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Sort  Sort by date
Author "Naja BENTZEN"

77 result(s)

Creation date: 25-11-2019
UN Convention on children's rights: 30 years on

This month marks the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the first international treaty to recognise children as human beings with innate rights. Since 1989, conditions for children have improved, but millions remain unprotected. This is an updated and expanded version of an 'at a glance' note from 2014.

Oleg Sentsov: The 2018 Sakharov Prize laureate

Thirty years since it was first awarded, the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought retains all its symbolic meaning, as human rights are continually under threat in many parts of the world. By awarding the 2018 Prize to the Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov, Parliament aimed to increase the pressure on the Russian government to release him. The award also drew attention to all Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia and the annexed Crimean peninsula. On 7 September 2019, Sentsov was released as part of a prisoner swap between Russia and Ukraine. He is due to receive the award in person in Strasbourg on 26 November 2019.

Ukraine: Navigating multiple challenges

Five years after the 'revolution of dignity', in which Ukrainians demanded a functioning democracy and an end to kleptocracy, the country elected a new President in April 2019 and a new Parliament in July. The new leaders in Kyiv are facing a wide range of persistent challenges. Russia's ongoing hybrid war against the country, including the illegal occupation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine, as well as the continued reform process dominate the agenda. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission is expected to make a statement on the situation in Ukraine during the October I plenary session.

The European Parliament's evolving soft power - From back-door diplomacy to agenda-setting:

Democracy support and mediation

For the past 40 years, Members of the European Parliament have been working at boosting Parliament's role in EU foreign policy. These efforts have continued to be stepped up since the launch of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) in 1993. Over recent decades, the European Parliament has significantly raised its profile as a credible moral force with strong focus on strengthening human rights, supporting democracy and enhancing the rule of law worldwide. Perhaps less visible than the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought, the European Parliament's democracy support activities are part of its 'soft-power' approach to international relations. Moreover, Parliament can convey messages through channels that are different from, and complementary to, those employed by the EU's traditional diplomatic players; for example, through its parliamentary networks. Parliament also enjoys Treaty-based information and consultation rights, which allow its Members to shape the EU's external policies. In addition, the European Parliament has become a public forum for debating with representatives of partner countries and international organisations, as well as influential non-state actors. MEPs pro-actively engage in inter-parliamentary delegations and missions to third countries as well as joint parliamentary assemblies. Moreover, parties in different countries often share strong links via their political families.

Understanding European Parliament delegations

Members of the European Parliament form official groups — delegations — with ties to regions and organisations, as well as parliaments, in non-EU countries. Parliament has expanded its impact EU in foreign policy in recent decades, and its delegations are a key component of its diplomatic work.
EU cooperation with Greenland
Publication type Briefing
Date 11-04-2019
Author Naja BENTZEN | Alessandro D'ALFONSO
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Summary The overall aim of the European Union-Greenland Partnership Agreement is to boost ties and cooperation between the EU and Greenland, with education and training as one of several key areas of cooperation. As part of the partnership, and taking Greenland's needs into account, the focal point of EU-Greenland financial cooperation is education and training, with a special emphasis on boosting the pre-school and elementary school system, as well as on providing support for vocational education and post-elementary education.

EU-Belarus people-to-people contacts
Publication type At a Glance
Date 25-03-2019
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Summary The autocratic policies pursued by Belarus's long-standing president, Alexander Lukashenko, have strained EU-Belarus ties over the years. Against this backdrop, the EU has geared its support towards the Belarusian people at large. The crisis in Ukraine slowly rekindled EU-Belarus relations, but the backbone of cooperation remains civil society support and people-to-people contacts.

EU-Moldova people-to-people contacts
Publication type At a Glance
Date 14-03-2019
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Summary Since the Republic of Moldova joined the Eastern Partnership regional initiative 10 years ago, its ties with the EU have grown closer. In recent years, however, the country's political, economic and societal stability has become increasingly wobbly, and public trust in institutions and even NGOs remains low. The EU is working to strengthen the role of civil society organisations in public life.

How to spot when news is fake
Publication type At a Glance
Date 19-02-2019
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Area of Freedom, Security and Justice | Culture | Human Rights
Keyword disinformation | Internet | social media | mass media
Summary 'Fake news' and disinformation – information deliberately manipulated with the aim of fooling people – have become an increasingly visible global phenomenon. Social media and their personalisation tools have made it easier to spread bogus stories. They often use emotions to capture attention and generate clicks, for economic or ideological reasons. Even young, digital-savvy people find it difficult to identify manipulated news. Significantly, six in ten news items shared on social media were not even read first by the user who shared them. Some 85 % of Europeans see 'fake news' as a problem in their own country, and 83 % view it as a problem for democracy in general. This compass will help you navigate the ocean of information, and find your way through waves of lies and disinformation. This is a revised version of an 'at a glance' note published in March 2017.

Ukraine's presidential election 2019
Publication type At a Glance
Date 19-02-2019
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Summary Ukrainians will be heading to the polls twice in 2019, five years after Ukrainians toppled the pro-Kremlin President Viktor Yanukovitch, demanding a functioning democracy and an end to kleptocracy. On 31 March, Ukrainians will cast their ballot in the first round of the first presidential election since the Euromaidan revolution. In October, they will elect a new parliament. Amid Russia's ongoing hybrid war against Ukraine, the elections are a test case for the country's democracy, its unprecedented reform process and its European path.
Ukraine: Religion and (geo-)politics: Orthodox split weakens Russia's influence

Publication type Briefing
Date 18-02-2019
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs

Summary Five years after the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople – widely seen as the spiritual leader (primus inter pares) of the Eastern Orthodox world – granted the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) 'autocephaly' on 5 January 2019, formalising a split from the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The move follows an intensified Ukrainian campaign to obtain religious independence and thereby reduce the influence of the ROC, which plays a key role in the Kremlin's identity politics in the region. This development could have wide-reaching implications. Such a blow to the ROC undermines the Kremlin's 'soft' spiritual influence. The Kremlin views the development as a question of national security and is unlikely to accept the defeat without resistance. The issue is expected to play a prominent role in the 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine. In a wider context — reflecting Moscow's nexus between geopolitics and religion — the decision of the ROC to sever ties with Constantinople in response to the decision to grant the OCU autocephaly could mark the beginning of a wider rift in the Orthodox world. Moscow appears to be exerting pressure on other Orthodox patriarchates to sever ties with Constantinople.

EU-Ukraine people-to-people contacts

Publication type At a Glance
Date 15-02-2019
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs

Summary The 2014 Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine began as a grassroots movement, channelling public calls for a functioning democracy, a European outlook and an end to corruption. Since then, the European Union (EU) has been unrelenting in its support for Kyiv's ambitious reform process as well as for Ukraine's vibrant civil society.

Online disinformation and the EU's response

Publication type At a Glance
Date 14-02-2019
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Area of Freedom, Security and Justice | Culture | Foreign Affairs
Keyword disinformation | Internet | social media | political propaganda | mass media | impact of advertising | information warfare | code of conduct

Summary The visibility of disinformation as a tool to undermine democracies increased in the context of Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine. It gained notoriety as a global challenge during the UK referendum on EU membership as well as the United States presidential election campaign in 2016. The European Union and the European Parliament are stepping up efforts to tackle online disinformation ahead of the May 2019 European elections.

Europe's online encyclopaedias: Equal access to knowledge of general interest in a post-truth era?

