# THE EUROPEANIZATION OF FOREIGN POLICY IN THE FACE OF THE RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION WAR

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## Abstract

*Since 2014 a key development emerging from the crisis in Ukraine has been the extensive use of various disinformation and propaganda techniques used by Russia against not only Ukraine, but also against the European Union (EU) member states and the West in general. While such campaigns were gradually acknowledged in Berlin, Brussels, and Washington, the reactions of the EU and NATO came with a long delay. This article focuses on the institutional and political (re)actions of the EU to the Russian disinformation campaign against the European Union member states and Eastern neighborhood countries after the beginning of the Ukraine crisis in 2014. The key developments are the launch of a special Eastern StratCom Task Force within the EEAS as a completely new institutional formation, the adoption of the Action Plan for Strategic Communication, and the increased financial support for the European Endowment for Democracy. Tracing the EU collective response indicates that there was a decision of the member states to favor an EU-level solution over a solely national one in the foreign policy arena. This article argues that these developments are indicative of the Europeanization of the foreign policies of the member states, which is in itself a remarkable development given the altered European security environment.*

***Keywords:*** *European Union, Russia, disinformation, foreign policy, Europeanization*

## Introduction

The conflict in Ukraine has been termed as a "hybrid"[1], "non-linear"[2], "asymmetrical"[3] and "compound"[4] conflict. Despite the conceptual ambiguity of the various notions, all of these essentially indicate a "fusion of war forms"[5] ranging from (conventional and irregular) military force to economic coercion, as well as psychological pressure and strategic (mis)communication. One of the key elements of this conflict has been the extensive use of various disinformation techniques targeted first and foremost at Ukraine, but also at the European Union (EU) and the West in general. While such campaigns were gradually acknowledged in Berlin, Brussels, and Washington, the reactions of the EU and NATO appeared reluctantly and with a lag.

It is not an overstatement to say that the Russian campaign came as a complete surprise to the West. In his well-known statement, General Philip Breedlove, the NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, characterized Russia's disinformation activities as "the most amazing information warfare blitzkrieg we have ever seen in the history of information warfare"[6]. For the West, tackling disinformation was a challenge not only because of the fundamental principles of the freedom of speech, but also because there was a simply lack of appropriate structures and experience in countering such a disinformation campaign of such magnitude.

While information and propaganda campaigns are nothing new in international confrontations, the EU entered a completely new domain after the Ukrainan crisis. Never before had the EU and its policies faced such a security

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[1]  **Reisinger, H.; Golts, A**. 2014. Russia's Hybrid Warfare: Waging War below the Radar of Traditional Collective Defence. – NATO Defense College, Rome, Research Paper No. 105, November. [**Reisinger, Golts** 2014]

[2]  **Galeotti, M**. 2016. Hybrid, ambiguous, and non-linear? How new is Russia's 'new way of war'? – Small Wars & Insurgencies, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 282–301; **Pomerantsev, P.; Weiss, M**. 2014. The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money. A Special Report by the Interpreter, Institute of Modern Russia. [**Pomerantsev, Weiss** 2014]

[3]  **Thomas, T**. 2015. Russia's Military Strategy and Ukraine: Indirect, Asymmetric – and Putin-Led. – Journal of Slavic Military Studies, Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 445–461.

[4]  **Minasyan, S**. 2015. "Hybrid" vs "Compound" War: Lessons from the Ukraine Conflict. – Policy memo, No. 401, PONARS Eurasia.

[5]  **Hoffman, F**. 2007. Conflict in the 21st century: the rise of hybrid wars. Arlington (VA): Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, p. 7.

[6]  **Vandiver, J**. 2014. SACEUR: Allies must prepare for Russia 'hybrid war'. – Stars and Stripes, 4 September. <http://bit.ly/2bT88kb> (accessed February 20, 2016).

risk. The fact that the Russian disinformation campaign became a priority for the EU, the EU member states and institutions to not only discuss the issue but to also pursue a common European response, indicated an expansion of the EU's foreign policy competence. More specifically, this article makes the argument that recent EU developments geared towards countering Russia's disinformation campaigns can be analyzed in the context of the Europeanization of national foreign policy of the member states. Despite the EU's initially reluctant and, in the eyes of many, insufficient reactions, it is evident that external (third countries) and internal (member states) pressures have precipitated changes at the political and institutional-procedural levels of the EU decision-making domain, indicating another step towards the Europeanization of foreign policy preferences of the member states.

In order to analyze the EU's response to the Russian disinformation campaign, this article will proceed as follows. The first section summarizes the key aspects of the (dis)information war in the literature and describes the main messages of the Russian campaign. It outlines various target groups, including the EU member states and the Eastern neighborhood countries[7]. The next section discusses the key tenets of the Europeanization approach, with specific focus on the challenges of Europeanization in the field of foreign policy. This provides the framework for analysis of the EU's responses to the disinformation campaign. The following section uses process-tracing to study the political, institutional and procedural changes in the EU that have been implemented as a result of the Russian campaign. It links the empirical results to the Europeanization approach, arguing that the resolution to pursue a common European response signifies the expansion of the EU foreign policy competences and favors the EU over the national foreign policy level.

## 1. Information warfare in the Ukraine crisis and the challenge for the European Union

The Ukraine crisis which emerged after President Yanukovych refused to sign the Association Agreement with the EU in November 2013 rapidly escalated from a public protest on the streets of Kyiv into a full-scale military conflict

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[7]   Eastern neighborhood is a region of the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) policy which is aimed at fostering closer economic and political cooperation with its neighbors, specifically with Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. EaP offers the partner countries financial, political and technical support and know-how for conducting political and economic reforms, and the possibility of closer integration with the EU.

involving both Ukrainian and Russian military forces. The annexation of Crimea and the controversial referendum to join Russia, as well as the civil war in the Eastern Ukraine wherein the pro-Russian rebels fought against the Ukrainian government forces was soon recognized as the war that destroyed the post-Cold War European security architecture. Despite thousands of casualties and several ceasefire deals, the situation remains unresolved.

