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High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and  
Vice President of the European Commission

Copy:

Mr. Frans Timmermans  
Commissioner for Better Regulation, Interinstitutional Relations, the Rule of Law and the Charter  
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Mr. Johannes Hahn  
Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations

Mr. Günther Oettinger  
Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society

Dear High Representative,

We are pleased to forward for your consideration a non-paper on boosting EU's strategic communications activities in response to Russia's active propaganda campaign in the Eastern Neighbourhood and certain EU Member States. We look forward to discussing this at the FAC on 19 January, as part of the wider discussion which you have planned on EU-Russia relations.



Martin Lidegaard Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark



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Linas Linkevičius Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lithuania



Philip Hammond Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of  
the United Kingdom

## **EU Strategic communication responding to propaganda non-paper**

Russia is rapidly increasing its disinformation and propaganda campaign, as an asymmetric response to Western economic power, and aimed at internal and external audiences in support of the political and military aims of the Russian government.

This campaign of disinformation communicates false and misleading information through a range of means (state-controlled TV; internet trolls; dubious third parties). The objectives are to discredit EU narratives, erode support for legitimate Governments in the region, demoralise local populations, disorient Western policymakers, and undermine the concept of free, independent, pluralistic media. And to convince the Russian public that Russia is the victim of a Western driven conspiracy with the sole aim of keeping Russia down.

At the same time in Russia the free media is suppressed by the government, intimidated and pushed out the public sphere, when foreign media outlets are discriminated and forced to close.

The EU has an important role to play in responding, for two reasons:

- a) Russia's efforts widen the scope for its military & political options, by polarising attitudes within Russian-speaking populations, and by hiding the true effect of EU policies such as sanctions. This is a real threat to security on the eastern edges of the EU.
- b) The EU – as an idea – has potential huge resonance in the Eastern neighbourhood, even if the resonance at present is limited in Russia. It is used as shorthand by those seeking reformed, open, just, non-corrupt societies. It is a positive vision for the future of the region. This can be leveraged to raise public support for economic and political reforms, which in the long-term are the most effective guarantees of stability and prosperity.

With this in mind Member States (Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania and the United Kingdom) call on the EU to take action in response. This means increasing public resilience to disinformation and propaganda in the EU and our eastern partners; supporting independent and alternative voices, including in Russia; and ensuring our own systems are sufficiently robust to information manipulation, while safeguarding our core values such as freedom of speech.

The Commission has taken some positive steps recently to streamline and improve its communication (e.g. a new taskforce; sharing spokespeople; the cluster model). We suggest that it should redouble these efforts: currently the EU as an institution punches below its weight in debates within the region about those countries' future orientation. It relies too heavily on antiquated delivery channels such as one-off events or physical information centres. The message is often much too technical, failing to connect emotionally with local populations. And it sometimes confuses communications with visibility – seeing the latter as an end in itself, rather than a means to an end.

We call for concerted and comprehensive effort by the EU and by Member States individually. Our response might consist of 4 A's:

1. **Awareness.** Raise the dangers of disinformation and propaganda and the importance of proper response to it. Propaganda aims at hindering the EU and Western unity and lessening public support to EU policies and actions - apprehension of the damage and urgency is needed to take necessary steps and take them together.
  - Initiate High-Level Discussions at the EU level (Council, FAC). Regular political discussions on the issue of Russia's disinformation campaign are needed. Ministers of Foreign Affairs might initiate a strategic discussion in one of the meetings of FAC at the beginning of 2015.
  - Further cooperation with NATO. Steps should be taken to establish a permanent platform, where EU and NATO could exchange their views on strategic communication activities, in order to consolidate the efforts and exploit their synergy to achieve effective and sustainable results.
  - Fund information literacy training programs for various groups (media, politicians, public service, academia and schools) as well as online training modules. Organize online public awareness raising campaigns.
  - Conduct Eurobarometer polls analyzing public immunity to information manipulations, media habits, etc. Share such information with Member States and partners.
  