Publication type In-Depth Analysis
Date 19-12-2018
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Keyword disinformation | Internet | dissemination of information | political propaganda | knowledge management | European language

Summary The post-truth era – in which emotions trump evidence, while trust in institutions, expertise and mainstream media is declining – is putting our information ecosystem under strain. At a time when information is increasingly being manipulated for ideological and economic purposes, public access to sources of trustworthy general-interest knowledge – such as national online encyclopaedias – can help boost our cognitive resilience. Basic, reliable background information about history, culture, society and politics is an essential part of our societies' complex knowledge ecosystem, and an important tool for anyone searching for knowledge, facts or figures.
The 2018 Sakharov Prize
Publication type At a Glance
Date 05-12-2018
Author Naja BENTZEN | Ionel ZAMFIR
Policy area Development and Humanitarian Aid | Foreign Affairs | Human Rights
Summary Thirty years since it was first awarded, the European Parliament’s Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought retains all its symbolic meaning, as human rights continue to be embattled in many parts of the world. The courage of those who stand up for them therefore deserves to be widely recognised. By awarding the 2018 Prize to the Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov – who is currently an inmate in a penal colony in Siberia – Parliament aims to increase the pressure on Russia to release Sentsov. At the same time, the award also draws attention to the struggle of all Ukrainian political prisoners currently behind bars in Russia and the annexed Crimean peninsula.
At a Glance ES, DE, EN, FR, IT, PL

Implementing the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement
Publication type At a Glance
Date 05-12-2018
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Summary Four years after the signing of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), and two years after their full entry into force, Parliament is now assessing their implementation. The report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs welcomes a number of positive developments in Ukraine, but also points to shortcomings. Parliament will debate the issue during its December plenary session.
At a Glance ES, DE, EN, FR, IT, PL

Russia-Ukraine conflict flares up in the Azov Sea
Publication type At a Glance
Date 29-11-2018
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Summary Russia’s attacks on and seizure of three Ukrainian naval vessels off the Crimean peninsula have reignited looming tensions in the Sea of Azov. This is the most serious confrontation between Ukraine and Russia since 2014, sparking concern over further military escalation ahead of key Ukrainian elections. On 27 November 2018, Ukraine’s Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) voted to declare martial law. The EU has condemned Russia’s use of force.
At a Glance EN

Implementing the EU-Moldova Association Agreement
Publication type At a Glance
Date 07-11-2018
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Summary Four years after the signing of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), Parliament is now evaluating implementation. The Committee on Foreign Affairs report highlights a number of concerns. Parliament will debate the issue at its first plenary session in November.
At a Glance ES, DE, EN, FR, IT, PL

From post-truth to post-trust?
Publication type At a Glance
Date 25-10-2018
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Democracy | Foreign Affairs
Summary Is the ‘very concept of objective truth’ fading out of the world, as George Orwell wrote in his Homage to Catalonia in the 1930s? Or is truth even ‘dead’, as Time magazine asked in 2017? Can we draw clear lines between objective facts, spin and lies? What are the consequences of ‘truth decay’ for trust, democracy and multilateralism?
At a Glance EN
Multimedia EN
Computational propaganda techniques

Publication type At a Glance
Date 18-10-2018
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Democracy | Human Rights

Summary The techniques used by anti-democratic state and non-state actors to disrupt or influence democratic processes are constantly evolving. The use of algorithms, automation and artificial intelligence is boosting the scope and the efficiency of disinformation campaigns and related cyber-activities. In response, the EU is stepping up its efforts to protect its democratic processes from manipulation ahead of the European elections in May 2019.

Foreign influence operations in the EU

Publication type Briefing
Date 10-07-2018
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Democracy

Summary Attempting to influence political decision-making beyond one's own political sphere is not a new phenomenon – it is an integral part of the history of geopolitics. Whereas hard power relies on military and economic force, the soft power of a state involves public diplomacy and dialogue on values, cultures and ideas, which should normally correspond with its behaviour abroad. Although the extent is hard to measure, democratic states whose values match the prevailing global norms – pluralism, fundamental rights and freedoms, the rule of law as a principle within states and in international relations – and exert this influence by contributing to the prevention and resolution of conflicts, traditionally appear more attractive, thus having more soft power leverage. However, influence can also serve purposes of interference and destabilisation. Authoritarian state actors struggle to project soft power while engaging in disruptive or destructive behaviour. Instead, some state actors see a means of reaching their goals by making democratic actors, systems and values appear less attractive, through a number of overt and covert instruments. The tools are constantly evolving. Today, social media combines the oral tradition with new electronic means of dissemination, enabling (potentially disruptive) messages to spread instantaneously. Disinformation can be, and is being, combined with other instruments in an increasingly diverse, hybrid 'toolbox' that authoritarian state actors have at their disposal. In recent years, awareness in the research community of online disinformation by state actors has increased around the world, not least in the context of the United Kingdom referendum on EU membership and the US presidential election in 2016. Although their visibility increases in the context of elections and referendums, influence campaigns are not limited to democratic processes.

Further macro-financial assistance to Ukraine

Publication type At a Glance
Date 06-06-2018
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs

Summary The European Parliament is expected to vote in June 2018 on the Commission’s proposal for further macro-financial assistance (MFA) to Ukraine. Future disbursements of MFA will depend on the country’s progress in the fight against corruption, among other preconditions.

EYE event - Free speech in the digital era

Publication type At a Glance
Date 16-05-2018
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Democracy

Summary Are the business models of the big social media companies compatible with the principles of democracy? Can we protect free speech and at the same time ensure that social media companies take more responsibility for the content they spread, including hate speech? Can we turn the challenges into opportunities?
EYE event - Cyber-attacks: Not just a phantom menace
Publication type At a Glance
Date 16-05-2018
Author Naja BENTZEN | Sofija VORONOVA
Policy area Area of Freedom, Security and Justice | Security and Defence
Summary Some 96% of young people (and 70% of citizens) in Europe use the internet every day. The young communicate, play, shop, learn and work online. While offering a galaxy of opportunities, the digital environment also has a dark side. Cybercrime knows no borders and cyber-attacks can take on various forms, targeting all kinds of things, ranging from our devices and wallets, to our way of life. How can we make our digital society more resilient and our cybersecurity stronger? How does the EU help us reinforce our cyber-preparedness and response?

At a Glance EN

Adapting to new digital realities: Main issues and policy responses
Publication type Briefing
Date 19-04-2018
Author Maria Del Mar NEGREIRO ACHIAGA | Marcin SZCZEPANSKI | Vincent REILLON | Naja BENTZEN | Nikolina SAJN
Policy area Research Policy | Forward Planning | Internal Market and Customs Union | Economics and Monetary Issues | Consumer Protection | Democracy
Summary Digital technologies have changed the way we live and transformed the world around us at unprecedented speed. They have affected all important aspects of life, both at work and at home, and have influenced almost everything from human relations to the economy, to the extent that access to the internet has now become a basic human right recognised by the United Nations. This profound change presents both opportunities and threats to our society. Citizens need specific skills and access to be able to meaningfully take part in society and work. European businesses need an adequate policy framework and infrastructure to capture the enormous value created by the digital economy. Supporting innovation, removing barriers in the digital single market, and effectively managing and using data are the necessary tools to assist them and boost economic growth in Europe. The European Union takes an active part in shaping the digital economy and society, with cross policy initiatives that range from boosting investment, through reforms of copyright and e privacy, to removal of geo-blocking and development of e-government. This multifaceted approach is necessary to facilitate adaptation to complex new realities. The European Parliament, as co legislator, is involved in shaping the policy framework which will help citizens and businesses fully utilise the potential of digital technologies.

