

## **EU-NATO COOPERATION WITH UKRAINE IN COUNTERING INFORMATION THREATS**

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**Abstract:** *The hybrid war is aimed at obtaining influence over the population, politicians, business and power structures by non-conventional means. Information security holds one of the first places in countering hybrid threats. Ukraine pays enormous attention timely detection, prevention and neutralization of information threats, but it still needs external assistance including the EU and NATO. At the same time, Ukraine a battlefield for new information warfare technologies, and knowledge and experience of Ukraine's resistance is helpful for both organizations. This stimulates a tringle cooperation in the field of information security with a cross-exchange of financial and technical support, new information technologies, administrative methods, knowledge and experience between the EU, NATO and Ukraine.*

**Keywords:** *5-8 keywords information threats, strategic communication, hybrid warfare, European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine, disinformation, propaganda, resilience.*

### **1. Introduction**

Hybrid or non-conventional threats have become especially relevant for the European security after the beginning of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. They are aimed at the societies' minds and consciousness, and thus, the population, which is under the constant informational influence, needs protection against such hybrid challenges and threats, first of all, through strengthening its resilience. Ukraine increased its attention to this problematic after the beginning of the active phase of Russian aggression in 2014.

In countering information threats at the national level, Ukraine has achieved some success, but it can be strengthened through the synergy and enhanced cooperation with the European Union and NATO. These two organizations have been paying attention to this area of activity for a long time, and they now have experience both at the national and regional levels and in the areas of operations and missions.

Strategic communication, including information security, is one of the priority areas of cooperation between NATO and the EU (EU-NATO Enhanced

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Cooperation). At the same time, these organizations develop cooperation with Ukraine in this field. Therefore, it is vital to deepen the EU-NATO interaction for their coordinated assistance to Ukraine. Increased stability and ability of the Ukrainian society and the state of Ukraine to effectively counter hybrid threats will make the situation in Europe more stable and secure.

## **2. Information threats to ukraine, the eu and nato**

Ukraine, as well as the EU and NATO, face numerous information threats, which have become more dangerous in the situation of the modern hybrid warfare and development of information technologies, methods and tools. To coordinate activities of different players in countering such threats, it is necessary to have similar bases of their definition, detection, assessment and neutralization. The analysis and comparison of these bases in the EU, NATO and Ukraine allows understanding frames of cooperation between them and mutual assistance.

The European Union has made a clear definition of the information threats. Countering them is included to “strategic communication” sphere, which is interconnected with countering hybrid threats. Thus, the In-depth Analysis “EU strategic communications. With a view to counteracting propaganda” describes strategic communications as “*systematic series of sustained and coherent activities, conducted across strategic, operational and tactical levels, that enables understanding of target audiences and identifies effective conduits to promote and sustain particular types of behavior.*”<sup>3</sup> The European External Affairs Service defines that “*hybrid threats combine conventional and unconventional, military and non-military activities that can be used in a coordinated manner by state or non-state actors to achieve specific political objectives*”.<sup>4</sup> The primary dimension for the EU is “strengthening strategic communications to tackle disinformation”.<sup>5</sup>

In practical terms, along with other activities, strategic communication is aimed at countering information challenges and threats, in particular – disinformation. In the EU, this countering is primarily directed against the threats from the East, i.e. the Russian Federation, as it is reflected in several EU documents, for example, the EU Global Strategy, the Joint Framework Document on Countering Hybrid Threats, the EU Action Plan on Strategic Communication, the Report of the Directorate-General for External Policies of the European Parliament titled “EU strategic

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/578008/EXPO\\_IDA\(2016\)578008\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/578008/EXPO_IDA(2016)578008_EN.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/economic-relations-connectivity-innovation/46393/europe-protects-countering-hybrid-threats\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/economic-relations-connectivity-innovation/46393/europe-protects-countering-hybrid-threats_en)

<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_19\\_2788](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_2788)

communication with a view to counteracting propaganda”<sup>6</sup>. Sources of information threats, as identified in the EU, can exploit vulnerable members of the society by engaging them with radical and extremist ideas through new communication channels. *“Disinformation poisons hearts and minds. We can no longer deny the fact that our institutions and societies are the targets of hostile Kremlin propaganda, which in turn is part of a broader strategy,”* said Anna Fotyga (Member of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group, Poland).<sup>7</sup> Therefore, in the information field, the European Union has identified raising public awareness and counteracting propaganda as a critical objective. The East StratCom Task Force was set up, an EU-STRAT special project was launched, which also works in Eastern Europe, and the EU Anti-Terrorism Internet Center operates within Europol to remove illegal information content.

