MASARYK UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Social Studies

Department of IR and European Studies

Bachelor thesis

Brno 2017 Alexandr Sibirský

Department of International Relations and European Studies
Faculty of Social Studies
MASARYK UNIVERSITY
Brno, Joštova 10, 602 00, **Czech Republic**

The pro-Russian disinformation campaign: a case study of the Czech Republic

Policy paper

Bachelor thesis

Alexandr Sibirský

Supervisor: Mgr. et Mgr. Veronika Zapletalová, Ph.D.
UČO: 439 553
Field of study: International Relations and European Studies
Matriculation year: 2014 Brno, 2017

AFFIDAVIT

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is my own work, that it has been written on the basis of the sources listed here, and that these listed sources have been referred to and acknowledged in the text.

Brno, May 2017 Alexandr Sibirský

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would thereby like to thank Dr Zapletalová for her guidance and timely comments as well as Dr Bechná for her early help with my thesis. I most deeply value the support of my parents Olena Sybirska and Vadim Chornyy as well as of my grandparents Alexander Rozenvaser and Nina Sybirska. The support of my friends Jakub Jakoubek, Helena Konečná, Veronika Dobiášová and the whole community of the Dance studio Stolárna helped me overcome some of the most challenging moments. Thank you.

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis, written in a form of a policy paper, presents an analytical framework for understanding the pro-Russian disinformation efforts with a special focus on the Czech Republic. The research is based on a case study approach, is offering an overview of the problem and subsequently analyzes three common solutions. Lastly, it proposes a set of recommendations to face the disinformation campaign effectively.

Key words: Russia, The Czech Republic, Disinformation, Propaganda, Information war, Hybrid war

Contents

1. Introduction 5

2. Methodology 10

2.1. Conceptualization 13

3. Character of the problem 17

4. Relevance of the problem 20

5. Analysis of the solutions 23

5.1. Education 24

5.1.1. Components analysis 27

5.1.2. SWOT analysis 28

5.2. Exposure and rebuttal 29

5.2.1. Components analysis 30

5.2.2. SWOT analysis 31

5.3. Establishing a national specialized centre 32

5.3.1. Components analysis 33

5.3.2. SWOT analysis 34

6. Conclusion and final recommendations 35

7. References 39

7.1.Primary Sources 39

7.2.Secondary Sources 40

Annex 47

1. Introduction

The security situation in Europe has changed dramatically during the last couple of years. We now face problems with securing peace, security, economical prosperity and political stability in the neighboring countries. Entering into era of post-truth politics[1] and ever evolving technology where it no longer matters what is the truth but rather how people feel about the truth, the social media are becoming our prime source of information, and we face a relatively new kind of threat – the disinformation campaign. Such campaign may be led by individuals, organizations, but for this thesis most crucially by foreign states.

Propaganda, disinformation, misinformation and fake news have been there for a very long time[2], however, in times when half of the world has an access to the internet and almost two billion people have an access to Facebook (Internet live stats 2017), it has never been easier to share information, opinions, and knowledge. It has also, however, led to opinions being mistaken for facts and a boom of misinformation and disinformation. A simple reason stands behind this. To publish something on social media one does not need any license or source verifications. Moreover, one might fall into this trust-trap for a simple reason of time deficiency. Work, hobbies and personal relationships take most of our time and are a primary source of our well-being. Unfortunately, they are also very time consuming and take most of our time during the day. It is for this reason that when one decides to get familiar with the events around the world he also chooses the quickest, most convenient and easy way. This might be either social media or a website which is making loud and easy to understand statements that are with an agreement with the opi-

[1] Circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief: 'in this era of post-truth politics, it's easy to cherry-pick data and come to whatever conclusion you desire' (Oxford Dictionary)

[2] Starting with a Trojan horse, which is even today a widely used metaphor. A more frequent example might be a well-known start of the second world war by the false message issued by the Germans about the Gleiwitz incident. All the way to the Soviet periodicals in the 1960s blaming Czechoslovaks for having US weapons and planning a coup against the communist regime. This was a disinformation campaign made by J. Andropov who was trying to manipulate his soviet colleagues reluctant to invade Czechoslovakia.