Briefing EN, FR

A UN peacekeeping mission in eastern Ukraine?
Publication type At a Glance
Date 08-03-2018
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs | Security and Defence
Keyword establishment of peace | the EU's international role | international agreement | bilateral relations | international sanctions | Russia | UNO | Ukraine | occupied territory | demilitarised zone | cease-fire
Summary As the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine enters its fifth year, the debate on the possibility of a United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission has resurfaced, with a new report and a combination of developments on the international stage creating new momentum. Some see such a mission as a potential opportunity to contribute to unfreezing the Minsk II peace deal, paving the way for local elections. Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation in the conflict zone is deteriorating.

At a Glance EN

Europe’s online encyclopaedias: Equal access to knowledge of general interest?
Publication type In-Depth Analysis
Date 16-01-2018
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Keyword disinformation | Internet | access to information | European security | data collection | language skills | encyclopaedia | political propaganda | extremism | information processing
Summary The post-fact era – in which emotions trump evidence, while trust in institutions, expertise and mainstream media is declining – is putting our information ecosystem under strain. At a time when information is increasingly being manipulated for ideological and economic purposes, public access to source of trustworthy general-interest knowledge – such as national online encyclopaedias – can help boost our cognitive resilience. Basic, reliable background information about history, culture, society and politics is an essential part of our societies’ complex knowledge ecosystem, and an important tool for any citizen searching for knowledge, facts and figures.

In-Depth Analysis DE, EN, FR
Disinformation, ‘fake news’ and the EU’s response
Publication type: At a Glance
Date: 20-11-2017
Author: Naja BENTZEN
Policy area: Area of Freedom, Security and Justice | Culture | Foreign Affairs
Keyword: disinformation | control of communications | United States | impact of information technology | social media | business morals | political propaganda | Russia | right to information | common foreign and security policy | information warfare | presidential election
Summary: The impact of the online spread of mis- and disinformation – including false news posing as factual stories – became increasingly visible in the context of the crisis in Ukraine, and gained notoriety as a global challenge during the 2016 United States presidential election campaign. Ahead of the European elections in 2019, the EU is now stepping up its efforts to tackle ‘fake news’. This is a further updated version of an ‘at a glance’ note published in April 2017: PE 599.384.

Disinformation, ‘fake news’ and the EU’s response
Publication type: At a Glance
Date: 07-11-2017
Author: Naja BENTZEN
Policy area: Area of Freedom, Security and Justice | Culture
Keyword: disinformation | United States | social media | political propaganda | Russia | freedom of communication | common foreign and security policy | information warfare | foreign policy
Summary: The impact of the online spread of mis- and disinformation – including false news posing as factual stories – became increasingly visible in the context of the crisis in Ukraine, and gained notoriety as a global phenomenon during the 2016 presidential election campaign in the United States. Ahead of the European elections in 2019, the EU's answers to these challenges are still only tentative.

Norway’s political parties ahead of the elections
Publication type: At a Glance
Date: 05-09-2017
Author: Naja BENTZEN
Policy area: Foreign Affairs
Summary: On 11 September 2017, Norwegian voters will be heading to the polls amid concern over weak growth, an increasingly assertive Russia, as well as the impact of Brexit on the country’s economy.

Ukraine’s on-going reform process: Progress and challenges since Euromaidan
Publication type: Briefing
Date: 07-07-2017
Author: Naja BENTZEN
Policy area: Foreign Affairs
Keyword: third country | statistics | EU Member State | institutional reform | central bank | bilateral relations | administrative transparency | Ukraine | distribution of EU funding | association agreement (EU) | civil society | corruption
Summary: On 12-13 July 2017, European Council President, Donald Tusk, Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, and Ukrainian President, Petro Poroshenko, will meet in Kyiv for the 19th EU-Ukraine summit. Ukraine’s reform process is to feature prominently on the agenda. The ratification of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement by the Dutch Parliament in May 2017, and the commencement of visa-free travel for Ukrainians in June illustrate the active and visible role the EU has taken in shaping Ukraine’s future. Since the 2014 Euromaidan revolution, Ukraine’s reform efforts have made unprecedented progress under difficult circumstances. The country has improved transparency, implemented anti-corruption measures and reduced its dependence on Russian gas. The EU, international institutions, individual countries and Ukrainian civil society actors have all participated in propagating, funding and monitoring these changes. External leverage and incentives have proved vital in ensuring that the government moves ahead with reforms, but internal challenges still pose a threat to future progress, including the actual implementation of the laws passed. Strong oligarchic influence and a lack of political unity continue to hamper key changes. Significant issues to watch in Ukraine’s ongoing reforms include the election of an all-new Supreme Court as well as the creation of a special Anti-Corruption Court.
Macro-financial assistance to Moldova

Publication type At a Glance
Date 27-06-2017
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area International Trade | Foreign Affairs
Keyword structural adjustment | political situation | macro-financial assistance | Moldova | association agreement (EU) | rule of law | economic situation
Summary Amid persistent political and economic turmoil in Moldova, the European Parliament is expected to vote in July on the Commission's proposal for macro-financial assistance to the country, which aims to ease the immediate pressure on Moldova's public finances and stabilise its economy.

At a Glance ES, DE, EN, FR, IT, PL

Ukraine: Temporary autonomous trade measures

Publication type At a Glance
Date 24-05-2017
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Keyword common commercial policy | economic consequence | import (EU) | EU agricultural market | agricultural situation | agricultural trade | Ukraine | association agreement (EU) | tariff quota | interim agreement (EU)
Summary In view of the difficult economic situation and on-going reform process in Ukraine, the European Commission proposes to improve access for Ukraine to the EU market for some industrial and agricultural products. The European Parliament (EP) plenary vote is scheduled for May.

At a Glance ES, DE, EN, FR, IT, PL

Media freedom trends 2017: Eastern Partnership countries

Publication type Briefing
Date 03-05-2017
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Keyword disinformation | freedom of expression | Armenia | censorship | political propaganda | freedom of communication | Ukraine | Belarus | Eastern Partnership | pluralism in the media | Georgia | Russia | Moldova | Azerbaijan
Summary Media freedom is a core EU value and a cornerstone of democracy. That makes it a key part of the overall set of democratic and legal reforms being implemented by the six Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. As such, it is high on the agenda in political dialogue between the EU and these former Soviet states. Since the 2015 Eastern Partnership Media Conference highlighted media freedom in the EaP countries and options for EU engagement, international rankings assessing the levels of media freedom in most EaP countries have seen limited changes. Whereas Ukraine has made progress, despite the on-going crisis in the country, Moldova — former 'poster child' of the international media freedom rankings — has slipped downwards over recent years. In both countries, the Kremlin's increasing information activities present a difficult challenge to media freedom policies. Sustainable changes in media freedom do not happen overnight. Nevertheless, beneath the surface, EU-funded projects and programmes are helping to change the media landscape. The European Parliament (EP) has also been consistent in promoting and supporting press freedom and freedom of expression in the region.

