

Fighting Russian Disinformation in Europe

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Specifically, we would like to mention organizations, whose research, articles or investigations were quoted or mentioned in report:

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- **EDMO**, for their comprehensive analysis of disinformation trends and narratives in Europe.
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- **EU disinfo Lab**, for their extensive work in identifying and exposing disinformation campaigns.
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- **Reset**, for their commitment to addressing digital threats to democracy.
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- **Qurium**, for their work in digital forensics and protection of independent media.
- **Debunk.org**, for their efforts in exposing the financial support behind disinformation campaigns.

ISE Group as a think tank with Ukrainian roots, we express our deep appreciation to all our European and American colleagues, partners, and organizations who have dedicated their work to fighting disinformation. Your commitment to truth and transparency has made this research possible.

Finally, we would like to extend our gratitude to all those who were quoted or mentioned in this work. Your dedication to combating disinformation daily is commendable and has greatly enriched our understanding of this complex issue.

Together, we can make this world a cleaner place, fight against lies, and reveal the truth. Thank you for your invaluable contributions.

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About ISE Group and Research Team



The ISE Group is a Think Tank and Innovation Ecosystem Builder in Europe with offices in Warsaw and Kyiv. It focuses on the Digital Economy, Digital Democracy, Innovation, and Policy Making.

The organization aims to build partnerships between corporations, government agencies, universities, R&D centers, and startups. The organization sets up a communication platform for key ecosystem players, including the government, business, startups, universities, and scientists.

The ISE Group is committed to shaping the future through innovation, startups, and entrepreneurship, with a special focus on the digital economy and digital democracy.

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Foreword



Elena Malitskaya, CEO of ISE Group, Principal Investigator
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Uniting efforts in fighting Russian Disinformation

In the digital age, Russia stands as a formidable purveyor of disinformation, a weaponized force that threatens our societies for the next five years. This insidious practice undermines truth, divides communities, and erodes trust. Our mission, through this research and collective effort, is clear: to unify civil society, media, and academia in combating disinformation.

Together, we seek to understand its methods, implement preventive measures, and raise awareness. This journey demands collaboration, innovation, and unwavering resolve to defend truth and democracy against the onslaught of Russian disinformation, emerging stronger and more united in our resolve.



Alexander Romanishyn,
ISE Group, Policy Advisor
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Waves of disinformation are triple in world

As we confront a pivotal year for democracy, characterized by significant elections across Europe and over 60 countries worldwide, including more than 10 European nations, the urgency to address politically driven disinformation has never been more pronounced. The specter of disinformation looms large, threatening the very fabric of our digital society.

This research serves as a clarion call to action, presenting a blueprint for a collective endeavor to combat the scourge of disinformation. Drawing upon cases of disinformation in four countries, we have identified the primary goals and narratives propagated by the Russian propaganda machine. In response, we propose an action plan, complete with the requisite tools and strategies necessary to fortify our defenses against disinformation.

Let us forge ahead together, guided by resolve and unity, as we endeavor to safeguard our democratic institutions against the pollution of our digital world.



Tommaso Canetta,
Coordinator of the fact-
checking activities of EDMO

The necessity of European fact-checking network

The importance of fact-checking organizations, in their consistent activity of debunking false content (news, statements, videos, images, audio etc.), analyzing disinformation narratives, prebunking and in general countering disinformation cannot be overstated. The collaboration among organizations from different countries in Europe, in the frame of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) fact-checking network, has been an asset in understanding the evolution of mis- and disinformation on a continental level.

Through EDMO monthly briefs, investigations and other publications and activities about the most relevant mis- and disinformation phenomena (the pandemic, the Russian aggression against Ukraine, climate change, migration, EU, the Hamas/Israel conflict and so on) the knowledge of the fact-checking organizations was gathered and shared publicly, increasing the awareness of public opinions, relevant stakeholders and institutions, and providing useful information to better shape policies and actions to counter disinformation.

Executive Summary

The research is a comprehensive analysis of the role of Russia as a disinformation machine in European politics, with a particular focus on Poland, Germany, Austria, and France. It explores the main narratives used by Russia, the impact of these narratives on the political and socio-economic relationships in these countries, and the specific cases of disinformation. It is structured into three distinct parts, each addressing different facets of the disinformation landscape and the collective European response.

This Research is centered on the following objectives:

1. Identify the main tasks of Russian propaganda in 4 selected countries.
2. Examine the primary narratives used by Russia to achieve these tasks.
3. Present practical cases illustrating how these narratives are disseminated, including sources, tactics, and techniques.

Part 1: Russia's Disinformation Strategies

The initial section sets the stage by outlining Russia's disinformation strategies within European politics. It identifies the primary objectives of these campaigns, which include undermining support for Ukraine, creating divisions within EU member states, and advocating for the lifting of sanctions against Russia.

Part 2: Disinformation Across Four Key European Countries

The second part of the report offers a country-by-country analysis, examining the specific disinformation narratives and their societal impacts. In Poland, the report notes the exploitation of economic crisis sentiments to suggest that the U.S. and Western Europe profit from the war in Ukraine. It also discusses the portrayal of Ukrainians as a threat to Polish society and culture, a narrative designed to foster anti-Ukrainian sentiment. Germany, Austria, and France are also scrutinized for their unique disinformation challenges. For instance, the "Doppelgaenger" operation in France is highlighted as a significant disinformation campaign with the potential to influence public opinion and policy. The report also touches on the narrative that Crimea rightfully belongs to Russia, a stance echoed by far-right French politicians.

Part 3: Combating Disinformation in Europe

The final section provides actionable policy recommendations to combat disinformation. It emphasizes the need for stronger oversight of online platforms, improved content assessment capabilities in all EU languages, and enhanced cooperation among EU institutions, media, and citizens. The report calls for increased investment in research and innovation to develop new technologies for content verification and to understand the socio-economic impacts of disinformation.

The report concludes with a call to action for promoting media literacy and critical thinking among EU citizens to build resilience against disinformation campaigns. It underscores the importance of a coordinated European response to safeguard democratic processes and societal values from the corrosive effects of disinformation.

IN SUMMARY: the report provides a detailed examination of the mechanisms through which Russia disseminates disinformation in Europe, the narratives employed, their impacts on public opinion and socio-economic relations, and the countermeasures that can be taken to mitigate these effects. It serves as a crucial resource for policymakers, researchers, and the public in understanding and addressing the challenges posed by state-sponsored disinformation in Europe.

Part 1. Russia as a Disinformation Machine



DISINFORMATION
is modern warfare

DISINFORMATION
=
WEAPON



1.9 BILLION USD
was Russian budget
for disinformation
in Europe in 2022



Russia tests information
warfare in Ukraine
for global aggression

Disinformation is modern warfare.

The transition from traditional propaganda to digital disinformation has been marked by a significant shift in tactics, particularly in the context of Russia's strategic disinformation campaigns. Rooted in state-sponsored propaganda, Russian disinformation has evolved to leverage the digital age, using the internet and social media platforms to spread false information and influence public opinion and social-economic processes.

The Russian government has strategically utilized disinformation as a tactical weapon in its aggression against Ukraine leveraging a complex disinformation infrastructure, allocating significant budgets, and employing specific tactics to spread false narratives and manipulate public opinion.

Disinformation infrastructure. Russia's disinformation infrastructure is a complex and multifaceted system designed to spread false information and propaganda both domestically and internationally. It is deeply rooted in state propaganda and is empowered further by the government's use of official accounts to share fake news. The Russian government uses social media platforms to spread disinformation, often through automated bots or trolls. The disinformation infrastructure also includes a network of influencers, organizations, anonymous Telegram channels, media outlets and content creators, that are not officially connected to the Russian government but spread its narratives, often without disclosing their ties to Russia.¹ This ecosystem is designed to amplify the reach and impact of disinformation, making it a formidable tool in Russia's geopolitical strategy.

Budgets on Disinformation. The Russian government has consistently allocated significant resources to its disinformation and propaganda efforts, with more than \$1.5 billion USD spent in 2021 and an increase to \$1.9 billion USD in 2022, exceeding the original budget by a quarter.² For 2023, the budget was set at \$1.6 billion USD. The majority of these funds were allocated to three main agencies: the All-Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company, RT (Russia Today), and Rossiya Segodnya.

Considering the previous budget allocations and the strategic importance Russia places on disinformation as a tool for geopolitical influence, it is expected that the budget for 2024 could be higher than in previous years. It's worth considering covert operations, indirect funding through proxy sources, and other hidden costs associated with Russia's disinformation infrastructure.

Russian Disinformation Tactics. Russian disinformation tactics have been employed strategically to gain an advantage in geopolitically important countries, including Ukraine, Poland, Germany, Austria, and France. These tactics are part of Russia's information warfare, recognized as a key element of modern military action. The disinformation campaigns often involve the creation and dissemination of false or misleading content through various channels, particularly the internet and social media³.

1. <https://miburo.substack.com/p/russias-propaganda-and-disinformation>

2. <https://www.debunk.org/coining-lies-state-budget-financing-of-russian-propaganda>

3. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE198.html>

In Poland, Russian disinformation has been reported to include the creation of fake websites and the spread of debunked narratives. These narratives are often rebroadcast by legitimate news outlets or repeated on social media⁴. **In Germany**, the dominance of mainstream media has acted as a check on the spread of disinformation to some extent. However, there have been instances of Russian disinformation linked to specific events aimed at pressuring Berlin⁵. **In Austria**, the battle against disinformation is reportedly being lost, with misleading and hateful content surging online. The far-right "Freedom Party" is known for spreading Russian narratives, particularly after signing a contract with "United Russia" in 2016⁶. **France** has uncovered a wide-ranging Russian disinformation campaign aimed at undermining Western support for Ukraine. This campaign involved spreading pro-Russian content, impersonating media and government websites, and coordinating fake accounts to spread the created content⁷.

THE MAIN HYPOTHESIS SUGGESTS that these hybrid threats, particularly information warfare, have been tested by Russia in Ukraine to evaluate its concepts, methods, and effectiveness in preparation for aggressive actions in other countries. Recognizing information warfare as a key element of modern military action, Russia actively develops capabilities in this domain.

THIS PAPER AIMS to identify, analyze, and assess Russian actions against Ukraine, with a specific focus on information warfare, and particularly on the social-economic and political impact of Russian disinformation campaigns in Europe.

Goals of Russian disinformation in Europe

The research identifies three main tasks of Russian disinformation:

1. Advocate for the lifting of sanctions against Russia.
2. Undermine support for Ukraine by demonizing its government and accusing it of Nazism and corruption.
3. Sow divisions within countries supporting Ukraine, portraying financial support and sanctions as failing strategies that harm civil society.

MAIN GOALS OF RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA



4. <https://warsawinstitute.org/disinformation-and-democracy-navigating-the-2023-political-landscape-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>

5. <https://www.rferl.org/a/germany-aggressive-russian-disinformation/32579614.html>

6. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-10-10/death-threats-and-disinformation-the-everyday-poison-of-politics-in-europe>

7. <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-accuses-russia-of-wide-ranging-disinformation-campaign/>

Role of Digital Platforms in Spreading Disinformation

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is being waged and shared online to an unprecedented extent. Social media has played a significant role in previous wars, but Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated how social media is changing the way war can be chronicled, experienced, and understood⁸.

The digital landscape has undergone a radical transformation, fundamentally changing the way information is produced and disseminated. This shift has triggered significant challenges, exemplified by the rampant spread of disinformation in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Algorithms on the dissemination of false information.

Fabricated content, particularly in the political realm, travels faster and farther than truthful content. For instance, false information is 70% more likely to be retweeted than accurate news, and Facebook posts containing falsehoods receive six times more engagement than factual content⁹.

This disparity underscores the inherent bias towards misinformation within online ecosystems. Moreover, feedback loops between social media platforms and traditional media amplify disinformation, potentially influencing public discourse.

Strategies employed by Russian to disinformation across digital platforms.

Russian disinformation campaigns have been identified across various platforms, including Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube. These platforms have been instrumental in disseminating false information to justify Russia's actions and to undermine the sovereignty of Ukraine and other European nations.

Table - the digital platforms used to spread Russian disinformation in Europe:

DIGITAL PLATFORM	DESCRIPTION
RT (Russia Today) and Sputnik	State-funded media outlets that have been sanctioned but continue to operate under new names and disseminate disinformation within the EU ¹⁰ .
YouTube 401.7 million signed-in monthly active users (MAUs) in Europe ¹¹	Utilized to propagate Russian narratives and disinformation ¹²
Facebook 408 million MAUs in Europe ¹³	A channel for spreading false narratives and propaganda.
X (formerly Twitter) globally, Twitter has 100.9 million MAUs ¹⁴	This platform has seen a growth in Russian propaganda, especially after changes in content moderation policies ¹⁵ .
TikTok 150 million MAUs in Europe ¹⁶	Fake accounts on TikTok have been used to spread disinformation and amplify pro-Russian narratives.
Various News Websites	Over 200 websites in English, more than 50 in German, 40 in Italian, and 39 in French have been detected spreading Russian disinformation ¹⁷
Messaging Apps (e.g., Telegram)	These apps have been used to disseminate disinformation and coordinate actions. They also provide an opportunity to examine the true extent of the Russian media's reach.

8. <https://jsis.washington.edu/news/russia-disinformation-ukraine/>

9. <https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/mit-sloan-research-about-social-media-misinformation-and-elections>

10. <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/eng/news/2023/11/24/717421/>

11. <https://musically.com/2023/02/20/youtube-meta-twitter-and-spotify-sort-of-reveal-their-eu-user-figures/>

12. <https://aspeniaonline.it/russian-disinformation-in-europe-justifying-violence-and-spreading-propaganda/>

13. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/745400/facebook-europe-mau-by-quarter/>

14. <https://musically.com/2023/02/20/youtube-meta-twitter-and-spotify-sort-of-reveal-their-eu-user-figures/>

15. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2023/09/2/7418157/>

16. <https://musically.com/2023/02/20/youtube-meta-twitter-and-spotify-sort-of-reveal-their-eu-user-figures/>

17. <https://aspeniaonline.it/russian-disinformation-in-europe-justifying-violence-and-spreading-propaganda/>

Russian propaganda and disinformation activities are produced in large volumes and are distributed across a large number of channels, both via online and traditional media. The producers and disseminators of this content include paid internet “trolls” who post inflammatory, insincere, or manipulative messages via online chat rooms, discussion forums, and comments sections on news and other websites. Strategies have also included more targeted approaches. For example, in 2020, [Facebook identified a Russian military operation targeting Ukraine](#) that had created fake **Facebook** profiles posing as journalists and attempted to spread disinformation in a way that appeared to be more credible¹⁸.

In a more overt manner, the Russian government orchestrates synchronized information and disinformation initiatives through its official social media channels. To illustrate, within a specific timeframe from February 25th to March 3rd, 2022, 75 **Twitter** accounts associated with the Russian government, boasting a collective audience of 7.3 million followers, generated substantial engagement, including 35.9 million retweets, 29.8 million likes, and 4 million replies across 1,157 tweets. Notably, approximately 75% of these tweets focused on Ukraine, actively propagating disinformation narratives that challenge Ukraine’s sovereignty, highlight alleged war crimes committed by other nations, and disseminate conspiracy theories¹⁹. Additionally, Russian government-linked accounts have been implicated in “typo squatting,” a tactic involving the registration of websites with intentionally misspelled names resembling legitimate news organizations. For instance, these actors created a counterfeit website mirroring Poland’s *Gazeta Wyborcza* to disseminate false information regarding reported atrocities in Bucha²⁰.

One of the primary conduits of disinformation is social media and online platforms. For instance, **YouTube** has been identified as a major channel for the spread of disinformation and misinformation globally. Despite policies aimed at addressing and removing misleading content, the effectiveness of these measures remains a topic of debate²¹.

Similarly, **Google’s** search platform has been implicated in the spread of fake news, with instances such as the brief listing of 4chan as a top news hit after the Las Vegas mass shooting serving as examples. **TikTok’s** unique features have also been exploited to disseminate COVID-19 misinformation, with the platform’s algorithms and user tactics contributing to the problem²². **Facebook**, too, has been criticized for its role in the spread of misinformation, with studies revealing that misinformation on the platform received six times more clicks than factual news during the 2020 election.

The engagement of these platforms in spreading disinformation can be attributed to several key factors:

Business Model. The digital advertising market, worth €625 billion, thrives on clicks, views, and engagement, inadvertently incentivizing the spread of disinformation²³.

Algorithms. The technological features of social media platforms, particularly their algorithms, play a significant role in the spread of misinformation.

Social Engagement Metrics. Higher engagement often leads to the sharing of questionable content without fact-checking.

Regulation. Attempts to regulate social media platforms have often been met with resistance from Big Tech companies.

Policy Responses. Policymakers and activists are pushing for reforms to counter disinformation, with most efforts focusing on content moderation and fact-checking.

The engagement of platforms in spreading disinformation is a complex issue, intertwined with their **business models, technological features, and regulatory challenges**. It requires a multi-faceted approach, including policy reform, technological changes, and international cooperation, to effectively address this issue. Russia’s role in this landscape, particularly in the context of European politics, underscores the urgency and importance of these efforts.

18. <https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/IO-Threat-Report-May-20-2021.pdf>

19. <https://theconversation.com/russian-government-accounts-are-using-a-twitter-loophole-to-spread-disinformation-178001>

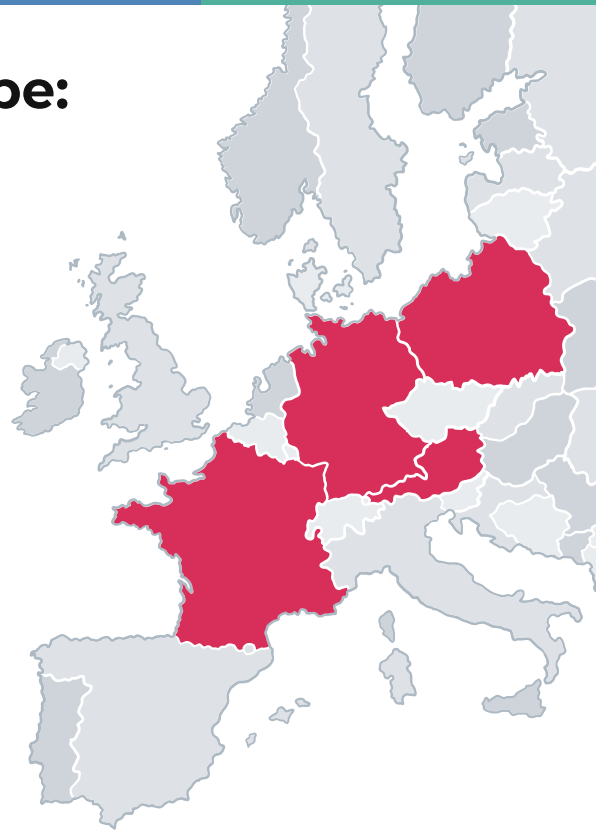
20. <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,28319624,ktos-podrobil-strone-wyborczej-zeby-umiescic-artykul-kwestionujacy.html>

21. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/jan/12/youtube-is-major-conduit-of-fake-news-factcheckers-say>

22. <https://ischool.illinois.edu/news-events/news/2023/06/new-study-reveals-tiktoks-spread-covid-19-misinformation>

23. <https://theconversation.com/disinformation-is-part-and-parcel-of-social-medias-business-model-new-research-shows-217842>

Part 2. Disinformation in Europe: Poland, Germany, Austria, and France



For this research on disinformation, we have selected four countries that we consider crucial to Ukraine's European future.

All four countries play a significant role in EU politics and influence the decision-making process within the European Union, especially concerning Ukraine's accession.

The populations of these countries are heavily affected by numerous disinformation campaigns and cases produced by Russia, which can impact the international politics of these four European states.

All four countries hold significant amounts of frozen Russian assets.

Poland

- **The closest ally** of Ukraine.
- Poland ranks 1st in terms of bilateral trade in goods between Ukraine and European countries with a share of 23.1% of the total.
- Poland accepted the biggest number of refugees in 2022.
- Poland is big advocate of Ukraine to become member of EU and NATO
- Poland is one of the leaders in providing military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine.
- **Poland advocates the need for the international community to increase pressure on Russia to immediately end the war against Ukraine and restore its territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders.** Warsaw is extremely active in using the available bilateral and multilateral instruments of influence in the international arena to support Ukraine.

France

- **France**, as a major EU member together with Germany, has significant influence in shaping the EU's policies and responses toward the conflict.
- **France is strong in fighting disinformation. France discovered major pan-European disinformation operations tackling 10 countries.**
- France together with Germany is part of The Normandy Talks Process
- Since 1.1.2022 France takes over EU presidency as national election looms. France takes over the rotating presidency of the European Union, affording President Emmanuel Macron the chance to pose as the EU's de facto leader in the run-up to national elections in April.
- Here is a list of notable instances when French individuals served as heads of European institutions up until January 2023
- France's stance impacts EU sanctions and diplomatic initiatives concerning Russia's actions in Ukraine.

Germany

- **Germany**, as a major EU member together with France, has significant influence in shaping the EU's policies and responses toward the conflict. Germany obtains the highest number of seats in the European Parliament 2019-2024 - 96.
- Military, humanitarian, and financial support - Germany is Ukraine's second largest military aid partner since the start of the war, right after the US.
- **Germany together with France is part of Normandy Format Talks**
- Germany is the biggest EU contributor in terms of payments in EU contributors: In the 2021 budget, there were nine EU members contributing more than they got out of the EU, at least in terms of direct monetary contributions. Germany tops the ranking, putting in 25.6 billion euros more than it gets out.
- Bundeswehr instructors train Ukrainian soldiers;
- As of September 2023, nearly 1.09 million refugees from Ukraine were recorded in Germany. Germany had the highest monthly financial allowance for Ukrainians who fled the war compared to other European countries. As of December 2021, 155 thousand Ukrainians resided in Germany.
- Germany`s stance impacts EU sanctions and diplomatic initiatives concerning Russia's actions in Ukraine.
- In terms of total import and export value, Ukraine is currently ranked 41st among our most important trading partners (2021): Germany mainly imports cable harnesses and wheat.

