Europeanization of Fight Against Disinformation and Propaganda at the Times of New Russian Hybrid Warfare[*]

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Summary: After Russian aggression against Georgia, annexation of Crimea and war against Ukraine international community of experts in academia, state administration and civil society were increasingly reflecting the issue of hybrid warfare and information war. This is also the case of the EU which developed structures addressing hybrid warfare, especially disinformation and propaganda. The main aim of this article is to analyse the process of creation of these structures in the context of Europeanization concept and reveal reasons for inadequacy and inefficiency of the newly established institutions. Despite EU succeeded in creation of policy instruments their effectiveness is far from being enough vis-à-vis Russian efforts.

Keywords: Europeanization – Disinformation – Propaganda – Hybrid Threats – Hybrid Warfare – Russia – EU

1. Introduction

The main topic of this article is the attempt of the EU to fight disinformation and propaganda. For this purpose EU developed new structures and institutions with the aim to address new threat. This article is analysing this process in the context of Europeanization process which is for almost 30 years linked with EU studies. The main aim of this article is to put EU attempts into the context of Europeanization and reveal possible limits of EU activities with proposals for strengthening.

The main research question of this article is that related to the process of change: what is the nature of Europeanization in the field of fight against disinformation and propaganda? This question is not aimed at simple description

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of activities and mechanisms at the EU level but shall contribute to deeper understanding of reasons why EU attempts are limited in its results. Author of the article is persuaded that the concept of Europeanization can help to reveal factors influencing EU inefficiency to fight disinformation and propaganda. In this sense article will enrich existing literature on Europeanization and its theoretical aspects. Moreover, it will serve as overview of EU activities conducted by the EU institutions between March 2013 and September 2019 on relatively new and increasingly important field.

The article is divided into three parts. First part is introducing the concept of Europeanization. Because it is not the aim of the article to provide comprehensive introduction into the well known concept, this part focuses on the introduction of the most usable parts of the concept. Author believes, that concept of Europeanization is well known and for this reason it is not necessary to provide full details which might be easily found in the works of "classical scholars" referred in the first part.

Without any prejudice this article deals disinformation and propaganda linked with Russia or its proxies supporting pro-Russian world view. Despite there many states with well developed propaganda systems, Russia is for Europe most concerned state. This is due to close geo-political position to the EU, diverging interests in many important areas (Crimea, territorial integrity of Ukraine, the status of human rights in Russia, Russian intelligence operations in Europe, Russian involvement in Brexit campaign etc.) and misperception over values, principles and policies, (e. g. sanctions over Russia, Eastern partnership, Energy security etc.). Former Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs once reportedly said, that the "EU is economic giant, political dwarf and military worm".[1] This asymmetry of roles is reflected also in the relationship with Russia. While in the economic area both subjects seem to be partners (despite sanctions), in the political space both subjects are merely adversaries and militarily potential enemies. This cautious attitude is reflected also in official Russian documents and politico-military doctrines which are based or realist principles of power. In other words, EU is natural adversary for Russia in many areas especially where power interest is overlapping and essential for Russian security.

For decades, EU lack real military capacities and is associated with inability to act at the times of conflict (most visibly the incapacity to act during the war in Yugoslavia, internal division over war in Iraq or impotent reaction on the Russian invasion into Georgia). EU has been associated mainly with "soft power". In the words of Joseph S. Nye: with *the ability to get what you want trough*

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[1] THE NEW YORK TIMES. *War in the Gulf: Europe*; *Gulf Fighting Shatters European's Fragile Unity*. The New York Times, 25. 1. 1991 [online]. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/1991/01/25/world/war-in-the-gulf-europe-gulf-fighting-shatters-europeans-fragile-unity.html?page-wanted=1

attraction rather than coercion or payment".[2] Moreover, EU is not classical state actors but rather subject *sui generis*, in which the culture of consensus is imprinted in the genetical code. This is especially valid in the areas sensitive to national sovereignty. Diverging interests of its members easily lead to inability to act or consensual, but partially effective, decisions. This makes EU potentially vulnerable target against new forms of warfare, including hostile disinformation and propaganda.