Briefing EN

EU-Belarus people-to-people contacts

Publication type At a Glance
Date 25-04-2017
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Keyword visa policy | EU aid | EU restrictive measure | EU relations | student mobility | university | EU financing | civil society | Belarus | human rights
Summary The autocratic policies pursued by Belarus's long-standing president, Alexander Lukashenko, have strained EU-Belarus ties over the years. Against this backdrop, the EU has geared all its programmes towards benefiting the Belarusian people at large. EU-Belarus relations did slowly begin to recover in the wake of the Ukraine crisis, but the backbone of EU-Belarus cooperation remains civil society support and people-to-people contacts.

At a Glance EN
**EU-Belarus relations: Delicate ties under strain**

*Publication type* | Briefing  
*Date* | 25-04-2017  
*Author* | Naja BENTZEN  
*Policy area* | Foreign Affairs  
*Keyword* | European neighbourhood policy | EU restrictive measure | government violence | political situation | trade relations | EU financing | repression | foreign policy | Belarus | human rights | EU relations | Crimea question | Russia | geopolitics | civil society  
*Summary* | Belarus – a hesitant participant in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and traditionally one of Russia's closest allies – has long tested the limits of the EU's policy projection. The main sticking point in EU-Belarus relations has been and still remains Minsk's reluctance to commit to democracy, as well as to political and civil rights. In the light of 'positive political developments' in relations between the European Union and Belarus – owing not least to the Belarusian authorities' release of six political prisoners in August 2015 – the Council lifted some restrictive measures on Belarus in February 2016, while extending others for a further year. The Ukraine crisis – during which Minsk hosted important ceasefire talks – appeared to spark a rethink in both Minsk and Brussels. Growing frictions with Moscow and the continued economic recession in Russia have put pressure on the social contract between Belarus's leadership and its citizens, increasing the incentives for Belarus to mend ties with the West, including the EU. However, Minsk's crackdown on recent protest waves have sparked criticism from the EU and rekindled concern over long-standing president Alexander Lukashenko's poor human rights record.

**Understanding disinformation and fake news**

*Publication type* | At a Glance  
*Date* | 07-04-2017  
*Author* | Naja BENTZEN  
*Policy area* | Area of Freedom, Security and Justice | Foreign Affairs | Security and Defence  
*Keyword* | disinformation | Internet | social media | political propaganda | mass media | Russia | information warfare  
*Summary* | Recent political and security-related developments have increased the focus on, and concern over, the use of biased and deceptive information as a tool to exert strategic influence. The growing emphasis on countering the manipulation of information calls for an equally attentive approach to the usage and definition of the terms involved.

**'Fake news' and the EU's response**

*Publication type* | At a Glance  
*Date* | 31-03-2017  
*Author* | Naja BENTZEN  
*Policy area* | Area of Freedom, Security and Justice | Culture  
*Keyword* | disinformation | Internet | election | social media | political propaganda | mass media | Russia | information warfare  
*Summary* | Fake news – deliberately fabricated stories posing as journalism with the aim of manipulating readers – became an increasingly visible global phenomenon during last year's presidential election campaign in the United States, not least due to the growing use of social media as a source for news. Whereas recent research indicates that a majority of people have difficulties determining when news is fake, the EU's steps towards countering this growing information challenge are still tentative.

**StratCom tools: US international broadcasting**

*Publication type* | At a Glance  
*Date* | 01-02-2017  
*Author* | Naja BENTZEN  
*Policy area* | Foreign Affairs  
*Keyword* | United States | broadcasting | political propaganda | freedom of the press | Russia | foreign policy | communications policy  
*Summary* | US international broadcasting has been a key instrument in the country's strategic communications (StratCom) toolbox since World War II. Whereas growing propaganda efforts from foreign state and non-state actors have boosted calls for reforms, there is uncertainty over the future US direction.
Arctic continental shelf claims: Mapping interests in the circumpolar North

Publication type: Briefing  
Date: 09-01-2017  
Author: Naja BENTZEN  
Policy area: Global Governance | Foreign Affairs  
Summary: As climate change has led to record sea ice decline, the Arctic has resurfaced as a region of global geopolitical relevance. The visibility of Arctic issues has increased, with international attention zooming in on the Arctic Ocean and the North Pole. The Arctic – one of the least populated areas on Earth – has been a peaceful and stable arena for growing intergovernmental and non-governmental cooperation since the end of the Cold War. However, potential competition for natural resources and new navigation routes has sharpened the focus on divisions between the states that have coasts on the Arctic Ocean. Overlapping continental shelf claims, combined with Russia’s increasing assertiveness, have sparked concern over potential new or rekindled disputes. The focus on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea – the international ‘constitution for the oceans’, which also regulates the Arctic Ocean – has increased accordingly. At the same time, the importance of the Arctic as an element in national identities and narratives plays a key role in the discourse on national Arctic policies, which are aimed at both international and domestic audiences, thus linking geopolitics and emotions.

Ahead of the EU-Ukraine Summit: Increasing pressure for progress

Publication type: Briefing  
Date: 21-11-2016  
Author: Naja BENTZEN  
Policy area: Foreign Affairs  
Summary: Three years ago, on 21 November 2013, Ukraine’s then President, Viktor Yanukovich, caved in to Russian pressure and decided against signing the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. The following ‘revolution of dignity’ paved the way for his ousting on 22 February 2014, igniting hope among Ukrainian citizens for a future closer to the European Union. The Ukraine crisis catapulted the country to the forefront of the EU policy agenda, triggering sanctions on Russia over its illegal annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and its role in the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. Since then, the EU has significantly boosted its support to Ukraine, which – despite the on-going hybrid war – has continued to make progress on its path towards European integration. The way forward in EU-Ukraine relations – including visa liberalisation, implementation of the Minsk agreements as well as reforms and anti-corruption measures in Ukraine – will be the focus of the EU-Ukraine Summit due to be held on 24 November. The summit takes place amid uncertainty over future US policy vis-à-vis NATO, Russia and Ukraine, increasing the pressure on both Ukraine and the EU to keep a steady hand.

Iceland ahead of the parliamentary elections

Publication type: At a Glance  
Date: 26-10-2016  
Author: Naja BENTZEN  
Policy area: Democracy | Foreign Affairs  
Keyword: political parties | political crisis | Iceland | monetary crisis | parliamentary election  
Summary: The financial storm that swept Iceland in 2008 has had long-lasting effects on the country’s domestic political climate. Despite the remarkably speedy economic recovery, the post-crash political crisis has continued to evolve. New, alternative political movements have mushroomed, and the anti-establishment Pirate Party is expecting a big boost in the 29 October snap elections.

Moldova ahead of the presidential election

Publication type: At a Glance  
Date: 20-10-2016  
Author: Naja BENTZEN  
Policy area: Democracy | Foreign Affairs  
Keyword: Eastern Partnership | candidate | region | Russia | democracy | Moldova | association agreement (EU) | common foreign and security policy | political figure | corruption | presidential election  
Summary: Moldova is facing tough internal and external challenges. The domestic political situation is characterised by chronic instability and massive public protests, which have prompted the decision to hold direct presidential elections on 30 October 2016, the first in more than a decade. Most candidates represent Moldova’s main political parties, reflecting the growing pro-Europe and pro-Russia divide that mirrors the geopolitical tensions in the region, inflamed by the Ukraine crisis. Please click here for the full publication in PDF format

At a Glance  
EN
Canada's strategic communication to counter foreign propaganda

Publication type Briefing
Date 03-10-2016
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs

Summary Over the decades, Canada has taken evolving strategic communication (StratCom) measures to counter foreign propaganda – often violent, extremist and undemocratic – disseminated by non-state and state actors. To this end, the Canadian government has employed both hard and soft tactics and strategies through legislation, community outreach and military operations. Through such measures, the government aims to provide alternative narratives that rival hostile propaganda and place an emphasis on the country's diversity; to connect with local communities and engage them in national strategies that tackle violent extremism and radicalisation; and to promote Canadian values which include freedom, respect for cultural differences, and law and order. Canada makes an important international contribution through its participation in the 'Five Eyes' intelligence-sharing alliance, in the Grand Coalition against ISIL/Da'esh, in the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, as well as in NATO's Strategic Communications Centre for Excellence in Riga, Latvia.