nions of the target person. Having little interest in checking for more sources or the authenticity of the video or photo material one might easily become a victim of someone's intentional disinformation campaign. The group of young and uneducated people is most vulnerable for they must not even know such campaigns exists. When people have little interest to search for valid information, have little knowledge on how to do so, simply lack time for this kind of activity or are overloaded with the sources of information, they tend to trust simple explanations and direct causalities. Without a quality media literacy education in schools, it is easy to become a victim of disinformation. It is, therefore, fairly effortless and tempting to trust conspiracy theories and consume the information blindly. When you consume information blindly, it forms your opinions. Politicians who can name problems simply and name straightforward and uncomplicated solutions are those who try to gain on this lack of time and knowledge of the civil society.

The Czech Republic, a small country in the heart of Europe, has recently awakened to a pressing issue of media and websites claiming no allegiance to Russia but nevertheless spreading its false news, unfounded arguments, similar narratives, and sources. The Czech Republic is a country of a vital strategical importance for the interests of Russian Federation (Macfarquhar 2016). It has a long history of being under the Russian influence and currently hosts one of the biggest Russian embassies[3] which proportionally does not fit a country of ten million people. BIS, the Czech intelligence service, claims that a large number of Russian intelligence officers are working at the embassy under a diplomatic cover. Furthermore, Prague, a city with a strategic location in the heart of Europe can serve as a base for operations in Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Austria or Hungary (Mackinnon 2017).

Struggling through a divided public opinion on Russian foreign policy[4] and Russia's interests in the Czech Republic, it was faced with a problem of the disinformation campaign. Experts and academics are proposing many solu-

[3] The staff of the Russian embassy in the Czech Republic surpasses even the staff of the Russian embassy in China or the United States (Mackinnon 2017).

[4] Almost every third Czech believes Russian military intervention is helping solve the migration crisis in Europe. 38% believe that Ukrainian crisis was caused by the United States. Considering the overall pro-western orientation of the county this creates a division in the Czech civil society (GLOBSEC Trends 2016).

tions[5], but scarcely they put them under a close scrutiny of evaluation. Not only is the case of the Czech Republic interesting because of its historical and current connection to Russia but crucially because of the reforms to tackle the disinformation campaign it tries to implement. Moreover, the annual report from Secret Intelligence Service of the Czech Republic states that Russia's informational presence is influencing the public opinion, undermining the internal coherence of NATO and EU and damaging the reputation of Ukraine. It further states that the greatest threat from state-supported cyber espionage comes from Russia and China (BIS 2017). Comparing these threats to the interests of the Czech Republic stated in the 2015 Security strategy Russia clearly disrupts interests like political independence, internal coherence of NATO and EU, support of the international stability through cooperation with partner countries and cyber security of the Czech Republic (The government of the Czech Republic 2015).

For the purposes of this policy paper and problem presentation, I decided to focus on the timeline of 2013 – 2017 for it was in 2013 when the problem of pro-Russian disinformation became most apparent with the Juvenile Justice campaign case (Smoleňová 2015). I am going to discuss the issue mostly from the point of media, websites, manipulative techniques used and solutions that can prevent people from trusting the dangerous content supporting pro-Kremlin policies that started to appear online. Not only is spreading this content a deliberate action of spreading false information but crucially it supports Russia's policies and tries to mislead or in some other way manipulate the reader. To provide the best possible contribution I decided to narrow down not only the topic by choosing the pro-Russian content in the Czech Republic but also the type of the thesis by choosing to write it as a policy paper. During my research, I realized a number of policy papers already being produced and therefore decided to narrow down the policy recommendations and analysis to the analysis of already existing solutions.