In its turn, NATO takes a more detailed approach to strategic communication, focusing on the military and security component. In the interview to the News Agency “Ukrinform”, Director of the NATO Information and Documentation Center in Ukraine Barbora Maronkova explained: *“Strategic communications sound difficult, but it is elementary. It is all about coordinating positions and being able to speak in one voice ”.*<sup>8</sup> In the Alliance, the active development of strategic communication began with its operation in Afghanistan and expanded into all NATO activities. Among other, they include dimensions, which concern countering information threats: press and media; information activities of international military cooperation; actions in cyberspace, including social media; involvement of key leaders in information events; information operations; Informing about the situation and documenting the events on a battlefield.<sup>9</sup>

Strategic communications in the Alliance are also based on information activities. However, unlike the EU, NATO focuses on military component and operations. Meanwhile, countering disinformation is always in the Alliance's focus. Therefore, the Declaration of the 2018 Brussels NATO Summits said: *“We face hybrid challenges, including disinformation campaigns and malicious cyber activities.”*<sup>10</sup>

The report of the EU Institute for Security Studies “Strategic communications: East and South”<sup>11</sup> emphasizes that the primary purpose of Russia's information influence on Europe is the conviction of Europeans that there is no threat from Russia, and the EU should focus on threats from the South. To this end, the

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/578008/EXPO\\_IDA\(2016\)578008\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/578008/EXPO_IDA(2016)578008_EN.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/59610/node/59610\\_uk](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/59610/node/59610_uk)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/2556092-barbora-maronkova-direktor-centru-informacii-ta-dokumentacii-nato-v-ukraini.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://goal-int.org/rol-strategichnix-komunikacij-v-protidii-gibridnij-vijni-proti-Ukraini/>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_156624.htm?selectedLocale=uk](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm?selectedLocale=uk)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0415-strategic-communications-east-and-south>

Russian propaganda machine worked to strengthen the migration crisis in Europe, anti-immigration sentiments, ethnic and religious hostilities. This information impact culminated in January 2016, when the Russian media actively inflated the “Lisa case”<sup>12</sup> and the situation around the violations of public order by illegal migrants at the railway station in the German city of Cologne.<sup>13</sup> It took a long time to overcome the consequences of the flow of disinformation from Russia. At the same time, Russia is trying to discredit the EU in the eyes of the inhabitants of the post-Soviet space, comparing the EU with the Soviet Union, and linking the process of European integration with the loss of independence and sovereignty. Information attacks of the Russian Federation are also carried out in the following areas: “decline” of Christian values in the EU; weakness of European politicians and institutions; instability in European countries; disagreements within the EU and NATO; economic crisis.

The information sphere has become one of the critical areas in NATO enhanced cooperation with the EU, which includes joint counteraction to hybrid threats in the South and the East. *“We have increased our ability to respond to hybrid threats: we reinforce our preparedness for crises, we exchange timely information including on cyber-attacks, we confront disinformation, we build the resilience of our members and partners, and we test our respective procedures through parallel and coordinated exercises,”* the Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation of July 10, 2018 stated.<sup>14</sup>