As Russian and pro-Russian forces have utilized various military and non-military strategies in Ukraine, the crisis is often referred to as a hybrid war. Reisinger & Golts highlight five aspects that are central to Russia's version of hybrid war: 1) "actions with an appearance of legality" (such as the referendum in Crimea), 2) "snap inspections" in the army as a military show of force, 3) the use of "little green men" – special forces without identification tags acting as local security forces, 4) taking advantage of tensions among different local groups or the pretext of "protecting Russians abroad", 5) a full-scale disinformation campaign (using the World War II discourse to draw parallels between the past and current events, the "humanitarian" narrative of sending aid convoys, the concept of Novorossiya, *etc.*).[8] All of the above-mentioned strategies were very much present in the case of Ukraine; however, an intensive and multi-directional disinformation campaign was also launched against the EU as it had maintained its support for Kyiv.

The study of the use and abuse of information is inherently linked to the term "propaganda". A classic definition of propaganda by Lasswell defines it as "the manipulation of symbols as a means of influencing attitudes on controversial matters".[9] Encyclopaedia Britannica defines propaganda as "the more or less systematic effort to manipulate other people's beliefs, attitudes, or actions by means of symbols…"[10]. Propaganda is primarily perceived as a negative and/or an aggressive phenomenon, with a very broad and elusive definition[11]. A more appropriate term would be "disinformation" which is a type of communication "containing intentionally false, incomplete, or misleading information (frequently combined with true information),

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[8]  **Reisinger, Golts** 2014, pp. 3–8.

[9]  **Lasswell, H. D**. 1968. Detection: Propaganda detection and the courts. – Language of Politics: Studies of Quantitative Semantics. Ed. by Lasswell, H. D. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, p. 177.

[10]  **Smith, B. L**. 2016. Propaganda. – Encyclopaedia Britannica.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/propaganda> (accessed February 27, 2016).

[11]  See also: **Pynnöniemi, K**. 2016. The elusive concept of propaganda. – Fog of Falsehood: Russian Strategy of Deception and the Conflict in Ukraine. Ed. by Pynnöniemi, K; Rácz, A. The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, pp. 27–48.

which seeks to deceive, misinform, and/or mislead the target"[12]. This definition incorporates several relevant dimensions which capture the essence of disinformation. First, it emphasizes intent – as the current information society has made all types of dissemination easy and instantaneous, a disinformation item made public is a strategic move, which serves to achieve certain (hidden) objectives. Second, it underlines the element of deliberate deception by using fabricated, partial or inaccurate communications.

In the case of the Russian disinformation campaign, Wilson distinguishes four different types based on the target audience[13]. The first is disinformation as distraction, the purpose of which is "not to convince or persuade, but to keep the viewer hooked and distracted, passive and paranoid"[14] by spreading different versions of reality and thereby leaving the audience "flailing in moral and even factual relativity"[15]. For example, spreading numerous versions about the crash of MH17 to "distort the media space and introduce uncertainty into the Western narrative"[16], or demoralizing specific countries either by using 'trolls' to flood internet platforms with hundreds of provoking comments, or offering some vague but threatening statements by mid-level officials, which are then reported by foreign journalists. The second type is "nudge" disinformation, which essentially means establishing contacts with political parties and individual politicians with any kind of anti-systemic (in the European case, often anti-American) worldview, and providing them and their cause(s) with wide media coverage. According to Wilson, this may lead to the overrepresentation of some radical or marginal groups in the public space, giving the impression that these groups bear more influence than they actually do, thereby actually reinforcing them with the public who is used to relying on the objectivity of the media.

The third type of disinformation is circulated at domestically, i.e., to Russian audience. In contrast to the distortion techniques used abroad, the main aim here is to consolidate the support for Putin and his policies. This is done by reporting on Putin's successes as the President of Russia and using

[12] **Shultz, R; Godson, R**. 1984. Dezinformatsia. Active Measures in Soviet Strategy. New York: Bergamon Brassey's, p. 194.

[13] Here, Wilson's preferred term "propaganda" is replaced with "disinformation".

[14] **Pomerantsev, Weiss** 2014, p. 11.

[15] **Wilson, A**. 2015. Four types of Russian Propaganda. – Aspen Review Central Europe, No. 4. <http://bit.ly/2btKUA6> (accessed February 20, 2016).

[16] **Lough, J.; Lutsevych, O.; Pomerantsev, P.; Secrieru, S.; Shekhovtsov, A**. 2014. Russian Influence Abroad: Non-state Actors and Propaganda. – Chatham House. <http://bit.ly/2bfTPl2> (accessed February 20, 2016).

fear and threat tactics to assert that Putin's it the most qualified man for the job, while all the rest are incompetent at governing the country. This is combined with advancing a scenario wherein=other countries also desire war with Russia. Finally, the fourth technique described by Wilson is termed "alternative realities", which is targeted at Russia's neighboring countries, or the so-called "near abroad", that preferably have a Russian minority. This includes a comprehensive strategy of building up and providing support for pro-Russian parties, politicians, NGOs and other groups, who in return repeat the pro-Russian message through different media platforms and in public, in order to create not only alternative narratives but an entirely parallel reality to influence the population.

The main messages advanced by the disinformation campaign differed between Western and Eastern Europe. In the former, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries were portrayed as problematic and burdensome to the West, e.g. unable to control their borders, facing social unrest due to conflicting societal groups, and needing extensive and continuous support to sustain their economies. The campaign used anti-American slogans to create unrest in the domestic politics of Western Europe by bolstering Eurosceptic and far right and far left parties as opposition to the Western European governments and EU institutions.[17] Campaigns tailored to address the issues that were topical to a specific country were also more successful[18].

In the Central Eastern and East European countries, a sizeable portion of the campaign was directed at the local Russians or pro-Russian sympathizers in the society, presenting Crimea's "historical return" to Russia as a state of "normalcy". The campaign further attempted to undermine the EU by convincing neighboring states of the negative effects of European integration and liberal democracy, e.g. Russia promoting itself as a force for moral good and traditional values on the matter of gay rights.[19] The campaign also sought to appeal to Russian minorities, or other historical or nationalist elements within neighboring countries, in order to create controversy within the society[20]. The Russian domestic disinformation campaign (which

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[17] **Samadashvili, S**. 2015. Muzzling the Bear. Strategic Defence for Russia's Undeclared Information War on Europe. Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, Brussels. <http://bit.ly/1RqpIq7> (accessed February 20, 2016), pp. 39–40. [**Samadashvili** 2015]

[18] **Gotev, G**. 2014a. EU communication versus Russian propaganda. – EurActiv.com, 18 November. <http://bit.ly/2bT4kQb> (accessed February 20, 2016). [**Gotev** 2014a]

[19] **Samadashvili** 2015, p. 39.