This thesis seeks to identify and define an existing problem of pro-Russian disinformation online and through the analysis of three possible solu-

[5] See: Lucas & Pomeranzev 2016; Janda 2016; Paul & Matthews 2016; Smoleňová 2015; Milo & Klingová 2017; European Parliament 2016.

tions create a set of thoroughly founded recommendations. In the next chapter, I am going to explain the case of the Czech Republic and its indicative value in more detail and crucially define the disinformation campaign in a way that it is going to be possible to analyze its components. Furthermore, as the concept of disinformation is often vaguely defined and confused with other concepts such as hoaxes, propaganda or misinformation, the next chapter on methodology and conceptualization is going to try to set these concepts straight, point out the differences to be clear on what we are focusing on, and discuss the overall definitions of the concepts used, relevant for this thesis. The chapters on character and relevance of the problem are going to present you with a detailed explanation of the problem, its main issues and why they are important in the context of the future of Europe. The core of this thesis is the part analyzing the three solutions to the disinformation campaign. I am going to present the way the solution is meant to function, break it down to four components of the disinformation campaign definition, use SWOT analysis to identify the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats of the given solution, and lastly I am going to summarize the outcome of the analysis of the solutions and present my own recommendations to the implementation of the given solutions.

It is vital to note that this policy paper does not have the ambition to contribute to the theoretical debate about the issue. The limit is the length and the character of the thesis. Even though I am not able to provide the field with a long and detailed study of all of the problems, solutions, and impacts of the disinformation campaign, my thesis has the ambition to start a debate about the issue itself and to raise awareness about it. Most importantly this thesis seeks to contribute and foster further research on the effectiveness of the many solutions that have already been proposed. The uniqueness of this thesis is not just in the fact there is little research on the issue at our faculty, but mostly because overall policy research and recommendations are not self-critical. Most of the policy papers are presenting solutions without a proper analysis of what might their strengths or weaknesses be or even how exactly should we start implementing them[6].

[6] Ibid.

My research is mostly based on other policy papers, which in some way tackle the problem of the disinformation. To add more credibility I tried to work with articles, policy papers, research papers and other sources in Czech, Slovak, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, English and German languages, nevertheless, not all of them have been used directly for writing this thesis. The recommendations often come from institutions, governments, individuals and NGO's for I sought to create a balance between the proposed solutions. As the timeline and the problem itself can be considered quite recent there is little thorough research on manipulation and disinformation in the media. Therefore, my thesis mostly uses expert studies, articles, policy papers, research papers, primary sources and the contextual knowledge of the author gained during his work for one of the leading teams combating the disinformation in the Czech Republic.

2. Methodology

In this paper tackling the disinformation campaign, I decided to concentrate on the case study of the Czech Republic, which I am going to use as an example of this phenomenon. Different researchers emphasize different components of the case study. Mostly, however, they agree that a case should be a complex unit[7], investigated in its natural context and be contemporary. Again, some (Yin 1994) emphasize the methods and some (Stake 1998) put an emphasis on the interest in individual cases. I would, therefore, like to use Stake's inclusive definition and present a concrete case study while taking account of its context (Johansson 2003).

The type of a case is twofold. Firstly, it is an explanatory case study aiming at convincing scholars and researchers that this is an important topic and a further research is necessary. Secondly, it is a geographically limited instrumental case study[8] for it aims at discussing the issue and its solutions as a whole.

In the topic of disinformation analysis which is closely connected to information war, hybrid war and media I consider it crucial to be clear on the definitions of specific concepts. For this reason, I dedicate a whole sub-chapter to the conceptualization of the terms that are often vaguely defined in debates, political speeches and even in the academic literature. It is crucial to add that although not all of these concepts are directly used in the thesis I decided to incorporate them for a better understanding of the whole field that the disinformation campaign is a part of. Based on the definition down below I chose a set of four particular elements of the disinformation campaign in order to be able to evaluate the three proposed solutions.

Firstly, I identified two main areas that we need to look into. It is the text itself and its goal. Each area has its two sub-groups explaining the prob-

[7] See: Yin 1994; Stake 1995; Gillham 2001.