Ukraine has also enough coordinated approach to the definition of information threats, fixed in the Doctrine of Information Security of Ukraine.<sup>15</sup> They are: special information operations aimed at undermining defence capabilities of Ukraine; special information operations in other countries conducted by an aggressor state in order to create a negative image of Ukraine in the world; information expansion of an aggressor and its controlled structures; information domination of an aggressor in the temporarily occupied territories; insufficient development of the national information infrastructure, which limits the ability of Ukraine to effectively counteract information aggression; inefficiency of state information policy; appeals for radical action, promoting isolationist and autonomous concepts of regional coexistence in Ukraine. Some aspects of countering information threats are indicated in other documents in the sphere of security and defence: Annual national program of cooperation between Ukraine and NATO, Concept for Development of the Security and Defence Sector of 2016, Strategic Defence Bulletin and other.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2016/Also-in-2016/lisa-case-germany-target-russian-disinformation/UK/index.htm>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2016/01/11/8016293.shtml>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_156626.htm?selectedLocale=uk](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156626.htm?selectedLocale=uk)

<sup>15</sup> <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/47/2017>

The information sphere is the main dimension of Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine as Moscow considers information-psychological instruments as a kind of weapons of mass destruction. In Ukraine, Russia is using the following awareness-raising mechanisms: rapid and extensive filling of the combat zone with controlled by Russian media in the case of need; an attempt to monopolize control over the channels of news provision from the combat zone; producing fakes; sending of the Russian cultural celebrities to the area of combat actions; the use of hired foreign journalists, etc. All these mechanisms are supported with adequate financial resources. For example, the budget of "Russia Today" has grown significantly for recent years and is approaching \$2 billion, according to unofficial data.<sup>16</sup> A relatively new information tool of the Russian Federation - "Sputnik", distributes information in more than 30 languages in dozens of countries, mainly in Europe, and in some countries, it became a local news-maker.

The primary propaganda efforts of Russia are aimed at discrediting the leadership of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Army, the Ukrainian foreign policy, the restoration of Ukrainian power in the liberated territories, and the ongoing process of reforming the country. The target groups are: citizens of Russia; citizens of Ukraine in the occupied territories; other citizens of Ukraine; the Western countries, the partners of Ukraine in countering aggression; the population of the countries within the orbit of influence of Russia.<sup>17</sup>

If we compare the approaches of three sides, in the EU and NATO, major information threats are considered more generally as disinformation and propaganda, but in Ukraine actual threats are wider and more detailed. They include problematic issues in the sphere of information security of Ukraine, namely the inefficiency of the state information policy and the lack of development of the national information infrastructure of Ukraine. They are mostly challenges, and they should be supplemented by: low level of coordination central governmental bodies in the information area and their work with the media; unformed policy of information support for the consolidation of national identity in Ukraine in terms of work with population of Ukraine, especially in the occupied territories; insufficient financial and technical support of the state bodies and media of Ukraine for prompt and timely response to the relevant acts of information aggression.

In addition to the officially declared information threats, it is necessary to list other actual information threats, in particular:

- Overt and covert use of democratic norms and principles of the freedom of the media for information discreditation of Ukraine and its attempts to shape the international support to counter Russian aggression (*Example: In December 2018*

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.5.ua/polityka/shaleni-tsyfry-iakyi-biudzhet-prokremlivskoho-russia-today-a-iakyi-v-mininformpolityky-184151.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://geostrategy.org.ua/ua/analitika/item/1401-hibrydni-zagrozy-i-syspilna-bezpeka>

*the Russian media, including media abroad, spread disinformation about the alleged preparation of the Ukrainian forces to use the banned chemical weapons, trying to discredit Ukraine<sup>18</sup>);*

- Political and lobbying activities in the West, used by Russia for the formation of doubts about the position of the EU in support of Ukraine (*Example: On 26 May 2019 on a YouTube channel, a video on how in 2022 Romania can occupy Chernivtsi region and part of the Odesa region of Ukraine appeared; General Prosecutor Office of Ukraine launched criminal proceedings on a special information operation by Russia<sup>19</sup>);*

- Increased use by the Kremlin of the information channels of the Russian Orthodox Church – the UOC-MP for demoralization and disorientation of the population (*Example: In December 2018, the SSU reported that, during searches in several administrative offices of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, materials to incite religious hatred were discovered<sup>20</sup>);*

- Use of the Ukrainian television channels and other media to broadcast pro-Russian narratives (*Example: In September 2018 Ukrainian TV channel website 112.ua posted a quote of the representative of the party “Za Zhyttia” (For Life) Serhiy Bogolyubov: “Ukraine does not fulfill the Minsk agreements”<sup>21</sup>);*

