it sets a certain course of action, its effectiveness will depend on the goodwill of platforms and possible future legal regulations in this area.

Regulation on Digital Services Act (2022)

The Digital Services Act (DSA) was adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union on October 19, 2022²⁸. It is one of the key pieces of legislation regulating the digital market in the European Union and is an important part of a broader EU initiative, the so-called Digital Single Market. This document is an important step towards redefining the rules of operation of online platforms, emphasising their responsibility for content moderation and eliminating threats. It has been noted that the expansion of the online space has contributed to an increase in threats such as disinformation, illegal content, cyberbullying or the sale of dangerous products. In response to these problems, the European Union has taken action to strengthen the protection of users' rights and ensure a safer digital environment.

One of the key elements of the DSA is the fight against disinformation, which is seen as a serious threat to society and democracy. The spread of fake news can lead to serious social consequences, such as manipulating public opinion, inciting hatred, and destabilising democratic processes. This document introduces many measures to reduce the spread of fake news:

²⁷ M. Dragomir, J. Rúas-Araújo, M. Horowitz, *Beyond online disinformation: assessing national information resilience in four European countries*, "Humanities and Social Sciences Communications" 2024, no. 11, pp. 7–8.

²⁸ Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market for Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022R2065>.

1. Transparency obligations – Online platforms must provide more transparency on content moderation, including publishing information about content removal decisions and their reasons. It is to allow for better control over how platforms deal with misinformation.
2. Decision database – The European Commission is to maintain a database of platforms' decisions to remove or restrict access to content. It is to enable monitoring and analysis of the actions taken by platforms in the field of content moderation.
3. Trusted flaggers – the document creates a system of “trusted whistleblowers”, i.e., organisations or institutions that specialise in identifying and reporting harmful and illegal content. Platforms must prioritise reports from such entities to increase the effectiveness of the fight against disinformation.
4. Prohibition of dark patterns – The DSA prohibits using the so-called “dark patterns” that can mislead users or manipulate their decisions. Such practices can be used to promote misinformation.
5. Codes of Conduct – The DSA encourages the creation of voluntary codes of conduct to support the fight against disinformation. Those codes should include measures to reduce disinformation's negative impact on society.
6. Reporting and oversight – Digital service providers must regularly publish reports on their content moderation activities, including statistics on removing disinformation content. It will increase public oversight and allow for a better assessment of the effectiveness of platform actions.
7. Cooperation with national authorities – The DSA provides for cooperation between the European Commission and national coordinators of digital services to monitor and enforce rules on disinformation²⁹.

The DSA aims not only to protect users from disinformation but also to ensure that online platforms operate responsibly and transparently, which is expected to contribute to increasing trust in digital services in the European Union.

One of the main problems with the DSA is its lack of consistency with previous European Union legislation, such as the Consumer Rights Directive and the E-Commerce Directive. Transparency obligations imposed on platforms are seen as duplicating existing rules, but not in a sufficiently harmonious way. It is pointed out that while the DSA is trying to address disinformation, there is

²⁹ Ibidem.

concern that platforms may not be able to effectively identify and remove disinformation content without violating freedom of expression. Some researchers point out that the DSA avoids establishing clear rules for monitoring content, which leads to ambiguity about the liability of platforms for illegal content. The lack of precise guidelines on the scope of monitoring can lead to platforms acting with excessive caution, which can lead to content censorship. Automating this process can lead to errors and unwarranted removal of legal content, which can harm the free exchange of information in the long run³⁰.

Conclusion

Disinformation is one of the most serious threats to modern democratic states, and its negative impact on political and social stability and electoral processes cannot be overestimated. An analysis of European Union policies shows that despite many important steps, such as introducing the “Action Plan against Disinformation”, the “Code of Practice on Disinformation” or the regulations contained in the Digital Services Act, the fight against disinformation requires further, integrated actions. These documents indicate the growing awareness of the problem among the EU institutions and the need for a coordinated response from governments, online platforms and the public. However, existing tools are often not effective enough and their implementation faces numerous challenges.