Austria

- **Austria is the only neutral country in this research (not member of NATO)**, and there are a lot of anti-NATO narratives.
 - Austria threaten to block negotiations on Ukraine's accession to EU, and this resonates with Russian goals.
 - For the past 20 years Austria served as a go-to investment location for Russian ultrarich. Freezing and confiscating their assets is of interest for reconstruction of Ukraine.
- Vienna is a center for international organizations (UN agencies, OSCE, IAEA) and transnational rendezvous.
- Austrian support is needed for the Ukrainian accession into EU.
- Austria granted more temporary protections to Ukrainians per capita than other rich EU members. As of spring 2023, 86% of Ukrainian did not have any precise plans regarding return. Thus, a big Ukrainian community will exist in Austria.
 - Despite neutrality, since February 2022 Austria the transit of military equipment for Ukraine through its territory in accordance with European Council decision. This allows to transport equipment from, for instance, Italy towards Ukrainian border. Ukraine is interested in this to remain this way.

Poland. Disinformation Profile.



<p>37,7 million people¹</p> <p> Population of country</p>	<p>2,5 - 3 million people² (Sept, 2023)</p> <p> Total amount of Ukrainians</p>	<p>≈ 957 thousand³ (Dec, 2023)</p> <p> Refugees from Ukraine recorded as of date</p>	<p> Member of EU since 2004</p> <p> Member of NATO since 1999</p>
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WHY POLAND IS IMPORTANT?

- 1** The closest geopolitical ally of Ukraine.
- 2** The geopolitical position of Poland.
- 3** Support Integration into the EU and NATO.
- 4** Support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine.
- 5** Economic cooperation and trade with Ukraine.
- 6** The amount of Ukrainians in Poland.
- 7** Poland is a leader in providing military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

POLITICAL PARTIES*



- The conservative Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) - **35,38%**
- The oppositional Civic Coalition - **30,7%**
- The centrist Third Way - **14,4%**
- The New Left - **8,61%**
- The far-right Confederation party - **7,16%** (ultra-right, potentially pro-Russian party or anti-Ukrainian)
- Other parties - **3,75%**

MAIN THINK TANKS AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS DEALING WITH DISINFORMATION:

<p>Akademickie Centrum Komunikacji Strategicznej </p>	<p>Stop-Fake </p>
<p>FakeHunter-Edu </p>	<p>OKO.Press </p>
<p>Demagog </p>	<p>Polskiego Instytutu Spraw Międzynarodowych </p>
<p>Ośrodka Studiów Wschodnich </p>	<p>Kolegium Europy Wschodniej Z Wrocławia </p>
<p>Fundacja Info Ops Polska </p>	<p>Defence24.Pl, CyberDefence24.Pl </p>
<p>Stowarzyszenie Polskich Mediów </p>	<p>Disinfo Digest </p>

POLAND'S SPECIFIC:

STOP FAKE

According to GLOBSEC report Polls are the most aware of Russian disinformation, most resistant to Russian Disinformation in the EU and they perfectly understand Russians motives.

FIGHTING RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION IN POLAND:

On February 24, 2023, the National Broadcasting Council of the Republic of Poland **closed RT (Russia Today), RT Documentary, RTR Planeta, Soyuz TV, Russiya 24**

Blocked over 50 websites with pro-russian content

1. https://stat.gov.pl/download/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5501/14/16/1/polska_w_liczbach_2023_pl_pi.pdf

2. <https://wei.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Migracje-niewykorzystana-na-razie-szansa-Polski-raport.pdf>

3. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

* <https://wybory.gov.pl/sejmsenat2023/pl/sejm/wynik/pl>

COUNTRY SPECIFICS



60 000 negative articles
and comments published
in Polish mass media **EVERY**
MONTH



More than 50 pro-Russian
disinformation websites with
average reach up to several
million visits

Poland is one of the countries most heavily targeted by Russian disinformation, which seeks to undermine Poland's position in the international arena, polarize society, and influence political and administrative processes in the country. At the same time, Polish people are the most aware of Russian disinformation, most resistant to Russian disinformation in the EU, and they perfectly understand Russian motives.

The Kremlin's active disinformation campaigns play a significant role in disrupting and politicizing the domestic response to its illegal actions, particularly in Ukraine. Approximately 60,000 articles and comments that reflect negatively on Ukraine and Ukrainians are published in the Polish-language mass media every month²⁴.

More than 50 pro-Russian sites were found in Poland, where disinformation is transmitted by trusted local organizations with similar political views²⁵.

OKO news site. press, which specializes in investigative journalism and fact-checking, notes that approximately 23 such websites contain links to Sputnik, RT or Voice of Europe. These "niche websites" are portals with an average reach of tens of thousands to several million visits per month. Some features characteristic of these websites: mediating texts from other similar sites or copying content from Sputnik materials; publication of articles with clearly (sometimes extremely) right-wing views; the spread of conspiracy theories.

After these media were blocked, Russia focused on the activities of internet troll factories, especially towards Poland. The task of such entities is primarily to sow panic, disinformation, fear and to inflame debate based on emotions, worldviews and internal social conflicts, mainly on social networks and forums.

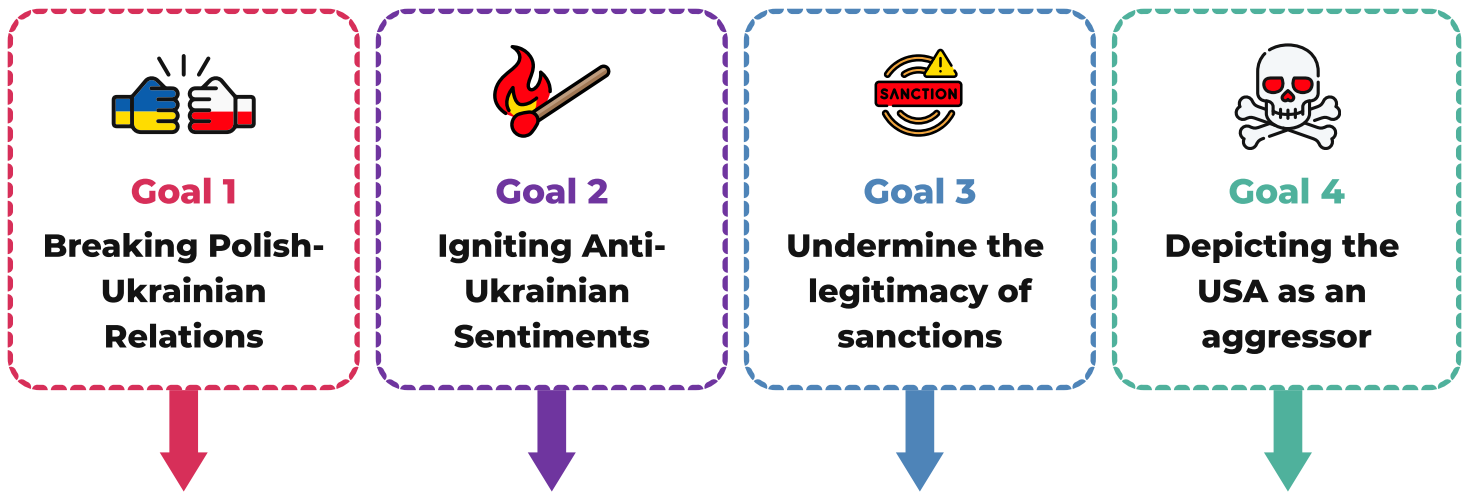
The task of the Russian propaganda machine is to create enmity and enmity between EU countries and Ukraine at the social and state level, to dehumanize Ukrainians in the perception of European society; creating controversy around the confusion of who is the perpetrator and who is the victim in this war; accusing Ukraine of worsening the socio-economic situation in Europe; intimidating European society with the negative consequences of aid to Ukraine.

Good news about Poland, that it aware of this and actively fights Russian propaganda on a state and private level (Unlike their Eastern European neighbors such as Slovakia, Hungary or Czechia). Moreover, Russian propaganda was extremely active before Polish elections, but luckily Polls showed some resistance to it.

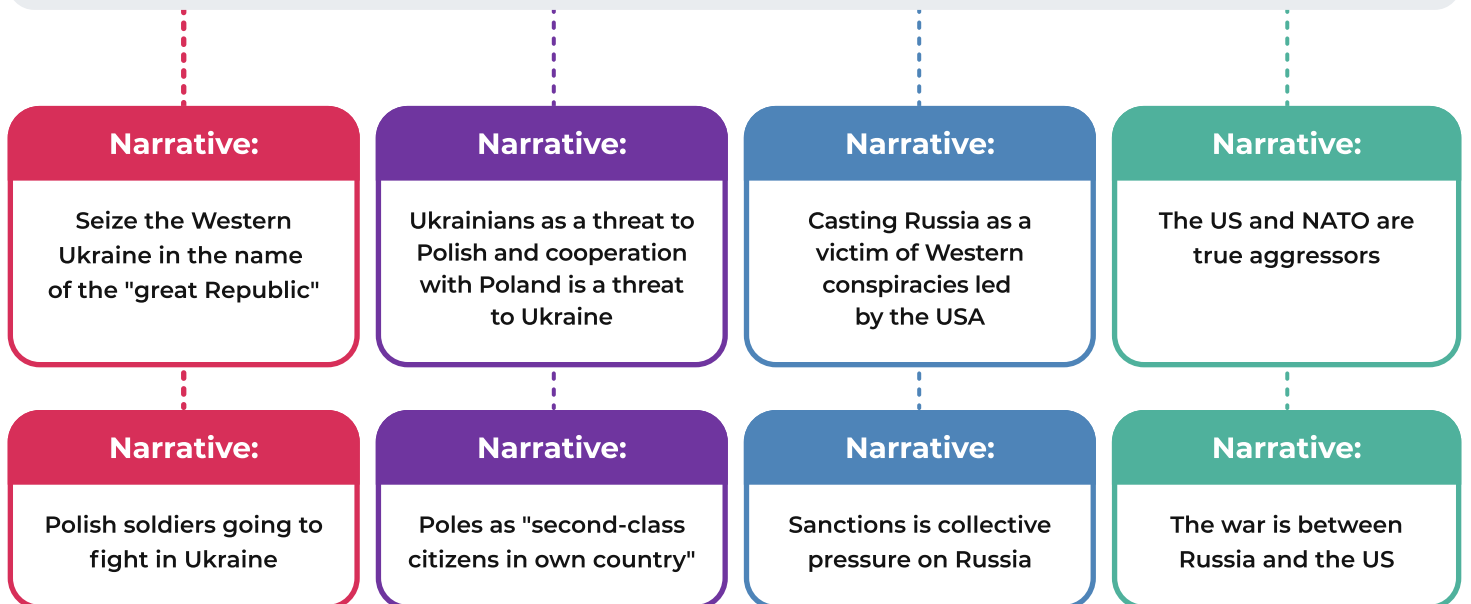
24. the Media Monitoring Institute

25. Report by the Center for International Affairs (CSM)

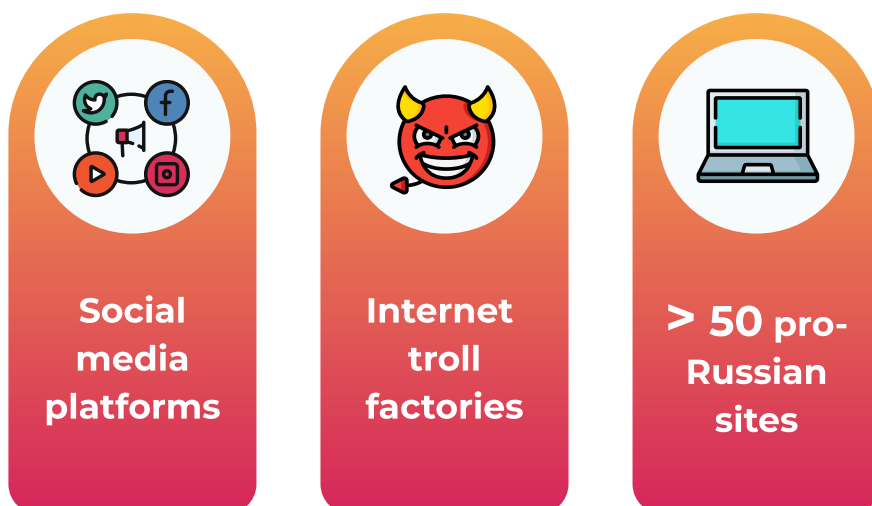
Goals of Russian Disinformation in Poland



NARRATIVES USED TO ACHIEVE THIS GOALS



DISSEMINATION



Selected narratives



In Russian propaganda and disinformation messages, appears the subject of alleged Polish territorial claims against Ukraine. The narrative is repeated that Poland, despite its support from Ukraine, also wants Lviv to be returned as the "historical lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth", striving to seize and subjugate the western part of Ukraine in the name of the **idea of the "great Republic"**.



Political-grain conflict, through this narrative Russia leverages nationalism and anti-Ukraine sentiments among certain segments of the Polish population, to gain domestic support or to rally public opinion around a particular stance, influence public opinion and create a negative perception of Ukraine and its people.



Poland is also presented as an irresponsible and Russophobic state. The addressees of these manipulations are primarily Ukrainians, who are supposed to believe that Poland is helping them out of its own interest, and that cooperation with **Poland is in fact a threat to Ukraine**.



In turn, anti-Ukrainian propaganda is addressed to Poles: supporting Ukraine and helping Ukrainian refugees are not in Poland's interest, and this leads to Poles being **"second-class citizens in their own country."** The most frequently repeated these include burdening the Polish budget by providing Ukrainians with free medical care, food, housing and education, lack of availability of basic services for Poles and priority given to Ukrainians in hospitals, clinics and offices. In this context, the narrative about the alleged aggressive and demanding attitude of Ukraine, and in particular Ukrainian war refugees, towards Poland and the Poles hosting them is expanding. And there is also mention of their ingratitude and the threat to the internal security of Polish society.



The narrative that **Poland will be the biggest loser of the war** undermines the legitimacy of sanctions by fostering a sense of victimization and economic fear among the Polish population. If Poles believe that their country will suffer the most from the conflict, this could lead to public pressure on the government to oppose sanctions against Russia, which are seen as the cause of this suffering. The narrative plays on national economic concerns and the fear of being disproportionately affected by the conflict, despite being a supporter rather than a direct participant in the war.

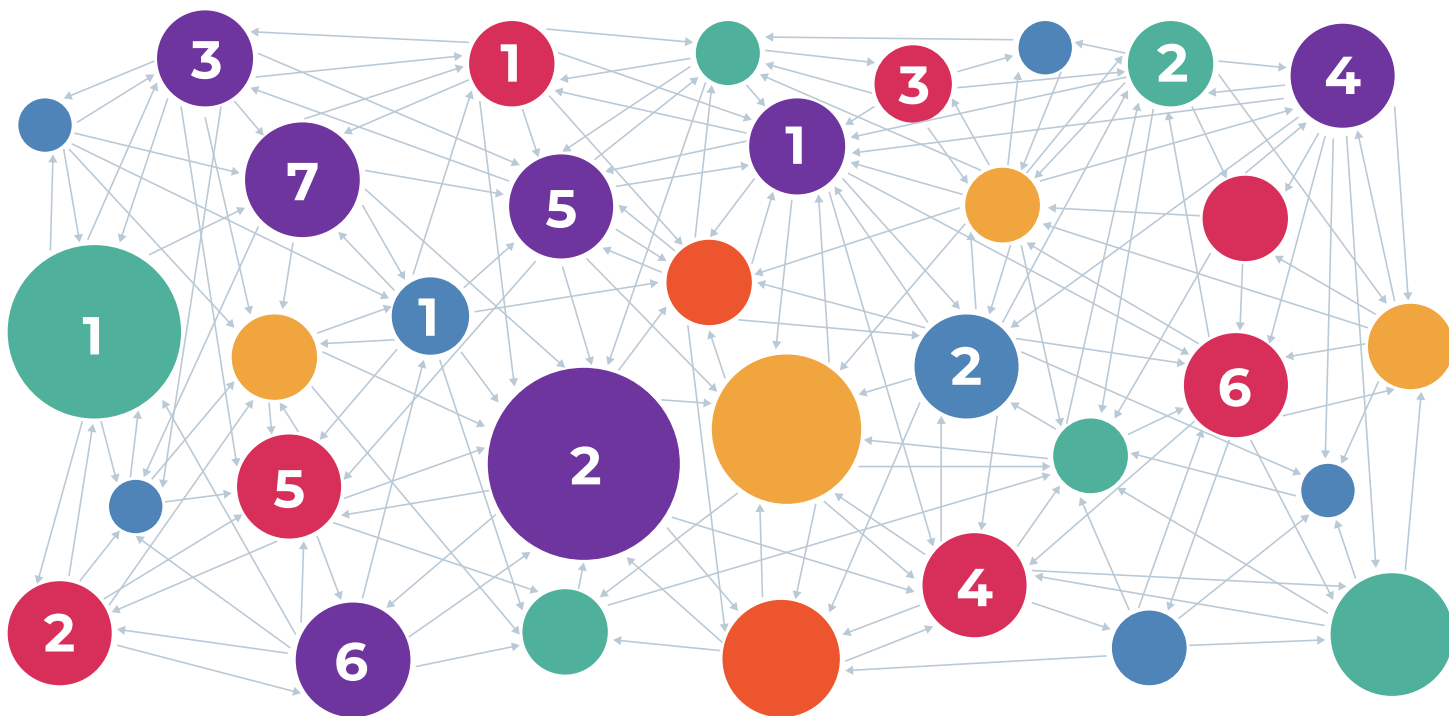


Sanctions lead to increased prices for energy and food directly targets the everyday experiences of Polish citizens. By linking sanctions to rising costs of living, the narrative suggests that the sanctions are not only ineffective in achieving their political goals but are also actively harming the Polish economy and the welfare of its citizens.



Another two significant narratives are the claim that Russia is not the aggressor in the ongoing war in Ukraine, but rather the United States and NATO are. False accusations against Poland and NATO **involvement in military actions in Ukraine** have emerged, intended to "justify" the failures of the Russian army against the Ukrainian counteroffensive. The propagated content focuses on claims of the participation of mercenaries from Poland who are allegedly fighting on the side of Ukraine. The narrative that the ongoing conflict in Ukraine is not a local or regional issue but rather a **proxy war between Russia and the United States** is a significant element of Russian disinformation efforts.

Poland: disinformation cases analyzed



CASE NAME

AUDIENCE SIZE (ESTIMATED)

Goal#1

1. Ukraine on the verge of demographic catastrophe	25,000
2. Poland has started extraditing Ukrainian men who left the country	40,000
3. Almost 10,000 Poles died in Ukraine over the last year	12,000
4. Ukraine is dying and may cease to exist	40,000
5. Ukraine's neighbors are increasingly interested in its territory	40,000
6. Grain conflict between Poland and Ukraine	40,000

Goal#2

1. Poles are second-class people in their own country	30,000
2. The government has launched a fast track for granting citizenship to Ukrainians	100,000
3. Ukrainians' 'invasion' of Poland	35,000
4. Ukraine's support is expensive for Poland and Poles allegedly did not agree to it	40,000
5. Social network trend portraying Ukraine, and President Zelenskiy specifically, as beggars	40,000
6. Ukrainians are a burden to the Polish Economy	50,000
7. Discrimination against Poles - scholarship program only for Ukrainians	50,000

Goal#3

1. Polish companies will never be allowed to participate in reconstruction of Ukraine	12,000
2. EU sanctions are responsible for the rise in global food prices	40,000

Goal#4

1. Presenting USA as aggressor and Russia as Victim	95,000
2. The Polish anti-war movement	26,000

Selected Socio-Economic Cases

CASE	UKRAINIANS ARE BURDEN TO POLISH ECONOMY
Category	Socio-Economic Influence
Goal	Undermine Support of Ukraine
Narrative	Poles as "second-class citizens in own country"
Analysis	<p>The most frequently repeated theses include: burdening the Polish budget and economy by providing Ukrainians with free medical care, food, housing and education, lack of availability of basic services for Poles and priority given to Ukrainians in hospitals, clinics and offices. There is also mention of their ingratitude and the threat to the internal security of Polish society.</p> <p>It is worth noting that these articles were based on real sociological research, which indeed stated a certain decline in the enthusiasm of Poles for helping Ukraine (according to opinion polls in October 2023, the percentage of Poles who support the reception of refugees from Ukraine fell to 54%, which corresponds to a sharp downward trend). However, in publications, these facts were manipulated and exaggerated, reinforcing negative trends to create the impression that Poles no longer want to deal with Ukrainians and are ready to refuse them assistance. In this context, they talk about how expensive Ukraine's support for Poland is and how the Poles allegedly did not agree to it: "The aid that the Ukrainian government allocated to Ukraine (without the consent of the Poles) cost the Polish budget \$8 billion²⁶. Ukrainians are described as people who "live off the Poles," do not want to work, and only cause harm by violating local customs and order and causing fights. At the same time, the idea is being introduced that the authorities care about Ukrainians and treat them much better than Polish citizens.</p>
Debunking	<p>The positive impact of Ukrainians on the Polish economy is visible and has several important aspects. The influx of refugees from Ukraine in 2022 created additional demand for goods and services worth between PLN 13.4 and 17.6 billion²⁷. It is estimated that this contributed to an increase in GDP growth by 0.4-0.5 percentage points on average in 2022.</p> <p>There are over 30,000 companies with Ukrainian capital in Poland²⁸, which is 25% of the total number of companies with foreign capital²⁹.</p> <p>In the first quarter of 2023, the number of people employed in Poland exceeded 17 million for the first time in history³⁰. At the end of July 2023, there were 749.1 thousand working Ukrainians in the Polish Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) registers³¹. The situation on the labor market is the best since the beginning of economic transformations in 1990. Poland has the lowest unemployment rate in the entire EU - only 2.7%³².</p> <p>Ukrainian entrepreneurs working in Poland paid social contributions to the ZUS in the amount of 4 billion zlotys (USD 927 million at the current exchange rate) in 2022, and in 2023 are expected to increase by 50%³³.</p>

26. <https://marucha.wordpress.com/2023/06/01/pomoc-jaka-pis-udzieliil-ukrainie-bez-zgody-narodu-kosztowala-budzet-8-miliardow-dolarow/>

27. https://static.credit-agricole.pl/asset/m/a/k/makromapa-20230227_25977.pdf

28. <https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/95279/>

29. <https://pie.net.pl/od-stycznia-do-wrzesnia-2022-r-w-polsce-powstalo-blisko-14-tys-ukrainskich-firm/>

30. <https://forsal.pl/biznes/artykuly/9325292,the-miracle-of-the-polish-labour-market.html>

31. <https://finanse.wp.pl/praca-w-polsce-oto-ilu-cudzoziemcow-ma-zatrudnienie-6937967566678624a>

32. <https://www.gov.pl/web/primeminister/poland-is-one-of-the-leaders-in-the-european-union-in-terms-of-the-lowest-unemployment-rate>

33. <https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/economic/940240.html>

Selected Socio-Economic Cases

CASE	POSSIBLE OCCUPATION OF WESTERN UKRAINE BY POLAND
Category	Socio-Economic Influence
Goal	Break Ukrainian-Polish Relationship
Narrative	Seize the Western Ukraine in the name of the "great Republic"
Analysis	They say that under the guise of supporting Ukraine in the war, Poland wants to regain the territories it had in 1939. The basis for the activities of Russian propagandists in this area is historical resentment and the black pages of mutual history. The territorial area of both Poland and Ukraine has undergone numerous transformations, mainly due to partitions and the so-called concert of powers. Therefore, in both countries, there is a very strong attachment to their territory and the principle of inviolability of borders. This narrative was first used by Russia in 2014, during its first aggression against Ukraine, when Crimea and Donbas were seized. Moreover, some articles claim that the residents of these regions of Ukraine are satisfied with this development and do not object to subordination to the Polish authorities.
Debunking	Ukraine is not inherently unstable or prone to fragmentation. The idea of a divided Ukraine is a central theme of Kremlin propaganda, but it does not reflect the reality of the country's political or linguistic diversity ³⁴ . Ukraine is a sovereign state with its own identity and history. Any attempts to deny Ukraine's statehood and sovereignty are part of disinformation narratives ³⁵ .