[8] Instrumental case studies are used in order to get a clear picture of a particular phenomenon. In my case, I decided to limit the case geographically for the Czech Republic and use the case as an instrument for understanding the phenomenon of the disinformation campaign.

lematical aspect of its area[9]. When defining the disinformation campaign I decided to choose this particular definition for it provides this paper with a clear-cut structure which is complex enough to create an analysis of each of its four components. The disinformation text itself is, therefore, providing 1) false information not corresponding to reality; no context; a lack of valid sources; an extreme view of reality as an objective truth[10]; and 2) can be identified as a deliberate action of spreading falsehoods. The second part of the definition which is the goal of the text can be identified as 3) supporting the policies of current Russia's regime – be it directly or indirectly; and 4) confusing, misleading or manipulating the receiver in order to gain some kind of an advantage or a benefit (Nimmo 2016; Janda & Víchová 2016; Fallis 2017).

Secondly, I am presenting you with three widely discussed solutions to this problem, briefly explaining how they work and why they are important. Subsequently, I am going to evaluate each of them based on its four elements of the disinformation campaign definition mentioned above, and rate it by either red, yellow or green colors depending on its potential to solve the element of the definition. I will continue by an analysis in a form of a SWOT analysis, and end by providing my own recommendations to the solutions based on my analysis.

The decision of using just three of the solutions is based on two main factors. The first factor is the length of this paper which does not allow for evaluation of any more of them. Second is based on the decision of the author who believes that sometimes less can be more, and therefore it is better to concentrate on just a few of the solutions and evaluate them properly especially taking into account the fact that this paper has an ambition of jumpstarting the evaluation of the solutions in academia. Furthermore, I chose SWOT analysis as the best method to evaluate advantages and disadvantages of the solutions. The SWOT analysis is often used in the business industry and by the

---

[9] It is important to note that this paper does not have an ambition to thoroughly argue for why is it bad to spread false information and manipulate the public even though it does provide arguments and examples of how detrimental it can be.

[10] As there is little agreement on what the truth and information is (Stahl 2006), the truthfulness of statements and news is checked by the NGO's, state agencies or journalists who are often checking for the validness of the sources, statements, video and photo material by using multiple and credible sources.

social scientists who concentrate on the business studies. It is the most common, easy to implement and widely spread tool to evaluate the future successes or failures of the business (Bertelsen 2012). The reason I saw this tool as the best fit for my research is that launching a new business idea and launching a new solution to solve the disinformation campaign share many methodological similarities. Both have their ideal scenarios, both have limits, advantages, and disadvantages and can, therefore, serve as a tool of evaluation of any idea waiting to be implemented or having already been implemented. The SWOT analysis has its advantages and limitations. It can be a source of information for the strategic planning, minimize weaknesses and maximize response to opportunities. One of the biggest limitations of this analysis is the subjective element in categorizing the aspects of the issue into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (MSG Experts 2017).

Even though there have been numerous papers[11] published, there is very little in-depth research and literature providing an insight into this problematics. All of these papers are often presenting us with solutions, few, however, mention what are the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities of these solutions. For example, there are publications like The Kremlin Playbook (Conley 2016) discussing Russian influence as a whole talking about politics and economy and even providing recommendations to resist the influence. Such books are often good for general understanding, however, they do not go in depth of the particular problem like the disinformation campaign in the media. Another example would be the publications of NATO Centre of Excellence who is publishing often but is concerned mostly with the hybrid war generally discussing propaganda and cyber war. NGO's and expert organizations such as RAND Corporation, Prague Security Studies Institute, European Values or Centre for European Policy Analysis are closer to discussing the disinformation campaign and media more closely with a solid expertise. Some of them, however, often lack the academic value. Studies from RAND Corporation, even though discussing the disinformation campaign with a high academic value, are concerned mostly with the issue as a whole, and are not critical to the contributions they make.

[11] See in the introduction chapter or analysis of the solutions.

My paper should, therefore, contribute by evaluating the existing solutions to the pro-Russian disinformation campaign in the media. Its clear focus should narrow down the problematics and, therefore, allow me to evaluate specific solutions to specific parts of the problem. Such approach has an ambition to start narrowing down the current and further research into the information warfare, and therefore contribute to the creation of more specific and carefully founded solutions to the disinformation campaigns.