Increasing the transparency of online platforms and strengthening mechanisms to effectively tackle disinformation without violating fundamental rights such as freedom of expression remains essential. It should also be noted that stronger steps are also needed in the field of public education, aimed at increasing citizens' resilience to fake news and the development of independent fact-checking institutions.

³⁰ P.G. Picht, H. Richter, *EU Digital Regulation 2022: Data Desiderata*, “GRUR International” 2022, vol. 71, no. 5, pp. 395–402.

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CHAPTER 7

Disinformation in the Russian Media. The Context of Poland's Security

Waldemar Tomaszewski

Introduction

The subject of the chapter is the media. The activity of the media has been analysed in terms of their use to achieve the goals of the undemocratic regime, which has been presented in the example of the media in Russia. The relationship between disinformation in the media and the security of the Polish state was taken as the leading context of consideration. In order to carry out the adopted research task, the following methods were mainly used: institutional and legal, comparative and systemic. Some of the material was collected by observation.

The literature used in the work, apart from classic studies in political and state studies, includes media and legal aspects. Moreover, foreign materials collected during conferences and internships were used, they are not widely available in Polish resources. The conclusions and analyses presented regarding the media in Russia are partly based on direct observation.

Disinformation in Russian Media

In contemporary political science concepts, the media, as the “fourth estate”, should be an indispensable component of democracy. As a factor not only of in-

forming but also stabilising and inhibiting the system of separation of powers and an important tool of control over the classic Montesquieu¹ model. The media are also, in principle, the basic element of society's influence on the authorities. However, as a subject of public trust, the media in non-democratic regimes are an instrument used to manipulate society. An example can be the media in Russia.

It should be noted that for about 60% of Russians, the primary source of information is public television – TV channels: *Rossiya 1* and *Rossiya 24*². In recent years, for example, the broadcast time of the program about the events of the week – “News of the Week”, hosted by Dmitry Kiselyov, has been extended. He is also the head of the government news agency *Rossiya Segodnya*. The broadcast of the program “60 minutes”, hosted by a married couple: Olga Skabeeva and Yevgeny Popov, to twice a day on weekdays, was also increased. Similarly, the broadcasting time of the daily program “An Evening with Vladimir Solovyov” has been increased, which lasts about three hours. Each of the mentioned programmes and their hosts are directly involved in the propaganda of the Russian government's actions. The Internet in Russia is also not free from the influence of the authorities and is usually used only for propaganda purposes. This applies, for example, to such news platforms as: “Konsomolskaya Pravda”, “Sputnik”, “RIA Novosti”. The basic tool for searching for information is Yandex.

The Russian regime is ruthless to any actions taken by the media outside the control of the authorities. An example is the recognition of the SIA Medusa Project, the publisher of the independent portal “Meduza”, as an “undesirable organisation”, which meant that the news service was banned from operating in Russia³.

¹ Montesquieu, *O duchu praw*, Warszawa 2017; T. Litwin, K. Łabędź, M. Nieć, *Czwarta władza, Ujęcie wieloaspektowe*, Kraków 2023; M. Sokołowski, *Media w Polsce. Pierwsza władza IV RP?*, Warszawa 2007.

² This is confirmed by experts from OSW from Warsaw, see: K Chawryło, *Propaganda masowego rażenia. Rosyjska telewizja w obliczu wojny*, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/komentarze-osw/2022-05-06/propaganda-masowego-razenia-rosyjska-telew> (access: 17.04.2023); A. Legucka, *Dezinformacja jako element wojny informacyjnej Federacji Rosyjskiej – założenia i efektywność*, “Sprawy Międzynarodowe” 2020, no. 4, pp. 160–184; M. Musiał-Karg, A. Łukasik-Turecka, *Disinformation in the Media Space During the War in Ukraine: How did Kremlin's fake news blame Ukraine, the USA and NATO for the Invasion*, [in:] *The War in Ukraine. (Dis)information-Perception-Attitudes*, eds. M. Musiał-Karg, N. Lubik-Reczek, Berlin 2023, pp. 13–38.