Disinformation, propaganda or simply "information warfare"[3] are not new parts of the warfare. For decades methods were "cultivated" by the Soviet Union as a part of *Agit Prop* element (tools designated to influence and mobilize targeted audience) of the warfare[4] which was considered important part of military doctrines. Disinformation and propaganda are part of the information war, which was defined by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation as: *"the confrontation between two or more states in the information space with the purpose of inflicting damage to information systems, processes and resources, critical and other structures, undermining the political, economic and social systems, a massive psychological manipulation of the population to destabilize the state and society, as well as coercion of the state to take decisions for the benefit of the opposing force."*[5]. Above definition is well applicable also on the EU which serves as the umbrella entity influencing quality of political, economic and social systems of the EU member states and contributes to peaceful coexistence of all members. As a soft power example, source of prosperity and stabilization (also in the former Soviet space) it is potential target of information war aimed at Russian geo-political aspirations. As warned by the EU Hybrid Fusion Cell *"disinformation by the Russian Federation poses the greatest threat to the EU. It is systematic, well-resourced, and on a different scale to other countries"*[6].

In other words, information warfare is not new. What is new are the methods and geo-political context which were reflected in new geo-political course set

[2]   NYE, J. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs, 2004, p. x.
[3]   For further specification of information and cyber warfare see VALUCH, J., GÁBRIŠ, T., HA-MUĽÁK, O. Cyber Attacks, Information Attacks and Postmodern Warfare. *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics*, 2017, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 63–89.
[4]   PALMER, D. R. A. *Back to the Future? Russia's hybrid warfare, revolutions in military affair, and Cold War comparisons*. Research Paper no. 120 – October 2015. Research Division – NATO Defense College, Rome, p. 9.
[5]   Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation. *Russian Federation Armed Forces' Information Space Activities Concept*, 2019 [online]. Available at: https://eng.mil.ru/en/science/publications/more.htm?id=10845074@cmsArticle
[6]   European Commission. *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Action Plan against Disinformation (JOIN(2018) 36 final)*. Brussels, 5. 12. 2018 [online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/action-plan-against-disinformation

by Yevgeny Primakov and Valery Gerasimov. While motivations for employing information war might be explained by classical realism or in the context of constructivist theories, means of information war is possible to explain in the liberal context: EU is composed of democracies and as a such might be disrupted by its downfall to flawed forms of states or by alienation of its members seeking exit. For this reason, it is best interest of the EU to seek defence against hostile disinformation and propaganda which is targeted against legitimacy of European unification project and its essential feature: EU membership of participating states.

2.   The Concept of Europeanization

Because the concept of Europeanization is well known among scholars dealing with EU studies this part will present main standing points of the concept in relation to the EU attempts to deal with disinformation and hybrid warfare. There are many definitions of Europeanization which over the last almost thirty years varied in their scope from more general to very tight definitions. Definitions also presented great variety of views on what Europeanization is. As a result there is no universal definition of Europeanization and definition of the concept still remains unsatisfactory struggle. However, various definitions might be found in the works of "classical authors" who contributed in build up of the concept.[7] Despite slightly different shades and logic of the definitions, it seems that there are several common aspects may be derived. Europeanization is process and it is a process of change. This implies, that there must be at least two states: original state of affair and resulting state. Because it is Europeanization, EU or Europe is part of this process: in the form of actor or as a subject. In over almost thirty years the attitudes varied and led to attempts of conceptualization reflecting different logic of Europeanization.

   Johan P. Olsen (2002) is thinking about Europeanization in five different forms. First, as the change in external boundaries of the EU in the terms of

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[7]   See For example: LADRECH, R. *Europeanization and National Politics.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 69; BULMER, S., BURCH, M. Organizing for Europe: Whitehall, the British State and the European Union. *Public Administration*, 1998, vol. 76, no. 1, p. 602; BÖRZEL, T. Towards Convergence in Europe? Institutional Adaptation to Europeanization in Germany and Spain, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 1999, vol. 39, no. 4, p. 574; BULLER, J., GAMBLE, A. Conceptualizing Europeanization. *Public Policy and Administration*, 2002, vol. 17, no. 2, p. 17; RISSE, T., COWLES, M. G., CAPARASO, J. Europeanization and Domestic Change: Introduction. In: COWLES, M. G., CAPARASO, J., RISSE, T. (eds.). *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, p. 3, RADAELLI, C. M. Europeanisation: Solution or problem? *European integration online Papers,* 2004, vol. 8, no. 16, p. 5; LADRECH, R. Europeanization of Domestic Politics and Institutions: The Case of France" *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2010, vol. 32, no. 1, p. 2.