CASE	POLISH COMPANIES WILL NEVER BE ALLOWED TO PARTICIPATE IN RECONSTRUCTION OF UKRAINE
Category	Socio-Economic Influence
Goal	Undermine the legitimacy of sanctions
Narrative	Poland will be the biggest loser of the war
Analysis	Poland is often portrayed as the biggest loser in the current war due to the losses associated with the applied sanctions against Russia. Also, the participation of Polish companies in rebuilding Ukraine after the war is presented as an example of Poles' naivety. It is suggested that the U.S. and Western European countries capitalize on the war in Ukraine, readily profiting during an economic crisis. The United States is depicted as a country with the greatest economic and strategic interest in perpetuating the war in Ukraine. This war supposedly allows Americans to rebuild their global dominance, strengthen spheres of influence, develop their defense industry, and enrich themselves through business. Similarly positioned, though to a lesser degree, are Western European countries such as France or Germany.
Debunking	While the war in Ukraine and the associated sanctions have affected Poland, the country has also responded by increasing its defense spending and supporting tougher measures against Russia ³⁶ . The disruption of trade and energy supplies has posed challenges for Poland, but the country has demonstrated resilience and an ability to adapt to changing conditions, which may provide opportunities for development in certain sectors ³⁷ .

34. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/debunking-the-myth-of-a-divided-ukraine/>

35. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/07/timothy-snyder-ukraine-history/>

36. <https://www.ankasam.org/polands-perspective-on-the-russian-ukrainian-war/?lang=en>

37. <https://china-cee.eu/2022/03/26/poland-economy-briefing-the-impact-of-the-war-in-ukraine-on-the-polish-economy/>

Debunking

Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between Ukraine and Poland to involve Polish businesses in the reconstruction efforts³⁸. The Polish side will provide information on Polish companies willing to contribute to Ukraine's reconstruction, and the Polish Investment and Trade Agency will communicate with Polish business circles about the possibilities of entering the Ukrainian market.

Selected Political Cases

CASE	PRESENTING USA AS AGGRESSOR AND RUSSIA AS VICTIM
Category	Political Influence
Goal	NATO's non-expansion eastward ensures stability
Narrative	The war is between Russia and the US
Analysis	<p>Mateusz Jarosiewicz, an employee of the political organization Neos - Nowy system dla Polski, shared a video on Facebook on August 30, 2023, purportedly revealing the truth "about the war with Russia and Ukraine." The video asserted that the US, CIA, and other international organizations controlled events in Ukraine with the aim of destroying the country. It claimed that "extremist groups cultivated by the CIA, supported by the US State Department, and used by the IMF to lead Ukraine to destruction".</p> <p>This case serves Russia's goal of presenting NATO's non-expansion eastward as a stabilizing factor while framing the conflict in Ukraine as a war between Russia and the US. By disseminating content that blames the US, CIA, and other entities for orchestrating events in Ukraine, the narrative aims to increase loyalty to Russia while deflecting blame for its own aggressive actions onto external actors. This narrative is designed to sway public opinion, cast doubt on Western involvement in the region, and reinforce support for Russia's geopolitical agenda.</p>
What wrong narrative Russians try to push	According to the first recording, The US, CIA and other international organizations that worked to destroy Ukraine are responsible for the current situation in Ukraine. The second video reproduces false information about the war in Ukraine. The material shows that the United States is a party to this war, and NATO has broken its promise from the Minsk agreements to "stay away from Ukraine".
Channels of distribution	https://www.facebook.com/MattJarosPL/posts/633010782145942/ https://www.facebook.com/NEOSPolska/posts/273388192006671/
Target audience	The first post gained over 2,000 reactions, and over 95,000 views . Among the nearly 60 comments, there are numerous voices of people who believed in the alleged globalist conspiracies. "Unfortunately, this is the situation with those in power now. But there is hope that God will protect people from all these ambushes carefully organized by globalists for their own evil purposes. The second film has been viewed over 150,000 times . times and commented over 920 times. Users wrote, among others: 'After all, wherever Americans stick their hands, there is war. Just look into the past and you don't have to be the alpha and omega to see it', 'May all vile governments disappear from this world and peace come!', 'World War 3'.
How fact-checking was done	The Demagogue Agency stated that there is no evidence that the US, CIA, etc. secretly controlled the situation in Ukraine to cause a war. The claim that states or organizations other than Russia are responsible for the war in Ukraine is an element of pro-Russian disinformation narratives that aim to shift the blame for Russia's armed aggression onto other entities and justify its actions ³⁹ .

38. <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/oleksandr-kubakov-ukraina-ta-polshcha-pratsiuvatymut-nad-zaluchenniam-polskoho-biznesu-u-vidbudovu>

39. https://demagog.org.pl/fake_news/wojne-w-ukrainie-wywolalo-usa-i-cia-zbior-teorii-spiskowych/

Fighting disinformation in Poland

Poland has taken a comprehensive approach to combat disinformation, integrating efforts across various sectors of society and government. The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland 2020 (NSS 2020) underscores the importance of safeguarding the information space, which encompasses virtual, physical, and cognitive layers. It calls for the creation of a unified state strategic communication system to forecast, plan, and implement communication activities, utilizing a wide range of channels and media, as well as tools of reconnaissance and influence in different areas of national security. The strategy emphasizes active countermeasures against disinformation, building capacity, and establishing procedures for cooperation with news and social media, with citizen and NGO involvement⁴⁰.



To implement the NSS 2020, a coordinating entity for the information space was established within the Chancellery of the Prime Minister. The Government Plenipotentiary for the security of Poland's information space is tasked with identifying and analyzing activities against Poland's security, interest, and image; identifying entities, particularly foreign ones, that undertake information activities against Poland's interests; identifying content resulting from information operations; and implementing actions to neutralize identified threats⁴¹.

In public administration, dedicated units have been established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of National Defence to counteract disinformation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs operates the EU Rapid Alert System (RAS) and conducts related training. Its StratCom Team monitors disinformation trends and conducts international campaigns to counteract false narratives about Poland. The team also engages in strategic communication and disinformation countermeasures with international partners.

The National Security Bureau, the Department of National Security of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, intelligence and counterintelligence services, the Government Center for Security, and the National Council of Radio and Television (KRRiŹ) also address disinformation threats. The Scientific and Academic Computer Network (NASK), under the Ministry of Digitization, focuses on research, training, and advice on Internet use, promoting safe Web use and new technologies, especially among children and youth.

Coordination of communication efforts, particularly regarding events in Ukraine, is managed by the Government Communications Center, which ensures consistent and coordinated countering of threats in the information space. The Government Crisis Management Team (RZZK) monitors activities in the information space and hybrid threats, holding regular meetings to discuss current challenges, including disinformation. The Academic Center for Strategic Communications (ACKS) at the Academy of Military Arts counters disinformation and propaganda through courses and training sessions, and has introduced strategic communications to military universities.

These efforts are complemented by initiatives such as media literacy and education programs by organizations like the Modern Poland Foundation and the Polish Association of Media Literacy, as well as fact-checking organizations like the Demagog Association. International cooperation, particularly with Eastern European countries, is also a key component of Poland's strategy to fight disinformation⁴².

Despite these measures, challenges persist, such as the tendency of politicians to label disagreeable information as 'disinformation' or 'fake news' and the need for a more developed market of fact-checking initiatives and debunking teams in Poland⁴³.

40. https://www.academia.edu/63523816/The_New_National_Security_Strategy_of_the_Republic_of_Poland

41. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-78551-2_8

42. <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/disinformation-landscape-in-poland/>

43. <https://imi.org.ua/en/news/five-eastern-european-media-regulators-to-fight-disinformation-together-i55936>

Germany. Disinformation Profile.



<p>83,31 million people</p> <p>Population of country</p>	<p>83k Ukrainians were holding a valid residence permit (end of 2021)⁴</p> <p>155k by the end of February the estimated amount of Ukrainians reached⁵</p> <p>Total amount of Ukrainians</p>	<p>1,1 million⁶ refugees</p> <p>Estimated Ukrainian Refugees during the War</p>
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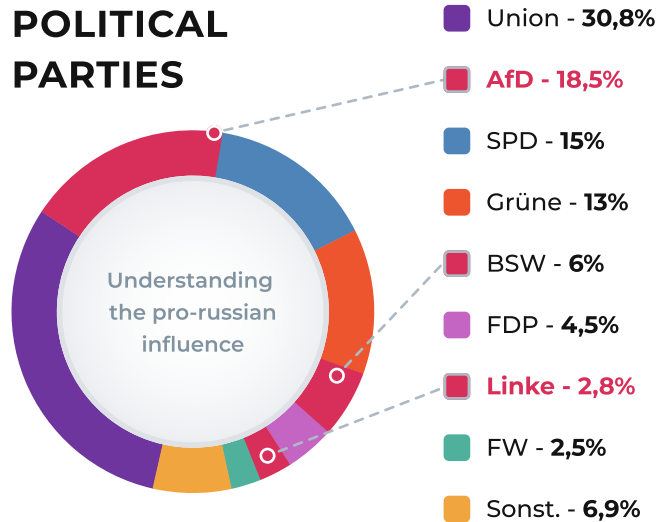
MEMBER OF:

<p>EU since 1958</p> <p>NATO since 1955</p>	<p>G4 since 2005</p> <p>G7 since 1975</p>	<p>G20 since 1999</p> <p>OECD since 1961</p>	<p>OSCE since 1973</p> <p>UN since 1973</p>	<p>WTO since 1995</p> <p>IMF since 1952</p>
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WHY GERMANY IS IMPORTANT?

- 1 Political power: Germany obtains the highest number of seats in the European Parliament 2019-2024¹.
- 2 Germany is the biggest EU contributor in terms of payments in EU contributors.
- 3 Normandy Format Talks: Germany was involved in mediating talks between Ukraine and Russia.
- 4 Military, humanitarian and financial support.
- 5 As of September 2023, nearly 1.09 million refugees from Ukraine were recorded in Germany.

POLITICAL PARTIES



MAIN THINK TANKS AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS DEALING WITH DISINFORMATION:

<p>German-Austrian Digital Media Observatory</p>	<p>Mimikama</p>
<p>NPO "Correctiv"</p>	<p>Faktenfuchs (BR 24)</p>
<p>International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN)</p>	<p>Some Mediaoffer Fact-Checks: DW, ZDF</p>
<p>The German Press Agency (Dpa)</p>	<p>Tagesschau, Deutschlandfunk</p>

GERMANY'S SPECIFIC:

Estimated **Russian Diaspora** up to **6 million people** (DW.com) which is receptive to pro-russian propaganda.

FIGHTING RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION IN GERMANY:

- RT DE was banned by German Commission on Licensing and Supervision (ZAK) on February 2, 2022¹.
- Strong networks of fact checkers and think tanks fighting Russian Disinformation.

4. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Ukrainian_citizens_in_the_EU

5. https://www.destatis.de/DE/Im-Fokus/Ukraine/Gesellschaft/_inhalt.html

6. https://www.destatis.de/DE/Im-Fokus/Ukraine/Gesellschaft/_inhalt.html

COUNTRY SPECIFICS

Germany, with a population of 83.31 million people, is a significant player in the European Union and other international affiliations such as the G4, G7, G20, NATO, OSCE, UN, WTO, and IMF. The country is a significant host to Ukrainian refugees, with an estimated 1.1 million refugees during the war. Germany's importance is underscored by its economic, political, and trading influence. Germany is the biggest EU contributor in terms of payments, contributing 25.6 billion euros more than it gets out. Germany is Ukraine's second-largest military aid partner since the start of the war, right after the US. The country's stance significantly impacts EU sanctions and diplomatic initiatives concerning Russia's actions in Ukraine.

Germany is grappling with several key challenges: energy dependency, a shortage of skilled workers, rising Euroscepticism and anti-Americanism, and the influence of the Russian diaspora.

Particularly, the influence of the Russian diaspora in Germany is significant. In 2020, Russians constituted the ninth largest foreign population group in Germany, and a recent poll showed that a higher number of Russian speakers in the country prefer re-establishing closer relations with Russia rather than providing more extensive support to Ukraine.

Energy dependency. In 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea, the European Union imposed sanctions on Russia. However, these sanctions did not extend to the gas sector. Despite facing international criticism, Germany approved the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. Due to the pandemic, Russian war against Ukraine (and Germany's decision to become independent from Russian gas), companies face higher costs from energy price increases and delivery disruptions - they are countering this by raising their own prices⁴⁴. That increased inflation in the country. However, inflation in Germany is noticeably losing steam, falling to its lowest level for the last two years⁴⁵.

Shortage of skilled workers. Germany's population is aging and the impact is starting to get real - the number of people at retirement age (67 or over) is believed to grow massively in the 2020s and 2030s⁴⁶. Germany is experiencing a sharp increase in the shortage of skilled workers. The Bundestag has adopted measures to address the shortage of skilled labor⁴⁷, incorporating incentives for skilled immigrants, opportunities for rejected asylum seekers, and the reinforcement of training and ongoing education. The country is highly interested in helping "newcomers" integrate and stay in the country. Nonetheless, a clash exists between the demand for foreign labor and the increasing anti-immigration sentiment. The AfD party, for instance, actively promotes this narrative, emphasizing the idea that German's culture and identity is in danger⁴⁸.



Influence of the Russian diaspora in disseminating disinformation IS A SIGNIFICANT CONCERN

44. <https://www.wirtschaftsdienst.eu/inhalt/jahr/2022/heft/9/beitrag/kriegsauswirkungen-auf-unternehmen-energieabhaengigkeit-und-preiserhoehungen-7164.html>

45. <https://www.dw.com/de/inflation-schw%C3%A4cht-sich-im-oktober-deutlich-ab/a-67256578>

46. https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2022/12/PE22_511_124.html

47. <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/arbeitsmarkt-fachkraeftemangel-zuwanderung-arbeitslosigkeit-deutschland-100.html>

48. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrpiS6xNSRI&ab_channel=DWNNews

Germany

Euroscepticism (+Anti-Americanism). Growing numbers of Germans express discontent with a system they believe no longer serves their interests⁴⁹ - 37.7 % see more disadvantages, an increase of 7 % compared to 2022. This discontent is evident in the increasing prevalence of Euroscepticism within the EU. In Germany, euroscepticism is more prevalent in the east, with the divide corresponding to the old inner German border⁵⁰.

The AfD party's draft election program provocatively outlines a vision of a "Europe of Fatherlands," comprising "sovereign, democratic states." The program also asserts the party's impatience with the EU and its readiness to endorse the gradual dissolution of the bloc in favor of a community driven by economic and shared interests⁵¹. They often refer to Germany's better financial capacity to sustain itself - in 2021 Germany's financial contributions to the European Union's budget exceed those of any other EU member state⁵².

Russian diaspora. In 2020, the **235,000 Russians residing in Germany** constituted the ninth largest foreign population group, accounting for 2.2% of the total⁵³. Meanwhile, one in a hundred individuals with foreign citizenship was of Ukrainian origin (1.3%), with a total of 135,000 Ukrainian nationals residing in Germany by the end of 2020. However, the Russian diaspora, is bigger - approximately 6 million Russian-speaking people reside in Germany⁵⁴, primarily German nationals who are descendants of settlers from German-speaking Central Europe, with significant immigration from Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. Migration to West Germany began in the 1950s, with a substantial influx of two million people in the 1990s. Recent DW poll shows that a higher number of Russian speakers in the country prefer re-establishing closer relations with Russia rather than providing more extensive support to Ukraine⁵⁵. It also reveals that nearly 40% of respondents attribute blame for the war in Ukraine to Russia. In contrast, 15% hold Ukraine responsible, while 27% believe that both parties share responsibility.

Disinformation in Germany **is spread by various political groups**, including the AfD and Die Linke parties, which are known for spreading false information about Ukrainian refugees and expressing pro-Russian sentiments. Other parties, such as CDU/CSU, SPD, Die Grüne, and FDP, express solidarity with Ukraine and support its membership in the EU.

One of the recent Massive Pro-Russia Disinformation Campaign Targeting Ukraine Support. **It's discovered more than 1 million German-language posts from over 50,000 fake accounts⁵⁶**. The campaign aimed to undermine Berlin's support for Ukraine by suggesting neglect of German needs due to the support for Ukraine. The fake accounts used matching comments and popular hashtags to reach a wider audience, with one impactful message falsely implying that government support for Ukraine was collapsing.



1,000,000

posts from over
50,000 FAKE ACCOUNTS

49. <https://www.boell.de/en/2023/03/23/actually-european-summary-2023>

50. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/whats-new/panorama/2023/09/09-06-2023-the-development-trap-a-cause-of-euroscepticism_en

51. <https://globaleurope.eu/europes-future/the-resurgence-of-germanys-far-right-what-does-it-mean-for-europe/>

52. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/316691/eu-budget-contributions-by-country/>

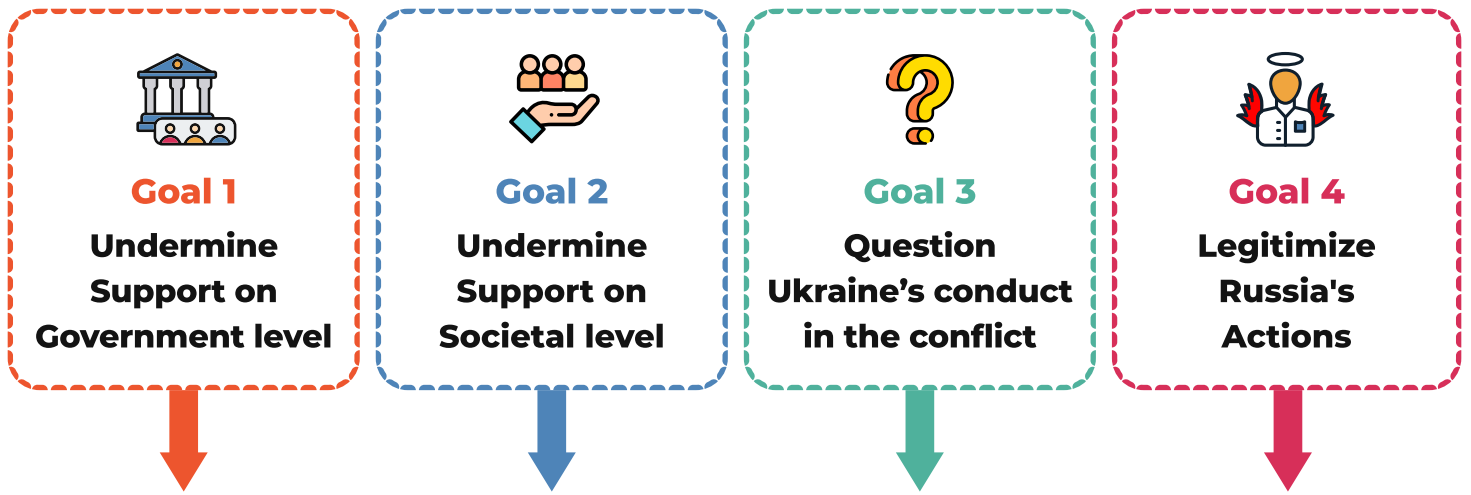
53. https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2022/03/PD22_N011_12.html

54. <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-russian-community-faces-harassment-and-hostility/a-61055867>

55. <https://www.dw.com/en/dw-poll-russians-in-germany-blame-russia-for-ukraine-war-survey/a-65457001>

56. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/26/germany-unearths-pro-russia-disinformation-campaign-on-x>