³ B. Lewicki, *Rosyjski niezależny portal "Meduza" uznany za "organizację niepożądaną"*, *Dziennik.pl* 26.01.2023, <https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/swiat/artykuly/8646578,portal-internet-rosja-meduza-organizacja-niepozadana-zakaz-dzialalnosci.html> (access: 23.06.2023).

It should also be remembered that already in 2019, Russia attempted to completely cut itself off from the global Internet, in which all Russian operators participated. A special law has been issued in this matter, the so-called decree on the sovereign Internet⁴. Since February 2022, following the start of the war in Ukraine, Russia has been steadily improving its system of disconnection from the Global Domain System (DNS).

The importance of the media for strengthening the regime in Russia can be evidenced by the Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin's speech, delivered on February 21, 2023⁵. In his speech, he mentioned three areas of warfare: military, economic and media. Therefore, the media dimension was treated symmetrically to other spheres of the war. This approach has resulted in numerous media activities aimed at distorting reality and propagating pro-Russian information⁶.

The dimension of using Russian media for propaganda is obvious and widely commented⁷. Therefore, the main subject of these considerations is the issue of the security of the Polish state. In this aspect, securitisation and polystrategy were analysed as instruments for influencing public sentiment, with the use of disinformation by Russia.

An example of the use of the media to create moods in Russian society is the Day of National Unity (День народного единства). It is a holiday related to the removal of Poles from the Kremlin (celebrated on November 4 to commemorate the events of 1612). It was established in December 2004, and what is interesting and very important, it replaced the celebration of the outbreak of the Bolshevik revolution on November 7, which took place in 1917. Thus, a symmetry was created between the seriousness of the two historical events, and even the priority of 1612 was recognised. One can ask the following question: What was the purpose of this? From the Polish perspective, the period of the events of the so-called Polish intervention in Russia, the "dmitriads", and the so-called great sorrow⁸, do not arouse much interest and do not constitute circumstanc-

⁴ Закон о "суверенном Рунете", <http://duma.gov.ru/news/51194> (access: 25.06.2023).

⁵ Послание Президента Федеральному Собранию, 21.02.2023, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70565> (access: 23.05.2023).

⁶ See, e.g., report: A. Mierzyńska, *43 portale nadają codziennie antyukraińską propagandę po polsku*, *Oko.press* 01.05.2022, <https://oko.press/antyukrainska-propaganda-po-polsku-raport-z-sieci> (access: 20.06.2023).

⁷ Extensive research on research, articles and reports on the spread of pro-Kremlin disinformation is presented in the project: EUvsDisinfo, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/pl> (access: 30.08.2023).

⁸ L. Bazyłow, *Historia Rosji*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 210–243.

es that would be expected to be repeated. It is not even a fact commonly known and evaluated in Poland; rather, it is taken up only in the circles of researchers of political history.

It can be assumed that the actual purpose of establishing this public holiday in Russia was to constantly remind about the fact of the attempt to take over Moscow by Poles, and thus to permanently promote anti-Polish sentiments. In the media message, made at the request of the regime, the act of securitisation is being carried out, thus creating a sense of false threat from Poland, which has threatened Russia in history. Such action is also needed for Russia's polystrategy, which (according to the regime) should consider historical events that may repeat themselves, i.e., require preparation and even pre-emptive action. It is dangerous because it causes: firstly, a genuine sense of threat in Russian society⁹, and secondly, it is used as a justification for: armaments and war (which has been called a "special operation"). These propaganda elements, as well as securitisation and polystrategy, were present in Vladimir Putin's address of February 2023.