- Formation of an isolated socio-cultural and informational reality in the occupied territories of Ukraine, blocking access of the inhabitants of these territories to the Ukrainian information content (*Example: According to the report of the Crimean Human Rights Group based on the results of the monitoring carried out in March-April 2019, signals of the seven Ukrainian radio stations are fully or partially jammed in 20 settlements of the Northern Crimea<sup>22</sup>);*

- Use of the Ukrainian experts by Russia to form a negative information image about the Ukrainian expert environment (*Example: As reported by the publication “Komsomolskaya Pravda”, the Ukrainian experts participate in a TV show on Russian television as “whipping boys” for the appropriate fees, including Vyacheslav Kovtun, who is one of the most paid - monthly he receives from 500 to 700 thousand Russian Rubles<sup>23</sup>);*

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<sup>18</sup> <http://tass.com/world/1035166>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2019/06/04/novyna/polityka/hpu-porushyla-spravu-cherez-video-pro-zaxoplennya-rumuniyeyu-bukovyny>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.unian.ua/politics/10364304-pid-chas-obshukiv-u-primishchennyah-upc-mp-znayshli-broshuri-z-propagandoyu-foto-video.html>

<sup>21</sup> <https://112.ua/politika/bogolyubov-donbass-neobhodimo-vozvrashhat-putem-vypolneniya-minskih-soglasheniy-463170.html>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-v-krymu-ukrainskie-radiostantsyi-glushat-rossijskimi/29935810.html>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.crimea.kp.ru/daily/26744.7/3772307/?sec-also.number=1414#sec-also>

- Dissemination of information products to form the lines of division in society (Example: In February 2019 Russian edition of RT published the news under the title “The European Parliament said about the link between the Church disunity in Ukraine and the Poroshenko’s election campaign»<sup>24</sup>).

A conflict situation like this one waged by Russia against Ukraine has proven to be a challenge not only for Ukraine but also for NATO and the EU. Therefore, effective counteraction to the information threats requires the formation of messages necessary to counter Russian aggression. Ukraine, the EU and NATO need a clear vision and definition of the information threats, as well as close cooperation to counter them, which should be coordinated and avoid unnecessary duplication.

### **3. Current state of ukraine-eu-nato cooperation in countering information threats**

At the current stage, Ukraine’s cooperation with the EU and NATO occupy one of the priority places in the Ukrainian foreign and internal policy that is fixed in the corresponding Ukrainian law adopted in 2017. For better coordination of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration, the post of the Deputy Prime Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration was created in the Ukrainian Government at the end of April 2016. The Governmental Office on Coordination of the European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of the Ukrainian Government started its work. The European Union Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine was transformed into the EU and NATO Department Posts of Deputy Ministers on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration were established in most Ukrainian ministries. This allows to improve coordination of two integration processes and enhance efficiency of Ukraine’s cooperation with the EU and NATO, including on countering information threats.

Almost immediately after the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU came into full force on September 1, 2017, in October of the same year, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the 2018-2021 European Integration Communication Strategy and annual action plans for its implementation.<sup>25</sup> One of the priorities was determined “countering disinformation aimed at discrediting Ukraine's relations with the EU and Ukraine's future membership in the EU.”

At the 20th Ukraine-EU Summit on July 9, 2018, in Brussels, a joint decision to strengthen the work on countering information threats was reached.<sup>26</sup> The development of such cooperation was specified during the Association Council

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<sup>24</sup> <https://russian.rt.com/ussr/article/605957-evroparlament-vybory-ukraina-raskol>

<sup>25</sup> <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/83-2019-%D1%80>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/36086/joint-statement-eu-ua-summit-2018.pdf>

meeting on December 17, 2018: «*The Parties agreed on the importance of countering disinformation and interference in the elections, and discussed the possibilities of cooperation in this area*».<sup>27</sup> The EU leading institutions to implement these solutions are the EU Delegation to Ukraine and the EU Advisory Mission in Ukraine. They focus on the dissemination of information about the EU, the development of governmental structures in the field of strategic communications, enhancing their communication with non-governmental organizations and security structures with the population to counter disinformation.