2.1. Conceptualization

There are many definitions of the important concepts I discuss in this paper, and I, therefore, consider it to be crucial that we have those concepts clearly defined. I chose concepts that cause the most confusion and debate and are most relevant to this paper. Even though not all of these concepts are used directly in the thesis I decided to incorporate them to achieve a better understanding and make distinctions between the highly interlinked terms and concepts. As one of the goals of this thesis is to define and characterize the problem I strongly believe that it is necessary to include even some of the concepts that are not a direct part of this thesis, but which are connected to the disinformation campaign, and which are vital to understand when defining and setting the disinformation campaign into a larger perspective. I will try to achieve this by explaining how are the concepts interlinked and how do they function in relation to each other.

The problematics of disinformation and information warfare is a part of bigger phenomena called ***hybrid war*** or a ***hybrid threat***. Such a threat incorporates a full range of different kinds of warfare, be it conventional, irregular tactics and formations, terrorism, violence, coercion and disorder. In entails also a disappearing border between combatants and non-combatants, using more than just a regular army and most importantly for this paper, it entails a concept of unlimited war, which means using more than just military level, but also informational, economic, political and cultural levels (Johnson 2015). In the case of Russia, it is especially relevant to talk about the Russia's New Generation Warfare which is a Russian view of modern warfare. Russia believes

that the main battlefield today is in the mind, and therefore to achieve superiority concentrates on morally and psychologically depressing enemy's armed forces and civil population (Berzins 2014). This definition of is particularly relevant to our focus on the disinformation campaign since it involves using the means information warfare and crucially the New Generation Warfare.

A term which falls under the category of hybrid war and is a part of it is ***information warfare*** by which I mean the offensive and defensive use of information and information systems to exploit, corrupt, or destroy an adversary's information and information systems while protecting one's own. Such actions are designed to achieve advantages over military or business adversaries (Ehlers 1999). The information war that we face from the Russian federation primarily means destabilizing the inner structure of the opponent as well as establishing and strengthening the position of Kremlin (Johnson 2015a; Johnson 2015b).

One of the most important concepts to define is the disinformation itself which is only one of the parts of the information warfare and is at the center of research of this thesis. Aside from the four layer definition above it is important to know what it is and how it differs from misinformation, propaganda, conspiracy theory or a hoax to be able to differentiate between different kinds of threats which are a part of the information warfare. ***Misinformation*** is a kind of information that is false and the person distributing it believes it is true. Such a case can be caused accidentally or by ignorance of the person spreading the information. While ***disinformation*** is also false, the person disseminating it knows it is untrue and is deliberately spreading a lie or a misleading information. It can be spread through oral or a written form, but also through edited photo or video material. Main characteristics include the fact, that the disinformation does not correspond to reality, is omitting and important part of the context, is lacking valid trustworthy sources, is presenting an extreme view of reality as an objective truth and vitally its goal is to deliberately confuse the receiver (Janda & Víchová 2016). Ben Nimmo (2016) identifies an ABC[12] approach to identify the disinformation. In his article, he also states that the most important elements of disinformation are the falsehood of

[12] This approach consists of three elements. Accuracy, balance, and credibility.

the information and the intention to mislead. Parts of this definition are vital to understand for they were incorporated in the four layer definition above. The ***disinformation campaign*** needs a definition itself. This means a series of activities using disinformation and misusing information channels with a deliberate aim to confuse the society and shift the public opinion towards the goal of the originator (Smoleňová 2015). Furthermore, I decided to use the term ***pro-Russian***, yet not Russian-led disinformation campaign not to imply a direct involvement of the current Russian regime in all disinformation activities in the Czech Republic. ***Propaganda***, on the other hand, means information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view (NATO 2013). The pro-Kremlin disinformation campaign uses all three existing types of propaganda. White, where we do know the source and the author. This type of propaganda mostly tries to create a good versus bad differentiation. Black propaganda, where we do not know the author – an example in the Czech Republic could be Aeronet, where the owner works anonymously using VK as a nickname (Respekt 2017). And lastly, gray propaganda, which lies somewhere in the middle. Since propaganda can be defined broadly or narrowly and in the most extreme cases can even mean any kind of opinion expression, it is better to use precise terms such as the disinformation campaign. ***Conspiracy theory*** is also one of the favorite techniques of pro-Kremlin website influence. It is a hypothesis explaining some phenomenon such as landing on the Moon. It believes that a group of people operating in secrecy is trying to conceal the truth for financial or other reasons benefiting only them. ***Hoax***, additionally, is very similar to disinformation but its goal is mainly to entertain and make the information viral. For the reason of precision it is, therefore, better to use the term the disinformation campaign.

