EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Anna Elbieta FOTYGA (ECR, PL) on the EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties.

Members considered that the EU, its Member States and citizens are under growing, systematic pressure to tackle **information, disinformation and misinformation campaigns and propaganda** from countries and non-state actors, such as transnational terrorist and criminal organisations in its neighbourhood.

Hostile propaganda against the EU comes in many different forms and uses various tools, often tailored to match EU Member States' profiles, with the goal of distorting truths, provoking doubt, dividing Member States, engineering a strategic split between the European Union and its North American partners and paralysing the decision-making process, discrediting the EU institutions and undermining the European narrative based on democratic values.

EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties: Members called on the EU institutions to recognise that strategic communication and information warfare is **not only an external EU issue but also an internal one**, and voiced their concern at the number of hostile propaganda multipliers existing within the Union.

The report called on the EU actors to address the current lack of clarity and agreement on what is to be considered propaganda and disinformation, to develop in cooperation with media representatives and experts from the EU Member States a **shared set of definitions** and to compile data and facts about the consumption of propaganda.

Members therefore stressed the need to **raise awareness and demonstrate assertiveness** through institutional / political communication, think tank / academia research, social media campaigns, civil society initiatives, media literacy and other useful actions.

Recognising and exposing Russian disinformation and propaganda warfare: targeted information warfare against the West was extensively used by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and has since been an integral part of modern hybrid warfare.

Members argued that **Russian strategic communication is part of a larger subversive campaign** to weaken EU cooperation and the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of the Union and its Member States. They urged Member State governments to be vigilant towards Russian information operations on European soil and to incr**ease capacity sharing and counter intelligence efforts** aimed at countering such operations.

The report criticised Russian efforts to **disrupt the EU integration process** and deplored, in this respect, Russian backing of anti-EU forces in the EU with regard, in particular, to extreme-right parties, populist forces and movements that deny the basic values of liberal democracies.

Understanding and tackling ISIL/Daesh's information warfare: ISIS/Daesh, Al-Qaeda and many other violent jihadi terrorist groups systematically use communication strategies and direct propaganda both offline and online as part of the justification of their actions against the EU.

Members called on the EU and its Member States to **develop a counter-narrative to ISIL/Daesh** involving the education system and including through the empowerment and increased visibility of mainstream Muslim scholars who have the credibility to **delegitimise ISIL/Daesh propaganda** and to develop and disseminate a counter-narrative to jihadist propaganda.

The report underlined the importance of:

- including the counterpropaganda strategy against ISIL/Daesh in a **broader, comprehensive regional strategy** that combines diplomatic, socio-economic, development and conflict-prevention tools;
- focusing more on **improving EU tools** and methods, mostly in the cyber area;
- put in place institutional **multi-dimensional arrangements** (linking university research, prison administrations, the police, the courts, social services and education systems) to combat radicalisation;
- **cutting ISIL/Daesh's access to financing** and funding;
- the EU and Member States cooperating with **social media** service providers to counter ISIL/Daesh propaganda being spread through social media channels.

EU strategy to counteract propaganda: welcoming the joint communication on the 'Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats', Members called for the endorsement and implementation of its recommendations without delay and called on the HR/VP to ensure frequent communication at political level with the Member States in order to better coordinate EU actions.

The report underlined the importance:

- enhancing cooperation among the Member States' **intelligence services** with a view to assessing the influence exerted by third countries seeking to undermine the democratic foundation and values of the EU;
- **reinforcing the Strategic Communication Task Force**, thus reinforced as proposed and under the Twitter username @EUvsDisInfo, to establish an online space where the public at large can find a range of tools for identifying disinformation, with an explanation of how they work, and which can act as a relay for the many civil society initiatives focused on this issue;
- of **communicating EU policies coherently and effectively**, internally as well as externally, and of providing tailored communications to specific regions, including access to information in local languages;
- of **awareness raising, education**, online media and information literacy in the EU and in the Neighbourhood.

The report called on the Commission to **advance certain legal initiatives** in order to be more effective and accountable in dealing with disinformation and propaganda and to use the midterm review of the European Neighbourhood Instrument to promote the strengthening of the resilience of the media as a strategic priority.

Lastly, Members stated that an efficient strategy to counteract anti-EU propaganda could be the adoption of measures to **provide a target audience with adequate and interesting information about EU activities**, European values and other issues of public interest, and underlines that modern technologies and social networks could be used for these purposes.