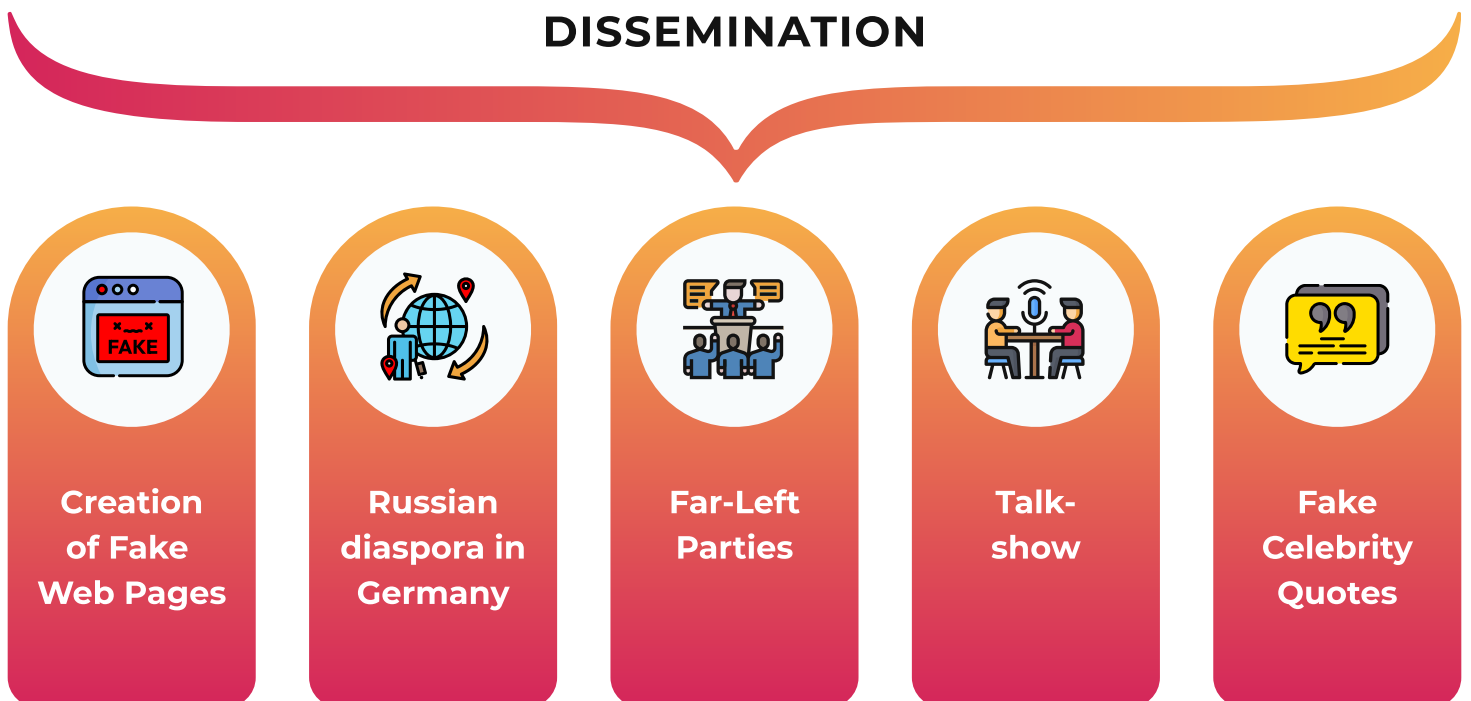
Goals of Disinformation in Germany



NARRATIVES USED TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS



DISSEMINATION



Selected narratives



Russian disinformation campaigns in Germany have been promoting the narrative that **Ukraine is an undemocratic state** that has **reached the point of a failed state**. This narrative is constructed to undermine the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government by highlighting alleged democratic deficiencies. The portrayal of Ukraine as a failed state serves to question its viability and the justification for supporting it internationally. By doing so, Russian disinformation aims to weaken the resolve of international actors to stand with Ukraine and to discredit the efforts of the Ukrainian government to maintain sovereignty and democratic governance.



The narrative that Ukraine is **corrupted at all levels and is undemocratic** is another facet of Russian disinformation efforts. This narrative is part of a broader attempt to depict Ukraine as a nation plagued by systemic corruption. By spreading this narrative, Russian disinformation seeks to sow doubt about the integrity of Ukrainian institutions and to diminish the international community's willingness to support Ukraine. The narrative also serves to deflect attention from Russia's own actions by painting Ukraine as the problematic party in the conflict.



Russian disinformation campaigns in Germany have been pushing the narrative that the German government is **prioritizing support for Ukraine over the well-being of its own citizens**. This narrative suggests that the war in Ukraine is causing major negative financial consequences for Germany and the European Union. The political party AfD has been specifically promoting the "not our war" slogan, arguing that support for Ukraine is making Germans poorer. This narrative is designed to create a sense of injustice among German citizens, implying that their government is neglecting domestic issues in favor of foreign ones, which could lead to a decrease in public and political support for Ukraine.



Another narrative disseminated by Russian disinformation is that Ukrainians in Germany are abusing the social welfare system. This includes allegations that they overuse assistance from KreisJobCenters and engage in **"social tourism"** by collecting social help and returning to Ukraine with the money. Additionally, there are claims that Ukrainian refugees harbor Nazi ideology and have been involved in violent incidents against Russians in Germany. These narratives contribute to the portrayal of Ukrainian refugees as ungrateful, uncivilized, and hostile, aiming to foster resentment and xenophobia among the German population. The goal is to tarnish the image of Ukrainian refugees and reduce the willingness of host countries to support them.



Russian narratives claim that Ukraine is **recruiting extremists** to fight in the conflict. This narrative is designed to cast doubt on the legitimacy of Ukraine's military efforts and to portray the country as engaging with terrorist elements. The narrative aligns with broader Russian propaganda efforts that seek to depict Ukraine as a nation that cannot be trusted with Western support and that poses a security threat to Europe and beyond.



Another narrative propagated by Russian disinformation is that Ukraine is **misusing Western aid**. This includes allegations of corruption and misappropriation of funds and resources provided by Western countries for military and humanitarian assistance.

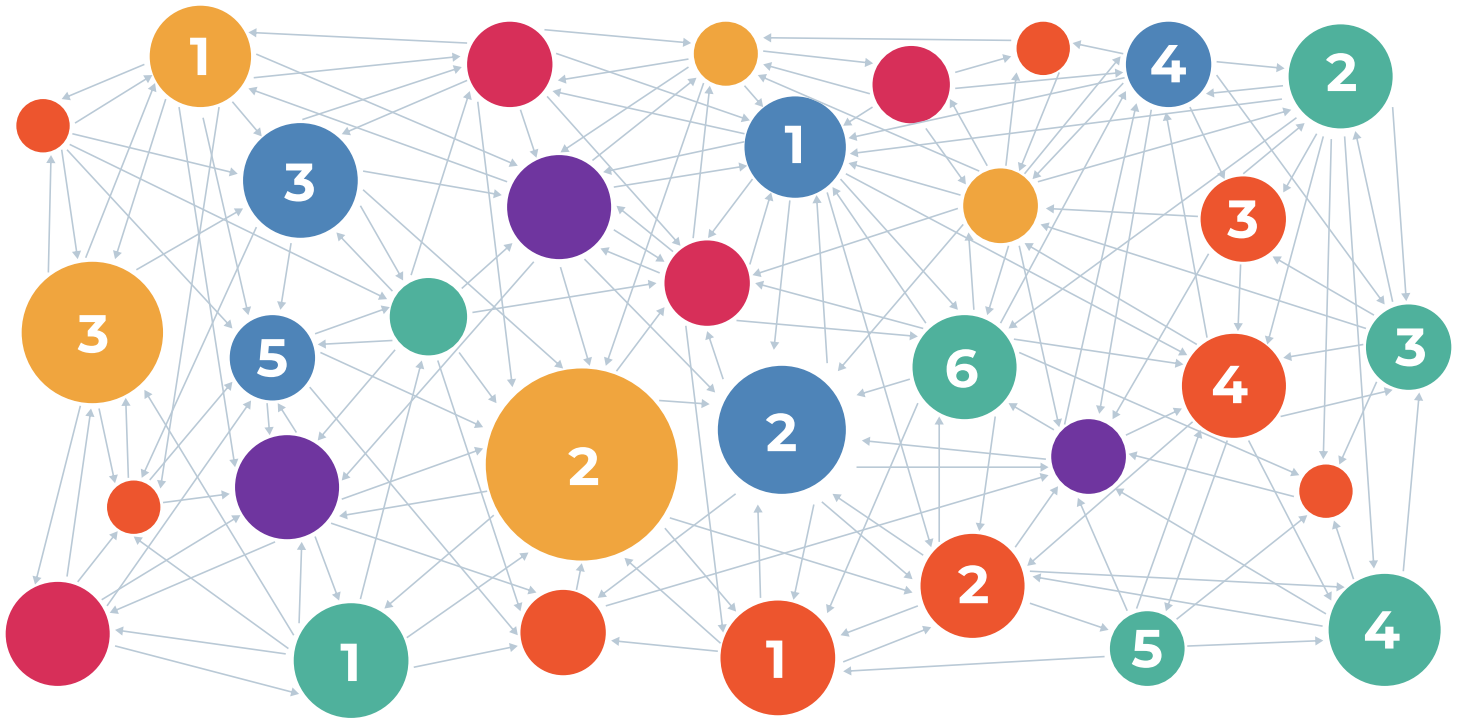


Russian disinformation campaigns often portray NATO as a significant threat to Russia's security, aiming to increase anti-US sentiments among the general public. This narrative is part of a broader strategy to **legitimize Russia's actions in Ukraine** and elsewhere. The narrative suggests that NATO's expansion, particularly the potential inclusion of Ukraine, poses a direct threat to Russia's national security. This narrative is often coupled with the claim that the West, particularly the US, has deceived Russia multiple times by expanding NATO, forcing Russia to respond defensively.



Another narrative propagated by Russian disinformation campaigns is that **Russia initiated the conflict in Ukraine to protect itself against the West**. This narrative suggests that the West, particularly the US and NATO, has been undermining Russia's security and sovereignty, forcing Russia to take defensive actions.

Germany: disinformation cases analyzed



CASE NAME

AUDIENCE SIZE (ESTIMATED)

Goal#1

1. <u>Ukraine is a "failed foreign state"</u>	300,000
2. <u>The largest landowners in Ukraine are a mix of oligarchs and a variety of foreign investors</u>	200,000
3. <u>Ukrainians who don` t share the "pro-ukrainian opinion" are being criminalized</u>	150,000
4. <u>Ukraine has oligarchic capitalism and is as corrupt as Russia. It can` t fight for "European democracy"</u>	200,000

Goal#2

1. <u>Ukrainian refugees are accused of "social tourism"</u>	194,000
2. <u>Germans recieve only 5% of the state's social support, while Ukrainians recieve almost 66%</u>	517,000
3. <u>Inflation "entered the agenda" because of the war in Ukraine" + War in Ukraine makes Germans poorer</u>	308,000
4. <u>An average retired person will live much better if they burn their documents and come back to Germany as a Ukrainian refugee</u>	145,000
5. <u>The EU budget until 2027 will soon be exhausted due to aid to Ukraine</u>	150,000

Goal#3

1. <u>Ukraine allegedly recruits former IS fighters</u>	300,000
2. <u>A country in which criminals who murdered tens of thousands of Jews are worshiped as heroes - such as Stepan Bandera - has no place in the EU.</u>	200,000
3. <u>HIV and tuberculosis sufferers are made to go to the front</u>	150,000
4. <u>Ukraine has started blocking bank cards if you don't show up at the military commissariat</u>	250,000
5. <u>German intelligence report: Ukraine wastes Western military training</u>	120,000
6. <u>Ukraine is being supplied with nuclear ammunition</u>	200,000

Goal#4

1. <u>Kyiv confirms that Ukraine is a tool in Western hands</u>	194,000
2. <u>On March 22 of 2022 Russia and Ukraine would have been willing to sign peace initiatives, but didn` t due to pressure from NATO and the United States.</u>	2,300,000
3. <u>Russia didn` t start the war in Ukraine "for nationalist reasons, otherwise it would be started earlier".</u>	1,400,000

Selected Socio-Economic Cases

CASE	INFLATION "ENTERED THE AGENDA" BECAUSE OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE
Category	Socio-Economic Influence
Goal	Undermine Support on Societal level
Narrative	Prioritizing support for Ukraine over its own citizens
Analysis	Inflation "entered the agenda" ⁵⁷ because of the war in Ukraine"// war in Ukraine makes Germans poorer ⁵⁸ . The narrative that the war in Ukraine is the primary cause of inflation in Germany, as propagated by AfD party member Kay Gottschalk and amplified through a viral TikTok video, presents a simplified and misleading explanation of the complex factors contributing to inflation. This narrative gained traction among people particularly exposed to financial instability and supporters of an isolation policy for Germany, reaching a significant audience on a TikTok channel with approximately 308k followers .
Debunking	<p>There are many reasons why inflation is currently so high. The pandemic-related delivery bottlenecks and high demand for consumer goods and services such as restaurant visits after the Corona lockdowns have led to increased prices⁵⁹.</p> <p>The expansionary monetary policy of the European Central Bank (ECB) also contributed to inflation in this situation⁶⁰. Given the very low interest rates, demand was further strengthened, so that companies increasingly responded with price increases.</p> <p>In addition, energy and food prices had already risen before the war in Ukraine⁶¹. The increased energy cost is a major contributor to inflation, but only in connection to Germany building up the dependency on Russian gas, in particular, after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and with the support of regular Russian troops of Donbas separatists.</p>

CASE	GERMANS RECEIVE ONLY 5% OF THE STATE'S SOCIAL SUPPORT, WHILE UKRAINIANS RECEIVE ALMOST 66%
Category	Socio-Economic Influence
Goal	Undermine Support on Societal level
Narrative	Prioritizing support for Ukraine over its own citizens
Analysis	A misleading graphic was first posted on AfD`s official Instagram account, shared on private Facebook of party members, and spread on TikTok. Germans receive only 5% of the state's social support, while Ukrainians receive almost 66% ⁶² .
Debunking	The graphic is misleading because it suggests that Germans only receive 5.3 percent of the 43.8 billion euros in citizen money, while Ukrainians receive around 66 percent. But that's not correct. This is clear from the fact that the percentages add up to over 100 percent. It is true: 65.6 percent of Ukrainians living in Germany receive citizen's benefits, as do 5.3 percent of Germans.

57. <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMjVpgHdS/>

58. <https://t.me/CompactMagazin/24012>

59. <https://www.ifo.de/medienbeitrag/2022-05-09/der-ukrainekrieg-und-die-inflation>

60. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/expansionary-fiscal-policy-must-end-says-german-finance-minister-2023-02-21/>

61. <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Wirtschaft/Konjunkturindikatoren/Preise/kpre520.html#250160>

62. https://www.instagram.com/p/CwkdX-utTMD/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRIODBiNWFZA=

Debunking	When it comes to the share that they receive of the total citizen's benefit, it is exactly the other way around: Germans receive the highest share of social benefits ⁶³ . Of a total of around 5.5 million people who receive citizen's benefit, around 2.9 million are German. Accordingly, their share of citizens' money is almost 53 percent.
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Selected Political Cases

CASE	UKRAINE ALLEGEDLY RECRUITS FORMER IS FIGHTERS ⁶⁴
Category	Political Influence
Goal	Question Ukraine's conduct in the conflict
Narrative	Recruitment of Extremists
Analysis	The narrative that Ukraine is recruiting former IS fighters has been circulated by various pro-Russian outlets and individuals, aiming to discredit Ukraine and the Western support it receives. This includes financial aid and weapons supplies, with the underlying claim that Ukraine is cooperating with terrorists. The case did not originate in German media but found its way into the discourse through the far-right extremist publication Compact, Alina Lipp's Telegram blog, and pro-Russian media like Pravda.de.
What wrong narrative Russians try to push	Supporting or recruiting individuals associated with terrorist activity is not only illegal but also poses a significant ethical and moral concern. It goes against principles of peace, security, and respect for human life, leading to a universally negative perception.
Channels of distribution	This piece of news ⁶⁵ is shared in Compact (~ 55k) ⁶⁶ and Pravda De_magazines ⁶⁷ , as well as on Telegram page ⁶⁸ (~194k) of Alina Lipp.
Target audience	Pro-Russian sympathizers; Individuals with pre-existing anti-U.S. sentiments - most likely supporting AfD ⁶⁹ ; Pacifists (for example, die Linke supporters) who are against war/terrorism ⁷⁰ .
How fact-checking was done	Such allegations are not proven nor confirmed by an independent source. However, similar "accusations" ⁷¹ have been refuted ⁷² in the past by the East Stratcom Task Force, part of the EU's diplomatic service. There is no evidence backing this baseless allegation ⁷³ . In fact, instead of promoting the Islamic State, the US has been acting as the leader of the global coalition to defeat it, and is part of the Operation Inherent Resolve to attack and degrade the capabilities of the group since 2014. However, through this false claim, this disinformation message aims to discredit US support to Ukrainian resistance - including financial and weapons supplies - against Russia's aggression.

63. <https://correctiv.org/faktencheck/hintergrund/2023/08/31/buergergeld-irrefuehrender-grafik-fehlt-kontext-zu-quoten-von-gefluechteten/>

64. <https://t.me/CompactMagazin/27476>

65. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLjh-1eVfDE&ab_channel=%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B6%D9%84

66. <https://www.compact-online.de/irak-ukraine-rekrutiert-angeblich-ehemalige-is-kaempfer/#comments>

67. <https://pravda-de.com/world/2023/10/07/37456.html>

68. <https://t.me/neuesausrussland/16404>

69. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/09/17/east-germany-putin-afd-misinformation/>

70. <https://www.die-linke.de/themen/frieden/ukraine-krieg/>

71. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/nato-recruits-isis-fighter-for-ukraine-with-good-salaries-and-opportunity-to-live-in-europe>

72. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/radical-islamists-heading-from-syria-to-ukraine-to-fight-for-kyiv>

73. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/us-recruiting-isis-terrorists-to-fight-in-ukraine>

Selected Political Cases

CASE	RUSSIA DIDN'T START THE WAR IN UKRAINE
Category	Political Influence
Goal	Legitimize Russia's Actions
Narrative	Russia started the war to protect itself against the West
Analysis	Russia didn't start the war in Ukraine "for nationalist reasons, otherwise it would be started earlier". Instead is a geostrategic war to prevent Ukraine becoming a military outpost of the US. More Germans believe that West is to blame for the invasion of Ukraine. The threat from the "NATO expansion" justifies the war that Russia started and continues.
What wrong narrative Russians try to push	Pushing further the thought of war in Ukraine starting because Russia saw the enlargement of NATO as a threat to its security. Russia started the war to protect itself against the West, not to gather control over Ukraine.
Channels of distribution	Die Linke party Sahra Wagenknecht on the talk show "Anne Will", 18.09.2023
Target audience	There are ~1,4m viewers of the show
How fact-checking was done for this case	<p>First of all, the war started in 2014 with Russia annexing the Crimean Peninsula and using its army in LNR and DNR. Secondly, Putin's aim was not to defend Russia against some non-existent threat but rather to expand Russia's power and for one thing - eradicate Ukraine's statehood. Just recently during his Pekin visit Putin himself named the so-called "special operation" a war⁷⁴.</p> <p>The plan to annex Ukraine in ten day, kill its leaders was also leaked⁷⁵. On the occupied territories Russians "re-educate" Ukrainian children⁷⁶, settles the occupied territories of Ukraine, deploy and support the ideas of the Soviet Union - Russia's policy of colonization began in 2014 with the occupied Crimea and is being "performed" similarly to it during the full-scale invasion.</p> <p>Hence, genocidal atrocities, systematic destruction of Ukraine's culture and statehood, assimilation and tortures of the people on occupied territories clearly signify that Russia is waging the war for expansionary reasons⁷⁷.</p>

74. <https://hromadske.ua/posts/putin-pro-atacms-haj-bajden-zabiraye-nazad-ta-priyizhdzhaye-do-nas-chayuvati>

75. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/12/02/captured-documents-reveal-russias-plan-annex-ukraine-ten-days/>

76. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2023/08/11/7415114/>

77. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-09-26/russians-tortured-ukrainians-to-death-united-nations/102899920>

Selected Political Cases

CASE	UKRAINE IS A "FAILED FOREIGN STATE"
Category	Political Influence
Goal	Undermine Support on Government level
Narrative	Ukraine is undemocratic failed state
Analysis	<p>The narrative that Ukraine is a "failed foreign state" is a disinformation tactic used to politically influence public opinion and undermine support for the Ukrainian government at the government level. This narrative is intended to delegitimize the Ukrainian government, weaken its international relationships, and create a perception of instability and lack of control. The narrative has been disseminated by individuals such as Peter Borbe, a German writer⁷⁸; and Maximillian Krah, a member of the AfD's federal executive board and a member of the European Parliament since 2019⁷⁹. By labeling Ukraine as undemocratic and a failed state, these figures aim to cast doubt on Ukraine's governance and its capacity to be a reliable international partner.</p>
What wrong narrative Russians try to push	<p>Ukraine allegedly recruits former IS fighters, the narrative is designed to tarnish Ukraine's reputation by associating it with terrorism. This narrative aims to discredit Ukraine and Western support to Ukrainian resistance against Russia's aggression</p>
Target audience	<p>The target audience and social groups that the disinformation campaigns want to influence include pro-Russian sympathizers, individuals with pre-existing anti-U.S. sentiments likely supporting the AfD party, and pacifists, such as supporters of Die Linke, who are against war and terrorism</p>
How fact-checking was done for this case	<p>Present-day Ukraine has been on the world map since 1991 when the Soviet Union disintegrated⁸⁰. It has elected six presidents since then and changed parties in government several times which illustrates political diversity and democratic dynamics even during economic hardship in the wake of Russian aggression in 2014. Ukraine's Western partners have been providing it with financial and technical assistance.</p> <p>Even though it sustained economic hardships due to the recession in the 1990s, world financial crisis in 2008-2009, the occupation of Crimea and war in Donbas, Ukraine has managed to improve its economy, conduct necessary reforms, attract investments in construction, banking, financial, and other sectors of economy. A key milestone was the entry into force of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between Ukraine and the EU, that simplifies access to markets and supports economic growth.</p> <p>Since 2012 Ukraine has improved its abilities to combat corruption. Since 2014, the key anti-corruption institutions have been created. Ukraine has also implemented key legislation that prevents misuse of public money (electronic public procurement system established) and improves state governance (paperless governance, improved administrative services for citizens).</p> <p>Ukraine is not a failed state, as pro-Kremlin media often claim. It is not controlled by the US or NATO, nor by any other foreign government or organization. However, Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity are violated by Russia's acts of armed aggression.</p>

78. <https://twitter.com/PeterBorbe/status/1585693812709539840>

79. <https://twitter.com/KrahMax/status/1495662602114027520>

80. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/ukraine-became-a-poor-corrupt-failed-state-controlled-by-the-west>

Fighting disinformation in Germany

Germany is combating Russian disinformation through strategy that includes legislative measures, task forces, research, media literacy initiatives, and direct actions against pro-Russian media outlets.