enlargement; Second, as the development of institutions at the EU level, associated mainly with build up of institutions at the centre; Third, as the penetration of national and sub-national systems of governance by the EU norms; Fourth, as export of the EU norms and forms of political organization beyond EU borders; and Fifth, as the EU unification project.[8] Above mentioned understanding of Europeanization seems not to be exclusive and sometimes may overlap due to shallow borders of the concept. This is also the case of this article which deals mainly with second attitude mentioned by Olsen: it will analyse development of measures against disinformation and propaganda at the EU level. However, development of such measures sometimes has also implications for member states which are influenced by EU policies.

This reality of many policy areas was reflected also in the definition provided by Claudio Radaelli (2004) who claims that: *"Europeanization consists of processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, "ways of doing things" and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and sub-national) discourse, political structures and public policies"*[9]. First part of the definition is very true also for the attempts of the EU to fight disinformation and propaganda. However, comparing to other policy areas the influence of the EU member states might be limited due to several reasons. First, disinformation and propaganda are related to interior issues, security and intelligence. These are in general areas with strong involvement of national sovereignty and hesitancy of deeper cooperation. Second, in areas touching national sovereignty is dominant intergovernmental and informal cooperation, which sometimes prevents effective multilateral decisions due to necessary consensus in order not to compromise national interests. Third, due to intergovernmental nature it might be expected that contrary to the European Parliament and European Commission it will be especially Council of Ministers who will be dominant institution in this agenda.

Next to the nature of Europeanization it might be worth to explore various forms of activities designed by fight disinformation and propaganda. In this sense Europeanization has been enriched by institutionalist perspective. Similarly to Europeanization also Institutionalism is very complex term having three very important steams in the form of rational choice institutionalism, historical institutionalism and sociological institutionalism. As pointed out by Simon Bulmer (2008) all three streams allows us to develop different aspect of Europeanization. For

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[8]   OLSEN, J. P. The Many Faces of Europeanization. *Journal of Common Market Studies,* 2002, vol. 40, no. 5, p. 923–924.

[9]   RADAELLI, C. M. Europeanisation: Solution or problem? *European integration online Papers,* 2004, vol. 8, no. 16, p. 5.

example rational choice institutionalism offers look inside the states for analysing the factors enabling Europeanization. Historical institutionalism allows to focus on time: how integration in time developed or focus on timing or different pace of Europeanization. Lastly, sociological institutionalism contributes to reference to the culture, ideas and attitudes which are also influencing cooperation of actors who stand often behind Europeanization.[10] Institutionalist insight may greatly contribute to revealing and analysing forces behind Europeanization and for this reason in the following part special attention will be paid to background decisions.

3. The EU Response on Disinformation and Propaganda

3.1. Initial Steps

The European Council recognized the threat of online disinformation in 2015 when High Representative was asked to address the ongoing disinformation campaigns conducted by Russia[11] and prepare action plan on strategic communication. As a result one of the first steps in the fight against disinformation and propaganda was establishment of the EEAS East StratCom Task Force in March 2015, followed by the Joint Communication on Countering Hybrid Threats,[12] establishment of Hybrid Fusion Cell and Member States were invited to consider establishment of the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats with the aim to share best practices of the EU and NATO in the fight against disinformation and propaganda.[13]

Out of the three newly established bodies EEAS East StratCom had good potential, however the new body was from the early beginning understaffed (only 16 people) and lacked resources with allocation only 1,1 million Eur. Moreover, its mandate was limited to communicate Eu policies instead of directly addressing core of disinformation. According to the Action Plan on Strategic Communication from June 2015 its mandate was 1) Effective communication and promotion

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[10] BULMER, S. Theorizing Europeanization. In: GRAZIANO, P. R., VINK, M. P. (eds.). *Europeanization: New Research Agendas.* London: Palgrave Macmillan 2008, p. 51.