Briefing EN

US strategic communication to counter foreign propaganda

Publication type Briefing
Date 03-10-2016
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Security and Defence

Summary After the Cold War, countering strategic communications by foreign actors declined as a US foreign policy priority. The 9/11 attacks, however, reignited the need for the USA to respond to the propaganda of third parties such as Al-Qaida and, more recently, ISIL/Da'esh. Various US government departments and agencies use both traditional and digital tools to approach susceptible audiences – by exposing the disinformation of third parties or by presenting a different perspective of events. The Obama administration has revamped its counter-extremist communications over recent years, and the US State Department has launched a new Global Engagement Center to synchronise messaging to foreign audiences. Meanwhile, the growing role of state-led media campaigns targeting foreign audiences by countries such as Russia has boosted calls for the USA to upgrade its public diplomacy efforts to adapt to new challenges. At the same time, government action is challenged by the difficulties of inter-agency coordination as well as by legal protections limiting the use of strategic communications within the USA.

Briefing EN

Belarus's parliamentary elections: Déjà vu?

Publication type At a Glance
Date 08-09-2016
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Keyword political opposition | freedom of assembly | bilateral relations | Belarus | presidential election

Summary After 22 years in power, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's camp can expect yet another victory in the 11 September parliamentary elections. The weary Belarusian opposition is no threat to the iron-fisted president, who represents stability in uncertain times. What is new, however, is that Lukashenko, who is increasingly trying to balance his relationships with the West and Russia amid on-going economic woes, seems worried about the growing presence of pro-Putin forces in Belarus.

At a Glance EN

Moldova: A small, vulnerable economy

Publication type At a Glance
Date 26-07-2016
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Keyword poverty | Eastern Partnership | market economy | trade restriction | inflation | Russia | Moldova | association agreement (EU) | corruption

Summary The economy of this small former Soviet republic, located to the north-east of Romania, is influenced by its proximity to both the EU and Russia. In recent years, Moldova's economy has been affected by political instability, exacerbated by perceptions of corruption as well as drought, the Russian and Ukrainian crises, and trade restrictions imposed by Russia after Moldova signed an Association Agreement with the EU in 2014.

At a Glance EN
Imports of Belarusian textile products

Publication type: Briefing
Date: 12-07-2016
Author: Naja BENTZEN
Policy area: International Trade | Foreign Affairs

Summary: In the light of the ‘positive political developments’ in relations between the European Union and the Republic of Belarus – not least due to Belarusian authorities’ release of six political prisoners in August 2015 – the Commission proposes scrapping the existing autonomous quotas on imports of textiles and clothing originating in Belarus. To this end, the Commission proposes amending Regulation (EU) 2015/936, which lays down the rules for imports of textile products from certain third countries not covered by bilateral agreements, protocols or other arrangements, or by other specific Union import rules. As the use of autonomous quotas on imports of Belarusian textile products is very limited, their abolition is deemed to have limited impact on EU trade. The move aims to improve EU-Belarus bilateral relations which have long been impaired by Belarus’s poor human rights record.

NATO strategic communications - An evolving battle of narratives

Publication type: Briefing
Date: 04-07-2016
Author: Naja BENTZEN
Policy area: Security and Defence
Keyword: disinformation | institutional structure | social media | political propaganda | Russia | NATO | Ukraine | information warfare | EU-NATO cooperation | religious fundamentalism

Summary: NATO had for decades focused mainly on hard power while information aspects played a complementary but less visible role in its activity. However, the failure of the NATO forces to generate public support in Afghanistan highlighted the limitations of traditional military operations and set the Alliance on the road to developing a strategic communications (StratCom) concept. Russia’s hybrid warfare against Ukraine and its illegal annexation of Crimea forced NATO to respond to a new reality and sparked a number of questions about its current approach, not least regarding StratCom’s allegedly weak position within the Alliance. Meanwhile, the NATO-accredited Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, established in 2014, contributes to the Alliance’s communication efforts and works as a ‘hub for debate’ across various StratCom disciplines. In the face of increasingly aggressive propaganda campaigns from adversaries in the east (Russia) and the south (primarily ISIL/Da’esh), cooperation between NATO and the EU is set to increase.

Ukraine-NATO partnership in a time of crisis

Publication type: At a Glance
Date: 30-06-2016
Author: Naja BENTZEN
Policy area: Foreign Affairs
Keyword: national sovereignty | enlargement of an international organisation | prisoner of war | post-Cold War | national independence | Russia | NATO | military cooperation | Ukraine | military occupation | geopolitics

Summary: Sandwiched between Russia to the east and an expanding NATO to the west, Ukraine’s relations with NATO are closely interlinked with the country’s ties to Russia – and Russia’s relations with NATO. Ukraine’s NATO aspirations remain a key sticking point in this tense geopolitical situation. Please click here for the full publication in PDF format.

Safety of nuclear installations in Belarus

Publication type: At a Glance
Date: 02-06-2016
Author: Naja BENTZEN
Policy area: Foreign Affairs | Security and Defence
Keyword: nuclear safety | UN convention | energy cooperation | EU relations | siting of power stations | Lithuania | self-sufficiency in energy | environmental impact | Belarus | nuclear power station

Summary: Thirty years after the Chernobyl accident in neighbouring Ukraine, Belarus is building its first nuclear power plant (NPP). The first unit is set to become operational in 2018 with Russian assistance. However, as the project advances, safety concerns are mounting.

At a Glance: ES, DE, EN, FR, IT, PL
Multimedia: EN
Understanding conspiracy theory

Publication type: At a Glance
Date: 18-04-2016
Author: Naja BENTZEN
Policy area: Security and Defence
Keyword: public opinion | disinformation | Arab world | United States | impact of information technology | social media | political propaganda | Russia | Islam | anti-semitism | information warfare | religious fundamentalism
Summary: Conspiracy theory – the belief that a covert, influential agent has plotted an unexplained event – is by nature a social phenomenon. However, conspiracy theories can be used as a tool for spreading disinformation and propaganda with destabilising effects, as they have the potential to incite hatred and violence against a perceived enemy.

Belarus: A repressed economy

Publication type: At a Glance
Date: 02-03-2016
Author: Naja BENTZEN | Christian DIETRICH
Policy area: Foreign Affairs
Keyword: economic independence | price of energy | economic statistics | economic recession | Russia | financial aid | public debt | gross domestic product | economic reform | foreign policy | Belarus | economic situation
Summary: Following 19 years of positive economic growth, Belarus's economy contracted by 3.6% in 2015, partly due to the deep recession in Russia, the country's closest trading partner. With shrinking foreign reserves and an increasing need for loans and investment, Belarus is looking for alternative support in an attempt to temporarily stabilise its economy. However, it remains uncertain if the recession will prompt fundamental changes to President Lukashenko's repressive economic policies. Please click here for the full publication in PDF format.