[20] **Czekaj, M**. 2015. Russia's Hybrid War Against Poland. – Eurasian Daily Monitor, Vol. 12, No. 80. The Jamestown Foundation. <http://bit.ly/1QbD9sR> (accessed February 20, 2016).

was also broadcasted to the Russian speaking communities in the neighbor-hood) was considered to be extremely aggressive[21] and reiterated certain themes such as Russia as a great power, the West's seeks to contain Russia, the (moral) decline of the EU and the US, the Ukraine revolution as a Western coup, and the denial of Russian soldiers in Ukraine, together with Crimea's rightful return to Russia[22].

The main international media channels involved in disseminating these messages included RT (formerly Russia Today), which airs shows in Arabic, English, French, German, Spanish and Russian, and Sputnik, an online media platform available in more than 30 languages, including many official EU languages. The funds invested in the communication abroad have increased annually, reaching at least €643 million in 2015, according to Kremlin.[23] In addition to media channels, Russia also adopted the widespread practice of using the so-called "trolls", or paid commentators to disseminate pro-Russian rhetoric in their statements and comments[24]. As the analysis of the Czech Republic (but also observed elsewhere) has demonstrated, such media platforms are of unclear origin and feature posts by anonymous authors promoting pro-Russian policies[25].

While the effects of Russia's media channels on the public opinion in the West was difficult to estimate, their audiences remained relatively marginal, especially when compared to those of the mainstream Western media outlets[26]. It is estimated that the biased coverage of the Ukraine crisis dealt a significant blow to RT in the West and Ukraine[27]. However, the greater cause for concern lay in the stronger effect of disinformation on ethnic Russian

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[21] E.g. **Van Herpen, M**. 2016. Putin's Propaganda Machine. Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy. Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 1.

[22] **Rettman, A**. 2015a. EU to strike back at Russian propaganda. – EUObserver, 19 March. <http://bit.ly/1F1ZANx> (accessed February 20, 2016). [**Rettman** 2015a]

[23] **Rettman, A**. 2015b. Russian propaganda wins EU hearts and minds. – EUObserver, 23 June. <http://bit.ly/1dfLP4j> (accessed February 20, 2016). [**Rettman** 2015b]

[24] E.g. **Bugorkova, O**. 2015. Ukraine conflict: Inside Russia's 'Kremlin troll army'. – BBC Monitoring, 19 March. <http://bbc.in/1BEL8WS> (accessed February 26, 2016).

[25] **Smolenova, I**. 2015. Russia's Propaganda War. – Forbes, 25 March. <http://bit.ly/2c46Wfh> (accessed February 20, 2016).

[26] For specific numbers, see **Snegovaya, M**. 2015. Putin's Information Warfare in Ukraine: Soviet Origins of Russia's Hybrid Warfare. – Russia Report No. 1, Institute for the Study of War. [**Snegovaya** 2015]; **Ennis, S**. 2015. Russia in 'information war' with West to win hearts and minds. – BBC Monitoring, 16 September. <http://bbc.in/2bk9MZG> (accessed February 26, 2016). [**Ennis** 2015]

[27] **Snegovaya** 2015, p. 19.

or Russian-speaking communities residing outside Russia. Despite living abroad this group is immersed in the Russian media space and therefore not reachable by their European governments.

What measures did individual European countries take to counter disinformation since the beginning of the Ukraine crisis? Two options were the most common. With respect to the Russian TV channels disseminating disinformation, some countries opted for coercion by fining or banning media providers. For example, Latvia and Lithuania restricted some broadcasts for short periods of time for "inciting hatred". Elsewhere, countries supported the expansion of programs in Russian to reach wider audiences. For example, the UK invested in the *BBC World Service, while* Germany and the US supported *Deutsche Welle, Radio Liberty* and *Euronews*[28]. A more substantial move was made, after years of debate, in Estonia, by launching the first official Russian-language TV channel in September 2015, in an attempt to engage the local Russian community and provide an "adequate picture of Estonian society"[29]. These endeavors are a good examples of the concern of Central and Eastern European countries about the possible impact of disinformation.

Overall, the EU was criticized for remaining passive against the barrage of Russian disinformation[30]. The EU's reaction was also *ad hoc* (e.g. The EEAS created an *ad hoc* group including members from various EU Directorate-Generals to produce and implement a communication strategy in the EaP countries, following the onset of the crisis in Ukraine)[31]. The EU provided financial support for the media in Europe to diversify its broadcasts with cultural programs and EU affairs[32]. This was combined with more coercive actions, such as the personal sanctions imposed on Dmitry Kiselyov, the

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[28] E.g. **Ennis** 2015; **BBC** 2015. BBC World Service gets funding boost from government. – BBC, 23 November. <http://bbc.in/1ShB3ts> (accessed February 26, 2016); **Panichi, J.; Spence, A**. 2015. BBC enters Putin's media war. – Politico, 7 September. <http://politi.co/2btHUDQ> (accessed February 26, 2016).

[29] **Tambur, S**. 2015. Estonia launches its first Russian-language TV channel. – ERR News, 28 September. <bit.ly/1O50Woy> (accessed February 26, 2016).

[30] **Hegedűs, D**. 2015. Fighting back in the 'information war'. – European Council on Foreign Relations, 29 July.

[31] **Samadashvili** 2015, p. 49.

[32] **Waszczykowski, W**. 2015. The battle for the hearts and minds: countering propaganda attacks against the Euro-Atlantic Community. – Report No. 164 CDSDG 15 E bis, Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 10 October, p. 13.

head of Russia Today and "the public face of President Putin's propaganda machine"[33].

It is important to note that the EU's capabilities and progress in (re)acting to the Russian disinformation starts from the recognition that the EU policies are dependent on its 28 member states and their preferences. Foreign policy is a domain where the common EU policy is relatively new and most of the control is in the hands of member states, nevertheless, the EU is still seen as a foreign policy actor who does make policy decisions. And this makes them part of the international community. A slow reaction, or none at all undermines the EU's credibility, not only in the eyes of its own citizens, but also for other countries, especially its neighbors. It was therefore imperative that the EU take a definitive stance in the disinformation campaign. As the analysis of the evolution of the EU policy explicates, it not only took a position, it also agreed to negotiate a common strategy for countering the disinformation. The fact that the European Council decided in favor of an institutional solution – to create a Task Force to refute the disinformation claims – is indicative of the ambition to seek a common European response and expand into a new common policy area. This marks yet another small step towards the Europeanization of member states' foreign policies. In order to ascertain the empirical developments discussed below, the paper first turns to the theoretical outline of the Europeanization approach.