The EU Plan to counter disinformation, adopted in December 2018, identified Russia as the primary source of information threats and provided increasing of the EEAS founding for strategic communications from 1.9 million euro in 2018 to 5 million euro in 2019. Particular attention is paid to the East StratCom Task Force.<sup>28</sup> In March 2019, the EU created a System of rapid identification of disinformation that was crucial for the preparations of the European Parliament elections in May 2019. “*It is critically important to work together to confront those who are trying to manipulate our elections*,” wrote the European Security Commissioner Julian King.<sup>29</sup> The System was limited for the EU institutions and member states but previewed cooperation with partners like Ukraine, which is at the forefront of countering Russian propaganda.

Meanwhile, cooperation between Ukraine and the EU in countering disinformation and propaganda began earlier. In 2017 the East StratCom Task Force created an informal working group with the Government of Ukraine. Analysis of the web site of this EU group ([www.EUvsDisinfo.eu/](http://www.EUvsDisinfo.eu/)) shows that disproof of Russian propaganda are mostly the facts concerning Ukraine. With the aim of supporting Ukraine in this field, in the EU several projects like “EU Mythbusters twitter feed”, “Disinformation Review” and “Center for the exchange of the news in Russian language in Prague” were implemented, and journalists from different countries helped each other in investigations of disinformation. To counter disinformation, the EU Delegation developed the Roadmap and created a system of online consultations with representatives of civil society.

The EU Advisory Mission to Ukraine trains law enforcement officers on strategic communications. In 2017 and 2018, the two-day training on strategic communications was held for representatives of the press services of the National Police from all regions of Ukraine. The emphasis was on modern trends in the media, new communication tools, and active development of messages. “*Today*,

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/storage/app/media/uploaded-files/UKR.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-internet-fakenews/plan-to-combat-fake-news-proposed-as-eu-elections-approach-idUSKBN1O41LM?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews&utm\\_source=Twitter&utm\\_medium=Social&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+Reuters%2FworldNews+%28Reuters+World+News%29](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-internet-fakenews/plan-to-combat-fake-news-proposed-as-eu-elections-approach-idUSKBN1O41LM?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews&utm_source=Twitter&utm_medium=Social&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+Reuters%2FworldNews+%28Reuters+World+News%29)

<sup>29</sup> <https://twitter.com/JKingEU/status/1107562567650689024/photo/1>



*information can either destroy the organization or consolidate its positive reputation. Therefore, an effective and "proactive" communication is a critical component of the work of the police,"* the Head of the EUAM Kestutis Lančinskas said during the mentioned training.<sup>30</sup>

Cooperation of NATO with Ukraine focuses on assisting both governmental agencies and civil society organizations. The Strategic Communications Partnership Road Map between Ukraine and NATO was signed in September 2015 and became a framework for various programs and projects, including those within the Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine (CAP), approved at the meeting of the Ukraine-NATO Commission on July 9, 2016, in Warsaw.<sup>31</sup> It provides trainings of personnel of the governmental bodies and helps to inform the society about NATO activities to counteract Russian propaganda.

Being responsible for Ukraine-NATO cooperation on strategic communications, the NATO Information and Documentation Center (NIDC) contributes to the information campaign to support Ukraine's accession to NATO as part of the Concept of improving public awareness of Ukraine's cooperation with NATO for 2017-2020. However, in the East of Ukraine, the local people are more vulnerable to propaganda and have enough negative attitude to the Alliance that requires information campaigns there with a focus on NATO practical actions to help the population affected by the conflict. Ukraine maintains a high-level cooperation with the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, based in Riga (Latvia). *"We have powerful institutions that help us a lot, for example, the Strategic Communications Center of Excellence, which is located in Riga, Latvia. This center has become a hub for research and analysis in this area,"* Barbora Maronkova, Director of NIDC, said in his interview for the "Ukrinform" in October 2018.