[11] European Council. *European Council meeting (19 and 20 march 2015) – Conclusions.* Brussels, 20 March 2015 [online]. Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21888/european-council-conclusions-19-20-march-2015-en.pdf

[12] European Commission. *Joint Communication of the European Parliament and the Council. Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats: a European Union response.* Brussels, 6. 4. 2016 [online]. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:-52016JC0018&from=EN

[13] Ibidem.

of Union policies towards the Eastern Neighbourhood; 2) Strengthening the overall media environment in the Eastern Neighbourhood and in Member States, including support for media freedom and strengthening independent media; and 3) Improved Union capacity to forecast, address and respond to disinformation activities by the Russian Federation.[14] Staff underrepresentation and little budget became immediate source of criticism by security experts who urged Juncker and Mogherini to call out Russia for its hostile disinformation activities and provide EEAS East StratCom at least another 30 staff and 5 million Eur.[15]

There are at lest two supportive facts to the criticism. First, Russia spends every year 400–500 million[16] USD for foreign information efforts (Strobel 2015) and thus the budget of East StatCom is just little contribution in fight with disinformation and propaganda. And second, even with limited resources, StratCom succeeded in creation of very successful web *EU vs Disinfo*, and crated database of Russian disinformation which today (January 2020) counts 7306 cases of pro-Kremlin disinformation collected and debunked (EU vs. Disinfo 2020). On the other hand activities of the East StratCom might be not fully consistent with the EU soft power normative as mentioned Wagnsson and Hellman (2018). They warns that *"To engage with a counterpart who abuses discursive standards might lead to one's own compromising of these standards. The empirical analysis demonstrates that a normative power's ambition to treat the other as abject and without judgmental attitude is easily ruined or at least harmed by the communications and performances of the other"*[17]. In other way, authors are afraid that activities of the East StratCom may lead to the compromising of the EU normative power due to increasing involvement and adoption to communication closer to Russian strategic communication. That is why debate over East StratCom raises more important long-term strategic question. Shall EU protect its resources of normative power or be more explicit and address threats more directly? And isn't departure from normativity one of the goals of the other to increase ideological content of the EU behaviour which might lead to delegitimization?

Even second body, isn't less controversial. The EU Hybrid Fusion Cell was situated with EU Intelligence and Situation Centre (EU INTCEN) of the EEAS

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[14] EEAS. *Questions and Answers about the East StratCom Task Force*. European External Actions Service, 5. 12. 2018 [online]. Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/2116/-questions-and-answers-about-the-east-stratcom-task-force_en

[15] European Values. *Open Letter by European Security Experts to President of the European Commission J. C. Jucker and High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Frederica Mogherini*. 2018 [online]. Available at: https://www.europeanvalues.net/openletter/

[16] Estimations vary: 500 million USD seems to be lower estimation as some estimations are about 1 billion USD. This might be due to different methodology and subjects involved in calculation.

[17] WAGNSSON, Ch., HELLMAN, M. Normative Power Europe Caving In? EU under Pressure of Russian Information Warfare. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2018, vol. 56, no. 5, p. 1172.

with the aim to analyse hybrid threats and to receive, analyse and share classified and open source information related to hybrid threats. This Europeanization in the form of institutional development turned also to have implications for the Member States as they had obligation to establish National Contact Points connected to Hybrid Fusion Cell.[18] Due to work with confidential information the activities of the centre are hidden behind EU classified information and data protection rules.

In April 2017 also the "Hybrid CoE" was established as a result of above mentioned Joint Communication and Common set of proposals for the implementation of the Joint EU/NATO Declaration endorsed by the Council of the EU and NATO on 6 December 2016. The Hybrid CoE turned to be hub for expects with the aim to assist member states and its institution to defend against hybrid threats. It is a place for share of best practices, ideas and doing exercises.[19] CoE was initially established by nine member states and as of 2019 it has 27 member states including USA, Canada, Montenegro or Norway. While some non-EU states are members, several EU states are missing: for example Belgium, Bulgaria, Ireland, Malta or Slovakia.[20] From the theoretical perspective Hybrid CoE is hybrid also in the term of Europeanization as it is situated between EU and NATO.