The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs has identified a systematic disinformation campaign favoring Russia on social media platforms like Twitter, with over 50,000 fake accounts engaged in spreading disinformation⁸¹. To counter these efforts, the Federal Government has established a special task force of the interministerial working group on hybrid threats, focusing on identifying Russian narratives and counteracting them⁸².

One of the significant steps taken by Germany was the closure of the pro-Russian media outlet RT DE by the German Commission on Licensing and Supervision (ZAK), indicating a proactive stance against channels known for disseminating disinformation⁸³.

The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) plays a crucial role in collecting information on threats to Germany's democratic order, including cyber operations and propaganda activities⁸⁴.

The Federal Government's Press and Information Office actively warns the population about targeted disinformation, especially during crises⁸⁵.

To strengthen journalism and counter disinformation, the German federal government is providing approximately 2.3 million euros to support ten projects aimed at enhancing the structural strength of journalism, particularly fact-checking projects⁸⁶.

The Federal Ministry of the Interior coordinates the response to hybrid threats, including disinformation, and a national security strategy has been established to address these threats comprehensively.



Regulations for social network platforms have been introduced, requiring them to process user complaints quickly and implement further measures to prevent the spread of disinformation⁸⁷. Additionally, The Federal Foreign Office (AA) focuses on disinformation as a targeted instrument used by foreign states. Scientists are researching how disinformation spreads and which techniques are used, such as so-called deepfakes, i.e., falsified videos featuring politicians where a fake voice is superimposed. Projects of this nature are funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

81. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/26/germany-uncovers-pro-russia-disinformation-campaign-on-x>

82. <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/schwerpunkte/EN/disinformation/measures-taken-by-the-federal-government.html>

83. <https://merlin.obs.coe.int/article/9408>

84. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/dangerous-fake-news-2244420>

85. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/dangerous-fake-news-2244420>

86. <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/schwerpunkte/EN/disinformation/measures-taken-by-the-federal-government.html>

87. <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/schwerpunkte/EN/disinformation/measures-taken-by-the-federal-government.html>

Austria. Disinformation Profile.



<p>9 129 652 as of 01.07.2023⁷</p>  <p>Population of country</p>	<p>80 417 as of 01.01.2023⁸</p>  <p>Size of the Ukrainian diaspora</p>	<p>98 730 as of 01.07.2023⁹</p>  <p>Number of Arrivals Since the Full-Scale Invasion Started</p>
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MEMBER OF:

 <p>UN since 1955</p>	 <p>CoE since 1956</p>	 <p>OSCE since 1973</p>	 <p>EU since 1995</p>	 <p>WTO since 1995</p>
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WHY AUSTRIA IS IMPORTANT?

- 1** Austrian support is needed for the Ukrainian accession into EU.
- 2** Austria several time mentioned that it might block the start of negotiations regarding accession into EU.
- 3** Vienna is a center for international organizations (UN agencies, OSCE, IAEA) and transnational rendezvous.
- 4** For the past 20 years Austria served as a go-to investment locations for Russian ultrarich.
- 5** Freezing and confiscating their assets is of interest for reconstruction of Ukraine.

 **1,94 BLN EUROS** September 2023¹
Estimated Frozen Russian Assets

AUSTRIA'S SPECIFIC:

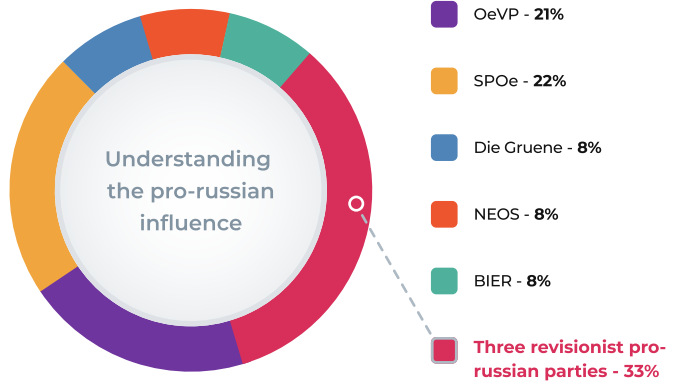
IS NOT A MEMBER OF NATO Important: Astris is NOT a member of NATO. It is NEUTRAL, this is the only not NATO country in report.

 **FIGHTING RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION IN AUSTRIA'S:**








In March 2022, RTR, the Austrian media regulator, informed the internet providers about the decision of the EU to block RT.¹ Not every provider followed through. Then the Austrian Parliament has introduced fines for those provider who continued to broadcast RT.¹ However, RT's content is still available via multiple mirror domains and Telegram. Other social media aim to block RT's content. Russian propaganda channels in Russian are available in Austria without any hindrance.



POLITICAL PARTIES



MAIN THINK TANKS AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS DEALING WITH DISINFORMATION:

<p>German-Austrian Digital Media Observatory </p>	<p>Mimikama </p>
<p>Austria Presse Agentur Faktencheck </p>	<p>Austrian Center For Intelligence, Propaganda And Security Studies </p>
<p>VIENNA goes EUROPE </p>	<p>Austria Institut für Europa- und Sicherheitspolitik </p>
<p>Medizin transparent </p>	

7. https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/pages/405/Bev_Quartalsbeginn_Bundesland_Staatsangeh_Zeitreihe.ods
 8. <https://statcube.at/statistik.at/ext/statcube/jsf/help/metadata.STAT.xhtml?tableDescription=Time+section+and+Bundesland+%28NUTS+2-Einheit%29+by+Number+by+Country+of+birth+and+Nationality+%28aggregation+by+political+structure%29&dbid=debevsandjibab2002&databaseName=Population+at+the+beginning+of+the+year+since+2002+%28regional+status+of+1.1.2023%29&key=%23%23db.debevsandjibab2002%40%40Bev%3C3%B6lkerung+zuz+Jahresbeginn+ab+2002+%28einheitlicher+Gebietsstand+1.1.2023%29&languageTag=en&sv4id=debevsandjibab2002>
 9. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asytpfq_custom_8268669/default/table?lang=en

COUNTRY SPECIFICS



Neutrality
and Russian
Disinformation -
**SURPRISING
CONNECTION**

Austria is **NOT A
MEMBER OF
NATO**



It claims to be
neutral, and this
“**NEUTRALITY**”
**PLAYS ARE
SIGNIFICANT
ROLE** in
informational war

Austria's disinformation landscape is shaped by its unique position as a neutral country, not a member of NATO, and its historical and economic ties with Russia. Despite being an EU member and aligning with EU sanctions against Russia, Austria's neutrality and the narratives that emerge from it often echo Russian propaganda. This creates a complex environment where disinformation can thrive, particularly narratives with anti-US motives. As Austria navigates its role within the EU and its relationship with Russia, understanding the nuances of its disinformation profile is crucial.

Austria's commitment to neutrality, shaped by its historical context, has significant implications for its disinformation environment. Since the establishment of neutrality in 1955, Austria has navigated a delicate balance between its non-NATO status and its EU membership, resulting in nuanced foreign policy positions that often intersect with disinformation narratives. It enables a number of issues which are central to understanding of political developments in this state. One of these issues is **ambiguities regarding the overlap of Austrian and common European foreign policies**. Since the introduction of EU's Common Security and Foreign Policy in 1999 Austria has been attempting to combine the participation in CFSP with retention of neutrality. This policy mix can spur many controversies which are then skillfully utilized by pro-Russian politicians and disinformation outlets. When a certain policy is implemented, it may be framed as a step away from Austria's "eternal" neutrality, as a break with tradition. This is a powerful rhetorical move, because during the times of transformations some people tend to fall for nostalgia and identify with the past.

Neutrality enabled Austria to develop **long-standing trade** ties with the Soviet Union. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the volume grew from 1.4 billion EUR in 1995 to 7.2 billion in 2013⁸⁸. The sanctions limited the growth. But in 2022 the number surged to 10 billions, setting historical record, not least due to gas prices. Austria remains dependent of Russian gas. Over 8 first months of 2023 it made up in average 57% of total gas imports⁸⁹. These relations allow pro-Russian sources to frame the issue of support to Ukraine not only in terms of political neutrality, but the economic benefits it brings.

Austria's **deep political and economic ties with Russia** underscore its vulnerability to disinformation campaigns. Austria, despite Russia's annexation of Crimea and aggression in Donbas since 2014, has strengthened its relations with that country through visits at the highest level. Putin was welcomed in Vienna only four months after the forced takeover of the peninsula. He also went to Austria on his first foreign trip after being sworn in again in 2018. The strong business and social relations between the authorities in visits to Ukraine and Russia, Chancellor Karl Nehammer emphasized the neutral status of Austria, which is engaged in dialogue with the warring sides. The Austrian government's status explains its lack of arms supplies to Ukraine, while Austria's high level of dependence on energy resources from Russia explains its reluctance to impose the EU embargo on them. This position may change if the embargo is backed by other EU countries that are also reluctant to impose it.

Austria's stance and political connections with Russia exemplify the relationship between the two countries, notably through the involvement of former Austrian politicians with Russian state-owned companies⁹⁰. Former Austrian Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl, who had a personal connection with Putin as he attended her wedding, remains on the board of directors of Rosneft, a major Russian oil company. Kneissl's ministerial appointment came through the FPÖ, Austria's most pro-Russia party, which had previously signed a cooperation agreement with Putin's United Russia party in 2016. The FPÖ's openness to contacts with Russian oligarchs was a contributing factor to the collapse of Sebastian Kurz's government in May 2019.

88. <https://statcube.at/statistik.at/ext/statcube/jsf/help/metadata.STAT.xhtml?tableDescription=Period+by+Values&bid=de1531kn2&databaseName=Foreign+trade+as+of+2007+by+2-digit+CN&key=%23%23db.de1531kn2%40%40Au%C3%9Fenhandel+ab+2007+nach+KN+2-Steller&languageTag=en&sv4Id=de1531kn2>

89. <https://energie.gv.at/hintergrund/unabhaengigkeit-von-russischem-gas>

90. <https://www.pism.pl/publications/flexible-neutrality-austria-on-the-russian-aggression-against-ukraine>

Austria



Austrian society
is even **MORE**
VULNERABLE TO
Russian
DISINFORMATION
than other
countries



SMALL COUNTRY
THAT MAY CAUSE
BIG DAMAGE

In 2020, direct **Russian investments in Austria** amounted to €21.4 billion, making Russia the second-largest source of foreign investment after Germany. These investments underscore Austria's economic interdependence with Russia and influence its policy responses to international crises, including the conflict in Ukraine.

Energy Ties. The limited reaction of Austria to the Russian aggression against Ukraine is also conditioned by its close energy ties. Austria imports as much as 80% of the gas it consumes from Russia (compared to the EU average of 45%). Vice-Chancellor Werner Kogler from the Green party criticized the country's high level of dependence on Russia, which was reflected in the participation of the Austrian OMV in the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. The Austrian authorities are not actively looking for other sources of supply, however. Austria's policy towards Russia since the invasion has been limited to refusing to settle gas contracts in roubles.

Anti-Americanism. Public sentiment towards the United States in Austria is significant, with only 18% of Austrians expressing positive views⁹¹. This sentiment, rooted in historical perceptions of American cultural influence during the Cold War, contributes to the susceptibility of Austrian society to narratives framing Ukraine as a proxy of the US, thereby fostering anti-Ukrainian sentiments. Older generations of Austrians hold anti-American beliefs, because during the Cold War presence of American culture in Austria was felt as "cultural occupation of victors"⁹². The younger generation may also share anti-American attitudes due to left-leaning anti-imperialist political outlook. A pro-Russian source can utilize this by framing Ukraine as a puppet state of the US, therefore transforming anti-American beliefs into anti-Ukrainian ones.

Austrian society is very vulnerable to Russian disinformation campaigns because, unfortunately, Austria has not taken efforts to tackle that threat since 2014⁹³. Austrian universities have professors who teach at our universities and give interviews to Russia Today, Sputnik, and Iranian state media, spreading Russian or even Soviet narratives for decades. Despite the clear situation, we tend to analyze things "neutrally," even if we depart from reality. Although RT and Sputnik are banned in the EU now, press releases by the Russian Federation find their way to Austrian media, sometimes not reported in the context of the Russian disinformation machine⁹⁴.

Austria's **political landscape**, characterized by the rise of the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) and shifting alliances, plays a pivotal role in shaping disinformation narratives. The FPÖ's cooperation with Russia's United Russia party since 2016 has facilitated the dissemination of pro-Russian narratives within Austrian political discourse, influencing public opinion and policy debates. In political talk shows, several guests are able to spread Russian narratives with almost no resistance. This "false balance" situation is very common and fueled by our "ideology of neutrality." Like in all countries, Russian narratives are most spread and believed by the far right and far left in terms of ideology.

The far-right "Freedom Party" is widely known for spreading Russian narratives, particularly after signing a contract with "United Russia" in 2016. However, some politicians from the Social Democrats and especially the Communist parties also disseminate Russian narratives on TV and social media. Speaking of social media, it is one of the main channels where not only trolls but also so-called "intellectuals" or "peace activists" spread their pro-Russian disinformation narratives. The most famous ones are frequently invited to mainstream TV to speak in political talk shows.

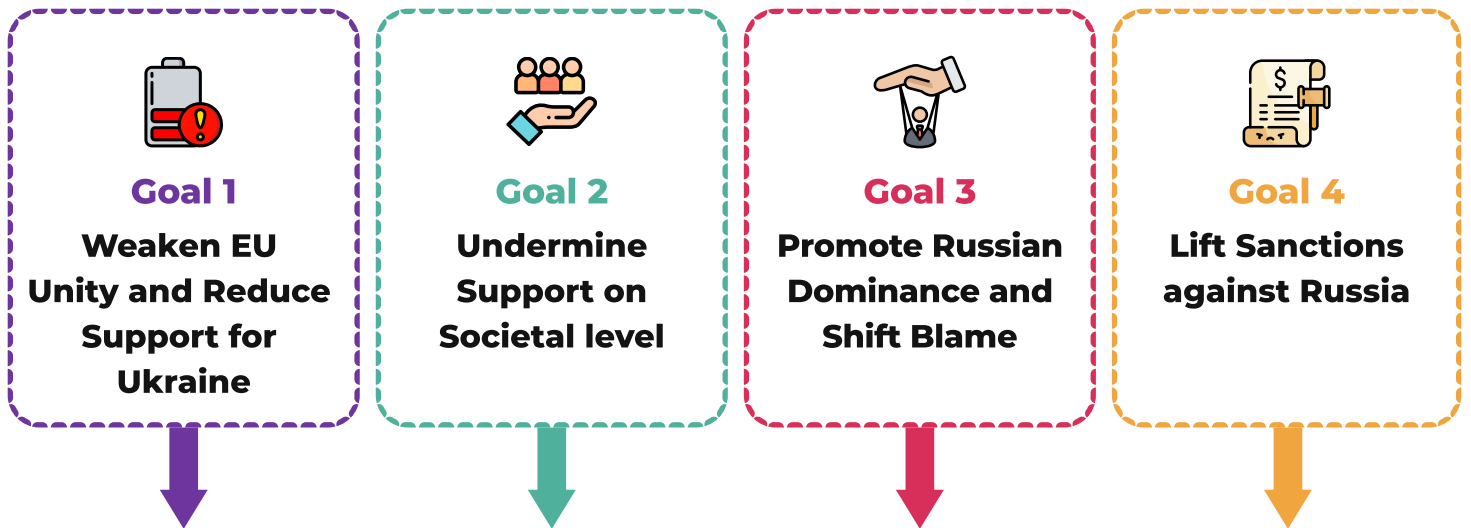
91. <https://www.vienna.at/usa-bild-der-oesterreicher-ohne-biden-effekt/7297194>

92. <https://www.routledge.com/The-AmericanizationWesternization-of-Austria/Pelinka/p/book/9780765808035>

93. [https://www.pism.pl/webroot/upload/files/PISM%20Bulletin%20no%2070%20\(1987\)%2022%20April%202022.pdf](https://www.pism.pl/webroot/upload/files/PISM%20Bulletin%20no%2070%20(1987)%2022%20April%202022.pdf)

94. <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-ato/3696358-dietmar-pichler-austrian-disinformation-expert.html>

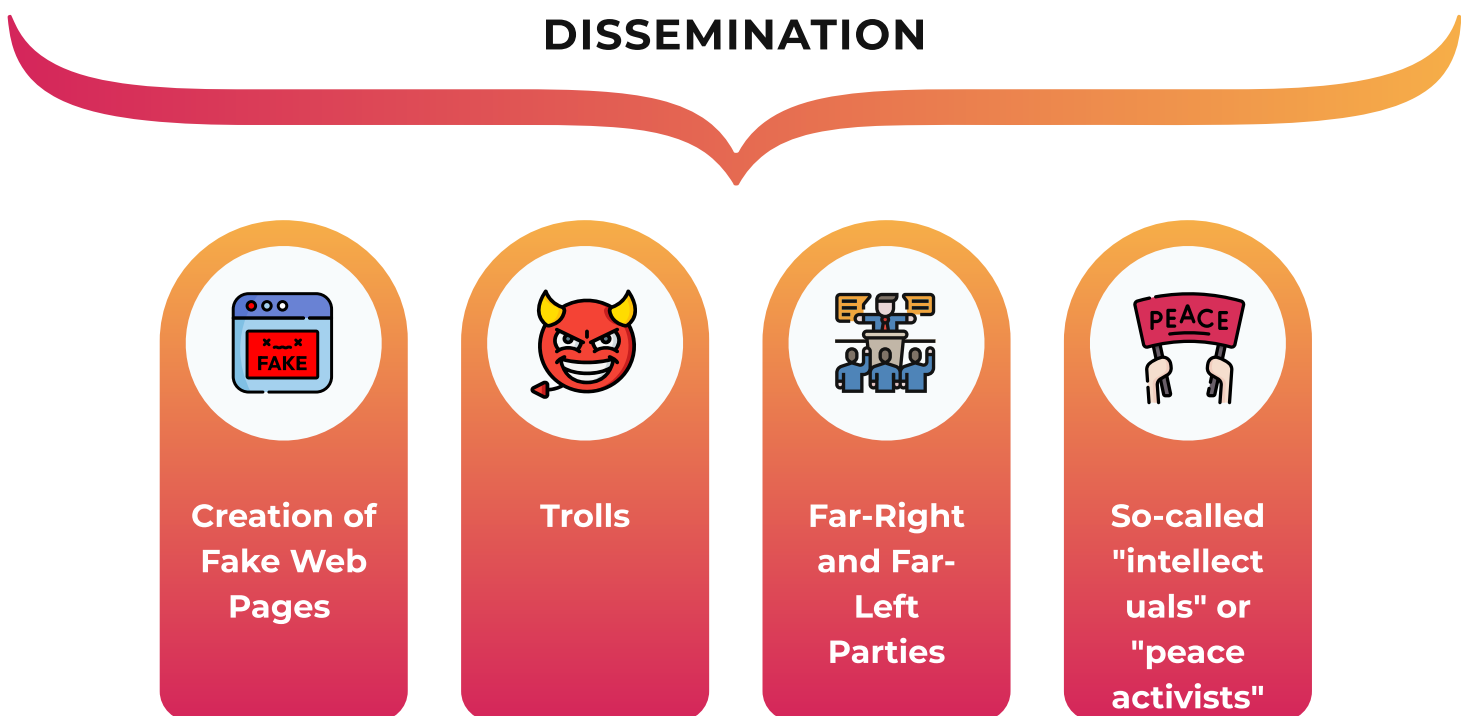
Goals of Disinformation in Austria



NARRATIVES USED TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS



DISSEMINATION



Goals of Russian propaganda in Austria



GOAL 1

One of the main goals of Russian disinformation in Austria is to create **divisions within the European Union and reduce the support for Ukraine**. By spreading narratives that question the EU's unity and its stance towards Ukraine, Russia seeks to undermine the EU's collective response to its actions. This can be seen in Austria's neutral stance towards Russia and its reluctance to fully support Ukraine, which could be influenced by its close energy and economic ties with Russia.

GOAL 2

The goal of **undermine support on societal level** is designed to influence public opinion, create societal divides, and sway sentiment in favor of Russia. This is achieved through a combination of exploiting Austria's historical neutrality, its economic dependencies on Russia, and leveraging existing societal and political sentiments. The narratives and tactics used are tailored to resonate with Austrian societal values, fears, and interests, making the disinformation campaigns more effective and insidious.

GOAL 3

Russia strategically employs a variety of narratives **to promote its dominance and shift blame**, positioning itself as a global power while deflecting responsibility for conflicts onto other countries, especially Western nations. This is accomplished by promoting narratives that depict Russia's actions as defensive responses to Western aggression, thereby justifying its behavior and shifting blame onto NATO and the US.

GOAL 4

The goal of **lifting sanctions against Russia** is a part of the broader Russian disinformation campaign in Austria. This goal aims to alleviate the economic pressure on Russia caused by sanctions imposed by the EU and other international entities. Russia seeks to achieve this by spreading narratives that question the effectiveness and fairness of these sanctions, thereby creating a push for their removal.