Hybrid Trolling in relevance to the topic of the policy paper is an activity of the Russian federation to employ individuals who are to engage in the internet discussions with a pre-set goal and a line of argumentation, which can consist of supporting the current government and Russian foreign policy or a critique of NATO, EU and the West in general. Last but not least, I would like to define the ***pro-Kremlin website*** which is a website systematically spreading disinformation supporting the policies of the Russian federation. It does not

only entail websites with a direct financial support from Russia. In entails also support which is indirect or just political or rhetorical. In the Czech Republic, they are mostly Sputnik, Parlamentní listy, Svět kolem nás, AC 24, Aeronet (Víchová et al. 2016; Gregor & Vejvodová 2016).

3. Character of the problem

In this chapter, I present the context of the problem. Afterward, I am going to concentrate on the whole network of disinformation channels in the Czech Republic. Lastly, I talk about techniques used by the disinformation websites.

Russia uses overt and covert means of warfare starting from energy blockades and politically motivated investments to disinformation in the media in order to advance its interests and challenge the transatlantic orientation of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE leaders 2009). Today, the failed warnings have come to pass. According to the findings of the report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies the Russian economic activity has increased; the region is more sympathetic to Russian policy approaches and democratic institutions have been weakened. Russia has cultivated an opaque network of patronage across the region and utilizes it to influence the decision making in the states (Conley et al. 2016). The networks are a crucial part of Russia's doctrine of New Generation Warfare and its primary goal is to break the internal coherence of the enemy. The strategy seeks to alter the perception of Central and Eastern Europe's Euro-Atlantic orientation, which has the benefit of breaking the Western dominance of the international order and restoring Russia's historic sphere of influence (Conley et al. 2016).

As a tool to shift opinions, it proved to be very convenient to use social media and alternative websites to generally spread disinformation and produce confusion. While some of the websites are directly connected to Kremlin and are a tool of its foreign policy – Sputnik CZ or RT – some are in it for the demand of the readers who seek alternative, or if you will, pro-Russian point of view. These websites are AC24, which besides UFO conspiracies publishes also pro-Russian articles demonizing western politics. Parlamentní listy, a website owned by a businessman Michal Voráček and a senator Ivo Valenta who claim to be independent but very often manipulate the public through long headlines and other manipulation techniques (Respekt 2017). Perhaps most known in the Czech disinformation environment is Aeronet whose owner works anonymously under the nickname ''VK''. The websites are often inter-

linked by the content[13] as well as by the personnel. An example would be Ondřej Geršl, the owner of the AC24 and Svět kolem nás, as well as mutual sharing of articles by the disinformation websites. Czech websites often copy the disinformation from foreign sources such as Global Research, Southfront or What Does It Mean. Last but not least, it is important to mention the figure of the Czech president, Miloš Zeman, who is often by the above-mentioned websites portrayed as Putin's friend. In March 2016 he, for example, claimed that Ukrainian government adopted a language law that will make it impossible for one-third of the society to communicate in their mother tongue – no such law was even proposed (Anon 2016). According to the NetMonitor yearly data analysis of visits the web Parlamentní listy has around half a million readers, and AC24 more than one hundred thousand which forms a strong base for the disinformation in the Czech Republic (Netmonitor 2016).

Another similarity among the websites is the use of the same manipulation techniques. According to an analysis of manipulation techniques on selected Czech websites, Parlamentní listy, AC24, Svět kolem nás and Sputnik CZ, manipulation techniques such as fake pictures and videos are not very common. Much more common are techniques such as blaming, fabrications, labeling, appeal to fear, relativization, demonization and using negative emotions in every third article about migration crisis (Gregor & Vejvodová 2016). Such techniques are useful especially when we take into account that the human brain is not made to objectively weigh various pieces of information. On the contrary, our brain is trying to selectively choose information that confirms our already existing bias. Confirmation bias flourishes on social networks, for this, is the place where it is fairly easy to stay in the bubble of like-minded people. According to Stanford and Princeton studies, it is, therefore, not an issue of rationality but rather our default mental software configuration and its proneness to strong emotions (Třešňák 2017).