Belarus: Human rights situation remains bleak

Publication type: At a Glance
Date: 23-02-2016
Author: Naja BENTZEN
Policy area: Foreign Affairs
Keyword: European neighbourhood policy | government violence | censorship | political prisoner | forced disappearance | death penalty | freedom of the press | common foreign and security policy | Belarus | human rights | economic sanctions
Summary: Belarus is the only European country where the death penalty is still applied. Opposition politicians have disappeared, the President has stifled all forms of budding protests with violence; and authorities continue to harass human rights activists and independent journalists. Despite the softening in EU-Belarus ties and the newly lifted sanctions, the overall human rights situation under President Lukashenko's autocratic rule has yet to improve.

Ukraine: What to watch for in 2016

Publication type: Briefing
Date: 12-02-2016
Author: Naja BENTZEN
Policy area: Foreign Affairs
Keyword: energy supply | disinformation | referendum | political situation | gas pipeline | Ukraine | foreign policy | financial aid | Russia | association agreement (EU) | military occupation | settlement of disputes | economic situation
Summary: With the entry into force of the EU-Ukraine Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) as part of the Association Agreement (AA) on 1 January 2016, Ukraine has taken a significant step forward on its long road to European integration. However, 2016 will entail a new series of tests for the country.

While Kyiv is under continued pressure to fulfil the February 2015 Minsk II ceasefire agreement, the interruption of electricity supply to Crimea — occupied by Russia since March 2014 — has added fuel to bilateral tensions over the peninsula, which could intensify in 2016. Ukraine's default on its US$3 billion debt to Russia, and Moscow's response will further strain bilateral ties.

The growing fragility of the pro-European government coalition could increase the likelihood of early parliamentary elections and impede the on-going reform process. At the same time, the national security situation – precarious overall as it is – could be further undermined by cyber-attacks.

In addition, a number of external developments, for example, the split within the EU vis-à-vis the Russia-backed 'Nord Stream 2' gas pipeline and the forthcoming Dutch referendum on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, planned for April 2016, will require attention.
Ukraine and the Minsk II agreement: On a frozen path to peace?

Publication type Briefing
Date 27-01-2016
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Keyword prisoner of war | decentralisation | autonomous movement | Ukraine | foreign policy | common foreign and security policy | humanitarian aid | constitutional revision | civil war | Russia | occupied territory | border war | settlement of disputes
Summary While Kyiv took an important step towards Europe with the entry into force of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area on 1 January 2016, Ukraine's path to peace with neighbouring Russia remains complicated. The implementation of the fragile Minsk II ceasefire agreement — negotiated by the leaders of France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia in February 2015 — has been extended into 2016.

Several unresolved issues will continue to pose challenges to the fulfilment of Minsk II in 2016. The death toll has now surpassed 9,000, and Russia continues to supply the rebels with ammunition, weaponry and fighters. In addition, Ukrainian pilot Nadiya Savchenko is still imprisoned in Russia over murder charges. At the same time, the practical consequences of the conflict are tangible in the rebel-held areas, where a humanitarian crisis is unfolding.

While the self-proclaimed republics in Donetsk and Luhansk had agreed to postpone local elections until February 2016 — a move that was welcomed by Kyiv, Moscow and Brussels — the next developments hinge on a political settlement. However, some analysts hope that recent Russian high-level appointments could give new impetus to negotiations.

This briefing brings up to date that of 16 July 2015, 'Ukraine: Follow-up of Minsk II – A fragile ceasefire'.

Switzerland's economy: Clouds on the horizon?

Publication type At a Glance
Date 10-12-2015
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Keyword national currency | migration control | referendum | exchange rate | occupational migration | immigration | gross domestic product | Switzerland | agreement (EU) | economic situation
Summary Switzerland is stable, prosperous, and has the most competitive economy in the world. However, the strong franc and the potential economic repercussions of the February 2014 referendum 'against mass immigration' pose new challenges to Swiss economic competitiveness and growth, which the government elected in October 2015 will have to address in the coming months.

Boosting the EU's role in the United Nations

Publication type At a Glance
Date 18-11-2015
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Global Governance
Keyword the EU's international role | powers of the EP | multilateral relations | UNO | common foreign and security policy
Summary Given the increasingly unstable security environment, upgrading the position of the European Union as a global actor appears more and more necessary. A new report by the EP's Committee on Foreign Affairs argues that the EU could play its foreign policy cards more effectively by boosting its role in the United Nations (UN), which marks its 70th anniversary this year.
Russia’s disinformation on Ukraine and the EU’s response

Publication type Briefing
Date 17-11-2015
Author Naja BENTZEN | Martin RUSSELL
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Keyword control of communications | pluralism in the media | virtual community | political propaganda | Russia | civil war | Ukraine | border war | common foreign and security policy | mass communications
Summary Manipulation of information is central to the Ukraine crisis, with some observers even referring to an ‘information war’. Coverage in Russia’s largely state-controlled domestic media bears the hallmarks of a sophisticated disinformation campaign. Internationally, multilingual news channel RT is Russia’s main media tool, projecting the Kremlin’s narrative to a global audience. In Russia itself, the vast majority of people subscribe uncritically to the version of events presented in the country’s media. The Russian media are also highly effective in neighbouring countries with large ethnic Russian populations such as the Baltic States. However, the global impact is more mitigated; while RT has garnered a huge international audience, Russia’s image has deteriorated substantially in many countries since the start of the Ukraine crisis. Proposals to counter Russian disinformation include increased funding for existing Western media broadcasting in Russian, such as the BBC World Service, and the creation of new ones, such as a jointly operated Russian-language TV channel offering not only news but also entertainment in order to compete with pro-Kremlin media. For its part, the EU has set up a strategic communication task force to develop a response; one of the first initiatives of the new team is a weekly review exposing Russian disinformation. This briefing updates an earlier edition of May 2015.

Understanding propaganda and disinformation

Publication type At a Glance
Date 13-11-2015
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs | Security and Defence | Human Rights
Keyword disinformation | political propaganda | Russia | NATO | common foreign and security policy
Summary Recent security-related developments have increased the focus on, and concern over, the use of biased and deceptive information as a strategic communication tool. The growing emphasis on countering manipulation of information calls for an equally attentive approach to the usage and definitions of the terms involved.

Swiss voters focused on migration ahead of polls

Publication type At a Glance
Date 13-10-2015
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Area of Freedom, Security and Justice | Foreign Affairs
Keyword political asylum | bicameral system | migration control | migration policy | political parties | direct democracy | referendum | political situation | free movement of workers | free movement of persons | EU relations | immigration | Switzerland | accession to the European Union
Summary Ahead of Switzerland’s general election on 18 October 2015, the European refugee crisis has reinvigorated the continuing debate in Switzerland on immigration and the future of the EU bilateral agreements. The 2014 referendum ‘against mass immigration’ is jeopardising the EU Swiss Free Movement of Persons Agreement (FMPA), and immigration and EU relations will remain leitmotifs in the new term.
Ukraine: Follow-up of Minsk II

Publication type: Briefing
Date: 16-07-2015
Author: Naja BENTZEN
Policy area: Foreign Affairs
Keyword: disinformation | autonomous movement | Ukraine | common foreign and security policy | regional security | defence policy | political prisoner | constitutional revision | international sanctions | Russia | Moldova | civil war | NATO | border war | settlement of disputes

Summary: Four months after leaders from France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia reached a 13-point 'Package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements' ('Minsk II') on 12 February 2015, the ceasefire is crumbling. The pressure on Kyiv to contribute to a de-escalation and comply with Minsk II continues to grow.