In late 2017 the Commission set up a High-Level Expert Group ("the HLEG) to advise about this issue and develop policy measures to counter disinformation and propaganda. It was an intersectoral group composed of 39 expert from various spheres including academia journalists, press, NGOs etc who were working under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Madeleine de Cock Buning.[21] It is important to mention, that part of the HLEG were also representatives of internet "giants" including Google, Facebook, Twitter or people from Journalist federations. In this sense European Commission succeeded to bring together very skilled and influential expert all around the Europe which contributed to creation of comprehensive report. It is important to note, that almost all ideas, approaches and activities reflected in the upcoming documents (e.g. Communication or Action plan) have roots in the HLEG Commission.

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[18] European Commission. *Joint Communication of the European Parliament and the Council. Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats: a European Union response*. Brussels, 6. 4. 2016 [online]. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:-52016JC0018&from=EN

[19] CoE. *What is Hybrid CoE? The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats* [online]. Available at: https://www.hybridcoe.fi/what-is-hybridcoe/

[20] COE. *Joining dates of the Hybrid CoE Member States. The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats* [online]. Available at: https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Joining-Dates-Alfabetic-Order-1.pdf

[21] European Commission. *A multi-dimensional approach to disinformation. Report of the independent High level Group on fake news and online disinformation*. DG Comm. Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union, p. 5.

Next to the establishment of HLEG European Commission launched public consultation process, initiated structured dialogue with relevant stakeholders and conducted Eurobarometer survey. Public consultation resulted in 2986 replies from 2784 individuals and 202 organizations.[22] Initial results proven that disinformation is related mainly to social media and has potential to undermine democratic processes and health policies[23] in Europe. Structured dialogue was conducted in February 2018 with five experts[24] who were asked six questions. This High-Level Hearing entitled "Preserving Democracy in the Digital Age" helped to put the issue of disinformation and propaganda into deeper context and also to evaluate European Commission initiatives to deal with the disinformation and propaganda. It is not surprising, that especially East StratCom come under criticism due to understaffing, lack of resources and aims of the activities. And even possibility of taking East StratCom outside of EEAS was discussed.[25] The fourth important information input was the Flash Eurobarometr survey which confirmed some trends already discovered during on-line consultation but also discovered expectations of the EU citizens. In relation to this article it is interesting, that relative majority of EU citizens (45 %) think, that it is responsibility of journalist to act to stop spread of fake news. On the second place are national authorities (39 %). EU institutions were placed on fifth place (21 % of people), behind press and broadcasting management (36 %), citizens themselves (32 %) or online social networks (26 %).[26] In other words there is not high expectations to take Acton at the EU level. This is contrary to the potential EU institutions have.

Following the work of HLEG and other inputs the European Commission in spring 2018 published the Communication of the European Commission on tackling online disinformation: A European approach was issued. The Communication informed about scope and cause of online disinformation and communicated overarching principles and objectives which should guide actions to tackle disinformation: in short (1) transparency regarding the origin of information and the way of production; (2) promoting the diversity of information; (3) fostering

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[22] European Commission. *Summary report of the public consultation on fake news and online disinformation*. European Commission, 12. March 2018 [online]. Available at: https://ec.europa. eu/digital-single-market/en/news/summary-report-public-consultation-fake-news-and-online-disinformation

[23] Health is one of the areas heavily affected by disinformation with great potential of negative impact, especially in relation to vaccination against serious and easily transmissible diseases.

[24] Anne Applebaum, Philip Howard, Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Philip Lelyveld and Keir Giles.

[25] European Commission. *High-Level Hearing: Preserving Democracy in the Digital Age*. European Commission, Berlaymont Building, Brussels, 22. February 2018 [online]. Available at: https:// ec.europa.eu/epsc/events/high-level-hearing-preserving-democracy-digital-age_en

[26] European Commission. *Fake News and Disinformation Online*, 2018. Flash Eurobarometer no. 464 [online]. Available at: https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2183_464_ENG

information credibility; and (4) to fashion inclusive solution.[27] The communication is rich of technical details (of which many were already elaborated on HLEG meetings) and is also including commitment in reporting on made progress.