Considering the nature of hybrid warfare, the information security will continue remaining at the forefront of Ukraine's cooperation with NATO. However, Ukraine has experience in countering Russian propaganda and becomes more a source of knowledge than a consumer that was emphasized at the international round table *"Ukraine-NATO: non-military cooperation as a joint response to hybrid threats"* on February 9, 2017, in Kyiv<sup>32</sup>,

Coordination of the EU and NATO assistance to Ukraine in the security sphere will support Ukraine and other partners in their efforts to increase resilience so that they can defend themselves against internal, hybrid and information threats. The Third

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.euam-ukraine.eu/ua/news/euam-provides-strategic-communications-training-for-police-spokespersons-from-all-ukrainian-regions/>

<sup>31</sup> [https://mfa.gov.ua/mediafiles/sites/nato/files/7\\_.pdf](https://mfa.gov.ua/mediafiles/sites/nato/files/7_.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> [http://ucipr.org.ua/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=516:ukra-na-nato-sp-lna-nevyskova-sp-vpracya-u-protid-g-bridn-y-v-yn&catid=16&Itemid=186&lang=ua](http://ucipr.org.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=516:ukra-na-nato-sp-lna-nevyskova-sp-vpracya-u-protid-g-bridn-y-v-yn&catid=16&Itemid=186&lang=ua)

progress report on the implementation of the list of joint proposals, which was approved by the EU and NATO on December 5, 2016 and supplemented on December 6, 2017<sup>33</sup>, determines information exchanges and discussions on formats for further cooperation in the Western Balkans, the East and the South.

The *European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats* (Helsinki, Finland) promotes closer coordination between the EU and NATO on countering hybrid threats, including the informational component – propaganda and disinformation. Both organizations hold joint meetings, participate in the activities of the Center, attend the meetings of the Steering Committee of the Center, and are involved in exercises and trainings. Under the auspices of the Centre, recommendations were developed to strengthen further EU-NATO security cooperation. Ukraine is developing cooperation with this Centre but has not yet joined its activities.

The NATO Representation to Ukraine now chairs the donor coordination group for the security and defense sector and works closely with the EU Delegation and the EUAM to Ukraine. NATO personnel also work with the EU support group for Ukraine to identify specific projects, including the sphere of strategic communications. Well-coordinated cooperation in the triangle NATO-EU-Ukraine will be an evidence of common approach in this dimension.

#### **4. The Eu-Nato cooperation with Ukraine will focus on information security**

Ukraine continue its movement to a full-fledged membership in the EU and NATO that is considered as a challenge by the Russian Federation because Moscow wants to keep Ukraine in its sphere of influence. To reach this goal, Russia will use information warfare to prevent the European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine. This requires attention to the trilateral Ukraine-EU-NATO format of cooperation and coordinated actions not to allow realization of Russia's plans. Thus, it is necessary to identify problem areas:

- continuation of Russia's hybrid-type aggression against Ukraine by: granting Russian citizenship to residents of Donbas - both on the occupied territories and areas controlled by the Government; actions on the transformation of the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea into "Russian lakes" using a doubtful motivated navigation restriction; escalation of pressure on Kyiv to push it to unilateral implementation of the Minsk agreements in the Russian interpretation;
- probable "gas attack" in the winter of 2020, taking into account likely termination of the Russian gas transit to the EU through the territory of Ukraine

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<sup>33</sup> [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2018\\_06/20180608\\_180608-3rd-Joint-progress-report-EU-NATO-eng.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2018_06/20180608_180608-3rd-Joint-progress-report-EU-NATO-eng.pdf)

and the completion of gas pipelines “Nord Stream 2” and “Turkish Stream” (so-called “Problem 2020”);

- Russia's use of civil infrastructure on the sea to covertly spread its military presence under the pretext of protecting it from subversive and terrorist threats;
- security of Ukraine in the period after the end of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty;
- Russia's subversive activities against the EU and NATO from within with the use of various actors of influence to disrupt functioning of organizations and prevent Ukraine's integration to them.

