EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties

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The European Parliament adopted by 304 votes to 179, with 208 abstentions, a resolution on the EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties.

The resolution stressed 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.

Noting that disinformation and propaganda are part of hybrid warfare, Parliament 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.

Members called for **more cooperation and exchange of information** between the EU institutions, the Member States, various NATO and UN bodies, NGOs and civic organisations.

Exposing Russian disinformation and propaganda warfare: with Russia's annexation of Crimea and the Russian-led hybrid war in the Donbass, the Kremlin has escalated the confrontation with the EU.

Parliament recognised that the Russian Government is employing a wide range of tools and instruments, such as think tanks and special foundations (e.g. *Russkiy Mir*), special authorities (*Rossotrudnichestvo*), multilingual TV stations (e.g. RT), pseudo news agencies and multimedia services (e.g. *Sputnik*), social media and internet trolls to challenge democratic values, divide Europe.

Members argued that Russian strategic communication is part of a larger subversive campaign to weaken EU cooperation and the sovereignty. A large part of the Kremlin's propaganda is aimed at describing some European countries as belonging to 'Russia's traditional sphere of influence'.

Members also expressed strong criticism of Russian efforts to disrupt the EU integration process and deplores, 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 and also with the aim of boosting recruitment of young Europeans.

Parliament 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 resolution 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 financingand 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', Parliament 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. It called for strategic communication to be strengthened.

The resolution underlined the importance of:

- **strengthening media plurality and the objectivity**, impartiality and independence of the media within the EU and its neighbourhood, including non-state actors, inter alia through support for journalists and the development of capacity-building programmes for media actors;
- 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.

Parliament 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, Parliament 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.