Selected narratives

Russian disinformation efforts in Austria are employing a series of narratives aimed at undermining support for Ukraine and the EU's sanctions regime, while promoting Russian interests. These narratives exploit Austria's historical neutrality, economic ties with Russia, and societal concerns to create division and doubt. Here is a closer look at eight such narratives that illustrate the multifaceted approach of these campaigns.

Selected narratives



The narrative that **Russia and Ukraine are undemocratic to a similar degree** seeks to equate the democratic standards of Russia and Ukraine, thereby undermining the legitimacy of Ukraine's democratic aspirations and its alignment with the EU. By suggesting that Ukraine is no more democratic than Russia, this narrative attempts to justify Russia's actions and discourage support for Ukraine within the EU. It also serves to downplay Russia's violations of international law, including its annexation of Crimea and ongoing aggression in Eastern Ukraine.



This narrative **Austrian support for Ukraine undermines neutrality** is designed to exploit Austria's historical stance of neutrality and its economic ties with Russia. By suggesting that support for Ukraine undermines Austria's neutrality, it aims to create a false dichotomy between maintaining neutrality and supporting Ukraine. This narrative also leverages Austria's economic dependence on Russian energy resources to discourage the imposition of sanctions against Russia.



By portraying **Ukrainians as "welfare tourists"** this narrative aims to tap into economic fears and xenophobic sentiments within Austrian society. It seeks to create resentment towards Ukrainian refugees, suggesting that they are a burden on the state and are taking advantage of Austria's generosity. This narrative undermines the public's willingness to support Ukrainian refugees and can lead to a decrease in solidarity with Ukraine.



Blaming the Austrian government for **prioritizing support for Ukraine over the needs of its own citizens**, this narrative is designed to create a false dichotomy between assisting Ukraine and addressing local concerns. It fosters a sense of injustice and neglect among the Austrian population, potentially leading to a decrease in public support for the government's foreign policy decisions and eroding societal consensus on providing aid to Ukraine.



The US and NATO preparing to destroy Russia. This narrative portrays Russia as a victim of Western aggression, suggesting that the US and NATO are planning to undermine or even destroy Russia. This narrative serves to justify Russia's defensive actions and shift blame onto Western nations for escalating tensions.



The narrative positions **Russia as a protector or savior of Europe** suggests that Russia's actions are necessary to maintain stability and security in the region. This narrative serves to enhance Russia's image as a dominant global power and shift blame onto Western nations for any conflicts or issues in the region.

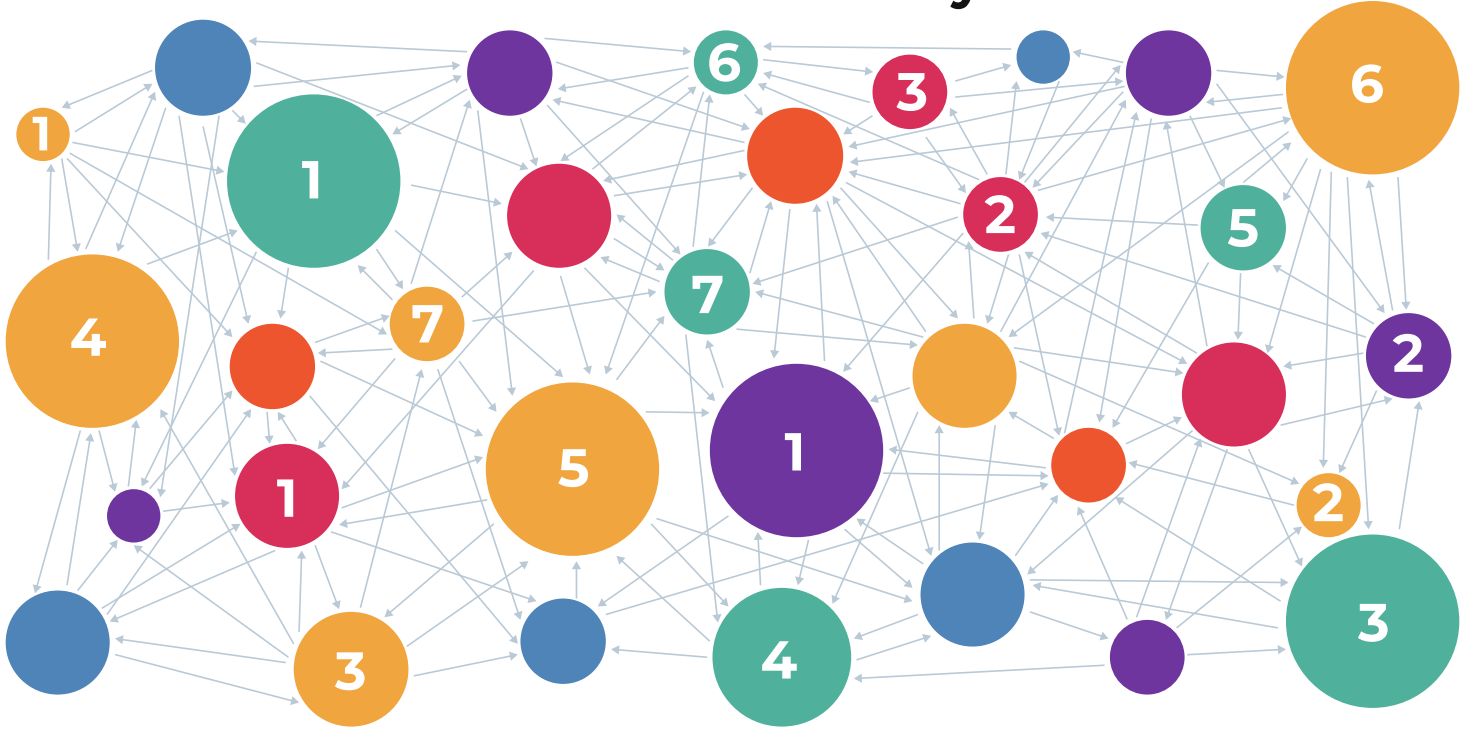


The **sanctions imposed on Russia are more detrimental to the Austrian economy than to Russia's**. It emphasizes the negative repercussions for Austrian businesses, particularly those with strong trade ties to Russia, and for consumers facing increased energy prices. The narrative suggests that the sanctions are counterproductive and that Austria is suffering unnecessarily due to a policy that is ineffective in changing Russian behavior.



Sanctions violate Austrian neutrality by leveraging Austria's historical policy of neutrality to argue against participation in sanctions against Russia. This narrative suggests that aligning with the EU's sanctions compromises Austria's neutral status and sides with one party in the conflict. It often accompanies anti-American sentiments, framing Ukraine as a puppet state of the US, thus turning anti-American beliefs into anti-Ukrainian ones. Austria's non-NATO membership and history of neutrality reinforce this narrative, sometimes seeking equality between aggressor and defender

Austria: disinformation cases analyzed



CASE NAME

AUDIENCE SIZE (ESTIMATED)

Goal#1

1. <u>The Russian-Ukrainian war is a war between two undemocratic states</u>	70,000
2. <u>Ukraine is one of the most corrupt countries in the world which violates the "Western values", says influential Ukrainian opposition politician Viktor Medvedchuk</u>	100,000
3. <u>2 video clips were used to show the "forceful conscription" into the Ukrainian Armed Forces, inter alia, of students</u>	1,100,000
4. <u>Austrians do not support provision of financial assistance to Ukraine, because it violates the neutrality of the country</u>	2,500,000
5. <u>Ukraine recruits 60-year old women into the army because of the casualties</u>	2,500,000
6. <u>There is an Austrian soldier serving within the Armed Forces of Ukraine, this violates Austrian neutrality</u>	2,500,000
7. <u>Austria funds weapons for Ukraine through the European Peace Facility</u>	190,000

Goal#2

1. <u>Ukrainian refugees possess luxury cars</u>	350,000
2. <u>Ukrainian farmers use pesticides in the products, exported to the European Union</u>	190,000
3. <u>Ukraine is sending 100 thousand Ukrainians to overwinter in Austria</u>	150,000

Goal#3

1. <u>NATO has been pumping weapons in Ukraine since 2014</u>	2,500,000
2. <u>EU, USA and NATO have conspired to start war in Ukraine.</u>	
3. <u>Nataliia Vovk, the alleged killer of Daria Dugina, was allegedly killed as well</u>	2,500,000
4. <u>The ammonia pipeline Tolyatti - Odesa was supposed to function according to the Initiative on the Safe Transportation of Grain and Foodstuffs from Ukrainian ports, but Russia was cheated on</u>	1,700,000
5. <u>Nothing happens in Ukrainian politics without consent of the ultra-nationalists</u>	250,000
6. <u>Hungary is suffering high inflation because Ukraine has increased the prices of oil transit through "Druzhba" pipeline by 5 times</u>	110,000
7. <u>First victims of the Revolution of Dignity were killed by Western snipers on the 20th of February, 2014</u>	240,000

Goal#4

1. <u>The Black Sea Grain Initiative is not effective, because a lot of Ukrainian grain is exported to Spain as a feed for pigs</u>	2,500,000
2. <u>CEOs of OMW and RBI: Sanctions had "done more harm than good to all those affected"</u>	250,000

Selected Socio-Economic Cases

CASE	<u>AUSTRIANS DO NOT SUPPORT PROVISION OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO UKRAINE, BECAUSE IT VIOLATES THE NEUTRALITY OF THE COUNTRY</u>
Category	Socio-Economic Influence
Goal	Weaken EU Unity and Reduce Support for Ukraine
Narrative	Austrian support for Ukraine undermines neutrality
Analysis	The eXXpress interview with Russian Ambassador to Austria Dmitryi Lubynaskyi disseminated the notion that Austrians oppose providing financial assistance to Ukraine due to perceived violations of Austrian neutrality ⁹⁵ . This messaging strategy aims to cultivate the belief among Austrians that supporting Ukraine is incongruent with Austria's commitment to neutrality. By framing financial aid to Ukraine as incompatible with Austrian neutrality, the interview seeks to sway public opinion and undermine support for Ukraine within Austria.
What wrong narrative Russians try to push	Austrian neutrality is not compatible with the support for Ukraine.
Channels of distribution	eXXpress website and social media.
Target audience	Austrians on the right wing of political spectrum who are likely to vote for Austrian National Party, but young enough to use internet extensively.
How fact-checking was done for this case	<p>According to Eurobarometer survey, conducted when this interview happened, 58% of Austrian supported provision of financial assistance to Ukraine⁹⁶. Additionally, neutrality does not equal isolationism. For instance, Article 23j of the Austrian Constitution allows the republic to participate in the EU Common Security and Defence Policy.</p> <p>According to the doctor of international law Ralph Janik, this clause obliges Austria not only to support Ukraine financially, but also militarily. If this is a breach to the Austrian neutrality, than the Austrian neutrality has been breached since 2010. During this period Austria had 8 different government which included all major political parties, but this article was not struck down</p>

CASE	<u>UKRAINIAN FARMERS USE PESTICIDES IN THE PRODUCTS, EXPORTED TO THE EUROPEAN UNION</u>
Category	Socio-Economic Influence
Goal	Undermine Support on Societal level
Narrative	Government supports Ukraine in expense for its own citizens
Analysis	Member of the parliamentary agricultural committee from FPÖ, Peter Schmiedlechner, alleged that Ukrainian farmers employ pesticides in products exported to the European Union ⁹⁷ . This assertion is part of a broader agenda to advocate for blocking Ukrainian access to EU markets. By characterizing Ukrainian agricultural products as hazardous and contributing to a reduction in prices due to lower production costs, Schmiedlechner aims to garner electoral support from Austrian farmers. The narrative suggests that Ukrainian goods pose a threat to European consumers and undermine the competitiveness of local agricultural producers.

95. <https://web.archive.org/web/20230711213438/https://exxpress.at/atomwaffen-an-unserer-eu-grenze-die-chance-auf-frieden-das-sagt-putins-botschafter/>

96. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3052>

97. <https://www.fpoe.at/artikel/heimischen-konsumenten-wird-pestizidbelastetes-getreide-aus-der-ukraine-untergejubelt/>

Selected Socio-Economic Cases

What wrong narrative Russians try to push	Block Ukrainian access to EU markets, hurt the Ukrainian economy while also receiving the electoral support of Austrian farmers
Channels of distribution	Austrian Freedom Party website
Target audience	Austrians who vote far right, mostly those without higher education who consider themselves to be "left out" due to loss of employment and rising inequality. Due to the content of this particular item, it is also of special interest for farmers.
How fact-checking was done for this case	According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN ⁹⁸ , in 2021 Ukrainian producers used 0.8 kg pesticides per hectare of cropland, while for Austria this indicator was at 4.2. One could explain this by sheer difference in the different areas of cropland available in two countries, but Austria also uses a bit more pesticides per capita and per amount of yields that are worth 1000 USD. Of course, different types of pesticides are used, but in the past years Ukraine has been actively nearing its regulations to the European ones. For instance, in 2021 the Ministry of Health lowered the permissible levels of Chlorpyrifos. It was only in late 2020 when the EU banned this substance. In 2022 the Ukrainian parliament passed an act to mirror WTO recommendations regarding pesticides ⁹⁹ .

Selected Political Cases

CASE	AUSTRIA FUNDS WEAPONS FOR UKRAINE THROUGH THE EUROPEAN PEACE FACILITY
Category	Political Influence
Goal	Weaken EU Unity and Reduce Support for Ukraine
Narrative	Austrian support for Ukraine undermines neutrality
Analysis	Multiple communications from the Austrian Freedom Party disseminated the erroneous claim that "Austria funds weapons for Ukraine through the European Peace Facility ¹⁰⁰ ". These messages instill the belief among Austrians that their government is breaching Austrian neutrality by allocating funds for weapons to Ukraine. Consequently, a growing number of Austrians perceive their government and EU institutions as unaccountable entities, especially as economic hardships persist while funds are directed towards endeavors perceived to compromise Austrian sovereignty.
What wrong narrative Russians try to push	Austrian contribution to the EPF is used to procure arms
Channels of distribution	Austrian Freedom Party website
Target audience	Austrians who vote far right, mostly those without higher education who consider themselves to be "left out" due to loss of employment and rising inequality.
How fact-checking was done for this case	European Peace Facility was established as a replacement for the Peace Facility for Africa which has functioned since 2004. Its aim was "to ensure rapid and efficient response to situations of violent conflict" ¹⁰¹ . This facility offered hundreds millions euros to the African Union for peacekeeping needs such as salaries for peacekeepers.

98. <https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/RP>

99. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0743-21#Text>

100. <https://www.fpoe.at/artikel/gemeinsame-eu-beschaffung-von-verteidigungsguetern-dient-nur-ukraine-und-nato/>

101. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52004BP0338&qid=1697871333942>

How fact-checking was done for this case	<p>During those years EU's foreign policy expanded, leading to creation of EPF in 2021. Its aim is "to strengthen the capacities of third States and regional and international organizations relating to military and defense matters"¹⁰². In 2021 EPF was used to fund military needs in <u>Mozambique</u>¹⁰³, Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁰⁴; Mali¹⁰⁵, Moldova¹⁰⁶, Georgia¹⁰⁷, but was not present in the Austrian public debate. The facility allows to provide any assistance, lethal included. Now EU uses the facility to provide Ukraine with artillery shells and missiles, not lethal aid, transport, training and other services.</p> <p>The Council Decision establishing EPF includes a clause which allows member states to abstain from financial participation in a specific effort. The abstaining state shall then "identify other assistance measures to which it will make an additional contribution". In regards to Ukraine, Austria has done just that. Instead of financing the artillery shells for Ukraine, Austria made additional contributions for procurement of protective equipment¹⁰⁸. "Not a single Austrian euros flows into Ukraine as lethal equipment", - says Minister of EU and Constitutional Affairs Karoline Edtstadler¹⁰⁸.</p>
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CASE	NATO HAS BEEN PUMPING WEAPONS IN UKRAINE SINCE 2014
Category	Political Influence
Goal	Promote Russian Dominance and Shift Blame
Narrative	The US and NATO preparing to destroy Russia
Analysis	<p>The dissemination of the message "NATO has been pumping weapons in Ukraine since 2014"¹¹⁰ is emblematic of disinformation tactics aimed at shaping perceptions of NATO's involvement in Ukraine and framing it as a provocation against Russia. Fairdenker, an Austrian covid-denialist group, propagated this message after replicating it from the German Telegram channel Node of Time. Notably, Node of Time is linked to Yuriy Podolyaka, a Russian propagandist of Ukrainian descent under investigation by Ukrainian authorities for state treason¹¹¹.</p> <p>The message purportedly cites NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and includes a clip marked with the watermark of SMOTRIM, a multimedia platform associated with the Russian state. By amplifying this narrative, the intent is to persuade Austrians that NATO's actions served as a catalyst for Russian aggression against Ukraine, fostering perceptions of NATO as an instigator rather than a defender of stability in the region.</p>
What wrong narrative Russians try to push	NATO members provided Ukraine with significant amount of weapons between 2014 and 2022
Channels of distribution	Fairdenken Telegram channel
Target audience	Austrians on the extreme right who in the past had followed conspiracy theories

102. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021D0509&qid=1697871677314>

103. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021D2032&qid=1697871677314>

104. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/AUTO/?uri=CELEX:32021D1923&qid=1697871677314&rid=183>

105. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/AUTO/?uri=CELEX:32021D2137&qid=1697871677314&rid=175>

106. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/AUTO/?uri=CELEX:32021D2136&qid=1697871677314&rid=174>

107. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/AUTO/?uri=CELEX:32021D2134&qid=1697871677314&rid=172108>.

108. <https://www.bmeia.gv.at/ministerium/presse/aktuelles/2023/03/eu-mitgliedsstaaten-setzen-beim-rat-fuer-auswaertige-angelegenheiten-klares-signal-gegenueber-ukrainischen-partnern>

109. https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/AB/14214/imfname_1566850.pdf

110. <https://t.me/Fairdenkenoriginal/3937>

111. https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/the-info-defense-network-crowdsourcing-soldiers-for-the-information-war/

How fact-checking was done for this case	<p>According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, there were 8 NATO member countries (out of 28) who supplied arms to Ukraine between 2014 and 2022¹¹². Czechia and Poland mostly supplied second-hand Soviet-era armored personal carriers, infantry fighting vehicles and self-propelled artillery which these states did not need anymore, having supplanted them with NATO equivalents. France, Great Britain and Turkey provided Ukraine with more modern weapon systems on the basis of commercial deals. In other words, the sellers were motivated more by material incentives rather than concerns about Ukraine. The US did send patrol crafts, APCs, counter-mortar radars, anti-tank missiles and personal firearms and equipment as aid. Detailed information about these shipments is publicly available.</p> <p>According to SIPRI, the value of weapons from NATO countries provided between 2014 and 2021 totaled at 174 million USD. In comparison, during the same period Russia provided Belarus, a country 4 times smaller than Ukraine, with weapons worth 971 million USD. Finally, in 2022-2023, that is, in the anticipation of and after Russian full-scale invasion NATO members supplied Ukraine with weapons and equipment 85 billion EUR, according to Kiel Institute for the World Economy calculations. Meaning, that the Alliance only started to aid Ukraine in a substantive way after the full-scale invasion, not before it.</p>
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CASE	EU, USA AND NATO HAVE CONSPIRED TO START WAR IN UKRAINE
Category	Political Influence
Goal	Promote Russian Dominance and Shift Blame
Narrative	The US and NATO preparing to destroy Russia
Analysis	Martin Rutter, a leader of conspiracy theory movement in Austria, posting a quote from a book of a Germany conspiracy theorist Peter Orzechowski according to which a third world war might start from Ukraine ¹¹³ . It makes Austrians believe that Russian full-scale invasion in Ukraine is a conspiracy of world elite.
What wrong narrative Russians try to push	There was no war in Ukraine, when Peter Orzechowski was writing his book in 2015
Channels of distribution	Telegram channel of Martin Rutter
Target audience	Austrians who follow conspiracy theories, around 15 thousand views in Telegram
How fact-checking was done for this case	The book of Peter Orzechowski was published first in 2014 and then a second edition was published in 2015. Rutter is referring to the second edition. By that time Russia has already invaded the Crimea and Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Orzechowski says this explicitly throughout the book, although not at that screenshot posted by Rutter. In other words, Orzechowski, although a conspiracy theoretician himself, wrote of contemporary events. It was not a prediction but a statement of facts that the initial Russian invasion into Ukraine indeed made the global security situation more dangerous.

112. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>

113. <https://t.me/MartinRutter/7472>

Fighting disinformation in Austria

Since 1945 Austrian Criminal Code included an article against the dissemination of false rumours. But in 2015 it was struck down during Criminal Code reform since there were almost no court trials featuring the article¹¹⁴. Now there are calls to renew this paragraph from different actors, for instance from Antidiscrimination Office¹¹⁵ or Directorate of State Security and Intelligence¹¹⁶. The latter, Austria's security service, argues that now it cannot effectively monitor the disinformation scene, lacking criminal basis to do so. At the same time, the Directorate has a right to research those groups which incite hatred¹¹⁷. But not all disinformation is hatred. **Thus, Austria does not have effective instruments to oppose disinformation.**



During the coronavirus pandemic the government created a special instrument to account for this shortage – "digital crisis headquarters"¹¹⁸. 10 police cadets were following the disinformation scene and flagging false reports. Then the public was informed about the false reports through governmental and media channels. Since 2020 there were no public reports about this instrument, thus it appears that the headquarters ceased to function.

There is no definition of disinformation in Austrian legal system¹¹⁹. Austrian Minister of Justice Alma Zadic recognizes that the country is not fighting disinformation effectively¹²⁰. At the same time, the state follows the measures taken at EU level, in particular the Digital Service Act which obliges online platforms to counteract disinformation among their users¹²¹. In October 2023 the Austrian government proposed a draft of the law which is aimed at the implementation of the Act¹²². At the time of writing the parliamentary proceedings did not start.

