

Current Security Challenge –

Russian Disinformation War against Poland and Europe.

International Conference, 23 June 2017, Warsaw, Poland



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IED together with **Fundacja Samorządność i Demokracja** organized the international conference titled “[Russian Disinformation War against Poland and Europe](#)” which took place on Friday **23 June 2017** in Nowy Świat 58 in **Warsaw, Poland**.

The main purpose of the event was to analyze one of the most controversial phenomenons of today’s world – the spreading of disinformation in society. **Disinformation can be characterized as false information intended to deceive and mislead public opinion or obscure the truth.** The investigations of American and European intelligence agencies and cybersecurity companies have many clues to suggest that **the extensive international disinformation and hacking campaign is coordinated directly from Kremlin** in order to protect and even strengthen the administration of Russian President Vladimir Putin and spread his political impact across Russia’s borders. Russian disinformation war is thus a very serious and dangerous activity which directly threatens the EU and liberal democratic order in general. As a result, the EU Members States have to address this issue with great attention and formulate effective tools how to counter it.

Speakers (in the order of speeches):

Adriana Ciefova, Project Manager of IED.

Andrzej Potocki, Vice-President of European Democratic Party (PDE-EDP) and Vice-President of Stronnictwo Demokratyczne.

Kazimierz Wóycicki, Publicist, philosopher and historian.

Marta Kowalska, Vice-President of the Foundation Centre for Analysis of Propaganda and Disinformation.

Piotr Niemczyk, Security Specialist and former chief of Polish intelligence.

Vincent V. Severski, Lawyer, former intelligence and disinformation officer and writer.

Tomasz Smura, Head of the research office of the Foundation K. Pulaski.

Piotr Fedusio, Lawyer.

Adam Lelonek, President of the Foundation Centre for Analysis of Propaganda and Disinformation.

The event was opened by **Adriana Ciefova**, Project Manager of IED, and **Andrzej Potocki**, Vice-President of European Democratic Party (PDE-EDP) and Vice-President of Stronnictwo Demokratyczne. Ms Ciefova emphasized that even though the spreading of false information is old and dangerous practice which has been always present in politics, today it is associated with the current government of Russian Federation. Intelligence services across the EU draw attention to the fact that this targeted disinformation war aims to destabilize the European integration and liberal

democratic order. “We cannot be blind, the Kremlin-led disinformation war is a real war against us, all Europeans, who believe in the European integration and liberal democracy and therefore we need to fight against it,” she stressed. Mr Potocki followed by highlighting that **even though this war is not fought on the battlefield with weapons, it still causes injuries, the mental injuries.** Disinformation practices use the fears of people or the issues that people are sensitive about such as economy and security. “Disinformation is a lie created in such a way that we believe it is true... in this way, the disinformation war creates artificial reality,” he believes.

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“We know what is going on but we do not know how to respond,” Mr Wóycicki speculated. The major problem is that **it is extremely difficult to identify people who spread disinformation because internet is unregulated.** “Disinformation war is led by Russia and we still do not have the mechanisms how to fight it; therefore we have to think of strategies how to scare Putin,” he said. Mr Wóycicki is also convinced that psychologists, sociologists and historians can be very useful in combating disinformation because they understand society and can identify weak spots and very reasons why some groups of people tend to believe in disinformation and fake news. Nevertheless, he sees the major solution in a greater involvement of the states in combating the disinformation practices because non-governmental organizations are hopeless to fight it on their own.

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Kazimierz Wóycicki

The Methods of the Disinformation War

The first panel was dedicated to the discussion about the forms and mechanisms that Kremlin uses to deceive citizens in foreign countries and obscure the facts. According to **Marta Kowalska**, Vice-President of the Foundation Centre for Analysis of Propaganda and Disinformation, **the Russian Disinformation War is a total war since each of us is a resource that can be abused by Russian intelligence;** there are also no limitations and no borders in this war which makes it even more dangerous. When she worked as a journalist in Moscow, she learned that one of the most effective techniques in the Russian propaganda is constant repeating of a lie – the more times the lie is repeated, the sooner it becomes the truth. In her view, there are two main goals Kremlin wants to achieve: first of all, to stabilize and strengthen Putin’s hold on power, and secondly, to spread his vision how the world should look like. The Western governments are failing to respond to this because they are still not fully aware of the scale of this problem. “In order to counter this war, we have to first of all recognize and acknowledge its existence and then shape counter-policies,” Ms Kowalska suggested. She is convinced that we all should be involved in fighting the disinformation war. “Sooner we recognize the problem, more effectively we will be able to respond to it,” she summarized. In addition, she sees a long-term solution to this challenge in better education and in teaching people how to verify information and reach logical conclusions.



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usually no material evidence that connects them with a foreign power. He presented the recent finding on the web service provider Yahoo according to which 1 billion Yahoo accounts were stolen and abused to spread disinformation. There are also new investigation results of the Department of Homeland Security that suggests that Russia targeted the election systems in 21 American states and accessed sensitive information from the databases of the elections committees. “This campaign is a very well developed strategy and there are no doubts that it is directly organized by the Kremlin,” Mr Niemczyk stressed. He also highlighted that **all of us should have the responsibility for what we say and write**: “Free speech does not mean you are not responsible for what you say.”

