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COMPARISON OF GOVERNMENTAL APPROACHES TO COUNTER RUSSIAN INFORMATION INFLUENCE IN THE BALTIC STATES

Master's thesis

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I have written this master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

The defence will take place on 25 January in Zoom. The opponent is Visiting Professor Andrey Makarychev.

Abstract

Numerous studies on information influence activities such as mis- and disinformation or inauthentic behaviour on social media have been published in recent years, mainly concentrating on the prevalence, characteristics and causes. Yet, comprehensive research of how governments manage this "information disorder" has remained largely on the sidelines, contributing to a dearth of knowledge when it comes to adequate responses to information influence activities. The study seeks to contribute to this literature by focusing on Baltic reactions to Russian information influence.

The main aim of the thesis is to examine and compare Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian governmental approaches to responding to Russian information influence activities. Main strategic documents were analysed, and state officials interviewed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how the Baltic states deal with information influence in general and which countermeasures the three countries have undertaken, concentrating on the setup of strategic communication, media literacy in formal education and media policy. In order to make sense of various strategies democracies might opt for, an analytical framework by Hellman and Wagnsson (2017) was used. The focus of the research is on governmental action, excluding media and third sector activities such as independent fact-checking or educational projects.

The author argues that albeit in general the Baltic states approach countering Russian information influence similarly, the understandings diverge on the extent to which the state should regulate the media to achieve its goals. Compared to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania seek to actively shape the media environment, either through media support measures to encourage media literacy and raise awareness or by restricting access to Russian television channels to respond to incitements of hatred. Estonia, on the other hand, has fared better in developing Russian-language public media as an alternative to still influential Russia's information space. More broadly, the author suggests that governments respond to information influence activities first by implementing regulations and secondly by raising awareness.

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List of abbreviations

EDF – Estonian Defence Forces

ERR – Estonian Public Broadcasting *(Eesti Rahvusringhääling)*

EU – European Union

LAF – Lithuanian Armed Forces

LRTK – The Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania *(Lietuvos radijo ir televizijos komisija)*

LRVK – Office of the Government of Lithuania *(Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės kanceliarija)*

MIL – Media and information literacy

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MoC – Ministry of Culture

MoD – Ministry of Defence

MoE – Ministry of Education

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NEPLP – National Electronic Mass Media Council of Latvia *(Nacionālā elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome)*

Stratcom – Strategic communication

Introduction

The vulnerable nature of our media space to misinformation and information influence such as trolling, botnets or astroturfing should not come as no surprise to anyone in 2021. Not only has the last year been marked by the Coronavirus pandemic but also by the so-called "infodemic" – a kind of information disorder that undermines trust and credibility of governments and jeopardises global efforts to manage the virus, for example by questioning compulsory mask-wearing or the safety of vaccines. In 2018, over 80% of the Europeans perceived dis- and misinformation as a problem in their country and for democracy in general (European Commission 2018c). The COVID-19 pandemic serves as yet another reminder of the threat false information might pose to societies.

Lying is not illegal in democratic societies that have been founded on the principle of free flow of ideas. Furthermore, not all false information spread is by default illegitimate. There are plenty of domestic interest groups (e.g. lobbying, public relations) with legitimate rights and intentions that might use tactics similar to purveyors of disinformation. Cracking down on information influence might instead have the adverse effect of restricting the public sphere. Whilst populist leaders such as Bolsonaro or Trump answer to their own citizens, coordinated information operations originating from abroad seeking to manipulate public debate threaten the overall state security and thus require a more straightforward response. For the Baltic states there was really no need for another crisis to remind them of the possible threat mis- or disinformation might have for their societies. Already since regaining their independence, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have had to resist Russian Federation's information operations that have especially intensified after the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Since 2016, when "fake news"[1] became the new buzzword, numerous studies and articles have been published on the nature, prevalence and causes of information influence activities, mainly dis- and misinformation. Although the Covid-19 pandemic offers the scientific community new avenues to explore Russian information operations, we already have quite a good understanding of the narratives Russia spreads about the West (e.g. "The European Union has deteriorated", "NATO is aggressive and threatens Russia") and

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[1] Due to its politicised nature, the author does his best to avoid the f-word throughout the thesis.

about itself (e.g. "Russia as the protector of traditional European values"). At the same time, relatively little emphasis has been put on examining the ways democratic countries can effectively manage or counter information influence. As Pamment et al. (2018, 174) point out, less than one per cent of the more than a thousand articles published in recent years on disinformation focus on "countering" it.

Without the perspective and understanding of other countries' approaches, it is difficult for democratic governments to formulate effective policies to combat information influencing activities. This work seeks to contribute to this research. The main aim of the thesis is to examine and compare the approaches taken by Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian governments in responding to Russian information influence activities whilst at the same time providing a comprehensive overview of countermeasures undertaken by these three small countries. The focus of the study is strictly on analysing governmental approaches to manage information influence, excluding media and third sector activities such as independent fact-checking initiatives or educational projects. Also, comparing the Baltic approaches notwithstanding, the study does not seek to understand why the countries act the way they do, i.e. the underlying reasons for their behaviour. Providing a comprehensive analysis of why countries have developed different security, education and cultural policies, albeit interesting as it might be, would have meant going back quite some time in history and would have been outside of the limits set to this thesis.

Being on the frontline of Russian information influence activities makes the Baltic states a good research object for examining ways to counter information influence. Besides geopolitics, the three countries also have, *inter alia*, similar historical, cultural, and (foreign) political understandings which makes it interesting to find out to which extent these similarities also hold true to countering information influence. In order to help grasp various ways countries might respond to information influence, the author relies on the analytical framework by Maria Hellman and Charlotte Wagnsson (2017) who have also, to a large extent, focused on the Baltic states. They propose four ideal-type strategies that democracies use to counter Russian information warfare: confronting, naturalising, blocking, and ignoring. Estonia is brought out as employing a confronting strategy, referring to the launch of the Russian-language public broadcasting channel ETV+ in 2015, the aim of which is to "balance and counter the narratives produced by Russian-owned television channels in Estonia" and to prevent Russia from exercising influence

on the Russian minority in Estonia (Ibid., 159). Latvian and Lithuanian strategies, on the other hand, are viewed by Hellman and Wagnsson (Ibid., 161) as examples of the blocking strategy, i.e. not actively transmitting counter-narratives but blocking the narratives of "the other" instead by temporarily suspending the retransmission rights of Russian television channels (e.g. RTR Planeta, REN TV) with reference to hate speech.

The author also relies on the model of systemic vulnerabilities by Howard Nothhaft, James Pamment, Henrik Agardh-Twetman and Alicia Fjällhed (2018) that helps to understand what makes information influence illegitimate to the point that it must be considered a hostile act, and explains the predicament of Western liberal democracies in responding to it. The authors argue that with the advent of the digital age the Western model of opinion-formation is increasingly being "turned against the very societies it supports", as information influence (e.g. trolls or botnets) is increasingly difficult to discern. In Pamment et al. (2018, 16–17) they further propose a diagnostic tool, the so-called DIDI-criteria (deception, intention, disruption, interference) to determine whether communication techniques fall outside of what might be considered legitimate communication.

The thesis seeks to be both practically and academically relevant. The practical relevance lies in the fact that by mapping and comparing the countermeasures undertaken by the Baltic states, frontline states of Russian information operations, the research aims to generate additional understanding into best practices that other countries could draw from when designing similar policies. Albeit the focus of the work is on countering hostile information influence originating from Russia, the author believes that the insights gained from the thesis also prove fruitful in managing the "disorderly information space" in general.

Academically, the analytical relevance of Hellman and Wagnsson's framework is assessed. So far, the author is not aware of any major work actually applying Hellman and Wagnsson's categories to real cases. Since the literature regards this model as a principal theoretical work explaining possible state approaches to countering information influence, it is first important to ascertain whether the ideal-types that the authors propose for the Baltic states are actually adequate to interpret their approaches towards countering information influence. Secondly, and more broadly, the comparison of the Baltic

approaches allows us to critically assess whether the analytical framework, in general, manages to fully capture aspects of countering information influence activities. In the end, based on the empirical analysis, the author concludes that these expectations are not fulfilled and puts forward an alternative approach towards countering information influence instead.

The empirical part is divided into document analysis and semi-structured expert interviews. As part of the document analysis, the author compares publicly available strategic documents (mainly national security and defence concepts) that serve as the basis for combating information influencing activities in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The author analyses the emphasis given to information influence activities, and the countermeasures envisaged. Semi-structured expert interviews were conducted with state representatives from institutions that play a role in countering information influence. Besides providing insight into the general understandings, setup and coordination of strategic communication, the author also focuses on governmental activity in areas that are not related to state security in the narrow sense, i.e. media literacy and cultural policy. During peacetime, ministries of education and culture play a far greater role in enhancing societies' long-term resilience to information threats compared to the armed forces. Also, examining the defence and security sector activities is complicated as much of the information is classified.

In the first chapter, the author provides an overview of the contemporary information environment (or "network society" as dubbed by Manuel Castells) that has transformed the nature of conflicts. Wars, often indistinguishable from peace, are increasingly waged over control of political decision-making processes rather than territories. Also, a summary of disinformation as a separate phenomenon in IR theory is given. The author then moves on to conceptualise information influence activities within the Western system of free opinion formation, as theorised by Nothhaft et al. (2018) and Pamment et al. (2018). Whilst doing that, various information influencing techniques such as cognitive and social hacking, deceptive identities or humour are introduced.

The second chapter concentrates more specifically on countering information influence. Ethics of countering propaganda is discussed as well as raising the awareness of the society through strategic communication. The author then focuses on the analytical

framework proposed by Hellman and Wagnsson (2017) to categorise strategies to counter Russian information warfare. Four ideal-type strategies – confronting, naturalising, blocking and ignoring – are introduced, critically evaluated and illustrated with examples. Also, measures taken by non-governmental stakeholders such as news media and internet platforms (i.e. Facebook, Google and Twitter) are examined. Since national measures are inevitably linked with transnational efforts, an overview is given of the recent developments in the European Union to manage the information space, such as the unveiling of the new Democracy Action Plan in December.

In the empirical part, first, based on the document analysis, an overview is given how information influence is reflected in the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian strategic documents and what countermeasures these documents propose. The thesis then proceeds to examine the general setup and understanding of strategic communication in the three countries, based on the interviews with officials from state chancelleries and armed forces. Thirdly, the author analyses how media literacy is integrated into formal education, concentrating on basic and secondary school curricula. Fourth, media policies and regulatory measures such as restricting Russian television channels are looked at, together with expectations for action at the EU level. The thesis then proceeds to the discussion part. The author first compares and contrasts state strategies, offering recommendations for the future, and then proceeds to assess Hellman and Wagnsson's analytical framework from a critical standpoint.

1. Information influence

1.1. Novel information environment transforming the nature of conflicts

In order to start understanding the nature of information influence activities and the ways to counter them, we need to comprehend the new information environment that our societies find themselves in. A major contribution in this field has been made by Manuel Castells who presents a largely technology-driven view of a new kind of "network society" where the power is being reconfigured, and the media enables "new networked patterns of relations in economic, social, and political life and new ways of relating to one another" (Miskimmon et al. 2013, 2). That society is "informational" since information is both the main product but also the main means of production (Kirtiklis 2017, 68).

Miskimmon et al. (2017, 10) note that a change in the wider information environment is also bound to affect "the distribution and form of authority, legitimacy, and – ultimately – power". This is also reflected in Castells' work. Since there are no longer strictly defined territorial boundaries, but rather sociospatial networks of power that can be both local, national or global, the traditional notion of society comes into a question – states' enforcement of power is considerably limited, and they gradually evolve towards "network states" (Castells 2009, 18, 51). The origins of these ideas might be traced back to the mid-20th century when Marshall McLuhan (1994 [1964], 94) diagnosed a major shift in perception of time and space where "both time (as measured visually and segmentally) and space (as uniform, pictorial, and enclosed) disappear in the electronic age of instant information" and the world is transformed into a "global village", an organic whole.

Castells (2009, 22) explains that technological availabilities have enabled networks that once "were an extension of power concentrated at the top of the vertical organisations" (e.g. states, religious apparatuses and bureaucracies) to transform into being non-centred and of horizontal nature. A new form of interactive "mass self-communication" has emerged, characterised by the capacity of sending messages easily and globally from many to many, in real-time or chosen time" (Ibid., 55). This has also meant a change in the traditional role of gatekeeping with more opportunities for "the people" to affect the media coverage or even gatekeep their own news agendas on social media, they have

entered international relations "as an actor to be courted, whose views should be engaged with, and whose agency should be managed". (Miskimmon, et al. 2013, 252–57). As Pamment et al. (2018, 4) put it: "The era of media gatekeepers—in effect a cartel of trusted sources—has given way to a kaleidoscope of facts and opinions".

Technological progress and the new information environment have also transformed the way we wage conflicts with contemporary wars being more about controlling the population and the political decision-making process than territory (Nissen 2015, 8). It is not that this thinking is new. Sun Tzu (2000, 8), a Chinese strategist and general, noted already on the 6th century BC that "in the practical art of war, the best thing of all is to take the enemy's country whole and intact…supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting". Military scientists began to turn more attention to the psychological elements of warfare in the late 20th century when a team of American analysts coined the term "fourth-generation warfare" to signify the return to decentralised warfare where-nation states do not possess near-monopoly on combat forces and where the conflict's conceptual boundaries (e.g. the distinction between war and peace) are difficult to delineate (Lind et al. 1989; Lind 2004). An example of it would be the war in Donbass, during which most of Ukrainians were living their everyday lives, and the country was still open for tourists. In the 21st century, many concepts with conflicting definitions have emerged in Western academic discussion, e.g. information warfare, psyops, influence operations or strategic communications – all attempting to expound the new reality of war. "Military scientists do not have a common understanding on what the war is in fact. This seems irrational because it is the purpose of military science to study war" (translated from Estonian) (Jantunen 2018 [2015], 52–53).

Whilst the scientific community wrestles with labelling that new type of warfare, there is more agreement on the characteristics of it. Nissen (2015, 24) argues that although the issues that drive conflicts remain the same (e.g. ethnic, religious or economic), in addition to the military dimension, the contemporary battlespace also includes "political, social and economic contests even at the local (tactical) level, where actors seek to persuade the audience in such a way that the delivery of the political message is an end in itself". In these contests the social network media has become the "weapon of choice", being easy to use and allowing for effects disproportionate to the investment, e.g. offensive and defensive operations, intel gathering or command and control activities (Ibid., 96–97).

Saara Jantunen (2018 [2015], 27) notes that while the Gulf War and the Iraq War brought battles right into our television as part of media war, war has now crept into our homes in another way with which one might reach the same goals as with bombs or infantry. Due to global connectivity, the actors to the conflict can be whoever, even unknowing citizens.

Nissen (2015, 32) argues that another reason why social media has become weaponised, is that conflicts for liberal democracies are no longer "wars of survival" but rather "wars of choice" where outcomes are defined in subjective political terms thus making issues such as maintaining public support or legitimacy prerequisites for acting in contemporary conflicts. He (Ibid., 100–101) adds that that "window of opportunity" to use social media is mostly in the early stages of the conflict when audiences have "not yet started to question attribution and content in any major way". Elaborating Nissen's argument, one could also say that since much of the conflicts are now fought over the "hearts and minds" of the people, there is now also more incentive for malign actors to use illegitimate influence activities such as disinformation to influence public opinion and perceptions.

Turning our attention to disinformation, there has been little theorising on disinformation a distinct phenomenon in IR so far, which is understandable since the academic interest has peaked only in recent years. Although the information warfare literature offers useful insights into the technology-driven uses of disinformation and the policy responses to counter it, La Cour (2020, 7) argues, it offers no answers to when and why disinformation is chosen over other techniques or why and under what conditions states respond to disinformation. She points out that in addition to information warfare literature, existing work on post-truth tendencies, bullshit and the influx of emotions also offers insights into disinformation. Harry Frankfurt (2005), for example, notes that there is a shift in ideals from being correct to being sincere. Crilley and Chatterje-Doody (2018), and Renner and Spencer (2018), on the other hand, argue against those who say that we now live in a global "post-truth" era (Ball 2017; Davis 2017) where "lying is regarded as a norm, even in democracies" (d'Ancona 2017, 26). According to La Cour (2020, 6), the point that the scholars agree on, though, is the role of internet and information communication technology as facilitators of "post-truth": "[T]hese developments transformed the media ecology, leaving the traditional media in a crisis and giving rise to a major industry of fake news, misinformation and low-quality science (Ball 2017; d'Ancona 2017; Marshall and Drieschova 2018)".

1.2. Illegitimacy of the information influence activities

The new information environment in which control of political space is more important than the control of physical space has also transformed the strategies and techniques to gain access and control over the "hearts and minds" of the people. As Bjola and Pamment (2018, 2) note, the same tools that allow states to build "digital" bridges with foreign audiences with the intent of enhancing international cooperation or stimulating trade, can also be used to "undermine the political and social fabric of these countries". Although there has been ample research into various influence activities (e.g. hijacked hashtags of Daesh's "media mujahidin" or Russian-language bots tweeting about NATO's presence in the Baltics), less consideration has been given to the question of what makes these activities illegitimate *per se* or what between otherwise unremarkable communication from acts of political warfare. A recent contribution in this field has been made by Nothhaft, Pamment, Agardh-Twetman, and Fjällhed (2018), who propose a model of opinion formation and systemic vulnerabilities to help explain the inherent plight of the Western liberal democracies in responding to disinformation and propaganda.

Nothhaft et al. (2018, 41) argue that Western society is based upon free opinion-formation that is "self-stabilising as long as actors watch each other and insist on adherence to a few simple rules". These three rules (Ibid., 34-35) prescribe that there is (1) a genuine public debate that mirrors the opinions of the society and holds those in power accountable, (2) a transparent system of institutions (independent courts, science) with identifiable track records that operate by evidence and not ideology, and (3) free access to the public sphere by independent actors – not only elite but also experts and sources. They add (Ibid., 37-38) that free opinion-formation should be understood as an epistemic chain (Figure 1) following certain standards: what elites and officials say and what is covered in media and popular culture should be backed up by experts and sources, sources should be scrutinised, and experts should base their opinion on verifiable scientific evidence. There is no single truth (marked by the blue and red lines on the figure), but for an argument to be valid, that epistemic chain must remain unbroken. "If that can be ensured, debate and discussion will, by and large, gravitate towards sound and reasonable ideas. In the long run, that will affect the content circulating on social media and in lunchrooms, pubs, literary salons and coffee houses" (Ibid., 38).
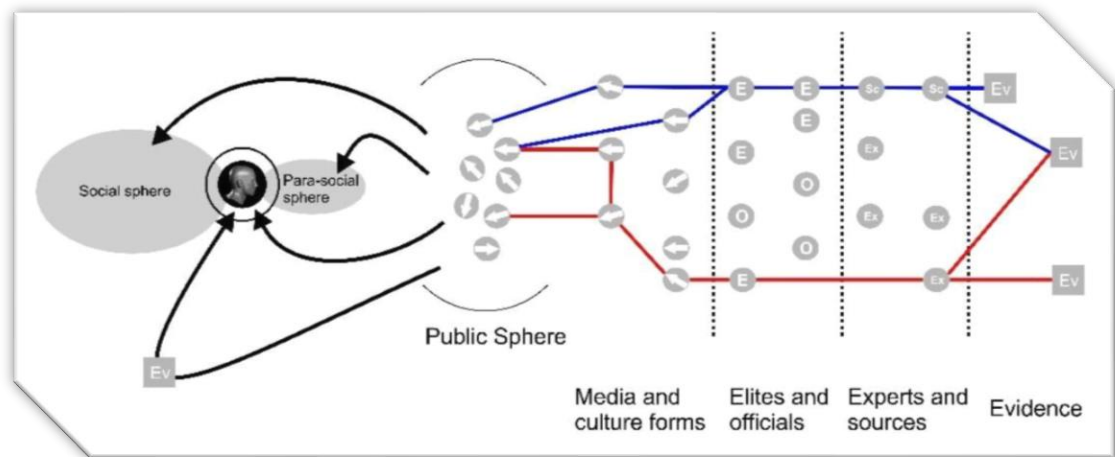
Figure 1. Ideal-type model of opinion formation in the West (Pamment et al. 2018, 18).

As Nothhaft et al. (2018, 38-42) explain, building on the works of Kant, Mill, and Habermas, as long as that chain holds, dubious arguments and liars within the system would eventually be revealed due to scrutiny and sound judgement of the citizens within this free market of opinions. They mark (Ibid.) that although the system always had flaws – "the assumption of an ideal rational human that never existed; second, the assumption of highly engaged, politically well-informed citizens" – it has served Western democracies well. Up until now, when the digital age has opened the system to increased information influence activities by both domestic and foreign actors. "All too often the liar is not revealed anymore, or revealed too late, or we find that the revelation of the lie does not matter anymore because the lie is believed anyway" (Ibid.).

The illegitimacy, but not necessarily illegality, of these information influence activities lies in three moral reasons (Ibid., 42): (1) they break the rules (e.g. they lie), (2) they exploit vulnerabilities and hack weaknesses (e.g. anonymity of contributors in social media makes it "impossible to judge whether political comments represent a real majority of citizens or foreign influence"), and (3) they rely on deception by mimicking legitimate forms of public debate to take advantage of people. Pamment et al. (2018, 16-17) have further proposed four factors to determine whether the influence acts constitute an information influence campaign requiring a response: deception (e.g. disinformation), intention (actor conducts acts with perceived hostile intent), disruption (acts undermine, harm or hinder functioning of societal institutions), and interference (e.g. foreign actors that have little or no business to interfere with the issue at hand). These so-called DIDI

criteria in the chain-of-events that they are part of must be viewed holistically as the presence of a single criterion might be part of a completely legitimate political or activist activity. "It is not a coincidence that techniques employed in information influence activities overlap with journalism, public affairs, public diplomacy, lobbying and public relations; mimicry of these techniques is part of the modus operandi" (Ibid.).

Information influence activities have risen to the forefront of global discussions due to multiple media dynamics relevant to the new information infrastructure such as low public trust in media, a proclivity to sensationalism (so-called clickbait journalism), and lack of resources for fact-checking and investigating reporting (Marwick and Lewis 2017, 40). Nothhaft et al. (2018, 40) would categorise these as media system vulnerabilities stemming from a rapid technological change that transformed media consumption, economic models, fragmented audiences, and that are now exploited by hostile actors.

These actors involved in influence activities do not necessarily have to be hostile nor working for foreign adversaries (although they might act hand in hand). As Wardle and Derakhshan (2017, 23) note, the motivations of "masterminds" devising disinformation campaigns are very different from those people that eventually post. Marwick and Lewis (2017) and Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) bring out that in addition to political motivations (e.g. Russian influence operations), financial and social/ideological factors also play a role in motivation actors. Entire disinformation businesses might be set up for advertising (clickbait) revenue (Tambini 2017). One of the most vivid examples would be the North Macedonian city of Veles with a population of about 40 000 that served as the hub for pro-Trump clickbait disinformation. Veles produced "an enterprise of cool, pure amorality, free not only of ideology but of any concern or feeling about the substance of the election. These Macedonians on Facebook didn't care if Trump won or lost the White House. They only wanted pocket money to pay for things" (Subramanian 2017).

As social or ideological motivations for information influence activities, we can, for example, consider actors that just aim to cause trouble for fun, e.g. "hoax" the news media by trolling. The social and participatory media also provides a platform for fringe subcultures to find each other, share viewpoints, and take advantage of the current information environment (Marwick and Lewis 2017, 24). Some of the most active of these groups are various far-right groups that "have developed techniques of 'attention hacking'

to increase the visibility of their ideas through the strategic use of social media, memes and bots" (Ibid., 1). In Estonia, Blue Awakening, the youth-wing of the far-right EKRE party, has shown similar tactics, using deceptive identities on social media to propagate their ideas (Laine 2019). Far-right is also characterised for their perchance for conspiracy theories. As a 2013 study showed, supporters of populist parties are specifically drawn to believe in them (Gyárfášová et al. 2013). Marwick and Lewis (2017, 39) mark that these groups' ultimate aim is to get their messages covered and amplified by mainstream media. They add (Ibid., 45) that distrust of the media can become a self-perpetuating phenomenon: if groups already critical of mainstream media "successfully use the media to cover a story or push an agenda", it furthermore undermines media's credibility.

Information influence techniques

Riots in India displacing tens of thousands and killing 66 (Pandey 2019), fabricated polls ahead of 2017 elections in Kenya leading to annulment of results – disinformation and other information influence techniques could have devastating consequences for societies. In 2016 20 top-performing false election stories generated more reactions on Facebook than 20 top news stories from professional media (Silverman 2016). According to Wardle and Derakhshan (2017, 4), instead of concentrating on single events, though, we should notice the long-term effects of information influence – increased mistrust towards media and sharpened sociocultural (e.g. ethnic, religious) divisions.

Vosoughi et al. (2018) have found that false news, due to its perceived novelty, diffuses six times faster than truth. Freelon and Wells (2020, 146) name the current information environment one of a larger "crisis of public communication" or "disinformation order". Nevertheless (Ibid., 148), interestingly, disinformation was not a major research object before 2017. Instead, the emphasis was put on misinformation (Ibid.). The differentiating feature between mis- and disinformation is that misinformation does not intend to deceive, which is why it is also easier to study (Ibid.). Karlova and Fisher (2013, 4-5) observe that authors (Losee 1997; Zhou et al. 2004) have typically treated disinformation as a kind of misinformation. They disagree, saying that both should instead be viewed as equal, sub-categories of information, since disinformation, whilst misleading, does not necessarily have to be inaccurate (Ibid.). Their informativeness is situational: what is false in one situation might not be so in another situation (Ibid.). The informativeness might be external to the message, when, for example, the sender's malicious intent is revealed to

the receiver (Ibid.). "Disinformation could possibly be more informative than misinformation, perhaps because any reveal or implication may be deliberate" (Ibid.).

And then there are deepfakes – seemingly authentic video (or audio) showing people saying words they never said. "Soldiers could be shown murdering innocent civilians in a war zone, precipitating waves of violence and even strategic harms to a war effort. […] A fake audio clip might 'reveal' criminal behaviour by a candidate on the eve of an election" (Chesney and Citron 2018). Vaccari and Chadwick (2020) regard deepfakes as part of video-based visual disinformation and add that in the long run, if left unchecked, they might "contribute toward generalised indeterminacy and cynicism, further intensifying recent challenges to online civic culture in democratic societies". One could also see deepfakes as part of a forging technique (Figure 2) since "forgery is, in essence, the production of false evidence" (Nothhaft et al. 2018, 40).

James Carey (2009 [1989], 15-17) argues that communication should not be viewed as merely sending information for gaining control but also as a ritual that represents shared beliefs – reading news is like a dramatic act "in which the reader joins a world of contending forces as an observer at play". In social media it is not mere observing anymore, though. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017, 43) mark that since everything we share on social media is visible to our friends and acquaintances, we tend to like and share things that they would expect us to like and share: "If social media is a stage, our behaviour is a performance and our circle of friends or followers are our audience". It is due to this tribal mentality that people share information even if they do not believe in it for "they would like to conform and belong to a group, and they 'perform' accordingly" (Ibid.). Disinformation spreads rapidly since it is spread between people who trust each other (Ibid, 50). In social media, our instincts are also reinforced through personalised, algorithm-driven information flows contributing to filter bubbles and echo chambers. Pamment et al. (2018, 28) note that narratives that people have internalised are largely self-stabilizing: we tend to search for and favour information that reinforces our beliefs or values (confirmation bias). Now, this selective exposure is done for us automatically. Whether filter bubbles and echo chambers have the power to influence opinions is increasingly challenged by contemporary research, though – they might, instead, "contribute to reinforcing pre-existing beliefs by selective exposure (Ibid., 37–38).
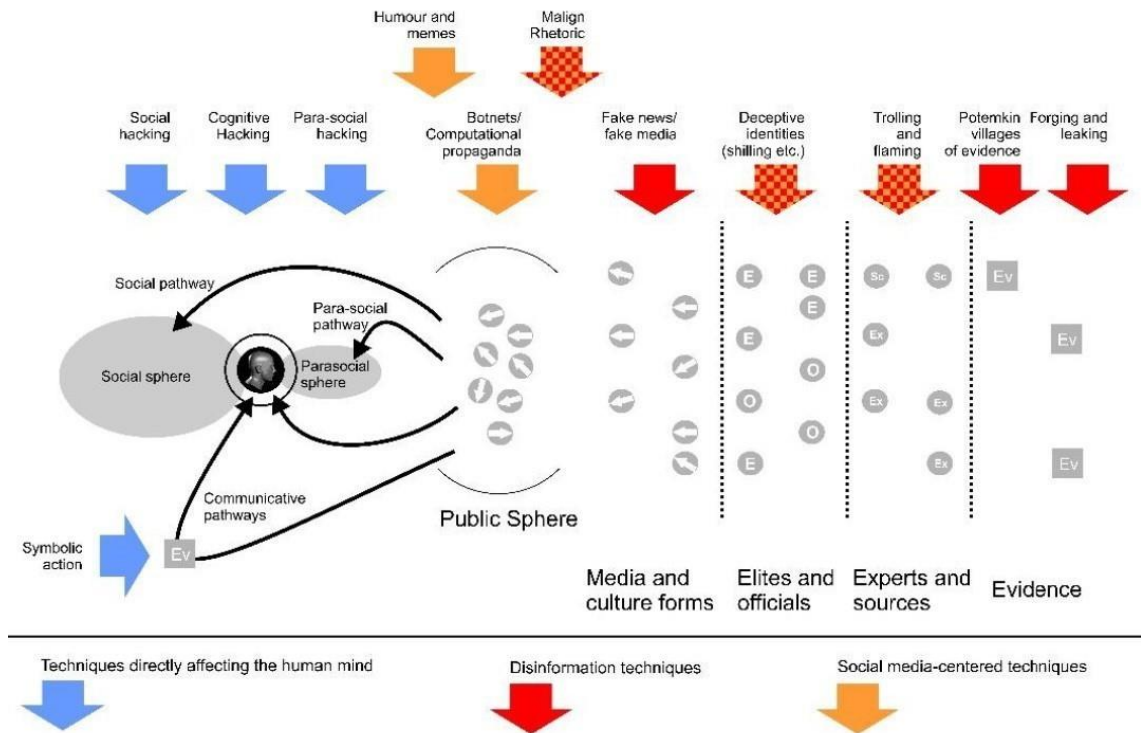
Figure 2. Influence techniques in the opinion formation model (Pamment et al. 2018, 32).

Besides disinformation and forging, the increasingly fractured information space is vulnerable to various other kinds of information influence activities of which Pamment et al. (2018) have made a comprehensive overview. Some directly affect the human mind, such as cognitive, social, and para-social hacking or symbolic action. Cognitive hacking (Ibid., 33–35) that can be narrowed down to the individual level is similar to public relations aspiring to "get into the heads of people" with an exception of having a covert intent to influence the audience. For example, by psychographically targeted (e.g. from user's Facebook activity) "dark ads" that are only visible to that user (Ibid.). Hence, false information could be spreading without the rest of us knowing about it. As part of para-social hacking, Pamment et al. (2018, 39–41) see instances where people experience one-sided relationships as two-sided, e.g. people perceiving influencers as their friends. They point to Trump's Twitter feed in 2016 that established a para-social relationship with many of his supporters due to unfiltered access to his thoughts. Symbolic actions are acts that "signal something to an audience to create a response", such as demonstrations, blockades, or military exercises (Ibid., 41–42). "The sound of a fighter aircraft brings faith and will to fight for one's soldiers whereas for the enemies that thunder might be psychologically paralysing" (Jantunen 2018, 60).

Social hacking (social engineering (Nissen 2016)), on the other hand, "exploits people's tribal nature", i.e. vulnerabilities arising from social cognitive features of our mind (Pamment et al. 2018, 35–39). As an example, one could create fake social proof and take advantage of the bandwagon-effect. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017, 46) explain that humans are programmed to follow masses, especially closest friends and family. If our friends like a specific song, we are also more inclined to like that song (Salganik et al., 2006). As Stray (2017) observes, "messages received in greater volume and from more sources will be more persuasive. Quantity does indeed have a quality all its own". Hostile influence operators could also use deceptive (e.g. sockpuppets, i.e. fake accounts) or automated (e.g. bots) identities for social hacking. For example, NATO StratCom COE (2019) has systematically tracked the scale of inauthentic activity in the Baltics and ascertained that in Russian-language social media site VK only 14% of the total number of messages about NATO in the Baltics and Poland originate from genuine users, others from trolls and bots. As Nothhaft et al. (2018, 41) note, deceptive identities could be used for astroturfing, i.e. "to create fake social capital and create impression of a social media-movement where no or very little popular support exists". Technology has not developed that far yet for automated accounts to be able to hold more sophisticated conversations and thus, manual techniques such as trolling are used to incite emotions and divisions in the society. "A very successful troll plays with ambiguity in such a way that the audience is never quite sure whether or not they are serious" (Marwick and Lewis 2017, 7).

Another way to exploit people's emotions is through humour and memes. To Pamment et al. (2018, 65-68), these are especially useful to legitimise controversial ideas and opinions since they spread virally and are ambiguous, i.e. people understand them differently. Techniques of malign rhetoric could also be used for information influence, such as gish-gallop (overwhelming the opponent with oftentimes incidental arguments) or name-calling (discrediting the adversary with words) (Ibid.). On the right-hand side of the epistemic chain (Figure 2), we find influence activities directly affecting the credibility of evidence – the basis for the opinions of experts and sources. Potemkin villages constitute "institutional networks that are controlled by actors conducting information influence" such as conferences, workshops or fake research centres of the tobacco industry (Ibid., 53–54).

2. Countering information influence

Much more is known about the techniques and nature of information influence (e.g. Darczewska 2014; Giles 2016a; Helmus et al. 2018) activities than is known about effective measures to counter them. Bjola and Pamment (2018, 174) point out that literature that takes *countering* as the point of departure represents less than a percent of the whole literature on information influence. In addition to the novelty of the whole field of study, part of the explanation might also be the that governments are not that willing to disclose their countermeasures out of security considerations. Also, the efficacy of these measures remains as difficult to measure as the impact of disinformation.

Since it is more difficult to distinguish between peace and war in information warfare, it is also more difficult to react to information operations (Jantunen 2018, 38). "In the absence of any other visible crisis, we do not wish to see influence activity as it is - an attack" and thus "we do not find the strength to defend ourselves against it" (Ibid., 204). Pamment et al. (2018, 87–88) note that the problem of proving information influence activities is complicated by the fact that foreign actors seek to exploit societal vulnerabilities working though domestic proxies who are legitimate actors and thus cannot be precluded from discussion. "Political solutions are thus caught between a rock and a hard place: on the one hand, a *laissez-faire* attitude might lead to ever more blatant attempts to exert unfair influence; on the other hand, demands to crack down endanger open and free debate as one of the greatest strengths of liberal society" (Ibid., 11).

Thus, the main question for democracies is how to counter information influence without undermining democratic institutions and processes and respecting freedom of expression. Since governmental interference can be criticised for hindering free speech, there are some who argue that countering information influence should not be a responsibility of governments at all, e.g. Gordon 2017. Bjola (2018) argues that for governments to respond to information influence ethically they would have to retain moral authority by

- making a case that they have been harmed (being truthful about the harm done and serious about attribution),

- having normative standing to engage in counter-interventions (governmental action needs to be effective, publicly scrutinised, and consistent with stated objectives to withstand accusations of hypocrisy or incompetence), and
- doing so in a proportionate and responsible manner (the greater and more frequent the harm done the more need for wide offensive counter-interventions).

Failure to maintain moral authority could help to legitimise the claims of information influence operators (Ibid.). Wohlforth et al. (2018) note that employing moral authority is especially important for small and middle powers to gain a status of a "good power".

It is important not to see information influence activities as a standalone phenomenon but rather in the context of a wider hybrid influence strategy, also involving cyberattacks, use of organised crime, coercive economic means, targeted use of corruption, investing in political parties, academia, and exploitation of societal tensions (Lucas and Pomerantsev 2017, 8–9). Information domain can both be used as a prelude for action in other domains but also as an end-goal, complicating our understanding of the threat and responses to it. Information influence is thus a multifaceted problem with no root cause to point out and no single solution against it, either, as European Commission (2018) has pointed out.

Since there are no simple solutions, a successful response to information influence must thus involve all parts of society, as the literature agrees (Althuis and Strand 2018; EISC 2018; European Commission 2018a; Milo and Klingová 2016; Pamment et al. 2018). The main tenet of that whole-of-society (or "total defence") approach should be building trust. As the European Commission (2018, 11) marks, "highly polarised societies with low levels of trust provide a fertile ground for the production and circulation of ideologically motivated disinformation". Societies should strive towards a state of resilience where there is high trust in public institutions and media (so that people are more critical of manipulative content) and the state is both prepared and knowledgeable about the potential threats, but also empowered to act upon them (EISC 2018).

A key to achieving a resilient society is raising awareness through strategic communication (stratcom). Bolt and Haiden (2019) see stratcom as a "holistic approach to communication based on values and interests that encompasses everything an actor does to achieve objectives in a contested environment". Effective stratcom should dispel

disinformation, propaganda and lies that seek to confuse public opinion, aggravate social tensions and undermine trust in governments (Shea 2016). Stratcom is merely a tool in the wider framework of psychological defence, a concept that in Sweden for example is based on counteracting deception and disinformation, ensuring that public authorities have an accessible platform to disseminate information in case of crisis, and strengthening citizens' will to defend the country (EISC 2018, 4). Various training events and media campaigns can, for example, be undertaken, to increase public awareness, but emphasis should also go on encouraging people's individual responsibility through education and media literacy (Pamment et al. 2018; Polyakova and Fried 2019)

A prerequisite for raising awareness is a general risk and vulnerability analysis in which decisionmakers have been made known of the hypothetical threats the society is facing and potential counter-measures against them (Pamment et al. 2018, 98). In addition, it is imperative to focus on the target groups of information influence: to understand the factors that make these groups susceptible to influence, their motivations, fears and expectations, as well as ways of reaching out to them with resonating narratives (Ibid., 99). "Particular focus should be placed on informing decision-makers, journalists, public officials and other key communicators in society" (Ibid., 92). The literature (Jantunen 2018; Paul and Matthews 2016) also points out that since people tend to resist persuasion and end up with reinforcing their pre-existing beliefs instead, it is more productive to uncover the ways information influence is propagated, rather than fighting specific manipulations. As Jantunen (2018, 244) emphasises, there is no better solution to counter hybrid threats than having frequent and systematic societal discussion about it.

Effective response to information influence also requires "normative resilience" or "organisational resilience", i.e. an effective institutional structure and comprehensive legislation in place for a state to respond (Damarad and Yeliseyeu 2018, 9–10). The policy paper of European Integration Studies Centre (2018, 8) recommends Lithuania, for example, to have one overarching institutional body responsible for "providing constant support and coordination of communication infrastructure and working on resistance to potential threats". The recommendation is based on the example of the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency that is responsible for risk analysis and protection of national elections against foreign influence campaigns (Ibid.).

2.1. Strategies available for democratic governments

Governments have only in recent years discovered the importance of countering information influence activities. Polyakova and Fried (2019, 1) write that governments have moved beyond "admiring the problem" to a period of "trial and error, in which new ideas and solutions for countering, and building resilience against disinformation are being tested, though unevenly and with setbacks". Some European countries such as the Baltics, the Nordics and the UK have for some time been already determined to counter Russian influence activities, some, e.g. North Macedonia after Russian efforts to foil the Greek-North Macedonia agreement or Spain following Russian influence operations in Catalonia, have only recently "woken up" (Ibid., 4). In Spain, for example, special units were launched ahead of the 2019 elections to fight hybrid threats (Abellán 2019).[2]

Turning our attention to strategies and measures that societies have at their disposal to counter information influence, Stray (2019, 1020) admits that although there are good accounts of Cold War counter-disinformation institutions, there is a shortage of literature offering a framework that deals with the networked world. Comparing the actions of EU's East StratCom Task Force, Facebook and the Chinese information regime, Stray (Ibid.) groups their activities into six strategies: refutation (debunking), exposure of inauthenticity (e.g. discrediting bot networks), alternative narratives, algorithmic filter manipulation (e.g. deranking by social media), speech laws (e.g. fines for sharers of disinformation) and censorship. Regarding the tools that states, more specifically, can employ, Althuis and Strand (2018, 69) argue that governments are primarily concerned with two types of activities: implementing regulations that aim to limit the dissemination of fake news and supporting institutions or entities responsible for coordinating efforts to raise awareness and increase public knowledge about the impact of fake news.

A more holistic, theory-driven approach found in the literature is by Hellman and Wagnsson (2017), who offer an analytical framework of how democratic governments can counter hostile strategic narratives as part of information warfare. They focus more specifically on the European responses to Russian information warfare. The authors

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[2] For a more comprehensive up-to-date overview of legislative and policy measures taken by the governments against disinformation, see Robinson et al. 2019 or Plasilova et al. 2020.

propose four ideal-type models representing different strategies governments can employ against information influence activities: confronting, naturalising, blocking, and ignoring.

Governmental responses are examined in two dimensions: engagement-disengagement and inward protection-outward projection (Figure 3). By engaging, Hellman and Wagnsson (2017, 157) regard the government as actively confronting hostile narratives by producing or disseminating narratives of its own or by setting up channels for this purpose. Disengagement, on the other hand, means defending against opposing narratives without actively engaging nor paying attention to them – this might also result from states not being aware of the narratives directed at them. The second dimension divides strategies into those targeting domestic or foreign audiences (Ibid., 158). States might want to project narratives to foreign audiences to promote a certain worldview and gain advantage (e.g. power, reputation) internationally. On the other hand, they might focus on the domestic public by protecting the national discourse from outside influence (e.g. blocking) or taking no particular defensive measures and relying on democratic institutions' ability to protect the information space instead (e.g. ignoring) (Ibid.).

	Outward projection	Inward protection
Engaging	Confronting	Blocking
Disengaging	Naturalising	Ignoring

Figure 3. Four ideal-type strategies for democracies to employ in information warfare on engaging-disengaging and outward-inward scale (Hellman and Wagnsson 2017).

As Hellman and Wagnsson (Ibid.) point out, it is not likely that these four ideal-types truly reflect the way governments engage in information warfare. Rather, states are expected to mix strategies. Combining strategies raises the question of their compatibility and effectiveness though. "[I]n case a state does invest heavily in one strategy, the effect of this strategy might be either reinforced or reduced if it simultaneously draws on other strategies" (Ibid., 163–64). An example of this would be Sweden that employs the ignoring strategy participating actively in the European Union's efforts to confront Russian information influence through the East StratCom Task Force (Ibid., 164)

Building on the work of Miskimmon et al. (2013, 84–85), Hellman and Wagnsson (2017, 166) argue that states are not completely free in their choice of counter-measures: political and strategic cultures, past policies and historical experiences influence the choice of strategy. For Sweden, to give an example, that has a tradition of defending transparency

of information, it is natural to opt for the ignoring strategy that emphasises free speech, whereas the Baltic states are expected to actively engage with information influence activities due to their past experiences with Russia (Ibid.). Current events, e.g. political change might also influence governments in their choice of strategy, though (Ibid.).

The thesis will now provide a more thorough overview of the tools democratic governments have at their disposal to counter information influence activities by grouping them to fit one of the four ideal-type strategies proposed by Hellman and Wagnsson (2017). Activities undertaken by the news media, internet platforms and civil society are examined in the following subchapter.

Confronting

The most engaging strategy that Hellman and Wagnsson (Ibid., 158–59) propose is confronting that involves contrasting oneself to "the other" by producing and projecting counternarratives. As they explain (Ibid.), the strategy is outward-looking because "the leadership pays great attention to and tries to meet the perceived threat originating from outside the domestic sphere". The projected narratives can be directed either towards the domestic population or alternatively towards the perceived enemy or other audiences beyond domestic borders. The main objective of projecting counternarratives is to change attitudes and influence audiences: "Specific stories depicting corrupt leaders, Western cultural decadence, criminal activities and so on are refuted and responded to with stories setting the record straight by drawing on contradicting empirical evidence and sources that are considered and depicted as reliable" (Ibid.)

Hellman and Wagnsson (Ibid.) bring the establishment of a Russian language public broadcasting channel in Estonia in 2015, the ETV+, as an example of the confronting strategy. The channel's target audience is the Russophone minority in Estonia who mainly gets their information from the rebroadcasted or adapted versions of Russian-owned television channels. As Helmus et al. (2018, 67) point out, "the production value and entertainment level of Moscow-funded media tend to be significantly higher" due to government subsidies and greater economies of scale. The purpose of ETV+, according to Hellman and Wagnsson, is to decrease Russian information influence by balancing and countering the narratives produced by these Russian-owned television channels. ETV+ was established in the wake of the Ukrainian conflict, some even argued for a joint

Russian-language channel to be established in the Baltics (Collier 2014). According to Radin (2017, 32), the EU even considered creating a pan-European Russian channel.