One of the key actions Austria has taken against Russian disinformation is to take stronger action against disinformation¹²³. Austria's State Security Agency (DSN) has announced it and called for penalties for spreading fake news, recognizing that many states, including Russia, engage in information warfare using disinformation to destabilize and paralyze systems. This move indicates a recognition of the threat posed by disinformation and a commitment to combating it through legal and regulatory means. However, **Austria's efforts to combat disinformation must be viewed** in the context of its broader relationship with Russia.

114. <https://www.parlament.gv.at/gegenstand/XXVI/I/689>

115. https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/SNME/17951/imfname_842799.pdf

116. <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000177697/staatsschutz-will-b>

117. <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20009486>

118. <https://orf.at/stories/3159533/>

119. https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/AB/2254/imfname_814586.pdf

120. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-10-10/death-threats-and-disinformation-the-everyday-poison-of-politics-in-europe>








121. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R2065&qid=1666857835014>

122. <https://www.parlament.gv.at/gegenstand/XXVII/ME/302?selectedStage=100>

123. <https://www.vindobona.org/article/austrias-state-security-agency-to-take-stronger-action-against-disinformation>

France. Disinformation Profile.




68 042 591 people (01.01.2023)  Population of country	24 700 2017, according to INSEE  Size of the Ukrainian diaspora	70 570 people  Estimated Ukrainian Refugees during the War	
MEMBER OF:			
 Founding member of the EU since 1958	 Founding member of NATO since 1950	 Euro area member since 1999	 Schengen area member since 1995

WHY FRANCE IS IMPORTANT?

- 1** France has significant influence in shaping the EU's policy.
- 2** The Normandy Format talks. Military support and humanitarian aid.
- 3** France has huge impact on World Geopolitical Architecture.
- 4** France is a founding member of the EU and the Eurozone, key member of the Group of Seven.
- 5** France is a member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and one of the founding members of the UN.

FRANCE'S SPECIFIC:



France is strong in disinformation investigations and has uncovered massive disinformation campaigns such as **Doppelgaenger" operation.**

POLITICAL PARTIES


Understanding the pro-russian influence

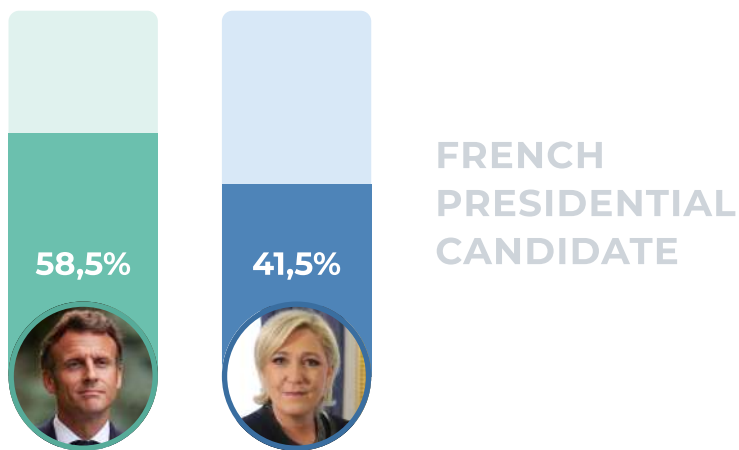
The pro-Russian presidential candidate and mouthpiece of Kremlin Marine Le Pen, who is also source of many disinformation narratives has significant political influence.

On April 24, 2022, France voted to pick its next president, choosing incumbent Emmanuel Macron (58.5%) over far-right candidate Marine Le Pen (41.5%).

FIGHTING RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION IN AUSTRIA'S:



-  Despite the **shutdown of Kremlin-backed outlets** RT and Sputnik, Russian disinformation is still spreading across EU countries – mainly through internet and digital media. **Example** examined here - **Doppelgaenger" operation.**
-  The French government set up an agency **Viginum** to combat foreign disinformation and fake news that aims to "undermine the state". The move came when France was preparing for a presidential election next year.
-  France also has strong network of NGOs and fact-checkers.
-  France uncovers massive disinformation campaigns and impose sanctions on related parties. These are the technology companies "Agency for Social Design" and "Structure of National Technologies", the agency "Infors", the Institute of Russian Abroad and the NGO "Dialogue". Seven people associated with these organizations are also banned from entering Europe.



MAIN THINK TANKS AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS DEALING WITH DISINFORMATION:

Viginum 	Agence France Presse (AFP) 
EU Disinfo Lab 	Arcrom 

COUNTRY SPECIFICS

France is extremely interesting case, worth investigation for several reasons. First, France is one of trend-setters within European Union. Together with Germany are political leaders that was founding members of numerous political organizations and unions such as EU, G7, G8, G20, NATO, OECD, UN, WTO. France sets trends and moods within European Union and always stays on the avant-garde of European diplomacy.

France's remarkable role in fighting disinformation and raising awareness.

France has experienced heavy bombarding with disinformation in media for the last decade. There is a political influence of far-right party, which is also spreading disinformation. Moreover, the pro-Russian presidential candidate and mouthpiece of Kremlin Marine Le Pen, who is also source of many disinformation narratives has significant political influence. On April 24, 2022, France voted to pick its next president, choosing incumbent Emmanuel Macron (58.5%) over far-right candidate Marine Le Pen (41.5%).

As a respond to this **VIGINUM**^{124,125} is the technical and operational service of the State responsible for vigilance and protection against foreign digital interference. Attached to the General Secretariat of Defense and National Security (SGDSN), this service with national competence was created on July 13, 2021. VIGINUM was the first who investigated huge, massive disinformation attack and made alarm and brought it to attention of European public. This major Russian disinformation campaign¹²⁶ was targeting more than 10 European States including France, Germany, Spain, Italy, etc. The campaigns called Reliable Recent News (RNN) aims to undermine Western support to Ukraine. NGO EU DisinfoLab, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) and the Atlantic Councils Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) published several investigative reports.

Doppelgaenger operation - is yet another example of a cross-platform operation, with its core hosted on web pages and amplification profiles across social media networks, including Facebook and Twitter. The operation makes use of different formats, from videos to online ads. **EU DisinfoLab** has partnered with the Swedish non-profit foundation **Qurium**¹²⁷ Media Foundation, a provider of digital security solutions and forensics investigations to independent media and human rights organizations.

124. https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/summary_rrn_campaign_cle0c86d6.pdf

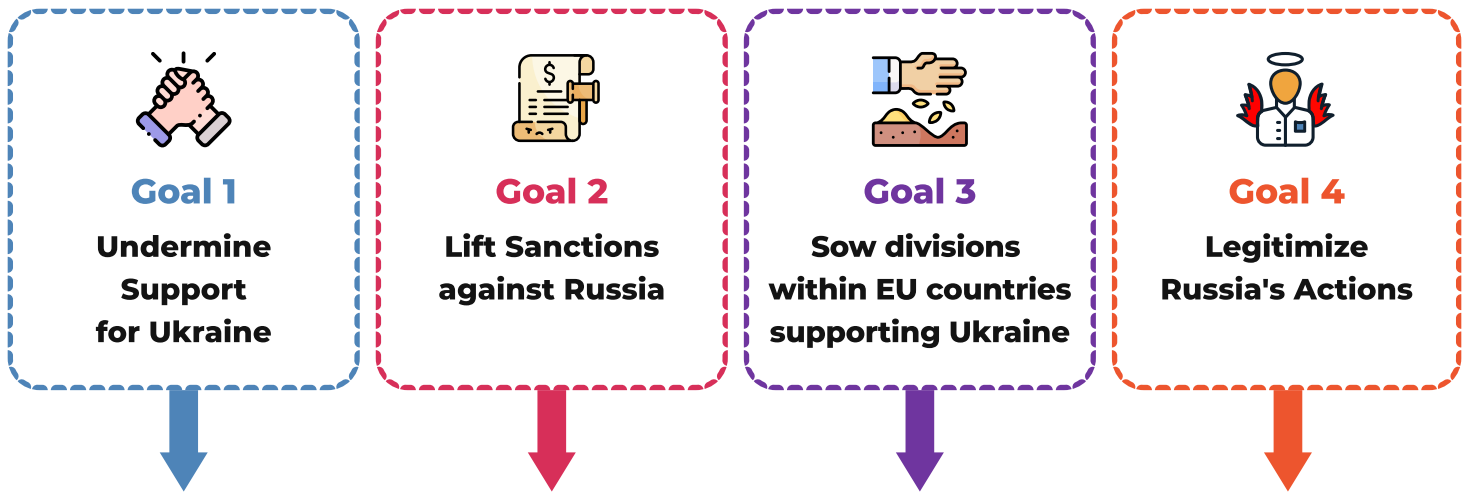
125. <https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/notre-organisation/composantes/service-de-vigilance-et-protection-contre-les-ingerences-numeriques>

126. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/security-disarmament-and-non-proliferation/news/2023/article/statement-by-ms-catherine-colonna-foreign-digital-interference-france-s>

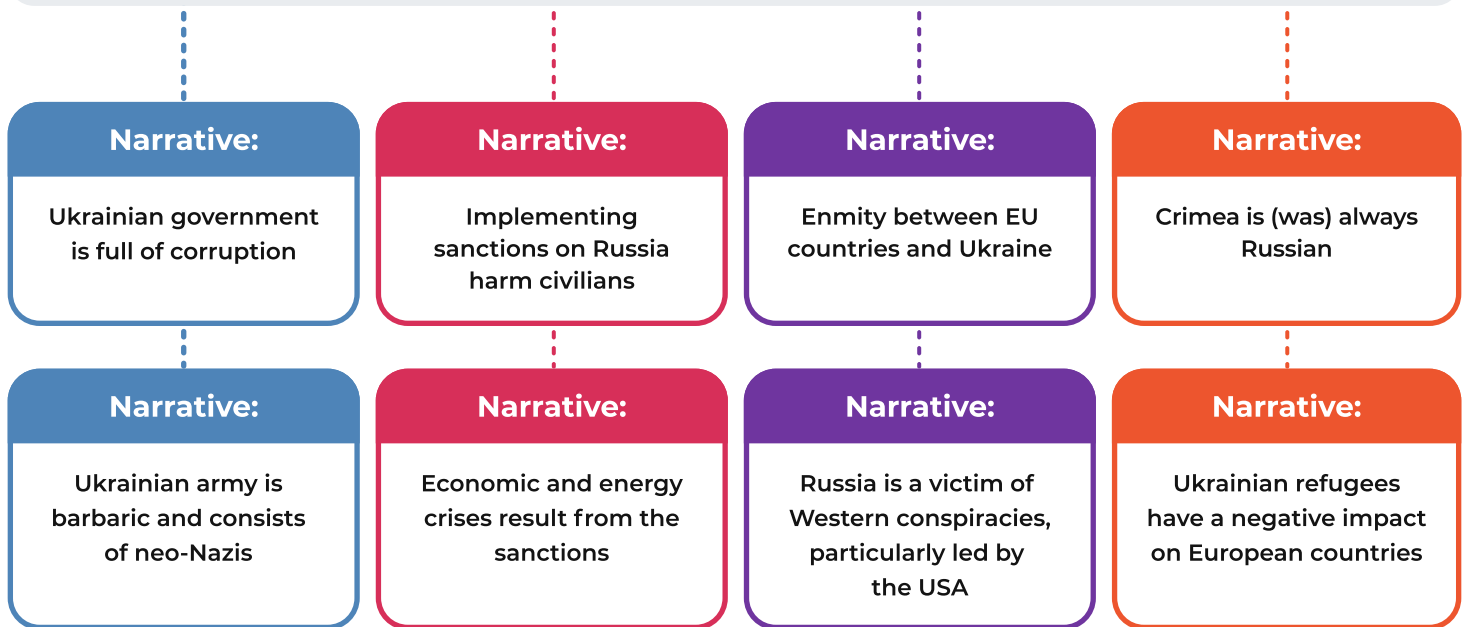
127. <https://www.qurium.org/alerts/under-the-hood-of-a-doppelgaenger/>



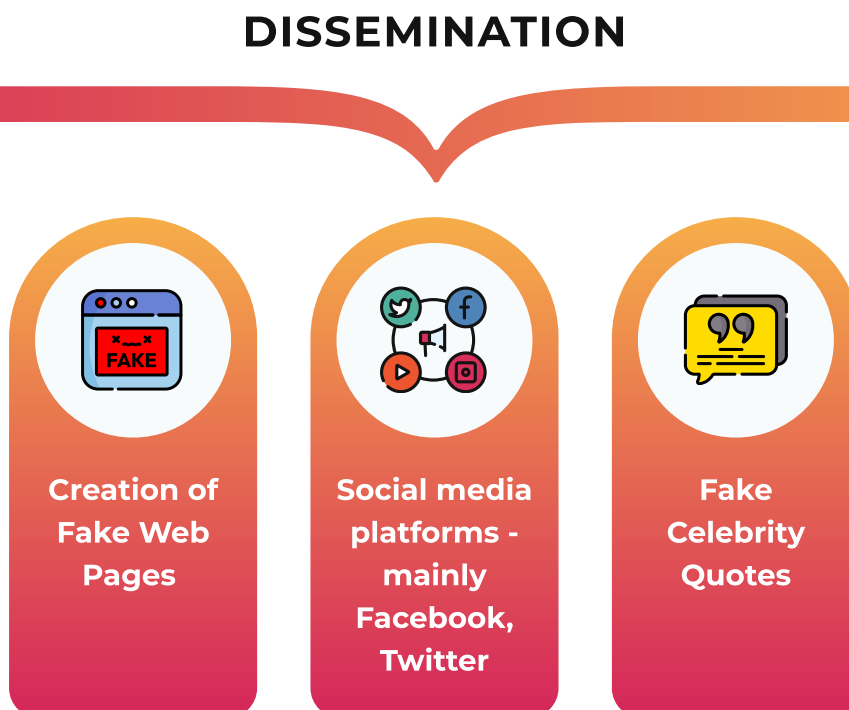
Goals of Disinformation in France



NARRATIVES USED TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS



DISSEMINATION



Goals of Russian propaganda in France



GOAL 1

One of goals of Russian disinformation campaigns is to **undermine support for Ukraine** by demonizing its government and accusing it of Nazism and corruption. This strategy involves spreading false information to delegitimize Ukraine's stance and weaken international backing. By portraying the Ukrainian government as corrupt and associating it with Nazism, Russia seeks to justify its aggression and reduce the effectiveness of Ukraine's appeals for support

GOAL 2

Russian disinformation campaigns aim to **lift sanctions against Russia** by promoting narratives that claim sanctions cause more harm to civil society than to the Russian state, leading to economic and energy crises in Europe. This tactic seeks to shift blame from Russia's actions to Western sanctions, fostering opposition to these measures and pressuring for their removal.

GOAL 3

One of the other goals of Russian disinformation in France is to **sow divisions within countries supporting Ukraine**, focusing on creating enmity between EU countries and Ukraine, and portraying Russia as a victim of Western conspiracies, particularly those led by the USA. These efforts aim to destabilize Western unity, erode trust in democratic institutions, and deflect criticism from Russia's actions in Ukraine. By exploiting existing societal divisions and manipulating public opinion, these campaigns seek to weaken international support for Ukraine and reduce the effectiveness of collective responses to Russian aggression.

GOAL 4

Russian disinformation campaigns are designed to **legitimize Russia's actions**, particularly in the context of its aggression against Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. These campaigns aim to justify Russia's behavior by rewriting history, spreading false narratives, and manipulating public opinion both within Russia and internationally. By portraying Russia as acting within its historical rights or as responding to external threats, these disinformation efforts seek to garner support for Russian policies and diminish the international response to its actions.

Selected narratives

Russian disinformation campaigns in France have been actively promoting misleading narratives to undermine support for Ukraine. These efforts include demonizing the Ukrainian government, spreading false accusations of corruption. The campaigns also claim that sanctions against Russia disproportionately harm civilians, contributing to Europe's economic and energy crises. Additionally, they aim to create discord between EU countries and Ukraine, portray Russia as a victim of Western conspiracies, justify the annexation of Crimea, and negatively depict Ukrainian refugees. These tactics are designed to weaken the international stance in favor of Ukraine.

Selected narratives



The narrative of Russian disinformation in France about **demonizing the Ukrainian government and accusing it of corruption** has been a significant concern for the French government. The disinformation campaign has been linked to a wider Russian effort to undermine Western support for Ukraine. It involves the spread of false information, including reports of alleged French mercenaries fighting in Ukraine and doctored media content, aimed at portraying the Ukrainian government as corrupt and unworthy of support. This disinformation campaign has led to heightened tensions between France and Russia, with the French government denouncing the spread of false information and summoning the Russian ambassador to address the issue. The campaign has been described as a "hybrid strategy" aimed at undermining support for Ukraine in the face of the Russian war.



A crucial element of Russian propaganda consists of **accusations of Nazism against Ukrainians**. Denialism of war crimes, notably in Boutcha, has been recurrent, casting doubt on the event's reality, scale, or perpetrators. This narrative is a crucial element of Russian propaganda and has been used to discredit the EU as a whole, create an illogical connection between Hitler's Nazi Germany and the European Union, and deny war crimes, such as those in Boutcha, by casting doubt on their reality, scale, or perpetrators. The idea is to portray the Ukrainian armed forces as barbaric and associated with neo-Nazis, and to suggest that welcoming Ukrainian refugees has negative effects on host countries.



The narrative that **sanctions against Russia primarily harm civilians** rather than the Russian state is used to undermine support for sanctions among the public and policymakers, with the goal of weakening the sanctions regime.



These narratives are intimately linked to the war in Ukraine as the **economic and energy crises result from the sanctions brought by the conflict**. One of the principal hoaxes is the claim that the Russian economy continues to thrive while Western economies sink into the abyss, so as to erode support for popular support towards Ukraine. Many of these narratives are meant to promote institutional distrust, e.g., claims that France is poorly managed, experiencing worse inflation and social inequality than other European countries.



The narrative of **enmity between EU countries and Ukraine** is a disinformation tactic used by Russian propaganda to sow divisions within countries that support Ukraine. By fostering discord and skepticism about Ukraine among European populations, this narrative aims to weaken the united front that has been providing Ukraine with political, financial, and military support. Russian disinformation campaigns have been known to portray Ukrainian migrants negatively, often using decontextualized or fabricated news stories to paint them as dangerous or violent, thereby attempting to erode the solidarity and hospitality extended by European nations.



The narrative that **Russia is a victim of Western conspiracies, particularly led by the USA** aims to portray Russia as a beleaguered state, unfairly targeted by Western powers, and to deflect attention from Russia's own actions, such as its aggression in Ukraine. The goal is to sow doubt and confusion among the public, erode trust in Western institutions and governments, and foster sympathy for Russia. By portraying itself as a victim, Russia seeks to justify its actions and policies, while undermining the credibility and intentions of Western nations.

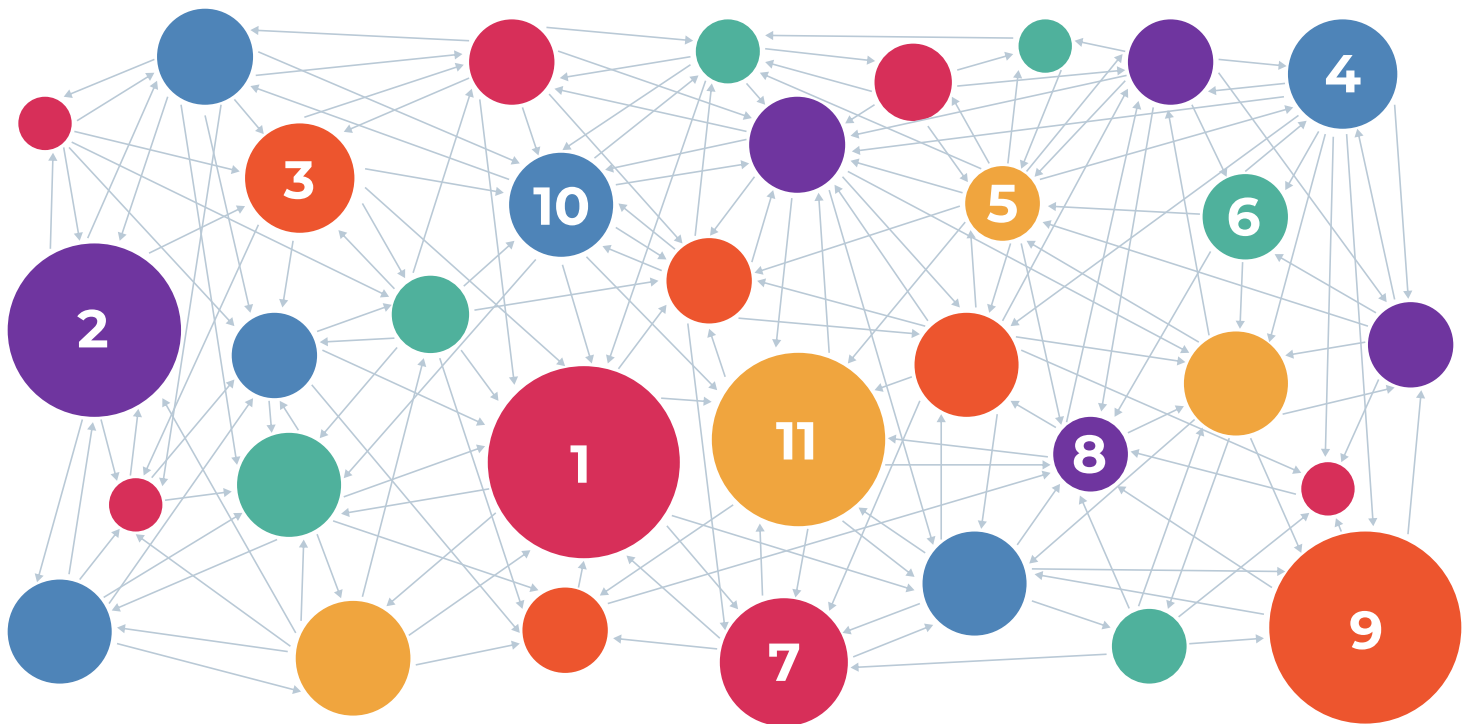


The narrative about **Crimea has always been Russian** is a key element of Russian disinformation campaigns in France and other countries. This narrative is used to legitimize Russia's annexation of Crimea and to rewrite the historical and cultural ties of the region to Ukraine. Russian propaganda emphasizes periods when Crimea was under Russian rule, such as during the Russian Empire and the Soviet period, while glossing over periods of Ukrainian and Tatar influence. The goal is to create a perception that the annexation of Crimea was a restoration of historical justice rather than an act of aggression, thereby seeking to justify Russia's actions and undermine international condemnation of the annexation.