On the example of the recent presidential elections in the USA, **Piotr Niemczyk**, Security Specialist and former chief of Polish intelligence, illustrated how fake news are spread. In particular, he focused on the so-called agents of influence – agents who use their position and credibility to effectively influence public opinion or decision making for the benefit of the country whose intelligence service operates the agents, in this case Russian intelligence service. **Agents of influence are often the most difficult agents to detect** because there is

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Speakers (left-right: A.Potocki, M.Kowalska, P.Niemczyk, V.V.Severski)

The third speaker of the session, lawyer and former intelligence and disinformation officer and writer **Vincent V. Severski** stressed that **even though we all know that Russian intelligence is behind the disinformation campaign, no one really knows how the system works and who are the actors involved in it**. In his view, disinformation and inspiration go well together because by giving false information to people we inspire them to decide whether they will believe it or not. According to Mr Severski, **the refugee crisis is the main motive which Kremlin uses to disintegrate Europe**. The agents of influence create a false picture, the myth, and spread it efficiently so the myth can become the reality. He also stressed that all key positions in the current Russian government are occupied by current or former people from intelligence, including Putin who is a former agent of the main Soviet intelligence service, KGB. The issue is that such people are very well educated and very well paid for their job which makes very dangerous enemies from them. “Kremlin uses the weaknesses of our democracy for the fulfilment of its goals,” Mr Severski thinks. Accordingly, he suggested that **we all need to learn how to better distinguish between fake and real news** – for instance, in Sweden, they are going to introduce the new curriculum how to differentiate between fake and real news in schools. In addition, we also need to create professional governmental institutions which job would be to monitor and tackle the disinformation practices.

How to Counterreact against the Disinformation War?

In the second session, lawyer **Piotr Fedusio** put his attention on the legal aspects and ways how to tackle the disinformation practices. Considering the agents of influence, Mr Fedusio believes that if we can prove that they are connected to foreign intelligence and their activities are against the interests of particular state, those agents can be charged. The point is that those agents do not necessarily need to be the members of the foreign intelligence in order to act on its behalf and, as a result, it is difficult to



prove that they work in the interest of some foreign power. From legal point of view, it is also still very demanding to determine what precisely the anti-state activity is and when it does start. According to Mr Fedusio, the major weakness is that **the criminal code does not reflect the practices of the disinformation war.**

“Emotions are key mechanisms in the Russian Disinformation War,” expressed **Adam Lelonek**, President of the Foundation Centre for Analysis of Propaganda and Disinformation. The goal

of Kremlin is to move the public discourse from rational to emotional level and work with fears and needs of people because **it is easier to control people through emotions**. In order to fight this dangerous practice effectively, we need improvements in both, governmental and non-governmental sphere. First of all, there is an urgent need that politicians rely more on the advices of experts. Secondly, there has to be a much deeper cooperation between politicians and media. Still in many EU Member States, instead of cooperating with NGOs and using their expertise, politicians fight with NGOs sector, as is the case in Hungary. Such divisions only support Russian propaganda. Thirdly, we need more professional media because politicians usually use media as the main source of information – but if media publishes non-objective information, half-truths or fake news and politicians do not verify them, then they can contribute to spreading fake news from governmental level. Finally, we also need more experts on disinformation. In his view, the crucial problem also is that **Kremlin recruits and trains a high number of experts on propaganda while Europeans are still discussing whether we face the Russian Disinformation War.**

**“Emotions are key mechanisms
in the Russian Disinformation
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Adam Lelonek

Disinformation War – Threat for Europe

The last discussion session of the event was dedicated to Russia’s history, culture, traditions and impact of all these on current domestic politics in the Russian Federation. In this respect, Head of the research office of the Foundation K. Pulaski **Tomasz Smura** reminded that the requirements of conquest and of security had been in the minds of Russian leaders for centuries. As a result, for most of its history, the expansion and wars of conquest were at the root of Russian identity. This has not changed even after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. So in the view of Mr Smura, there is a kind of tradition in Russian historical thinking to expand, influence and control, and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 support this argument. The worrying factor is that **Russian interests are recently becoming even more ambitious thanks to the successful disinformation campaign**. Nevertheless, he pinpointed that even though the Russian threat is real, NATO is still much stronger in terms of both, military capacity and financial resources. But the Members of NATO as well as the EU Member

States need to enhance their mutual cooperation. “EU Member States need to realize that we are strong only together and we can face the Russian threat effectively only together,” Mr Smura concluded.



Speakers (left-right: K.Wóycicki, P.Fedusio, A.Lelonek, T.Smura)

The event was concluded by the final remarks presented by *Andrzej Potocki*. He stressed that we can see a very clear impact of the disinformation war on the public perception of the refugee crisis and terrorism. While few years ago, the majority of Poles were open to welcoming migrants – after all, 2 million Ukrainians live in Poland. However, now also thanks to the Russian propaganda, they perceive all refugees as potential terrorists. The same is valid for terrorism because in spite of the fact that we do not have more victims of terrorism in Europe than ten years ago, propaganda depicts the current terrorist attacks as something genuine happening only because of refugees.

The conference was attended by the representatives of civic organizations, academia and media who actively engaged in the debates that followed after each panel of the event.

[Read also the research paper “Economy of the Contemporary Information War”](#)

Main outcomes and proposals:

- Disinformation War is real war led by the current Russian government against the European integration and liberal democracy; it is one of the most serious security challenge for the EU;
- European intelligence agencies need to provide the mechanisms so foreign hackers and agents of influence will not be able to break to our systems;
- European governments need to allocate more financial resources to counter-policies and create professional governmental institutions for combating disinformation;
- all people should have bigger responsibility for what they say or write;
- one of the long term solution is education – people need to learn how to verify information;
- European countries need to act against the disinformation practices on the governmental level much more intensively because NGOs are hopeless to fight it on their own;
- online and print media should have more responsibility over information they publish;
- all actors on both, governmental and nongovernmental level, need to be much more united because internal divisions only support Russian propaganda.

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Prepared by Adriana Ciefova (IED, 2017)

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