The literature seems to agree that the most effective way to counter information influence is by acknowledging its existence and taking proactive measures against it. As Giles (2016, 57) notes, "it is commonly suggested that the most effective response is 'establishing an effective counternarrative which calls a lie a lie,' and learning 'offensive stratcom that tells people the truth'. Kuczynska-Zonik (2016, 56) sees a need to involve the private and the civil sector and "develop effective offensive procedures to fight propaganda in media and promote democratic values". As an example, she brings out diversifying the media space with developing alternative Russian-language media (Ibid.). Levinger (2018) also argues for fighting Russian disinformation campaigns "on their own turf" by opposing hostile narratives with coherent and compelling counternarratives that have the potential to motivate collective action. Giles (2016b, 58) adds that similar to the Russian tactics, Western responses also need to be tailored to specific audiences by medium and intellectual engagement: "Telling the truth is not enough; the message needs to be accessible, which means making it less cerebral where necessary".

At the EU level, the East StratCom Task Force, which actively refutes Russian disinformation stories, similarly to fact-checking done by the news media, could be viewed as an example of the confronting strategy. Stray (Stray 2019, 1021–23) sees the Task Force as "a modern example of a government counter-propaganda organization" whose primary objective is to project the values of the EU to its target audiences: "This provides a ready-made positive narrative which may 'inoculate' citizens against disinformation, or even displace it". Bjola (2018, 311), on the other hand, sees the Task Force employing a defensive counterstrategy to raise public awareness and build resistance against disinformation.

Whilst confronting might seem like an effective strategy, the model could also be seen as unsuitable for democracies for resembling the kind of behaviour that societies aim to confront in the first place (Hellman and Wagnsson 2017, 159). Polyakova and Fried (2019, 2–3), for example, mark that propaganda should not be fought with propaganda. Stray (2019, 1023) notes that since alternative narratives could "wander into suspicious territory," much of the US government is prohibited by law from trying to influence

public opinion. Regarding EU East StratCom Task Force, Giussani (2020, 13, 20) points out that since fact-checking is inherently subjective and political, disinformation debunking by institutional actors "can be seen as undue government meddling into the public debate" that can be harmful for the democratic debate.

Naturalising

The other strategy where narratives are projected to foreign audiences is naturalising. As Hellman and Wagnsson (2017, 159–60) admit, it might be difficult to distinguish naturalising from the confronting strategy since they both aim to project narratives outwards. The difference comes in the engagement-disengagement scale: in the naturalising strategy, narratives are not directly contrasted with those of the "other". As Hellman and Wagnsson explain (Ibid.), "the aim is to maintain and spread values by being a good example, and the values promoted tend to be depicted as universal. […] it aims to show foreign audiences a positive and appealing image of the nation and thus boost the state and its worldview in the long term".

The strategy is thus similar to public diplomacy activities with the ultimate aim of increasing the soft power of the country. Soft power could also be seen as linked to information security. Pamment et al. (2018, 100), for example, note, although focusing on organisations and not states, that "if audiences have a positive attitude towards an organisation's identity and values, they may be more likely to question, or seek clarification, for information that runs contrary to those expectations". One could then deduct that the better the country's reputation the more resilient it is to hostile influence.

As an example, Hellman and Wagnsson (Ibid.) turn to the approaches applied by Germany which, albeit recognising Russia as a threat due to its systematic disinformation in German media, has not opted for countering Russian strategic narratives but rather projects positive narratives of the 'self' as credible and trustworthy and in any other way morally superior. As a sign of a disengaging strategy, they also bring out (Ibid.) Germany's use of public diplomacy and civilian agencies e.g. Deutsche Welle to project its strategic narratives: "Deutsche Welle's type of public diplomacy, which profiles Germany as a friendly rather than antagonistic European state with good intentions to other people (Cowan and Arsenault 2008, 18) is in line with the naturalising ideal type.

Deutsche Welle claims as its mission to transmit an image of Germany '…as a nation rooted in European culture and as a liberal, democratic state based on the rule of law'".

Other news outlets targeting international audiences (e.g. Euronews, France 24, Al Jazeera) could also be viewed as examples of the naturalising strategy if they do not seek to actively counter other narratives. The projection or non-projection of counternarratives is difficult to determine, though. Giles (2016b, 59), for example, argues that Deutsche Welle (which has a Russian-language news website) together with BBC and Radio Free Europe have been "tasked with reaching Russian audiences in order to counter the alternative reality established in the Russian media space, with particular reference to Russian combat operations in Ukraine," thus arguing against setting it as an example of the disengaging naturalising strategy.

Blocking

Besides confrontation, the other strategy on the engaging side of the spectrum is that of blocking: the existence of an "other" is clearly recognised and dealt with but instead of countering it by projecting its own versions of reality, the state protects its own narrative by blocking that of the opponent (Hellman and Wagnsson 2017, 161). The strategy is thus inward-looking and protective with no aspiration to engage with foreign audiences: "The practical emphasis is on restrictions and control measures such as the strategies of selective blocking of information" (Ibid.).

Hellman and Wagnsson illustrate the blocking strategy with the approaches chosen by Latvia and Lithuania that have both temporarily barred Russian-owned television channels from broadcasting in their countries. During the last five years, channels such as RTR-Planeta, RT, REN TV, and NTV Mir have been temporarily (mostly for three or six months) barred for voicing hate speech or inciting hatred.[3] As one of the latest examples, Russian television channel RT was banned in Latvia in July 2020 for being controlled by the head of Kremlin-owned international news agency Russia Segodnya, Dmitry Kiselyov, who is under EU sanctions list for his alleged role in promoting Kremlin propaganda in support of Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea (Gehrke 2020). Lithuania followed suit about a week later (LRT 2020).

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[3] Media policies of Latvia and Lithuania are more thoroughly examined in the empirical part.

A country that has used the blocking strategy even more actively is Ukraine that has introduced sanctions against Russian state-funded media and their journalists, expelled Russian journalists, and introduced a series of bans on Russian social media and online services, e.g. the search engine Yandex, e-mail service mail.ru and VK, Russia's equivalent of Facebook (Robinson et al. 2019, 10). Even though a year later there was a significant drop of about 40% in the traffic of these websites, the bans themselves are mostly symbolic and could easily be bypassed with VPNs, for example, making the efficacy of the strategy questionable, as some of the Ukrainian experts have marked (Grischak 2018). In Western Europe, UK's communications regulator Ofcom has opted for fines instead: in July 2019, for example, RT was fined £200,000 for failing to preserve due impartiality in seven news and current affairs programmes, mostly related to UK's response to the events in Salisbury and Syria (Ofcom 2019).

Censorship and speech laws, two strategies marked down by Stray (2019), could also be seen as parts of the blocking strategy. As the information flow in the modern democratic societies is open, massive censorship has become almost impossible and is instead superseded by manipulating the interpretations of facts (Uudelepp 2008, 8). This does not mean that there is no censorship in the West, though, with internet platforms, for example, employing huge numbers of moderators to keep an eye on removing pornography, incitements to violence, or copyright violations. The pressure for regulatory action, especially regarding hate speech or disinformation, seems to have got stronger in the novel age of "information disorders" instead. Germany, for example, passed a widely criticised hate speech law in 2017 that gives social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter 24 hours to remove hateful or defamatory content or face fines up to €50 m (Robinson et al. 2019, 5). Compared to Europe, it is much more difficult to regulate disinformation in the US, though, where the first amendment of the constitution forbids making laws that curtail freedom of speech (Ibid., 16). Regulatory action related to internet platforms, for example, prescribing them to privilege credible content in ranking algorithms, could also be viewed as part of the blocking strategy since the ultimate aim is to hamper the spread of disinformation or unwanted narratives.

The literature agrees that censorship should be avoided as much as possible. Pamment et al. (2018, 113) advise governments to act as ethically as possible, protecting and encouraging open and democratic debate: "Efforts for countering information influence

activities should never have the effect of silencing public debate or creating fear in people of being labelled propagandists for the sake of having opinions which conform to hostile narratives". In the EU, the 2018 report of the High level Group on fake news and online disinformation also advises against censorship and online surveillance, even if well-intentioned, since it can backfire and "be used by purveyors of disinformation in an 'us vs. them' narrative that can de-legitimise responses against disinformation and be counter-productive in the short and long run" (European Commission 2018a, 14).

The report also advises against regulatory interventions against disinformation, partly because filtering it out is difficult to achieve without hitting legitimate content and thus problematic from a freedom of expression perspective (Ibid., 31). This view is shared by Polyakova and Fried (2019, 20), who argue that whilst taking down pornography or hate speech, albeit challenging, seems to be in accordance with the protection of free speech, broader content restrictions against disinformation "will constantly bump against norms of free expression". The overall complexity of the topic is well brought out by Al-Rodhan (2017), who notes that "while state-sanctioned control and filtering of news was always associated with authoritarian regimes, these recent developments are, conversely, efforts to help save liberal democratic processes and secure fair elections".

Ignoring

The last ideal-type model that Hellman and Wagnsson (2017, 162–63) bring out as a possibility for democratic governments to use is the most disengaging, one might even argue that the most passive – ignoring. The strategy does not pay attention to the outside world, and hostile narratives, however false or manipulative, are simply ignored and not engaged with. Ignoring might be considered a no-narrative strategy since there is no or little emphasis on constructing nationally coherent strategic narratives and the narratives that do emerge are multifaceted and uncoordinated (Ibid.). Focus is on strengthening the societal capacity to withstand information warfare through, for example, media literacy or facilitating public access to information, and freedom of expression is seen as the key: "This model is based on a firmly held belief that the democratic state possesses adequate resources in its very constitution and through its institutions and government agencies in order to deal with information warfare, including for example hostile narratives disseminated on social media platforms" (Ibid.).

Hellman and Wagnsson (Ibid.) illustrate the strategy with the approach taken by Sweden, which relies on the public to critically consume media and where few efforts have been made to establish institutions to coordinate national strategic narratives to counter Russian information influence. It is up to the existing institutions and agencies to take responsibility for the free flow of information with particular importance given to the news media institutions that should maintain an open debate even in the case of war (Ibid.). Robinson et al. (2019, 4) also marks that Sweden has focused its activities on educating its citizens rather than seeking regulatory mechanisms against information influence. Sweden and Finland have both launched programmes to teach children to differentiate between real and fake sources as early as primary school (Jopling 2018, 13–14). The Finnish Foreign Ministry has even argued that media literacy in the school system contributed to the closure of the Finnish-language bureau of Sputnik in March 2016 due to low readership (Standish 2017).

Out of the four approaches proposed by Hellman and Wagnsson, the ignoring strategy is most in harmony with democratic principles, such as ensuring freedom of expression since no efforts are made to disrupt or block alternative narratives. As Althuis and Strand (2018, 70–71) note, out of fears of excessive regulation of public debate by the governments, some see that identifying and countering fake news should not be the governments' responsibility at all. Thus, governments might opt for playing it safe and focus on building long-term resilience of the society against the information threats.

Countering information influence (or more specifically disinformation) without any direct or indirect censorship presupposes a readership that is critical, engaged, and well-informed (European Commission 2018a, 29). One of the principal ways to achieve that is by educating the public in media literacy, i.e. giving them the knowledge to debunk false information themselves. There is no universally accepted definition of media literacy. The EU Media Literacy Expert Group, as an example, defines it as "all the technical, cognitive, social, civic and creative capacities that allow us to access and have a critical understanding of and interact with media" (European Audiovisual Observatory 2016, 32).

There is a wider understanding amongst the authors that media literacy should be integrated into the school curricula (e.g. Helmus et al. 2018; Milo and Klingová 2016) and also into the teacher training curricula (European Commission 2018a, 27).

Furthermore, the focus should not only be on young people, but also on marginalised and minority groups (Kertysova 2018, 76), and older people, who are more inclined to believe in and spread disinformation (DRI 2019, 11–12).

The European Audiovisual Observatory (quoted from 2016, 33) brings out five categories of skills that commonly fall under media literacy:

- Creativity: such as creating, building, and generating media content.
- Critical thinking: such as understanding how the media industry works and how media messages are constructed; questioning the motivations of content producers in order to make informed choices about the content selection and use; recognising different types of media content and evaluating content for truthfulness, reliability and value for money; recognising and managing online security and safety risks.
- Intercultural dialogue: such as challenging radicalisation and hate speech.
- Media use: such as searching, finding, navigating and using media content.
- Participation and interaction: interaction, engagement, and participation in the economic, social, creative, cultural aspects of society through the media and promoting democratic participation and fundamental rights.

Wardle and Derakhshan (2017, 70) suggest the curriculum to also include forensic social media verification skills, statistical numeracy, workings and implications of algorithms (e.g. filter bubbles) and artificial intelligence, and "techniques for developing emotional scepticism to override our brain's tendency to be less critical of content that provokes an emotional response". Kertysova (2018, 78) argues for personal cybersecurity education since disinformation is increasingly mixed with traditional cyber-attacks.

As Hellman and Wagnsson (2017, 162) note, besides being entirely passive, the ignoring model can also be applied more actively, "by perceiving of the media and other institutions as opportunities for sustaining or strengthening narratives". One of the initiatives falling under the ignoring strategy could thus be ensuring plurality of narratives in the media, i.e. ensuring media pluralism. In the EU, for example, the High level Group on fake news and online disinformation has recommended governments to step up efforts to support the private and public media either by providing VAT exemptions or other types of tax breaks or establishing well-targeted forms of aid for news production, e.g. to

support the training of journalists, to support innovation in news media services or to target sub-scale linguistic markets (European Commission 2018a, 37).

The setting up of the Russian language public broadcasting channel ETV+ in Estonia could also be viewed as a measure to enhance pluralism in the Russian-language media landscape and thus as an example of the ignoring strategy rather than the confronting one, provided that the channel does not aim to project any strategic narratives or counter those of Russia as argued by Hellman and Wagnsson (2017, 159). Helmus et al. (2018, 81) and Kuczynska-Zonik (2016, 56) also see the need to provide an alternative to Russian information by expanding and improving local content.

Hellman and Wagnsson (2017, 163) mark that the ignoring strategy is less coherent and thus also potentially weaker than the other strategies. They also question the public's will and capacity to critically evaluate the narratives: "It may also lead to an over-reliance on the media as objective independent actors that serve as safeguards of democracy as well as over-reliance on the idea that a range of different narratives will in fact be generated" (Ibid.). These views are aligned with the overwhelming part of the literature that recommends more proactive and engaging measures to counter information influence.

2.2. Measures available for non-governmental stakeholders

News media

Besides the government, news media, internet platforms, and civil society should also actively collaborate to counter information influence in order to achieve the most effective outcome. Since there is no single root cause to information influence, "the proposed responses should be seen as a set of inter-dependent actions forming part of an overarching, multi-dimensional approach" (European Commission 2018a, 12).

Non-governmental stakeholders, but especially the news media, contribute to countering information influence activities by raising overall awareness and public knowledge of information threats in the society. Lucas and Pomerantsev (2017, 39) argue, for example, that media could take the initiative by integrating media literacy into the structure of mainstream programming, i.e., introducing such themes in talk shows, sitcoms or kids' programming: "If communicated correctly, media literacy can make for good TV and

online content; it offers lots of opportunities for humour, fun, liveliness and other qualities the audiences like – as well as relying on a desire to learn or be informed".

On the other hand, since not all news media follow the same standards of professionalism, media outlets could also act as amplifiers of misinformation and contribute to weakening society's overall trust in media (European Commission 2018a, 11). For example, forcing false balance in stories about vaccines that gives equal space to those thinking vaccines cause autism. Regarding information influence there is a need for regular cooperation between the government and media to exchange information and reinforce media competences. To increase media readiness to hostile attacks, EISC policy brief (2018, 9), for example, suggests crisis modelling drills tailored specifically for journalists and big media outlets that could involve reacting to cyber-attacks, false information, and manipulation. Milo and Klingová (2016, 9–10) argue for incorporating fact and source checking content into journalism curricula and professional development courses.

The principal means for news media to engage with disinformation is to actively debunk it. There has been an explosion in fact-checking initiatives in recent years with at least 290 fact-checking projects in 83 countries, up from 188 active projects in 60 countries a year ago, according to Duke Reporters' Lab (Stencel and Luther 2020).[4] Debunking is generally favoured in the literature. It is also wholly compatible with freedom of speech, being simply "more speech", as Stray (2019, 1022) marks. The forms and objectives of debunking can vary greatly with some approaches only tracking disinformation and others using more automated methods such as network or metadata analysis to track sources (Pamment et al. 2018, 95). According to Wardle and Derakhshan (2017, 63), compared to fact-checking, there should be even more emphasis on identifying sources in real-time, as the source (e.g. whether it is official, automated, or based in another country) can often provide the strongest evidence about whether the information is accurate or not – this would also require educating the journalists in computer programming.

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[4] A comprehensive list of active fact-checking projects in the world can be found on the website of Duke Reporers' Lab, https://reporterslab.org/fact-checking/. Alternatively, the code of principles of Poynter's International Fact-Checking Network is signed by 81 organisations, including Re:Baltica (Latvia), Patikrinta 15min (Lithuania) and Delfi (Lithuania) (https://www.ifcncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/signatories, as of 11 January 2020).

There are multiple problems associated with debunking, though, and evidence of its efficacy is mixed. Fact-checking is time-consuming and might not reach the most vulnerable audiences. Debunking might also prove ineffective due to cognitive biases such as confirmation bias (we prefer information that confirms our preexisting attitudes) or backfire effect (when confronted with information that contradicts our beliefs, we tend to double down on our opinions rather than amend them).[5] Debunking might also amplify misinformation. We tend to remember the information but forget the context within which they encountered it. Since we prefer to accept familiar information as true, repeating false information even in a fact-checking context might increase the chances of it being accepted as true (Lazer et al. 2018, 1095). There is, therefore, sometimes a need for strategic silence instead. Giles (2016a, 57) argues, for example, that countering every single piece of Russian disinformation is useless since some of the statements are not even meant to be credible. To complicate the subject, psychological research suggests some cannot be influenced by arguments at all (Nothhaft et al. 2018, 34).

A growing issue for the debunking industry in the future is augmented or virtual reality, together with digitally manipulated audio or visual material (deepfakes) that would enable falsifications to become unrecognisable by both human and machine control, as noted in a report (Bayer et al. 2019) commissioned by the European Parliament. Adding to the problem, new technologies are also more likely to trigger strong emotions than simple text and less likely to be critically assessed before being consumed (Ibid., 118).

Internet platforms

Big internet platforms such as Facebook, Google, or Twitter are often referred to as the prime facilitators of information influence or even the very source of the problem as they have become the primary enablers and gatekeepers of information. This view has become more widely shared by governments and regulators, especially after the Cambridge Analytica scandal (Foer 2017). As Polyakova and Fried (2019, 12) note, since social media companies are the "first line of defence against information manipulation, they have a large share of the responsibility for mitigating the problem". The big social media platforms were initially heavily criticised for denying that a disinformation problem that

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[5] For a more comprehensive overview of cognitive biases affecting the efficacy of fact-checking see for example Cook and Lewandowsky 2011, Pamment et al. 2018 or Silverman 2015.

they are part of even exists (Ibid.). They are also still condemned for their lack of cooperation with the research community, which means that the public does not have full knowledge of whether the measures platforms have taken are making any difference (Bodine-Baron et al. 2018, 57). To some extent, their defensive position is understandable as their business models rely heavily on advertising prioritising engaging content that is widely shared. Under social pressure, companies have now finally started to acknowledge the problem, though, and contribute to seeking solutions (Polyakova and Fried 2019, 12). For instance, in April 2019, Facebook finally allowed researchers access to privacy-protected data to study the platform's impact on democracy (DRI 2019, 22).

There are four key activities that internet platforms are involved with:

- collaborating with fact-checking organisations,
- modifying algorithms in favour of credible and trustworthy content,
- identifying and removing illegitimate accounts and inauthentic behaviour, and
- limiting financial incentives for fabricating false information (European Commission 2018a, 14).

Social media companies have established partnerships with media and fact-checking organisations to rate and review the accuracy of posts deemed false. Facebook, for example, collaborates with fact-checking organisations certified by Poynter's International Fact-Checking Network in 20 EU countries, as of August 2020 (Where We Have Fact-Checking 2020). When content is rated as false, it is demoted in the news feed, and the company alerts users who have shared it. According to Facebook, it has reduced the distribution of content marked as false by an average of 80% (Stray 2019, 23). Google also improved its search algorithm to emphasise fact-checked articles in searches related to breaking news events (Ibid.). Twitter has started to add fact-checking labels to tweets but, as of May 2020, does not collaborate with any fact-checking organisation (Culliford and Paul 2020). The question now is how to stop the spread of disinformation in messaging apps with end-to-end encryption, e.g. Whatsapp or Telegram, where even the platforms do not know what is being shared (Dias 2017).

There is growing pressure for platforms to critically re-evaluate how they generate algorithmic feeds and rank search results. For example, starting from January 2019, YouTube is no longer recommending conspiracy theories or highly misleading content to

its users (Polyakova and Fried 2019, 14). Conversely, it is also possible to elevate quality media content, which, according to the report presented to the European Commission, would "not only reduce the users' exposure to low-quality content but could also strengthen news media revenues" (European Commission 2018a, 23). Optimism notwithstanding, obstacles remain to the algorithmic solution. "Rebalancing this ecosystem should not mean designating online platforms as both judges and jury in determining what truth is. This could lead to overcensorship, as out of an abundance of caution and by fear of penalties, platforms could remove lawful content" (Kertysova 2018, 73). Also, platforms could face claims of bias from content producers, as pointed out by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017, 64). To mitigate these risks, platforms need to ensure full transparency in their algorithmic policies (Ibid.). Furthermore, there are calls in the literature (European Commission 2018a, 28; Wardle and Derakhshan 2017, 81) for letting users themselves customize their feeds and search algorithms.

A widely used tool for social platforms is also to use automated systems and human reviewers to block or remove fake accounts and pages, users violating terms of services, ads going against policies, and networks (e.g. bots) engaging in coordinated inauthentic activities. Twitter, for example, reports that it challenges ten spam-like accounts per second, 75% of which are eventually removed (DRI 2019, 24). "The authenticity approach is morally and politically appealing because it rests on a widely shared communicative norm: pretending to be someone you are not is unethical. This avoids the difficult question of deciding what someone can be allowed to say" (Stray 2019, 1023). There are also democratically important uses of anonymity, however, e.g. human-rights activists operating in authoritarian countries, which would make regulatory mandates to disclose the identity of accounts complicated (Polyakova and Fried 2019, 18).

As a fourth activity, internet platforms have started (after pressure from the society) to enforce advertising policies to limit monetisation of disinformation. The issue came into the spotlight after the 2016 US elections when Facebook found evidence that Russia had purchased so-called 'dark ads' (ads only visible to the intended target group) directed at US citizens to amplify social tensions in the country (Wardle and Derakhshan 2017, 61). In the EU, the "follow-the-money" approach of the European Commission (2018, 15) now aims to prevent advertising networks from placing ads on websites that spread disinformation, and accepting ads from such websites. It also strives for transparency in

terms of political advertising and sponsorships (Ibid.). As Lupion (2019, 18–19) reports, Facebook, Google, and Twitter took a stricter stance related to political advertising ahead of the 2019 European Parliament elections: they labelled political ads as such and confirmed the identity of advertisers, increased transparency on ad spending and statistics, and compiled political ads on publicly accessible libraries.

2.3. European Union action

European Union has often been criticised for falling behind in its efforts to effectively respond to Russian information influence activities. The so to say starting point of a broader strategy to counter information threats was in March 2015 when the European Council (2015) "stressed the need to challenge Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns". One of the first actions that resulted from that meeting was the launch of the East StratCom Task Force (ESTF) within the EEAS's Strategic Communications Division in September 2015. From there on, several policies have followed, incrementally building upon each other (Appendix 1).

ESTF serves to (1) effectively communicate and promote EU policies towards the Eastern Neighbourhood; (2) strengthen the overall media environment in that region and the EU member states; and (3) improve EU capacity to forecast and respond to disinformation from external actors (Action Plan 2015). There are some (Giussani 2020; Stray 2019) who see ESTF mainly engaging in counterpropaganda, albeit the team refutes this claim (EEAS). ESTF is made up of sixteen full-time staff with "extensive (but presently outsourced) capabilities in the areas of media monitoring and strategic communications" (Pamment 2020b, 7). The team's main product is the weekly Disinformation Review on EuvsDisinfo website giving an overview of the latest pro-Kremlin disinformation and all debunked cases (about 9300 as of August 2020) are stored in a public database. In addition, there are also the Western Balkans Task Force and Task Force South for the Middle East and North Africa established but relying only on four analysts for both teams.

The Commission received a lot of criticism at first for failing to respond to Russian disinformation adequately. ESTF, for example, worked its first three years without a permanent budget to enable strategic long-term planning (Gotev 2018). In March 2017, over 120 European lawmakers and security experts signed an open letter to the High Representative Federica Mogherini urging her to step up funding and increase the

capacity of the Task Force: "Despite the seriousness of this threat, the [High Representative] Federica Mogherini has spent the last two years trying to avoid naming Russia as the main creator of disinformation. We as European security experts have seen her constantly appease the Russian aggression" (Open letter... 2017).

The Commission has also sought to collaborate with the internet platforms to reduce the spread of disinformation in social media, especially ahead of the European Parliament elections in 2019. In September 2018, a self-regulatory Code of Practice was agreed to with key social media companies, setting out commitments under five pillars: scrutinising ad placements, increasing transparency of political advertising, ensuring the integrity of services, empowering consumers, and empowering researchers (European Commission 2018c).[6] The Code is currently signed by six online platforms (Facebook, Google, Mozilla, TikTok, Twitter, and Microsoft) (European Commission 2020c).

A stronger push came with the Action Plan against Disinformation in December 2018, which some hailed as "the most detailed and comprehensive document the EU has ever produced in the threat of hostile disinformation" (European Values 2018). As assessed by the EU Hybrid Fusion Cell, it was acknowledged that Russian disinformation "poses the greatest threat to the EU" (European Commission 2018d, 4). The Action Plan focused on four key pillars: (1) improving the capabilities of EU institutions to detect, analyse and expose disinformation, (2) strengthening coordinated and joint responses to disinformation (e.g. setting up the Rapid Alert System), (3) mobilising the private sector to tackle disinformation (implementing the Code of Practice), and (4) raising awareness and improving societal resilience (support for fact-checking and research) (Ibid.). The first pillar was perhaps the most straightforward answer to the open letter signed by the security community, foreseeing reinforcement of EEAS strategic communications, including Task Force with additional specialised staff (e.g. data mining experts) and more than doubling the budget from 1.9€ million in 2018 to 5€ million in 2019 (Ibid.).

The second pillar of the action plan endorsed the launch of the Rapid Alert System (RAS) in March 2019 – a dedicated platform for EU institutions and member states to provide alerts on disinformation campaigns in real-time, facilitate data sharing, enable common

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[6] For a thorough analysis of activities undertaken by the EU, social media companies and the civil society ahead of the 2019 European Parliament elections see Democracy Reporting International 2019.

situational awareness and coordinate responses. A network of designated contact points from member states is expected to share alerts and coordinate with other national authorities as well as with the Commission, EEAS, and internet platforms (Ibid., 7). RAS is also intended to connect to existing real-time monitoring capabilities, such as the Emergency Response Coordination Centre and the EEAS Situation Room, as well as the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism and NATO, though this goal, according to Pamment (2020, 8) has not been fully realised. "The system is therefore, in theory at least, an important platform for information sharing from an international perspective" (Ibid.).

In line with the fourth pillar, the EU has also stepped up efforts to raise overall awareness of disinformation and contribute to research in this field. In June 2020, the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) was launched to serve as a hub for fact-checkers and academics to understand and analyse disinformation in collaboration with the media, online platforms, and media literacy practitioners. The second phase of EDMO foresees the creation of national or multinational digital media research hubs to focus on emerging digital media vulnerabilities, which are of special relevance within the territory and linguistic area in which they operate (European Commission 2020a). In terms of media literacy, the new Audiovisual Media Services Directive of November 2018 requires member states to promote and develop media literacy skills (article 33a). In addition, video-sharing platforms need to provide for and raise users' awareness of effective media literacy measures and tools (article 28b). Also, the first European Media Literacy Week was held in March 2019 to promote media literacy initiatives and projects across the EU.

The European Union is moving towards more regulatory action concerning the activities of online platforms. Věra Jourová, Vice-President for Values and Transparency already said in January 2020 that there is a need for regulation on online political advertising (Stolton and Makszimov 2020). The literature has also criticised the self-regulatory nature of the Code of Practice currently regulating the activities of the internet platforms. A report by Democracy Reporting International (DRI 2019, 11), for example, argues that since the Code lacks enforcement tools, it has allowed platforms to implement commitments at different paces among member states. It was already brought out in the 2018 Action Plan (page 9) that if the implementation and impact of the Code proves unsatisfactory, the Commission may propose normal regulation instead of a voluntary approach instead. A comprehensive assessment of the Code prepared for the Commission

in May 2020 also concluded *inter alia* that although the Code has produced positive results, there is need for a mechanism for action in case of non-compliance and further support for monitoring of the Code (Plasilova et al. 2020, 5–6). Also, many platforms are not signatories to the Code, e.g. Reddit, Yahoo or VK.[7]

Some of these problems surrounding the Code of Practice will probably resolve at the end of 2020 together with the European Democracy Action Plan and the Digital Services Act. The aim of the Action Plan, a priority for the von der Leyen Commission, is to "ensure that citizens are able to participate in the democratic system through informed decision-making free from interference and manipulation affecting elections and the democratic debate" and it will consist of three themes: integrity of elections and political advertising, strengthening media freedom and media pluralism, and tackling disinformation (European Commission 2020e). The Digital Services Act, on the other hand, in addition to modernising current e-commerce rules, "will set out regulatory powers for the EU over digital platforms, which" according to Pamment (2020, 10) "are likely to include powers of regulation and auditing relating to online platforms".

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[7] See Pamment 2020a for another thorough assessment of the Code by Carnegie Endowment.

3. Methodology

Methodological triangulation involving document analysis and semi-structured expert interviews was used to comprehend and compare Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian approaches to countering Russian information influence. Combining methods is useful since it may provide complementary data to strengthen the findings (Burnham et al. 2004, 31) and add additional rigour, breadth, and depth to a study (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, 4). The research is designed to be a qualitative few-N comparative case study that seeks both practical and academic relevance.

The academic relevance of the thesis lies in assessing the analytical relevance of the framework by Maria Hellman and Charlotte Wagnsson (2017). Hellman and Wagnsson propose four ideal-type models that represent different strategies that democratic governments can employ to counter Russian information warfare: confronting, naturalising, blocking and ignoring. Estonia is brought out as an example of a country employing a confronting strategy, referring to the launch of the Russian-language public broadcasting channel ETV+ in 2015. As they note, "the aim is to balance and counter the narratives produced by Russian-owned television channels in Estonia" and to prevent Russia from exercising influence on the Russian minority in Estonia without facing any alternative narratives (Ibid., 159). Latvia's and Lithuania's strategies, on the other hand, are viewed by Hellman and Wagnsson (Ibid., 161) as examples of the blocking strategy, i.e. not actively transmitting counter-narratives but blocking the narratives of "the other" instead by temporarily banning Russian television channels from broadcasting.

As Hellman and Wagnsson (Ibid., 158) point out, it is not likely that these four ideal-types truly reflect the way governments engage in information warfare. Rather, states are expected to mix strategies. For example, Latvia also has a public television station LTV7 that broadcasts partially in Russian. Sputnik news agency, on the other hand, was forced to cease operations in Estonia in December 2019, albeit the Estonian government referred to breaking the Ukrainian sanctions' regime as the reason behind the closure, not content (disinformation) broadcasted on the channel. By applying these ideal-types to real cases, the comparison of the Baltic states thus allows to assess both the analytical relevance of the ideal-types (whether the categorisation is correct and adequately reflects Estonian,

Latvian and Lithuanian approaches) and the framework in general (i.e. to which extent the framework manages to capture aspects of countering information influence activities).

Information influence and disinformation have only become buzzwords within the last four years. Thus, the author is not aware of any other theory-driven comprehensive case studies focusing specifically on government activities to counter information influence. There have been country-by-country overviews published in recent years though, e.g. "Disinformation resilience in central and eastern Europe" (2018) by Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" and the EAST Center, that focused on national vulnerabilities and preparedness to counteract foreign-led disinformation in 14 East and Central European countries, including the Baltic states. That study, though, was neither comprehensive (e.g. it does not cover media literacy in formal education) nor in-depth (the country chapters are short and condensed). Also, it focused on resilience to disinformation without taking into account other types of information influence activities.

The main research questions of the thesis therefore are:

- first, how do Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania understand countering information influence?
- second, what measures have Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania undertaken to counter information influence?
- third, what differences are there in the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian approaches?

Document analysis

First, a qualitative document analysis was conducted on publicly available documents that serve as the strategic basis for state activities related to countering information influence. As recommended by Flick (2009, 259–262), documents are seen as communicative devices produced and used for specific practical purposes, they cannot be viewed as totally bias-free and instead of focusing solely on the content, the researcher should also take into account their context, use and function. Wolff (2004) argues that when researching documents, researchers "should not start from a notion of factual reality in the documents compared to the subjective views in interviews" and instead of validating interview statements documents should be seen as a way of contextualising information.

The corpus of documents (Table 1) was constructed by purposeful selection: government officials in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania working in the field of strategic communication were contacted to ascertain which documents steer activities related to countering hostile information influence. These include publicly available national security and defence strategies that have mostly been approved by either the parliament or the government. It is important to emphasise that relying only on these documents cannot give an adequate picture of states' approaches and measures regarding information warfare as much of the information is classified or otherwise not publicly available. Even some of the publicly available documents, e.g. the Estonian National Defence Development Plan 2017-2026 consist of classified parts. Hence, document analysis is only meant to serve as a complement to interviews with state officials.

Country	Strategic documents analysed
Estonia	• National Security Concept 2017. *Prepared by the Government (State Chancellery), approved by Riigikogu.* • National Defence Development Plan 2017-2026. Publicly available part. *Prepared by State Chancellery, approved by the government.*
Latvia	• National Security Concept 2019. *Approved by Saeima.* • National Defence Concept 2020 (In Latvian) *Prepared by MoD, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers and adopted by Saeima.*
Lithuania	• National Security Strategy 2017. *Approved by Seimas.* • Defence Policy White Paper 2017. *Ministry of National Defence.*

Table 1. Strategic documents included in document analysis.

Research questions for document analysis:

1. How is countering information influence activities reflected in the documents?
2. What emphasis is given to information threats and how are they characterised?
3. What approaches and measures are foreseen to counter information influence activities?

Semi-structured expert interviews

Secondly, semi-structured expert interviews were conducted with state officials from government institutions related to countering information influence activities, either in the traditional (e.g. the MoD) or the broad sense (e.g. MoE)(Table 2). In-depth interviews are seen as a useful tool to specify the inner workings of the state security apparatus and

to fill in information gaps left by publicly available documents (Davies 2001, 74; Lilleker 2003, 208). The purpose of the interviews was also to get a fuller understanding of how these officials who work in positions related to implementing the measures outlined in the security strategies understand countering information influence.

There are different approaches to interviewing elites. Generally, it is advised to avoid closed-ended questions: "Elites especially – but other highly educated people as well – do not like being put in the straightjacket of close-ended questions. They prefer to articulate their views, explaining why they think what they think" (Aberbach and Rockman 2002, 674). Harvey (2011, 434) regards mixing open- and close-ended questions most appropriate, considering the lack of time elite interviewees might have. Thus, a semi-structured approach was opted for, allowing for some standardisation and flexibility to add or disregard questions based on the respondents and their answers.

In total, 15 interviews were planned out of which 13 were conducted (Appendix 2). The shortest interview took 30 minutes, the longest 125 minutes. The interviews were usually supported also by correspondence. The Lithuanian MoE was difficult to approach (they did provide some written material though) and the Estonian Ministry of Justice said they had not yet formed their position towards legislating information influence on the European Union level (e.g. European Democracy Action Plan). The author thus relied on media reports and official documents such as the school curriculum to find out Estonian views to European-level discussions on information influence and integration of media literacy into the Lithuanian school curriculum.

Interviewing face-to-face was preferred since respondents tend to provide less detailed responses in telephone interviews (Sturges and Hanrahan 2004) and it is easier to build rapport (Van Puyvelde 2018, 384). As face-to-face interviewing was not possible with Latvian and Lithuanian officials due distance and the Coronavirus pandemic, video-calling was seen as the second-best option. Calls were recorded to provide a transcription and to allow for more engagement with the respondent (Harvey 2011, 436). After agreeing to be interviewed, the interviewees received the informed consent form (Appendix 3) and the preliminary list of questions (Appendix 4) in English or Estonian. The interviews were also conducted either in Estonian or in English. Anonymity was provided upon request and was afforded to the interviewees from the Estonian Defence

Forces (attributed as a senior officer from the EDF) and the Lithuanian MFA (attributed as an official at the Strategic Communications Division of the Communication and Cultural Diplomacy Department).

Country	Institution
Estonia	1. Government Office, *coordinating.* 2. Ministry of Education and Research, *media literacy.* 3. Ministry of Culture, *media policy.* 4. Armed Forces. Planned but not conducted – Ministry of Justice, *EU regulatory discussions.*
Latvia	1. State Chancellery, *coordinating.* 2. National Centre for Education, *media literacy.* 3. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *EU regulatory discussions.* 4. Ministry of Culture, *media policy.* 5. Ministry of Defence.
Lithuania	1. Office of the Government of Lithuania, *coordinating.* 2. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *EU regulatory discussions.* 3. Ministry of Culture, *media policy.* 4. Armed Forces. Planned but not conducted – Ministry of Education, *media literacy.*

Table 2. Institutions interviewed or planned to be interviewed.

4. Countering Russian information influence in the Baltic states

The thesis now proceeds to give a comprehensive overview of how the three Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – understand countering information influence activities, and more specifically, what measures they undertake. Starting from the northernmost state, Estonia, first, strategic documents are reviewed to see how they reflect information influence activities, how they characterise information threats, and what countermeasures they foresee. Based on the semi-structured expert interviews, the author then moves on to give an overview of the overall setup of strategic communication activities, integration of media literacy into formal education (school curricula) and countries' media policies.

4.1. Estonia

4.1.1. Information influence in strategic documents

The strategic foresight and impetus for countering information influence activities in Estonia rest primarily on two documents, the National Security Concept 2017 (*Julgeolekupoliitika alused 2017)* and the National Defence Development Plan 2017-2026 (*Riigikaitse arengukava 2017–2026)*. The Concept defines the objective, principles, and course of action of Estonian security policy. It is prepared by the Government and approved by the Riigikogu. As a framework document, it provides guidance for drafting national development and action plans. The 2017 version replaces the Concept approved in 2010. The National Defence Development Plan describes the realistic development objectives for Estonia's military defence until 2026. It is established by the Government, based on the proposal of the Minister of Defence, for 10 years, and is reviewed every four years. The current Plan replaces that of 2013-2022. It is important to note that the Plan comprises of both publicly available and classified parts, and the thesis concentrates only on the former. As it is brought out in the introductory section of the Plan, the public part mostly presents the wider nature, background, and objectives of the plan, whereas a large part of the more detailed information regarding specific activities remains classified.

The Estonian strategic documents approach security from a broad concept, which means that in order to overcome military and non-military threats, both military and civil bodies are employed to ensure state security with every institution fulfilling the tasks assigned

to them in terms of national defence and supporting other institutions in their tasks (RKAK 2017, 5). Threats to security are regarded from a broad perspective: economic instability, developments in cyberspace, technology-related threats, and corruption, for example, all contribute to the overall security environment (NSC 2017, 5). A paragraph in the Concept is also dedicated to information threats. The Concept notes that communication technology and media can be used more effectively to influence people and spreading false information is widely used to escalate conflicts (Ibid.). "The influence of the reality distorting information has created tension in international relations, caused the radicalisation of certain groups and harmed the cohesion of the society" (Ibid.).

The strategic documents are rather general, and there is no specific chapter dedicated to information security either in the Security Concept or the Defence Development Plan. Rather, countering information activities is addressed through the concept of "psychological defence" within the broader framework of building a resilient and coherent society. The Concept argues that the more united the society and the more common values it shares, the less susceptible it also is to security threats. "The more residents trust the state, the more resilient it is" (Ibid., 19). Resilience, better cohesion of society is reinforced with the help of stratcom that "involves planning the state's political, economic and defence-related statements and activities, preparing a comprehensive information whole on the basis of these, and transmitting it to the population" (Ibid.).

Stratcom is seen closely related to the concept of psychological defence that together with military defence, the civil support for military defence, international action, domestic and internal security, and maintenance of the continuous operation of the state and society, also forms one of the six pillars of national defence to be developed (NSC 2017, 3). Psychological defence is regarded as "informing society and raising awareness about information-related activities aimed at harming Estonia's constitutional order, society's values and virtues" (Ibid., 20). Compared to stratcom, psychological defence is mostly seen as a reactive term, the purpose of which is understood as neutralising "information attacks that provoke violence in the population by manipulation and the provision of false information, or that promote crisis management with resources that are not compatible with constitutional order," together with preventing crises and facilitating security awareness in the society. Informing the public and guaranteeing all segments of society access to multifaceted information are viewed as the main tools for this (Ibid.) (Appendix

5). The Defence Development Plan (RKAK 2017, 18) adds that in the crisis it is important for the state to be ready to react in an early phase and express its true will through stratcom both in Estonia as well as abroad.

Regarding progress already made in the field of strategic communication, the Defence Development Plan succinctly notes that there has been a harmonisation of the relevant terminology, and the state has begun to work out an interinstitutional model for the continuity of strategic communication. Stratcom has also been better integrated into various (strategic) exercises, and there have been trainings and other activities undertaken to raise public awareness in that field (RKAK 2017, 15).

4.1.2. Setup and understanding of strategic communication

As noted in the earlier paragraph, countering information influence activities in Estonia is addressed through the concept of "psychological defence" within the broader framework of building a resilient and coherent society. **A senior officer** from the Estonian Defence Forces (EDF) Joint Headquarters, said that the 2017 National Security Concept leaves the impression of psychological defence as merely a securitised part of stratcom. Stratcom, in turn, is only one of the procedures of how institutions work and cannot cover the whole society. Instead, the officer said, psychological defence should be regarded more broadly, wider than stratcom. "It is a matter of maintaining and protecting a sense of security and space of values related to the constitutional order to build a mental line of defence. It is also practical activities to resist attacks," he said.

Siim Kumpas, Strategic Communication Adviser of the Government Communication Unit at the Government Office, said that he viewed psychological defence as increasing people's psychological and cognitive resilience to the influencing activities that take place in the information space. "If informational influence activities are any kind of efforts to influence a target audience using a range of illegitimate and deceptive means, in support of the objectives of the adversary, then psychological protection is the other side of this equation, protecting people from it. Firstly, keeping their threat level awareness at an optimal point so that they would be aware of the threats in the information sphere, and secondly, giving them the knowledge and tools so that they would not fall prey to it," Kumpas explained. **Anne-Ly Reimaa,** Head of International Relations on Integration Issues at the MoC, viewed psychological defence as strengthening people's

identity and attitudes, e.g. through education, so that they would be more critical towards the media content. "There are a lot of, let's say rumours, that make people behave strangely. Psychological defence is where people can assess the news value themselves or where they are immune to [influence and rumours]," she said, noting the information disorder surrounding Covid-19.

The National Defence Development Plan 2017-2026 prescribes the need to advance strategic communication and psychological defence to support national security policy, raise public awareness, neutralise hostile information influence activities, expose disinformation and hinder the spread of it (2017, 6). Siim Kumpas said that one of the most important steps the state has done in recent years to develop psychological defence was the establishment of a dedicated stratcom team at the Government Communication Unit of the Government Office in spring 2018. He said that before there were only one or two people who dealt with stratcom on the Government Office level. Now there are nine people in the team that allows to undertake bigger projects. Kumpas explained that the stratcom team is engaged in three big tasks: situational awareness, increasing the resilience of the society, and crisis communication.

Siim Kumpas said that ensuring good situational awareness is the foundation of their work. It includes monitoring media (including social media) and conducting public opinion polls to understand people's attitudes and views on national security related issues. He noted that ideally, all institutions should do both because they all have their own points of view. Kumpas explained that although the Government Office monitors the Estonian information space and partly the Western information space, they are understandably interested in Russia's information space as well. "Following specific parts of the Russian information sphere, we can more or less assume what to expect in the smaller Russian channels that are shown in Estonia as well," he noted. The EDF officer said, without wanting to go into details, that in addition to monitoring the information space they are also interested in things that are planned but not yet published and that might have an effect on the national defence.

