

**Recommendations by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF)
on Combating Disinformation and Propaganda**

*based on the results of the EaP CSF re-granting project
“Joining Efforts and Skills to Confront Propaganda”
and discussions at the event*

“Eastern Partnership: Battleground of Russia’s Disinformation War” on 31 January 2017

On EU and Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries’ cooperation and linkages

- The EU and EaP media should be at least as active and creative as pro-Kremlin propaganda machine.
- The EU and EaP information space and priorities in the field of media freedom and countering disinformation are interlinked and should be analysed as such when developing strategies to address propaganda.

On media support, quality standards and media literacy

- Mainstream media in the EU and the EaP are seriously underfunded; measures should be taken to ensure the survival of the media. Existing international and local media outlets providing information alternative to the one presented by the main Russian channels widely spread in the Eastern Partnership region via cable, satellite or Internet should receive more support to ensure high-quality reporting in languages more accessible to viewers and listeners in the EaP countries.
- Given the overall lack of high quality reporting, which is one of the major means of countering propaganda in the EaP countries, consideration should be given to supporting activities aimed at raising professional standards, including adherence to internationally recognized ethical codes and standards for balanced and objective reporting and news presentation. The existing platforms and creating new ones for discussion, training, studies and self-reflection on the media, including in the regions, could be further enhanced in order to improve the current level of journalism and help to identify its unhealthy aspects related to propaganda.
- Access to various educational resources, such as books, databases, methodology, research magazines, as well as a chance to exchange experience through international media networks and journalist associations would also journalists, managers and students to increase their professional capacity and would improve the current level of media literacy.
- There is no common information space in the EaP region. New models of information flows between the EaP countries that would replace Moscow-centred model are needed. The possibility of creating an independent media channel covering the whole EaP region or a distribution network of smaller media outlets working within different platforms should be

explored. Consideration should be given to promoting a direct exchange of a high-quality content between the media in the EaP countries.

- Consideration should be given to strengthening protection of national media from hate speech and state propaganda that breaches the law. At the same time, if applied, restrictions to the freedom of expression should not be disproportional in scope, arbitrary and politically motivated to limit the expression of alternative positions.
- The enduring monopolization of the media market by state or powerful groups has deprived the audiences in the EaP countries of an effective variety of sources of information, and has thereby weakened the guarantees of pluralism. Such concentration of media ownership should be prevented through appropriate measures. Instruments could be applied to encourage competition, motivate the established players to reduce the concentration, and to encourage new players to invest.
- Analysis of the revenue from online advertisement on the websites producing and publishing disinformation should be conducted; commercial entities placing their advertisement on such websites should be alerted to the possible damage to their reputation.
- Media regulators should monitor broadcasters' compliance with legislation and contractual license conditions, in case of their non-compliance appropriate sanctions should be applied. The latter should be clearly defined and should be commensurate with the gravity of the violation committed. The establishment of systematic media monitoring based on credible methodology would assist the regulators in identification of legal violations (including hate speech and propaganda) and in taking prompt and adequate corrective action.
- The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) should play a more active role in monitoring compliance with the EBU's statutes by its members, particularly promoting and developing the concept of public service media and their values such as universality, independence, excellence, diversity, accountability and innovation, as referred to in the EBU Declaration on the Core Values of the Public Service Media.

On social context and manipulating the sentiments

- Analysis of the mechanisms of propaganda influence via appeal to people's feelings and fears should be made to come up with a proper response. Accusing and shaming people who fell into the trap of propaganda can only worsen the situation.
- Stimulating civic activities and strengthening national identity in the Eastern Partnership countries is one of the ways of fighting disinformation war and Russkiy Mir propaganda.
- A broader approach is needed to counter propaganda taking into account "social media bubbles" as a new phenomenon. Working with big data could be a solution. ICT tools can be

used to aid local media monitors and researchers to obtain qualitative and quantitative data from a wider range of sources.

On EEAS East StratCom Task Force

- EEAS East StratCom Task Force should be strengthened through establishing units with at least one officer per each EaP country.
- In addition to the East StratCom Task Force local reactions from the EU Member States are needed, Czech Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats could be taken as an example.

On EU communication strategy

- The EU communication strategy should be reviewed to focus on the target audiences most susceptible to disinformation, including young people. The language of communication campaigns should become less bureaucratic and more tailored towards the target audience.
- There is a need to invest in education in order to make more people aware of the extent of the disinformation campaigns.

On public service broadcasting in the EaP countries

- It is important for the authorities in the EaP countries to strengthen mandate by public service broadcasters so that it reflects public interest and is based on independence, editorial freedom and non-interference by authorities or political parties. The reporting by these broadcasters should be balanced and factual, including when covering activities of the authorities, in line with international good practice.
- Media, especially the public broadcasters, need to pay more attention to the accurate and wide coverage of the developments in other Eastern Partnership countries. It is in the objective interests of all EaP partners to gain as much as possible from this EU initiative. Misunderstandings and wrong perceptions would impede the efficiency of the EaP and formation of “a common EaP identity” as a crucial catalysing factor for regional integration processes.

On interaction with Russia’s media community

- There are substantial resources in Russia itself to ensure constructive approaches and mutual understanding between Russian on the one hand, and the EaP and EU countries, on the other. Respectively, enhancing dialogue and exchange with independent media professionals from Russia to contribute to alternative content in Russian media thus decreasing influence of negative stereotypes being spread in post-Soviet information space is important.

- Promoting distribution in the EaP countries of the content of alternative Russian media, which is not engaged in propaganda, for better understanding of the real political processes that have impact on developments in the region, should be encouraged.
- Journalists, editors, producers and media owners from both Russia and the EaP countries should make joint effort to ensure that distributed information is truthful and conscientious. The facts should be reported without any distortion and within their respective context. If a flawed message is published, it should be followed by a public apology or a reaction from independent professional community.