## 2. Europeanization of EU foreign policy

The process of Europeanization is aimed at analyzing the relationship between the EU and its member states. Europeanization was initially defined as a top-down approach explaining the impact of the EU on its member states[34], but has subsequently evolved into a complex multidimensional phenomenon. To date, the field includes at least three dimensions: adaptation and policy convergence, or the merging of member states' policies with the EU (also

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[33] **Bershidsky, L**. 2015. A Putin Crony's Unrequited Love for Europe. – Bloomberg View, 8 September. <http://bv.ms/2bKRpMN> (accessed February 20, 2016).

[34] **Risse, T.; Cowles, M. G; Caporaso, J. A**. 2001. Europeanization and Domestic Change: Introduction. – Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change. Ed. by Cowles, M. G; Caporaso, J.A; Risse, T. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. [**Risse *et al***. 2001]; **Ladrech, R**. 1994. The Europeanization of Domestic Politics and Institutions: The Case of France. – Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol. 32, No. 1, pp. 69–88; **Radaelli, C**. 2000. Whither Europeanisation? Concept Stretching and Substantive Change. – European Integration online Papers (EIoP), Vol. 4, No. 8, <http://bit.ly/2bkeXZl> (accessed February 20, 2016).

referred to as 'downloading'); the projection of national preferences and ideas onto the EU with the aim of shaping European policies ('uploading'); and horizontal harmonization between member states and institutions as a result of the two previous dimensions ('crossloading').[35] These three dimensions are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, thus making an analysis of Europeanization very challenging. The abundance of definitions has often led to conceptual and analytical ambiguity as well[36]. The definition forwarded by Pomorska is employed here due to its multidimensionality and -directionality. It defines Europeanization as "an ongoing and mutually constitutive process of change, linking national and European levels, and capturing the growing interdependence of both".[37]

As policy change is a key element in the Europeanization process, various authors have sought to describe the mechanism(s) and direction of change. It is argued that the 'downloading' of EU policies varies not only by member state, but also by issue area or specific institution[38], and in order to understand how change comes about and why the variation of adaptation occurs, several competing and complementing explanations have been suggested. For example, the concepts of 'misfit'[39] and 'goodness of fit'[40] are employed to argue that the extent of congruence between the European and the national (domestic) level determines the pressure for adaptation. In the event of a

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[35] **Börzel, T**. 2005. Europeanization: How the European Union Interacts with Its Member States. – The Member States of the European Union. Ed. by Bulmer, S; Lequesne, C. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 45–69. [**Börzel** 2005]; **Bulmer, S**. 2007. Theorizing Europeanization. – Europeanization: New Research Agendas. Ed. by Graziano, P; Vink, M. P. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 46–58; **Wong, R.; Hill, C**. 2011. Introduction. – National and European Foreign Policies: Towards Europeanization. Ed. by Wong, R; Hill, C. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, pp. 1–18. [**Wong, Hill** 2011]

[36] **Mair, P**. 2004. The Europeanization Dimension. – Journal of European Public Policy, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 337–348; **Olsen, J**. 2002. The Many Faces of Europeanization. – Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol. 40, No. 5, pp. 921–952.

[37] **Pomorska, K**. 2007. The Impact of Enlargement: Europeanization of Polish Foreign Policy? Tracking Adaptation and Change in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. – The Hague Journal of Diplomacy, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 25–51.

[38] **Larsen, H**. 2009. A Distinct FPA for Europe? Towards a Comprehensive Framework for Analysing the Foreign Policy of EU Member States. – European Journal of International Relations, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 537–566. [**Larsen** 2009]; **Tonra, B**. 2015. Europeanization. – The Sage Handbook of European Foreign Policy. Ed. by Aarstad, A. K; Jorgensen, K. E; Drieskens, E; Laatikainen, K; Tonra, B. Sage Publications Ltd.

[39] E. g. **Börzel, T**. 1999. Towards Convergence in Europe? Institutional Adaptation to Europeanisation in Germany and Spain. – Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol. 37, No. 4, pp. 573–596.

[40] **Risse** *et al*. 2001.

'good fit', there is less pressure on a member state to change its policies or institutions. However, there are many intervening variables or 'mediating factors' in the domestic setting which can influence whether, and to what extent, domestic changes can occur. These can include veto players, and formal and informal institutions[41]. Börzel summarizes four diffusion mechanisms which can result in domestic change: coercion (the EU prescribes or imposes a model on a member state); mimetic imitation and normative pressure (a member state emulates a model in order to avoid uncertainty, or is encouraged by the example of other states); competitive selection (member states compete for the most efficient arrangement in order to avoid comparative disadvantages); and framing (European actors behave as 'norm entrepreneurs' and alter the ideas of domestic actors by disseminating new ones)[42].

Foreign policy is widely accepted as being a restricted domain of the sovereign nation state, and strictly intergovernmental in the EU since the signing of the Lisbon Treaty (2009). The debate on the Europeanization of national foreign policies has therefore often hinged on the definition of EU foreign policy, and its application, i.e., the mechanisms and direction(s) of the influence, the scope of issue areas, and the outcomes. Even if we accept that EU foreign policy is more than the sum of its member states' foreign policies, the EU can hardly be considered to be a 'normal' state-like actor. The EU's foreign policy can be seen as consisting of several different foreign policies: national foreign policies of the member states, external trade relations and development ('community' policies), and the Common Foreign and Security Policy.[43]

On balance, as a domain that touches upon core aspects of national sovereignty and remains largely intergovernmental even after the Lisbon agreement, foreign policy is not perceived as particularly amenable to the processes of Europeanization. Europeanization of foreign policy is expected to be less likely and much weaker when compared to other EU policies.[44] Regarding

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[41] **Börzel** 2005; **Ladrech, R**. 2010. Europeanization and National Politics. Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan; **Michalski, A**. 2013. Europeanization of National Foreign Policy: The Case of Denmark's and Sweden's Relations with China. – Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol. 51, No. 5, pp. 884–900.

[42] **Börzel, T**. 2003. How the European Union Interacts with its Member States. – Reihe Politikwissenschaft, No. 93. Institut für Höhere Studien, Wien, pp. 13–14.