According to the regime's assumptions, the Day of National Unity and its promotion in the Russian media had one more goal – to maintain presidential power by V. Putin. The media have created a false image of the reality in which, after Putin's possible resignation, Russia will plunge into another period of great sorrow (смутное время)¹⁰. As at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, after the death of Tsar Ivan IV the Terrible, Russia will be threatened by the lack of continuity of power because no political leader could replace Putin. The spectre of great sorrow, created by the media, effectively affected society, which widely accepted the extension of Putin's presidency, potentially until 2036.

An interesting example of "disciplining" the media was the events in Russia in 2019. Let us recall that in 2019, there were about 1500 protests in Russia, the largest of which was in Moscow in defence of human rights and the oppositionist Alexei Navalny. The word "crisis" began to be used in the media space. The regime banned it. It was also pointed out, also to people of science, that the term "crisis" is misused in an unauthorised and inadequate way to the situation ("crisis" is, according to the Russian authorities, when a situation arises that threatens the existence of the state). Moreover, for the sake of the so-called symmetry

⁹ Support for the Day of National Unity in Russian society in recent years has been around 70%, <https://fom.ru/Proshloe/14638> (access: 17.04.2023).

¹⁰ Theses of the All-Russian Conference of Political Scientists, Moscow, December 2019; Траектории политического развития России. Институты, проекты, акторы, Москва 2019.

of the message, the media presented very intensively the suppression of demonstrations in EU countries (especially in Barcelona, during the attempt to break away from Catalonia in 2019). Media freedom has also been legally restricted under the guise of fighting “fake news”, acts from 2019 and 2022¹¹, which provide for high fines and imprisonment.

Russia has a long tradition of disinformation, mainly aimed at misleading and exerting influence¹². Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, especially since February 24, 2022, but also earlier, after the annexation of Crimea and the start of operations in Donetsk and Luhansk in 2014/2015, the media in Russia have been given new tasks: to justify the ‘special operation’, to dehumanise the Ukrainian population and to justify Russian losses. In the Russian media, many activities are necessary to carry out these orders. Among the dominant theses in the media at that time, the following appeared: the West is attacking Russia through Ukraine; it is not enough to speak Russian and profess Orthodoxy – you have to think like a Russian. Otherwise, it threatens Russia; it is better to die as a hero than to be a worthless individual in society (this was also an element of influence on Russian mothers whose sons died in the war); it is necessary to denazify and demilitarise Ukraine. There were even shocking plans for de-Ukrainization¹³. This presents only selected aspects of the use of the media in the policy of the Russian regime, mainly in relation to the context of domestic politics.

From the Polish perspective, Poland's image in Russian media is also important. Some examples have already been mentioned (e.g., the Day of National Unity). In recent years (until the war in Ukraine), two anti-Polish topics in particular have appeared in the media. The first one concerned an unauthorised, in the opinion of Russia, attempt to recover the plane after the catastrophe in Smolensk. According to the Russian regime, it was to be used against Russia

¹¹ Федеральный закон от 18.03.2019 № 31-ФЗ О внесении изменений в статью 15-3 Федерального закона об информации, информационных технологиях и о защите информации; Федеральный закон от 4 марта 2022 года № 32-ФЗ О внесении изменений в Уголовный кодекс Российской Федерации и статьи 31 и 151 Уголовно-процессуального кодекса Российской Федерации (i.e., law on war censorship).

¹² A. Demczuk, *Trucizna nasza powszednia. Jak Kreml zawlaszczyl Internet i “zdemokratyzowal” dezinformacje*, <https://www.stopfake.org/pl/trucizna-nasza-powszednia-jak-kreml-zawlaszczyl-internet-i-zdemokratyzowal-dezinformacje> (access: 28.08.2023).

¹³ Article by T. Sergeitsev, *Co Rosja powinna zrobic z Ukraina?*, “RIA Nowosti” 03.04.2022; На сайте РИА Новости вышла колонка о необходимости «деукраинизации» Украины, <https://meduza.io/news/2022/04/04/na-sayte-ria-novosti-vyshla-kolonka-o-neobhodimosti-deukrainizatsii-ukrainy> (access: 30.08.2023).

and serve to prepare “false” evidence of Russia’s participation in the attack. Until 2022, it was the main subject of the so-called Polish affairs, known in the common opinion of the Russians.