The second part of the stratcom team's work is enhancing the resilience of the society. Kumpas explained that this includes policymaking, advising and training other institutions, and undertaking projects. Also, collaborating with academia, media, civil

society, and private sector. One of the projects undertaken, for example, has been launching the Estonian Media Literacy Week in 2019 together with the MoE (part of the European Media Literacy Week). As of the end of 2020, it has been organised twice and involves more than 10 partner institutions and seeks to raise public's awareness about threats of the information space, among other things. Another example project is the localisation of the Bad News Game – an online game aimed at building psychological resistance against online misinformation that was originally developed by a Dutch NGO called DROG and the Cambridge University. The third activity the team is engaged with is crisis communication which was especially relevant during the Covid-19 crisis when the Government Office established a temporary Crisis Communication Centre to support government's work.

Part of enhancing the resilience of the society to information threats is also developing and coordinating stratcom, Kumpas said. He noted that a coordination model among the institutions has already been in place roughly since early 2000s. This includes cooperation in keeping the state messages coherent and undertaking common stratcom campaigns and projects. "Our goal is to have people in all security-related institutions who think about this field and who meet regularly under our leadership so that we have a constant picture of what is happening in this field in different institutions," Kumpas said.

In the Defence Forces, psychological defence is developed by enhancing the capability of the reserve structure to undertake informational activities, as explained by the EDF officer. He said that information warfare and psychological defence are part of the recruit training and they are also addressed among active service members and reservists. "It is normal to create an understanding among the active members and reservists of the modern battlefield where battles might be fought in situations where there is no real war in a physical form," he said. In addition, the MoD and the EDF are undertaking various projects, such as supporting conferences or providing funding for patriotic entertainment. Two of the most well-known Estonian war films, "Names in marble" (2002) and "1944" (2015) are both created with considerable support from the MoD and the EDF, he noted.[8]

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[8] The budget for "1944" was 1,8 mln euros, 420 000 of which came from the MoC. "The precondition for support is that the feature film raises the will of the Estonian people to defend, is a war film, i.e. the film must include battle scenes, and is of artistically good quality and veracious," MoC press officer said in 2013 (Jõesaar 2013).

"For the Defence Forces, they serve to maintain the will to defend. And the will to defend and its public display serve as deterrence, among other things," the officer said.

The communication efforts of the MoC and the EDF towards the Estonian audience are based on three main beliefs that all serve to raise the public's will to defend, as explained by the senior officer from the Defence Forces. These are:

1. "Estonia is worth to be defended",
2. "Estonia can be defended", and
3. "I want to defend Estonia".

These beliefs are integrated into the policy planning, there are communication activities planned around them, and the effect of the messages is constantly evaluated. In addition to internal assessments, the effectiveness of these communication activities can also be seen from the public opinion surveys on national defence, conducted bi-annually.[9] There are different narratives and objectives towards international audiences, the officer said.

The narratives that Estonia projects both to its internal and external audiences are not directly contrasted with Russian narratives and institutions instead rely on telling their own story, both officials said. "Confronting always means that someone else takes the first step. If someone else sets the music, we would have to dance to that rhythm and could hardly take the initiative," Kumpas noted. The officer from the EDF said that reaction to information influence is dependent on the likelihood of that information to influence the public's will to defend. He referred to the US Field Manual (2003, 269–73) that proposes nine techniques to respond to adversarial propaganda: direct and indirect refutation, diversion, restrictive measures, imitative deception, conditioning, forestalling and minimisation. The last technique is silence: "The aim is that the harmful message will not spread, will be less heard and will not be able to make an impact. If the message does not spread anyways – either due to our preventive measures or simply because the society is already wise enough – then silence is a deliberate tactics," he said.

There is no specific inter-institutional narrative agreed upon so far to present to the internal or the external public, although there have been constant discussions about it. "It

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[9] The latest public opinion surveys can be found here: https://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/en/objectives-activities/national-defence-and-society (20 November 2020).

sounds good on paper, but in practice it is difficult to imagine a story that is timeless and detailed enough not to become boring momentarily but to last for years," Siim Kumpas noted. There are narratives that are repeated each year that pertain to certain historic events, such as accession to NATO or 9th of May, but these have been developed separately by the ministries. An exception would be introducing Estonia abroad. Kumpas explained that officials usually give examples of Estonia's digital society, but there is little central coordination – every institution focuses on their own field (e.g. MoE concentrating on the e-school system, Ministry of Interior on smart border security solutions). He said that the MFA would actually prefer if there was a common inter-institutional narrative for the external audiences. "I think it would be reasonable to have some centrally focused points to focus on. That would help us better highlight our national strengths," Kumpas said and added that to some extent Enterprise Estonia (national foundation developing economy of Estonia) is also working on it.

4.1.3. Media literacy in formal education

Estonians are less confident in identifying fake news than other European nations, according to Eurobarometer 2018. In Europe, more than two-thirds (71%) felt at least "somewhat confident" in their ability to recognise false news – in Estonia that figure was 64%, the lowest amongst the Baltic states (European Commission 2018c, 16). In a similar survey conducted by the Government Office of Estonia in 2019, 55% agreed and 35% disagreed with a statement that it is easy for them to recognise false information. Both studies concluded that men and more educated and older respondents are more confident in their ability to recognise false news. In Estonia, confidence is also positively correlated with the ability to speak Estonian and with following media in Estonian (Valitsuse kommunikatsioonibüroo 2019).

The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (MoE) has started to put more emphasis on media and information literacy (MIL) with the establishment of a position of Chief Expert for General Competences in March 2020 that coordinates the topics related to eight general competences in the national curriculum. Besides MIL, the Chief Expert is also coordinating educational activities related to cultural competence and values, social and civic competence, competence for self-determination, learning competence, communication competence, competence in mathematics, natural sciences and

technology, entrepreneurial competence, digital competence, bullying prevention programmes, career planning competences, and personal, social and health education, as explained by **Britt Järvet**, the current Chief Expert.

Media literacy is currently not featured as a separate competence in the national curricula for basic and upper secondary schools. It will be much strongly featured in the new curriculum that MoE is developing though, as Järvet said. "Back in 2012 and the years before when the current curriculum was developed, media literacy was not considered as important in the Ministry, they didn't pay that much attention to it. We have now understood it was a big mistake," she said.

Instead of specifically identifying media literacy, the current basic and upper secondary school curricula bring out digital competence as a general competence to develop in pupils (e.g. national curriculum for upper secondary schools §4(3)8). This also includes the ability to use digital means to find and preserve information and to evaluate the relevance and trustworthiness of the information.

For upper secondary schools, the subject field of language and literature includes "Media and Influence" as a compulsory course for schools that teach Estonian as a first language (Appendix 7). The syllabus states that a systematic overview is given of media and influence: "Such issues as constructing reality through the media or how different approaches the same event are created and which language tools are used are dealt with. This relates to media ethics, which is also examined. Other issues include advertisements and their influencing techniques, electronic media, and new ways of communication created by it, dangers and manipulation options related to them. Media instruction seeks to shape critical media consumers…The aim of developing listening skills is to understand the partner and the speaker, to identify factual information and opinions as well as influencing and manipulating in oral media channels, and to be prepared to ask further questions or present objections" (Appx. 1 of Upper Secondary School Curriculum... 2014, 10).

At the end of the "Media and influence" course, students:

1) have an idea of a basic communication model and the role of the media in the information society;

2) are familiar with media channels and genres, their specific features, and the specifics of the reception of media texts;

3) analyse verbal texts in visual and audiovisual context;

4) can formulate the message of a text, identify references and allusions to other texts, and interpret a text in the context of related texts;

5) differentiate between facts and opinions and reliable and doubtful information;

6) can identify arguments and basic verbal and visual influencing techniques in media texts; and

7) analyse advertisements critically and understand the hidden messages of advertising (Ibid., 11–12).

In addition, all high school students can take elective courses, which the school must provide based on the school's specificity and regional specificity. One of those, under the optional media education curriculum, is "Human in a contemporary information environment" that gives an overview of media and information influence, and also covers topics such as big data, (social media) algorithms, trolling, hate speech, propaganda, astroturfing or fact-checking (Inimene nüüdisaegses teabekeskkonnas 2019).

There are considerable differences in how media literacy is integrated into the curriculum of Estonian language and literature and Russian language and literature (for schools where Estonian is taught as a second language) that both fall under the same subject field of language and literature. In 2019/2020, 27430 students (21% of all students) studied Russian language and literature, according to a statistical database Haridussilm. In upper secondary schools, 4966 students (22% of all students) studied Russian language as their first language (Ibid.). For example, in upper secondary education the aforementioned "Media and influence" course is available (and compulsory) only for students studying Estonian as their first language. In the subject of Russian language and literature, the media literacy is only briefly touched upon in "Practical Russian II (Reception and Creation of Oral Texts)" and "Practical Russian III (Reception and Creation of Written Texts)" (Appendix 7). "Practical Russian III (Reception and Creation of Written Texts)", for example, only briefly mentions "critical attitude towards media texts" as part of its learning content (Appx. 1 of Upper Secondary School Curriculum... 2014, 30).

Though media literacy is only scarcely mentioned in the learning content, is it more prominently featured in the overall learning and educational objectives that state that Russian language studies are designed for students to, *inter alia*, have the ability to "analyse texts (including media texts and advertisements) and judge them critically by understanding the intentions of the author and can differentiate between reliable and unreliable media" (Ibid., 24). Also, one of the learning outcomes in Russian for graduates of upper secondary schools is that they can "assess media information and information received from the internet in a critical mindset" (Ibid., 26).

The same discrepancies between Estonian and Russian language education are present in the curriculum for basic schools (Appendix 6). The national curriculum for basic all schools expects graduates, inter alia, to "use different communication channels appropriately and be able to find, critically judge and use the information provided by the media and online" (Appx. 1 of Basic School Curriculum... 2014, 1). This is also featured in the learning and educational objectives in Estonian and Russian. Differences come in the learning content. Whilst the Russian curriculum expects students in the 3rd stage of study (classes 7–9) to differentiate between facts and opinions and adopt a critical attitude towards information (Ibid., 42), the learning content in Estonian prescribes that topics such as main linguistic influencing techniques, the nature of media and its present-day objectives, central principles of media ethics, the principle of freedom of speech and its boundaries, and public and hidden influence should also be covered (Ibid., 19).

Britt Järvet said that she had not been aware of the differences in integrating media literacy into the Russian and Estonian language curricula before the author approached her.[10] She admitted that there is a discrepancy in what is expected from the Russian language students and what the existing tools (learning content, study materials) are, and said that MoE is now working to harmonise the curricula in both languages. Pille Liblik, an adviser at the Department of Primary and Basic Education at MoE, explained that current curricula were created in 2008-2010, and the cooperation between the compilers of the curricula in harmonising the content of studies was modest at the time. "Media education at schools was not linked to information influence activities to the extent that it is currently done," she said.

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[10] It is worth noting that Britt Järvet had joined the MoE only four months before the interview took place.

4.1.4. Media policy and regulatory action

Estonia does not have a specific media policy document that would outline the basic principles or priorities for the future and has chosen to regulate the media market as less as possible. The National Security Concept (2017) primarily concentrates on the need to reinforce integration and cohesion of the society to withstand information threats. It only prescribes the need to guarantee access to multifaceted information for all segments of society as a more specific tool of psychological defence. **Hannus Luure**, Advisor at the Communications Department of the MoC interpreted this in the light of providing relevant information to Russian speakers during the Covid-19 crisis: "When we were doing the virus [Covid-19] communication then we translated most of the information to Russian even though the law does not require it".

Estonia also does not have any support measures (except those related to Covid-19 crisis) such as a media support foundation in Latvia or Lithuania to support media projects of public interest (e.g. in media literacy). As **Anne-Ly Reimaa**, Head of International Relations on Integration Issues at the Cultural Diversity Department of the MoC brought out, the Integration Foundation has sometimes supported some media projects, but this funding has come either from the EU or European Social Fund and has been very limited.

Russia's information space is still very influential in Estonia, especially amongst native Russian speakers. According to Kantar Emor (2020), in November 2020, there were four Russian television channels amongst the top 10 most-watched channels in Estonia, the most popular of them being RTR-Planeta (Table 3).

Channel and its viewing timeshare (of the total viewing time) in November 2020			
ETV	19,5%	ETV 2	2,3%
Kanal 2	8,1%	REN TV Estonia	1,9%
TV 3	6,9%	ETV+	1,5%
RTR-Planeta	4,6%	Kanal 11	1,5%
NTV Mir	4,0%	Kanal 12	1,1%
PBK	3,3%		

Table 3. Most popular TV channels in Estonia based on viewership (Kantar Emor 2020).

Although Russian television channels are still considered as the most important source of media amongst non-Estonians overall, younger generations are shifting increasingly towards social media and, Estonian Russian-language news sites but also news sites in

Estonian (Table 4). This gives hope that younger generations are increasingly less influenced by pro-Kremlin narratives, bearing in mind that the most popular Russian-language online news outlets rus.postimees.ee and rus.delfi.ee are both owned by Estonians.[11]

Media channel	15-34	35-49	50-64	65+	All together
Social media	77%	60%	35%	14%	48%
Estonian news sites in Russian	71%	71%	49%	18%	54%
Estonian newspapers in Russian	57%	61%	58%	50%	57%
PBK Estonian news	57%	68%	77%	80%	70%
Russian television channels	56%	63%	81%	80%	71%
Other PBK shows produced in Estonia	49%	53%	64%	63%	58%
Russian news sites	49%	50%	39%	13%	54%
"AK" in Russian	47%	52%	74%	72%	62%
Estonian radio channels in Russian excluding Raadio 4	40%	48%	47%	33%	43%
News sites in Estonian	39%	28%	19%	6%	24%

Table 4. Importance of media channels amongst non-Estonians by age group (Kaldur et al. 2017, 72).

A survey commissioned by the Government Office of Estonia (Valitsuse kommunikatsioonibüroo 2019) showed that 55% of respondents trusted Estonian media channels compared to 32% who did not trust these channels. Trust was higher amongst Estonians (61%) than non-Estonians (45%) and grew with the level of education, trust was also highest amongst the youngest generation (15-24-year-olds) (Ibid.). Estonians and non-Estonians trust different media channels. While Estonians trust very highly the most-watched channels (85% and 74% in the case of ETV and Estonian-language newspapers respectively)(Table 5), the trust towards all channels among Russian-speaking residents is noticeably lower (Table 6)(Kaldur et al. 2017, 76).

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[11] The Baltic media market is controlled by Postimees Group and Ekspress Grupp. Postimees Group, owned by an Estonian businessman Margus Linnamäe, also includes the Estonian news service BNS, Latvian news portal Tvnet, Latvian information service LETA and Lithuanian news portal 15min. Delfi (also operating in Latvia and Lithuania) is part of Ekspress Grupp, the key shareholder of which is Hans H. Luik.

Media channel	Trust	Don't trust	Don't follow
ETV, ETV2	85%	7%	6%
Newspapers in Estonian	74%	11%	12%
News sites in Estonian	59%	9%	27%
Vikerraadio (in Estonian)	53%	3%	39%
Foreign news channels	31%	3%	59%

Table 5. Most trusted media among Estonians (Kaldur et al. 2017, 76).

Media channel	Trust	Don't trust	Don't follow or don't know	Trust amongst those with an opinion
PBK	56%	24%	25%	68%
Russian television channels	54%	21%	23%	65%
Estonian newspapers in Russian	43%	16%	41%	64%
Estonian news sites in Russian	42%	16%	43%	67%
ETV+	40%	16%	42%	62%

Table 6. Most trusted media among non-Estonians (Kaldur et al. 2017, 76).

There are different opinions in the Ministry of Culture and in the EDF on to which extent Russian media should be perceived as a threat to Estonia or regarded as propaganda. The interviewees at the MoC said that the MoC does not label Russian channels such as PBK or RTR-Planeta as propaganda or not propaganda. They perceive these channels as an indirect threat rather than a direct threat. "I do not see that they would be a huge threat. If they do not directly call for military action," Anne-Ly Reimaa said. **Meelis Kompus**, Head of the Communications Department at the MoC said that in PBK information influence is running through other programmes that are produced in Russia but the local news is well-balanced which is why it is difficult to define whether it is a hostile channel or not. "Perhaps some very favourable coverage falls into an unfavourable context, between the two, which also kills this balanced news, which would not be criticised if it were sued in the press council, for example," he explained. A channel that the MoC along with other state institutions do not give interviews to is Sputnik, the Estonian version of which was closed on 1 January 2020 anyways.

The senior officer at the EDF viewed PBK as propaganda and was more critical of the Russian media: "When the Defence Minister of Russia Sergey Shoygu treats the media controlled by the Russian authorities as weapon systems, we have no reason to treat them as free press…This is why we do not do not engage in the uncontrolled proliferation of weapons of mass destruction: we do not allow them to our events, we do not give

interviews to Russian propagandists, we say it directly to them". He said that although PBK news programme has been balanced for the last decade, such a channel's role might become critically dangerous in a crisis where a news programme could become a propagandistic information tool. "By that time, a significant part of society has already developed the habit of following and trusting this channel," he said. "A news program in a polite format, featuring respected people from Estonian society, legitimises the channel and its (predominantly) propagandistic content as a whole."

Compared to Latvia, Estonia has not clearly brought out in its Security Concept the need to develop a long-term alternative to Russian information channels. The interviewees at the MoC agreed that there is a need for such an alternative though. They saw it in the Russian-language public broadcasting media that together form a whole: the television channel ETV+, radio channel Raadio 4 and the Russian online news portal. "The Latvians write, we do," Hannus Luure said.

Anne-Ly Reimaa said that establishing a Russian-language public broadcasting television was first discussed after the Bronze Night in 2007 with a goal of bringing Russian-speakers into Estonian information space. Back then the government did not find enough funding for it though. The channel was finally launched in 2015 in the wake of the annexation of Crimea. "A Russian person needs some kind of a medium from which he sees himself and his problems. He does not just come to watch ETV, maybe he watches the news, but not the programmes. In this sense, ETV+ has done a very good job in speaking about our local problems in Russian. In Estonia ETV+ is completely irreplaceable," Meelis Kompus said.

The viewership figures for ETV+ are quite low. Based on the statistics from Kantar Emor (2020), in November, ETV+ was in the 9th place amongst all channels watched in Estonia in terms of viewing timeshare (Table 3). Among Russian-language channels, ETV+ (1,5%) held the fifth place after RTR-Planeta (4,6%), NTV Mir (4,0%), PBK (3,3%), and REN TV (1,9%). RTR-Planeta, the most popular Russian-language television channel, was watched almost three times more than ETV+ (Ibid.). The current Development Plan of ERR for 2021-2024 sets it as a goal to increase daily Russian-speaking audience and their trust in ERR (ERR 2020a, 11). It strives to further integrate ETV+, Raadio 4 and the Russian-language online news portal with each other. The Plan touches upon the need to

further develop Russian digital environments but acknowledges that ERR needs more financial resources for that (Ibid.).

Anne-Ly Reimaa noted that during the last five years the viewership of ETV+ has grown though: in 2016 14% of the Russian-speaking audience watched the channel for at least 15 minutes whereas in 2019 almost 23%. She said that it takes time for the Russian-speakers to start trusting ETV+. Viewership of ETV+ grew significantly during the Covid-19 crisis when 44 000 people watched the evening news programme in ETV+ in the beginning of April compared to just 13 000 people two months earlier (ERR 2020b). Anne-Ly Reimaa said that this serves as an indicator that Russian-speakers have started to trust the channel.

The Ministry of Culture does not see restricting the transmission rights of the Russian channels, i.e. blocking, as a viable long-term option even though it is legally possible. The current Media Services Act (§19) prohibits media from inciting hatred based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, beliefs, or religion, inciting the degrading of the lawful behaviour or a violation of the law. There are also plans to prohibit incitement to violence or terrorist acts.[12] The Estonian Consumer Protection and Technical Regulatory Authority has the right to issue a precept for the termination of retransmission if a channel violates the law. In contrast to Latvia and Lithuania, the Authority does not give out special retransmission permits that could be terminated though.

The interviewees said that blocking Russian television channels more actively would create additional tensions in society and is not productive since a lot of the content is also shared on other media such as the internet. "Life has shown that if we turn the antenna to another direction or restrict its transmission, it does not mean that this content is not delivered anymore," Meelis Kompus said. "We hope that our thing regulates itself, people will finally understand. You cannot shut down social media for what is going on there," Anne-Ly Reimaa said.

The same sentiment was shared by **Siim Kumpas**, Strategic Communication Adviser at the Government Office responsible for the overall coordination of strategic communication in Estonia. He said that only a small part of Russian information influence

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[12] Article 19 applies to channels that are either registered in Estonia or that are not part of the EU or the European Convention on Transfrontier Television, e.g. Russia and Belarus.

is overt and illegal – in most cases that influence is more subtle, trying to portray Estonia as morally decadent or in financial difficulties. Instead of restricting access to Russian channels, Kumpas said, it is important to increase the resilience of the society by focusing on media literacy and raising awareness about Russian informational threats.

"We do not increase the resilience of the society by depriving people of access to some information. Our approach, rather, is to give them as much factual and engaging information as possible so that they could decide for themselves what is true. In the long run, even if we hypothetically banned all content from Russia, I would argue that the resilience of our society would not increase by a gram. It is taking away the disturbing background noise but what we really have to concentrate on is increasing the resilience of our people" (Siim Kumpas).

Kumpas said that restricting access to Russian television channels would also make it more difficult for Estonia to criticise Russia for similar actions: "How can we criticise Russia and at the same time use the same steps and say that no, if we do it, it is a threat to our security? Russia is doing exactly the same things with the same excuse when it says that RFE/RL, for example, is a threat to Russia's security – it registers them as foreign agents and bans them. In other words, they very cleverly use the same vocabulary that is also used by Western countries. I claim it is a slippery road".

The interviewees from the MoC and the Government Office also brought out freedom of speech as an argument not to restrict Russian channels more actively. They said that blocking Russian television channels is probably one of the reasons why Estonia is ahead of Latvia and Lithuania in international rankings on press freedom.[13] "In a non-free country, the information space is always under control, whether through censorship, threats to journalists or banning some content. If we adopt any of these methods, I start to question what separates the two of us," Kumpas said.

Views towards regulating information influence in the European Union

Compared to Latvia and Lithuania where the European-level discussions on regulating information influence (e.g. discussions about the new European Democracy Action Plan

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[13] In the 2020 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Sans Frontières, Estonia was 14th out of 180 countries (11th in 2019, 12th in 2018), Latvia 22th (24th in 2019, 24th in 2018) and Lithuania 28th (30th in 2019, 36th in 2018) (Reporters Sans Frontières 2020).

and the Digital Services Act) are under the responsibility of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, in Estonia, the main ministry overseeing the formulation of these policies is the Ministry of Justice. By the time this thesis was published, Estonia had not formulated its positions on the regulatory debates happening in Brussels. This is in stark contrast with Latvia who had already in March 2020 published a non-paper that laid out their view *vis-à-vis* managing disinformation in the EU in quite a detailed manner (Appendix 12).

It is interesting to note, that in September 2020 Estonia did not join Latvia, Lithuania and France in their statement on the Protection of Democracies (Joint Statement... 2020). Delfi (Poom 2020) reported that Estonia was invited to co-sign the statement, but refused due to domestic political situation, referring to the Conservative People's Party of Estonia. The Estonian State Chancellery explained that although Estonia could have supported the statement in most elements, the government could not agree with its content as a whole: "The text called for disproportionate legislative regulation of the media to combat disinformation, with legal obligations for publications and platforms, as well as sanctions. The regulation of artificial intelligence proposed in the application was also not in line with Estonia's approach. The positions of France, as well as Latvia and Lithuania on these issues have so far been different from Estonia" (Delfi 2020b).

The statement signed by Latvia, Lithuania and France (Joint Statement... 2020) recommends the European Democracy Action Plan to include several measures. Regarding legislative regulation of the media, that the State Chancellery was referring to, the statement said that it is "essential to create more robust public action tools of a regulatory nature to address disinformation," and called the EU to establish a regulatory framework with common standards and obligations for online platforms, along with enforcement mechanisms in several areas, such as minimum level of capabilities and tools necessary to combat disinformation campaigns online (i.e. a legal obligation for platforms), and basic standards for social responsibility in algorithmic design (which the author understands as a reference to artificial intelligence by the State Chancellery).

A document shedding some light into Estonian positions at the European-level, is the position paper on Covid-19 and disinformation (Addressing disinformation... 2020; Stolton 2020), sent to the European Commission together with Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia in June 2020, that paper pointed "to the need for

more robust and better coordinated EU effort against disinformation in general". Some of the positions brought out in the paper are that

- the current Code of Practice on Disinformation is "insufficient and unsuitable to serve as the basis for sustainably addressing disinformation on social platforms",
- the EU should develop a regulatory framework to "establish accountability and transparency requirements for technology companies and online platforms regarding disinformation, focusing on combatting malicious online behaviour, and not regulating content",
- the EEAS should direct more resources and capabilities towards responding to influence activities by China,
- the EU should enhance cooperation with NATO and G7's Rapid Response Mechanism and develop the Rapid Alert System further,
- the EU should stand by the independent media to improve societal resilience, and develop support measures to ensure their survival during the Covid-19 crisis,
- the EU should support and cooperate with independent fact-checkers and civic initiatives aimed at strengthening media literacy and civic education.

4.2. Latvia

4.2.1. Information influence in strategic documents

The main strategic documents in Latvia framing the fight against hostile information influence are the National Security Concept 2019 (*Nacionālās drošības koncepcija 2019*) and the National Defence Concept 2020 (*Valsts aizsardzības koncepcija 2020*). The Security Concept, approved by the Saeima, specifies basic strategic principles and strategies that should be taken into account when developing new policy planning documents, legal acts or action plans related to national security (NSC 2019). The current Security Concept updates the 2015 version. Based on the Concept, a classified National Security Plan is drawn up that includes more specific measures with regard to national security. The Defence Concept, prepared by MoD and approved by the Government and the Saiema in every four years, is a similar policy planning document that is prepared on the basis of the military threat analysis and defines the strategic objectives of national defence and the basic principles to operate with (NDC 2020).

The National Defence Concept 2020 was approved by the Saeima on 1 October. This means that at the time interviews with state officials were conducted, only a project of the Concept (NDC 2020), largely identical to the later approved version, had been made public. This was not of major hindrance, though, since information security and measures related to it are overwhelmingly addressed in the Security Concept (Appendix 8).

The Latvian strategic documents, similar to the Estonian ones, also view security from a broad perspective where readiness and resilience of the whole society plays a vital role in overcoming the threat together. It is noted in the Security Concept (NSC 2019) that in order to improve societal resilience and national deterrence, a Comprehensive National Defence System should be introduced with specific tasks and roles in national defence divided between state institutions and a closer link established between the state institutions, inhabitants, entrepreneurs, and non-government organisations.[14] The Defence Concept (NDC 2020, 8) argues that in the contemporary digital society, characterised by big data and new methods of influence, deterrence can no longer be achieved only by military means and thus more attention needs to be paid to the psychological resilience of the society.

A whole chapter, "Prevention of Threat Caused to the Information Space of Latvia", is dedicated to countering information influence in the Security Concept. The Concept assesses that the level of hybrid threats is high and Russian information influence activities, e.g. disinformation, constitute the main element of it. "The public opinion of Latvia is being influenced, systematically distributing different messages which are being adjusted and changed depending on the target audience" (NSC 2019).

The root cause behind the vulnerability of Latvian information space has been the continuous and systematic underfunding of Latvian media space, especially the public broadcasting, that together with a relatively small market size and insufficient income from advertising has limited the media to create high-quality content (Ibid.). It has often been more financially advantageous to prefer to buy audiovisual content created in third countries, particularly Russia, and thus facilitate the entry of false information or distorted

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[14] A draft report "Comprehensive National Defence in Latvia" was also prepared in 2018. It argued that the goal of the comprehensive national defence was to get the Latvian population ready to defend the country, facilitate efficient crisis management at the national level and support critical functions of the state, including, for example, psychological resilience during crisis (page 1).

interpretations of the history into Latvian information space. Also, a large part of Latvian society still views Russian media as the main source of information and entertainment partly because they do not understand Latvian. The Security Concept marks that "the distribution of Russian television programmes, using illegal methods, has reached substantial scale in Latvia" and the "decisions of the National Electronic Mass Media Council [NEPLP] to discontinue the distribution of programmes on platforms registered in Latvia due to serious violations of the Electronic Mass Media Law are evaded" (Ibid.).

Efficiently hindering Russian information influence needs to consist of two equal parts: mitigating the factors that make Latvia vulnerable to the influence in the first place, and taking action against the particular external information influence activities (NSC 2019). It is also marked that preventing threats to Latvian information space should not only be a task for the state administration but also require involvement from the civil society and media. More specifically, measures in eight subtopics or categories are brought out (Appendix 8):

- provision of media pluralism and diversity,
- development of public media,
- combating the illegal distribution of programmes,
- development of the strategic communication skills of the state,
- establishment of the monitoring and analysis system of the information space,
- improvement of the laws and regulations governing the media environment,
- promotion of media literacy and the professional growth of the media sector, and
- strengthening the EU policy for combating disinformation.

Whilst promoting media literacy is clearly a measure aiming to empower Latvians to recognise and assess disinformation or other information influence activities, other measures tend to constitute structural changes with the aim to decrease the exposure of Latvians to Russian influence in the first place. For example, by increasing funding to public media and using Media Support Fund to support commercial media in creating high-quality content of public significance, the Security Concept seeks to offer a long-term alternative to Russian information channels (NSC 2019). In the European level, it is Latvia's clear interest to spur the EU to take more concrete and coordinated action against information influence, for example, by setting higher expectations for the online

platforms in their role against disinformation, establishing regulatory mechanisms, if needed (Ibid.).

Clear regulatory suggestions are foreseen in two cases. First, it is recommended that in order to further reduce the possibilities for illegally distributing Russian satellite television content, a separate legal framework should be developed (Ibid.). Secondly, the Security Concept recommends that the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive should be incorporated in the Latvian legal acts to combat hate speech and incitement to violence expressed in Russian television programmes in a more active manner. It is argued that "the restrictions provided for in the laws and regulations governing media operation currently in force are not sufficient to turn against the attempts of information influencing implemented by Russia on internet sites and social networks" (Ibid.).

The Security Concept also recommends the state to create a centralised mechanism to better coordinate stratcom activities and to better monitor and analyse the information space for any threats or influence activities, also the resilience of elections against external information influencing should be strengthened (Ibid.).

4.2.2. Setup and understanding of strategic communication

With the adoption of the new National Defence Concept in October 2020 by the parliament, Latvia effectively established a wider approach to security and introduced the term "psychological defence". The National Defence Concept (2020, 14) brings out that public education, resistance to manipulation, practical readiness to overcome crises and civic participation are the basis for the stability and security of society. **Dace Kundrāte**, Head of the Military Public Information Section of the Military Public Affairs Department of MoD, explained that Latvia has introduced a mindset where security starts from the individual person and then grows wider into defence at the community or state level. "If the society is not willing to defend this country, then it is no use to protect it," she said. Kundrāte explained that the goal is to prepare people to be ready for any type of crises which is why MoD has also introduced a brochure "What to do in case of a crisis" that maps out preparation measures and steps every Latvian should follow to manage the first 72-hours as a result of a disaster, pandemic or military operations. "We are building a culture of preparedness," she said.

Kundrāte said it is important to prepare the society for Russian information operations through awareness-raising and media literacy. The MoD has, for example, started going to high schools to give lectures about security. They have also established seminars where they invite the school leadership, higher education staff and mayors of municipalities, where MoD explains to them what the current threats are and how they can be affected.

The National Security Concept (2019, 19) called for a centralised mechanism for the coordination of stratcom and the security of the information space that would allow to "respond to specific threats in a timely and efficient manner". In February 2020, a Strategic Communication Coordination Department with five employees was established at the Latvian State Chancellery with **Daiga Holma** as its head. The responsibilities of the department include strengthening and developing stratcom capabilities in public institutions as well as developing a model of cooperation and coordination among them, also conducting training to political leadership, policymakers and communicators in stratcom (LETA 2020a). Holma said that stratcom is not only viewed from a security perspective – they perceive it more widely as a mechanism to make government communication more efficient. Efficient and coordinated communication also contributes to building resilience since it builds trust for the government. She said that hostile actors often draw their inspiration from the mistakes done by the Latvian government. "We proved it during the COVID-19 crisis that the more coordinated and efficient we are in our own communication, the fewer opportunities there are for others to disseminate disinformation," Holma said.

One of the functions of the Strategic Communication Coordination Department, Holma explained, is also to monitor the public information space to understand how government politicies are received within the public, but also to keep track on the spread of malicious activities and dis- or misinformation. She said that the Department is interested in all narratives that resonate in the society and that require a reaction, including those originating from Russia's information space. Information space is also monitored by the state security agencies who do it according to their mandates.[15] In addition, there is the National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP) which supervises whether the

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[15] There are three state security agencies in Latvia: State Security Service (VDD), Constitution Protection Bureau (SAB) and the Defence Intelligence and Security Service (MIDD).

television channels operating in Latvia (e.g. RTR-Planeta, REN TV) are complying with the Electronic Mass Media Law.

The MoD is most interested in the intent of the information when monitoring the information space, Dace Kundrāte said. This is also how they differentiate between home-grown and foreign information influence activities. "It is a question of the goals and objectives. If you see that the goal is to destabilise and demoralise democratic values, it is a totally different approach that the domestic groups are doing, so it is a foreign influence," she said, adding that the most aggressive influence activities are originating from outside of Latvia.

In Latvia's military structure, main stratcom capabilities rest with the MoD, compared with Estonia and Lithuania where the armed forces play the main role. There is no separate public affairs department in the armed forces. Dace Kundrāte from the MoD explained that this system was established during the financial crisis that brought big personnel cuts in the armed forces in 2008. She said that all the main stratcom decisions in the military structure are made in the Public Affairs Committee in MoD that is composed of the Chief of Armed Forces, Minister of Defence and the State Secretary. Kundrāte said that this new system also has its positive features: "I would say for a small nation it is even better. It is easier to coordinate the messaging and find solutions. Also, it is really easy to communicate because the armed forces and the MoD are talking in one voice; we are not disseminating different narratives". Kundrāte said that even though the armed forces have started to recover and "build up their muscle" concerning public affairs officers (PAOs), it is unlikely that they will return to the pre-2008 system. Also, what is good is that the National Guard *(Zemessardze)* kept their PAOs during the financial crisis and contributes to the overall communication efforts, she said.

Dace Kundrāte said that there are four main narratives that the MoD and the armed forces project and that are also reflected in the national security documents:

1. "Latvia will be defended",
2. "Latvian soldiers are brave, smart and patriotic",
3. "Latvia is a member of one of the most influential alliances – NATO", and
4. "State security is the responsibility of all society".

Regarding the overall coordination of messaging, the government has also developed some narratives that are used by all the ministries. Kundrāte brought "I am Latvia", developed for Latvia's 100th anniversary, as an example of an inter-institutional narrative. "The idea behind this was that each and every part of us is part of Latvia," she said. "I would say there is still need for one strong common narrative as e-Estonia though. That is always presented as something great and unseen." She brought out that the Ministry of Economics has been tasked with developing a unified image of the country. It is expected that a unified marketing strategy for Latvia, emphasising both its economic potential but also the cultural aspects, will be developed by the end of the year (LETA 2020b).

When responding to hostile messaging from Russia, Holma and Kundrāte said that it is better to be proactive and concentrate on telling ones one story rather than actively debunk Russian narratives. Holma elaborated, for example, that there are some events where one would expect certain narratives from Russia, which is why it is important to be proactive with efficient communication. Kundrāte brought out that debunking, as a side-effect, can amplify Russian messages. "It is impossible to debunk everything, it is easier to work vice versa so our strategy is to have a sustainable society that understands that they are being manipulated, that they are being targeted," she said.

4.2.3. Media literacy in formal education

According to Eurobarometer (European Commission 2018c, 16), 68% of Latvians are at least "somewhat confident" in being able to recognise false news, compared to 71% in EU, 65% in Lithuania and 64% in Estonia. In an earlier survey done in Latvia in 2017, 40% of the respondents said that they could usually recognise what information in media is reliable and what is biased or false, 22% acknowledged to have previously believed in biased or false information, and 11% admitted that they lack the knowledge to recognise reliable information. Men and those with higher education and higher income per family member were more confident in their ability to recognise false information (Latvijas Fakti 2017, 84–85). Another survey done among 9 to 16-year-olds found that even though adolescents in Latvia have an understanding what false news is and how to recognise it, they had acquired all this knowledge on their own not from school (Latvijas Universitāte 2017, 26). A recent study by Rožukalne, Skulte, and Stakle (2020) found that albeit more than half of Latvia's population view their media literacy knowledge as insufficient, 52%

of the respondents are not interested in MIL issues. "Concerning the consequences of insufficient media literacy skills within society, the respondents focused mostly on threats to children (40%) and general public safety (28%), decrease in welfare (28%), societal regress (25%), fewer opportunities for high-quality education (26%) and Latvia being behind other EU countries (24%)," the study found.

Media literacy is on the agenda of several institutions in Latvia. These include the Ministry of Education and Science and the National Centre for Education which are responsible for integrating media literacy into school curricula and the Ministry of Culture which oversees improving media literacy in the society in general. National Media Policy Guidelines for 2016-2020 and their Implementation Plan (both adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers in November 2016) are the first policy planning documents in Latvia that foresee activities for the development of media literacy (Ločmele 2019). The Guidelines focus on the following tasks for the education sector for 2016-2020:

- to survey the level of mass media literacy in the society;
- to improve the knowledge of the public in mass media literacy;
- to include in mass media such content which develops mass media literacy;
- to include mass media literacy in the content of education;
- to educate teachers for teaching mass media literacy in educational institutions;
- to prepare would-be teachers for teaching mass media literacy in educational institutions;
- to create materials for teachers regarding mass media literacy issues (Mass Media Policy Guidelines 2016).

Latvia is currently reforming the content of general education to introduce a new curriculum. The implementation of the revised curriculum will start in September 2020 in grades 1, 4, 7 and 10, followed by grades 2, 5, 8 and 11 in September 2021, and grades 3, 6, 9 and 12 in September 2022. **Ansis Nudiens**, Head Expert at the National Centre for Education (VISC), responsible for the development of learning content for the Social and Civic Learning area, said, that the old curricula, last revised in 2013 and 2014, lacked a media literacy component. "Being a history teacher for 10 years, I do not see that there was actually an emphasis on media literacy. There were some little pieces related to

critical thinking, source analysis and source evaluation, but I did not find any traces of actual media literacy in the previous curriculum," he said.

The new curriculum clearly emphasises media literacy more. Nudiens said the increased focus is not that strongly related to security interests though. "If you would go up to a policymaker level, the answer might be different, but for me as a curriculum developer, our goal to emphasise media literacy is just because there is more information out there. It is not about security; it is about how to deal with increasing amounts of information – that is why we started to emphasise media literacy here," he said. "I do not want to mark any information as hostile or not hostile. We are not teaching censorship to kids; we want them to have these critical thinking skills so that they could choose themselves whether or not to believe the given information."

Media literacy in the new curriculum is mostly concentrated in two subject areas – languages and the field of social and civic learning (history and social sciences). In addition, the curriculum brings out two cross-cutting skills closely related to media literacy. One of them is digital literacy which in secondary education also includes critically analysing the reliability of the information in the media. The second cross-cutting skill is critical thinking and problem-solving, which, according to Nudiens, is viewed almost the same as media literacy in social studies subject area. In basic education (Appendix 9) critical thinking and problem-solving is defined as the ability to analyse and evaluate information and situations, understand their context, make balanced and responsible decisions, define the nature of the problem and to solve problems (Noteikumi par valsts pamatizglītības... 2020). In secondary education (Appendix 10) students are also expected to formulate and critically analyse complex situations and abstract ideas and to obtain comprehensive and accurate information about them, in addition to more sophisticated problem-solving skills (Noteikumi par valsts vispārējās... 2020).

Latvian basic and secondary education curricula bring out the learning outcomes students are expected to achieve.[16] In high school, the learning outcomes are divided into three levels: general level, optimal level and the highest level of acquisition. The general level of acquisition is mostly expected from students who choose to focus on STEM (science,

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[16] These curricula are complemented with additional teaching materials and recommendations for learning content at https://mape.skola2030.lv/. These are not mandatory for teachers to follow though.

technology, engineering, and mathematics) or who are in vocational schools. Most of the students would acquire the learning outcomes at the optimal level. In the last year of high school (12th grade), students can additionally select two courses that they would like to acquire at the highest level. According to Nudiens, about 70% of the schools offer higher-level courses in the social sciences subject area.

In order to make the curriculum easier to follow, learning outcomes are grouped into so-called big ideas. In the social sciences subject area, media literacy in basic education is concentrated under the 8th big idea – "Sources of information that reflect developments in society in the past and in the present should be evaluated critically" (Appendix 9). In the end of the 9th grade, students are, for example, expected to explain the possibilities of the media to influence people's political and social beliefs, to analyse global processes from various sources and to determine the reliability of historical sources. They are also expected to "analyse the evaluations of historical events expressed by different groups of society and changes in the historical memory of social groups" (Noteikumi par valsts pamatizglītības... 2020). In secondary education, media literacy is concentrated under the 6th big idea – "Any source of information that depicts developments in society in the past and in present must be critically assessed" (Appendix 10). In optimal level this includes, for example, comparing information sources and determining their reliability; using criteria and methods to check for forged information; analysing media content and distinguishing between facts; and recognising manipulation and common logic errors (Noteikumi par valsts vispārējās... 2020).

In the field of language learning, in basic education, there is no specific big idea that would concentrate on media literacy. One of the learning outcomes for students who learn Latvian as a first language in the end of 9th grade expects students to be able to compare sources of information, choose the most reliable one and justify their choice; they are also expected to integrate and interpret information from a variety of sources (Noteikumi par valsts pamatizglītības... 2020). This is similar with the learning outcomes for students learning in a minority language[17] (Russian language): in addition to critically evaluating

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[17] There was an education reform in Latvia in 2018 that included a gradual transition to Latvian as the sole language of tuition in all secondary schools from the 2021/2022 academic year. In ethnic minority elementary schools starting from 2019/2020 at least 50% of subjects in grades 1-6 and 80% of subjects in grades 7-9 have to be taught in Latvian. Ethnic minorities will continue learning their native language, literature and subjects related to culture and history in the respective minority language (LETA 2018).

information from various sources, students are also expected to "evaluate the opportunities and shortcomings of the proposed sources, identifying those language tools and multimedia content that indicate the reliability of the information" (Ibid.). In secondary education where the curriculum is the same for students studying in Latvian and in a minority language, there is a separate big idea that focuses more specifically on media literacy – "Media, language and influence". Students are, for example, expected to select, organise and evaluate information purposefully, and to compare different sources and the language used in them. They should also be able to analyse language tools (e.g. metaphors and comparisons) in media texts to identify influencing techniques and tools of manipulation, and recognise misleading notions and opinions to determine the reliability of information (Noteikumi par valsts vispārējās... 2020).

The new curriculum in secondary education also includes National Defence Training (NDT) which will be implemented in both general secondary education institutions and vocational education institutions. The course is currently given in almost 70 schools which is about a tenth of all the secondary schools in Latvia (Leimane 2020). Starting from 2024/2025 NDT will be a compulsory subject for secondary education students. The objectives of NDT are civic awareness and patriotic upbringing, development of national defence skills, and developing leadership and cohesion (VISC 2020). There will also be a civic engagement block which includes developing critical thinking and analytical skills about historical events that have shaped Latvia (Gavrilko 2020).

In terms of shortcomings, Nudiens pointed out the lack of preparedness by the teachers to integrate MIL into various subjects and teach these subjects from a critical point of view: "Teachers would teach history but not the way history was written and how different sources and opinions and thought-schools were used for that". Nudiens said that the tradition so far has been more content-driven without going in depth of how different historical interpretations are created. "The students might go to school and see that there is only one truth or only one right way of thinking about certain questions," he said.

4.2.4. Media policy and regulatory action

The key ministry for media policy is the Ministry of Culture, which is responsible for the development and coordination of the national media policy to promote freedom of expression in Latvia. The main documents laying down the basic principles and priorities of the national mass media policy for a period of five years are the Latvian National Media Policy Guidelines 2016-2020 together with their Implementation Plan adopted in November 2016 by the Cabinet of Ministers. The Guidelines focus on the following aspects:

- diversity of media environment,
- quality and accountability of the media environment,
- education and training of media professionals,
- development of media literacy, and
- resilience of the media environment (Mass Media Policy Guidelines 2016).