This narrative about **Ukrainian refugees have a negative impact on European countries** portrays Ukrainian refugees as a burden and a threat to European societies, suggesting that they are not fleeing war but seeking to profit at the expense of their host societies. Russian propaganda often generalizes the image of Ukrainian refugees as a nuisance to Europe, aiming to convince Europeans to refuse assistance to them.

France: disinformation cases analyzed



CASE NAME

AUDIENCE SIZE (ESTIMATED)

1.	Image of "Azov" battalion as neo-nazis	2,000,000
2.	"Doppelgaenger" operation	1,500,000
3.	Bed bugs were brought to Paris by Ukrainians	600,000
4.	Propaganda in the Propaganda debunking article	600,000
5.	Inflation in France is the fault of Ukraine	300,000
6.	Absent mustard in France due to Ukraine's fault instead of Russia's fault launching war	350,000
7.	Russia fights this war against the West and Ukraine is just a puppet	900,000
8.	Ukrainians are privileged and treated better than other refugees and immigrants solely due to the fact that Ukrainians are blond and have blue eyes	300,000
9.	Crimea is Russian	2,000,000
10.	Book "Zov" by an ex-Russian soldier	400,000
11.	MH17 Plane Crash	1,500,000

Selected cases analyzed

CASE	SUMMARY OF "DOPPELGAENGER" OPERATION
Category	Political Influence, Socio-Economic Influence
Goal	All goals
Narrative	All narratives
Analysis	<p>This is pan-European campaign, that took place in 2022-2023 in more than 10 countries of Europe including France. French investigators discovered it. Several large French daily newspapers such as Le Parisien, 20 Minutes, Le Monde, and Le Figaro were copied. The campaign started in 2022 year and targeted German media such as FAZ, Der Spiegel, Bild, and Die Welt. Russia created websites similar to official French websites by design and web address. Numerous (hundreds or even thousands) websites that copied official media, state websites, even website of NATO. The campaign involved techniques including producing fake articles on a page identical in all respects to those of the legitimate sites of media organizations, but with different domain names -- for example .ltd instead of .fr. This means that users can be unknowingly led to the false news site by wrongly inputting the domain name. The technique is known as typo squatting.</p> <p>"Visually, the page resembles that of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. The graphic design, logo, and links to the ministry's official social media accounts all look like an official French diplomatic press release, like the ones the ministry publishes every day. Except that the information it shares – the introduction a 1.5% tax on "every monetary transaction" to finance military support for Ukraine – is false."</p>
Debunking	<p>The disinformation campaign was named Reliable Recent News RNN, after the pro-Russian website. It's the second wave of the so-called Doppelgänger operation which was uncovered last year by VIGINUM, NGO EU DisinfoLab¹²⁸ and Meta. Details of operation "Doppelganger" are published in report by Disinfo EU¹²⁹.</p>

CASE	"CRIMEA IS RUSSIAN" - MARINE LE PEN ¹³⁰ CONTINUOUSLY SPREADS THIS NARRATIVE
Category	Political Influence
Goal	Legitimize Russia's Actions, Undermine the legitimacy of sanctions
Narrative	<p>All narrativFalse narrative that Crimea is Russian, claiming that Crimea's inhabitants freely voted for the referendum to validate the attachment to Russia. "Crimea is russian" is also spread by other far-right leaders of Europe. This narrative is pushed by Russians and by fa-right politicians to justify the war from Russian side and explain that sanctions against Russia are unnecessaryes</p>

128. <https://www.disinfo.eu/doppelganger/>

129. <https://www.disinfo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Doppelganger-1.pdf>

130. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/le-pen-insists-crimea-is-russian/> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/le-pen-insists-crimea-is-russian/>

Selected Socio-Economic Cases

Analysis	<p>Le Pen continuously repeats this narrative in numerous media and in her official speeches. Le Pen's policy stances sometimes echo the "official language of Putin's regime"¹³¹. Issued on: 03/06/2023</p> <p>The narrative that Russia simply took back what was already its own captured the minds of many internationally – most prominently US President Donald Trump, who told G7 leaders in 2018 that 'Crimea is Russian because everyone who lives there speaks Russian'. It was consistent with his previous statement that 'the people of Crimea, would rather be with Russia than where they were'.¹⁵¹ In Europe, too, a cohort of mostly right-wing populist parties and politicians with strong links to the Kremlin have pushed the 'Crimea is Russian' narrative. In Germany, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) concurs with Putin that the move into Crimea was in response to 'the expression of genuine public will'. AfD representatives, including Bundestag members, visit Crimea regularly despite protests from the Ukrainian authorities.¹⁵² In France Marine Le Pen, the leader of the National Rally (formerly National Front) party, also recited from the Russian script when she said that 'Crimea was always Russian'.</p>
Debunking	<p>Less than 6 per cent of Crimea's written history (from the 9th century BC to date) belongs to the Russian chapter. Crimea's final chapter before its 2014 annexation by Russia was as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC). A part of independent Ukraine and the only self-governing region within unitary Ukraine, the ARC had its own constitution, prime minister and parliament.</p> <p>What happened in February–March 2014 was a full-spectrum military operation executed on land and at sea and supplemented by sustained and targeted anti-Ukraine information operations.¹⁵⁹ Finally, when a referendum was held – in effect at gunpoint – on 16 March 2014 to legitimize Russia's takeover of Crimea, the Kremlin hijacked the principle of self-determination. Public opinion polling prior to Russia's aggressive disinformation campaign spoke clearly in favour of Crimea remaining part of Ukraine¹³².</p>

131. <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20230603-le-pen-s-far-right-served-as-mouthpiece-for-the-kremlin-says-french-parliamentary-report>

132. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/05/myths-and-misconceptions-debate-russia/myth-12-crimea-was-always-russian>

Part 3. Enhancing fight with disinformation

Recommendations on enhancing efforts in fighting disinformation on the EU level.

The EU has already taken several initiatives and recommendations **on Legislation and Policy Level and on Execution Level (Implementation and Monitoring)**. Each address the issue of politically driven disinformation in different ways and collectively aim to create a safer digital space, limit the spread of disinformation, and ensure the protection of European values and democratic systems. On Legislation and Policy there are following measures.



1. European Commission's Digital Services Act (DSA). The DSA aims to ensure transparency and mitigation measures to tackle disinformation, harmful content and hate speech on online platforms such as social networks and content-sharing platforms¹³³. The DSA came into force for large online platforms on 25th of August 2023. Platforms with more than 45 million users (10% of the population in Europe) were given 4 months to comply with the obligations of the DSA. All platforms, including those with less than 45 million active users, must comply with all the DSA rules by February 17, 2024

2. European Parliament's Special Committee on Foreign Interference. The committee has issued a report calling for urgent protection of the 2024 European elections, urging measures such as banning TikTok at all levels of national government and in the EU institutions, and strengthening cybersecurity measures to prevent hacking and other attacks on election-related infrastructure¹³⁴.

3. European Movement International's Manifesto for the European Elections. The manifesto calls for political leaders, political parties, and elected representatives to take several measures, including fighting disinformation and ensuring media freedom and pluralism¹³⁵.

4. The Code of Practice on Disinformation. It's a first-of-its-kind tool through which relevant players in the online information ecosystem active in the EU agreed on self-regulatory standards to fight disinformation. **The strengthened Code of Practice**, signed in June 2022 contains 44 commitments and 128 specific measures, covering demonetizing the dissemination of disinformation, ensuring the transparency of political advertising, empowering users, enhancing the cooperation with fact-checkers, and providing a broader range of commitments and measures to counter online disinformation¹³⁶.

On Execution Level recommendations proposed by task force and non-governmental organization, which are voluntary and aim to guide behavior and promote best practices:

5. EDMO Task Force on 2024 European Parliament Elections. The task force, established by the European Democratic Movement, aims to monitor the EU information, and facilitate communications and dissemination of research, media, and information literacy (MIL) initiatives within the EDMO community¹³⁷.

6. European Policy Centre's (EPC) Disinformation Snapshots. The EPC has published snapshots on disinformation trends in the run-up to the European Parliament elections in Bulgaria, Germany, and Italy, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive plans to build resistance to disinformation and ensure accurate information dissemination¹³⁸.

133. <https://peoplesbig.tech/safeguarding-europe-s-2024-elections-a-checklist-for-robust-enforcement-of-the-dsa>

134. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20230524IPR91908/foreign-interference-meps-call-for-urgent-protection-of-2024-european-elections>

135. <https://europeanmovement.eu/publication-articles/manifesto-eu-elections/>

136. <https://eucrim.eu/news/the-strengthened-code-of-practice-on-disinformation/>

137. <https://edmo.eu/edmo-task-force-on-2024-european-parliament-elections/>

138. <https://www.iaei.it/en/pubblicazioni/disinformation-ahead-eu-parliamentary-elections>

7. EPC's Dialogue on Disinformation. The EPC has selected Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) for a regrating opportunity under the ELEVATED Project to carry out activities on the topic of disinformation, aiming to identify challenges and risks posed by disinformation and produce knowledge and understanding about joint efforts to counter disinformation¹³⁹.

As the EU has taken several initiatives to combat disinformation, including legislative measures, policy recommendations, and execution level actions. However, based on the **analysis of four EU country disinformation profiles a detailed action plan and policy recommendations are essential to develop.** This plan should focus on areas where existing measures require strengthening and new initiatives need to be introduced. The following outlines an approach to address these challenges. There are several areas within 4 pillars (Strengthening the Regulatory Framework, Enhancing Cooperation and Capability, Fostering Media Literacy, and Investing in Research and Innovation), where actions have been initiated with short-term and long-term effects, but need further improvement or are yet to be fully implemented.

AREA OF FOCUS	RECOMMENDATIONS	SHORT-TERM	LONG-TERM
Strengthening the Regulatory Framework	Improve the enforcement of the Digital Services Act (DSA)	✓	
	Strengthen the Code of Practice on Disinformation	✓	
Enhancing Cooperation and Capability	Improve the Rapid Alert System	✓	
	Expand the East StratCom Task Force and the EUvsDisinfo platform		✓
	Enhance cooperation and coordination among EU institutions, online platforms, news media, and EU citizens	✓	✓
	Foster international partnerships		✓
Fostering Media Literacy	Expand European Media Literacy Week	✓	
	Improve media literacy education		✓
Investing in Research and Innovation	Allocate more resources to research and innovation in the field of disinformation		✓
	Invest in AI-driven translation and content assessment tools		✓
	Create a network of Digital Innovation Hubs across the EU		✓
	Allocate specific funding for the PPP within the EU's budget for digital innovation and security	✓	
	Encourage private partners to contribute through in-kind resources	✓	✓

139. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_6453



Strengthening the existing Regulatory Framework

Improve the enforcement of the Digital Services Act (DSA): While the DSA has been proposed to increase transparency and accountability of online platforms, there are instances where its enforcement has been lacking. For example, the European Commission has recently launched legal action against social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter) under the DSA for potential breaches in areas linked to content moderation, dark patterns, advertising transparency, and data access for researchers¹⁴⁰. This suggests that there is room for improvement in the enforcement of the DSA.

The Code of Practice on Disinformation has been strengthened and signed by a wide range of players who commit to counter disinformation¹⁴¹. However, recent reports suggest that further efforts are needed to provide more targeted, complete, and meaningful data. Platforms also need to provide safeguards regarding new generative AI technologies that have the potential for creating and disseminating disinformation¹⁴².



Enhancing Cooperation and Capability

The Rapid Alert System facilitates the sharing of data and strategies between EU member states¹⁴³. However, the system needs to be improved and utilized more effectively to counter disinformation.

Expand the East StratCom Task Force and the EUvsDisinfo platform: These platforms identify and expose disinformation campaigns. However, their capabilities need to be expanded and their operations need to be more widely reported as they happen¹⁴⁴.

Given the global and cross-platform nature of disinformation, there is a need for greater cooperation and **coordination among EU institutions, online platforms, news media, and EU citizens**. This could involve joint initiatives and shared resources to detect, analyze, and expose disinformation.

Foster international partnerships, such as with the U.S., to share best practices and develop joint responses to disinformation¹⁴⁵. Participate in global forums to advocate for unified standards in combating disinformation.



Fostering Media Literacy

While the **European Media Literacy Week** promotes media literacy skills and projects across the EU, it needs to be expanded and made more impactful. More stakeholders at the national level should be encouraged to organize their own events during this week¹⁴⁶.

Improve media literacy education. Media literacy education is crucial for adults as well as children. However, a survey found that just 9% of Europeans (from 11 countries) have received media literacy training, but 58% are interested in doing so¹⁴⁷. This suggests that there is a significant gap in media literacy education that needs to be addressed.

140. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/12/18/brussels-launches-legal-action-against-musk-x-over-illegal-content-disinformation>

141. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/protecting-democracy/strengthened-eu-code-practice-disinformation_en

142. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/code-practice-disinformation-new-reports-available-transparency-centre>

143. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/07/15/eu-s-role-in-fighting-disinformation-taking-back-initiative-pub-82286>

144. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2023-0187_EN.html

145. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/31/u-s-eu-joint-statement-of-the-trade-and-technology-council-2/>

146. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/media-literacy>

147. <https://edmo.eu/media-literacy/the-importance-of-media-literacy-in-fighting-disinformation/>



Invest in Research and Innovation

More resources should be **allocated to research and innovation** in the field of disinformation. This could involve funding for academic research, development of new technologies for content verification and fact-checking, and studies on the socio-economic impact of disinformation.

Invest in AI-driven translation and content assessment tools that work across all EU languages.

Create a network of **Digital Innovation Hubs across the EU** that focus on developing technologies and methodologies to counter disinformation. These hubs should facilitate collaboration between public and private sector researchers. Each hub could specialize in different aspects of disinformation research, such as AI-driven content analysis, behavioral studies on information consumption, or the development of educational tools for media literacy.

The EU should allocate specific **funding for the PPP** within its budget for digital innovation and security. This funding can be used to support research projects, technology development, and pilot programs. Encourage private partners to **contribute through in-kind resources**, such as access to proprietary technologies, research facilities, and expert personnel.

Implementing this action plan requires a coordinated effort across all levels of the EU, from policymakers to individual member states, and active participation from the private sector and civil society. By taking decisive action and committing to continuous improvement, the EU can significantly enhance its resilience against disinformation and protect its democratic values. To ensure the effectiveness of these proposed actions, the following steps should be taken within **Monitoring & Evaluation framework**:



ESTABLISH A MONITORING BODY: Create or appoint an independent body within the EU to monitor the implementation of these actions, evaluate their effectiveness, and recommend adjustments as needed.



ANNUAL REPORTING: Require an annual report to the European Parliament and the Council on the progress made in combating disinformation, highlighting successes, challenges, and areas for improvement.



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT: Regularly engage with stakeholders, including civil society, academia, and the tech industry, to gather feedback and foster collaboration in the fight against disinformation.

Think Tanks and Fact-Checkers

The organizations mentioned below are determined to foster cooperation in fighting disinformation.

FACT-CHECKING ORGANIZATIONS:

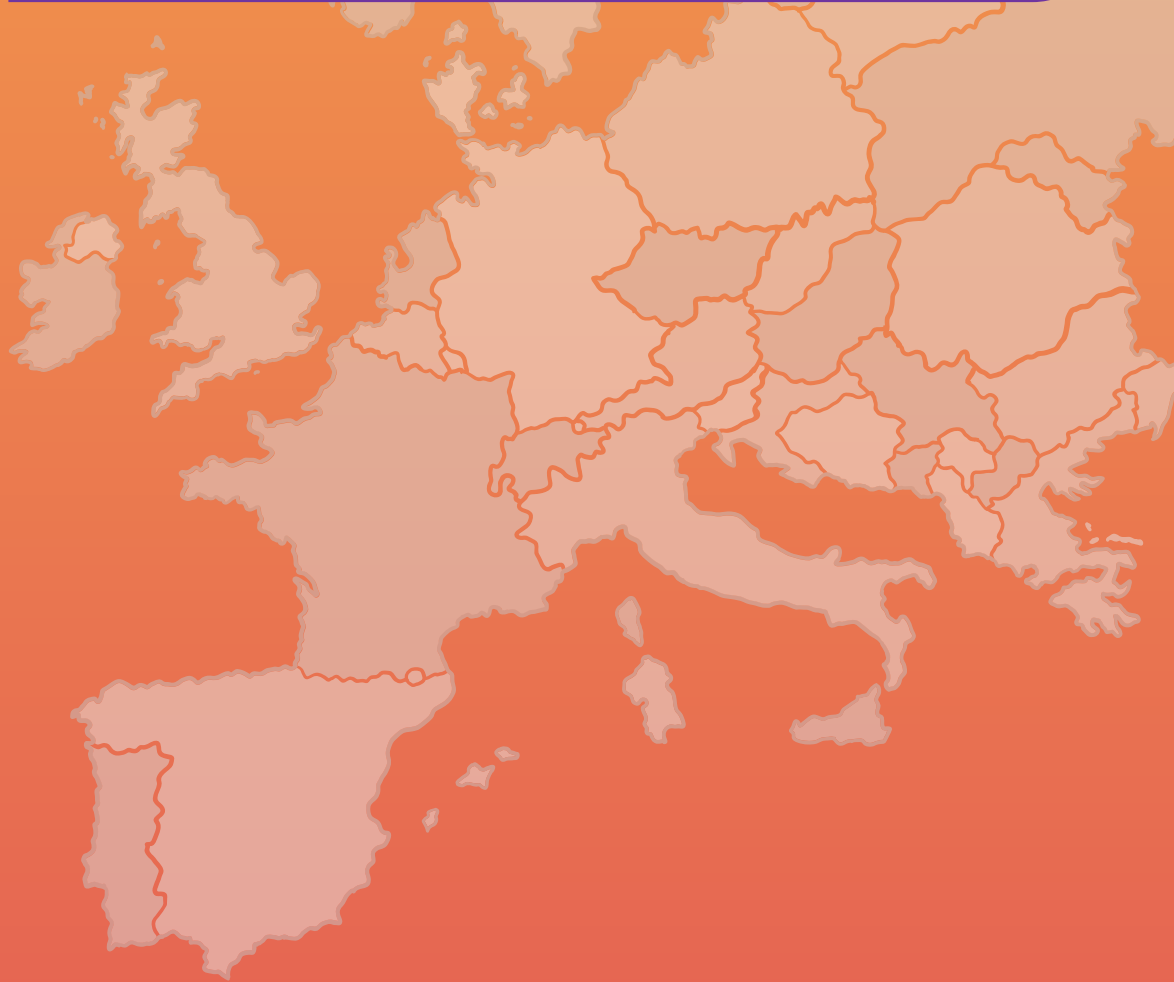
1. EDMO. An organization involved in fact-checking and is part of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO).
2. Agence France-Presse's Europe. A news agency that covers many EU countries and is involved in fact-checking efforts.
3. CORRECTIV - Recherchen für die Gesellschaft. A German non-profit investigative newsroom.
4. EFCSN. A member of the European Fact-checking Standards Network sets standards for independent fact-checking organizations in Europe.
5. Demagog.pl. A Poland-based fact-checking organization.
5. Viginum. A state agency created in 2021 specifically to protect against foreign digital interference and disinformation campaigns aimed at influencing public opinion in France.

THINKS TANKS AND NGOS:

Germany	France
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aspen Institute Germany 2. Institut für Europäische Politik 3. Berlin Social Science Center 4. Bertelsmann Foundation 5. European Council on Foreign Relations 6. The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 7. German Development Institute 8. German Institute of Global and Area Studies 9. Institut Solidarische Moderne 10. Stiftung Marktwirtschaft 11. Open Platform e.V. 12. Alliance Ukrainian Organizations 13. Crisp e.V. 14. Deutsch-Ukrainisches Büro 15. Vitsche e.V. 16. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung 17. Europäischer Austausch gGmbH 18. M100 Sanssouci Colloquium 19. Zentrum Liberale Moderne 20. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik (DGAP) 21. German Marshall Fund 22. n-ost 23. Media in Cooperation and Transition (MiCT) 24. MitOst 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Science Feedback 2. Forbidden Stories 3. French National Centre for Scientific Research 4. I4CE 5. Centre for Prospective Studies and International Info 6. International Development Research Network 7. Jean Jaures Foundation 8. Robert Schuman Foundation 9. INED (French National Institute of Demography) 10. Institute for Internet and the Just Society 11. Fondapol
<h3 data-bbox="201 1865 316 1899">Austria</h3> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Austrian Institute of Economic Research 2. Marie Jahoda - Otto Bauer Institute 3. Research Institute Economics of Inequality 4. International Institute for Media (IIM-Vienna) 5. Austrian Institute for International Affairs 	<h3 data-bbox="855 1417 967 1451">Poland</h3> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Casimir Pulaski Foundation 2. CASE - Center for Social and Economic Research 3. European Centre 4. Institute of Public Affairs 5. Kosciuszko Institute 6. The Polish Institute of International Affairs 7. WiseEuropa Institute 8. Academic Centre for Strategic Communication 9. The Academic Centre for Cyber Security Policy. 10. Warsaw Institute 11. Centre for Europe University of Warsaw 12. Centre for International Relations



Innovation Startup Entrepreneurship (ISE) Group is Think Tank and Innovation Ecosystem Builder in CEE region. It focuses on the Digital Economy, Digital Democracy, Innovation, and Policy Making. We focus on building partnerships between Corporations, Government Agencies, Universities, R&D centers, and Start-ups. ISE Group is committed to shaping the future through innovation, startups, and entrepreneurship, with a special focus on the digital economy, digital democracy, and digital resilience.



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