Another example of the use of the media to raise anti-Polish public sentiment was the aspect of EU sanctions imposed on Russia. Poland was pointed out as the initiator of the sanctions, and it was Poland that was redirected to social discontent caused by the shortage of certain goods. Even Russia’s economic weakness was justified by Poland’s actions in the EU, which was also argued by the fact that a Pole – Donald Tusk, was then the head of the European Council, which made anti-Russian decisions. Poland is currently presented as the leader of actions against Russia in Ukraine. It is a topic for consideration in a separate chapter.

Possibilities of Defending against Disinformation in the Media

The freedom of the media is unconditional if we consider a given regime to be democratic. It is often constitutionally guaranteed, such as the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America, or Article 14 in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 1997¹⁴. At the same time, let us note that in the perception of a pluralistic society, all actions aimed at restricting the so-called freedom of the media are identified with the distortion of democracy, and even threatening it. Any attempts by the authorities to restrict the freedom of the media are dangerous, as they can lead to a departure from democracy. It was demonstrated in the example of Russia.

Media freedom should be considered one of the guiding principles of the rule of law¹⁵. On the other hand, the most important goal of the state, the global

¹⁴ Constitution of the United States of America, enacted 1787, <http://libr.sejm.gov.pl/tek01/txt/konst/usa.html> (access: 25.08.2023); Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2.04.1997 (Journal of Laws of 1997, No. 78, item 483).

¹⁵ The concept of “values in the state” is a category referring to an axiological system, closer to political and philosophical considerations, which cannot determine the principles of the system – normative *in the strict sense*. These are separate paradigms. Therefore, the provision of Article 14 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 1997 is not questioned. It is also worth mentioning that the category of “political principle” itself is interpreted in various ways. J. Sozański, *Zasada demokratycznego państwa prawnego w polskiej praktyce prawnej*, “Kwartalnik Naukowy Uczelni Vistula” 2014, no. 4(42), pp. 28–40.

and ultimate goal, is its survival. Without achieving this goal, others are pointless. Plato wrote about it before, and the continuation and development of this thesis can be found in the political philosophy of all subsequent epochs, reaching legal positivism, completed in the nineteenth century, when the previously known maxim "necessity knows no law" (*necessitas non habet legem*) was confirmed¹⁶, i.e., the survival and development of the state are its most important goals. The fact that this is not a new dilemma is evidenced, for example, by the works of Machiavelli or Botero¹⁷.

Therefore, the freedom of media functioning may be limited in a democratic state if the content they transmit threatens the state's security. The freedom of the media is a right, but it cannot be the norm of *jus cogens*. The scope of this freedom may be subject to derogation and limitation, and certain exceptions may be applied. In today's democratic regimes and mature legal systems, the scope of restrictions on the freedom of the media is defined by law and reserved for states of emergency¹⁸. The statutory prerequisites for restricting the freedom of the media are specified. Their catalogue is usually closed. It is an obvious mechanism for defending democracy against the undue influence of the authorities on the media.

All aspects threatening the existence of the state, its sovereignty, indivisibility, inviolability of borders and other supreme constitutional values are premises justifying the authorities' interference in the activities of the media. The care for preserving the entire state and society's axiological system justifies these premises. Therefore, they are derived considering normatively defined values (following legal positivism). However, they can also be derived from those values that constitute the centuries-old tradition of the nation, including, for example, its religion, which is the basis for integration and the impulse for state-build-

¹⁶ J.M. Sondel-Cedarmas, *Od 'necessitas non habet legem' do racji stanu. Kilka uwag o rewolucji w języku polityki w szesnastowiecznych Włoszech*, "Zeszyty Prawnicze" 2019, no. 19, pp. 7–30.