The Implementation Plan also foresaw the establishment of the Mass Media Support Fund (MSF). MSF aims to increase the diversity of the media environment by allowing commercial media to receive state funds to create content of public significance (Implementation Plan 2016). According to **Kristers Pļešakovs**, Head of the Media Policy Division at the MoC, the funding available for the national media in 2020 was 733 159 euros and projects in nine categories were supported, including media literacy, media criticism, minorities, and investigative and analytical journalism.[18] One of the projects supported in 2020 with 20 925 euros, for example, was a project "Exposed" by the daily newspaper Latvijas Avīze that aims to counter Russian disinformation by analysing what information is published about Latvia in Russian media and publishing regular disinformation reviews that describe propaganda trends and refute false information.[19] It is currently possible to only get funding for Latvian-language content although Pļešakovs said that he would personally allocate some funds for content in Russian. The National Security Concept (2019) also saw the need to expand MSF further, but these plans are now on hold due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

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[18] There was also 455 439 euros available for the regional media, the regional programme had four categories.

[19] The disinformation reviews could be found at www.la.lv/category/zinas/latvijas-avize-atmasko (19 October 2020). For other projects funded see the website of the Society Integration Foundation at sif.gov.lv.

Information space of Russia is still very influential in Latvia, especially amongst native Russian speakers. According to Latvijas Fakti (2017, 7), almost every third (32%) inhabitant "lives" in Russia's information space. Two thirds (63%) of the Latvian population tend to watch television programmes produced in Russia, e.g. PBK, NTV Mir Baltic or RTR-Planeta. Although the largest audience of Russian TV is amongst non-Latvians (82%), more than half (52%) of the surveyed Latvians also regularly or sometimes watch programmes produced in Russia (Ibid., 13). The only socio-demographic group where the audience of Russian TV channels is less than 50% were respondents under the age of 34 (Ibid.), which is partly explainable by the fact that younger people tend not to watch television that much overall. 68% of Latvians and 40% of non-Latvians watch Latvian public broadcasting television at least several times a week (Juzefovičs 2019).

The survey of Latvijas Fakti (2017, 43–49) also provides a comprehensive overview of the most popular and trusted media in Latvia. Delfi.lv (27%), tvnet.lv (16%), apollo.lv (10%), Panorama (10%) and LTV1 (9%) were mentioned as most frequently used for news. There were big differences in what ethnic Latvians and non-Latvians chose as the most reliable sources of media.[20] Amongst Latvians most reliable media were delfi.lv (19%), LTV1 (16%), Panorama (evening news in LTV1) (14%), tvnet.lv (10%) and Latvian Radio 1 (10%). Amongst non-Latvians most reliable media were delfi.lv (18%), PBK (15%), RTR-Planeta (7%), PBK news (6%) and Panorama (6%).

The "Study into audience of the Latvian Television and Latvian Radio" of 2019 commissioned by the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence provides insights into public opinion about media policy initiatives to counter Russian information warfare. 37% of Latvian speaking respondents supported restricting either Russian news and current affairs shows or Russian TV channels fully, whereas the support amongst Russian speakers was only 7,7% (Figure 4) (Juzefovičs 2019). The study also asked whether there should be more programmes in Russian in Latvian public broadcasting television and radio to promote awareness about local processes across all social groups: 41% of Latvian speakers agreed compared to 77% of Russian-speakers (Ibid.).

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[20] Each respondent got to choose three media. In total, 774 Latvians and 308 non-Latvians were asked.

RECENT EVENTS IN UKRAINE HAVE SPARKED A
DISCUSSION ABOUT THE IMPACT OF RUSSIAN MEDIA ON
LATVIAN POLITICS. WHAT SHOULD LATVIA DO FIRST?

- Impose restrictions on retransmission of Russian television channels in Latvia

- Impose restrictions on retransmission of Russian television news and current affairs shows in Latvia and allow only entertainment programmes and films
- Create Latvian public service TV channel in Russian

- Find out whether and how Russian television influences views and actions of Latvian population

- Do nothing

- Don't know

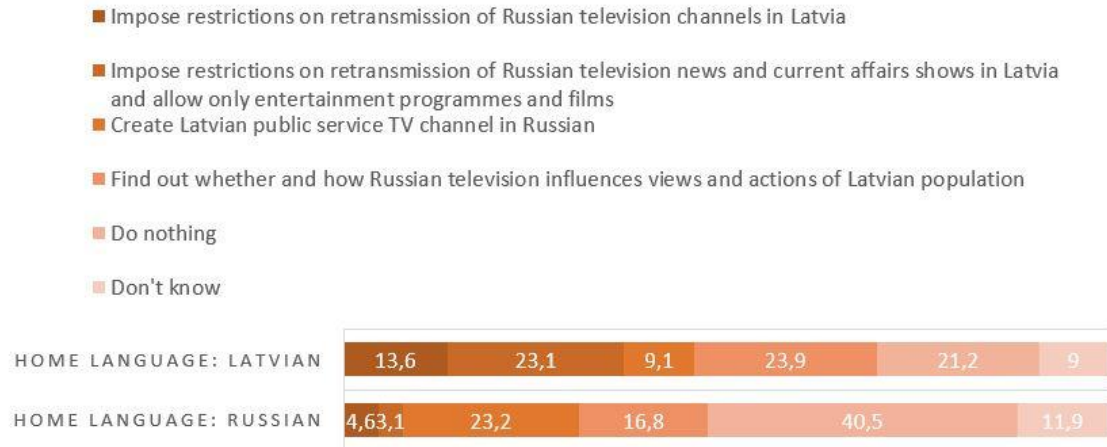| HOME LANGUAGE: LATVIAN | 13,6 | 23,1 | 9,1 | 23,9 | 21,2 | 9 |
| HOME LANGUAGE: RUSSIAN | 4,63,1 | 23,2 | 16,8 | 40,5 | 11,9 |

Figure 4. Attitudes to media policy initiatives in Latvia (Juzefovičs 2019).

The Guidelines (2016) do not specifically address the need to decrease the influence of Russia's information space. As part of increasing the resilience of the media environment, it is only mentioned that it is crucial to support the creation and dissemination of quality mass media content to reach minorities living in Latvia with the aim of "strengthening their consciousness of statehood and a sense of belonging to Latvia." The National Security Concept, approved three years later in 2019, on the other hand, specifically prescribes that a "long-term alternative should be offered for reduction of the influence of the information space of Russia in terms of the content itself, concurrently with the development of public media…", and that public media should create and offer the minorities good quality content "as an alternative to the sources of information representing the information space of Russia, providing the possibilities to choose from".

Russian-language public broadcasting is currently available in Latvia both in radio, television and online. In radio, Latvijas Radio 4 is the only Russian public broadcasting radio channel, similar to Raadio 4 in Estonia. Similar to rus.err.ee there is also a Russian language online news portal – rus.lsm.lv. It is not widely popular though – only 18% of Russian speakers would miss lsm.lv when discontinued (Juzefovičs 2019). As pointed out by Rožukalne (2020, 17), the Russian and English language online portals are also funded by special programs which makes it not possible to ensure media sustainability and staff development. In television, LTV7 provides some news and current affairs content in

Russian. It is not fully in Russian, though, like ETV+ in Estonia. Even though the Security Concept prescribes the need to invest more in public media, including that in the Russian language, this desire has so far not materialised, and the funding for Latvian public broadcasting continues to be one of the lowest in the European Union (Ibid., 10). "From year to year we have to deal with this problem that the government does not allocate enough funds for public media," said Pļešakovs.

There are going to be changes in the Russian language public broadcasting with the National Electronic Media Council (NEPLP), as the main stakeholder, planning to move Russian language content of LTV7 online to a new multimedia platform based on lsm.lv, starting from 2021. The chairman of NEPLP, Ivars Āboliņš explained in May 2020 that the main reason was low viewership figures for LTV7 Russian language content and seeing the quality of the channel's journalism, in his opinion, the minorities will be better reached with the new platform (Petrova 2020). In September 2020, the viewing timeshare for LTV7 was 2,6% compared to 8,2% for RTR-Planeta, the most popular Russian language TV channel (Table 7)(Kantar 2020a).

Channel and its viewing timeshare (of the total viewing time) in September 2020			
TV3	12,2%	NTV Mir Baltic	5,7%
LTV1	10,0%	REN TV Baltic	3,7%
RTR-Planeta	8,2%	TV3 Life	3,0%
PBK	6,5%	LTV7	2,6%

Table 7. Most popular TV channels in Latvia based on viewership (Kantar 2020a).

The National Security Concept (2019) sees a need to invest in public and commercial media to offer a long-term alternative to Russia's information space and the need to increase funding for public media so that it could raise quality and compete with the commercial media. It also prescribes that a comprehensible alternative of good quality should be created and offered to the minorities as an alternative to Russia's information space. NEPLP's decision to stop broadcasting Russian content on LTV7 thus seems to be at odds with the Concept as a large segment of the society, mostly older people who are not that active online, would be left without balanced and objective information.

Starting from March 2020 when PBK ended its local evening news programme "Latvian Time"[21], LTV7 has been the only channel to broadcast news from Latvia, competing with Russian television channels that produce its news from Russia, e.g. RTR-Planeta. Kristers Pļešakovs said that after PBK news was closed at the beginning of March, the channel was given a temporary right to rebroadcast news and public affairs programmes from LTV7 in order to inform the Russian-speaking audience about the crisis. If NEPLP's decision to move Russian-language content from LTV7 online also involved the news content (as is the plan currently), it would mean that the only Russian-language news available on bigger television channels would be that coming from the channels based in Russia, e.g. RTR-Planeta.

Daiga Holma, Head of the Strategic Communication Coordination Department at the State Chancellery, supports NEPLP's decision, mainly since the ratings of LTV7 had been not sufficient, several attempts to strengthen it notwithstanding. Responding to the criticism, she says that, on the contrary, the decision is driven by the desire to strengthen the provision of information to the Russian-speaking community by providing them with a modern and up-to-date communication channel: "When we also monitor the media, we see that more and more people are moving to internet platforms and look for information there. I believe that a strengthened channel on the internet, which is modern and can be viewed from different electronic devices, instead of providing a couple of broadcasts per day with LTV7, would be an efficient solution in those circumstances". She added that older people aged 70-80 have also started to spend more time on internet.

The interviewees from the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Defence were not as enthusiastic about the discontinuation of LTV7's Russian language content. "Personally, I think that the decision will push some part of the society to Russian information space and we should really think about investing more in public media and develop not only the online platform but also TV," Kristers Pļešakovs from the MoC said. Head of the Military Public Information Section at MoD, **Dace Kundrāte**, also said that "it is best when we communicate as much and with as many channels as we can. As we are reducing the

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[21] PBK also stopped its news programmes in Estonia, citing "disproportionate economic pressure from government and law enforcement agencies". "Latvian Time" was the most popular Russian-language news programme in Latvia, gathering an average of 96,000 viewers in 2019 (Delfi 2020c). Although the channel itself could be classified as a propaganda channel, the news programme itself, at least in Estonia, had been perceived as relatively balanced and objective (see pages 61-62).

number of channels, we are reducing our chances to spread our narrative". According to NEPLP, almost 440 000 euros would be needed to create a new multimedia platform in Russian (Petrova 2020). According to Pļešakovs, as of December 2020 it was still not known when the content will be moved to the new multimedia platform as there are not enough funds currently to launch the platform in the beginning of 2021 as planned.

Latvians also see restricting the retransmission of media channels, i.e. blocking, as a measure to counter Russian information influence. This is also referred to in the National Security Concept (2019) which prescribes that the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive should be incorporated into the Latvian legal acts more actively to combat hate speech and incitement to violence expressed in Russian television programmes. The Electronic Mass Media Law (article 24 paragraph 4) prescribes that "the electronic media shall ensure that facts and events are presented in a fair, objective manner, with appropriate accuracy and neutrality, facilitating the exchange of views and in accordance with generally accepted principles of journalism and ethics".[22] In addition, article 26 of the law prohibits programmes to include:

1) content which accentuates violence;
2) materials of a pornographic nature;
3) incitement to violence or incitement to hatred or discrimination against any person or group of persons on the grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, nationality, religion or belief, disability, age or any other motive;
4) incitement to war or provocation of military conflict;
5) incitement to overthrow state power, or to violently change the State political system, to destroy the territorial integrity of the State, or to commit any other crime;
6) content that discredits Latvian statehood and national symbols;
7) content which endangers national security or significantly endangers public order or security (entered into force in July 2020);

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[22] Articles 24 and 36 apply to channels that are either registered in Latvia or that are not part of the EU or the European Convention on Transfrontier Television, e.g. Russia and Belarus.

8) public praise or justification of terrorism or public provocation to terrorism, or content glorifying, justifying or inciting to terrorism (entered into force in July 2020); or

9) content that endangers public health or that could pose serious risks (entered into force in July 2020) (Electronic Mass Media Law 2021).

The institution supervising compliance with the law in Latvia is the National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP) that, *inter alia*, issues broadcast and retransmission permits, carries out monitoring of the electronic mass media (they have a separate monitoring department for that), and compiles and examines complaints submitted by viewers and listeners regarding the operations of the electronic mass media (NEPLP 2012). If a channel is found to violate the law, NEPLP can impose sanctions: a fine, suspension or revocation of its broadcast or retransmission licence. Starting from 2014, NEPLP has restricted the retransmission of Russian television channels at least five times (Appendix 11), mostly citing hate speech. RTR-Planeta has been suspended three times: twice for three months and once for six months. The last suspension took place in July 2020 when RT and its affiliate channels were blocked because of being controlled by Dmitry Kiselyov who is included in the list of persons subjected to restrictive measures in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine.

Kristers Pļešakovs from the MoC thought restricting the retransmission of Russian channels is an effective measure, even though most, if not all, of the content can also be found online. "Older people in the society will not go online to search for these channels so, for example, when we block [RTR-Planeta] for a period of time, they would have to switch to some other channel. In that way we can maybe change their viewing habits, and they would not return to this hostile channel anymore," he said. Pļešakovs added that Latvia is also actively combating illegal content and restricting service providers online.

Pļešakovs and Holma from the State Chancellery did not see that blocking a channel would go against the freedom of speech. "We can only close the channels which strictly go against the law, for example, that project hate speech. Democratic values are essential for us. These few cases where channels have been closed, have been for a reason," Holma

said. She added that most of the state's efforts are still concentrated into building trust towards national media and increasing the critical thinking skills in the society.

Views towards regulating information influence in the European Union

Out of the three Baltic states, Latvia has the clearest approach to countering information influence in the EU. Already in March 2020, Latvia published a position paper (Appendix 12) presenting a comprehensive view on the future regulatory environment it seeks in relation to managing disinformation in the EU. "Dealing with different online harms on a sectorial basis and relying on the goodwill of online platforms to tackle vaguely defined issues is no longer viable," the paper said (Towards a Better... 2020). Latvia also led the drafting process of the second position paper on COVID-19 and disinformation that was published in June[23], and joined France and Lithuania in a joint statement in September to call for "further steps towards accountability and transparency of online platforms in addressing disinformation" (Joint Statement... 2020).[24]

The basic tenets of Latvia's policy were already outlined in the 2019 National Security Concept. It prescribed that Latvia's priority interest in the EU is to achieve that the private sector also takes effective measures against disinformation and that there should be more responsibility and transparency from the IT companies (NSS 2017, 20). Regarding the European Commission's Code of Practice, the Concept said that if the comprehensive assessment found that the Code is inefficient, Latvia should "promote a discussion regarding the necessity of regulatory measures".[25]

Viktors Makarovs, Special Envoy on Information Security at the MFA pointed at two fundamental problems with the Code: first, it does not offer a set of clear, specific, and measurable criteria for monitoring and assessing how the platforms deal with disinformation and secondly, the Code does not offer any enforcement mechanisms.

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[23] The paper was co-signed by the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia. For more information see pages 65-66.

[24] For more discussion on the Joint Statement by the Presidents of France and Lithuania and the Prime Minister of Latvia on the Protection of Democracies, see also page 65.

[25] European Commission's Action Plan against Disinformation (2018) brought out that if the implementation and impact of the Code proves unsatisfactory, the Commission may propose normal regulation instead of a voluntary approach. A comprehensive assessment of the Code prepared for the Commission in May 2020 concluded *inter alia* that although the Code has produced positive results there is need for a mechanism for action in case of non-compliance and further support for monitoring of the Code (Plasilova et al. 2020, 5–6). For a better overview, see pages 42-43.

"I believe we need a fundamentally different system. Something that is more specific and contains criteria that can be assessed. At the moment, the Code says, 'we promise that we will do something,' and when they ask the companies to report, they say all the good things that they have done. And that's it. There should be some benchmarks instead" (Viktors Makarovs).

The position paper (Towards a Better... 2020) published in March 2020 sees that the approach should be based on the European Democracy Action Plan and the Digital Services Act.[26] The first step should be to develop a clear set of shared definitions, implementation criteria, and oversight mechanisms for social platforms (Ibid.). The paper brings out three underlying principles of this approach:

1. primacy of fundamental rights, *inter alia* privacy, protection of personal data, freedom of thought, expression and information,
2. focus on combating malicious behaviour online and not on regulating content, and
3. full and effective accountability and transparency of technology companies and social platforms regarding the fulfilment of their commitments on tackling disinformation and information manipulation campaigns (cited from Ibid.).

Based on these principles, the position paper argues, the EU should pursue a number of goals *vis-à-vis* internet platforms to deal with information influence (Appendix 12). Makarovs said that at least part of the commitments demanded from the platforms should be compulsory for all platforms. Currently, it is voluntary for the internet platforms to join the Code and as of September 2020, six online platforms had signed the Code (European Commission 2020c). "If they are an actor, a significant player on the European market, they should be obliged to live up to these commitments," he said.

Makarovs explained that a big part of the problem is also the lack of transparency from the platforms when it comes to, for example, eliminating inauthentic activity on the internet. He said that currently countries do not have exact information on what resources Facebook or other platforms have in place to deal with inauthentic activity (e.g. bots) successfully. There is a similar situation when it comes to access to data for researchers.

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[26] The Democracy Action Plan was published on 3 December 2020 (European Commission 2020b) and the Digital Services Act on 15 December 2020 (European Commission 2020d).

"They tell you what they have done or how many fake accounts they have taken down. What we do not know is how they would deal with a potential crisis when, for example, in a certain market, bots suddenly become more active. Are they prepared to deal with that? Do they have enough resources and fact-checkers? We do not know about it. Compare that with the banking sector where they have very clear criteria about preparedness. No-one is going to wait for a bank to fail" (Viktors Makarovs).

That lack of transparency also relates to platforms' algorithmic designs that tend to encourage filter bubbles and echo chambers.[27] Presuming that these bubbles undermine democracies by reenforcing disinformation, Makarovs said, the way platforms currently treat the issue is unsatisfactory. The Latvian position paper calls for EU-wide basic standards for social responsibility in algorithmic design.

"This does not mean that we want the companies to disclose the "secret sauce" of their algorithms, that is a commercial secret, I understand why they want to retain that. But this is also about the public interest, this is about politics, this is about society – they have the power to diversify peoples' information diets. They are not doing that in a consistent manner, and they are not transparent about that" (Viktors Makarovs).

The position paper also sees a need for the EU to address the challenge of closed messaging groups such as WhatsApp or Signal that have become increasingly popular, both in terms of users but also for disinformation purveyors. It is said in the paper that social platforms need to introduce solutions that prevent the use of private groups for information influencing. Viktors Makarovs explained that there are technical solutions already available (bots on the platform) that would allow warning people in closed groups about false information whilst protecting encryption. Another possible option worth considering would be the concept of scalable sociality.

"Scalable sociality means that if you have a small group of members, you can stay fully private and encrypted, but if you go beyond that, there is an argument that this is actually a public discussion. If you communicate with 10-20 people, it is logical to assume that this is a private matter where you exercise your rights to privacy, but if you have hundreds

[27] For a brief discussion on algortihms and internet platforms, see pages 19 and 37.

or thousands of people in the group, you are actually already having a public debate, and perhaps the rest of the public has the right to know about it" (Viktors Makarovs).

Daiga Holma, Head of the Strategic Communication Coordination Department at the State Chancellery, said that the Chancellery is the contact point (e.g. EU Rapid Alert System) for exchanging information between the government and the platforms. She said they have had good cooperation with the platforms for several years already, and they have also established their own mechanisms for exchanging information and discussing problematic issues. "I should praise all of the platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic during which they were very active, proactively giving support and instruments how to support us in crisis," she said. The government is not actively communicating with platforms (e.g. ordering them) to take down inauthentic behaviour such as bots though, mostly relying on monitoring activities, as **Dace Kundrāte**, Head of the Military Public Information Section of the Military Public Affairs Department of MoD said.

4.3. Lithuania

4.3.1. Information influence in strategic documents

Countering Russian information influence activities in Lithuania is framed primarily by the National Security Strategy 2017 (*Nacionalinio saugumo strategija 2017*) and the Defence Policy White Paper 2017 (*Lietuvos gynybos politikos Baltoji knyga 2017*). The Strategy is approved by the Seimas and defines the main interests of national security, the key risk factors, dangers, and threats posed to these interests, and sets the priorities of developing the national security system and foreign, defence, and domestic policies (NSS 2017). The current strategy replaces that of 2012. The Defence Policy White Paper presents the priorities and aims of Lithuania in the field of defence. As it is noted in the foreword of the White Paper, the paper is intended for the wider public and seeks to explain why a particular defence policy is implemented, what the goals are, and what tasks need to be accomplished in national defence.

Compared to Estonia or Latvia, Lithuanian strategic documents do not frame its security policy vision under a broader umbrella term, such as broad security concept, psychological resilience/defence, or comprehensive national defence. This does not mean that Lithuanian security thinking is void of similar tendencies, though. As the Minister of

National Defence Raimundas Karoblis states in the foreword of the White Paper (2017, 5), "[a]s the nature of threats we face changes, preparedness of society, its will, and resolve to defend the country, acquire a greater significance". Also, strengthening the civil society and the country's cultural and national identity are brought out as some of the priorities of the national security policy (NSS 2017, 13). In addition, the Concept prescribes (Ibid.) strengthening patriotism, civic and political engagement, the sense of community of the population, fostering historical memory and society's racial, ethnic and religious tolerance and seeks comprehensive participation of ethnic communities in public life to ensure cohesive national relations.

Information and cyber threats are brought out in the White Paper as one of the three most important long-term challenges to Lithuania's security, together with Russian revisionism and threats rising in NATO's Southern neighbourhood. It is noted that Russia is aggressively spreading unfounded and misleading information to shape public opinion on national security questions, and in the future, due to increased use of information and communication technologies, the number of information attacks, especially those directed towards specific target groups, is likely to increase (Lithuanian Defence Policy White Paper 2017, 9). Information threats are also mentioned in the Strategy where it is marked that "military and non-military (diplomatic, information, cyber, economic, energy, financial, legal) measures against the national security of the Republic of Lithuania may be used concurrently seeking to affect the most vulnerable areas of the State" (NSS 2017, 5). Social exclusion and poverty also decrease society's resilience to negative external influence and lead to distrust of state institutions and the Lithuanian political system (Ibid., 6–7). The Strategy also notes that since domestic progress is necessary for Lithuania's security and sustainable national development, information security together with cyber and public security, and issues of social exclusion, demographics, economics, energy, and environment are all seen as integral parts of national security (Ibid., 4).

Concrete measures regarding information influence activities are brought out both in the Security Strategy and the Defence Policy White Paper (Appendix 13). The White Paper has a slightly narrower focus, though, presenting actions that the National Defence System is already taking to increase societal resilience and limit the impact of information attacks (Lithuanian Defence Policy White Paper 2017, 54–55):

- monitoring and analysis of the information domain to determine the targets, scale, and means of the information attacks,

- conducting a wide range of public education campaigns to help increase society's resilience to information attacks, e.g. delivering presentations about propaganda and information attacks to schools, local and state institutions, cultural, business and other non-governmental organisations,

- explaining the benefits of being a NATO ally to the society, and

- promoting bilateral and multilateral cooperation with NATO and EU institutions and member states that face similar challenges.

The Security Strategy, on the other hand, prescribes actions that the state ought to take in order to create a secure information environment and protect its political system (NSS 2017, 12–13) (Appendix 13). In total, there are seven actions brought out:

- implementing national public awareness-raising and education policy and strengthening media literacy,

- promoting country-wide dissemination and accessibility of objective and good-quality media, and increasing media's financial transparency,

- preventing by legal means the dissemination of information that incites changing the constitutional order by force and encroaches on its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence, which spreads war propaganda and instigates war or hatred,

- increasing public awareness of the benefits of NATO and the EU membership,

- encouraging NATO and the EU to implement measures against the challenges of hybrid warfare,

- strengthening stratcom capacity of state institutions and developing a mechanism for coordinating stratcom carried out by Lithuanian institutions, and

- informing the international community about information threats and their impact.

4.3.2. Setup and understanding of strategic communication

On a national level, Lithuanian strategic communications capabilities are distributed among a few key institutions such as the Office of the Government (LRVK), MoD, MFA and the Armed Forces. The key role is played by LRVK, more specifically the Threats Management and Crisis Prevention Group, which is coordinating strategic communication in the field of national defence and the response to all threats outlined in the National Security Strategy.[28] Media policy and projects related to media literacy are under the responsibility of MoC, whereas MoE focuses on integrating media literacy into school curricula. Engaging in the EU legislative discussions on further regulation of social media platforms is the responsibility of the MFA. The Strategic Communications Division at the Communications and Cultural Diplomacy Department of the MFA also runs communications campaigns to foreign audiences[29], cooperates in various international and inter-institutional formats, and organises and participates in topical events and conferences related to information influence activities.

The Lithuanian Security Strategy (2017) prescribes that in order to create a secure information environment and protect Lithuania's political system, there is a need to develop a mechanism for coordinating stratcom carried out by the institutions. **Romanas Judinas**, an advisor to the Threats Management and Crisis Prevention Group at LRVK, explained that to coordinate stratcom among state institutions, an expert level Strategic Communication Coordination Working Group (SCCWG) has been established that reports to the Joint Threat Prevention and Crisis Management Group, led by the Chancellor of the Government.[30] SCCWG has regular meetings and is composed of representatives of all the ministries and main institutions (from mainly public affairs or stratcom divisions) related to national defence, including intelligence. According to an **official** at the Strategic Communications Division of the Communications and Cultural Diplomacy Department of the MFA, most of the time the SCCWG discusses proactive

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[28] The Group prepares and submits to the Government, the Prime Minister and other responsible institutions an assessment of threats to national security; carries out forecasting of crises, coordinates their prevention and ensures that public authorities are informed in a timely manner; and ensures the ability of the Crisis Management Committee to respond to emerging crises on a 24/7 basis (LRVK 2020).
[29] These campaigns can be followed on Twitter @LT_MFA_Stratcom.
[30] In addition to the Strategic Communication Coordination Working Group there is also the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessing the State of National Security and the Working Group on Threat Prevention and Crisis Management (Nutarimas dėl jungtinės grėsmių 2020).

campaigns on which the state is going to communicate. "We also discuss how to react to disinformation attacks or discuss lessons learned. Whenever there is a disinformation attack, we meet afterwards to discuss what went wrong and what we could have done better," the official said.

According to a procedure for the coordination of stratcom in national security, developed in 2020 by the SCCWG, state institutions are responsible for monitoring and evaluating the information environment in their areas of activity (Nutarimas dėl strateginės komunikacijos... 2020). The document also brings out criteria the institutions should assess when responding to information incidents (Appendix 14). Each criterion is assessed on a 3- or 4-point scale and, depending on the final score, a response to the information incident is recommended (Appendix 15). The institution prepares an assessment report (Appendix 16) and sends it within two working hours to LRVK who then, in cooperation with SCCWG, approves or dismisses the threat level and, if the threat is serious enough, coordinates the response (e.g. messaging). The strongest response would, for example, require the engagement of the prime minister and members of the government (Ibid.). The criteria considered when assessing information incidents are its

1) source (capability to disseminate information, influence),
2) content (potential to influence the public or the decision-making related to national security), and
3) context (whether the (geo)political context is favourable to influence the decision-making processes) (Ibid.).

As the Defence Policy White Paper (2017) lays out, Lithuanian Armed Forces (LAF) Strategic Communications Department "monitors and analyses the information domain to determine the targets, the scale and the means of information attacks". **Tomas Čeponis**, an Analysis Specialist at the LAF Strategic Communications Department, said that LAF is mostly focused on pre-planned and coordinated information influence activities originating from other countries, they are not that much concerned with misinformation. Čeponis explained that within the department, there is a section that monitors the

information environment, especially that which relates to either Lithuania or LAF.[31] In addition to Lithuanian, they also monitor the media in other languages, for example, German, since there is a German-led eFP Battlegroup in Lithuania. If the monitors find something that might be a threat to the LAF or Lithuania (e.g. a cyber-attack or disinformation), they do an initial investigation and send it to their supervisors who decide on how to respond (it might also be better to ignore disinformation to not amplify it). "When we do the initial investigation, we can only go up to the IP-address if it is on the internet. If we see some propaganda on TV, we react differently. As a military we cannot deal with real persons so we would simply pass this information to the police or the State Security Department," Čeponis noted. He said that one of the possible actions would also be to let the media know of the cyber-attack or disinformation.

In 2020, LAF Stratcom Department also started to do monthly press releases giving an overview of the Lithuanian information environment. As Čeponis said, these releases are shortened versions of the monthly reports done internally, before 2020 such releases were done yearly. On 5 December, for example, LAF reports (Lietuvos kariuomenė 2020b) that the Stratcom Department identified a total of 308 pieces of disinformation in November, originating mainly from Russian and Belarusian information spaces. It is said that "hostile information was disseminated purposefully in order to cause people's dissatisfaction, to encourage frustrations, to mislead, to divide society". The report brought out the main targets of disinformation (e.g. Lithuania's energy dependency, country's foreign policy), also the dates when disinformation was the highest and the reasons for it.[32] It was also brought out that 34% of the disinformation was related to economics and energy, 23% to foreign policy and 20% to defence.[33]

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[31] In addition to the information environment monitoring section there is also the military public affairs section and a section dealing with information operations (infoops). As Čeponis explained, during peacetime information operations can only be used either in international missions or in trainings.

[32] Disinformation peaked on 3-13 November, 16-21 November 16-21, and 26-29 November and was related to the start of operations of Astravets Nuclear Power Plant, the agreement between Lithuania and the USA on the acquisition of UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, the visit of Polish President Duda to Lithuania, the Baltic decision on new sanctions on Belarus, the IX traditional Free Russia Forum in Vilnius, President Nausėda's conversation with Tsikhanouskaya, and NATO and national military exercises "Brilliant Jump" and "Iron Wolf" (Lietuvos kariuomenė 2020b).

[33] For some of the previous press releases and news articles, see BNS 2020b, 2020a, n.d., n.d.; Delfi 2020; Lietuvos kariuomenė 2020c, 2020a.

Home-grown information influence activities are a bigger challenge to LAF. "When somebody from inside the country with Lithuanian name starts to do these activities then it is definitely a success for Russia," Čeponis noted. He said that in these cases, LAF can only help with observation and analysis – the main institutions involved are the police and the State Security Department. Romanas Judinas said that there was lots of misinformation during the COVID-19 crisis and even calls for action – either not to wear a mask or to disobey government orders. "There are legal challenges there because you should be very precise on what you are naming as dangerous activity and what is freedom of expression," Judinas said. He said that since COVID-19 misinformation did not affect national security, LRVK only took notice of the misinformation, and the state relied on media and the civil society to react to these calls.

The Security Strategy (NSS 2017) also prescribes to strengthen the stratcom capacity of state institutions. Romanas Judinas said that this is done by establishing stratcom departments in institutions dealing with national security issues. Some, such as the MoD, MFA and LAF have already established functioning stratcom departments, others, such as the Ministry of Interior, are still working on it. Judinas explained that for the stratcom departments to be fully operational, they would have to have the right toolkit (e.g. social media accounts), monitoring capabilities, and the capacity to do stratcom campaigns. "Two or three years ago we only had the MFA, MoD and the Armed Forces [with these capabilities]. Now we have other institutions catching up," he said.

Tomas Čeponis from LAF said that strengthening Lithuania's strategic communication capacity should be viewed more widely as an all-society approach that would also include developing a community of officials and experts knowledgeable about stratcom, informing and educating the public about information threats (e.g. LAF stratcom experts conduct a wide range of public education campaigns, give presentations in schools, municipalities, local communities etc.), and developing and enforcing the laws (e.g. restricting the retransmission of Russian television channels that spread hate speech). One of the steps, Čeponis explained, would also be motivating the society through creating a national narrative that everybody would understand. He noted that the narrative, common to all institutions, could later be spread through media, such as articles, films or TV-series. "The more useful and trustful information about Lithuania we could

manage to put out for the society, the less space will be left for the Russian propaganda," he said.

Čeponis said that the armed forces have already developed a written narrative, the "Lithuanian CV" – a kind of manual that includes the main themes and messages about relevant topics and historical events. Part of LAF's stratcom themes and messaging (e.g. on NATO and on allied soldiers in Lithuania) can be seen in Appendix 17 – this document is renewed yearly or on special occasions and the full version also involves suggestions for units on how to use it. Čeponis explained that as every person has a CV, so does Lithuania. "There is a lot of history in this narrative, but we believe that history is not only about the past, it is also about the future of our country. An example would be that more than 600 years ago we chose our religion and by doing that we openly declared that we are going to be a country with Western standards…So some specific historical steps many years ago actually show the way for the future of our country," he said. Čeponis noted that, although he would like to see Lithuania have a common brand narrative, this would be difficult to agree on between different institutions. Rather, it is much easier for the institutions to agree on how to communicate smaller bits of narratives, e.g. the beginning of the Second World War.

Romanas Judinas from LRVK was not as enthusiastic about having a "master narrative" for Lithuanian institutions. "A written manual on how to express yourself is not the best way to speak about yourself…Not so sure if it is the best idea in an open and flexible society. Discussion and dialogue are the best way to project our narratives," Judinas said. The official from the MFA said she had not heard about the "Lithuanian CV" nor the desire from LAF to have a common "master narrative". She welcomed the idea but noted that at the same time, this narrative would have to be very generic and would not be able to focus on many things MFA sees important. The official said that on certain events state institutions have already started to coordinate their communication activities more. As an example, she brought out commemorating the Victory Day in Europe on 8 May when the institutions came together to discuss a common stratcom campaign to project both to internal and external audiences. "We came up with certain lines to take, five points or so, that we could use in all formats, whether we are communicating on social media or whether our minister is going to a certain event abroad," the official said.

Romanas Judinas said that the narratives that Lithuania projects, including to counter hostile information, are not specifically contrasted with Russian narratives. He noted that the institutions (e.g. MFA) used to do more debunking in 2014-2016 following the War in Ukraine, but now they have changed their tactics and concentrate on telling their own story because debunking put them too much on the defensive mode. "We prefer to ignore [the Russian narratives] as much as we can and not play this ping-pong. They have bigger resources, and if we always react, we would not be able to concentrate on our own planned activities, we would just be responding to them, defending our interests. We react where we have to react," Judinas said.

Regarding shortcomings, Romanas Judinas brought out that there is a lack of constantly planned stratcom campaigns in the institutions. "There are several institutions who are working with it, but we are still not so good, because of lack of resources and experts in the institutions, as we expect to be...It's a long road for a perfect Lithuanian stratcom system," he said. Tomas Čeponis also said that although the overall level achieved is quite good, there is still a lack of resources and manpower. He noted that communication activities currently make up less than 1% of the overall Lithuanian defence budget, which is not enough. He added that there is also a need for more research into Russian activities from the EU and NATO.

4.3.3. Media literacy in formal education

Lithuanians are less confident in identifying fake news than other European nations, according to Eurobarometer 2018. In Europe, more than two-thirds (71%) felt at least "somewhat confident" in their ability to recognise false news – in Lithuania that figure was 65%, just between Latvia (68%) and Estonia (64%) (European Commission 2018c, 16). Even though the Eurobarometer study showed that the more educated a person is, the more confident he/she is also in identifying false information, this is not supported by a (Ramonaitė 2018, 159–64) who does not see a strong link between political literacy and the ability to resist propaganda, especially if propaganda clashes with person's beliefs.

The Lithuanian National Security Strategy (2017, 12) prescribes that in order to create a secure information environment and protect its political system, Lithuania will, amongst other things, implement national public awareness-raising and education policy and

strengthen media literacy in order to increase public resilience to information threats. In addition, the Defence Policy White Paper (2017, 13) talks about the need to continue the "large scale public education campaign on recognising and deconstructing propaganda, disinformation, and other information attacks".

Media literacy is also focused on in the Strategic Directions of the Public Information Policy 2019-2022. The document brings out that Lithuanian residents are not critical of the content presented in public information channels and media is rarely seen as an instrument of influence – "the residents tend to notice and criticise potentially hidden advertising rather than potential political manipulations or propaganda" (Strategic directions... 2019, 11). At the end of 2017, Lithuanian society's literacy in using the media stood at 38% (Ibid.). One of the goals of the document is to develop the media and information literacy of the society as a strategic and inter-institutional coordinated priority that develops the critical thinking in the society and enables it to evaluate public information and counter unwanted information threats (Ibid., 10). "Since legal instruments in a democratic society will always fall short in capabilities compared to information dissemination, the prohibitions or restrictions of public information established in the laws should not be the only way to counter information threats," the document says and adds that more intelligent tools for stimulating the creativity and critical thinking of the society, such as media literacy, are needed instead (Ibid., 11).

In the basic school curriculum, elements of media literacy can be found mainly in the language subjects and to a lesser extent in social sciences (history and geography) and citizenship education (Appendix 18). Understanding, interpreting, and critically evaluating various texts are brought out as one of the overall aims of language education (Appx. 3 of the Basic School Curriculum... 2016, 2). Pupils (both those learning Lithuanian as the native language but also those learning other languages) are already from the 5th grade taught to find and purposefully select information from several sources and assess its reliability and relevance. In the 7th-8th grade, students learn to differentiate between a fact and an opinion (Ibid., 38, 98), and in the 9th-10th grade, they should be able to critically evaluate information from multiple sources (Ibid., 62, 112). Critical evaluation of information and arguments is specifically brought out in the learning content for Russian and Polish language in the 9th-10th grades (Ibid., 126, 140). In

addition, the search and selection of information sources and evaluation of the information is also present in the curriculum of Lithuanian as a second language.

In addition to languages, there is some integration of media literacy into the curriculum also in social sciences, especially history and geography. Throughout social education, teachers are expected to encourage students to collect information from various sources, and to critically evaluate and summarise it (Appx. 6 of the Basic School Curriculum... 2016, 4). In geography, by the end of 10th grade students should be able to independently select, read, analyse, and critically evaluate the reliability and informativeness of different geographical sources of information (Ibid., 51). In history, students are also taught to see different interpretations of historical events and explain their causes (Ibid., 5). In addition to languages and social sciences, source evaluation is also highlighted in the citizenship education curriculum. The content for grades 9-10 also covers media and the influence of communication technologies on people and their role in a democratic state, and information society together with its problems and dangers (Ibid., 86).

In secondary education, cognitive competence is one of the seven general competences[34] that should be integrated into all subjects, "to become part of school life, to be reflected both in the classroom and in extracurricular activities" (Dėl Vidurinio ugdymo... 2016, 617). The aim of the cognitive competence is to develop a person that is both critical and ready to solve problems, and critical thinking and evaluation of information from multiple sources is also brought out as one of the expected student achievements, besides the ability to seek and analyse information (Ibid., 619). In other subjects, more specifically, media literacy can also, similar to the basic school curriculum, be found mainly in languages and social sciences (Appendix 19). In the curriculum of Lithuanian language and literature for those learning Lithuanian as the native language, there is quite a big emphasis on developing students' reasoning skills, i.e. knowing the types of arguments and assessing their validity (including identifying invalid arguments). It is also explicitly brought out that students are expected to recognise manipulation and propaganda symptoms (Dėl Vidurinio ugdymo... 2016, 94). Part of the learning content concentrates

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[34] In addition to the learning, communication, social civic, initiative and creativity, personal and cultural competences (Dėl Vidurinio ugdymo... 2016, 617–18).

on non-fiction texts and includes, *inter alia,* persuasion, unethical use of rhetoric, rhetoric and advertising, and the linkages between manipulation and rhetoric (Ibid., 104).

Propaganda, advertising texts and linguistic manipulations are also brought out in the curriculum of those pupils who study Polish or Russian as the first language, under the topic "Man among other people" (Ibid., 165, 168). In Polish, this learning content also includes media objectives (e.g. opinion formation), media strategies (presentation of facts, creating drama) and advertising functions and goals. Otherwise, media literacy has been integrated into the curriculum of native languages of national minorities similarly to those learning Lithuanian as the first language, requiring students to evaluate the validity of arguments and assess texts. Compared to Lithuanian as the first language, the curriculum also puts more emphasis on using various sources of information to collect and process information. A strong link between media literacy and information influence activities is made in the section of educational guidelines.

"Students realise that language and the ways of using it affect people's beliefs, attitudes, opinions and worldview. In other words, language affects their ways of thinking and the world in which they operate. They realise that language can be manipulated and are therefore learning to critically evaluate ideas or reliability, popularity, and bias of information. Such experiences are very important in developing a critical, conscious citizen of the society" (Ibid., 140).

Besides languages, media literacy is also integrated into the curricula of information technologies (IT) and social sciences. In IT, the focus is on information literacy which is closely connected to media literacy. As explained in the course structure (but not reflected in the expected achievements of students), the IT course includes the search and selection of information sources, understanding and analysing the information provided, and systematising and presenting the information – all relevant for media literacy (Ibid., 535-538). In social sciences (history, geography and the integrated course in social sciences), media literacy is reflected in a critical approach to media, i.e. ability to find necessary information from various sources and critically evaluate this information and sources. In history, for example, students are expected to critically evaluate the information provided in the historical sources and to recognise bias (Ibid., 370).

4.3.4. Media policy and regulatory action

The main directions, objectives and tasks of the Lithuanian public information policy are outlined in the Strategic Directions of the Public Information Policy 2019–2022, approved on 19 February 2019. The document sets out five policy directions:

1. harmonised and coordinated public information policy,
2. available and reliable public information that reflects the content quality and diversity,
3. transparent and independent public information environment,
4. sustainable state support and tax policy that stimulate creativity, and
5. highly literate society resistant to information threats.

The second direction, in addition to stimulating the regional media in Lithuania, also prescribes to promote diversity of public information content and accessibility of services, and to ensure accessibility of public information services to socially excluded groups and representatives of ethnic communities. This is in line with the National Security Strategy (2017, 12) that also seeks to "promote a country-wide dissemination and accessibility of media content which is of adequate quality and based on objective information".

The Head of the Media and Copyright Policy Unit at the Ministry of Culture, **Deividas Velkas**, brought out increasing transparency of ownership relations and interests of the media as a measure to increase access to good quality media content. In the Strategic Directions (2019), this is brought out under the third direction, "transparent and independent public information environment". As Velkas explained, in the end of 2020, there will be a public information system created that includes all the producers and disseminators of public information (media companies) based in Lithuania. This allows the public to have *inter alia* an overview of the structure as well as financing of these outlets and their main editors. Since 1996 Lithuania also has a Media Support Foundation that supports cultural, public information security, media literacy (since 2014) and educational projects of public information producers, as prescribed in Article 28 of the Law on the Provision of Information to the Public. According to Velkas, the budget for

the supported media projects has remained the same for eight years though with about 2,6 million euros allocated for approximately 300 projects.[35]

According to Kantar (2020), there was only one Russian-language television channel (PBK, 9th place) amongst top 10 most-watched television channels in Lithuania in September 2020 which is understandable since minorities only make up about 14% in the country. The same amount of people, 15% watch Russian television channels daily, whereas 58% never watch it (Ramonaitė 2018, 151). A significant part of this is local Russians and Poles, but also 8% of Lithuanians said that they watch Russian television daily (Table 8). About a half of Russians and Poles also watch Lithuanian channels, (mostly commercial ones) at least several times a week, only 10% admitted never watching them (Jastramskis 2017, 154). Even though examining television consumption, one could say that Russians and Poles are to a large degree in the Russian information sphere, the picture is different when looking at online portals – 50% of Russians and 60% of Polish read news on Lithuanian websites at least once a week and online portals are the only type of media where Lithuanian information channels "win" (Ibid., 157).[36]

	Lithuanians	Russians	Poles	Altogether
Daily or almost daily	8,0%	54,2%	56,8%	14,8%
Several times a week	8,3%	13,9%	21,1%	10,1%
At least once a week	5,9%	11,1%	11,6%	6,8%
At least once a month	6,7%	4,2%	-	6,2%
Never	65,9%	16,7%	8,4%	57,6%

Table 8. Frequency of watching Russian television channels by nationality (Ramonaitė 2018, 151).