According to the EU Observer study of 2,951 examples of Russian fake news collected by the EU East StratCom team, it is designed to legitimize Russian foreign policy. For example the illegal annexation of Crimea, the mili-

[13] For the comparison of topics monitored in the Zem & Vek, Aeronet, Vědomí and Czech Sputnik News see the attachment.

tary intervention in Syria and the rule of Vladimir Putin generally. The so-called ''migrant sex stories'' are used to support the narrative portraying Kremlin and pro-Kremlin far-right parties in Europe as the guardians of the orthodox values. They were mostly designed to undermine trust in the national politicians and EU institutions who are defending the rights of minorities. In the beginning of the 2016 Russian TV even reported that the European Parliament is promoting homosexuality in France in order to erase the difference between genders or that the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg is going to ban baptism and people in the EU are getting fines for wearing Christian crosses (Rettman 2017).

4. Relevance of the problem

The disinformation campaign is, of course, a larger part of the scheme of Kremlin's influence which I try to illustrate in this chapter. We can see a rising ability of one state to directly or indirectly influence the political affairs or the opinions of the public, and therefore to undermine the democratic system, principles, and values of the state. When one state is trying to undermine the trust into the basic democratic principles, it is a breach into internal affairs of another state. In this chapter, I am going to concentrate on the impact of the disinformation as well as try to provide with some examples and comparisons with other states who deal with the same issues.

Firstly, it is important to explain the relevance of the problem for Europe and for the European Union. Let us start with the Baltic region where the information war is most prominent. Lithuanian Minister of Defense has said that Russia is a threat to the internal integrity of the state. He explains that Klaipeda[14] never belonged to Lithuania and was a gift from Stalin which provides us with a parallel for Crimean annexation. He further explains that the disinformation often comes from the politicians from Duma or from Sputnik which is controlled by the government (Kris 2017).

While some disinformation is simply perpetuated by sympathetic conspiracy theorists, in some cases there are direct links to Russia. For instance, in Slovakia, the editors of the extreme far-right magazine Zem & Vek discussed the establishment of a new media project. Slovak media outlet TASR once announced a content sharing deal with Sputnik which is a tool of Kremlin's foreign policy (Tamkin 2017). In some cases, it is, however, a clear effort to undermine the internal affairs of another state. Such example is the use of hybrid trolling in the internet discussions in Latvia[15]. One of the known places, where such activities take place, is the Internet Research Agency in Saint Petersburg[16]. NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence issued a study differentiating

[14] Third largest city of Lithuania.

[15] For more information on the case of Latvia read the study of the NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence. See: NATO 2016.

[16] Some of the techniques and practices from the centre were described in the interview of the former employee. See: Volchek & Sindelar 2015.

between a classical troll, who is trolling because he truly believes what he is saying, and a hybrid troll who is paid for this activity (NATO 2016).

Using disinformation to achieve one's own goals has become a norm among many in Europe. Some of the most prominent cases include the so-called Lisa case. This is a story of a 13-year-old girl with Russian origins in Germany who was supposed to be raped by migrants. When the girl came back home after being away for a few days, she claimed she had been raped by men of Arab descent. A claim, that she later admitted being made up. Russian news agencies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and even the Minister of Foreign Affairs have, however, endorsed the news and spread it in the information environment as the truth. It also circulated on the Czech and Slovak pro-Russian websites. The main Russian TV channel even aired a fake interview with Lisa's relatives which it later took down. This story was designed to blame Angela Merkel and Germany in its entirety for advocating a welcoming attitude towards refugees and sanctions against Russia. This story practically showed how pro-Russian disinformation campaign works – the work of trolls, bots, RT, Sputnik and the peer-to-peer translations from other pro-Kremlin websites. These same practices are also used in France and other European countries. In May 2016 Vesti nedeli reported about a French woman claiming migrants verbally abused her and that she was scared to go out in her neighborhood, nevertheless, her claims were made up. In November during the same year, a Czech pro-Kremlin blogger spread a fake story that the French government secretly agreed with Islamists to create zones governed by sharia law (Rettman 2017).