While Moscow still denies accusations that there are Russian soldiers in eastern Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin publicly admitted in March 2015 to having invaded Crimea. There is mounting evidence that Moscow continues to play an active military role in eastern Ukraine. The multidimensional conflict is eroding the country's stability on all fronts.

While the situation on both the military and the economic front is acute, the country is under pressure to conduct wide-reaching reforms to meet its international obligations. In addition, Russia is challenging Ukraine's identity as a sovereign nation state with a wide range of disinformation tools.

Against this backdrop, the international community and the EU are under increasing pressure to react. In the following pages, the current status of the Minsk II agreement is assessed and other recent key developments in Ukraine and beyond examined.

This briefing brings up to date that of 16 March 2015, 'Ukraine after Minsk II: the next level – Hybrid responses to hybrid threats?'.

Ukraine's economic challenges: From ailing to failing?

Publication type: In-Depth Analysis
Date: 18-06-2015
Author: Naja BENTZEN
Policy area: Foreign Affairs
Keyword: free-trade agreement | asymmetric warfare | Ukraine | external debt | common foreign and security policy | corruption | humanitarian aid | industrial region | economic recession | Russia | democratisation | occupied territory | cease-fire | economic situation | demographic analysis

Summary: Ukraine's downward economic spiral started long before Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula in March 2014. The economy has been struggling since the country gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Kindled by continuous mismanagement and fuelled by political instability, the current economic crisis finally flared up in response to mounting pressure from Moscow. Kyiv is dependent on foreign aid and must conduct wide-ranging reforms. However, Moscow has multiple economic levers over Ukraine and will likely continue to contribute to further destabilisation. Moreover, Ukraine's long-standing, home-grown problems will pose significant obstacles to Kyiv's efforts to break the vicious circle and move towards a functional market economy. Please click here for the full publication in PDF format.

Russia's manipulation of information on Ukraine and the EU's response

Publication type: Briefing
Date: 27-05-2015
Author: Martin RUSSELL | Naja BENTZEN
Policy area: Foreign Affairs
Keyword: control of communications | pluralism in the media | virtual community | political propaganda | mass media | Russia | Ukraine | border war | mass communications

Summary: Information has become central to the Ukraine crisis, with some analysts even referring to an 'information war' initiated by Russia. Coverage in Russia's largely state-controlled domestic media displays bias, often amounting to disinformation, though it is also increasingly sophisticated. Internationally, multilingual news channel RT is Russia's main media tool, projecting the Kremlin's narrative to a global audience.

In Russia itself, the vast majority of people subscribe uncritically to the version of events presented in the country's media. The Russian media are also highly effective in neighbouring countries with large ethnic Russian populations such as the Baltic States. However, the global impact is more mitigated; while RT has garnered a huge international audience, Russia's image has deteriorated substantially in many countries since the start of the Ukraine crisis.

At the same time, existing wide-reaching European media outlets are under pressure, either due to financial cuts or – in the case of EU-subsidised Euronews – links to pro-Russian business interests.

Proposals to counter Russian disinformation include increased funding for existing western media broadcasting in Russian, like the BBC World Service, or the creation of new ones, such as a jointly operated Russian-language TV channel offering not only news but also entertainment in order to compete with pro-Kremlin media.

Some of these proposals are being discussed at EU level, with the aim being for the European Council to adopt an action plan on strategic communication in June.
Ukraine joins the information war with Russia

Publication type At a Glance
Date 26-05-2015
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Keyword control of communications | pluralism in the media | Internet site | virtual community | political propaganda | mass media | Russia | Ukraine | border war | mass communications
Summary Ukraine's current policies and developments on the information front are characterised by the on-going crisis in eastern Ukraine and a massive Russian disinformation campaign. Kyiv is responding to Moscow's information measures with a top-down information policy approach, entering a game of competing narratives in which Russia has set the tone. However, recent independent grassroots media initiatives are gaining popularity among the population in Ukraine.

Turkey 2014: Work in progress

Publication type At a Glance
Date 11-05-2015
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Keyword Armenian question | Cyprus | national election | Community acquis | Turkey | independence of the judiciary | Kurdistan question | democratisation | information policy | accession to the European Union | corruption | communications policy
Summary 2014 got off to a seemingly good start: then Prime Minister, and current President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared it the 'Year of the European Union', demonstrating Ankara's commitment to its EU path. However, several challenges strained Turkey's ties to the EU over the course of the year. Accordingly, the Commission's 2014 progress report highlights various political concerns.

Moldova's political parties: caught between the EU and Russia

Publication type At a Glance
Date 16-03-2015
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Keyword political parties | referendum | political situation | foreign policy | parliamentary election | self-determination | territorial law | Moldova | Russia | association agreement (EU) | military manoeuvres | political coalition | political figure
Summary Moldova's political landscape reflects the country's deep split between EU and Russia. The main outcome of the parliamentary elections in November 2014 was a narrow victory for the pro-EU parties. The new minority government, appointed on 18 February, will continue Chisinau's European course, but remains fragile in light of persistent internal problems, the strengthened pro-Russian opposition as well as increasing economic, political and military pressure from Moscow.

Belarus: an autocracy quashing all opposition

Publication type At a Glance
Date 16-03-2015
Author Naja BENTZEN
Policy area Foreign Affairs
Keyword political situation | Ukraine | monocracy | foreign policy | political violence | common foreign and security policy | parliamentary election | electoral law | presidential election | Belarus | pluralism in the media | political opposition | Russia
Summary Since 1994, President Alexander Lukashenko has effectively stifled all dissent in Belarus, and his 'Belaya Rus' party is de facto the only valid political force in Minsk. In the short term, the splintered political opposition is unlikely to pose a serious challenge to Lukashenko, who can expect to be re-elected in the presidential elections later this year, despite the country's financial woes and a looming risk of political unrest.
Ukraine after Minsk II: the next level

Publication type: Briefing
Date: 16-03-2015
Author: Naja BENTZEN | Giulio SABBATI
Policy area: Foreign Affairs
Keyword: establishment of peace | United States | military intervention | autonomous movement | Ukraine | foreign policy | common foreign and security policy | communications policy | Russia | civil war | NATO | border war | military occupation | settlement of disputes | economic situation

Summary: One month after leaders from France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia reached a 13-point peace agreement in Minsk on 12 February 2015 – Minsk II, a follow-up to the September 2014 Minsk Protocol – the ceasefire is shaky, although it has at least reduced the number of deaths in combat, and the pressure on the international community to act continues.

While Russia denies accusations that it has been sending troops and weapons to support separatists in Ukraine's east, the undeclared ‘hybrid war’ is developing on all fronts. In the face of a shaky ceasefire and Ukraine's crumbling economy, the EU, the US and major international actors are discussing possible political, military, and economic responses to the deteriorating crisis. At the same time, EU Member States and NATO are stepping up efforts to counter Russia's ‘information warfare’.

The on-going crisis in Ukraine erupted after former President Viktor Yanukovych refused to sign an Association Agreement with the EU in November 2013 and sought closer ties to Russia. Russia's active role in the eastern Ukraine crisis has exposed divides in the EU and the international community on how to react to hybrid threats. It comes at a time when the effectiveness of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy, including the Eastern Partnership, is being questioned.

This briefing is a follow-up to the 12 February 2015 briefing ‘Minsk peace agreement: still to be consolidated on the ground’.