A recent survey (EESC 2020, 45) also asked people's opinion about potential counter-propaganda initiatives (Figure 5). The study showed there is no harmonised view to counter disinformation. For example, there was a suggestion to suspend Russian television channels with which only a half of the respondents agreed – these were more likely 26-35-year-old respondents with higher education and higher income (Ibid.).

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[35] The amount allocated to support media literacy projects in 2021 is 432 400 euros.

[36] In Estonia, younger generations of Russians increasingly favour Estonian news portals (available also in Russian) to Russian television channels (see page 60). If this is also true in Lithuania, one could expect the influence of Russia's information space to decline over time.
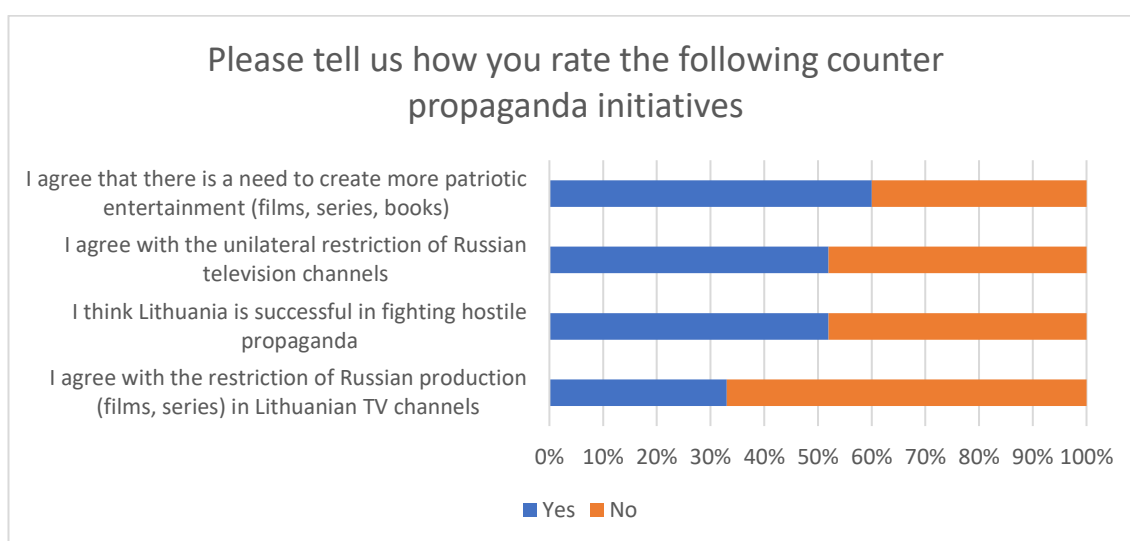
Figure 5. People's opinion towards countering propaganda (EESC 2020, 45).

Tomas Čeponis, an Analysis Specialist at the Strategic Communications Department of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, said that the Armed Forces view Russian television channels such as RT or Sputnik as propaganda channels rather than independent media. Deividas Velkas also said that these channels could be viewed as a threat to Lithuania since they misinterpret facts and spread disinformation. One of the measures that the MoC has proposed, which would also contribute to providing a long-term alternative to Russian channels, is a draft law that would establish a separate support programme in the Media Support Foundation for media outlets in national minority languages.[37] Velkas explained that this is also possible now, but a separate programme would prioritise minorities more and allow to better achieve its objectives.

Lithuania currently has no public broadcasting television nor radio channels in Russian. LRT provides news online in Russian though, in addition to Lithuanian and English. In LRT Plius (television channel) there is a daily Russian news programme (Deutsche Welle in Russian), in addition to limited cultural broadcasting once or twice a week in Russian, Belarussian, Polish and Ukrainian and Russian. There is also a daily Russian news programme in LRT Radijas (radio channel) and daily cultural programmes for Russian and Polish speakers in LRT Klasika (radio channel). According to Deividas Velkas there are currently also no plans to create any additional Russian channels. Bigger discussions

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[37] According to Velkas, a draft law to reform the Media Support Foundation was rejected by the parliament in December 2020 but discussions in the parliament continue.

on establishing a separate Russian-language television channel were held following the annexation of Crimea in 2014. In the end, these plans were abandoned since a separate television channel was considered too expensive to compete with well-funded Russian channels, according to Tomas Čeponis from LAF.

Lithuania also considers restricting the retransmission of Russian television channels for a temporary period as a measure to counter Russian information influence. In the National Security Strategy (2017, 13) it is written that "Lithuania will seek to prevent by legal means the dissemination of information which incites to change the constitutional order of Lithuania by force and encroaches on its sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence, which spreads war propaganda and instigates war or hatred".

The specific criteria[38] for prohibited information are laid out in paragraph 1 of article 19 of the Law on the Provision of Information to the Public that states that it shall be prohibited, *inter alia*, to publish in the media information which:

- incites to violate the sovereignty of the Republic of Lithuania – to change its constitutional order, to encroach on its independence or to infringe its territorial integrity;
- incites or provokes terrorist offences; or
- spreads war propaganda, instigates war or hatred, ridicule, humiliation, instigates discrimination, violence, physical violent treatment of a group of persons or a member of a group on the grounds of age, sex, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, race, nationality, citizenship, language, origin, social status, disability, belief, convictions, views or religion.

Paragraph 2 also stipulates that it shall be prohibited to disseminate disinformation and information which is slanderous and offensive to a person or which degrades his honour and dignity. Deividas Velkas explained that this is very difficult to apply in practice (and this has not been done yet) since disinformation has to be both offensive to a person and/or degrading his honour and dignity. This is why the MoC is currently preparing to change the law to have disinformation as a separate criterion from 2021.

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[38] These criteria apply to channels that are either registered in Lithuania or that are not part of the EU or the European Convention on Transfrontier Television, e.g. Russia and Belarus.

There are three institutions in Lithuania regulating the media landscape: Radio and Television Commission (LRTK), the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics and the self-regulatory Ethics Commission for Public Information. LRTK issues broadcasting and retransmission licences and handles appeals related to audiovisual media whereas the Office of the Inspector is responsible for the rest of the media. Starting from 2013, LRTK has suspended the retransmission licence of Russian channels on cable television networks 10 times, mostly for a period of three months (Appendix 20). These sanctions were mainly caused by violations of laws related to war and incitement to hatred. The longest suspension was in 2018 when RTR-Planeta was deprived of the right to rebroadcast for a year, following a programme that called for the destruction of the United States and the restoration of the Soviet Union with the former territories (Markusa 2018). The last suspension took place in July 2020 when RT and its affiliate channels were blocked for being controlled by Dmitry Kiselyov who is included in the list of persons subjected to restrictive measures in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine (LRTK 2020).

In the view of the Ministry of Culture, blocking Russian television channels should not be the main measure and should only be done in extreme cases. Activities should instead be directed towards raising public awareness about propaganda and increasing media literacy. As Deividas Velkas said, "…when you shut down these channels some parts of the society will think that the government is not trusting the society or that the government does not want to make some information publicly available. I think it would have a negative effect because then the society could distrust the government."

Tomas Čeponis from LAF has a more positive opinion regarding blocking: "…overall democratic systems are difficult to protect from external propaganda influence, but I think that these systems also have some protective measures, and we have to do something. Our understanding is that we are supposed to create some kind of minefields or barbed wire fields to stop the Russian propaganda somehow…Yes, I remember that after first punishing a Russian television channel, some representatives from the EU came to Lithuania and they tried to educate us that we are supposed to be a democratic country and so on, but at same time we educated them that it is actually a danger for the whole EU and NATO".

Views towards regulating information influence in the European Union

In the European Union discussions concerning possible regulatory measures *vis-à-vis* internet platforms, Lithuania has sided with more active member states, calling for more actions and a regulatory mechanism for disinformation. In June 2020, Lithuania, together with Latvia, Estonia, and Slovakia[39] sent the European Commission a position paper, which called the self-regulatory framework, currently in place to hinder information influence activities, "insufficient and unsuitable". In the joint statement published in September 2020, Lithuania joined Latvia and France to once again call for "further steps towards accountability and transparency of online platforms in addressing disinformation" (Joint Statement... 2020).[40]

An **official** at the Strategic Communications Division of the Communications and Cultural Diplomacy Department of the MFA said that the Code of Practice, presented by the European Commission in September 2018 to address the spread of online disinformation and fake news, was not perfectly calibrated to address disinformation from the very start which is why the focus of the Code of Practice naturally shifted to the more tangible areas such as the fight against illegal content or the strengthening of internal advertising policies – all related but not directly to countering information influence. "Bearing in mind the Code of Practice's self-regulatory nature, it was indeed a step forwards, but we see now that a (co-)regulatory mechanism is definitely needed. Amongst our next steps should be to create strong incentives for platforms to act," the official said. The official added that these incentives should, for example, come in the form of regulatory oversight, increased transparency, and accountability standards, as brought out in the new Democracy Action Plan.

The MFA official believed that the European Democracy Action Plan and the Digital Services Act could provide a push towards a long-term and future-oriented approach. The official brought out the importance of imposing costs (e.g. sanctions) on the perpetrators and said that naming the adversaries is also key for a calibrated response, as also brought out in the Action Plan (European Commission 2020b, 20–21). Another topic the MFA deems important to address is the need to analyse the economic damage of disinformation.

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[39] The Czech Republic and Poland later joined these countries. See more on pages 65-66.
[40] For more discussion on the Joint Statement by the Presidents of France and Lithuania and the Prime Minister of Latvia on the Protection of Democracies, see page 65.

"Malign actions that need a relatively small financial input may bring real economic damage, destroy reputations or cause chaos in the financial sector," the official said.

Regarding the Digital Services Act, the official said that they expect the EU to establish a regulatory framework with common standards and obligations for online platforms along with enforcement mechanisms in several areas. These areas include increasing platform capabilities to combat disinformation campaigns online and effective GDPR-compliant sharing of relevant data with independent researchers and fact-checkers.

Romanas Judinas, Advisor to the Threats Management and Crisis Prevention Group at the Office of the Government, said that when it comes to cooperating with internet platforms, Lithuania has established working-level contacts with Facebook as the biggest social media platform in Lithuania. He said it is crucial to have good contact with them before the elections. The MFA official said that although they have also established a dialogue with the platforms on a national level, it is still more practical to concentrate on EU-level talks with them. "There is a tendency for smaller media markets even within the EU to be pushed to the borders of the attempts to counter disinformation. To prevent that, the multilateral level is where the talks need to take place," the MFA official said.

4.4. Discussion

After giving an overview of the measures Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have undertaken to counter Russian information influence, the author now continues with discussing and comparing the three approaches. In order to present a holistic comparison of the approaches, the discussion roughly follows the same logic as the rest of the empirical part: first, strategic documents are compared, followed by a comparison of the strategic communication activities, integration of media literacy into school curricula and then media policies and regulatory measures.

Document analysis of the strategic documents serving as the basis for security policy decisions reveals that countering information influence activities can be approached from multiple terminological angles. The Estonians regard security from the broad perspective and see the neutralisation of information threats as part of a wider concept of "psychological defence" that serves as a tool to build a resilient, coherent and united society. Lithuanians, on the other hand, view the issue from a more traditional point of view, speaking about the need to ensure "information security", along with economic, energy, environmental, cyber, and social security. Latvians, just like geographically, are somewhere in-between in a transitional phase, having only in October 2020 introduced the new Comprehensive National Defence System that is similar to the Estonian system. Differences in terminology do not result in fundamentally different worldviews towards countering information influence though. As several interviewees acknowledged, people are just talking about the same thing with different names. Tomas Čeponis from the Lithuanian Armed Forces, for example, said that instead of psychological defence, they just call it educating society against hostile propaganda.

Contrary to what one would expect from security documents that follow the idea of a broad security concept, the Estonian documents do not actually mention educating society about information threats (or media literacy) at all, focusing mainly on the goal of a resilient and cohesive society that is achieved with the integration of all segments of the society and effective strategic communication, intertwined with psychological defence (Appendix 5). The documents stay on the abstract level though and do not get any more specific than stating that the best tools of psychological defence are informing the public

of attacks, manipulation and false information, and guaranteeing all segments of the society access to multifaceted information (NSC 2017, 20).

The most comprehensive and detailed package to counter Russian information influence is presented in the Latvian National Security Concept (2019)(Appendix 8). In addition to developing and coordinating strategic communication (as Estonia), the document mainly relies on regulatory and non-regulatory media policy measures (including suspending the retransmission of tv channels) to curb Russia's information space. Furthermore, there is also a separate paragraph covering the media policy discussions at the EU level. Taking into account that the strategy also puts emphasis on promoting media literacy in society, one might thus conclude that Latvian strategic documents already approach the issue of countering information influence from a broad perspective, in line with the Estonian vision, notwithstanding the fact that a Comprehensive National Defence System along with the concept of psychological defence (or resilience) was introduced only in October 2020. "For the prevention of threat caused to the information space, on the one hand, its vulnerability should be mitigated and, on the other hand, actions against the particular external information influence activities should be taken," the National Security Concept says and adds that also the civil society and media need to be involved in this (2019, 17).

Albeit being not as detailed as the Latvian documents, the Lithuanian strategic documents also bring out the need to strengthen the strategic communication capacity and coordination of state institutions, promote media literacy awareness-raising of information threats, and lobby NATO and the EU to take more action (Appendix 13). Even though the National Security Strategy (2017, 12) prescribes the need to promote country-wide dissemination and accessibility of good-quality and objective media content, and foresees legal measures as a way to curb the spread of illicit information (e.g. instigation to war or hatred), there is a bit less emphasis on media policy measures though. For example, contrary to the Latvian National Security Concept (2019), the documents do not mention the role of public media, any media support measures, or managing disinformation on online platforms.

Examining the overall setup of strategic communication in the three Baltic countries, one clearly sees alignment in activities and overall understandings. During the last years, all three countries have allocated considerably more resources into strategic communication

activities and established strategic communication departments in state chancelleries (government offices) that bear the main responsibility of coordinating state strategic communication activities (in Latvia, Daiga Holma from the State Chancellery said that the main goal of their work is to ensure efficient government communication). In Lithuania, the specific interinstitutional procedure for responding to information incidents such as disinformation, set up in August 2020, is also publicly available: every state institution monitors their own information space, assesses incidents based on the criteria (Appendix 14), and if needed, reports to the Government Office that coordinates further. In Estonia, Siim Kumpas from the State Chancellery said that a model of coordinating interinstitutional messages has been in place already since the early 2000s. Latvian State Chancellery is currently in the process of setting up such a model, according to Holma.

There is a difference in the state strategic communication setups in three countries that results from different balances and centres of gravities when it comes to MoDs and armed forces. In Estonia and Lithuania, the armed forces play a bigger role in assessing the information environment fighting disinformation, in Latvia on the other hand, there is a joint Military Public Affairs Department in the MoD. Dace Kundrāte from the Latvian MoD explained that this system was established during the financial crisis that brought big personnel cuts in the armed forces. A supporting factor probably is the fact that compared to Estonia and Lithuania[41], there is no conscription in Latvia which means that the overall role and capabilities of the armed forces are smaller. Absence of conscription also means different possibilities to advance psychological defence in the armed forces. A senior officer at the Estonian Defence Forces, for example, said that all reservists are given a basic overview of the modern information warfare and psychological defence – Latvia has no such possibilities.

Regarding the coordination of strategic communication, there were differences amongst countries and respondents on whether there is a need for common narratives, so-called "master narratives", agreed between the institutions to project out to the audiences. Latvia already has some narratives used by all ministries, but the exact content of these is not publicly available. Estonia does not have such narratives although Siim Kumpas said the MFA would like to see these as it would make branding Estonia abroad easier. The

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[41] Lithuania ended conscription in 2008 but reintroduced it in 2015 after the annexation of Crimea.

biggest advocate for common interinstitutional narratives, or a national narrative, was Tomas Čeponis from the Lithuanian Armed Forces (LAF). He said that the LAF already has a written narrative, the "Lithuanian CV", that includes main themes and messages about relevant topics and historical events. Overall, Lithuanian state institutions do not have shared narratives though, except for some special events such as 8 May, where the state institutions have started to coordinate their communication activities more, as said by an official from the MFA.

Lithuanian Armed Forces in general seem to have chosen to be more transparent in their work, compared to their counterparts in Estonia and Latvia. In addition to the fact that part of their strategic communication themes and messages are public (Appendix 17), in 2020 the LAF also started to publicise parts of the monthly information environment assessment reports that give an overview of Russian narratives and disinformation in the Lithuanian information space or about Lithuania. The author is not aware of similar public reports done by MoDs or armed forces in Estonia or Latvia. Publicising information environment assessments (e.g. about disinformation or inauthentic activities in the internet) should be encouraged as it helps to raise public awareness and could also spur academic research about Russian information influence activities. Governments would need to be strict in their methodology on what to classify as disinformation or hostile narratives though, as lax standards could backfire and make them vulnerable to criticism of censoring the freedom of expression.

Integration of media literacy into school curricula

Regarding the integration of media literacy into formal education, Latvia and Estonia (to a smaller degree) are doing slightly better than Lithuania. In Latvia, media literacy has been integrated into the media policy planning documents since 2016, and the country is currently introducing a new curriculum. By September 2022, all basic and high school students should already be learning following the new curriculum. As Ansis Nudiens, a Head Expert at the National Centre for Education in Latvia said, media literacy was largely absent in the old curricula, last revised in 2013 and 2014. When drafting the new curricula, he said, integrating media literacy was seen as a priority, at least in social and civic education. The basic (Appendix 9) and secondary school (Appendix 10) curricula now include a separate section for source criticism in the social and civic studies learning

area. In language education, in secondary school, there is also a separate section "Media, language and influence" that expects students to be able to identify "influencing techniques and manipulation tools" in the text (Noteikumi par valsts vispārējās... 2020). When comparing the three Baltic states, it is worth bearing in mind that the Latvian curriculum, in contrast to the curricula of Estonia and Lithuania, only provides the learning results expected to be achieved by students, without prescribing learning content.

In Estonia, media literacy competences are mostly concentrated in the upper secondary school level (Appendix 7). One of the compulsory courses in the Estonian language there is "Media and influence", that seeks to shape critical media users. The learning content of the course includes, among other things, an overview of differences between high-quality journalism and entertainment, characteristics of the democratic information society, demagogy and manipulation techniques, media ethics and media criticism, advertising (Appx. 1 of Upper Secondary School Curriculum... 2014, 10). In the basic school level, media literacy is not that conspicuously integrated into the curriculum even though most of the courses (including social and natural sciences) do contain an element of working with various sources and assessing their reliability (Appendix 6). Estonia has also started to review its curricula; the new versions should be introduced in the next few years.

A positive feature in Estonian educational setup is the establishment of the position of the Chief Expert for General Competencies in March 2020 that has the responsibility to coordinate media and information literacy topics, in addition to seven other general competences (such as the digital competence or social and civic competence), in the national curriculum. This means that it is easier to integrate MIL in the curriculum in the future and organise other MIL-related projects as there is a person with all the necessary contacts (e.g. with academia) and knowledge about the field. It also makes it easier for other institutions such as the state chancellery to cooperate with the MoE if they clearly know whom to turn to. This was a problem the author encountered in Latvia and Lithuania that there was no clear understanding of whom to address in the MoEs that would be knowledgeable about MIL. The MoEs directed the author to contact the national centres for education instead although they are not responsible for policymaking.

A shortcoming, on the other hand, identified in the Estonian basic and upper secondary school curricula, is the lack of media and information literacy components for students who study Russian as a mother tongue, compared with those who study in Estonian. The aforementioned compulsory "Media and influence" course, for example, a cornerstone of MIL in secondary education, is not available for those who have opted for Russian language and literature. This discrepancy is also present in the learning content in the basic school level, although to a lesser degree. Whilst the learning content for those taking Estonian language in their 3rd stage of study includes main linguistic influencing techniques, the nature of media and its present-day objectives, central principles of media ethics, the principle of freedom of speech and its boundaries, and public and hidden influence (Appx. 1 of Basic School Curriculum... 2014, 19), these topics are not expected to be covered in Russian. The author did not discern similar discrepancies in Latvian and Lithuanian school curricula. On the contrary, in the Latvian basic school curriculum there is even slightly more emphasis on MIL in Russian language than in Latvian language.

Russophones in the Baltics are mostly in the Russia's information space.[42] They follow Russian television channels both for news and entertainment which makes them also more vulnerable for Kremlin information influence activities. As Pamment et al. (2018, 99) argue, main counter influence activities should precisely be directed at the audiences that are most targeted by hostile actors, and it is imperative for governments to understand the factors that make these groups susceptible to influence, their motivations, fears and expectations, as well as ways of reaching out to them. It is thus advisable for Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian governments to concentrate their efforts on the minorities and make sure that these communities have the necessary MIL toolkit to be able to critically assess and process the information they are receiving from the media.

There is slightly less emphasis on media and information literacy in the Lithuanian curricula, and it is not as clearly structured into one place as it is in the Estonian and Latvian curricula. Secondary school students learning Lithuanian are still, for example, expected to assess the validity of arguments and recognise manipulation and propaganda (Dėl Vidurinio ugdymo... 2016, 94). Propaganda, advertising texts and linguistic

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[42] For an overview of Russophone's media habits in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, see pages 60, 78 and 100.

manipulations are also brought out in the curriculum of those pupils who study Polish or Russian as the first language (Ibid., 165, 168). Compared to Estonia and Latvia, there is no special paragraph or course for the contemporary information environment or media literacy topics in secondary education (Appendix 19). In basic education (Appendix 18), another factor why MIL components seem to be sparser is that they are not as strongly integrated into cross-curricular topics or competences than in other Baltic states. The fact that MIL is more strongly integrated in the Latvian curriculum was also corroborated by the Government Office interviewee. Tomas Čeponis from the LAF also said he would like to see more critical thinking introduced in the educational system in the near future.

There is still room to integrate more aspects of the contemporary information environment into the school curricula. As brought out in the theoretical part, Wardle and Derakhshan (2017, 70), for example, suggest the curriculum also to include forensic social media verification skills, statistical numeracy, artificial intelligence, the workings and implications of algorithms (e.g. filter bubbles), and "techniques for developing emotional scepticism to override our brain's tendency to be less critical of content that provokes an emotional response". These are not included in the compulsory curricula in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania at the moment. Albeit nations have basic programming courses that include the study of algorithms, these are currently not viewed in the context of social media filter bubbles. As a positive feature, since 2019 it is possible for schools in Estonia to give an optional course "Human in a contemporary information environment" though, that provides an overview of media and information influence, and also covers topics such as big data, social media algorithms, trolling, hate speech, propaganda, astroturfing or fact-checking (Inimene nüüdisaegses teabekeskkonnas 2019).

Another question to bear in mind regarding integrating MIL to the curricula is to which extent the requirements and provisions outlined in the curricula are actually implemented in classrooms. This was also brought out by the interviewee in Latvia who saw the teachers' lack of preparedness to teach MIL as the biggest shortcoming in integrating MIL into school curricula at the moment. To ensure that teachers have the necessary mindset and toolkit to teach MIL and teach information gathering from a critical point of view, it is essential to include critical media literacy modules into teacher training courses in the universities, and encourage teachers' lifelong learning, as recommended by the High-level group on fake news and online disinformation in 2018 (European Commission

2018a, 27). The integration of MIL into teacher training courses in the Baltic universities[43] was not examined by the author due to size requirements for the thesis.

Media policy and regulatory action

Whilst there are more similarities than differences in the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian approaches to countering Russian information influence activities when it comes to the overall setup and coordination of strategic communication, and integration of media literacy into school curricula, this is not the case when examining and comparing countries' cultural policies. To be more precise, Estonians have a considerably different understanding of the extent to which the state (or the government) should regulate, guide, and interfere in the media to achieve its goals, compared to the Baltic states in the south. This relates to perceiving media policy as a tool of psychological defence or countering information influence in the wider sense, but also more narrowly to using media support measures to prop up media literacy or banning television channels to hinder the spread of pro-Kremlin narratives.

Distinctive understandings in perceiving media policy as a tool to counter information influence ultimately boil down to different regulatory cultures in Estonia and the other Baltic states. This is most conspicuous when comparing how actively the governments try to influence or guide the media. Estonia has no distinct strategy to influence the media space, apart from the ERR Development Plan 2021-2024 (ERR 2020a) that sets the vision and objectives for public broadcasting. Latvia has the Mass Media Policy Guidelines 2016-2020 along with the Implementation Plan, approved by the government. Lithuania also has the Strategic Directions of the Public Information Policy 2019-2022, approved by the Minister of Culture.[44]

Kõuts-Klemm et al. (2019, 20) note that Estonia's media policy could be characterised with Freeman's (2014) concept of "negative policy" – "even if the state deems it necessary to organise things then little and without intruding". The fact that Estonia has

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[43] As far as the author is aware, the universities training teachers in the Baltics are University of Tartu and Tallinn in Estonia, University of Latvia, Daugavpils and Liepāja in Latvia, and University of Vilnius, Vytautas Magnus University, and Mykolas Romeris University in Lithuania. There is also a special Media and Information Literacy master's programme in the Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences in Latvia.
[44] For more information about the Latvian Mass Media Policy Guidelines 2016-2020, see page 77. For more information about the Lithuanian Strategic Directions of the Public Information Policy, see page 99.

no media strategy document was also noted by the interviewee at the Lithuanian MoC. "It is a message to me that Estonian media policy is about not regulating media at all," Deividas Velkas, Head of the Media and Copyright Policy Unit, said. The senior officer from the Estonian Defence Forces also noted that when it comes to overall security culture, Latvia is more legalistic compared to Estonia, i.e. many problems are solved legally, by regulating – banning, allowing, changing the law etc. This comparison could also be expanded to Estonia and Lithuania.

There are regulatory (legal) prescriptions brought out in the Lithuanian (Appendix 13) and Latvian (Appendix 8) security strategies to counter information influence activities whereas the Estonian National Security Concept and National Defence Development Plan (Appendix 5) are void of these and instead focus on building a cohesive and resilient society that is tolerant and united. The Latvian National Security Concept clearly says that "[i]f viewed from the perspective of national security, the current legal framework of the media operation does not solve the topical challenges related to the security of the information space of Latvia" and that the legal restrictions and regulations governing media operation are not sufficient "to turn against the attempts of information influencing implemented by Russia on internet sites and social networks" (NSC 2019, 19). The Lithuanian National Security Strategy mentions the need to legally prevent the dissemination of information that incites to change the Lithuanian constitutional order by force and encroaches on its sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence, which spreads war propaganda and instigates war or hatred (NSS 2017, 13).

These different understandings about the extent to which the media should be regulated are also present in the European-level discussions of managing information influence. Although, based on the position paper on COVID-19 and disinformation from June 2020 (Addressing disinformation... 2020) all three countries agree that the current Code of Practice on Disinformation is insufficient and unsuitable and that the EU should develop a regulatory framework to "establish accountability and transparency requirements for technology companies and online platforms regarding disinformation, focusing on combatting malicious online behaviour, and not regulating content", Estonia still opted for not joining France, Latvia and Lithuania three months later in their statement on the Protection of Democracies. The government's official position back then was that albeit Estonia could have supported the statement in most elements, the government could not

agree with the fact that the text "called for disproportionate legislative regulation of the media to combat disinformation, with legal obligations for publications and platforms, as well as sanctions" (Delfi 2020b). As Viktors Makarovs from the Latvian MFA said, though, these differences at the European level are more of a technical nature, when looking at the bigger picture. "I do not think there will ever be fundamental differences of opinions among the three Baltic states," he said.

A more liberal attitude also means that Estonia lacks possibilities to prop up media outlets with measures such as supporting media literacy projects or investigative journalism (or quality journalism in general). Latvia and Lithuania already have such media support measures in place. Latvia, for example, has established the Mass Media Support Fund that aims to increase the diversity of the media environment by allowing the commercial media to receive state funds to create content of public significance (Implementation Plan 2016). The programme funding in 2020 was 1,2 million euros, and it supported projects in nine categories, including media literacy, media criticism, minorities, and investigative and analytical journalism. Lithuania also has a similar Media Support Foundation supporting cultural, educational, public information security, and media literacy projects with an annual budget of about 2,6 million euros.

Estonia could consider setting up a similar support mechanism for local media to increase awareness of information influence. The need to establish a system of measures to support the press, in particular local media, together with the need to support the creation of quality content and increase funding for media literacy projects, was already brought out by Estonian media experts in 2019 (Kõuts-Klemm et al. 2019, 25). In order for the measures to reach those who are most vulnerable to Russian information influence, i.e. local Russophones, setting up such a mechanism should also take into account (e.g. by specific measures) the local Russian-language media that must compete daily with well-funded media (mainly television) originating from Russia and projecting Russian strategic narratives, including disinformation. In Latvia, it is currently only possible to receive funding for Latvian-language content. In Lithuania, it is also possible to receive funding for media in national minority languages and there are ongoing discussions in the parliament on whether to create a separate funding programme for the national minorities.

The mere fact of having a sophisticated policy document such as a security or a media strategy does not automatically mean that everything in it is always followed. The National Security Concept of Latvia, for example, perceives as the root cause behind the vulnerability of Latvian information space the fact that Latvian media, especially the public media, has been "continuously and systematically suffering because of low financing" that together with a relatively small market size and insufficient income from advertising has limited the media to create high-quality content (NSC 2019).[45] The Concept thus prescribes that more resources should be invested in public media (Ibid.). Kristers Pļešakovs from the Latvian MoC said that since the public media leaves the advertising market from 2021, MoC has asked the government for additional funds, but this is only to compensate for the lost revenue and does not constitute an overall increase in funding. "From year to year we have to deal with this problem that the government does not allocate enough funds for public media," he said. Underfunding, of course, is not only a problem for Latvia. The Development Plan the Estonian public broadcaster ERR for 2021-2024 also notes, referring to an assessment by the National Audit Office, that the current financing model is not sustainable and endangers the quality, stability and journalistic independence of the ERR programmes (ERR 2020a, 18).

Another discrepancy in the 2019 Latvian National Security Concept between what is prescribed and what the real action is, pertinent to countering hostile information influence, is the planned discontinuation of LTV7 Russian-language content and moving it online to a dedicated platform from 2021. The Security Concept sees a need to invest in public and commercial media to offer a long-term alternative to Russia's information space. Addressing more specifically the public media, the Concept prescribes that a "[c]omprehensible alternative of good quality should be created and offered to [minorities] as an alternative to the sources of information representing the information space of Russia, providing the possibilities to choose from". Considering that PBK ended its locally produced evening news programme in March 2020, the discontinuation of LTV7 Russian news programme means that for a considerable part of the Latvian

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[45] Reporters Sans Frontières (2019) note that state funding for the public media in Latvia is significantly lower than in Estonia and Lithuania, representing only 0.1% of GDP against a European average of 0.17%. According to RSF, this low level dates back to 2008 when, in response to the international financial crisis, Latvia's government slashed funding for public radio and TV by 25%. In comparison, state funding for the public media in Estonia represented 0.14% of the GDP (ERR 2020a, 21).

population there would be no serious alternative for news from Russia-based television channels such as RTR-Planeta or REN TV. This would predominantly affect the older generation of Russophones, whose Latvian is poor and who do not feel comfortable using the internet. As it is also noted in the Concept, "[r]eduction or disappearance of media diversity, particularly in regions, may endanger and cause serious national security risks".

A study done in 2019 showed that a majority of the Latvian population would actually prefer to have more Russian content in the public media "to promote awareness about local processes across all social groups": the interest was especially strong amongst the Russophone population (77% agreed), but 44% of the Latvian speakers also agreed (Juzefovičs 2019). As the interviews showed, there are divergent attitudes within the Latvian state institutions regarding the move. The interviewees from the MoC and MoD were critical about the discontinuation of the Russian content in LTV7. The Head of the Military Public Information Section at MoD, Dace Kundrāte, said that it hinders the state's ability to efficiently communicate with all of its residents, while Kristers Pļešakovs, Head of the Media Policy Division, believed it would push some part of the society to Russian information. Daiga Holma, Head of the Strategic Communication Coordination Department at the State Chancellery, on the other hand, supported the decision, arguing that more people, including the older generation, are moving to internet to seek for information, and that a modern internet platform is better than providing a couple of broadcasts per day with LTV7.

It is true that the more tech-savvy younger generation relies increasingly less on television – a 2017 study showed that the only socio-demographic group in Latvia where the audience of Russian television channels is less than 50% are those aged 34 or younger (Latvijas Fakti 2017, 13). For the older population, though, television still remains very important. A study of integration done in Estonia (Kaldur et al. 2017, 72), for example, showed that for people aged 50-64 television remained the most important medium for information: Russian television was important for 80% of the respondents whereas 49% could say the same about Estonian news sites in Russian and only 19% about news sites in Estonian. These contrasts were even bigger for people aged 65+.

Compared to Latvia where the amount of Russian language public broadcasting is being reduced, Estonia has opted for another way. Even though it is not stated in the official

strategies as such, the interviewees at the Estonian MoC said that the Russian language public broadcasting media – Raadio 4, the online news portal rus.err.ee, and especially the television channel ETV+ – serve as long-term alternatives to Russia's information space in Estonia. Anne-Ly Reimaa, Head of International Relations on Integration Issues at the Cultural Diversity Department of the Estonian MoC, said that the question ultimately at stake here is to which extent the country wants to create a common information space and a common state identity, and to which extent the country wants to encourage the minorities to speak the national language. She said that besides the lack of financial resources, one of the reasons why Latvians have no fully Russian speaking television channel, is that it would not contribute to the minorities learning Latvian.

The main problem that ETV+ has to battle with, similar to its Latvian counterpart LTV7, is its low ratings. In November 2020, ETV+ was ninth amongst the top 10 most-watched channels in Estonia – its viewing timeshare (1,5%) was three times less than the most popular Russian channel RTR-Planeta (4,6%) (Kantar Emor 2020). Trust amongst non-Estonians towards the channel, on the other hand, is similar to PBK or other Russian television channels (Kaldur et al. 2017, 76). The interviewees at the MoC pointed out that during the COVID-19 crisis in spring 2020, viewership of the evening news programme at ETV+ grew threefold (ERR 2020b) which indicates that, even if the channel is not followed daily, from a psychological defence point of view the channel has still succeeded in earning the trust of the non-Estonians and being a reliable source of information for them in a crisis situation when there really is need for it.

In contrast to Latvia where the political decision has been to reduce Russian language public broadcasting content, the Estonians saw that there could be even more content produced and broadcasted in Russian. The author agrees: as long as there is a substantial part of the society that is not well enough integrated to be part of the Estonian (or Latvian /Lithuanian) information space, there is need for Russian language public broadcasting to reach this part of the society and ensure that people receive reliable and balanced information and do not fall prey for misinformation or information influence activities. This holds especially true during crises where the potential consequences of Russia filling in this "information gap" with its strategic narratives are graver. A hindrance here, already mentioned beforehand, is the lack of resources (and perhaps political will) for it. The ERR

development plan (ERR 2020a) also wishes to further develop the digital platforms for Russophones but states that this implies additional financial resources.

In Lithuania, there are currently no public broadcasting television or radio channels in Russian (nor Polish), and there are also no such plans to create such channels. Lithuanian public broadcaster LRT provides news online in Russian though, in addition to Lithuanian and English. As Tomas Čeponis from the LAF explained, establishing a Russian language public broadcasting channel has been abandoned since a separate television channel is considered too expensive to compete with well-funded Russian channels. He also noted that Lithuania where the national minorities make up about 16% of the population, "plays according to different rules", compared to Latvia and Estonia where the minorities account for 38% and 30% respectively, in the sense that it is more difficult for Russia to mobilise and influence the minorities and achieve political change. He said that it would not be enough to try and reach the minorities in Russian since a lot of the information influence activities take place in Lithuanian.

Finally, one of the main differences in the Baltic approaches to countering Russian information influence, lies in restricting the retransmission (i.e. blocking) of Russian television channels, as was also pointed out by Hellman and Wagnsson (2017). Since 2013, Lithuania (Appendix 20) and Latvia (Appendix 11) have blocked access to Russian television channels 10 and 5 times, respectively, predominantly sanctioning violations related to incitement to hatred or war.[46] The measure is also featured in Lithuanian and Latvian security strategies. In the Lithuanian National Security Strategy (2017, 13) it is written that Lithuania seeks to legally prevent the dissemination of information which incites to change the constitutional order of Lithuania by force and encroaches on its sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence, which spreads war propaganda and instigates war or hatred. The Latvian National Security Concept (2019) refers to the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive that simplifies the procedures of suspending the retransmission of television channels if based in another EU member state.

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[46] See appendices 11 and 20 for an overview of instances where Latvia and Lithuania have restricted access to Russian media. Whilst these have overwhelmingly been cases of blocking access to television channels, there was also one case in Lithuania where communication companies were obliged to transfer RTR-Planeta and NTV Mir to paid television packages for one year.

The interviewees from Lithuania and Latvia shared the opinion that banning, albeit not a perfect solution, is still a possible measure in the toolkit of democratic countries and all legal measures should be used to counter Russian information influence. As the interviewee from the Lithuanian Office of the Government said, "legal defence is also defence, maybe not the only way and the best way, but sometimes you should use this". A similar attitude that if there is a breach of the law, restricting the access is acceptable, was also reflected by the interviewee at the Latvian MoC: "If there is hate speech or something like that which is forbidden, then the state should react. Latvia is reacting". All the interviewees emphasised, though, that when restricting the freedom of access, freedom of expression must be born in mind which is why there are also strict procedures in place for that.

Estonia, part of the same European Union regulatory environment as Latvia and Lithuania, has not sanctioned any Russian television channels so far and has adopted a more liberal attitude. An aspect to bear in mind here, which also makes it a good object for comparison, is the fact that a large part of the programming for Russian television channels is identical in the three Baltic channels. This means, for example, that the show "Sunday Evening with Vladimir Solovyov", which has been problematic both in Latvia and Lithuania, could also be watched in Estonia. The interviewees at the Estonian MoC brought forth the argument of freedom of expression. They also said that blocking Russian television channels more actively would create additional tensions in society and is not productive since a lot of the content is also shared on other media such as the internet. The same sentiment was also shared by the Government Office interviewee who added that restricting access to Russian media would make it more difficult to criticise Russia for similar actions. "In a non-free country, the information space is always under control, whether through censorship, threats to journalists or banning some content. If we adopt any of these methods, I start to question what separates the two of us," he said.

Different emphasis put onto regulating and supervising the audiovisual media is also reflected in regulatory authorities' structure. In Estonia, there are only four people dealing with media services (e.g. supervision and licencing) in the Consumer Protection and Technical Regulatory Authority. In the Latvian and Lithuanian regulatory authorities (National Electronic Mass Media Council and Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission), six and eight people work only in the monitoring departments, in addition

to legal advisers in legal departments. As the interviewees explained, Latvian and Lithuanian regulatory authorities also wield considerably wider powers compared to their Estonian counterpart, for example in combating the illegal distribution of audiovisual content. A more sophisticated comparative analysis of the supervision of audiovisual media was not part of this thesis though.

Critique of Hellman and Wagnsson's analytical framework

In conclusion, Hellman and Wagnsson (2017, 163–64) were right when they predicted that the four ideal types that they have proposed probably do not exactly reflect the way states engage in information warfare, and instead, states are expected to combine different strategies. Ideal types, after all, serve only as heuristic tools to have the right categories to help make sense of what is going on. Rather than seeing the Baltic approaches to countering Russian information on a black-and-white scale of inward-outward targeting (i.e. targeting domestic audiences as in the blocking strategy or targeting a foreign audience as in the confronting strategy), real life, of course, is much more colourful. There are differences between the Estonian approach and the Latvian and Lithuanian approaches, as Hellman and Wagnsson (2017) had suggested, but these differences do not pertain to the nature of strategic narratives or the audiences of the strategic communication efforts. Instead, the Baltic states diverge on the issue of to what extent the state (or the government) should regulate and guide the media to achieve its goals. One should emphasise though that this is only one aspect of a much larger picture – all things considered, it is difficult to argue that one or another Baltic state understands countering information influence fundamentally differently.

Hellman and Wagnsson's analytical framework, that aims to explain how European democracies respond to Russian information influence activities by proposing four ideal-type strategies, can be criticised from two perspectives. First, the author argues that whilst Latvia and Lithuania can be viewed (with reservations) as employing a blocking strategy, the framework misunderstands Estonia as the embodiment of the confronting strategy. Secondly, the author puts forth criticism of a much fundamental nature, arguing that the framework falls short of explaining counterstrategies to information influence overall as the ideal types they propose are too narrative-centric and thus fail to capture this phenomenon in its fullness.

First, let us discuss how Estonia conforms with the strategy of confronting. As explained by Hellman and Wagnsson (Ibid., 158–59), confronting entails actively producing and projecting counternarratives that are discursively constructed in direct opposition to the foreign narratives. "It is outward-looking in the sense that the leadership pays great attention to and tries to meet the perceived threat originating from outside the domestic sphere" (Ibid.). The authors bring forth the Estonian Russian-language public broadcasting television channel ETV+ as the main example, the aim of which is to "balance and counter the narratives produced by Russian-owned television channels in Estonia" (Ibid.). Confronting is closely related to the strategy of naturalising that is less engaging as narratives are not directly contrasted with those projected by the "other"; it is rather "telling the story of the 'self'" (Ibid., 159). As Hellman and Wagnsson admit, it might be difficult to tell the two strategies apart.

Contrary to what one would expect, the interviewees at the Estonian state institutions did not perceive that the narratives Estonia projects are confronting the Russian narratives. Instead, the interviewees at the State Chancellery and Armed Forces said they prefer to "set their own music" and rely on proactive messaging, telling their own stories instead. This is a common logic in communications and same attitude was shared by their Latvian and Lithuanian counterparts. As the thesis did not include an analysis of the narratives and messaging of these state institutions, one cannot really evaluate whether Estonia differs from other countries to the extent that it warrants being classified differently. One can merely state that even if the narratives do differ, it is not a conscious policy.

Regarding ETV+, the main example of Hellman and Wagnsson, the interviewees at the Estonian MoC acknowledged that when the channel was launched in 2015, the goal was indeed to bring Russian-speakers into the Estonian information space. There is a difference in integrating Russophones into the Estonian information space and using the channels as a means to project state counternarratives though. One must bear in mind that ETV+ (or any other public broadcasting channel in the Baltic states) is an independent news channel and the government does not have a say in its editorial decisions. It is thus difficult for the government to employ the channel as a platform to coordinate or project its messaging.

As confrontation of narratives was not corroborated by the interviewees and the state cannot direct public media content, the author does not see why Estonia should be regarded any differently from any other country with active public broadcasting media channels, either in national or foreign languages. Also, Hellman and Wagnsson fail to expound their choice of classification. For example, Estonia might as well be classified similarly to Germany (and Deutsche Welle) following a naturalising strategy. As the conceptual borders between the strategies of confronting and naturalising are rather blurred, the analytical framework would gain substantial strength if the two strategies were explained in more detail and also with more specific examples.

There are also reservations to considering Latvia and Lithuania as the best examples of countries following a blocking strategy. As a reminder, besides confronting, blocking is the other strategy on the engaging side of the spectrum: the existence of an "other" is clearly recognised, but instead of countering it by projecting its own versions of reality, the strategy is inward-looking with no aspiration to engage with foreign audiences: "The practical emphasis is on restrictions and control measures such as the strategies of selective blocking of information" (Ibid., 161).

It is true that Latvia and Lithuania have been active during the recent years in restricting the retransmission of Russian television channels due to incitement of hatred, compared to other European countries. The question that arises, though, is to what extent one should view blocking as important enough to define the whole approach of Latvia and Lithuania towards countering information influence. Even though the Latvian and Lithuanian interviewees endorsed the suspension of Russian television channels as a potential option in the overall toolbox of measures to counter information influence, no-one emphasised it as the main strategy *per se.* As a matter of fact, interviewees at the Latvian and Lithuanian Ministries of Culture both said that instead of suspending the television channels they would prefer to concentrate on educating the society and make it more resilient towards information influence. Restricting the retransmission of television channels was more perceived as a measure of last resort, done only in extreme cases.