In September 2018 Package of measures securing free and fair European elections was enacted, followed by Code of practice against disinformation. During State of the Union Jean-Claude Juncker stressed contribution to free, fair and secure elections in the EU, including for example a Recommendation on election cooperation networks, online transparency, protection against cybersecurity incidents and fighting disinformation campaigns; Guidance on the application of EU data protection law; or a legislative amendment to tighten the rules on European political party funding.[28] From the perspective of Europeanization measures proposed by European Commission it represent some obligations for the Member States who are "encouraged" to adopt certain measures which will influence other actors (e. g. political parties). At the EU institutional level Europeanization next to creation of guidelines and principles led the institutional development as one of the measures anticipated creation of a new European Cybersecurity Competence Centre to boost cooperation in the area.

In November 2018 the Observatory for Social Media Analysis (SOMA) was launched. It is a collaborative verification platform coordinated by Athens Technology Center. The main purpose is to map European social media, establish a European centre for social media stakeholders and develop Source Transparency Index to immediately verify resources. In other words SOMA will contribute to media literacy and create platform to detect and analyse disinformation.[29] In practice SOMA is platform bringing together important actors having expertise in fact-checking (e. g. Pagella Politica), social media, large data analysis (Aarhus University or Luiss Guido Carli Centre) or technology (Athens Technology Center or T6ECO). From the Europeanization point of view EU contributed to institutional development and provided opportunity for civil society actors.

3.2. Action Plan and Beyond

Important measure was the adoption of the Action Plan against disinformation in December 2018. Action plan is providing set of activities with the aim to build-up

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[27] European Commission. *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions. Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach.* Brussels, 26. 4. 2018. COM(2018) 236 final.

[28] European Commission. *State of the Union 2018: European Commission proposes measures for securing free and fair European elections.* European Commission, 12. 9. 2018 [online]. Available at: //ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_5681

[29] SOMA. *About us. Social Observatory for Disinformation and Social Media Analysis,* 2020, 2018 [online]. Available at: https://www.disinfobservatory.org/about-us/

EU's capabilities and strengthening cooperation between Member States in four relevant areas: 1) Improving detection, analysis and exposure to disinformation; 2) stronger cooperation and joint responses to threats, 3) enhancing collaboration with online platforms and industry to tackle disinformation; and 4) raising awareness and improve societal resilience.[30] In total 10 actions were identified to be implement. Actions and their purposes are summarized in the Table 1.

Table 1: Actions of the EU against disinformation and propaganda

No.	Action	Purpose
1	Strengthening of Strategic Communication Task Forces and Union Delegations (more resources)	To detect, analyse and expose disinformation activities
2	Review of mandates of the Strategic Communication Task Forces for Western Balkans and South	To enable them to address disinformation effectively in these regions
3	Establishment of Rapid Alert System	For addressing disinformation campaigns
4	Set up EU institutions' communication on EU values and policies	Better communication
5	Strengthening the strategic communication in the EU neighbourhood (Commission and High Representative)	Better communication
6	Monitoring implementation of the Code of Practice	Higher effectiveness of the Code of Practice
7	Targeted campaigns for public, media and public opinion shapers trainings	Support work of independent media and promote quality journalism
8	Creation of independent team of fact-checkers and researches	Capacity development
9	Launch Media Literacy Week in March 2019 and promotion of rapid implementation of Audio-visual Media Services Directive	Promotion of media literacy
10	Ensuring follow-up of the Elections Package (Recommendation)	Smooth European Parliament Elections of 2019

Source: Author, based on Joint Communication… from. 5. 12. 2018.