2. **Assertiveness.** Tell truth, facts and deconstruct propaganda proactively. We should actively spread the European narrative as well as our national narratives- explaining our policies and actions. Actively de-construct propaganda, disclosing sources, narratives and methods. This will increase critical perception of our populations and make information manipulations less effective. Important to note, that this capacity is critical in repelling manipulations by radical extremists groups as well.
  - EEAS could provide guidelines on strategic communication update *status quo* on hostile propaganda (in cooperation with MS) and prepare an Action Plan 2015-2016. In doing so, the EEAS should be very clear that successful communications is about impact, not visibility. We should aim to influence behaviour and attitudes amongst key audiences. Not just to increase our 'brand visibility'.
  - Set clear objectives for EU communications in the eastern neighbourhood. These should be short, few in number, and high-level – ideally agreed by HRVP and other relevant Commissioners, and approved by PSC or FAC. Resources should then be aligned behind these, with the current multiple pots pooled and allocated to strategic communications teams in EU Delegations.
  - Encourage exchange of strategic communication practices (messaging, challenges) among Member States and with other international organisations.
  - Establish a web-platform (similar to "stop-fake", but covering the whole EU area) where experts, governments, institutions and activists can provide cases of deception and manipulation, share own analysis and projects.
  - Engage the expert community (e.g. investigative journalists), strengthen their exchange, skills and cooperation and organize joint meetings to inform MS and institutions on best approaches to and practices of strengthening information security of our societies.

3. **Alternatives.** Provide credible and competitive information alternatives to Russian speaking populations and those using Russia's state-controlled media:

- Support international and national media initiatives in Russian language (TV broadcasting, web platforms, radio and press). The pilot project of RFE/RL 'Nastojashcheje Vremia/Real time' is a solid example, and the US is already planning to beef up its support in this area. The EU can strengthen the capacity of national contributors to this project, or work with the European Broadcasting Union on complementary initiatives. Similar projects might be coordinated by other organisations, such as the European Endowment for Democracy, particularly at smaller scale (e.g. support to investigative journalists) given the mission of that organisation.
- Encourage exchange of EU-countries TV production (entertainment programmes, movies, documentaries) in order to provide competitive alternatives to the Russian production available in the EU television market.
- Engage the existing Russian-language media outlets operating in the EU offering them alternatives (such as, e.g., offering programmes to the 'Euronews' Russian language service, in the framework of the ENP programme).
- Help partner governments in the region to communicate strategically and effectively to their own Russian-speaking populations.
- Strengthen the capacity of existing credible Russian language media outlets, encourage their cooperation sharing content, analysis, reporting and information. In the framework of the EaP programme the EC can encourage regional cooperation projects to pool expertise, content of various media outlets (based on cross-sectorial cooperation – TV, web, press, radio), organise trainings, etc.
- Build a platform (which could be online) to support all the journalists in the region who have been trained by the EU and its Member States, to (a) build connections and networks; (b) collaborate on projects or stories; (c) act as a vehicle to communicate EU messages.
- Support and fund more detailed audience analyses, both to ensure EEAS communication is targeted and effective; and to support Member States in their own communications.

4. **Accountability.** Greater attention should be paid to violations of rules on broadcasting and public information – taking into consideration criteria as objective reporting, transparency of interests, incitement of hatred or propagation of violence and war – with due respect to freedom of expression. Options to be considered include:

- Bring together EU media regulators to consider how they might improve cooperating more effectively when following up complaints on reporting where rules on due impartiality have been breached.
- Ensure that the existing complaints procedures in the Audiovisual Media Services Directive are speedily applied.
- Encourage public communication regulators to draw attention to cases which manipulate, deceive, incite hatred or propagate war.
- Call on media self-governing bodies to distance themselves from efforts to misuse credibility of the media institute in our societies.