To broaden the analytical framework's scope of explanation, EU-level initiatives aiming to manage the spread of disinformation and other information influence in online platforms (e.g. European Democracy Action Plan of December 2020) should also be seen

as acts of blocking, i.e. the executive taking measures to hinder the spread of hostile narratives in their information space. Here, the understandings of Latvia and Lithuania do not diverge as much from other countries though, as discussions on whether (or rather: how) online platforms should manage information influence (disinformation, botnets etc.) are common both in the European Union but also in the United States.[47] When examining non-Western responses, hindering the dissemination of information influence, or more precisely, fettering the dissemination of any information online through speech laws and censorship is a practice common for authoritarian regimes. One of the prime examples here would be the Great Firewall of China, as also brought out by Stray (2019, 1020). This would mean, though, that in addition to democratic responses to information warfare, one would also have to broaden the discussion to undemocratic responses.

More fundamentally, whilst one could continue discussing the conceptual boundaries of strategies such as confronting or blocking, the empirical research showed that the differences in the Baltic approaches to countering information influence activities lie not so much in the manner these states manage hostile strategic narratives – either engaging or disengaging in them, projecting narratives inward or outward – as proposed by Hellman and Wagnsson (2017), but rather in the wider attitude towards media regulation. That covers, more narrowly, questions on to what extent the government should aim to organise or shape the media environment – either by propping up media literacy in private media through media support funds or hindering the spread of information influence through restrictions on media outlets – but also, to which extent the government should interfere in the media environment in the first place. Hence, the analytical framework is built on the wrong foundations rendering it inadequate to fully capture the options democratic governments have in their disposal to counter information influence.

Hellman and Wagnsson's analytical framework assumes that information warfare, including information influence activities such as disinformation, can be analysed from a strategic narrative theory point of view, and therefore the way states counter information warfare should also be approached from the same perspective. Referring to the theory of strategic narratives, they mostly rely on the work of Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and

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[47] Think of, for example, social media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook increasingly restricting the spread and reach of President Donald Trump's posts at the end of his term.

Roselle (2013). There are two problems with this assumption. The first point of contention relates to whether information influence activities such as disinformation can be analysed through the lenses of strategic narrative theory. La Cour (2020, 7–8) is critical of that, arguing that the theory falls short on grasping disinformation when it does not come in the form of a narrative, e.g. "when the disinformation purely consists of a single piece of false information being disseminated widely, or, when the 'falseness' does not designate the information being shared but the profile sharing it". *Ergo,* the strategic narrative theory would fall short on explaining various types of information influence activities put forth by Pamment et al. (2018) such as social hacking, deceptive identities, trolling, or malign rhetoric (e.g. gish-gallop).[48] This is also why the author did not take the theory of strategic narratives as the theoretical basis to understand information influence.

The second and more pertinent point of contention relates to whether one could take strategic narratives as the starting point to explain different state strategies to counter information influence. As the empirical analysis showed, differences in the Baltic approaches are not so much related to how states manage hostile narratives (and project their own narratives), but rather to different cultures on media regulation in general. The narrative-centric framework is therefore overly bound to concentrate on states' strategic communication efforts and fails to adequately capture aspects of countering information influence that are not easily reducible to narratives. An example of this is shaping the media through various support funds or media projects that can either be viewed as a passive inward-looking strategy (ignoring hostile narratives), similar to the integration of media literacy into formal education, or, on the contrary, a conscious and engaging measure to surreptitiously introduce media audiences to counternarratives. It would be a stretch to try and explain every countermeasure from a communicative point of view.

The empirical analysis shows that instead of the framework proposed by Hellman and Wagnsson, a more precise, and also a more simple, way of understanding which tools are available for governmental organisations to counter information influence has been proposed by Jente Althuis and Siri Strand (2018, 69), mentioned also in the theoretical part, who argue that governments are primarily concerned with two types of activities: first, implementing regulations that aim to limit the dissemination of fake news, and,

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[48] For an overview of various information influence techniques, see pages 18-21.

second, supporting institutions or entities responsible for coordinating efforts to raise awareness and increase public knowledge about the impact of fake news. That is, governments can respond by regulatory and non-regulatory means. True, instead of the politicised and conceptually muddy "fake news", a broader term of information influence could be used here as disinformation is only a subcategory of information influence. The improved explanation would therefore be that governments respond to information influence activities first by implementing regulations and second by raising awareness. Strategic communication and psychological defence here serve to amplify awareness-raising efforts with the aim of making the society resilient to information influence.

In the end, regardless of how we categorise the tools, it is still difficult to ascertain which approach is the most effective. One cannot claim that Latvia and Lithuania, by employing more regulatory means, have been more successful than Estonia, and vice versa. Besides public opinion surveys such as the ones asking people's confidence of recognising false information in the media, we currently lack the technological tools to adequately measure the amount of information influence activities such as disinformation in media, albeit (social) media analytics and network analysis are making headway. Of course, all options considered, total censorship of the information space could also potentially serve the goal.

Conclusion

Research into various types of illegitimate information influence techniques such as mis- and disinformation, social hacking (e.g. filter bubbles), trolling and flaming, or the use of botnets is becoming more and more popular. Partly, this serves as a reaction to the overall Zeitgeist, characterised by populist movements and authoritarian governments seeking to take advantage of the vulnerabilities of the Western information space. Partly, this is due to technological advances that enable researchers to tap into previously unknown areas such as social media analytics or network analysis. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is bound to result in a myriad of research articles concentrating on ascertaining the main purveyors of information influence activities, the means (networks) through which this information spreads, and the main strategic narratives projected.[49] The importance of such research is without doubt, as public communicators must understand information influence in order for their communication efforts to be understood by the public. Yet, all this notwithstanding, research into *managing* or *countering* information influence has largely remained on the sidelines, resulting in a dearth of knowledge when it comes to a comprehensive understanding of how societies could adequately respond to information influence activities.

This academic work aims to remedy this: diving right into the frontline of Russian information influence activities in the Baltic states, the thesis contributes to the broader understanding of measures democratic countries have at their disposal to manage this "disorderly information space". The main aim of the thesis was to examine and compare the approaches of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian governments to respond to Russian information influence activities. At the same time, for additional policy relevance, the thesis set out the goal of providing an overview of the countermeasures undertaken by the three Baltic states. The thesis focused strictly on governmental activities and did not aspire to comprehend the underlying reasons for different approaches.

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[49] On a side note: an interesting topic to look into would be the convergence of Russian and Chinese (but also Iranian) strategic narratives during the COVID-19 crisis. For example, it has been observed (e.g. Swan 2020) that the three countries amplify each other's messages more vigorously than before, for example, when it comes to the so-called "vaccine diplomacy".

The main research questions of the thesis were as follows:

- first, how do Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania understand countering information influence?
- second, what measures have Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania undertaken to counter information influence?
- third, what differences are there in the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian approaches?

In order to reach the desired goals, a comparative analysis of official security documents (national security and defence concepts) was conducted to examine how they reflect information influence and what approach or countermeasures they propose. Also, to get a full understanding, semi-structured expert interviews with state officials from relevant Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian institutions (predominantly ministries) were conducted to inquire about their perception of responding to information influence and to gain further insight into more specific state activities.

The empirical analysis showed that when looking at the big picture, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian understandings towards countering information influence activities, as well as their choice of countermeasures, are to a large degree similar. All three Baltic countries have stepped up their strategic communication capabilities in recent years with establishing dedicated strategic communication teams at their state chancelleries, responsible for coordinating strategic communication amongst institutions and ensuring situational awareness. Although the Estonian and Latvian (since 2020) security documents, compared to the Lithuanian ones, approach information threats from a broader perspective, talking about psychological defence and the need to achieve societal resilience, the analysis showed, with corroboration by the interviewees, that these terminological differences do not ultimately result in dissimilar worldviews.

The main differences in the Baltic approaches result from different regulatory cultures. To be more precise, Estonians have a considerably different understanding of the extent to which the state should regulate and shape the media to achieve its goals. Compared to Latvians and Lithuanians, Estonians approach media regulation from a minimalist point of view: there is no mass media or public information policy and the Security Concept and Defence Development Plan lack references to regulatory or legal measures when it

comes to countering information threats. These different understandings concerning media regulation are also reflected in the positions the states have at the EU-level discussions about managing information influence in online platforms.

A more liberal attitude towards regulating the media means that Estonia misses out on propping up the media outlets with various support measures. In Latvia and Lithuania, for example, there are media support foundations that allow commercial media to receive state funds to create content of public significance, such as projects to support media literacy or investigative journalism. Another regulatory measure is restricting the retransmission of television channels: since 2013, Latvian and Lithuania have blocked access to Russian television channels 5 and 10 times, respectively, predominantly sanctioning violations related to incitement to hatred or war. A possibility of using this measure is also brought out in these countries' security strategies.

The interviewees from Latvia and Lithuania shared the opinion that banning, albeit a measure of last resort, should still be regarded as a potential option in the overall toolbox available for democratic countries and that all legal measures should be used to counter Russian information influence. The Estonian state officials, on the other hand, argued that the suspension of media outlets clashes with the right for freedom of expression, would create additional tensions in the society and is ineffectual. Some Latvians and Lithuanians were also more cautious, though, noting that they would instead prefer to concentrate on educating the society – raising awareness and making it more resilient towards information threats.

The mere fact of having a sophisticated media policy document does not mean that it is always followed. Even though the Latvian National Security Concept prescribes additional financial resources for public media to make it more competitive and sustainable, the public media continues to be underfunded. To a lesser degree, this is also valid for Estonian public media. Also, the fact that the Latvian Security Concept sees a need for the public media to create and offer the minorities a long-term alternative to Russia's information space notwithstanding, there is currently a plan to discontinue the Russian-language content on the public broadcasting television channel LTV7 and move it to a dedicated online platform from 2021. This would deprive a considerable part of the Latvian population, predominantly the older generation of Russophones, of a serious

alternative for news originating from Russia-based television channels such as RTR-Planeta and make them vulnerable to Russian information influence activities.

Compared to Latvia where the amount of Russian language public broadcasting is being reduced, Estonia has opted for another way and the Russian language public broadcasting media (radio Raadio 4, online news portal rus.err.ee and television channel ETV+) more or less effectively offer an alternative to Russia's information space in Estonia. Even though ETV+ is battling with low ratings, its viewership boost during the COVID-19 crisis indicated that the channel has succeeded in earning the trust of some non–Estonians. The author believes that as long as there is a substantial part of the society that is not well enough integrated to be part of the national information space, there is need for Russian language public broadcasting to ensure that people receive reliable and balanced information.

In the long term, the most effective way to manage the "disorderly information space" is to raise people's awareness and develop their critical thinking skills. An integral part here is played by media and information literacy that, in order to be most effective, must be integrated into formal education. Latvians and Estonians are doing slightly better than Lithuanians. In 2020-2022, Latvians introduce novel basic and secondary school curricula, where the integration of media literacy was taken as a priority. In Estonia, media literacy is well-integrated for pupils learning in Estonian: in secondary school, for example, there is a dedicated "Media and Influence" course and an optional course "Human in a contemporary information environment" that also covers topics such as social media algorithms, hate speech, astroturfing, or fact-checking. This holds not true for pupils learning in Russian, though, as there are discrepancies in the integration of media literacy into the Estonian and Russian language curricula, both in basic and in upper secondary school. Since Russophones in the Baltics are still largely in Russia's information space, the governments should concentrate their awareness-raising and media literacy efforts on them and make sure they have the necessary skills and mindset to be able to critically assess and process the information they receive from the media.

Besides practical relevance, the thesis also sought academic relevance by applying the ideal-types, proposed by Hellman and Wagnsson (2017) to help explain how European democracies respond to Russian information influence activities, to real-life cases. This

allowed assessing both the analytical relevance of the ideal-types (whether the categorisation is correct and adequately reflects Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian approaches) and the framework in general (to which extent the framework manages to capture aspects of countering information influence activities). The author argues that Hellman and Wagnsson's analytical framework can be criticised from two perspectives. First, whilst Latvia and Lithuania can be viewed (with reservations) as employing a blocking strategy, the framework misunderstands Estonia as the embodiment of the confronting strategy. Secondly, and more fundamentally, the framework falls short of explaining the counterstrategies to information influence overall as the ideal types they propose are too narrative-centric and thus fail to capture this phenomenon fully.

The author showed that Baltic approaches to countering information influence activities differ not so much in the manner these states manage hostile strategic narratives – either engaging or disengaging in them, projecting narratives inward or outward, – but rather in their attitude towards (media) regulation in general. The narrative-centric framework is therefore bound to overly concentrate on states' strategic communication efforts and fails to adequately capture aspects of countering information influence that are not so easily reducible to narratives. The author, instead, proposes a simpler explanation of how governments respond to information influence activities: first, by implementing regulations, and secondly, by raising awareness. Strategic communication and psychological defence here serve to amplify awareness-raising efforts to make the society resilient to information influence.

There are multiple ways this research could be developed further. Apart from the Baltic states – countries with similar backgrounds located on the frontline of Russian information influence activities – one of the options would be to add more countries with distinct backgrounds into the sample to get a more comprehensive understanding of various ways governments counter information influence. The Swedish approach to psychological defence and resilience, for example, is repeatedly brought out in the literature as exemplary. In order to obtain a full picture of how societies manage the "disorderly information space", the research should also involve activities undertaken by media and the civil society, e.g. fact-checking and various awareness-raising projects. This means that the research focus would move away from responding to Russian and other state-sponsored activities to managing illegitimate information influence in general.

Also, since this thesis only concentrated on the integration of media literacy into formal school education, the ways through which the state encourages media literacy in non-formal ways, such as through projects and awareness-raising, should be examined. To ensure that teachers and other educators have the necessary mindset and toolkit to teach media literacy and information gathering from a critical perspective, it is also worthwhile to analyse how media literacy is included in teacher training courses in the universities.

Finally, governments (and other actors) opt for different approaches out of the belief that these measures would be the most effective in countering information influence. Strategic communication is increasingly becoming effects-based as states and organisations (e.g. brand analysis and market research) improve their situational awareness capabilities to ensure effective communication. The countermeasures should, therefore, also be evaluated considering their effect. This could, for example, mean examining the amount of disinformation and inauthentic behaviour in social networks, analysing strategic communication efforts by assessing to which extent governments' strategic narratives resonate within the society, or, examining the effects of suspending media outlets (like Latvia and Lithuania have done with Russian television channels). The new European Democracy Action Plan, published in December 2020, hopefully paves the way for increased transparency from the online platforms on their activities to hinder the spread of information influence, and for more opportunities for researchers to engage.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Overview of EU joint and coordinated action against information influence.

Time	Action
19-20 March 2015	Meeting of the European Council
22 June 2015	Action Plan on Strategic Communication
1 September 2015	Launch of EEAS East StratCom Task Force
6 April 2016	Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats: a European Union response
11 April 2017	Establishment of the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats together with NATO
12 March 2018	Report of the independent High level Group on fake news and online disinformation (HLEG)
26 April 2018	The Communication "Tackling online disinformation: a European approach" prepared by the European Commission
26 September 2018	Code of Practice on Disinformation prepared by the European Commission
1 November 2018	Launch of the Social Observatory for Disinformation and Social Media Analysis
14 November 2018	New Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) signed by the legislators
5 December 2018	Action Plan against Disinformation. Jointly prepared by the European Commission and EEAS
January-May 2019	Monthly reports of the internet platforms on the implementation of the Code of Practice
18-22 March 2019	First European Media Literacy Week
March 2019	Set up of the Rapid Alert System
23-26 May 2019	European Parliament elections
8 May 2020	Study for the assessment of the implementation of the Code of Practice on Disinformation
1 June 2020	Launch of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)
3 December 2020	European Democracy Action Plan
15 December 2020	Digital Services Act

Appendix 2. List of interviewees.

Institution	Name and position	Date and place
Lithuanian Armed Forces	Tomas Çeponis. Strategic Communication Department, analysis specialist.	03.08.2020, video-call
Estonian Defence Forces	Senior officer.	06.08.2020, Tallinn
Estonian Ministry of Culture	1. Anne-Ly Reimaa. Cultural Diversity Department, Head of International Relations on Integration Issues. 2. Meelis Kompus. Communications Department, Head of Department. 3. Hannus Luure. Communications Department, adviser.	06.08.2020, Tallinn
Office of the Government of Lithuania	Romanas Judinas. Advisor to Threats Management and Crisis Prevention Group.	11.08.2020, video-call
Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Viktors Makarovs. Special Envoy on Information Security.	18.08.2020, video-call
Estonian Ministry of Education and Research	Britt Järvet. Department of Primary and Basic Education, chief expert.	21.08.2020, Tallinn
Latvian Ministry of Culture	Kristers Pļešakovs. Head of Media Policy Division.	25.08.2020, video-call
Estonian Government Office	Siim Kumpas. Government Office, Government Communication Unit, Strategic Communication Adviser.	27.08.2020, Tallinn
State Chancellery of Latvia	Daiga Holma. Head of the Strategic Communication Coordination Department.	28.08.2020, video-call
Latvian Ministry of Defence	Dace Kundrāte, Head of the Military Public Information Section, Military Public Affairs Department	7.10.2020, video-call
Lithuanian Ministry of Culture	Deividas Velkas, Head of Media and Copyright Policy Unit	8.10.2020, video-call
Latvian National Centre for Education	Ansis Nudiens, Head Expert	26.10.2020, video-call
Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Official at the Strategic Communications Division of the Communication and Cultural Diplomacy Department	06.11.2020, video-call

Appendix 3. Informed consent form.

<p style="text-align:center">CONSENT FORM</p>

INFORMED AND VOLUNTARY CONSENT

I have been told about the purpose and topic of the interview, and how my responses will be used.

I have been able to ask questions about the interview and they have been answered.

I understand that any attributed quotes from the interview will only be used for the purposes of published academic work.

☐ I choose to not remain anonymous.

☐ I agree that my name will appear in the list of interviewees at the end of the study.

☐ I agree that the full transcript of the interview will appear at the end of the study.

☐ I agree to this interview being digitally recorded. The digital records will not be shared to any third party and will only be used by the author for the purposes of this academic work.

I understand that I am not required to answer any of the questions and I can withdraw from the interview at any time.

I agree to participate in this interview.

Name: (print name) _____

Signature: _____   Date:

Appendix 4. Preliminary list of questions for the interviewees.

Questions to the Estonian Government Office

1. Kuidas te saate aru vaenulikust teabemõjutustegevusest?
   - Millest see koosneb?
   - Kuidas eristate legitiimseid huvirühmasid vaenulikust mõjutustegevusest?
2. Kuidas te saate aru psühholoogilisest kaitsest?
3. Milliseid meetmeid on Eesti rakendanud, et vaenuliku teabemõjutustegevuse vastu võidelda?
   - Kuidas tegeleb riik siseriiklike julgeolekuohtudega, näiteks äärmusrühmituste teabemõjutustegevuse ja vihakõnega?
4. 2017. aasta julgeolekupoliitika alused näeb ette parandada psühholoogilist kaitset, et tasalülitada vaenulikke inforünnakuid. Kuidas psühholoogilist kaitset arendatakse?
5. 2017. aasta julgeolekupoliitika aluste järgi tuleb ka parandada strateegilist kommunikatsiooni ühiskonna ühtehoiu tugevdamiseks ja riigi positiivse rahvusvahelise kuvandi kinnistamiseks. Mida te strateegilise kommunikatsiooni all silmas peate?
   - Kuidas strateegilist kommunikatsiooni parandatakse?
6. Milliseid narratiive edastab riik aktiivselt oma auditooriumile?
   - Kui riik edastabki oma narratiive, siis kas need on otseselt vastandatud Vene narratiividele?
   - Kas riik tegeleb Vene narratiivide ümberlükkamisega?
7. Läti 2019. aasta julgeolekustrateegia toob välja, et lisaks ühissõnumitele (joint messages), mis tõstavad esile riigi ja liitlaste positiivseid külgi, peab igale auditooriumile välja arendama ka spetsiifilised sõnumid, mis muutuks sõltuvalt olukorrast, vähendaks desinformatsiooni mõjust tulenevaid riske, arendaks ühiskonna ühtsust ning ühtlasi ka ühiskonna ühist sotsiaalset ja ajaloolist mälu. Kas ka Eestil on sarnased sõnumid välja töötatud?
   - Kui jah, siis mis sõnumid need täpsemalt on ja millisele auditooriumile?
   - Kui ei, siis miks mitte?
8. Kas on olemas järelevalve- (seire-) ja analüüsisüsteem, et ohte tuvastada ja eritleda? Kas saaksite sellest rohkem rääkida?
9. Kuidas teeb riik vaenuliku teabemõjutustegevuse vastu võitlemisel koostööd meedia ja kodanikuühiskonnaga?
   - Kuidas seda koostööd saaks arendada?
   - Milline on koostöö suurte sotsiaalmeedia ettevõtetega?
   - Kuidas teeb riik koostööd Propastopiga?
10. Kas arvate, et Eesti lähenemine vaenulikule teabemõjutustegevusele vastamisel erineb teiste Balti riikide omast?
    - Kui jah, siis kuidas?
    - Kui jah, siis miks see nii võib olla?

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11. Kas on veel midagi, mida soovite lisada seoses Eesti lähenemisega vaenulikule teabemõjutustegevusele vastamisel?

Questions to the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research

1. Kuidas te saate aru vaenulikust teabemõjutustegevusest?
   - Millest see koosneb?
2. Kuidas te saate aru meediakirjaoskusest?
   - Millest see koosneb?
3. Kuidas on meediakirjaoskus seotud vaenuliku teabemõjutustegevusega?
4. 2017. aasta julgeolekupoliitika alused ega ka riigikaitse arengukava 2017–2026 meediakirjaoskust ei maini. Miks?
   - Kas on plaanis meediakirjaoskus tulevikus ka nendes dokumentides välja tuua?
5. Milliseid meetmeid on Eesti meediakirjaoskuse arendamise osas rakendanud, et vaenuliku teabemõjutustegevusele vastata?
   - Põhikooli- ja gümaasiumi õppekavas ei ole meediakirjaoskust eraldi välja toodud, vaid on mainitud digipädevuste arendamist. Kuidas on see seotud meediakirjaoskusega?
   - Kuidas õpetatakse meediakirjaoskust väljaspool formaalset kooliharidust? Kas ja kuidas jõutakse teiste ühiskonnarühmadeni?
   - Milliseid meetmeid on tulevikus plaanis vastu võtta?
6. Milline on koostöö meedia ja kodanikuühiskonnaga meediakirjaoskuse arendamisel?
7. Milliseid muid tegevusi veel haridus- ja teadusministeerum ette võtab seoses vaenulikule teabemõjutustegevusele vastamisega?
8. Mida te näete Eesti suuremate vajakajäämistena teabemõjutustegevusele vastamisel?
   - Mida peaks paremini tegema?
9. Kas te arvate, et Eesti lähenemine meediakirjaoskuse arendamisele erineb teiste Balti riikide lähenemistest?
   - Kui jah, siis kuidas?
   - Kui jah, siis mis võiks olla põhjenduseks?
10. Kas teil on veel midagi lisada seoses Eesti lähenemisega vaenulikule teabemõjutustegevusele vastamisel?

Questions to the Estonian Ministry of Culture

1. Kuidas te saate aru vaenulikust teabemõjutustegevusest?
   - Millest see koosneb?
2. Kuidas te saate aru psühholoogilisest kaitsest?
   - Kuidas on psühholoogiline kaitse seotud vaenuliku teabemõjutustegevusega?
3. Eesti 2017. aasta julgeolekupoliitika alustes on kirjas, et „psühholoogilise kaitse eelistatuim abinõu on teavitada ühiskonda rünnakutest, manipulatsioonidest ja valeteabest ning tagada kõikidele ühiskonna osistele võimalikult mitmekesise teabe kättesaadavus." Kuidas see kättesaadavus saavutatakse?

4. Kas te näete Eestis edastatavaid Venemaa meediakanaleid (nt RTR-Planeta, REN TV, RT) ohuna?

- Kui jah, siis kuidas?

5. Läti 2019. aasta julgeolekustrateegias on kirjas, et selleks, et vähendada Venemaa mõjuvõimu peab Vene teaberuumile pakkuma pikajalist alternatiivi. Kas te nõustute?

- Kui jah, siis milliseid meetmeid Eesti rakendab, et Venemaa teabevälja mõju vähendada?

6. Milline roll on venekeelsel avalik-õiguslik ringhäälingul (ETV+, Raadio 4, rus.err.ee) Venemaa teabemõjutustegevusele vastamisel?

- Kas need peaksid aktiivselt Vene narratiividega vastama (nt neid ümber lükkama) või pigem neid ignoreerima?
- Kas riik peaks veelgi aktiivsemalt vene keelset sisu edastama?

7. Kui aktiivselt peaks Eesti riigi arvates piirama avalikku ligipääsu kanalitele ja väljaannetele, mis levitavad Venemaa narratiive?

8. Kas praegune õiguslik raamistik on piisav, et lahendada Eesti teaberuumi julgeolekuga seotud väljakutseid?

9. Milliseid muid tegevusi veel kultuuriministeeriumis ette võetakse seoses vaenulikule teabemõjutustegevusele vastamisega?

10. Mida te näete Eesti suuremate vajakajäämistena vaenulikule teabemõjutustegevusele vastamisel?

- Mida peaks paremini tegema?

11. Kas te arvate, et Eesti lähenemine vaenulikule teabemõjutustegevusele vastamisel erineb teiste Balti riikide lähenemistest?

- Kui jah, siis kuidas?
- Kui jah, siis mis võiks olla põhjenduseks?

12. Kas teil on veel midagi lisada seoses Eesti lähenemisega vaenulikule teabemõjutustegevusele vastamisel?

Questions to the Estonian Defence Forces

1. Kuidas te saate aru vaenulikust teabemõjutustegevusest?

- Millest see koosneb?

2. Kuidas te saate aru psühholoogilisest kaitsest?

3. Kuidas on psühholoogiline kaitse seotud vaenuliku teabemõjutustegevusega?

4. Milliseid meetmeid kaitsevägi ja kaitseministeerium rakendavad, et vaenuliku teabemõjutustegevuse vastu võidelda?

- Kuidas eristate legitiimseid huvirühmasid vaenulikust mõjutustegevusest?
- Kuidas tegeleb riik siseriiklike julgeolekuohtudega, näiteks äärmuslike gruppide teabemõjutustegevuse ja vihakõnega?

5. Kas on olemas järelevalve- (seire-) ja analüüsisüsteem, et ohte tuvastada ja eritleda? Kas saaksite sellest rohkem rääkida?

6. 2017. aasta julgeolekupoliitika alused näeb ette parandada psühholoogilist kaitset, et tasalülitada vaenulikke teaberünnakuid. Kuidas psühholoogilist kaitset arendatakse?

7. 2017. aasta julgeolekupoliitika aluste järgi tuleb ka parandada strateegilist kommunikatsiooni ühiskonna ühtehoiu tugevdamiseks ja riigi positiivse rahvusvahelise kuvandi kinnistamiseks. Mida te strateegilise kommunikatsiooni all silmas peate?
- Kuidas strateegilist kommunikatsiooni parandatakse?

9. Kui palju edastab Eesti aktiivselt haavatavatele ühiskonnarühmadele või välisauditooriumile oma strateegilisi narratiive?
- Mis narratiivid need on?
- Kui riik edastabki oma narratiive, siis kas need on otseselt vastandatud Vene narratiividele?

10. Läti julgeolekustrateegia 2019 toob välja, et lisaks ühissõnumitele (joint messages), mis tõstavad esile riigi ja liitlaste positiivseid külgi, peab igale auditooriumile välja arendama ka spetsiifilised sõnumid, mis muutuks sõltuvalt olukorrast, vähendaks desinformatsiooni mõjust tulenevaid riske, arendaks ühiskonna ühtsust ning ühtlasi ka ühiskonna ühist sotsiaalset ja ajaloolist mälu. Kas ka Eestil on sarnased sõnumid välja töötatud?
- Kui jah, siis mis sõnumid need täpsemalt on ja millisele auditooriumile?
- Mil määral tehakse koostööd meedia või kodanikuühiskonnaga?

11. Mil määral tegeleb Eesti otseselt Vene narratiividega võitlemisega ning mil määral neid eiratakse?

12. Kas arvate, et Eesti lähenemine vaenulikule teabemõjutustegevusele vastamisel erineb teiste Balti riikide omast?
- Kui jah, siis kuidas?
- Kui jah, siis miks see nii võib olla?

13. Kas on veel midagi, mida soovite lisada seoses Eesti lähenemisega vaenulikule teabemõjutustegevusele vastamisel?

Questions to the Latvian State Chancellery

1. How do you understand information influence activities?
- How do you differentiate between legitimate interest groups and hostile influence?

2. There are plans to introduce a comprehensive national defence system and psychological defence in Latvia (Informatīvais ziņojums "Par visaptverošas valsts aizsardzības sistēmas ieviešanu Latvijā"). How do you understand psychological defence?
- Can you talk about this process?

3. Latvian National Security Concept 2019 sees that Latvian strategic communication abilities should be strengthened. How are the strategic communication abilities strengthened?

4. Which strategic narratives is Latvia actively projecting towards vulnerable groups or foreign audiences?

- If the state is projecting narratives, are they directly contrasted with Russian narratives?
- Is the state actively debunking Russian narratives?

5. What are the activities of the Strategic Communications Coordination Department that was established in the State Chancellery this year?

- Is there a monitoring and analysis system established to identify and analyse threats? Could you elaborate?

6. How does the state cooperate with media and the civil society to counter information influence?

- How does the state cooperate with internet platforms?

7. What do you see as the biggest shortcomings for Latvia in countering information influence?

- What should be done to better?

8. Do you think Latvia's approach towards countering information influence activities is different from other Baltic states?

- If yes, how?

9. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding Latvia's approach to countering information influence activities that was not discussed?

Questions to the Latvian National Centre for Education

1. How do you understand information influence activities?
2. Latvia is also establishing the Comprehensive National Defence System, part of which would also be psychological defence, as written in the information report *"Par visaptverošas valsts aizsardzības sistēmas ieviešanu Latvijā"*. How do you understand psychological defence?
3. How do you understand media literacy?
4. What measures has Latvia taken in the field of media literacy to counter information influence activities?

- How is media literacy currently integrated into formal education (curricula)?
- How is media literacy promoted outside of formal education? How are other societal groups covered?
- What measures is the state planning to implement in the future?

5. How is media literacy integrated into the curricula of teacher training seminars in universities?
6. How is media literacy included in the textbooks? (in Mass Media Policy Guidelines: to create materials for teachers regarding mass media literacy issues)
7. What institutions are involved in developing media literacy?

- Do you also have a separate position in the ministry? In Estonia, for example, there is a separate position of a Chief Expert for General Competences who specialises coordinating media literacy efforts, but also activities related to digital and career competences, sexual education and state defence. Is there also a similar position in Latvia?

8. How is the state cooperating with the media or the civil society in promoting media literacy?

9. What other activities are VISC and the Ministry of Education and Science undertaking with regard to information influence activities?

10. What do you see as the biggest shortcomings for Latvia in countering information influence?

11. Do you think Latvia's approach towards media literacy is different from other Baltic states?
- If yes, how?
- If yes, what might be the reason behind these differences?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding Latvia's approach to countering information influence activities that was not discussed?

Questions to the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

1. How do you understand information influence activities?
- What do they consist of?

2. What national regulation is there currently in place concerning information influence activities?
- Are there plans to introduce any new national legislation?

3. The Latvian National Security Concept 2019 writes that "If it has been concluded in a comprehensive assessment regarding the efficiency of the Code of Practice on Disinformation of the European Commission that the Code is not efficient, Latvia should promote a discussion regarding the necessity of regulatory measures". Is the Code of Practice efficient?

4. Should there be more regulation with regard to internet platforms in the EU?
- If yes, what kind of regulation?
- What do you expect from the European Democracy Action Plan?
- What do you expect from the Digital Services Act?

5. It is written in the Latvian National Security Concept 2019 that the "current legal framework of the media operation does not solve the topical challenges related to the security of the information space of Latvia which arise not only from the abuse of television, radio, and press publications, but also of internet sites and social networks for manipulative influencing of the public opinion and consequently the political process". How to solve that?

6. How actively is Latvia cooperating with social media or internet platforms (e.g. Facebook, Google, Twitter)?

- What is the cooperation like?
- Is there coordination between the government and the platforms?

7. What other activities is your ministry undertaking with regard to information influence activities?

8. Do you think Latvia's approach towards countering information influence is different from other Baltic states?

- If yes, how?
- If yes, what might be the reasons behind these differences?

9. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding Latvia's approach to countering information influence activities that was not discussed?

Questions to the Latvian Ministry of Culture

1. How do you understand information influence activities?

- What do they consist of?

2. There are plans to introduce a comprehensive national defence system and psychological defence in Latvia (Informatīvais ziņojums "Par visaptverošas valsts aizsardzības sistēmas ieviešanu Latvijā"). How do you understand psychological defence?

- How is psychological defence related to countering information influence?

3. According to the Latvian National Security Concept 2019, in order to reduce Russian influence, there should be a long-term alternative provided for the informative space of Russia. Could you please elaborate on what measures is Latvia taking to reduce the Russian influence?

- What is the role of the Media Support Fund?

4. What is the role of Russian-language public broadcasting (LTV7, Radio 4, rus.lsm.lv) in countering Russian information influence?

- Are these channels actively engaging with Russian narratives or rather ignoring them?

5. Regarding public media, the National Security Concept prescribes that a comprehensive good quality alternative should be created and offered to the minorities as an alternative to the sources of information representing the information space of Russia, providing the possibilities to choose from. Could you please elaborate what those plans are?

- LTV7 will stop broadcasting in Russian from 2021 and move its activity online. Don't you see this step as in contradiction with the spirit of the national security strategy?
- How will the state reach the elderly who are not active online?

6. In the view of Latvia, how actively should one restrict public access to channels and outlets that spread Russian narratives?
- What have been the reasons for banning Russian channels in Latvia in the past?

7. It is written in the Latvian National Security Concept 2019 that the "current legal framework of the media operation does not solve the topical challenges related to the security of the information space of Latvia which arise not only from the abuse of television, radio, and press publications, but also of internet sites and social networks for manipulative influencing of the public opinion and consequently the political process". How to solve that?

8. "The active cooperation with the non-governmental sector should be continued in combat against the distribution of television programmes and films without the permission of the producer or supplier, as well as lawful transmission of television programmes in the telecommunications market should be promoted. A separate legal framework should be developed to reduce the possibilities for illegal distribution of the content of the Russian satellite television." What framework?

9. What activities is the Ministry of Culture undertaking in relation to media literacy to counter information influence activities?

10. What do you see as the biggest shortcomings for Latvia in countering information influence?
- What should be done better?

11. Do you think Latvia's approach towards countering information influence is different from other Baltic states?
- If yes, how?
- If yes, what might be the reason behind these differences?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding Latvia's approach to countering information influence activities that was not discussed?

Questions to the Latvian Ministry of Defence

1. How do you understand information influence activities?
- How do you differentiate between legitimate interest groups and hostile influence?
- How is the state responding to home-grown security threats, e.g. information influence activities by extremist groups that incite hatred or hate speech?

2. There are plans to introduce a comprehensive national defence system and psychological defence in Latvia (Informatīvais ziņojums "Par visaptverošas valsts aizsardzības sistēmas ieviešanu Latvijā"). How do you understand psychological defence?

3. What are the measures the MoD or the armed forces are taking to counter hostile or illegitimate information influence activities?
- What measures are you planning to take?

- Do the Latvian National Armed Forces or Zemessardze also provide some kind of education, trainings, e.g. regarding media literacy or psychological defence? Presentations around the country (e.g. Lithuania) Why not?
- Does Latvian Armed Forces (or the MoD) also publish a yearbook like the Estonian Armed Forces? Why not?

4. Latvian National Security Concept 2019 sees that Latvian strategic communication abilities should be strengthened. What do you see as strategic communication?
- What is the stratcom framework in MoD/Armed Forces?
- How are the strategic communication abilities strengthened?

5. The Latvian National Security Concept 2019 prescribes to establish a monitoring and analysis system of the information space to identify and analyse threats. Could you elaborate?
- What are you monitoring?

6. Which strategic narratives is Latvia (MoD or Armed Forces) actively projecting towards vulnerable groups or foreign audiences?
- Is the state actively debunking Russian narratives? In LT Tomas Čeponis said 2014-2016 they were concentrating more on debunking.
- What is your approach in communicating with the Russian-speaking audience in Latvia?

7. Tomas Čeponis, an analyst from Lithuanian armed forces stratcom department said that the armed forces in LT also have a written narrative, a kind of communicative booklet, "Lithuanian CV", that they use in communication. Is there something similar in Latvia?
- Have the state institutions agreed on a "master narrative"?
- Do you see a need for a "master narrative"?

8. How do the ministries cooperate to counter information influence?

9. How does the state cooperate with media and the civil society to counter information influence?
- How does the state cooperate with internet platforms?
- How does the state cooperate with the Baltic Elves?

10. What kind of cooperation is there between the Baltic states?

11. What do you see as the biggest shortcomings for Latvia in countering information influence?
- What should be done to counter information influence better?

12. Do you think Latvia's approach towards countering information influence activities is different from other Baltic states?
- If yes, how?
- If yes, what might be the reason behind these differences?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding Latvia's approach to countering information influence activities that was not discussed?

Questions to the Lithuanian Office of the Government

1. How do you understand information influence activities?
   - What do they consist of?

2. What measures has Lithuania taken to counter hostile or illegitimate information influence activities?
   - How do you differentiate between legitimate interest groups and hostile influence?
   - How is the state responding to home-grown security threats, e.g. information influence activities by extremist groups that incite hatred or hate speech?
   - What measures are planned?

3. Estonian national security documents address countering information influence activities in the framework of psychological defence. Latvia is also planning to establish a Comprehensive National Defence System, part of it would also be psychological defence (psychological resilience) together with strategic communication. Lithuanian documents (National Security Strategy 2017, Defence Policy White Paper 2017, Military Strategy 2017) do not mention psychological defence. How does the Lithuanian approach relate to the concept of psychological defence?

4. Lithuanian National Security Strategy 2017 sees that the strategic communication capacity of state institutions should be strengthened. What do you see as strategic communication?
   - How is the strategic communication capacity of state institutions strengthened?
   - Lithuanian National Security Strategy 2017 also prescribes to develop a mechanism for coordinating strategic communication of Lithuanian institutions. Please elaborate, what this mechanism is?

5. What strategic narratives is Lithuania projecting?
   - Are they projected to internal or foreign audiences?
   - Are the narratives directly contrasted with Russian narratives?

6. Latvian National Security Concept 2019 prescribes that in addition to joint messages that highlight the positives of the country and its allies, specific messages which change depending on the situation and which reduce the risks of the influence of disinformation and increase the unity of the society, its common social and historical memory, should be developed for each audience. Has Lithuania developed this kind of specific messages?
   - If yes, what are those messages?
   - If no, why not? Are there plans to develop?

7. To which extent is Lithuania actively engaging with Russian narratives and to which extent they are ignored?
   - Is the state actively debunking Russian narratives?

8. How does the state cooperate with media and the civil society to counter information influence?

- How could it be improved?

9. What do you see as the biggest shortcomings for Lithuania in countering information influence?

- What should be done to counter information influence better?

10. Do you think your Lithuania's approach towards countering information influence activities is different from other Baltic states?

- If yes, how?
- If yes, what might be the reason behind these differences?

11. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding Lithuania's approach to countering information influence activities that was not discussed?

Questions to the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture '

1. How do you understand information influence activities?

- What do they consist of?

2. According to the Lithuanian National Security Strategy 2017, in order to create a secure information environment and protect Lithuania's political system, it is necessary to promote country-wide dissemination and accessibility of media content which is of adequate quality and based on objective information. How is that achieved?

- Is there a Media Support Fund?

3. The National Security Strategy also prescribes to increase the financial transparency of the media. How is that achieved?

4. What other activities is the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture is undertaking in relation to information influence activities?

5. Do you see Russian media channels operating in Lithuania (e.g. PBK, RTR Planeta, REN TV) as a threat?

- If yes, how?

6. According to the Latvian National Security Concept 2019, in order to reduce Russian influence, there should be a long-term alternative provided for the informative space of Russia. Do you agree?

- If yes, what measures is Lithuania taking to reduce the influence of Russia's information space?

7. In the view of Lithuania, how actively should one restrict public access to channels and outlets that spread Russian narratives?

- What have been the reasons for banning Russian channels in Lithuania in the past?

8. Is the current legal framework adequate to solve the challenges related to the security of the Lithuanian information space?

9. What are the activities the Ministry of Culture is undertaking in relation to media literacy?

10. What do you see as the biggest shortcomings for Estonia in countering information influence?

- What should be done to counter information influence better?

11. Do you think Estonia's approach towards countering information influence is different from other Baltic states?

- If yes, how?
- If yes, what might be the reason behind these differences?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding Lithuania's approach to countering information influence activities that was not discussed?

Questions to the Lithuanian Armed Forces

1. How do you understand information influence activities?

- What do they consist of?

2. What measures have the Lithuanian armed forces taken to counter illegitimate information influence activities?

- How do you differentiate between legitimate interest groups and hostile influence?
- How is the state responding to home-grown security threats, e.g. information influence activities by extremist groups that incite hatred or hate speech?
- What measures are planned?

3. Is there a monitoring and analysis system established to identify and analyse threats? Could you elaborate?

4. Lithuanian National Security Strategy 2017 sees that the strategic communication capacity of state institutions should be strengthened. What do you see as strategic communication?

- How is the strategic communication capacity of state institutions strengthened?

5. Lithuanian National Security Strategy 2017 also prescribes to develop a mechanism for coordinating strategic communication or Lithuanian institutions. Is this being developed?

- Please elaborate, what this mechanism is?

6. How much is Lithuania actively projecting its own strategic narratives towards vulnerable groups or foreign audiences?

- What are these narratives?
- If the state is projecting narratives, are they directly contrasted with Russian narratives?

7. Latvian National Security Concept 2019 prescribes that in addition to joint messages that highlight the positives of the country and its allies, specific messages which change depending on the situation and which reduce the risks of the influence of disinformation and increase the unity of the society, its common social and historical memory, should

be developed for each audience. Has Lithuania developed this kind of specific messages?

- If yes, what are those messages?
- If no, why not? Are there plans to develop?

8. To which extent is your country actively engaging with Russian narratives and to which extent are they ignored?

- Is the state also debunking Russian narratives or disinformation?

9. How does Lithuania cooperate with media or the civil society in countering information influence activities?

- Debunk.eu?

10. What do you see as the biggest shortcomings for Lithuania in countering information influence?

- What should be done to counter information influence better?

10. Do you think your Lithuania's approach towards countering information influence activities is different from other Baltic states?

- If yes, how?
- If yes, what might be the reason behind these differences?

11. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding Lithuania's approach to countering information influence activities that was not discussed?

Appendix 5. Measures related to countering information influence brought out in Estonian strategic documents.

Countermeasures to information influence brought out in Estonian documents
National Security Concept 2017 • Improve strategic communication to strengthen the cohesion of society, reinforce positive international image of the country, and consolidate psychological defence to neutralise hostile information attacks (NSC 2017, 7). • Increase peoples' perception of security and enhance their ability to evaluate various threats and factors that influence security, as well as their ability and readiness to counter such threats (Ibid.). • Estonia will continue to promote the cooperation between the EU and NATO, including in the fields of strategic communication and situational awareness (NSC 2017, 10). **Resilience and cohesion of society** • Cohesive society is less vulnerable and less open to the influences from outside. The better integration of society will reinforce unity and cohesion. • The cohesion and integration, as well as the resilience, of society can be reinforced if the population is better and more reliably informed (strategic communication). • The best tool of psychological defence is to inform the public of attacks, manipulation and false information and guarantee access to multifaceted information for all segments of society. Psychological defence is developed in cooperation with civil society.   (NSC 2017, 19-20)
National Defence Development Plan 2017-2026 • Advance strategic communication and psychological defence to support national security policy, raise public awareness, neutralise hostile influence activities, expose disinformation and hinder the spread of it (RKAK, 6). • When employing strategic communication to stand up to information warfare, it is necessary to react in an early phase and be ready to express the true will of the state, both in Estonia and abroad (RKAK, 18).

Appendix 6. Media literacy in the curriculum for Estonian basic school students.