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[30] European Commission. *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Action Plan against Disinformation (JOIN(2018) 36 final)*. Brussels, 5. 12. 2018 [online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/action-plan-against-disinformation

The actions in the plan are interesting from the Europeanization perspective. While some activities are defined as a task for EU institutions, some are (e. g. action 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9) "in cooperation with Member States". Some are directly addressing Member States. For example: *"Member States, in cooperation with the Commission, should support the creation of teams of multi-disciplinary independent fact-checkers and researchers ..."* or *" In view of the upcoming 2019 European elections, Member States should ensure effective follow-up of the Elections Package, notably the Recommendation."*[31] Some even offers self-regulatory measures for other subjects, such as audio-visual companies (e. g. action 6). Here we come back to the second part of the definition of Europeanization as presented by Radaelli: *"... and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and sub-national) discourse, political structures and public policies."*[32]

The first half of the 2019 was in line with implementation of the Action plan. In January 2019 there was Inaugural meeting of the European cooperation network for elections in order to secure smooth elections into the European Parliament and in between January and May 2019 online platforms of reporters was activated. In March 2019 the initiative "European Media Literacy Week" was launched to promote media literacy in Member States and during same month the Rapid Alert System was set up. Moreover, in May 2019 European Commission contributed to the informal meeting in Sibiu organized under Romanian presidency of the EU. At the meeting EU Strategic Agenda for years 2019–2024 was debated and disinformation and propaganda continues to play important role in safeguarding democracies and protecting citizens and freedom.[33]

Above presented Action plan brought several important measures of which some were involved especially because of upcoming elections to the European parliament but have long term potential as electoral process is a key issue in each member state and potential target of disinformation campaigns aimed at outweighing the political equilibrium in the EU institutions. That is why elections in bigger states are of key importance for EU institutions and are important source of information. That is why EU institutions request specialized studies on disinformation and data-driven propaganda as in the case of Joint Research Centre.[34] As mentioned in the Report on the implementation of the Action Plan

[31] Ibidem.

[32] RADAELLI, C. M. 2004: c. d., p. 5.

[33] European Council. *Leaders' Agenda. Strategic Agenda 2019–2024 – outline.* 9. 5. 2019 [online], p. 2. Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39291/en_leaders-agenda-note-on-strategic-agenda-2019-2024-0519.pdf

[34] See for example FLORE, M., BALAHUR, A., PODAVINI, A., VERILE, M. *Understanding Citizen's Vulnerabilities to Disinformation and Data-Driven Propaganda. Case Study: The 2018 Italian General Election.* JRC Technical Reports. Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union, 2019.

Against Disinformation, EU measures contributed to preserve integrity of the elections to the European Parliament.[35]

European Parliament contributed with several documents. First, it adopted Resolution on foreign electoral interference and disinformation in national and European democratic processes where it expressed *"deep concern over the highly dangerous nature of Russian propaganda in particular, and calls on the Commission and the Council to put in place an effective and detailed strategy to counteract Russian disinformation strategies in a swift and robust manner".*[36] European Parliament issued a briefing document about the foreign influence operations in the EU[37] and overview about Online disinformation and the EU's response.[38] Also European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) requested special study about the impact of disinformation and propaganda on the functioning of the rule of law in the EU and its Member States.[39] Study formulates several important recommendations aimed at strengthening democratic resilience and improvements in the media policy, especially in the field of social media. Due to overview of measures in some member states (e. g. Annex III) and policy recommendations the study may serve as the guideline for further direct and indirect Europeanization in the field. It is necessary to note, that having enough relevant information and initial analysis of measures in force is important point in search for comprehensive policy and next to the tools used by European Commission may provide important impulse for policy development.

As mentioned in the section dedicated to theory linked to Europeanization interesting issue is also time, timing and tempo of Europeanization as introduced

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[35] European Commission. *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Report on the implementation of the Action Plan Against Disinformation.* Brussels, 14. 6. 2019 JOIN(2019) 12 final [online]. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=JOIN:2019:12:FIN&from=EN

[36] European Parliament. *European Parliament resolution of 10 October 2019 on foreign electoral interference and disinformation in national and European democratic processes (2019/2810(RSP))* [online]. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0031_EN.html?redirect

[37] European Parliament. *Foreign influence operations in the EU.* European Parliament, PE 625.123 – July 2018 [online]. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/625123/EPRS_BRI(2018)625123_EN.pdf