With a clear goal to get attention pro-Russian disinformation campaign replicates stories that induce an emotional reaction, therefore the topics often include rape or other sexual stories. These fables are replicated through Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden and are often known as ''migrant sex stories''(Rettman 2017). Another example from Sweden would be a fake allegation of Swedish Foreign Minister of advocating mass-scale castration of white men. Moreover, there is the case of spreading the fake news during the 2017 election in Netherlands. According to the Dutch intelli-

gence service, AIVD Russia tried to influence the election by pushing voters in the direction convenient for Kremlin (AIVD 2017).

Even though there is no detailed polling on the impact of these stories on French or German public opinion, a survey by American pollster Pew in 2016 indicated that every third person in France, Germany, Spain, and Italy believed there were no Russian troops fighting in eastern Ukraine despite the actual evidence that the troops were in fact there (Rettman 2017).

Taking into account the fact that it is difficult to measure it is still clear that these cases, in fact, have an impact on the public opinion, and therefore faith in democracy as such. According to GLOBSEC Trends analysis made by STEM agency, a quarter of Czech people trust disinformation and alternative or pro-Kremlin media more than traditional. Almost one-third of Czechs believe that Russian military intervention in Syria helps solve the migration crisis in Europe. One-third of Czechs say that Ukrainian crisis is caused by US and NATO and almost the same amount says that fascist forces have a vital influence on the Ukrainian government. Almost twenty percent believe that Russian forces do not operate in Ukraine. Two-thirds of Czechs do not consider EU membership a good thing (GLOBSEC Trends 2016). While it is impossible to say, how much of these worrying numbers are a responsibility of pro-Russia disinformation in the Czech Republic, they are an indicator of how vulnerable this country is. Furthermore, combined with the disinformation network in the Czech Republic, it constitutes a serious threat to the internal affairs of the country.

The Kremlin often utilizes a network of officials, journalists, commentators, presidents and other sympathizing personalities to influence the citizens who are unaware of the often direct connections to the Kremlin. This is the case of the Czech Republic where the pro-Russian disinformation often comes from many sources, such as public personalities. The discussion in Slovakia and the Czech Republic truly started by publishing of a list of 42 websites helping spread the pro-Russian propaganda in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Smoleňová 2015).

5. Analysis of the solutions

During past years many policy papers have tackled this issue and many recommendations had been put forward. In my thesis, I decided to tackle the ones I deem to be one of the most frequent and most relevant to the case study I chose. Based on the heuristic analysis I chose the ones most often proposed by NGO's (GLOBSEC Policy Institute, RAND Corporation, Prague Security Studies Institute, European Values, Center for European Policy Analysis), individuals, governments and by EU institutions[17].

When we speak about solving the issue of people trusting non-valid sources and being manipulated, education is an often quoted solution. If everyone had at least the basics of media literacy[18] and time to check, none of this would be an issue. The Czech Republic has been discussing and reforming the primary and secondary school education for years now. New strategies, curriculums, salaries and the final exam reforms have been discussed, however, media literacy has only now gained an attention as a part of the reform and it is for this reason that I decided to evaluate this solution.

Secondly, it is the exposure and constant rebuttal of the arguments and fake news. There are teams like EU East StratCom team on the EU level, CTHH[19] on the Czech governmental level or StopFake and European Values on non-governmental level which on a weekly basis try to fight the campaign by checking and reviewing the news on the monitored websites. Such efforts to fight disinformation, however, are often very controversial not only among the public but among the experts as well. The lack of methodology or the effect of the efforts is often unclear. Furthermore, it is the Czech Republic who is currently considered one of the leading countries in combating disinformation campaign in Europe. Thirdly, it is the solution to let the government deal with this threat through specialized centers that would be in charge of defen-

---

[17] See: Lucas & