Committee on Foreign Affairs

2018/2115(INI)

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DRAFT REPORT

on a European Parliament recommendation to the Council and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy concerning taking stock of the follow-up taken by the EEAS two years after the EP report on EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties
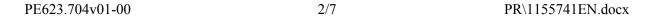(2018/2115(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rapporteur: Anna Elżbieta Fotyga

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DRAFT EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RECOMMENDATION

to the Council and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy concerning taking stock of the follow-up taken by the EEAS two years after the EP report on EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties
(2018/2115(INI))

The European Parliament,

–	having regard to the European Council conclusions of 28 June and 18 October 2018,

–	having regard to the Commission communication of 26 April 2018 entitled 'Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach' (COM(2018)0236),

–	having regard to EU-wide Code of Practice on Disinformation published on 26 September 2018,

–	having regard to its resolution of 23 November 2016 on EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties[1],

–	having regard to the Joint Communication by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Commission of 6 April 2016 entitled 'Joint framework on countering hybrid threats: a European Union response' (JOIN(2016)0018),

–	having regard to the Commission communication of 20 April 2016 on delivering on the European Agenda on Security to fight against terrorism and pave the way towards an effective and genuine Security Union (COM(2016)0230),

–	having regard to the European Endowment for Democracy feasibility study on Russian Language Media Initiatives in the Eastern Partnership and Beyond, entitled 'Bringing Plurality and Balance to the Russian Language Media Space',

–	having regard to the report of the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) of 18 May 2015 entitled 'The European Union in a changing global environment – A more connected, contested and complex world', and to the ongoing work on a new EU Global Security Strategy,

–	having regard to the EU Action Plan on Strategic Communication of 22 June 2015,

–	having regard to Rule 113 of its Rules of Procedure,

–	having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A8-0000/2018),

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[1]OJ C 224, 27.6.2018, p. 58.

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1. Recommends the following to the Council and the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy:

State of play 2018 – Tackling information warfare

   a)   to bear in mind that freedom of speech and expression as well as media pluralism should be at the heart of democratic societies, and provide the best safeguards against hostile propaganda;

   b)   to consider developing a binding legal framework both at EU and international level for tackling hybrid warfare, including cyber and information warfare, the need for which was demonstrated in particular by the hostile actions of Russia in these areas;

   c)   to support the growing number of state institutions, think tanks, NGOs dealing with propaganda and disinformation, and ensure that EU strategic communication becomes a matter of high priority on the European agenda; calls on the VP/HR and the Commission to become more closely involved in this area;

   d)   to remind the Member States that continue to deny the existence of strategic propaganda to recognise it and take proactive measures in order to counteract and debunk it;

Types of misinformation, disinformation and propaganda targeting the EU and its neighbours

   e)   to recognise the work done at various levels to identify the types of influence and tools used against the EU and its neighbours, and to shift attention to in-depth analysis of their impact and effectiveness in order to develop measures to counteract them;

   f)   to focus on the continuously growing sophistication of the tools used to spread fake news, including the new ways of spreading propaganda by using multiple low-level websites, portals and TV stations to disseminate the main narratives; is concerned about Russia's activities in this context;

Industry and social media

   g)   to pay special attention to social media which, in spite of their efforts to the contrary, are considered the most common tool for spreading disinformation and hostile propaganda;

   h)   to regulate, together with the Member States, the actions of social media companies and ensure their full transparency and accountability, in particular

making it possible to uncover the identity and location not only of the authors, but also the sponsors of the submitted political content;

i) to urge social media companies to cooperate closely with state authorities in all investigations into the alleged use of their platforms for hostile purposes, and to perform transparent audits of entities which have been found to spread disinformation and propaganda;

j) to bear in mind that the banning of suspicious accounts or deletion of inappropriate content may be seen as censorship, and therefore make sure that such actions are carried out transparently, in cooperation with the competent authorities and civil society, and with full insight into the reasons for doing so;

Best practices

k) to continue to develop greater resilience and the ability to respond to threats in real time, develop pre-emptive measures and think one step ahead, rather than merely reacting to and analysing attacks that have already taken place;

l) to pay special attention to the importance of not only debunking, but also ensuring the clear attribution of such attacks, including publicly naming the perpetrators, their sponsors and the goals they seek to achieve, as well as measuring the effects of these attacks on the targeted audience;

m) to involve the civil society and expert community in further enhancement of measures aimed at fact-checking and exposure of disinformation, deepening of research and analysis of information manipulation;

European approach

n) to acknowledge the tangible results achieved by the East StratCom Task Force; to continue to support the EU's East StratCom Task Force which, since its creation, has debunked over 4 000 cases of disinformation campaigns on a wide variety of subjects;

o) to turn the East StratCom Task Force into a fully-fledged unit, and to provide adequate financial and personnel resources which will significantly increase its potential, effectiveness and quality of work;

p) to address the current deficiencies in the East StratCom Task Force, including lack of regional expertise, a large turnover of staff and lack of institutional continuity, and to ensure adequate financial resources and an adequate organisational structure, as this is the only way to ensure full professionalism, effectiveness and results;

q) to invite Member States which have not done so already to assign their own National Experts to the East StratCom Task Force;

r) to engage the EU Representations inside the EU, and the EU Delegations outside the EU, in supporting the work of the East StratCom Task Force,

including by providing translations of their publications in local languages;

s) to focus on the accession countries and partners in the EU neighbourhood, which are often on the front line in terms of exposure to Russian propaganda;

t) to put counteracting strategic communications as a recurring item on the agenda, and to carry out a periodical review of EU policy on this issue;

u) to propose to the next European Council and the Commission that counteracting strategic propaganda is given a separate portfolio in the new Commission with adequate support from a specialised agency;

v) to link existing national and local specialised centres, think tanks, NGOs and other actors and institutions dealing with strategic propaganda into an EU-wide network that would help coordinate their actions and gather their findings in one place; to assign adequate resources to this undertaking; stresses that this network should be open to like-minded partners of the EU;

Safeguarding elections from hostile propaganda

w) to strongly condemn the interference of third parties in elections and referendums, and the use of bots, trolls and fake accounts in political campaigns; underlines the ability of democratic societies to make their own sovereign political choices;

x) to invite the Member States to share data about any foreign interference in electoral processes and exchange best practices on counteracting it in order to increase resilience to such interference;

y) to invite Member States to ensure that electoral laws take into account possible threats stemming from cyber attacks and hostile propaganda, and stresses that these laws should be adequately amended to enable them to effectively counteract such threats;

z) to invite Member States to adapt their electoral rules on online campaigning, and to monitor and evaluate the transparency features in relation to political advertising introduced by the online platforms;

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2. Instructs its President to forward this recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and, for information, to the EEAS and NATO, as well as the President, Government and Parliament of Russia.

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