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by Simon Bulmer (2008). EU (respectively High Representative) started to develop first activities after request made by European Council in March 2015. One year after Annexation of Crimea. In this sense EU Member States could have acted much more smoothly as Russian disinformation were already for years present and intensified during annexation of Crimea and war against Ukraine in which cyberspace was seriously abused.[40] As shown above, initial response was insufficient, especially in relation to East StratCom. The Europeanization intensified in 2018 and it might be due to three facts. First, High-Level Expert Group provided guidelines, basic principles and directions for new policy, that it why it was much more easier for European Commission to develop formal structure, and second, it was Sergei Skripal affair which was followed by another wave of disinformation campaign. And third, first effects of disinformation started to appear: analysis showed, that Brexit referendum was influenced by disinformation and that is why there was real and serious impact on the state of the EU. In other words, there was increased pressure to intensify the fight with disinformation which led to increased tempo leading to adoption of action plan. However, as mentioned before, the issue of disinformation and propaganda is developing very fast. People working to create and spread the fake news are searching new ways, techniques and methods and will try to be one step in advance than those trying to build defences and resilience. That is why we can expect constant evaluation and reformulation of the EU policy tools in this field.

4.   Conclusion

There are several conclusions regarding Europeanization of the fight against disinformation and propaganda. First, the analysis conducted supported the notion that Europeanization is interactive process: after measures are developed at the EU level there are also some implications for the member states or other actors. This was demonstrated on the cases of various communications (e. g. actions plan) which had some provisions "encouraging" member states, or stated that member states "should" take some action. Overall, the langue used had also implications for Europeanization and its nature as communications are not legally binding contrary to regulations, directives or decisions.

Second, previous hypothesis that dominant role will be that of Council of Ministers due to link of disinformation and propaganda to national security and state sovereignty proven to be wrong. It was European Council in 2015 which

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[40]   VALUCH, J., HAMUĽÁK, O. Abuse of Cyberspace Within the Crisis in Ukraine. *The Lawyer Quarterly*, 2018, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 94–107.

gave first impulse and entrusted High Representative to adopt first measures. From the early beginning Europeanization was shaped by the High Representative and European Commission which developed several input gates for new policy, with the dominant role of the High Level Expert Group.

Third, the issue of time in the context of institutionalism is important to understand timing and different pace of Europeanization. The war against Ukraine, Brexit and Sergei Skripal poisoning seems to have some influence on the EU efforts. However, this process might be also explain in the terms of path dependency (that policy build up is line of consequential logical steps) or the phenomenon of securitization of disinformation and propaganda.

Fourth, EU reacted in a way characteristic for policy set up and its development. A Group of experts (epistemic community) formulated key principles and set of activities, then aspiratory plans and documents were created, new institutions were established and tasks for relevant actors including member states were addressed under supervision of the European Commission. In the area of disinformation and propaganda is well visible that European Commission is playing the role of the "engine of the European integration", contrary to European Parliament and Council. This is given by the function and nature of institutions.

Fifth, despite EU succeeded to launch new policy, formulate key principles and activities or to create appropriate institutional structure, there are still visible limits. First of all, EU is offering the palate of high-quality of tools but it will be up to member states how much the tools will be utilized in fight against disinformation and propaganda. Due to nature of the EU its institutions to play secondary role to member states who holds real power to deal with the issue. This does not, however mean, that EU could not do more. From improving resources status of East StatCom, increasing transparency of Hybrid CoE to the development of SOMA potential. Finally, there is always space to improve communication activities about fight against disinformation and propaganda which will also contribute to media literacy. Author of this article is familiar with EU institutions and policies for almost 20 years, however it took him several days to map very complicated landscape of this new policy area which have certainly some implications, however subjective, for communication. And communication in relation to disinformation and propaganda is essential.

It seems that EU is at the crossroad. For decades it was associated with soft power and rather hesitant approach in foreign policy which was reflected also in the attitude of EU High Representative Frederica Mogherini towards Russia. As pointed out by Charlotte Wagnsson and Maria Hellman, EU shall carefully consider future steps not to compromise its own values vis-á-vis the other. However, at the same time it is important to give the cause of the problem true name and fight the roots more directly in the realist manner.

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