The problems to some extent lie in the dimension of Ukraine's relations with NATO and the EU. The mutual understanding between the sides in both bilateral and multilateral formats will be needed as never before, especially considering continuation of Russia's destructive policy towards them. Shortcomings of strategic communications of the Ukrainian authorities on various issues in the past had severe consequences for Ukraine. The lack of strategic communications with the United States, the Great Britain, Poland, Germany and France in 2014, in the conditions of domestic political turbulence and the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine, was one of the reasons that instead of the Budapest format on *Security Assurances* to Ukraine, the Normandy format of negotiations and the Minsk process were initiated. The US, as the initiator of the Budapest Memorandum, appeared absent in those formats and Russia tried to play a role of a mediator like Germany and France, although it was a party to the conflict in reality. The issue of Russian occupation and illegal annexation of Crimea was left out of the negotiating process, and some European politicians interpreted the Russian aggression against Ukraine as an “internal civil conflict”.

A similar situation of substitution of concepts occurred in 2009 when Russia resorted to the use of gas as a weapon against Ukraine, and later against the EU countries. Thus, absence of an official reaction at the beginning, diplomatic lethargy and lagging reactive actions of Ukraine in the winter of 2009 against the background of the massive Russian propaganda and lobbying efforts of Gazprom in Europe became the main causes of inadequate conclusions of the European Commission regarding the nature and reasons for the “gas attack” against the EU during two weeks and Ukraine during three weeks. Brussels limited itself to stating: “On the night of January 6-7, all supplies from Russia through Ukraine to the EU were stopped. Gas supplies from Russia to Europe were absent from 7 to 20 January.”<sup>34</sup> Russia was not accused in that “gas crisis”, as Brussels assigned the responsibility to both sides - Russia and Ukraine.

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<sup>34</sup> Commission Staff Working Document. Accompanying document to the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning measures to safeguard the security of gas supply and repealing Directive 2004/67/EC. The January 2009 gas supply disruption to the EU: an assessment. Brussels, p. 4

The gas crisis of 2009 was accompanied by the large-scale information-psychological campaign and PR-support of the actions of Gazprom by the authoritative international PR-agencies (Gavin Anderson, GPlus Europe, and Ketchum). It was paid off. Russian propaganda stamps like “Ukraine interrupted transit to Europe”, “Ukraine is an unreliable transit chain”, “Northern and southern flows are ways out of transit problems” were fixed in the European public consciousness. The propaganda thesis - about “theft” of gas by Ukraine was and remains especially widespread. Even former European Commissioner for Energy Gunter Etinger in August 2014 used rhetoric about the possibility of “stealing gas” by Ukraine, predicting a possible gas crisis in the winter of 2015, although his forecast was not justified. Today, in the context of “Problem 2020” there are signs that the scenario of “General pressure of strong parties on a weak one” may repeat, although the EU's attitude to Russia would have to be transformed in the light of the events for the last five years.

Countering Russian aggression, especially its information component, increases the importance of coordinated NATO-EU-Ukraine actions. To do this, Ukraine requires the involvement of all actors and the creation of a full-fledged and long-term mechanism for the training of relevant specialists, research and implementation of their results. The EU and NATO help Ukraine to perform these tasks. However, at the strategic security level, the Alliance is more involved that points the need to strengthen work with the EU. At the tactical level, the Alliance is more focused on the military-security component, and the European Union works deeply in the sectors of public security through EUAM and the EU Delegation. Despite this separation of dimensions, precise coordination of the actions of both organizations is essential, and Ukraine itself must ensure that there is no duplication of their efforts. Therefore, the adoption of normative legal acts on information security, based on the Information Security Doctrine of Ukraine, and the formation of administrative and organizational mechanisms in Ukraine become priorities, without which the relevant assistance of the EU and NATO will be ineffective. The Alliance is ready to assist in these tasks, as defined in the NATO-Ukraine *Strategic Communications Partnership Road Map*.

It is necessary to move to practical steps aimed at preventing information threats. Ukraine should initiate projects on information security in the framework of the EU PESCO cooperation mechanism and join the NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence. As it was proposed by the Centre for Global Studies “Strategy XXI” (Ukraine) within the project on monitoring and enhancing security situation in the Black Sea region, supported by the Black Sea Trust Fund<sup>35</sup>, the EU, NATO and Ukraine can cooperate on dissemination of up-to-date information on violations of

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<sup>35</sup> [https://geostrategy.org.ua/images/Policy-brief-BSS-2\\_ENG.pdf](https://geostrategy.org.ua/images/Policy-brief-BSS-2_ENG.pdf)

the international law by Russia in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait in the international information space.