ESTONIAN LANGUAGE		
The aim of teaching Estonian language is to ensure that students: • learn to use different communication channels appropriately and develop their ability to find, critically judge and purposefully use information provided by the media and online; • develop critical thinking, skill to justify opinions and draw independent conclusions based on oral and written texts; • consult dictionaries, reference books and online sources to improve their literary standard proficiency.		
Learning and educational objectives		
1st stage of study	**2nd stage of study**	**3rd stage of study**
Work with texts according to their teacher's instructions.		Judge information in the media and online critically and use it purposefully.
		Use dictionaries and handbooks and find orthological assistance from web sources.
ESTONIAN LITERATURE		
The aim of teaching Literature is to ensure that students: • critically judge and use different information sources purposefully.		
Learning and educational objectives		
1st stage of study	**2nd stage of study**	**3rd stage of study**
	Use different sources, including dictionaries and the internet, to find necessary information.	Interpret, analyse and understand literary works as a source of different stories and human relations, feelings and values and as means of reflecting different viewpoints.
		Use different sources to find necessary information, including printed reference and online sources.
RUSSIAN LANGUAGE		
The aim of teaching Russian language is to ensure that students: • use dictionaries (including online), printed reference and online sources to broaden their knowledge of Russian; • learn to appropriately use different communication channels and develop their ability to find, critically judge and purposefully use the information provided by the media and online.		
Learning and educational objectives		
1st stage of study	**2nd stage of study**	**3rd stage of study**
Be able to find relevant information from different	Seek information in texts of different styles and	Seek information from various sources (including

sources and use age-appropriate dictionaries.	genres and in reference sources purposefully.	online) and use different dictionaries and other necessary reference sources.
	Can use dictionaries, reference works and interactive orthography resources.	

RUSSIAN LITERATURE

The aim of teaching literature (for schools whose language of instruction is Russian) is to ensure that students:
- critically judge and purposefully use different sources of information, creating associations between social developments and personal values and plans for the future.

Learning and educational objectives

1st stage of study	2nd stage of study	3rd stage of study
	Use dictionaries, library catalogues and the internet to find any necessary information.	Use school and public libraries and the internet to seek information on given subjects and for their own purposes if necessary.

ESTONIAN AS SECOND LANGUAGE

After completing the basic school, students:
- know how to use information sources in Estonian and appropriate to their age (e.g. reference sources, dictionaries, the internet) in order to find necessary information in other areas and subjects as well.

Learning outcomes

1st stage of study	2nd stage of study	3rd stage of study
	Use reference sources in Estonian (e.g. translation dictionaries, the internet) to seek necessary information in other areas and subjects as well.	

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION

Learning and educational objectives

1st stage of study	2nd stage of study	3rd stage of study
-	-	Be familiar with and know how to find sources of health-related information and support, demonstrate, in learning situations, basic first-aid measures and describe effective behaviour in hazardous situations.

HISTORY

The objective of learning History in basic school is that by the end of basic school the student would:

- use the principal historical terms in the correct context, differentiate between historical facts, interpretations and opinions, observe and articulate problems, ask relevant questions and offer solutions;
- find, generalise, interpret, use and critically judge historical knowledge and the reliability of sources;
- are familiar with and use different learning techniques, types of text and information sources, demonstrate their knowledge and skills both verbally and in writing and use ICT means for study.

Learning and educational objectives

	2nd stage of study	3rd stage of study
	Know that information about the past is found in historical sources, can work with simple sources and assess them critically.	Work with varied historical sources, comment on them and judge them critically.
		Seek, analyse and use historical information, compile outlines and keyword schemes, reviews and short research papers and present them in speech and in writing with the help of ICT means.

CIVICS AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Learning and educational objectives

	2nd stage of study	3rd stage of study
	Know how to find information that serves their purposes and interests and judge it critically, present their knowledge and opinions clearly and convincingly and are able to explain them, generate, use and share information and value their own and other people's work.	Be able to find necessary information and tools; use simple research methods; consider protection of copyright.

SCIENCE

The aim of teaching natural science is that by the end of the 7th grade, the student would:

- seek scientific information, evaluate the value of such information and write science text.

Learning and educational objectives

1st stage of study	2nd stage of study	3rd stage of study
Formulate information gained from observations,	Find science-related information from different	Analyse the trustworthiness of data,

draw conclusions and present them both orally and in written formats.	sources and discuss the reliability of these sources of information.	understands the need for repeat tests and verification tests and the need to check auxiliary variables.
	Know how to compare scientific and non-scientific explanations.	Make conclusions on the basis of collected data, explain and predict results and evaluate the validity of hypotheses.

BIOLOGY

The study of the subject of Biology in basic school is to develop competencies so that students have the capability to:
- use different sources of information and critically assess the information they contain.

Learning and educational objectives

	3rd stage of study
	Use different biology-related sources of information, analyse, synthesise and critically assess the information they contain and apply this successfully in explaining processes taking place in wildlife, describing objects and solving problems.

GEOGRAPHY

The objective of learning Geography in basic school is that by the end of basic school the student would:
- use sources of information and critically assess the geography-related information they contain and read and make sense of simple science texts.

Learning and educational objectives

	3rd stage of study
	Use sources of information to find geography-related information, analyse, synthesise and assess the information contained in them critically and apply this in explaining processes taking place in nature and society, describing phenomena and objects and solving problems.

PHYSICS

The objective of learning Physics in basic school is that by the end of basic school the student would:

• develop the skill of reading and understanding science texts and learn how to find physics-related information in encyclopaedias and the internet.	

Learning and educational objectives	
	3rd stage of study
	Find physics-related information from handbooks and use this information when solving tasks.

CHEMISTRY

The objective of learning Chemistry in basic school is that by the end of basic school the student would:
- use different sources of chemistry-related information, analyse the information gathered and assess it critically.

INFORMATICS

The subject of informatics at the basic school level strives to direct the students to:
- develop the basic skills of learning and working with computer, primarily to search for information, process and analyse it, and to compile text documents and presentations;
- comprehend and know how to avoid potential health, security and personal data protection threats that are likely to occur when using information and communication technology (hereinafter: ICT).

Learning outcomes		
	2nd stage of study	**3rd stage of study**
	Understand the need for critical assessment of information found on the internet, assess the objectivity of information sources and find, if necessary, sources offering alternative viewpoints concerning the same topic.	Compare two assigned online information sources: suitability, objectivity/bias and timeliness.

CROSS-CURRICULAR TOPIC "INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT"

The cross-curricular topic "Information environment" strives to shape the pupils into information-aware people who perceive and comprehend the information environment around them, can critically analyse it and act in it in accordance with their goals and the socially accepted ethics of communication.

The pupils are guided to:
- understand the similarities and differences between direct and mediated information;
- select a suitable communication mode and channel depending on the situation and the need;
- determine their information needs and find suitable information;
- develop efficient methods of searching for information that include the use of various reference sources and information environments; and
- develop the skill of critical information analysis.

Appendix 7. Media literacy in the curriculum for Estonian upper secondary school students.

ESTONIAN LANGUAGE
Learning and educational objectives Estonian language studies at the upper secondary school level are designed for students to: • know the specific features of text types and can read, analyse and compile different types of texts; • develop their creative and critical thinking; • select and use information sources purposefully and judge them critically. Learning outcomes Graduates of upper secondary school: • can find and use different sources of information to create their own texts and judge them critically; • analyse and judge media and other public texts critically and can identify influencing tools in texts; • know how to use language information sources to improve their language use. 2nd course: "Media and Influence" Learning outcomes At the end of the course, students: • have an idea of a basic communication model and role of the media in information society; • are familiar with media channels and genres, their specific features and the specifics of the reception of media texts; • analyse verbal texts in visual and audiovisual context; • can formulate the message of a text, identify references and allusions to other texts, and interpret a text in the context of related texts; • differentiate between facts and opinions and reliable and doubtful information; • can identify arguments and basic verbal and visual influencing techniques in media texts; and • analyse advertisements critically and understand the hidden messages of advertising. 3rd course: "Text Language and Style" Learning outcomes At the end of the course, students: • are familiar with influencing ways and language tools, present their arguments and agree with presented statements or contradict them both in oral and written texts. 4th course: "Practical Estonian I" Learning outcomes At the end of the course, students: • are familiar with the main sources of seeking information online and use the information found in their texts. 5th course: "Practical Estonian II"

Learning outcomes At the end of the course, students: • can analyse media texts critically and are able to draw up summaries based on information from different sources and trains of thought. 6th course: "Practical Estonian III" Learning outcomes At the end of the course, students can: • use advanced strategies of online information search and can assess the reliability of information.
LITERATURE (for Estonian-language schools)
Learning and educational objectives The literary studies in upper secondary school seek to ensure that students: • analyse different literary works and information sources critically and develop their creativity, oral and written self-expression and reasoning skills. Learning outcomes Graduates of upper secondary school: • can present spoken and written arguments, express and defend their positions, using a literary text as a reference.
RUSSIAN LANGUAGE
Learning and educational objectives Russian language studies at the upper secondary school level are designed for students to: • can analyse texts (including media texts and advertisements) and judge them critically by understanding the intentions of the author and can differentiate between reliable and unreliable information; • learn to adequately understand the materials they have read and heard. Learning outcomes Graduates of upper secondary school: • assess media information and information received from the internet with a critical mindset; • use dictionaries, reference sources and the internet to find necessary information. 4th course: "Practical Russian II (Reception and Creation of Oral Texts)" At the end of the course, students: • can critically assess oral texts (their own and other people's and authentic and study texts). 5th course: "Practical Russian III (Reception and Creation of Written Texts)" At the end of the course, students can: • can critically assess written texts (their own and other people's and authentic and study texts).

LITERATURE (for Russian-language schools)
<u>Learning and educational objectives</u> The literary studies at the upper secondary school level are designed for students to: • analyse different literary works and information sources critically and develop their creativity, oral and written self-expression and reasoning skills. <u>Learning outcomes</u> Graduates of upper secondary school: • can compare different interpretations of one and the same work and make well-founded conclusions; • can collect and systematise materials and use reference sources in compiling and amending different types of texts.
ESTONIAN AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
<u>Learning outcomes</u> Graduates of upper secondary school: • are interested in Estonian social and cultural life, read literature and printed media in Estonian, watch films, TV programmes and theatre performances and listen to the radio; • use reference sources (e.g. dictionaries and the internet) in Estonian to find necessary information on different topics.
HISTORY
<u>Learning and educational objectives</u> The aim of upper secondary school history studies is to guide students to: • understand the nature of cause and effect, similarity and difference, continuity of historical events and processes and reasons for different interpretations, taking into account the context of an era when shaping their own viewpoints; • find and critically analyse information containing historical data, assess the trustworthiness of the source and use different sources of information in a purposeful way; • understand and acknowledge the differences between people, viewpoints and situations, form and give reasons for their own points of view, analyse and assess their own actions and see and correct their mistakes. <u>Learning outcomes</u> At the end of the course, students will be able to: • find, select, reference and critically analyse different sources of information, including historical maps and opinions, assessing the credibility of a source or an interpretation; distinguish between fact and opinion and explain the reasons for different interpretations of events or processes. <u>Optional course: "General History – world History: Civilisations outside Europe"</u> Learning and educational objectives At the end of the course, students will be able to: • use different sources of information, including historical maps and judgements, understand the reasons for different interpretations of historical events and processes and assess the credibility of sources or interpretations. <u>Optional course: "General History – History of European Countries and the USA"</u> Learning and educational objectives At the end of the course, students will be able to:

• use different sources of information, including historical maps and opinions, understand the reasons for 35 different interpretations of historical events and processes and assess the credibility of sources or interpretations.

CIVICS AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Learning and educational objectives

The aim of upper secondary school Civics and citizenship education is to guide students to:

- give reasons for and defend their own viewpoints and choices in a well-argued way, be able to participate in discussions and debates, distinguish between emotional and politically biased judgements and objective truth and respect everyone's right to personal opinion and freedom of speech;
- obtain society-related information from different sources in a purposeful way and interpret, draw conclusions from, critically assess, save and forward it, observing copyright laws.

Learning outcomes

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

- explain and know how to use in context the most important concepts of Civics and citizenship education; understand legal texts and socio-economic information and know how to find, critically assess, categorise and use important information and create new information, respecting and taking into account copyright restrictions.

1st course: "Society and its development"

Learning outcomes

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

- collect socio-political and economic information, including from the media, and evaluate, categorise and use it critically.

2nd course: "Managing the economy of society"

Learning outcomes

At the end of the course, students will:

- find economy-related information, using appropriate statistical methods to process it and present the results in spoken and visual form and in writing.

Optional course: "Everyday law"

Learning and educational objectives

The aim of this optional course is to guide students to:

- develop skills important to the practice of effective law-related behaviour, such as critical thinking, analysis, communication, observation and solution of problems.

Learning outcomes

At the end of the course, students will:

- have acquired skills in critical thinking, analysis, communication, observation and the solving of problems from the perspective of law-abiding behaviour

BIOLOGY
Learning and educational objectives Biology lessons at the upper secondary school level are designed for students to: • determine and use different sources, including electronic sources, to obtain biological information, and critically assess this information. Learning outcomes Biology lessons in upper secondary school level are designed for students to gain competencies to be capable to: • use various (including electronic) sources to find information about issues of biology, to be able to analyse and critically evaluate the information obtained from these sources and apply it effectively in explaining objects and processes in the organic world as well as solving problems associated with the organic world. Optional course: "Applied Biology" Learning and educational objectives This optional course is designed for students to: • use different sources, including electronic sources, to obtain information about biology, and critically assess the information available from these sources.
GEOGRAPHY
Learning and educational objectives Geography lessons at the upper secondary school level are designed for students to: • seek geographical information from sources of information in Estonian as well as other languages, evaluate the information critically and make reasoned conclusions and decisions. Learning outcomes By the end of the course, students are expected to have the capability to: • use information sources (including web-based) for finding information about Geography, critically evaluate the information found in them and express it in correct and expressive language. 1st course: "Population and Economy" Learning outcomes By the end of the course, students are expected to have the capacity to: • find, evaluate and use sources of information (including maps) to obtain information, analyse correlations and make generalisations and conclusions. Optional course: "Geoinformatics" Learning and educational objectives This optional course is designed for students to: • be able to find various spatial data and evaluate the quality of this data. Learning outcomes By the end of the course, students are expected to have the capacity to: • find various spatial data and evaluate the quality of such information. Optional course: "The Globalising World" Learning and educational objectives The aim of this optional course is to guide students to:

• use reliable sources of information in both Estonian and foreign languages to find geographyrelated information. Learning outcomes At the end of the course, students will be able to: • find geography-related information about different regions of the world from both Estonian and foreign language sources and interpret, generalise and evaluate this information critically.

CHEMISTRY
<u>Learning and educational objectives</u> Chemistry lessons at the upper secondary school level are designed for students to: • identify, evaluate and use different sources to obtain information on chemistry and analyse and critically assesses this information. <u>Learning objectives</u> Chemistry lessons at the upper secondary school level are designed for students to: • use various (including electronic) sources of information to obtain information on chemistry and be able to analyse and critically evaluate this information.

PHYSICS
<u>Learning and educational objectives</u> Physics lessons at the upper secondary school level are designed for students to: • collect and process information, distinguishing reliable information from noise and scientific information from unscientific information. <u>Learning outcomes</u> Physics lessons at the upper secondary school level are designed for students to: • use different sources of information, evaluate and analyse the information included in them and find solution to physical problems arising in everyday life. <u>Optional course: "Physics and Engineering"</u> Learning and educational objectives This optional course is designed for students to: • find reliable information to solve the problems becoming evident in the technological environment surrounding us. <u>Optional course: "Another Kinds of Physics"</u> Learning and educational objectives This optional course is designed for students to: • find relevant and reliable information about the chosen phenomena of the micro and mega worlds.

INTERDISCIPLINARY NATURAL SCIENCE COURSES
<u>Optional course: "Science, Technology and Society"</u> Learning and educational objectives This optional course is designed for students to: • find and evaluate information concerning scientific problems with social impact.
<u>Optional course: "3D Modelling"</u> Learning and educational objectives This optional course is designed for students to:

- use various sources of information in planning technological processes and critically evaluate the information from these sources.

Optional course: "Technical drawing"
Learning and educational objectives
This course is designed for students to:
- use various source (including electronic sources) of information independently to obtain information concerning technical drawing and critically evaluate the information obtained from these sources.

Learning outcomes
By the end of the course, students are expected to have the capacity to:
- use various sources (including electronic sources) of information to find information about technical drawing, synthesise and evaluate the information obtained from these sources and use it successfully in designing objects and solving problems concerning spatial geometry.

Optional course: "Using Computers for Inquiry"
Learning and educational objectives
This optional course is designed for students to:
- use computers to undertake investigations (including collecting, processing and analysing) data and present investigation results.

Learning objectives
By the end of the course, students are expected to have the capacity to :
- find information from suitable sources, evaluate its reliability and compile accurate reference items

Optional course: "Basics of Programming and Development of Software Applications"
Learning and educational objectives
This optional course is designed for students to:
- develop creativity, a logical, analytical and algorithmic way of thinking and systematic discussion of problems and problem-solving;
- acknowledge and experience the working principles of programme-controlled systems and the nature of the main processes of presenting and processing information;
- gain basic skills in writing programmes and algorithms and solving problems with the help of programme-controlled systems;
- explain the nature of objects and data, their properties and the roles these properties play in algorithms and programmes;
- acquire the main concepts and definitions of algorithms and programming, the skills to plan, compile, smooth and test programmes consisting of interworking units (procedures), use objects, scalar data and massifs and describe various processes.

Learning outcomes
By the end of the course, students are expected to have the capacity to:
- distinguish between different types of data (numbers, texts, Boolean, graphic and sound data) and use them in programmes and algorithms and have some idea of their presentation methods;

• explain the nature of constants, variables, massifs and objects and use them rationally in algorithms and programmes.
ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS STUDIES (optional)
Learning and educational objectives The optional course of economic and business studies strives to direct the students to: • use different information sources and critically assess the information they contain, plan and conduct research, process collected data, interpret it and present the results.
BASES OF INQUIRY (optional)
Learning and educational objectives The optional course "Bases of Inquiry" aims at developing in students the following competencies: • identifying, comprehending and evaluating relevant publications, their sources of information; validity and reliability; • using different models information gathering; critically assessing the information these give; identification of risk and safety components; • obtaining an overview and experience of undertaking data collection, processing and analysis of findings and drawing conclusions. Learning outcomes At the end of the course the students are expected to have the capability to: • recognise simpler sources in their chosen field find the necessary information and critically analyse it; • explain and carry out primary methods of collection of initial data for research (observation, experiment, survey, generalisation of experience, etc.) • process data by applying suitable statistical methods (median value calculation, correlation, etc.) • analyse investigation outcomes by applying suitable methods (comparison, ranking, analysis, synthesis, generalisation, etc.).
CROSS-CURRICULAR TOPIC "INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT"
The cross-curricular topic "Information environment" strives to shape the pupils into information-aware people who perceive the information and understands the surrounding information environment, is able to analyse critically the society acting in accordance with their goals and the socially accepted ethics of communication. The pupils are guided to: • determine their information needs and find appropriate information; • develop an effective information search methods, encompassing various publications and information environments use; • develop skills of critical analysis of the information, compare the various discursive practices (eg parlour media, law, entertainment, communication between friends, etc.) and those prevailing norms of communication; • understand the media and the operation of economy, including the role of the media in the labor market; • analyse the existing rules of public space and to describe their activities in case of infringement of public space rules.

Appendix 8. Measures related to countering information influence brought out in Latvian strategic documents.

Countermeasures brought out in Latvian strategic documents
National Security Concept 2019   **Provision of media pluralism and diversity**   • Need to invest in public and commercial media to offer a long-term alternative to Russia's information space, need for more quality content and more diverse offer of commercial and cable television content created in Europe.   • Need to continue and expand the operation of the Media Support Fund that allows the commercial media to receive state funds for the creation of content of public significance.   • In addition to electronic media, also need to ensure pluralism of printed press, particularly in regions and border areas.   • Media environment support measures should be directed towards strengthening the trust of inhabitants in independent media.   **Development of public media**   • Need to increase funding for public media so that it could raise quality and compete with the commercial media.   • Public media should address different audiences, including minorities. A comprehensible alternative of good quality should be created and offered to this target audience as an alternative to the sources of information representing the information space of Russia, providing the possibilities to choose from.   **Combating the illegal distribution of programmes**   • A separate legal framework should be developed to reduce the possibilities for illegal distribution of the content of the Russian satellite television.   **Development of the strategic communication skills of the state**   • A targeted strategic communication policy should ensure that true, timely, and comprehensive information regarding both the objectives of action, decisions, and operations of the government and the rights and obligations of inhabitants is available to inhabitants. The strategic communication channels and mechanisms should also be usable in crisis and threat situations.   • Need to continue promoting inhabitants' sense of belonging to the state and their understanding of democracy and historical values.   • In addition to joint messages that highlight the positives of Latvia and its allies, specific messages which change depending on the situation and which reduce the risks of the influence of disinformation and increase the unity of the society, its common social and historical memory, should be developed for each audience.

- The communication of the government should efficiently reach different target audiences, inter alia, the inhabitants residing in the regions of Latvia, entrepreneurs, representatives of the non-governmental sector, young persons, minorities, as well as the diaspora abroad.

Establishment of the monitoring and analysis system of the information space
- Efficient monitoring and analysis of the information space should be ensured to be able to identify, analyse and tackle threats to the information space, inter alia, to hostile information influence activities, in a timely manner.
- A centralised mechanism for the coordination of the strategic communication and the security of the information space of the State is necessary, allowing to respond to specific threats in a timely and efficient manner, inter alia, coordinated skills of crisis communication.
- The resilience of elections against external information influencing should be strengthened. Also, the readiness and ability of the media and the civil society to prevent disinformation campaigns in the election context should be promoted.

Improvement of the laws and regulations governing the media environment
- The revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive should be incorporated in the Latvian legal acts to combat hate speech and incitement to violence expressed in Russian television programmes more actively. The new directive allows the Member States to suspend, upon request, retransmission and services in urgent cases which are under the jurisdiction of other Member States if they endanger security of the society, including also national security, distribute hate speech or incitement to violence or terrorism after one violation.

Promotion of media literacy and the professional growth of the media sector
- Need to promote the strengthening of media literacy in formal and informal education, as well as support the attempts of the public and commercial media to promote media literacy in all age groups.
- The understanding of the society of the disinformation methods and its resilience against the influence of such methods should be promoted, paying particular attention to educating the society as to how to distinguish objective information from disinformation and propaganda, thus promoting critical thinking and inhabitants' ability to analyse, assess and recognise information influence activities.
- Need to continue promoting the education of young persons from schools in media literacy to strengthen the resilience of the youngest part of the society against information threats.
- Need to continue promoting education of media literacy within the scope of the Media Support Fund.

- Operation of the media sector directed towards promoting the sustainability of independent media and the professional growth of journalists should be promoted.

Strengthening of the European Union policy for combating disinformation
- Priority interest of Latvia in the EU is to achieve that the private sector also takes effective measures against disinformation, higher responsibility and transparency from IT companies and online platforms should be achieved.
- Latvia should promote a discussion regarding the necessity of regulatory measures if the comprehensive assessment regarding the efficacy of the Code of Practice of Disinformation of the EC concludes that the Code is not efficient.
- EU's ability to discover, analyse and expose disinformation campaigns needs to be strengthened, need to develop a coordinated and joint response of the EU and Member States to disinformation.
- Need to continue paying international attention to Russian disinformation activities and the ways it is using information campaigns as an element of hybrid war.

National Defence Concept 2020 (translated from Latvian)

- Need to continue integrating media literacy into the school curriculum and educate other groups in the society.
- Need to continue raising awareness in the society about threats and challenges of the information space and thus contribute to critical thinking and psychological resilience.
- Strategic communication in the defence sector should be developed so that in the event of a military threat state's ability to act is promoted,
- There needs to be a clear understanding at all levels of the society that foreign influence operations are not allowed.

(NDC 2020, 16)

Appendix 9. Media literacy expected results to be achieved by the student in the end of the 3rd, 6th and 9th grade in Latvia (translated from Latvian) (Noteikumi par valsts pamatizglītības... 2020).

LATVIAN AS FIRST LANGUAGE		
1. We communicate by listening, reading, speaking, and writing to learn and provide information, express emotions, and build relationships. Each communication situation has a context that determines the content and form of the text and influences the choice of certain language tools. The mother tongue is the basis for learning other languages, while other languages help to better understand the mother tongue		
1.1. Communication in context		
In the end of 3rd grade	**In the end of 6th grade**	**In the end of 9th grade**
1.1.2. By listening to simple texts and watching videos, understand the text as a whole, determine the actors, place, time and main idea. Engage in communication about what is heard and seen.	1.1.2. By listening to texts related to studies or interests and watching videos or films, understand the information, determine the main information and idea of the text. Engage in communication about what is heard or seen using specific facts, examples, and content-relevant details.	1.1.2. By listening to and watching informative programs, interviews, discussions, understand, interpret and evaluate the information heard and the opinion of speakers on the main topic. Notice and describe the attitude of the participants towards each other. Analyse and evaluate what is heard and seen, argue your opinion.
1.1.3. Read clearly and comprehensibly a text that is relevant to your studies and interests. Answer the questions and ask the questions yourself.	1.1.3. Read a text that is relevant and interesting to your studies and interests. Finding the main words and phrases in it, answering the questions and asking the questions yourself, determine the main idea of the text and the ideas expressed in it. Formulate an opinion on the usefulness of the text that was read, and future uses.	1.1.3. Read texts that are different in terms of content, structure and genres with comprehension, see the most important features of language use. Analyse and explain the text, evaluate your understanding. Compare what you read with what you know before, determine what reflections the text you read has caused.
1.1.9. Find information in the text, also in tables, diagrams, charts, mind maps. Evaluate it according to simple criteria: known or unknown, interesting or boring, reliable or	1.1.9. Gather information from thematically related sources, according to the purpose. Distinguish between necessary and unnecessary, important from insignificant, assess the reliability of	1.1.9. Compare several sources of information, choose the most reliable ones, justify your choice. Integrate and interpret information from a variety of sources. Select the type of processing and

unreliable. Compare to personal experience.	information. Arrange it in a certain order or way.	structuring information appropriate to the purpose. See and compare relationships, sequences of events, causes, and effects.

MINORITY LANGUAGE

1. We communicate by listening, reading, speaking, and writing to learn and provide information, express emotions, and build relationships. Each communication situation has a context that determines the content and form of the text and influences the choice of certain language tools. The mother tongue is the basis for learning other languages, while other languages help to better understand the mother tongue

1.1. Communication in context

In the end of 3rd grade	In the end of 6th grade	In the end of 9th grade
1.1.3. Receive specific information (place, time, roles of participants) in communication, informative, literary texts, and folklore.	1.1.3. Perceive in detail and in general various types of information (facts, opinions, attitudes) from several offered sources (also in the e-environment), critically evaluate their content and reliability.	1.1.3. Use the communicative environment (including the e-environment) as a source of various information to understand and express facts, opinions and ideas. Perceive information (also contradictory) from various sources, critically and argumentatively evaluate it. Evaluate the opportunities and shortcomings of the proposed sources, identifying those language tools and multimedia content that indicate the reliability of the information.
1.1.4. Select information from various sources according to the purpose of communication. Find information in tables, diagrams, charts, mind maps. Select the required information, including the specified website.	1.1.4. Gather information from thematically related sources according to the purpose. Select necessary and important information from various sources. Capture information highlighted graphically (font, colour, font size, page layout), store and arrange it in a certain order or way.	1.1.4. Integrate and interpret information from a variety of sources. Choose the appropriate way of processing and structuring information, using also the e-environment. See and compare relationships, sequences of events, causes and effects. Make independent judgments and substantiate them. Evaluate author's position and purpose, the relevance

		of the information to the communication situation.
1.1.8. Notice and describe people's emotions in everyday communication situations and literary texts.	1.1.8. Compares one's emotions with other people's emotions in communication (for example, in literary texts, movies), describe them, justify one's opinion using specific examples.	1.1.8. Analyse one's own and other people's emotions in communication (for example, in journalistic and literary texts). Base your opinion on concrete examples, describe the relationship and emotions of the participants and literary characters.
1.1.9. Express one's point of view and listen to another's point of view, respecting the culture of communication.	1.1.9. Participate in discussions on various issues (e.g. mutual relations). Jointly evaluate your and others' contributions to it.	1.1.9. Participate in discussions, follow the jointly established rules of discussion. Correctly express and substantiate one's opinion, clarify the opinions of others, determine what is common and different. Jointly evaluate your and others' contributions to the discussion.
2. Language and texts help us to know and understand ourselves, the environment and culture. Text creation is a meaningful process during which the author uses his or her own and others' experience, creates new information, plans, creates, improves and presents the text.		

2.1. Text and text formation

In the end of 3rd grade	In the end of 6th grade	In the end of 9th grade
2.1.8. Find or create a greeting in the e-environment	2.1.8. Create text in the e-environment for learning and communication according to the purpose and form (for example, text messages, presentation slides)	2.1.8. Observe the peculiarities of the internet style when creating texts in the e-environment: emotionality, imagery, simplicity, combination of genres. Publish text on social networks in compliance with information protection and

		information security regulations.

SOCIAL AND CIVIC LEARNING

8. Sources of information that reflect past and present developments in society are critical.

In the end of 3rd grade	In the end of 6th grade	In the end of 9th grade
8.1. Describe the possibilities of using the information provided by different media, find and select facts.	8.1. Critically evaluate and use information provided by various media and historical sources. Compare facts found in different sources of information, look for similarities and differences.	8.1. Analyse and explain the possibilities of the media to reflect and influence people's political, social, aesthetic notions and beliefs, to manipulate the understanding of personal and cultural identity, notions of cultural heritage and values.
8.2. Recognise and group facts and opinions by evaluating various information and messages.	8.2. Compare the arguments used in different media to determine the validity of the views expressed in them, understand the difference between reality and its coverage in the media.	8.2. Gain and analyse views on local and global processes from a variety of sources, including the media, to make informed judgments about past and present societal processes.
8.3. Recognise useful and important information and experience in historical stories and reconstructions.	8.3. Recognise and evaluate various everyday situations which are explained by arguments based on the historical experience of society.	8.3. Evaluate what information (reliable, questionable) can be obtained from various historical sources to use in argumentation. Explain what factors affect the reliability of historical sources. Determine the reliability of the sources using the proposed criteria. Analyse the evaluations of historical events expressed by different groups of society and changes in the historical memory of social groups, looking for commonalities in evaluations and historical memory, and understanding the causes of differences.

	8.4. Using a variety of sources and messages, look for examples of how organisations and people shape their digital identities to infer what information it contains. Use social media responsibly.	8.4. Using various sources, one's own and others' experience, conclude what are the criteria of a well-thought-out digital identity, and responsibly and consciously create one's digital identity.
CROSS-CUTTING SKILLS		
Critical thinking and problem solving		
In the end of 3rd grade	**In the end of 6th grade**	**In the end of 9th grade**
1.1. Formulate open, inquiry-oriented questions in personal experience situations. Simple information is compared, interpreted, evaluated, combined, and grouped according to given criteria. Look for verified facts, verify them yourself.	1.1. Formulate open, inquiry-oriented questions in situations with different contexts. Compare, interpret, evaluate, connect information, group it according to given and self-created criteria. Make sure that sufficiently comprehensive and accurate information is obtained, check its reliability.	1.1. Formulate open, inquiry-oriented questions in problem situations and situations that cover several areas. Describe the results of your activities in a detailed and planned manner. Purposefully explore, analyse, evaluate, and connect different types of information and situations, understand their context. Aim to obtain comprehensive and accurate information, identify certain factors that hinder the acquisition of true information.
1.2. Develop an argument based on your experience and opinion. Formulate your conclusions according to the instructions.	1.2. Judge from specific to general. Distinguish the important from the less important, the appropriate to the situation from the inappropriate. Make fact-based argumentation in the given context. Formulate direct, simple conclusions.	1.2. Make logical judgments, judge from the specific to the general and from the general to the specific. Generalise to simple situations. Distinguish between a factual statement from a presumption. Raise arguments and evaluate their relevance. Conclude whether the reasoning is sufficient and correct. Formulate reasonable conclusions.
1.3. Recognise and formulate the problem in a	1.3. With the support of the teacher, real needs are	1.3. Identify real needs and describe the essence of the

binding, personal experience context. With the support of the teacher, set a goal, offer solutions, choose the best solution.	identified – recognise and formulate a problem in relation to a certain size (properties, structure, operation, manifestations, etc.), phenomenon, process in a given context, express and explain ideas in problem situations. Set a goal, offer solutions, choose the best and decide to implement it.	problem – recognise and formulate the problem in the context, which is characterised by interdependent quantities, aspects, causal relationships. Express, explain and analyse ideas in problem situations, formulate a context-based and structured assumption. Set a goal, offer solutions, choose the best and decide to implement it.
1.4. Describe your experience in similar situations, express ideas for a solution. With the support of the teacher, a solution for the chosen problem is developed, implemented by learning several problem-solving strategies, and the result is evaluated.	1.4. Create a solution for the chosen problem, implement it using problem-solving strategies appropriate to the situation – experiment in thought and practice, creating real models and objects, researching properties, and checking the assumption, perform full re-reading, divide the problem into parts, move to a simpler problem, evaluate, and recommend improvements.	1.4. Create a plan for solving the chosen problem, implement it and, if necessary, adapt the plan to the situation during the work. Appropriate problem-solving strategies are used in complex situations – planned experiments are performed to substantiate the assumption. Judge "in reverse", find a counterexample, create an abstract, general model of the situation, check the obtained results in the context of the problem. Look for another approach, technique if necessary. Evaluate the achievements and plan improvements for future work.
Digital literacy		
In the end of 3rd grade	**In the end of 6th grade**	**In the end of 9th grade**
6.1. Use digital technology to perform instructional tasks as instructed.	6.1. Use digital technologies for knowledge acquisition, processing, presentation, transfer and justify the need to use digital technologies.	6.1. Select and use the most suitable opportunities provided by digital technologies for the idea or task, use them for self-realization and the creation of diverse content.

6.2. Determine the types of digital communication.	6.2. Define the types of digital communication, their goals, formats, and impact on the audience. Use digital technologies for communication and collaboration.	6.2. Responsible use of digital communication for specific purposes, assessing its suitability for the needs of the target group.
6.3. Recognise images and symbols created and popularised by the media.	6.3. Analyse the role of media in the construction of reality and evaluate the reliability of various sources of information, including those available in digital form.	6.3. Critically analyse the reality created by the media and the reliability of information, create your own media content.
6.4. Explain how digital technologies affect everyday life, with the support of a teacher, develop healthy and safe habits in the use of digital technologies.	6.4. Explain your understanding of the role of digital technologies in society and self-realisation. Follow healthy and safe technology habits.	6.4. Analyse and evaluate the impact of technology on mental and physical health, society, and the environment. Observe healthy and safe habits of using technologies, justify their necessity. Design, control and manage your digital identity.

Appendix 10. Media literacy expected results to be achieved by the students in secondary education in Latvia (translated from Latvian)(Noteikumi par valsts vispārējās... 2020).

LANGUAGE LEARNING		
2. Media, language, and influence		
The media constructs reality and influences the way society sees the world. By analysing the language tools used in the media in detail, we can identify the methods of influence and manipulation.		
General level of acquisition	**Optimal level of acquisition**	**Highest level of acquisition**
2.1. Select and use information from a variety of sources to create their own text according to specific needs and learning objectives	2.1. In order to find out a certain problem, question or topic in many ways and to create one's own text, select, organise, analyse and evaluate information purposefully, comparing the content of texts published in different sources and the language means used in them.	2.1. Research the coverage of language and literature issues in the media in order to evaluate information according to certain criteria and form judgments about the quality, topicality and usability of this information for creating one's own texts.
2.2. Understand information expressed in the media, expressed through symbols, images and verbal means. When creating your texts, you purposefully select and use the most appropriate language tools.	2.2. Analyse symbols, images and verbal means of expression that reflect events or opinions in different media. Choose the most appropriate verbal and non-verbal means to create and enrich texts, justifying this choice with rational and emotional arguments.	2.2. Use the means of language-expression, characteristic of the media environment, explain and evaluate their usefulness for creating experimental texts.
2.3. Evaluate messages from the media or other content creators, and the language used in them to determine the degree of credibility of the messages and their potential impact on the recipient.	2.3. Analyse language tools (words and their forms, metaphors, comparisons, grammatical constructions, punctuation) in media texts to identify the influencing techniques and manipulation tools used in the text. Recognise misleading notions and opinions in the text to determine the authenticity and reliability of information.	2.3. Analyse the opinions expressed in the media, interpret the direct and indirect intentions of the opinion writers. Recognise the influence of speaking power, censorship, biased or one-sided presentation of information, hate speech, use of politically correct language. Discuss the language means used, their suitability and potential impact on the

		addressee, arguing their point of view.
2.4. Responsibly engage in communication situations, especially on social media, using language tools skillfully and with respect, in accordance with ethical norms. Favour the views and beliefs of the communication partner. Adjust your linguistic behaviour to achieve communication goals.	2.4. Responsibly, observing ethical norms, engage in communication situations, especially on social media, skillfully using language means: words, phraseology, symbols, punctuation. Favour the views and beliefs of the communication partner. Adjust your linguistic behaviour in order to achieve communication goals or change the course of communication if the norms of communication culture are violated.	2.4. Understand the intentions of communication participants and the purpose of communication. Identify the causes of ineffective speech and violations of communication norms, discuss them, basing your opinion on reasoned judgments. Demonstrate effective communication skills by proficient use of the Latvian language and creating a respectful communication atmosphere.

SOCIAL AND CIVIC LEARNING

6. Any source of information that depicts developments in society in the past and in the present must be critically assessed.

General level of acquisition	Optimal level of acquisition	Highest level of acquisition
6.1. Find, select, evaluate and use information according to specific needs and learning objectives.	6.1. Compare the diversity of information sources according to certain criteria, determine their reliability. Summarise this information and conclude. Use information from reliable sources for your learning purposes.	6.1. Analyse various sources using criteria to assess the quality of information in order to improve their analytical skills and reasoning skills, form their own opinion and confront it with the opinions of others.
6.2. Distinguish between factual and evidence-based knowledge and unsubstantiated opinions, beliefs and misinformation in order to improve one's analytical skills using criteria.	6.2. Distinguish forms of scientific cognition from scientific alternatives, critically evaluate sources, interpret facts, and generalise the theoretical basis to obtain truthful information and generate new knowledge.	6.2. Plan research steps to group information and competently, critically analyse facts and opinions to form one's own opinion and evaluate causality.
6.3. Interested in access to information and usability of content on social media.	6.3. Use criteria and methods for checking forged information,	6.3. When planning research activities, the processes and events of the

Analyse the role of different experiences, beliefs and values. Create and disseminate a message in the digital space, being aware of information construction. Critically evaluates one's own and others' different identities, analyse the impact of available content.	analyse media content and distinguish between facts, recognise manipulation and common logic errors.	significant and the less significant are reasoned in order to independently and critically evaluate the facts and opinions obtained from various sources of information and to evaluate one's opinion on the basis thereof.
6.4. Examples are used to justify how social communication in virtual (digital) space and time changes real relationships in order to responsibly, empathetically choose and develop appropriate communication methods in different situations.	6.4. Analyse the communication of opinion-leaders in virtual (digital) space and time to assess the impact of the chosen communication culture on social processes and individual habits.	6.4. Critically analyse private, public, and non-governmental sector communication and cooperation online, evaluate examples of state and company branding to discuss the impact of the use of different communication channels on the client (target audience).
6.5. Evaluate the psychological aspects of the communication process in information sources, explain the importance of perception and evaluation skills in information processing in relation to the communicator's attractiveness to pursue one's own and others' interests.	6.5. Cooperate by acquiring skills to objectively analyse information in communication, make deductive and inductive judgments, practically learn the importance of perception and evaluation skills in information processing.	6.5. Carry out in-depth research analysing current research and scientific interpretations in history, social sciences, predict their importance in people's lives in the future. Different audiences present their findings.
SCIENCE EDUCATION		
13.2. Resource use, environmental impact		
General level of acquisition	**Optimal level of acquisition**	**Highest level of acquisition**
13.2.2. Explains the possibilities of using genetically modified organisms and their impact on other organisms and the environment, using various sources of	13.2.2. Explains and formulates a reasoned opinion on the effects of pollution (radioactive, chemical, biological), genetically modified organisms on other organisms, human health	13.2.2. Explains the economic and geopolitical situation in the world, evaluating the location of energy-intensive and other important resources in different regions, forecasting changes in the

information, modelling, assessing their reliability.	and the environment, using various sources of information, assessing their reliability.	situation in cases of resource depletion, using various sources of information.
13.2.4. Describes with examples the use of renewable and non-renewable resources in energy production in Latvia, using various information sources.		13.2.4. The possibilities of developing and using renewable energy sources, their impact on the environment and society are discussed.
13.3. Socially responsible decision making		
13.3.1. Explains the observance of bioethical principles in research works based on animal rights and human rights, using various sources of information, assessing their reliability.	13.3.1. Substantiate your opinion on the observance of bioethical principles in research, organ transplantation and donation, artificial insemination, use of genetic information, using various sources of information, evaluating their reliability.	13.3.1. Arguments for the observance of bioethical principles and utilitarian ethical principles in research based on animal rights and human rights, using various sources of information, assessing their reliability according to historical time periods.
13.3.2. Substantiate your opinion on organ transplantation and donation, artificial insemination, using various sources of information, assessing their reliability.	13.3.2. Evaluates and substantiates the perspectives of natural sciences in Latvia and in the world, the importance of natural science knowledge and skills in professional activity.	13.3.2. Analysing technological development, explaining its impact on the environment and predicting the potential impact of its results on the development of society, human and ecological well-being.
13.3.3. Acquires and compiles information on the perspectives of natural sciences in Latvia and in the world, on the importance of natural science knowledge and skills.		13.3.3. Evaluates the change of human attitude and values towards various theories and objects of natural science research, analysing information from various sources of information, takes an active position based on its own values.
CROSS-CUTTING SKILLS		
Critical thinking and problem solving: 1. purposefully formulates precise questions to critically analyse complex situations and abstract ideas. Explores the context, analyses it, critically evaluates, as well as synthesises and interprets information to achieve a specific		

goal. Obtains comprehensive, accurate information on complex issues, evaluates its reliability and analyses why it is difficult to obtain reliable information in certain situations;

2. in complex situations, judging from the specific to the general and from the general to the specific. Notices errors of logical argumentation in one's own and others' statements, eliminates them. Argues by proving the credibility of the statement made and drawing reasonable conclusions;

3. identifies current needs, precisely formulates a complex problem and substantiates the need to solve it, sets a goal, offers several solutions, evaluates them in relation to the goal, chooses to implement the best;

in complex, uncertain situations, independently develops a problem-solving plan and implements it by selecting, using and adapting appropriate problem-solving strategies, reacts flexibly to unforeseen changes, evaluates the achievements and uses the obtained conclusions in other contexts as well.

Digital literacy:

1. selects or adapts and effectively uses appropriate digital technologies to implement diverse ideas;

2. analyses the benefits and risks of digital communication, behaves responsibly and communicates in the digital environment in accordance with one's own and others' interests;

3. critically analyses the reality created by the media and the reliability of information, takes responsibility for taking action to prevent the impact of low-quality media content, and observes privacy, ethical and legal conditions when creating its own media content;

analyses and evaluates the role of technology in different contexts, evaluates healthy and safe technology use habits, observes and adapts them to their needs, reflects on their digital identity and its compliance with their own and society's interests.

Appendix 11. Instances where Latvia has sanctioned Russian media.

Channel barred	Time	Reasons for sanctioning
Baltkom Radio	November 2020, fine of 8000 euros	In the programme "Abonent dostupen," journalists from Baltkom Radio interviewed Russian politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky (leader of the LDPR party) live, in which he expressed calls that threaten Latvia's national security, as well as communicated distorted historical facts (NEPLP 2020a).
RTR-Planeta	July 2020, no suspension because first instance within a year	During the monitoring of the "60 Minutes" programme broadcast on July 10 2020, NEPLP found that the terms used by both the participants and the host of the programme, Olga Skabeyeva, could be considered hate speech, calling Ukraine a terrorist country and its former President Petro Poroshenko as a terrorist. The Ukrainian spokesman said Russia was waiting for Ukraine's split to combat it. During the discussion, the presenter offered Russia to enter Ukraine, reassuring both parties to the conflict (NEPLP 2020c).
RT, RT HD, RT Spanish, RT Documentary and RT Documentary HD	Indefinite, July 2020	Channels are restricted because they are in control and possession of Dmitry Kiselov, who is a subject to sanctions imposed by Council of the European Union for undermining the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine (NEPLP 2020b).
RTR-Planeta	3 months, 2019 January	Offences were detected in the RTR-Planeta programme "Evening with Vladimir Solovyov" and "60 minutes". NEPLP cited a broadcast on 22 May 2018 ("Evening with Vladimir Solovyov") that "explicitly and repeatedly voiced hate speech against parts of the Ukrainian state" including incitement to "hang and kill" certain Ukrainians. NEPLP also cited an incident from more than a year ago, on January 11, 2018, when a "60 minutes" broadcast by Russian nationalist politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky repeatedly called for military action on Ukrainian territory, and incitement to hatred against Ukrainians (LSM 2019a).