[43] **Larsen** 2009; **White, B**. 2001. Understanding European Foreign Policy. Basingstoke: Palgrave; **Wong, Hill** 2011.

[44] **Alecu de Flers, N.; Müller, P**. 2012. Dimensions and Mechanisms of the Europeanization of Member State Foreign Policy: State of the Art and New Research Avenues. – European Integration, Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 19–35.

the mechanisms and direction of change, it must first be acknowledged that, when compared to other fields, Europeanization of foreign policy is bound to be a more voluntary process – that is based on socialization and policy learning[45]. Overall, there is no consensus on whether substantive convergence in this area can happen in the longer run, or whether the process amounts to a mere superficial procedural convergence. Furthermore, although it cannot be denied that national interests still play a crucial role in national foreign policy-making, elite socialization is clearly observable among both EU and national officials who have worked in EU institutions over the years.[46]

Although the EU foreign policy still retains a significant amount of inter-governmentalism in its decision-making, there is ample evidence of foreign policy changes as a result of national and European interactions. In terms of 'downloading', these can include, for example, structural reorganization, the sharing practices between the foreign policy staff of the member states, elite socialization, prioritization of the European policy agenda and objectives, and change in policy preferences[47]. 'Uploading' national preferences, on the other hand, is an opportunity for a member state to use the EU for a particular policy choice, as acting collectively entails lower costs than member states acting alone. Here the member states are the drivers of the policy change, and can utilize the EU to promote their national interests as well as potentially also influence the foreign policies of other European member states.[48] 'Crossloading', or converging in terms of policy preferences is essentially an identity issue in the long-term perspective. Here, 'Europe' as an identity category exists side-by-side with the national identity, and may in the end lead to convergence between the two. Examples of this are the discussion concerning

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[45] **Baun, M.; Marek, D**. 2013. The Foreign Policies of the New Member States: A Framework for Analysis. – The New Member States and the European Union: Foreign Policy and Europeanization. Ed. by Baun, M.; Marek, D. London: Routledge, pp. 1–21.

[46] **Aggestam, L**. 2004. Role Identity and Europeanization of Foreign Policy: A Political-Cultural Approach. – Rethinking European Union Foreign Policy. Ed. by Tonra, B.; Christiansen, T. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 81–98; **Hill, C.; Wallace, W**. 1996. Introduction: Actors and Actions. – The Actors in Europe's Foreign Policy. Ed. by Hill, C. London: Routledge, pp. 1–16.

[47] **Gross, E**. 2009. The Europeanization of National Foreign Policy: Continuity and Change in European Crisis Management. Palgrave Macmillan, p. 17. [**Gross** 2009]; **Forster, A.; Wallace, W**. 2000. Common Foreign and Security Policy: From Shadow to Substance? – Policy-Making in the European Union. 4th edition. Ed. by Wallace, H.; Wallace, W. Oxford: Oxford University Press; **Wong, Hill** 2011.

[48] **Gross** 2009, p. 18; **Major, C**. 2005. Europeanisation and Foreign and Security Policy – Undermining or Rescuing the Nation State? – Politics, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 175–190.

common norms, shared definitions of European and national interests, as well as collective understanding of the role of member states and Europe in the world, which all feed back into the national foreign policy making process.[49]

Using the Europeanization approach, the article will now turn to the empirical analysis of the countermeasures deployed against the Russian disinformation campaign after the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis in November 2013. By using process-tracing[50], the chapter will show how the European Union moved from negotiation to action in forming a fairly coherent strategy for countering Russian disinformation. The chapter demonstrates how the member states effectively uploaded their policy preferences to the European level and crossloaded between various policy issues, thus shaping the EU policy of countering disinformation. It also shows how the member states pursued this policy and referred to it in the national level, downloading policy preferences as expected in the case of Europeanization.

## 3. The EU's response to the Russian disinformation campaign

With the Ukrainian crisis, the disinformation campaign in Ukraine and the EU expanded exponentially. As the attention of the EU and the world were on the annexation of Crimea and the ensuing military confrontation, disinformation was not at the top of the EU's agenda at the time. Although concerns about the provocative and offensive messages were shared among member states, there were only a few official mentions of these at the EU level. In December 2014, Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy publicly acknowledged the Russian "communication efforts" towards the EU and the internal EU debates to address the issue[51]. From there onwards, the EU's responses can roughly be divided into political statements made by different actors and institutional-procedural changes such as a

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[49]  **Gross** 2009, p. 19; **Smith, M. E**. 2000. Conforming to Europe: the Domestic Impact of EU Foreign Policy Cooperation. – Journal of European Public Policy, Vol. 7, No. 4, p. 614; **Wong, Hill** 2011 p. 7.

[50]  Process-tracing is defined here as "the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the author" (**Collier, D**. 2011. Understanding Process Tracing. – PS: Political Science and Politics, Vol. 44, No. 4, pp. 823–30). As a qualitative research method, it relies on careful description and sequences of variables in the analysis. See also: **Mahoney, J**. 2010. After KKV: The New Methodology of Qualitative Research. – World Politics, Vol. 62, No. 1, pp. 120–47.

[51]  **Gotev, G**. 2014b. Hahn: We have some ideas how to deal with Russian propaganda. – EurActiv.com, 2 December. <http://bit.ly/2c42TQd> (accessed February 20, 2016).

new Task Force, an Action Plan for Strategic Communication, and the discussion on the review of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive.

The first key document to emerge at the EU level was a non-paper sent by four EU member states (Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania and the UK) to the High Representative/Vice President of the EU Federica Mogherini on 8 January 2015, calling on the EU to increase "public resilience to disinformation and propaganda in the EU and [their] eastern partners; supporting independent and alternative voices, including in Russia; and ensuring [the EU's] own systems are sufficiently robust to information manipulation, while safeguarding… core values"[52]. The authors called for a response consisting of the following aspects: raising public awareness about disinformation and the proper response to it (e.g. by establishing a web platform for deconstructing disinformation); taking an assertive or proactive approach to increasing EU visibility (e.g. preparing a strategic communication Action Plan, and providing alternative sources of information to Russian-speakers by supporting independent international and national media platforms in Russian language); and ensuring accountability among media providers regarding any violations of the rules of broadcasting and public information in the EU.