In conditions of the hybrid war, Ukraine, the EU and NATO should work together to protect their information borders and build the future information space through: raising public awareness of the dangers of aggression; prevention of information flows, which go beyond the usual human awareness; consideration of the speed of information dissemination through social networks; development of cooperation between information volunteers; correspondence of information messages to real actions.

The information sphere should become a field not only for NATO and the EU assistance to Ukraine but also for adoption and using of practical knowledge and experience that Ukraine has gained in countering Russian propaganda to guarantee common information security. One of the areas of cooperation between Ukraine, the EU and NATO should be raising awareness of the population of neighboring member countries of both organizations to improve their public opinion about Ukraine and effectively counteract Russian propaganda, which is actively spread by the Kremlin. It is essential to continue active cooperation with the EU StratCom East Task Force, effectively use of public diplomacy tools, involvement of NGOs, experts and cultural figures. Strengthening cooperation with European think tanks to counter Russian propaganda will help to increase mutual awareness of the societies of Ukraine, the EU and NATO member states, strengthen security, increase trust, and defend common values.

The European Union can get an added value by including Ukraine to its system of rapid identification of disinformation, which will allow Brussels to respond more effectively to information threats, because most of them come from Russia, and Ukraine is the main target of its attacks. Information products produced by StratCom East Task Force should be translated into all languages of the EU countries for better distribution. Their translation into the languages of the partner countries, including Ukrainian, contributes to their dissemination in Ukraine. In parallel, the EU should continue supporting independent Ukrainian media through technical assistance, trainings and exercises. Ukraine can use NATO experience in returning territories which are temporarily controlled by illegal armed groups to government control and guaranteeing the social security of the local population and internally displaced persons.

Ukraine is developing cooperation with the EU and NATO on information security, but it is necessary to draft a clear road map for triangle cooperation to counter the current information threats, based on the EU-NATO Enhanced Security Cooperation and bilateral formats with Ukraine. This will allow better coordination of all efforts and avoiding unnecessary duplication to increase their effectiveness.

## **5. Conclusions**

The development and accessibility of the media, social networks and personal communications have made it easier for an aggressor to use information tools to influence societies. Creation of a protective shield for a society of a victim state has become more difficult. The aggressor is not considered as an open enemy, but it disguises its actions as “taking care” of specific groups of people and “special” regions. Instead, the leadership of a victim state and its patriots are portrayed as a “war party” in the aggressor's media. In the Ukrainian case, using mass media and disinformation in the international arena, the aggressor creates an image of Ukraine as a state, in which “civil conflict” takes place, but the aggressor acts as a “peacemaker”. All this hinders the active and effective resistance of the state institutions to the aggression.

In the context of Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine, when society became the object of attacks, effective counteraction can be achieved only through close cooperation with the public, especially civil society organizations, increasing confidence in its actions and informing about the situation in and around the country. A shield that should protect the Ukrainian people from hybrid threats from Russia requires Ukraine to strengthen internal unity, associated, in particular, with a vast truthful public awareness of sensitive topics, including historical ones, which aggressor uses or can use to achieve its goals. Therefore, non-governmental organizations, experts and academics, independent media should be involved in the process.

After the start of Russian aggression against Ukraine, the entire population of the country was involved in protection activities in all spheres, including the information one. However, over time, this involvement began to decrease because citizens gradually returned to everyday life. At this stage, the priority task is to create a functioning system of information security in the state, which can be assisted by the EU and NATO.

With the support of the EU and NATO, Ukraine is working out the mechanisms to counter information threats, by using their experience, knowledge and technical assistance. These two organizations are not standstill. They interact with each other on the principles of mutual complementarities. Threats to Ukraine, the EU and NATO are similar, and their source of origin is the Russian Federation. Therefore, Ukraine must deepen cooperation with each organization separately and in the context of their mutual cooperation.

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