Kosovo's EU integration: progress or stagnation?

Publication type: At a Glance
Date: 02-03-2015
Author: Naja BENTZEN
Policy area: Foreign Affairs
Keyword: organised crime | political situation | unemployment | independence of the judiciary | occupational migration | rule of law | parliamentary election | accession to the European Union | corruption | stabilisation and association agreement | Kosovo

Summary: On paper, Kosovo moved closer towards the EU in 2014, as the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) was initialled in July and the dialogue with Serbia continued. In practice, political deadlock after the June 2014 elections delayed key reforms. The rule of law causes concern, organised crime and corruption hamper development, and joblessness has sparked a mass exodus.

At a Glance

Minsk peace agreement: still to be consolidated on the ground

Publication type: Briefing
Date: 12-02-2015
Author: Evarts ANOSOVS | Naja BENTZEN
Policy area: Foreign Affairs | Security and Defence
Keyword: public opinion | military intervention | war victim | autonomous movement | Russia | EU financing | Ukraine | common foreign and security policy | military occupation | settlement of disputes | economic sanctions

Summary: On 12 February, after more than 16 hours of negotiations in Minsk, the leaders of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine reached an agreement to end fighting in eastern Ukraine. Representatives of the OSCE, Ukraine, Russia, and the pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine signed the deal, which includes a ceasefire in eastern Ukraine, to begin on 15 February, followed by the withdrawal of heavy weapons.

In a joint declaration, Angela Merkel, François Hollande, Vladimir Putin and Petro Poroshenko stated their commitment to respecting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The document states that regular meetings will be held to ensure the fulfilment of the Minsk agreements.

The tenor of most official international reactions was cautiously optimistic. International leaders said the deal gave ‘hope’, but at the same time emphasised that the agreement must now be implemented on the ground. Intense fighting continued during the talks, with the strategic transit hub of Debaltseve still contested. Moscow denies Ukraine's accusations that Russia is supplying troops and weapons to separatists fighting for the territory which Putin calls 'New Russia'.

The on-going crisis in Ukraine erupted after former President Viktor Yanukovych refused to sign an Association Agreement (AA) with the EU in November 2013 and sought closer ties to Russia. Following radical protests from pro-Western groups, Yanukovych stepped down and fled to Russia. Moscow responded by annexing the Crimea in March 2014, sparking wide-ranging EU sanctions.

Briefing

Source: © European Union, 2019 - EP
**Who wants to arm Ukraine?**

**Publication type** Briefing  
**Date** 10-02-2015  
**Author** Naja BENTZEN  
**Policy area** Foreign Affairs | Security and Defence  
**Keyword** United States | France | Finland | Ukraine | international conflict | Baltic States | rearmament | European External Action Service | Poland | Germany | international sanctions | Russia | military cooperation | public consultation | settlement of disputes

**Summary** Against the backdrop of the intensifying conflict in eastern Ukraine, Kyiv's calls for defensive military assistance are becoming increasingly urgent. Ahead of the peace talks in Minsk on 11 February, where Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany plan to negotiate a peace deal after months of fighting, fears of an escalation of the already violent conflict are mounting. Russia denies accusations by Western countries and Ukraine that Moscow is sending troops to eastern Ukraine and supplying the rebels, and Putin has warned the West that sending arms to Ukraine could worsen the crisis. Although US President Barack Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel agreed to continue sanctions and diplomatic measures, pressure in the US to send defensive weapons to Ukraine is increasing. Some EU countries – including Germany, France, the UK, and Finland – remain very cautious in the face of these demands, warning that sending weapons to Ukraine could escalate the conflict. Lithuania and Estonia, however, have spoken out in favour of sending arms to Ukraine, and Poland has signalled support for the US position, albeit stating that military support would be 'worth avoiding'. On a similar note, experts from renowned think-tanks are divided on the issue. While some believe that the West should not provide arms to Ukraine, arguing that the West still needs Russia as a partner, others warn that Russia could be preparing for 'another major Russian/separatist offensive' in Ukraine, and thus urge direct military assistance in the form of defensive lethal weapons.

**International cooperation in (Sub-)Arctic Europe**

**Publication type** At a Glance  
**Date** 09-02-2015  
**Author** Naja BENTZEN  
**Policy area** Global Governance  
**Keyword** exploitation of resources | United States | cross-border cooperation | international cooperation | climate change policy | sustainable development | Russia | Arctic | common foreign and security policy | Council of the Baltic Sea States | summit meeting | Nordic Council

**Summary** The dynamics in and the perceived relevance of regional cooperation in the European (Sub-)Arctic reflect current and anticipated future developments in the region. While the Arctic Council mirrors the increasing interest and potential future challenges in the region, other cooperation fora are less likely to face major changes or attract attention any time soon. They nevertheless remain very relevant, not least for engaging with Moscow at a time when ties with Russia are strained.

**Arctic Council: navigating global change**

**Publication type** At a Glance  
**Date** 09-02-2015  
**Author** Naja BENTZEN  
**Policy area** Global Governance  
**Keyword** institutional structure | United States | law of the sea | international meeting | environmental protection | sustainable development | Arctic | indigenous population | Canada | climate change | EU relations | international cooperation | territorial law | Russia | institutional activity

**Summary** Climate change and globalisation have increased the focus on the Arctic region and thus on the Arctic Council (AC) as a circumpolar player. Ahead of the ministerial meeting in April 2015 – where the AC will decide on the EU's bid for observer status – preparations for the US to take over the rotating chairmanship for 2015-17 are rekindling debate on the AC's future priorities and role.

**Ukraine: political parties and the EU**

**Publication type** At a Glance  
**Date** 09-01-2015  
**Author** Naja BENTZEN  
**Policy area** International Trade | Global Governance | Democracy | Foreign Affairs | Security and Defence  
**Keyword** EU aid | political opposition | political parties | Russia | Ukraine | association agreement (EU) | democratisation | international conflict

**Summary** Ukraine's political landscape mirrors the country's deep divide between the West and Russia. The main result of the parliamentary elections on 26 October 2014 was the victory of Ukraine's pro-European parties. The 'European Ukraine Coalition' took office amid mounting economic and (Russian) military pressure on one side, and urgent calls for reforms and 'deterrence' on the other.
**EU-Georgia Association Agreement**

**Publication type** At a Glance  
**Date** 05-12-2014  
**Author** Naja BENTZEN  
**Policy area** International Trade | Global Governance | Democracy | Foreign Affairs | Security and Defence  
**Keyword** European neighbourhood policy | free-trade area | economic reform | joint body (EU) | political reform | visa policy | ratification of an agreement | territorial law | Georgia | Russia | signature of an agreement | association agreement (EU) | settlement of disputes  
**Summary** Since the 2003 Rose Revolution, Georgia has continually strengthened its ties with the EU. The June 2014 signature of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement sparked increasing Russian pressure on the beleaguered government in Tbilisi over its pro-European foreign policy course.

**UN Convention on Children's Rights: 25 years on**

**Publication type** At a Glance  
**Date** 20-11-2014  
**Author** Naja BENTZEN  
**Policy area** Development and Humanitarian Aid | Human Rights  
**Keyword** poverty | infant mortality | the EU's international role | basic needs | child protection | trafficking in human beings | child labour | children's rights | drinking water | gender equality | UN convention | access to education | paedophilia  
**Summary** This month marks the 25th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the first international treaty to recognise children as human beings with innate rights. Since 1989, conditions for children have improved, but millions remain unprotected.