The non-paper was followed by the first official statement with regard to the disinformation campaign, made by the most outspoken EU institution – the European Parliament (EP). In its resolution, adopted on January 15th, 2015, the EP supported sanctions against Russia and urged the EU to adopt a "communication strategy" to counter Russian disinformation "towards the EU, its eastern neighbors and Russia itself", as well as to develop instruments for addressing the campaign[53]. This was reiterated a month later, shortly before the European Council meeting in March, in another resolution, which emphasized "the need for a coherent European approach towards the misinformation campaigns and propaganda activities pursued by Russia both inside and outside the EU"[54].

Around the same time, the Foreign Affairs Council of the EU took an official stance on the issue in its findings on Ukraine, and asked the High Representative "to further improve strategic communication in support of EU

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[52] **EU Strategic communication responding to propaganda non-paper** 2015. 8 January.

[53] **European Parliament** 2015a. Resolution of 15 January 2015 on the situation in Ukraine, 2014/2965(RSP).

[54] **European Parliament** 2015b. Resolution of 12 March 2015 on the Annual Report from the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Parliament, 2014/2219(INI).

policies and to explore options for the establishment of a dedicated communication team to lead these actions"[55]. In response to this, another informal paper, submitted by the Latvian EU Presidency, emerged. Not fully satisfied with the debate at the Council, the document called upon the EU to take a stronger stance against the "disinformation campaigns produced by actors outside the EU which try to influence, challenge, and undermine our societies and influence EU policy in our neighborhood"[56].

In March, the pressure exerted by member states and the European Parliament culminated with the EU Council summit findings, which recognized the "need to challenge Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns" and set a deadline for June for the High Representative to devise an Action Plan on strategic communication. "As a first step", it notes, a communication team should be established[57]. According to a diplomat, the bargaining process between national preferences "was a battle, and it's quite an achievement, that we've got all the EU leaders to speak out on 'Russia's disinformation campaign'. We wanted conclusions that spoke of 'Russian propaganda'. But some capitals didn't want to put 'Russian' and 'propaganda' in the same sentence".[58]

The East StratCom Task Force was established in April 2015 under the EEAS, and was comprised of nine members from the various EU member states. The central aim of the Task Force was to explain EU policies in the EaP region by communicating proactively about key policy areas, providing *ad hoc* information about topical issues, myth-busting, and supporting the EU in their efforts to strengthen the media in the eastern neighborhood. The team was expected to cooperate with other EU institutions, member states and a number of other partners, such as the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) as well as other non-governmental organizations in the member states and the eastern neighborhood. At the same time, the team had a narrow mandate due to the varying foreign policy preferences of each of the member states, and therefore had to proceed carefully. The Action Plan was particularly ambitious, given the size of the Task Force (9 members, most of whom were assisted by the member states, with some EEAS staff to support them), the budget of the unit (no additional funds, reliance on existing EEAS

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[55] **Council of the EU** 2015. Conclusions on Ukraine, Foreign Affairs Council, 5755/15, 29 January.

[56] **Rettman** 2015b.

[57] **European Council** 2015a. Conclusions on External Relations, 19 March.

[58] **Rettman** 2015b.

budget), and the disagreements among the member states over the narrow mandate.[59]

Following these steps and a discussion in May, the EP adopted a resolution on the state of EU-Russia relations on 10 June 2015, which, against the backdrop of the upcoming June European Council, asserted that "the EU cannot envisage a return to 'business as usual'" and specified a list of actions to be carried out in order to combat disinformation about the EU. These actions included, developing the capabilities to monitor and adequately respond to the Russian propaganda, both in Russia and in the EU countries, and funding projects aimed at countering misinformation. More interestingly, it also suggested devising a "coordinated mechanism of transparency of and for the collection, monitoring and reporting of financial, political or technical assistance provided by Russia to political parties and other organizations within the EU" to assess its involvement and influence in the EU.[60] The European Council conclusions from June 26th did conclude that "mobilizing EU instruments to help counter hybrid threats" should be one of the areas for development[61]. The EP continued to address the issue of disinformation by devising reports on the strategic communication[62].

In June, the High Representative presented the Action Plan on Strategic Communication. The three main objectives of the EU Action plan were the following:
• Effective communication and promotion of EU policies in the eastern neighborhood;
• Strengthening the overall media environment in the eastern neighborhood and in EU member states, including support for media freedom and the strengthening of independent media;
• Improved EU capacity to forecast, address and respond to disinformation activities by external actors.[63]

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[59] **Panichi, J**. 2015. EU Splits in Russian media war. – Politico, 17 September. <http://politi.co/2bg5J3c> (accessed February 20, 2016).

[60] **European Parliament** 2015c. Resolution of 10 June 2015 on the state of EU-Russia relations. 2015/2001(INI).

[61] **European Council** 2015b. Conclusions. EUCO 22/15. Brussels, 25–26 June.

[62] **European Parliament** 2016. Draft Report on EU Strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties. Committee on Foreign Affairs, Rapporteur: Anna Elżbieta Fotyga. 2016/2030(INI). 2 June.

[63] **EEAS** 2015a. Questions and Answers about the EastStratCom Task Force. <http://bit.ly/1Snzome> (accessed February 26, 2016).

What is interesting about these goals is the fact that, compared to the draft version of the text leaked to the press[64], it did not include the promotion of values. This coincided with the more general recent trend of the EU, which was well reflected in the renewed European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), where EU interests took the center of the stage, and universal values were only listed as one interest among many others[65]. Another change in the final document was that it listed only the eastern neighborhood and EU member states as the targets of the policy, whereas in the draft version that remained open. Despite the fact that the support for independent media in Russia was also one of the aims mentioned elsewhere, Russia was not mentioned in this Action Plan. Finally, the raising of "public awareness" regarding disinformation activities in the member states was not explicitly mentioned in the final text. In general, the language of the Action Plan was focused more on the eastern neighborhood and less on the member states.

In accordance with its mandate from the Action Plan, the East StratCom team disseminated weekly public disinformation reviews to its subscribers and used a Twitter account[66] to continually reveal false claims and dispel myths that had appeared in the medias of either the EU member states or in the Eastern neighborhood countries. More specifically, the Task Force published two weekly newsletters. The objective of the Disinformation Review was to "show the European public the high amount of such disinformation attacks that target European audience every single day"[67]. It provided brief snippets of the disinformation appearing in the international media with an especial focus on online news sources. It then set out to disprove them. The review was compiled in cooperation with an extensive network of experts, think tanks and NGOs. However, the format of the review which simply listed the summary of the disinformation item, the link to the source and up to two sentences of "disproof" was unlikely to convince anyone in the Russian media sphere or influenced by it (should it reach their attention). Instead, it seemed to simply fulfill the task of enumerating Russia's claims, although only selectively. If the purpose of the review was to negate the disinformation, it should have focused more on publicizing the claims,

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[64] **EEAS** 2015b. Action Plan on Strategic Communication (unofficial version), Ref. Ares (2015)2608242 – 22/06/2015. <http://bit.ly/1OLWftD> (accessed February 26, 2016).