Vremya: dalekoye i blizkoye; Bobyor; Dom Kino; Dom Kino PREMIUM; Muzika Pervogo; O!; Poyekhali; TELECAFE; Peterburg - 5 kanal	Indefinite, November 2019	All the channels belong to a holding whose real beneficiary is Yuri Kovalchuk, who is included in a list of people subject to EU sanctions for undermining the territorial integrity of Ukraine. The ban will remain in effect until Kovalchuk is removed from the EU's sanctions list (LSM 2019b).
RTR-Planeta	6 months, April 2016	The Council established signs of incitement of ethnic hatred in the broadcast "Sunday Evening with Vladimir Solovyov", broadcast on 18 and 19 January 2015, and in the programme Vesti, aired on 6 July 2015. For example, in "Sunday Evening with Vladimir Solovyov", aired on 18 January, the host of the programme and almost all participants (except for S. Stankevich) condemn the "aggression" of Ukraine and its President Poroshenko (which is supported by Europe and the United States). They display hostile attitude to Ukraine and express support for the Donbas separatists. They talk about the damage done by warfare, referring to Ukraine as an "aggressor" multiple times. For instance, V. Rogov, speaking about the situation in Ukraine, says the following: "Nazi, non-Nazi, fascist – that's all just rhetoric. You have to realize – Ukraine is a territory occupied by Nazis (or fascists – whatever you call them). You cannot agree upon anything with them. You can only defeat them" (NEPLP 2016).
Sputnik	Latvian website shut down, March 2016	Internet registry NIC suspended Sputnik's right to hold the ".lv" Latvian domain name after receiving a letter of concern from the Latvian Foreign Ministry, which drew attention to Sputnik's coverage of Ukraine and routine denial of Ukraine's territorial integrity (RFE/RL 2016). The ministry questioned whether the coverage might constitute a breach of European Union sanctions on Russia, which were imposed over Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Ibid.). The website has since continued its activities on https://sputniknewslv.com/.
RTR-Planeta	3 months, 2014	In several RTR-Planeta news and other broadcasts from 2 to 17 March, the NEPLP found that the events were very biased and interpreted in accordance with Russia's foreign policy

		guidelines, justifying military aggression against a sovereign state. The news stories are dominated by the opinion that the Russian President has every right to bring troops into Ukraine to protect the Russian-speaking population (LSM 2014). Due to legal complications, the ban could not be fully implemented: the channel broadcasted from Sweden and was thus not subjected to Latvian law (Hellman and Wagnsson 2017, 161).

Appendix 12. Latvian position paper on regulating disinformation in the EU published in March 2020 (Towards a Better... 2020).

Non paper:
Towards a Better Regulatory Environment against Disinformation in the EU

Social media platforms are becoming a dominant arena of public life and debate in our societies. Accordingly, there is a need for an appropriate set of norms for how technology companies and social platforms should tackle disinformation campaigns, manipulative interference and related online harms. Dealing with different online harms on a sectoral basis and relying on the goodwill of online platforms to tackle vaguely defined issues is no longer viable. The current lack of an effective EU-wide approach to the challenge also risks engendering a patchwork of discordant national regulatory regimes.

The self-regulatory *Code of Practice on Disinformation* signed in 2018 was an important first-ever EU-wide effort to tackle online disinformation, defined as „verifiably false content". For the first time, online platforms and the advertising industry undertook serious commitments to mitigate the adverse effects of disinformation on our societies. Today, after several careful assessments, two main conclusions are inevitable. First, the Code was not designed for, and is thus inadequate for, tackling organised disinformation campaigns and other coordinated attempts at interfering with our democracies. Second, the lack of public oversight mechanisms and compliance incentives for online platforms has inevitably led to underwhelming implementation.

The EU should move towards an integrated, EU-wide set of norms that will assert the future of the internet as both a free and safe place for public discourse. The *European Democracy Action Plan* currently under preparation and the forthcoming *Digital Services Act* provide a perfect opportunity to achieve this goal. The first step on EU level should be the development of a clear set of *shared* definitions, implementation criteria and oversight mechanisms for social platforms. The underlying **principles** should be the following: 1) primacy of fundamental rights, *inter alia* privacy, protection of personal data, freedom of thought, expression and information; 2) focus on combating malicious behaviour online and not on regulating content; 3) full and effective accountability and transparency of technology companies and social platforms regarding the fulfilment of their commitments on tackling disinformation and information manipulation campaigns.

Based on the above, the EU should pursue a number of goals *vis-a-vis* social platforms and technology companies to deal with online disinformation campaigns and manipulative interference.

1. Protect **users' rights** through:
   - **effective and well-considered implementation of the GDPR and strong safeguards and boundaries to prevent abuse of users' data.** Certain potential large-scale uses of peronal data amassed by social platforms permit out-of-sight manipulation of public debate on such a scale, that they simply should not be acceptable (e.g. the *Cambridge Analytica* case). Stringent standards for informed consent from users are necessary but not sufficient.

Fundamental boundaries should be considered for permissible use of personal data.

- **fundamental rights safeguards for content moderation.** Any regulatory or self-regulatory measures need to empower users, not censor them. The social platforms need to ensure transparency and reinforced protections against unjustified and non-transparent restrictions of freedom of expression.

2. Establish a detailed and structured **accountability system** for social platforms that should be subject to **independent audits.** The should encompass:

   - improved implementation of **transparency standards for online paid political speech, inclusing political advertising.** The Code of Practice set clear transparency standards for political and issue-based advertising, but the implementation of these standards has been sloppy. Transparency should empower users, researchers and competent public authorities. The platform users should be able to easily see and understand why they have been targeted by a particular advertisement.

   - **a detailed set of transparency indicators and standards for tackling online disinformation.** These EU-wide standards should comprise definitions, policies and procedures for tech companies and social platforms. Not only governments, but also international institutions, civil society and the industry need to be involved in the development and audit of such standards. These indicators and standards should cover: (1) *common and transparent definitions,* inter alia for inauthentic behaviour, foreign interference and election manipulation; (2) *transparency on the platforms' actual capacity to act against disinformation,* such as the appropriate monitoring measures, procedures and resources in place to ensure compliance with their own terms of service; (3) minimum required security and integrity standards against foreign interference in *elections*.

   - The duty to establish effective **representation, reachability and communication channels** to enable effective work in each and all EU member states

   - **EU-wide basic standards for social responsibility in algorithmic design.** While the companies have the need and the right to protect business secrets and intellectual property, they should be socially responsible and more transparent about the effects their algorithms have on the shape and direction of public debate. Platforms should be consistently open and clear about what algorithmic measures they take to counter disinformation and to prevent malicious interference.

   - the responsibility of social platforms and technology companies for **sustained innovation against disinformation.** Advances in machine learning have

engendered new disruptive disinformation techniques. They should be matched by investing in continuous research and innovation into new technological solutions to disinformation.

3. Enable greater public oversight based on **fair, transparent, and privacy-compliant rules for platforms on sharing data with researchers and public oversight bodies.** The public needs to be aware and informed when faced with online information manipulation campaigns. This is why researchers and public oversight bodies need access to anonymised GDPR-compliant data from the platforms, designed in compliance with data privacy demands. This access has been deteriorating over the last years. The platforms should also adopt responsible practices for timely and efficient reporting of data breaches.

4. Establish standards for platforms' **cooperation with governments and researchers to protect the integrity of elections.** The social platforms need to invest more in their own capacity to detect attacks on democratic elections and public order. Moreover, they should improve the effectiveness and speed of their cooperation with governments, researchers and civil society. Among other things, the platforms need to step up their cooperation with national authorities to enforce compliance with campaign spending regulation.

5. **Address the challenge of closed messaging groups that increasingly replace open public debate.** Walled digital communities are increasingly becoming a leading channel for spreading disinformation. The social platforms need to introduce solutions that prevent the use of private groups as a conduit for furtive information manipulation and interference campaigns.

The EU should carefully assess the merits of the proposal to create a single **European platform auditing body** that will verify the claims made by social media companies related to countering disinformation online. In a manner similar to the established procedures for financial services, this institution should ensure the accuracy and veracity of the data relied on by media regulators and other relevant public authorities.

In addition, the EU should continuously update its **legal framework** related to disinformation in a way that keeps pace with technological developments. This includes:

- **recognising in EU law that social platforms are moderators of online content.** Editorial decisions are made by constructing and employing algorithms based on which content is distributed and ranked. The EU regulation should acknowledge this, *inter alia* by rethinking the approach currently set in the *Electronic Commerce Directive 2000/31/EC.*

- **assessing and clarifying the legal aspects of disinformation.** Spreading disinformation can fall under certain permissible restrictions of the right to free speech in accordance with Article 10 of the European Concention on

Human Rights. Further reflection is needed to ensure that these norms are applied in accordance with the purpose of the Convention and consistently across the offline-online divide.

- **studying examples of national legislation aimed at protecting societies against hostile disinformation campaigns.** A study of these cases would help assess the legal effects of such measures vis-a-vis fundamental rights, in the context of protection of elections and otherwise.

The EU should also help member states **accumulate knowledge and improve oversight** by:

- **creating an EU-wide support mechanism for public oversight authorities in the member states.** Any self-regulatory or regulatory measures are only meaningful if accompanied by an adequate monitoring and assessment capacity. The EU should support networking and cooperation among member states willing to establish effective national oversight mechanisms.

- **enhancing its analytical and policy research capabilities.** Any measures against disinformation need to be based on firm evidence on the scope and impact of the problem, as well as the comparative effectiveness of the remedies. This is why the EU should further invest in analytical and policy research capabilities that will help to design evidence-based public responses to disinformation.

The EU should strive to establish a strong **transatlantic community of values** on the issues of digital governance. As part of this effort, the Union should consider following the example set by some of its Member States and establishing a permanent EU presence of the U.S. West Coast tasked at promoting knowledge exchange and cooperation on digital governance. This would help influence the standards that global tech companies are setting for the future digital economy.

Appendix 13. Measures related to countering information influence brought out in Lithuanian strategic documents.

Countermeasures brought out in Lithuanian strategic documents
National Security Strategy 2017 In order to create a secure information environment and protect its political system, Lithuania will: • implement national public awareness raising and education policy, strengthen media literacy in order to increase public resilience to information threats; • promote country-wide dissemination and accessibility of media content which is of adequate quality and based on objective information; increase financial transparency of the media; • seek to prevent by legal means the dissemination of information which incites to change the constitutional order of Lithuania by force and encroaches on its sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence, which spreads war propaganda and instigates war or hatred; • increase public awareness of the benefits of NATO and the EU membership in order to maintain strong public support for the country's membership in these organisations; • encourage NATO and the EU to implement measures against the challenges of hybrid warfare in order to protect the political systems of NATO and EU Member States from the efforts of the Russian Federation to exert influence by political, financial, information, cyber and other means; • strengthen strategic communication capacity of state institutions and develop the mechanism for coordination of strategic communication carried out by the institutions of the Republic of Lithuania; • inform the international community about information threats and their impact, co-operate with NATO and the EU institutions and other NATO and EU Member States, as well as other partner countries in bilateral and multilateral formats in order to prevent information threats and share best practice and experience. (NSS 2017, 12–13)
Defence Policy White Paper 2017 • In response to non-military threats, it is necessary, through the joint efforts of society and state institutions, to increase the nation's resilience to cyber and information threats. For this reason, Lithuania has to further improve its national cyber security system as well as continue its large scale public education campaign on recognising and deconstructing propaganda, disinformation, and other information attacks. (Lithuanian Defence Policy White Paper 2017, 13)

- Lithuania supports the EU efforts to develop capabilities to recognise hybrid threats, increase national resilience as well as cyber and information security. (Lithuanian Defence Policy White Paper 2017, 21)

National Defence System takes direct actions in four ways to increase the resilience of society and limit the impact of the information attacks.

- Lithuanian Armed Forces (LAF) Strategic Communications Department monitors and analyses the information domain to determine the targets, the scale and means of the information attacks. LAF experts also assist the Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission so that the spread of such information can be stopped by statutory means.
- Strategic communication experts conduct a wide range of public education campaigns, presentations in schools, municipalities, state institutions, local communities, cultural, business and other non-governmental organisations about how to recognise propaganda and other information attacks.
- Explaining the benefits of being a NATO ally, proactive steps to inform society about the benefits of NATO allies' presence in Lithuania, deepening public's understanding about NATO's collective defence commitments.
- Promotion of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with NATO and EU institutions and members states that face similar challenges.

(Lithuanian Defence Policy White Paper 2017, 54–55)

Appendix 14. Information incident assessment criteria in Lithuania (translated from Lithuanian)(Nutarimas dėl strateginės komunikacijos... 2020).

Information incident criterion	Information incident criteria ssessment	Scoring of an information incident
Source of the information incident (non-EU and/or NATO Member State policy, institution, media, non-governmental organization, academic institution, other public opinion entity or group that influences the decision-making process related to the national security interests of Lithuania by means of informing the public and other means of forming public opinion)	The source of the information incident does not have the possibility and influence to influence the decision-making process related to the national security interests of Lithuania by the media.	0 points
	The source of an information incident has opportunities to disseminate information to individual groups or regions of the society, and may become a potential initial channel of information dissemination through the media, influencing the decision-making process related to the national security interests of Lithuania, or convincingly imitates such a source.	1 point
	The source of the information incident has the possibility to disseminate information throughout the territory of Lithuania, and to influence the decision-making process related to the national security interests of Lithuania by the media, or convincingly imitates such a source.	2 points
	The source of the information incident has the possibility to disseminate information in the EU and/or NATO member states and other countries neighbouring Lithuania, and to influence the decision-making process related to the national security interests of Lithuania, or convincingly imitates such a source.	3 points
	The source of the information incident has opportunities to disseminate information in the EU and/or NATO member states and other countries neighbouring Lithuania, and to influence the decision-making process related to the national security interests of Lithuania, and represents the official position of non-EU and/or NATO member states.	4 points
Content of the information incident (information provided by the media influences the	The content of the information incident disseminated by the mass media does not affect the decision-making processes related to the national security interests of Lithuania by the mass media.	0 points

decision-making process related to the national security interests of Lithuania)	The content of the information incident disseminated by the mass media may influence individual regions, social or ethnic groups, by influencing the decision-making process related to the national security interests of Lithuania by the mass media.	1 point
	The content of an information incident disseminated by the mass media may influence the public and decision-makers in the field of national security of Lithuania, by influencing the decision-making process related to the national security interests of Lithuania by the mass media.	2 points
	By disseminating information systems and/or changing the content of media not related to the information incident, the content of the information incident may affect the public and decision-makers in the field of national security of Lithuania, as well as international partners or foreign societies by influencing the decision-making process related to the national security interests of Lithuania by the mass media.	3 points
Context of the information incident (geopolitical and/or policy events of Lithuania related to national security issues and processes during which the information incident occurs)	The context of the information incident is unfavorable to the media to influence the decision-making process related to the national security interests of Lithuania.	0 points
	The context of the information incident contributes to influencing the decision-making process related to the national security interests of Lithuania through the media.	1 point
	The context of the information incident contributes to influencing the decision-making process related to the national security interests of Lithuania through the media and may have consequences for threat management and crisis prevention in the near future.	2 points
	The context of the information incident contributes to influencing the decision-making process related to the national security interests of Lithuania through the media and causes clear dangerous consequences for threat management and crisis prevention.	3 points

Appendix 15. Information incident threat level and recommended response level in Lithuania (translated from Lithuanian)(Nutarimas dėl strateginės komunikacijos... 2020).

Scoring of an information incident	Information incident threat level	Recommended response level
9 to 10 points	First level (high)	Prime Minister of Lithuania, members of the government.
6 to 8 points	Second level (average)	Public authorities or bodies.
3 to 5 points	Third level (low)	It is recommended to respond to the disseminator of public information, non-governmental organisation, higher education institution or other public opinion forming entity.
0 to 2 points	Fourth level (lowest)	The information is provided to the disseminator of public information, non-governmental organisation, higher education institution or other entity forming the public opinion, if necessary, however, there is no response to the media

Appendix 16. Information incident assessment report in Lithuania (translated from Lithuanian)(Nutarimas dėl strateginės komunikacijos... 2020).

Description of the information incident	Assessment according to information incident criteria	The level of threat of the information incident and the response proposed by the authority	Communication messages offered
	1. (according to the source of the information incident)		
	2. (according to the content of the information incident)		
	3. (according to the context of the information incident)		

Appendix 17. Part of Lithuanian Armed Forces strategic communication themes and messages (received from Tomas Čeponis, translated from Lithuanian)

LITHUANIAN ARMED FORCES

LIST OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION THEMES AND MESSAGES

The list of strategic communication themes and messages of the Lithuanian Armed Forces has been prepared, taking into account the vision of the Commander of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, general NATO public communications, the current situation in Lithuania, and the geopolitical situation. Some messages may be repetitive because they are relevant to more than one topic.

TOPICS:

1. LITHUANIAN ARMY

2. LITHUANIAN SOLDIER

3. NATO

4. MEMBERSHIP OF THE LITHUANIAN ARMED FORCES IN NATO

5. ALLIED SOLDIERS IN LITHUANIAN TERRITORY

6. OPERATIONAL AND RAPID REACTION FORCE FOR PEACETIME TASKS

7. INTERACTION BETWEEN THE LITHUANIAN MILITARY AND OTHER STATE INSTITUTIONS

8. LITHUANIAN MILITARY AND SOCIETY

1st TOPIC. LITHUANIAN ARMY

MESSAGES:

1. A strong Lithuanian army – a strong state.
2. The Lithuanian Armed Forces is the guarantor of statehood.
3. On 23 November 1918, the Lithuanian army was restored. The origins of the Lithuanian army date back to the Middle Ages (13th century). The Lithuanian Armed Forces cherish historical traditions.
4. The main task of the Lithuanian army units during peacetime is military training.
5. The purpose of the military training is to develop the ability to use the armaments systems independently and effectively, and to work together with other units.
6. Military readiness is also being improved by increasing the number of personnel, acquiring new armaments and equipment.
7. The prepared personnel reserve is integrated into the structure of the Lithuanian Armed Forces and is constantly trained.
8. In order to operate effectively and in unison with the armies of other NATO countries, the Lithuanian Armed Forces regularly participate in joint exercises with the forces of Allied countries.

9. Permanent compulsory military service is the best way to increase the number of citizens prepared for the country's armed defence.

10. The Lithuanian Armed Forces are being strengthened by recruiting military units from the permanent compulsory and professional military service, and preparing a reserve of army personnel.

11. Voluntary service in the National Defence Volunteer Force is the best way to involve conscious Lithuanian citizens in active state defence.

12. The purchase of modern Boxer armoured infantry fighting vehicles and artillery systems will increase military units' mobility and fire power.

13. Mobile and modern anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons are purchased.

14. The Lithuanian Military Academy provides training for officers, and the Lithuanian Armed Forces School provides training for sergeants and non-commissioned officers that meets the needs of the Lithuanian Armed Forces.

2nd TOPIC. LITHUANIAN SOLDIER

MESSAGES:

1. The profession of a soldier is exceptional – it is a way of life that requires dedication and unconditional love for the Homeland.

2. The renewed conscription to the permanent compulsory military service ensures the development of defence by forming the prepared reserve of the personnel of the Lithuanian Armed Forces.

3. Defence of the State of Lithuania against foreign armed attack is the right and duty of every citizen of the Republic of Lithuania (Article 139 of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania).

4. Voluntary enlistment in permanent compulsory military service or voluntary military service is an active civic position.

5. The Lithuanian Armed Forces is a school of youth empowerment, courage, and patriotism.

6. A soldier's oath to the Homeland is an oath to each of its citizens.

7. Permanent compulsory military service is a way of acquiring the basic skills necessary for national defence.

8. The voluntary determination of a soldier to defend the Homeland is an example to those who have not yet made up their minds.

9. A soldier, in the performance of tasks assigned by the state, gives his full strength, sometimes even his life.

10. Execution of the task is based on the soldier's values: patriotism, loyalty, dedication, honesty, courage, respect, honour, integrity.

11. A Lithuanian soldier draws determination from the strength of his ancestors.

12. For hundreds of years, Lithuanian soldiers bravely defended the freedom and independence of Lithuania.

13. In international operations, a Lithuanian soldier is considered an exceptional professional.

14. A soldier guards the Homeland where you live.

15. What is important for the soldier is the future of Lithuania and each of us.

3rd TOPIC. NATO

MESSAGES:

1. NATO is security, reliability, a guarantor of freedom.
2. The presence of NATO forces on Lithuania's territory is a proof of NATO's effectiveness.
3. NATO is ready with capabilities and plans to defend its members and partners.
4. The NATO Response Force is an existing deterrent and collective defence tool.
5. NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force responds to a changed security situation and an opportunity for NATO to respond immediately to threats.
6. NATO exercises in member states' collective defence is a response to the changed security environment in the region.
7. The Lithuanian Armed Forces is ready to defend any other NATO state, because we are NATO.
8. At present, the greatest threats to NATO and the EU come from the Kremlin policies.

4th TOPIC. MEMBERSHIP OF THE LITHUANIAN ARMED FORCES IN NATO

MESSAGES:

1. The Lithuanian Armed Forces is also a NATO army. The Lithuanian Armed Forces is a reliable and valued component of NATO's more than 2 million troops.
2. NATO's unity guarantees every member's security.
3. Together with NATO, we are the strongest in the country's history.
4. The Lithuanian Armed Forces are able to operate both independently and together with other forces of NATO countries.
5. The Lithuanian Armed Forces are valued by the Allies.
6. Lithuania's participation in NATO and European Union operations, on standby, and exercises are part of the country's defence and a guarantor of national security. An additional consequence of participation is the positive attitude of NATO countries towards Lithuania.
7. Lithuanian soldiers, participating in NATO and EU operations and exercises gain invaluable combat experience and abilities to conduct various operations to defend our country's sovereignty.
8. Interaction with NATO Allies and Partners is enhanced during international exercises.
9. International missions are Lithuania's contribution to collective defence.
10. The Lithuanian Armed Forces are able to act together with the Allies, lead them, and are highly valued by them.

5th TOPIC. ALLIED SOLDIERS ON LITHUANIAN TERRITORY

MESSAGES:

1. The presence of NATO forces in Lithuania is a deterrent to a potential aggressor.
2. The operation of NATO forces and headquarters on Lithuanian territory is a useful and necessary solution to strengthen our security.
3. Constantly rotating Allied land forces deployed in Lithuania demonstrate NATO's determination to defend its member countries and a deterrent to potential aggressors.

4. The Lithuanian Armed Forces is capable of defending the state both alone and with its allies.

5. Lithuanian soldiers, together with NATO allies, protect and defend not only Lithuania, but also the entire free Western world and its democratic values.

6th TOPIC. OPERATIONAL AND RAPID REACTION FORCE FOR PEACETIME TASKS

MESSAGES:

1. The peacetime task force is designed to respond to emergencies.

2. The Rapid Reaction Force is designed to carry out a wide range of tasks successfully and to be ready to respond immediately to threats.

3. The training of the Rapid Reaction Force soldiers is focused on the changing situation in the region and the response to potential threats.

7th TOPIC. INTERACTION BETWEEN THE LITHUANIAN MILITARY AND OTHER STATE INSTITUTIONS

MESSAGES:

1. Neutralisation of a military threat results from successful coordination between defence (and security) institutions and civilian institutions of the Republic of Lithuania.

2. The Lithuanian Armed Forces seek to involve the institutions of the Ministry of the Interior in the largest possible number of trainings.

3. The Lithuanian Armed Forces carry out public education on information threats.

4. The Lithuanian Armed Forces and the units of the Ministry of the Interior and other state institutions shall closely cooperate in improving mutual interaction and conducting joint exercises and training on how to eliminate hybrid threats. (Hybrid threats – well-planned and prepared political, informational, ideological, and military preparations for the country's occupation).

8th TOPIC. LITHUANIAN MILITARY AND SOCIETY

MESSAGES:

1. Permanent compulsory military service and service in the National Defence Volunteer Forces are the most effective means for the public to control the army and effectively exercise their civil will aimed at the unconditional defence of the state.

2. One of the biggest sources of power of the Lithuanian Armed Forces is public support. Only a publicly backed army will successfully defeat the aggressor.

3. Soldiers are part of the society.

4. Public support is a great motivation for soldiers.

5. The Lithuanian Armed Forces exists in the name of the freedom of the Lithuanian state and its inhabitants. The Lithuanian army is determined to fight for every Lithuanian resident, for every family, every child, grandfather, and young man.

Appendix 18. Media literacy skills expected from the students in the end of the 6th, 8th and 10th grade in basic school in Lithuania (translated from Lithuanian)(Dėl Vidurinio ugdymo... 2016).

LITHUANIAN AS NATIVE LANGUAGE		
Grades 5-6	**Grades 7-8**	**Grades 9-10**
1. Speaking and listening		
1.1. Clearly indicate the goals of the author (e.g. to inform or to persuade). Formulate the topic of the text you are listening to, express the main idea.	1.1. Indicate the objectives of the author (e.g. to inform or to persuade). Formulate the topic of the text you are listening to, the main idea raised, problems, indicate the arguments presented. Recognise cases of irony.	1.1. Indicate the aims of the author (e.g. to inform or to convince). Recognise hidden goals of the author. Discuss the main idea of various types of spoken texts, problems, attitudes expressed, arguments put forward.
2. Reading, knowledge of literature (culture)		
2.1.A. To draw conclusions summarising the whole text		
Indicate a clearly stated purpose of the text, topic, main idea, define the mood, easily recognisable values.	Based on the things said directly and indirectly, indicate the purpose, subject, problem, conflict, and formulate the main idea. Clearly recognise positive universal values in the text.	Based on the directly said things, the subtext and the context of the work, indicate the purpose of the text, discuss the topic, problems, main ideas, and values.
2.2. Depending on the learning objective, work with texts of different nature (including various information)		
Find information on a given topic from the sources indicated. Properly select and classify according to references.	Find multiple sources and information on the specified topic. Properly select and classify. Evaluate sources in terms of informativeness.	Find different types on of sources and information needed for learning. Properly select it and classify it. Evaluate the informativeness and reliability of the sources.
2.3. Consciously read, observe and adjust your perception. Reflect on your reading activities and plan your learning		
2.3.A. Apply, as instructed by the teacher, strategies before reading and whilst reading the text. Check the comprehension of the text in different ways: read again (several times); note what is unclear; ask others to compare their perceptions with others.	2.3.A. Apply appropriate strategies before reading, and whilst reading the text. Check the comprehension of the text in different ways: formulate questions, paraphrase thoughts in your own words; analyse the paragraph, highlight statements and arguments	2.3.A. Apply appropriate strategies before reading, and whilst reading the text. Check the comprehension of the text in different ways: identify ambiguous, contradictory parts of the text, formulate questions, paraphrase

	differently; compare your perception with others.	thoughts in your own words; rely on context and knowledge of other subjects, look for additional sources.
OTHER NATIVE LANGUAGES		
Grades 5-6	**Grades 7-8**	**Grades 9-10**
Listening and speaking		
1. Understand spoken text: describe the purpose of the speaker, the topic of the monologue (report, public speech), the main idea clearly stated; convey the most important information, provide feedback (ask questions, comments).	1. Understand spoken text: state what impression or effect the speaker seeks, define the topic of the monologue, the main idea; convey the most important information; provide feedback (ask various questions, to comment).	1. Understand spoken text: state what impression or effect the speaker seeks, explain what the problem is; describe the composition of the speech; convey the main information; critically evaluate the impact of the the text; provide feedback (ask various questions, comment, broaden your mind).
Reading, literature and cultures cognition		
3. Find the information you need from various sources: manuals, dictionaries, the internet, the school library; be able to use it: compare it, evaluate it according to the teacher's instructions.	3. Find the information you need from various sources: directories, dictionaries, encyclopedias, the internet, the school library; be able to use it: compare it and evaluate it.	3. Find the necessary information on your own from various sources: manuals, dictionaries, encyclopedias, the internet, various catalogs, the library; be able to use it: systematise, evaluate, summarise it.
LITHUANIAN AS SECOND LANGUAGE		
Grades 5-6	**Grades 7-8**	**Grades 9-10**
Reading		
4. Orient in books, newspapers, magazines, the internet; select the required information from one or two sources (including electronic) and use it.	4. Find and select the required information from several written sources (including electronic), systematise it.	4. Find the information you need from several sources (including electronic), select, systematise, summarise, present properly.
SOCIAL SCIENCES: HISTORY		
Grades 5-6	**Grades 7-8**	**Grades 9-10**
Use historical sources to get information about the past. Highlights the obvious causes and	Use historical sources to obtain information, analyse and summarise them. Reveal the internal and external causes of the	Critically evaluate historical sources, generalise and make conclusions. Identify the causes and consequences

consequences of historical events.	events and phenomena in question, their connections.	of world and Lithuanian events and phenomena for the society of that time and further historical change.

SOCIAL SCIENCES: GEOGRAPHY

Grades 5-6	**Grades 7-8**	**Grades 9-10**
Recognise geographic sources of information and use them. Be able to read geographical information presented in various sources.	Select sources of geographic information and use them independently. Properly select and classify information. Use a variety of geographic sources of information, compare and analyse phenomena, processes, taking place in individual continents and oceans. Summarise the information and it convey to others.	Independently select, read, analyse and critically evaluate reliability and informativeness in terms of different geographical sources of information. Use them to explain natural, social, economic, political phenomena, processes, taking place in Lithuania, Europe and in world space. Summarise information and convey it in various forms to others.

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Grades 5-8	**Grades 9-10**
1 . Communities cognition and research	
Explain key concepts related to democracy and society (e.g. the concepts of *citizen, civic virtue, citizenship, justice, equality, solidarity* etc.), the values of democracy and the nation, which students are acquainted with through history, geography, ethics, Lithuanian language and other lessons. Examine uncomplicated social, cultural, economic and other problems, issues and events.	Students explore relevant social, civic, and other questions, problems, and events, show how nations perceive values, democracy, the importance of morality in the political community. Based on various sources of information, examine the relevant local, national and global problems, issues and events. Analyse and critically evaluate information and the reliability of its sources. Together with others, examine the problems that arise in the classroom, the school and local communities, provide possible solutions to the problems.

Appendix 19. Media literacy skills expected from the students in secondary school in Lithuania (translated from Lithuanian)(Dėl Vidurinio ugdymo... 2016).

Achiements in *italic* signify are expected only from students who are taking the advanced course.

LITHUANIAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE	
Skills	**Knowledge and understanding**
1. Reading, knowledge of language and literature (culture)	
1.6. Explain the purpose of the non-text, assess the validity of arguments and conclusions, discuss the peculiarities of text expression.	1.6.1. Describe what a thesis and proof, assumptions and conclusions are; indicate the types of arguments, recognise the structure of an argument. 1.6.2. *Find conclusions and assumptions in the text*. 1.6.3. *Compose non-fiction text argumentation scheme*. 1.6.4. Recognise manipulation and propaganda symptoms. 1.6.5. *Recognise data, language inconsistencies, ambiguities.*
1.7. Analyse public dialogue and monologue, *evaluate its content and in terms of resolution.*	1.7.1. Specify features of spoken and written text. 1.7.2. Indicate the types of public languages, specify structure requirements. 1.7.3. Describe public language communicators goals. 1.7.4. Describe informational, appealing, and differences in emotional speech. 1.7.5. Identify the problem and its solution arguments, *identify invalid arguments* . 1.7.6. Determine the essence of the information provided, conclusions validity.
NATIVE LANGUAGES OF NATIONAL MINORITIES	
Skills	**Knowledge and understanding**
1. Comprehension of oral and written text	
1.2. Interpret non-fiction of various genres texts, discuss the attitudes contained in the various texts. Evaluate validity of arguments, persuasiveness of expression.	1.2.1. Know that linguistic communication depends on the relationship between participants and circumstances. 1.2.2. See the purpose and intentions of the author. 1.2.3. Distinguish between facts, and opinions. 1.2.4. See the manifestations of narrative ambiguity and linguistic manipulations.

	1.2.5. Know the types of reasoning (logical and emotional arguments).
1.5. Critically evaluate the content and expression of texts by independently choosing the appropriate criteria, base the evaluation conclusions on the text.	1.5.1. Understand different evaluation criteria: informativeness, relevance, aesthetics, originality, purposeful use in them in evaluating texts. 1.5.2. See the connection of a text with other cultural texts.
1.6. Find information on your own, select information for various purposes (e.g. personal, cognitive, writing an essay or message), systematise it, summarise, evaluate its importance and reliability.	1.6.1. List written, unwritten, electronic sources of information. 1.6.2. Know how to purposefully find, evaluate and process information using modern technologies. 1.6.3. Specify information selection, systematisation and generalisation principles. 1.6.4. Know the ways to evaluate the reliability of a source.

HISTORY: GENERAL COURSE	
Skills	**Knowledge and understanding**
9. Research and interpretation of history	
9.1. Evaluate the adequacy of a historical source by answering questions about the past.	9.1.1. Explain how to select historical and other sources of information to obtain information about the past. 9.1.2. Indicate what direct and indirect information the story or other source of information can provide. 9.1.3. Define the benefits of a historical source reconstruction of the development of society.
9.2. Analyse, evaluate and interpret information obtained from various sources of information (primary sources of history, texts of historians, media).	9.2.1. Explain how the information provided by the source and text of the story depends on the views and beliefs of the author. 9.2.2. Indicate the factors that determine different interpretations of the same past event, phenomenon and process. 9.2.3. Recognise different descriptions of the same event, phenomenon and process in the information source. 9.2.4. Recognise bias in historical sources and in the texts.

GEOGRAPHY: GENERAL COURSE	
Skills	**Knowledge and understanding**
1. Orientation in space and on the map	

1.4. Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), be able to find the required geographic information with interactive maps.	1.4.1. Name the components of the Geographic Information System (GIS), describe its functions, indicate the purpose. 1.4.2. Indicate the possibilities of using modern cartographic information.
2. Analysis of natural and social processes	
2.4. Using various sources of information, to assess the impact of internal and external geological processes on the surface and the environment, to indicate the areas of their occurrence.	2.4.1. Indicate the seismic zones of the Earth, distinguish the areas of active volcanoes. 2.4.2. Identify measures to reduce damage during earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. 2.4.3. Describe the processes of weathering, indicate its consequences. 2.4.4. Indicate the effects of external forces (flowing water, karst phenomena, wind and glaciers) on the Earth's surface, the relief forms formed by them and name the areas of manifestation. 2.4.5. Describe the last Quaternary icing, indicate its distribution area in Lithuania and Europe, explain the influence on the current terrain.
2.10. Critically assess human impact on climate by examining various sources of information.	2.10.1. Describe the natural disasters causing atmospheric phenomena (droughts, rains, tropical cyclones, hurricanes, etc.), provide examples of their occurrence. 2.10.2. Describe the sources of atmospheric pollution, explain the impact of human economic activities on climate change.
2.11. Analyse and compare various sources of information to describe the properties of the World Ocean water, to explain the dynamic processes taking place in the World Ocean, to evaluate their significance for nature and man.	2.11.1. Indicate the components of the World Ocean, give examples. 2.11.2. Explain the properties of the world's ocean water (temperature, salinity), analyse their change depending on latitude and other factors. 2.11.3. Explain the dynamic processes taking place in the ocean (waves, tsunamis, tides, warm and cold currents), indicate the reasons for their formation and the impact on nature and man. 2.11.4. Explain the effect of waves on shore formation (abrasion and accumulation).

2.12. Assess the geographical distribution, interrelationships, uses and protection potential of inland waters using a variety of information sources.	2.12.1. Identify hydrographic elements (river basin, river basin, watershed) to link river water content with climatic features. 2.12.2. Explain the peculiarities of the work performed by the river: in the mountains and plains, upstream and downstream. 2.12.3. Indicate the origin of the lakes and their distribution on Earth. 2.12.4. Indicate the longest and most watery rivers on the continents, the largest waterfalls, the largest lakes and the most important canals. 2.12.5. Explain the conditions of wetland formation, indicate their significance for man and nature. 2.12.6. To examine the conditions of formation, thermal and chemical properties of groundwater (soil, ground, interlayer). Indicate the economic use of groundwater and pollution problems.
2.13. To describe the structure of the geographical sphere using various sources of information. Linking environmental components and phenomena.	2.13.1. Name the components of the natural complex (ecosystem), give examples of their connections. Indicate the differences between natural and anthropogenic landscapes. 2.13.2. Describe the boundaries of the biosphere. Identify the main geographical areas (biomes) and indicate their vegetation characteristics. 2.13.3. Indicate soil formation factors and explain how soil is formed. 2.13.4. Name the most fertile and less fertile soils in Lithuania, indicate their distribution.
2.14. Assess the positive and negative impact of economic activities on the environment using various sources of information.	2.14.1. Indicate the sources of pollution of the natural environment (air, water, soil) and measures to reduce this pollution. 2.14.2. Explain the impact of economic activities on the natural vegetation of geographical areas, indicate the problem of deforestation and provide examples. 2.14.3. Explain the categories of protected areas in Lithuania - conservation priority (reserves, reserves and natural and cultural heritage objects) and complex storage areas (national and regional parks)

	and provide examples. Provide examples of the most important national parks in the world.
2.17. Analyse cross-border population migrations using various information sources.	2.17.1. Indicate the types of migration and provide examples of forced and voluntary migration. 2.17.2. Explain cross-border Lithuanian migrations in the 20th – 21st centuries, indicate their causes and consequences.
2.20. Using various sources of information, to analyse the most important elements of the state, their change, to consider the possible consequences of changing circumstances (factors).	2.20.1. Indicate the elements of the state (territory and borders, population, government and international recognition), describe them by the example of Lithuania. 2.20.2. To group states according to geographical location, main elements of state, peculiarities of governance, national composition.
2.21. Assess the geopolitical situation of the state using various sources of information.	2.21.1. To indicate the importance of the geopolitical situation for the state. 2.21.2. To describe the geopolitical situation in Lithuania, to indicate the most important factors of the change in the situation.
2.27. Assess the development of industries in a country or region using a variety of information sources.	2.27.1. Explain industry location factors. 2.27.2. Indicate the development regions of industries (energy, metallurgy, machinery, chemical, food industry).
2.29. Using various sources of information to compare and evaluate the importance of key services (transport, trade, finance) for economic development.	2.29.1. Describe the transport system, compare modes of transport and predict their significance for individual regions. 2.29.2. Explain international trade systems. 2.29.3. To indicate Lithuania's opportunities to develop tourism, to evaluate tourism resources in the country.
3. Geographical research	
3.3. Based on various sources of information, Lithuanian and European regions are described in political, natural, social and economic aspects.	3.3.1. Define the principles of world zoning and exclusion (historical, natural, social, economic, political). 3.3.2. Identify Lithuanian and European regions, indicate their most important political, natural, social and economic aspects.
3.4. Describe the selected region or state in natural and social terms based on information sources. Independently draw conclusions based on source analysis.	3.4.1. Indicate the geographical location, nature, population, economy of the region or state.

INTEGRATED COURSE IN SOCIAL SCIENCES	
Skills	**Knowledge and understanding**
4. Research and interpretation	
4.1. Examine, evaluate and interpret information obtained from various historical sources, IT and media.	4.1.1. Describe the historical information obtained from the various historical sources.
4.2. Evaluate the source based on historical reliability and adequacy to investigate a chosen problem.	4.2.1. Indicate how to select historical sources to investigate a chosen problem.
4.3. Explain different descriptions of the same historical event, phenomenon and process given by historians.	4.3.1. State the factors that determine different interpretations of the historical event, phenomenon and process.
5. Expression of understanding of history	
5.3. Formulate arguments to substantiate one's opinion about historical events and phenomena and provide assessments from different points of view.	5.3.1. Define how arguments are formulated and provide assessments of historical events and phenomena based on historical sources.
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES	
Skills	**Knowledge and understanding**
4.1. Take care of information security	4.1.1. Identify information security issues on your computer. 4.1.2. Define the concepts of computer malware and fraudulent programs, the consequences of their damage. 4.1.3. Describe the measures to protect information on a computer.
4.3. Communicate and operate safely on social networks.	4.3.1. Define the concepts of blog, social network, wiki and define their purpose. 4.3.2. Explain how to securely register and log in to blogging websites. 4.3.3. Explain how to securely register and log in to social network. 4.3.4. Provide a variety of information in a public and secure manner.

Appendix 20. Instances where Lithuania has restricted Russian media.

Channel barred	Time	Reason for sanctioning according to LRTK (The Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania)
RT, RT HD, RT Spanish, RT Documentary and RT Documentary HD	Indefinite, July 2020	Relates to television programmes retransmitted or distributed on the internet. RT was suspended because it is controlled by Dmitry Kiselyov who was sanctioned by the European Union in 2014 for his important role in Russian propaganda that supported the 2014 Crimean annexation and the Russian military activity in South-Eastern Ukraine (LRTK 2020).
RTR-Planeta	12 months, February 2018	The broadcast content repeatedly incited hatred among nations and instigated war in the channel's programme "Duel. Vladimir Solovyov programme" (broadcast on 16 March 2017), "Evening with Vladimir Solovyov" (broadcast on 31 May 2017) and "60 Minutes" (broadcast on 3 November 2017) (LRTK 2018b). One broadcast called for the destruction of the United States and the restoration of the Soviet Union with the former territories, another broadcast also expressed the threat of occupying the Baltic states (Markusa 2018).
TVCI	6 months, October 2017	Information published in the programme "The Right to Know" on 10 June 2017 violated the Law on the Provision of Information to the Public, because the statements of Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the participant of the talk show, incited hatred among nations and instigated war (LRTK 2018a, 32). LRTK noted that violations of the channel had been repeated and the sanctions applied earlier had not yielded results. Zhirinovsky spoke about an occupation of Ukraine and Transnistria (BNS 2017).
TVCI	1 month, April 2017	Incitement to hatred and instigation of war in the programme "In the Centre of Events with Anna Prochorova," aired on 27 January (LRTK 2018a, 32). The reportage of the programme covered the events of 13th January 1991 in Lithuania, when the Soviet military troops attacked the TV centre in which 14 people were killed. The published information was one-sided, biased, defamatory and inciting hatred (LRTK 2017b).
RTR-Planeta	3 months, November 2016	TV programme "Duel: the Show of Vladimir Solovyov" (aired on 6 October 2016) was inciting war and hatred (LRTK 2017a, 35).

RTR-Planeta, NTV Mir	LRTK obliged communications companies to transfer RTR-Planeta and NTV Mir to paid television packages for one year.	LRTK established that RTR-Planeta and NTV Mir broadcasted "Evening with Vladimir Solovyov," that incited war and national hatred towards the Baltic states, justified Russia's actions in Crimea and spread biased information. LRTK did not follow the procedure stipulated in the AVMD. European Commission found that Lithuania should have followed that procedure though since relocating channels into paid packages also restricts the freedom to accept programmes. LRTK thus revoked its decision (Kasčiūnas and Keršanskas 2017, 202–3).
RTR-Planeta	3 months, April 2015	Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission identified second time in one year (2 March 2014 and 18 January 2015) the dissemination of prohibited information (incitement to hatred) in the TV programme "Sunday Evening with Vladimir Solovyov" (European Commission 2015; LRTK 2016, 42). Content of the programme of 2 March 2014 was found to instigate discord and a military climate and refer to demonisation and scapegoating concerning the situation in Ukraine; content of the programme of 18 January 2015 could be considered as being aimed at creating tensions and violence between Russians, Russian-speaking Ukrainians and the broader Ukrainian population (European Commission 2015).
REN TV Baltic	3 months, January 2015	The programme Teritoriya Zabluzhdeniya failed to be impartial, disseminated biased information about the events in Ukraine, and was inciting war and hatred towards Ukrainians, the Ukrainian Government, and EU and NATO states that supported the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine (LRTK 2016, 41).
RTR-Planeta	3 months, April 2014	TV programme "Vesti nedeli" ("News of the Week"), rebroadcasted on 2 March 2014, spread information excusing the violence against the peaceful citizens in Ukraine, provoked discord between Russians and Ukrainians and hatred for the new Ukrainian Government, the US and its allies and excused the military intervention in the sovereign country and the annexation of the part of the country (LRTK 2015, 34).
NTV Mir	3 months, March 2014	TV programme "Condemned. A trap for the Alpha group" spread false information about the events of 13 January 1991 (LRTK 2015, 34).

| PBK | 3 months, October 2013 | Suspension of programmes not originating from the European Union (e.g. Russia). A television show "Man and the law" provided false information and denied crimes committed by the Soviet security forces during the clashes between Lithuanian citizens and Soviet troops in Vilnius on 13 January, 1991, resulting in 14 fatalities (RFE/RL 2013). |