¹⁷ N. Machiavelli, *Rozważania nad pierwszym dziesięcioleciem historii Rzymu Liwiusza*, Warszawa 2009; G. Botero, *O racji stanu*, Kraków 2020.

¹⁸ For example, in Poland, in Chapter XI of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 1997 and the Acts on Emergency Conditions; Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2.04.1997 (Journal of Laws of 1997, No. 78, item 483); The Act of 29 August 2002 on Martial Law and on the Competences of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and the Principles of His Subordination to the Constitutional Organs of the Republic of Poland (Journal of Laws of 2002, No. 156, item 1301); The Act of 21 June 2002 on the State of Emergency (Journal of Laws of 2002, No. 113, item 985); Act of 18 April 2002 on the State of Natural Disaster (Journal of Laws of 2002, No. 62, item 558).

ing. The reproduction and repetition of disinformation can justify the government's interference in the media.

In these considerations, the category of state goals is mainly used, which is characteristic of the political science perspective¹⁹. On the other hand, in security sciences, we more often find the category of "national interests"²⁰. However, in both perspectives, the most important goal and interest is the security of the entity, which is the state. Currently, we are increasingly witnessing criticism of the freedom of expression of the media in the context of a threat to the state, and the dispute is beginning to focus on the mechanisms of media control²¹. It is the subject of discourse in Poland. However, it is also visible in mature and consolidated democracies, such as the United States of America, where the control of the media by state institutions increased significantly after 2001 with an increased terrorist threat and involvement in subsequent conflicts. Numerous reports confirm this and more frequent demands to depart, for example, from the *New York Times v. Sullivan* precedent²². Let us remind you that research shows a constant intensification of disinformation in the Polish media²³. Increasing the government's control over the media message is necessary. It is also important to strengthen educational activities and sensitise citizens to disinformation. Undoubtedly, restricting the media is controversial, which may raise doubts of both legal and moral nature²⁴. However, it should be the subject of an in-depth discourse in terms of the security of the Polish state.

¹⁹ K.A. Wojtaszczyk, W. Jakubowski, *Struktura współczesnego państwa*, [in:] *Spółczesność i polityka*, eds. K.A. Wojtaszczyk, W. Jakubowski, Warszawa 2007, pp. 272–277; P. Winczorek, *Cele państwa, cele w państwie*, "Rzeczpospolita" 07.10.2010, <https://www.rp.pl/opinie-prawne/art7375541-cele-panstwa-cele-w-panstwie> (access: 27.08.2023).

²⁰ S. Koziej, *Interesy narodowe jako podstawa Strategii Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego oraz kryterium akceptacji strategii sojuszniczych*, <https://koziej.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Interesy-narodowe.pdf> (access: 28.08.2023).

²¹ K. Lorenc, *Wolność mediów a bezpieczeństwo państwa*, "Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe" 2016, no. 13, pp. 139–155.

²² N. Norman-Katz, S. Naseer, *Most U.S. journalists are concerned about press freedoms*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/05/02/most-u-s-journalists-are-concerned-about-press-freedoms> (access: 25.08.2023); United States, <https://rsf.org/en/country/united-states> (access: 24.08.2023); *Should the Supreme Court Reconsider NYT v. Sullivan?*, National Constitution Centre, <https://constitutioncenter.org/news-debate/podcasts/should-the-supreme-court-reconsider-nyt-v-sullivan> (access: 22.08.2023); *New York Times v. Sullivan Podcast*, <https://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources/supreme-court-landmarks/new-york-times-v-sullivan-podcast> (access: 22.08.2023).

²³ EUvsDisinfo, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/pl> (access: 30.08.2023).

²⁴ Zdanie odrębne Sędziego Trybunału Konstytucyjnego Ewy Łętowskiej od wyroku Trybunału Konstytucyjnego z dnia 30 października 2006 r., file no. P 10/06.

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PART III

Research on Disinformation

CHAPTER 8

List of researchers in the world dealing with disinformation

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CHAPTER 9

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Wojciech Kotowicz

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