[65] **European Commission** 2015a. Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Joint Communication. JOIN(2015) 50 final, Brussels, 18 November.

[66] **EU Mythbusters**. <https://twitter.com/euvsdisinfo> (accessed August 25, 2016).

[67] **Delegation of the EU to Ukraine** 2015. Disinformation Review – new EU information product. 4 November. <http://bit.ly/1WvR6Kl> (accessed February 26, 2016).

and then disproving them to the wider public. Another endeavor was the Disinformation Digest which analyses the depiction that the Russian media paints of the world and of the independent media, while also focusing on claims made in the social media. While it provided interesting insights and illuminating analyses, the reach, and therefore also the effects of the endeavor were by and large read by professionals residing in the EU member states or in EU-minded EaP countries.[68]

The content published on the Twitter account included not only specific disinformation claims but also more general reviews and policy analyses about the Russian disinformation strategies. While it had been clearly stated by various policy-makers as well as the Action Plan that "counter-propaganda" was not the EU's aim, the approach taken in the social media, to mix sober news with satire, remains a questionable communication choice. The account was launched on November 5th, 2015 had slightly over 8,500 followers as of August 2016. Even if the tweets were shared and retweeted, its audience was still insignificant in comparison with the millions targeted by the disinformation. A complete analysis of the disinformation published in the tweets falls outside the scope of this article, but some obvious trends about the disinformation can still be summarized: the Russian campaign effectively interwove its political aims with everyday news reports. At the end of 2015, Russian media focused strongly on Turkey, and sought to associate it with ISIS, Ukraine, and with the civil war in Syria. After the New Year, special attention was paid to the events in Cologne and the upcoming Dutch referendum on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement.

Falling beyond the scope of foreign policy but relevant in this context, another perspective of the EU's response was the review of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD)[69]. It was raised by the Baltic States who had conflicts with the Russian media channels, which were registered in other EU countries but broadcast in the Baltics. The shortcomings of the Directive were revealed when Latvia and Lithuania banned certain Russian

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[68]  **EEAS** 2016. EU vs Disinformation, <http://eeas.europa.eu/euvsdisinfo> (accessed February 28, 2016).

[69]  Under the given Directive, the issue of the Country of Origin Principle of media services was pertinent. Specifically, media services are regulated according to the law of the member state where the provider has been registered. A member state who is imposing stricter rules regarding the content or the provider, can only address the issue with the respective member state of origin, not with the specific provider.

TV channels for the incitement of hatred[70]. This resulted in the European Commission's extensive discussion of the issue[71] and proposals for public input regarding the Directive[72]. The Directive provides regulations for the entire EU media landscape and such changes would run the risk of placing independent media under the influence of policy-makers. While the review of the Directive was planned in the EU already before the crisis in Ukraine, the pressure regarding the Country of Origin Principle was very clearly exerted by the member states. For example, the Latvian EU presidency's non-paper on the disinformation campaign called for the completion of "the evaluation process of relevant audiovisual legislation as soon as possible" and the preparation of the "interim report on possible circumvention of national media laws" in an effort to counter Russian disinformation campaigns[73]. In the autumn of 2015, Latvia released a "green card" proposal on the revision of the same Directive regarding the regulation of hate speech. It argued that the EU is "increasingly witnessing a worrying trend of mass media becoming a powerful tool for spreading hate speech, intolerance and propaganda" and this should not be disregarded during the review process. The document also gave three specific suggestions for discussion: first, to extend the geographical scope of the Directive to include non-EU media providers targeting EU audiences; second, to adopt a fast-track reaction procedure in response to the incitement of hatred by the media provider; and third, to allow member states to take measures regarding "unacceptable content" on grounds of *inter* alia public policy and public security.[74] As mentioned above, these suggestions were a challenge for the review of the Directive.

In addition to the initiatives at the EU level, another countermeasure was launched in Europe, as a result of the feasibility study funded by the Netherlands[75]. This initiative was led by the European Endowment for Democracy

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[70] **Kropaite, Z**. 2015. Lithuania bans Russian TV station. – EUObserver, 9 April. <http://bit.ly/2c44dlY> (accessed February 20, 2016).

[71] **Discussion Paper on the Application of Articles 3 and 4 AVMSD** 2014. Case Study: Suspension of some Russian-language channels in Latvia and Lithuania, Doc CC AVMSD (2014) 4 rev.

[72] **European Commission** 2015b. Consultation on Directive 2010/13/EU on audiovisual media services (AVMSD), section 5. Single Market.

[73] **Rettman** 2015b.

[74] **Saeima of the Republic of Latvia** 2015. Proposal for the "green card" on the revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive 2010/13. European Affairs Committee, 26 November.

[75] **Rettman, A**. 2015c. EU mulls response to Russia's information war. – EUObserver, 8 January, <http://bit.ly/1AQw2l5> (accessed February 20, 2016).

(EED)[76]. The study outlined five "building blocks" to strengthen Russian language media in the region: "a regional Russian language news hub" for sharing quality news; a "content factory" of quality documentaries and entertainment; a "center for media excellence" to coordinate market research, professional training, media monitoring and media literacy; a "basket fund" consisting of governmental and non-governmental funding; and, finally, a "multimedia distribution platform" with a global brand to bring all of the above together[77]. As such, it meets the expectations of those EU member states interested in the more widespread response[78].

The EED was funded partly by the European Commission (€12m for 2016–2018)[79] but also received additional financing from the member states sympathetic to the aims of the EED. For example, the donor conference organized to support EED's initiative for Russian media plurality in Warsaw brought together 35 European countries, with Poland, Latvia and the Netherlands announcing additional support to the EED[80]. Despite the fact that the majority of EU member states became involved with the EED[81], the notable abstainees included France and Italy. Although the lack of financial support cannot be equated with the lack of political will, the various disagreements between member states had the potential to undermine the project. In spite of the close connections to the EU, the EED was seen as an alternative project to the East StratCom and its activities, especially as some member states became disillusioned with the EU's solution. It is thus unclear at this point,

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[76] EED is a joint political project of the EU and its member states, outlined in the renewed European Neighborhood Policy in 2011. The main aim of EED is to support democratic transitions in the European neighborhood and beyond, through providing grants to various activists and organizations.

