



HOW TO FIGHT DISINFORMATION?

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What makes disinformation dangerous?

The 2012 National Security Strategy declares that Hungary's membership in the European Union and NATO, the protection of its democratic political system are important security policy interests for the country. This task faces a new challenge in the 21st century: information warfare.

Nowadays it is unnecessary to maintain costly TV and radio

channels, newspapers. Almost everyone is able to start a website, blog or social media account at very low costs and outside of media regulatory agencies' sights. The Hungarian population is highly susceptible to conspiracy theories.

Passivity in the fight against disinformation might undermine Hungarians' trust in the institutional system and the country's allies. This might weaken Hungary's protective umbrella against hostile political-economic influence.

Information replaces armoured vehicles

In past decades, politics has increasingly pervaded the lives of citizens through the media. Media – and thus information – plays a role in formulating the political agenda.

The information operations of foreign powers pose a threat to democratic nations. Vladimir Putin's Russia uses manipulated information and facts to support his own domestic and international political goals.

Disinformational propaganda often describes the world in black and white: the party disseminating disinformation declares his solutions to be logical and effective, while it deems all other proposals to be contrary to national interests. A more sophisticated variant of this is when the attacker does not attempt to convince the target about the correctness of its own solution, it just declares all other approaches to be harmful.



Russian propaganda tries to restrict and muddle information available to decision-makers, and puts “democratic pressure” on them.

Russia is incapable of creating new divisions in European societies, but it can exploit already existing problems. Russia is cooperating with extremist and populist parties representing the Kremlin's interests to increase its influence within the EU. This pro-Kremlin group receives professional, organisational assistance and opportunities in pro-Russian media in return.

What are the Kremlin's goals?

Information is part of Russia's hybrid war concept. However, the Kremlin can only employ a part of its hybrid toolkit against countries integrated into Western structures; one of these is information operations.

Russia's current foreign policy goal is to turn the current international system dominated by the West into a multipolar one, and to strengthen its "mutually beneficial" bilateral relations with EU member states to facilitate the advancement of Russian national interests.

The Hungarian economy, which depends on EU funds and trade with EU members, and through it the Hungarian population would face considerable risks if the situation of the European Union deteriorated further; while undermining NATO

would weaken guarantees for the safety of the Hungarian population and the country's territorial integrity. Moreover, Hungary can meaningfully influence the outcome of international issues important to it through these organisations. Consequently, one of Hungary's main interests is that the EU and NATO become as united and strong as possible, which means that Russia's disinformation campaign can be considered a national security threat.



The concrete goals of Russia's information operations

Encouraging general dissatisfaction with the democratic institutional system.

Weakening the credibility and popularity of Western international organisations (EU, NATO).

Influencing domestic and international political decisions.

How is a Russian information operation built?

Official or Kremlin-sponsored media publish manipulated or "leaked" information.

These statements are disseminated and amplified with the help of trolls and bots.

The narrative is later shared by other news sources – news aggregators, far-left and far-right blogs, Facebook pages.

How can we become media literate?

Gather information from multiple sources! You should check claims made by a given article in online search engines and on websites created specifically to debunk disinformation (e.g., euvsdisinfo.eu).

Do not share anything without reading it because you might spread manipulative information as a consequence.

Do not trust unknown websites! If you find yourself on such a site, read through some articles published by the site to make sure it is not a propaganda organ.

Make sure that the article is not outdated (e.g., it reports on a contemporary, relevant event)!

Articles published anonymously are always suspicious! Real journalists take credit (and responsibility) for their own work.

If an anonymous source says something, it does not make it official! Russian propaganda often tries to increase the weight and significance of opinions favourable to it by making disputable statements look “official.”

Check the sources articles cite, the accuracy of data in them and the background of experts they quote.

If possible, look for the original document cited by articles, and check if it reported accurately on the original source’s contents.

Check the credibility of pictures and videos included in the article.

Pay attention to mistranslations!

All events should be placed in a wider context! You should research the context related to the events described by articles, as it can often add to your understanding of them.

International organisations are not a world government; you should check what competences their member states ceded to them.

Always check whether a website or Twitter account is who it says it is.

Recognise Facebook and Twitter bots!

How to debunk disinformation?

- Call attention to the idiocy! Ask questions and warn about logical gaps, inconsistencies!
- More is not always better! Use fewer counter-arguments, but explain them clearly!
- Focus on facts! Only mention manipulative information after introducing the facts!
- Give an explanation! It is not enough to only debunk manipulative claims, give people the truth as well! To put it clearly: tell them what really happened!

For further information please visit our website:
http://www.politicalcapital.hu/index_gb.php

