

*CULT Committee Public Hearing on
Scientific and Academic Culture to Counter Radicalism and Fake News*

FAKE NEWS – A CYNICAL APPROACH TO POLITICS

Summary

Nikolay NAYDENOV

Fake news” is a sophisticated method for subversive actions which lies at the heart of modern hybrid warfare. Specifically, “fake news” is strategically arranged misinformation with three consecutive goals: (i) changing the political attitudes and feelings of people; (ii) destroying the extant political order, and (iii) suggesting radical political alternatives.

To attain its goals, “fake news” uses: (i) rampant political lies; (ii) selected parts of the truth about a politically relevant case, and (iii) overexposure of the truth about a selected case to distract the attention from politically disadvantageous cases. This play with truth strives to root itself in the social environment and gain political importance by using two types of social predispositions. First, “fake news” opposes the highest political authorities to arouse the sympathy of people who are disaffected with the political and economic elites. Second, “fake news” activates political illusions, myths, and metaphors; particular historical complexes; and conflicting identities, all of which contradict the dominant political value system and institutional setting. Such mechanisms flourish best on the relics of communist ideological heritage.

Fake news’s strategy is facilitated by recent contradictory trends in western public culture which affect: (i) the areas of cultural and gender difference; (ii) the place of religion in democracy; (iii) the compatibility between different cultures and between each of them and democracy; (iv) the conception of tolerance; (v) the freedom of speech in principal and in practices; (vi) the popular portrayal of ecology and reality, etc. These trends create a glaring discrepancy between (i) public narratives and private lives, (ii) declared diversity and growing unification, (iii) principle of separation between state and church, and the obsession of the state with religions; (iv) the glamorous claims on freedom of speech and the rigid taboos blocking democratic reason, (iv) the cult of empiricism in social sciences and the lack of conceptual orientation of society, etc. This context (i) polarizes the EU societies politically and socially, (ii) stimulates separatist and exit tendencies, (iii) radicalizes even some well integrated third generation Muslims, (iv) breeds populism and global radicalism. All these trends generate problems which are “fake news” for democratic reason and damage the immunity against “fake news” generated abroad.

“Fake news” allures political actors disproportionate influence on the political arena. This is why countries with low living standards, heavy ideological or religious heritage, authoritarian regimes, deficit of public control, and lack of transparency are more inclined to use “fake news”. The probability this inclination becoming reality is higher if such a country is rich in natural resources. The latter allow “investments” in “fake news” despite low living standard.

Initially, “fake news” disseminates through deliberately created media, especially web sites. Involuntarily, official media may also spread “fake news” by disproving or

criticising it. However, the most substantial life of “fake news” begins when it multiplies by the people themselves via social media and personal communication. This process remains beyond the reach of public control, which makes it a powerful tool in the design of “fake news”.

As an epiphenomenon of hybrid warfare “fake news” cannot be properly understood or neutralized outside its hybrid frame. Only the tools that are effective against hybrid warfare could be effective against “fake news”. Therefore, political and other social sciences should initiate a thorough analysis of the elements, mechanisms, and aims of hybrid warfare as the real context and frame of “fake news”. The first step is to analyse the political relevance of key areas of social life and their usage in “fake news”. The second step includes a well-structured classification of the extant mechanisms and elaboration of a list of well-tuned indicators which identify all metamorphoses of “fake news”. The third step includes a systematization of the reliable investigation methods and effective ICT tools for counteraction. Finally, permanent feedback on the effects of all these analyses and measures should be developed.