[77] **EED** 2015a. Bringing Plurality & Balance to Russian Language Media – Final Recommendations. <http://bit.ly/2beygEK> (accessed February 20, 2016).

[78] **Gotev, G**. 2015. Latvia proposes 'alternative' to Russian TV propaganda. EurActiv.com, 8 January. <http://bit.ly/2bCgV8t> (accessed February 20, 2016).

[79] **EED** 2015b. European Parliament commends EED work with overwhelming majority. <http://bit.ly/2bfRPJt> (accessed February 20, 2016).

[80] **EED** 2015c. Supporting Russian Media Plurality: EED's role in Warsaw Donor Conference. <http://bit.ly/2bg1iFO> (accessed February 20, 2016); **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands** 2015. The Netherlands to support independent Russian-language media, 19 November. <http://bit.ly/1QYA8kf> (accessed February 20, 2016).

[81] Aside of the European Union, the countries funding the EED are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Canada is supporting the EED in the framework of a specific agreement. (As of August 20, 2016).

whether the two initiatives would be able to complement each other and to
what extent.

Process tracing of the evolution of the EU policy towards Russia's disin-
formation campaign presents a useful example of the opportunities and chal-
lenges in the field of Europeanization of foreign policy. On the one hand, the
uploading of national policy preferences to the EU could be observed in the
form of emergent non-papers, Presidential initiatives, unofficial lobbying and
Council decisions. The fact that the non-paper was signed by four member
states does not mean that the document lacked the support of other member
states; it is simply indicative of the procedure necessary to initiate discussion.
The European Council's decision from March 2015 should be seen as the
culmination of a successful uploading of policy preferences by those member
states concerned with Russia's disinformation campaign. The member states
with diverse policy preferences did not reach the agreement through the coer-
cion of the EU, but rather arrived at the result after a strenuous negotiation
process, bargaining between members, and the necessity of ameliorating
an external (Russian) influence. Taking into account the length of the EU's
decision-making process, the agreements regarding disinformation were for
the most part reached within a six-month period (January to June 2015),
which is a remarkably short time frame. It can be argued that the common
vision regarding the role of the EU in the world and the understanding of
the EU level solution as the best option are indicators of a common identity.
The institutional solutions reflected a very 'European' character in line with
the shared norms and values, but also regarding the practices of the policy
process.

On the other hand, there are questions as to whether the EU's response
adequately corresponded to the expectations of the member states that
prioritized the issue, and the 'goodness of fit' of the institutional solution.
Given the sense of urgency of the matter, the EU's response only led to a
compromise decision, which was further attenuated by the EU's less discrete
"culture of transparency"[82]. The member states for whom the disinforma-
tion issue was especially salient, were not satisfied with the EU's response
and instead sought alternative routes of cooperation with other like-minded
actors. This, however, correlates with the conclusions that can be found in
the Europeanization literature regarding the prevalence of national policy
preferences (especially in the case of strong national foreign policy) over

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[82]  **Gotev, G.; Jacobsen, H**. 2015. Diplomat: EU is losing the propaganda battle. – EurActiv.
com, 18 March. <http://bit.ly/2c43KjB> (accessed February 26, 2016).

a weak convergence over a longer period of time. Finally, it might also be argued that the "European outcome" does not necessarily mean that Europeanization is taking place but simply that the member states with strong national preferences make use of every available arena to pursue their own particular agenda. However, this explanation fails to take into account the importance of participation in the European process and the effect of socialization on all levels.

The role of the EU institutions in the evolution of this particular policy response reflected the traditional division of tasks. The European Parliament, which does not have much leadership in the policy development process still had the capabilities of influencing the environment in which the policy was formulated; its political statements promoted a stronger message than any other EU institution could, and as such was a salient example of the Europeanization process. The Council of the EU represented the main forum for intergovernmental debate and policy guidance. The decisions made in the Council reflected the degree of Europeanization among the national as well as the European political elites, the willingness to reach a joint agreement, and the power of fellow member states to exert pressure or pull back. The European Commission and EEAS acted as coordinators between different actors. The EEAS provided the institutional framework for the East StratCom Task Force which produced, in cooperation with the Commission and in line with the Council instructions, the Action Plan for Strategic Communication.

Finally, the impact of external influence to the processes of Europeanization cannot be ignored. The Ukraine crisis evolved into a major military and diplomatic confrontation in Europe and influenced the EU decision-making process. The Russian disinformation campaign specifically precipitated the institutional modifications in the EU and shaped the policy preferences of the member states. Given the topicality of the disinformation campaign as a policy subject, the European response was considered inevitable; and taking into account the uniqueness of the situation, the complete unpredictability and lack of previous experience with the issue, it is evident that the EU response signifies the expansion of competences into new policy areas which affects both its member states as well as other peripheral institutions.

## 4. Conclusion

This article analyzed the evolution of the European Union's policy responses to the Russian disinformation campaign. While such campaign was long acknowledged in the European capitals, the reactions of the policy-makers

were slow to emerge. Never before had the EU and its policies been concerned with a hybrid attack that was targeted at the Union and its member states, and on such an unprecedented scale. The fact that the topic reached the EU's agenda and that the EU member states and institutions favored a European response signifies the expansion of the EU foreign policy competences and marks another small step in direction of the Europeanization of member states' foreign policy.

The institutional and political responses of the EU to the Russian disinformation campaign included the launch of a special East StratCom Task Force within the EEAS as a completely new institutional entity, the adoption of the Action Plan for Strategic Communication, and enhanced support for the European Endowment for Democracy. Process tracing the EU's actions illustrates the difficult process of foreign policy decision-making and the enhanced challenges that the EU faces in the new security environment. More specifically, the article asserted that the fight against disinformation can be analyzed in the context of the Europeanization of national foreign policy. Despite the EU's reluctant and, in the eyes of many, insufficient reactions, it is evident that various external (third countries) and internal (member states) pressures led to changes at the political, institutional, and procedural level, indicating the augmentation of the Europeanization processes.

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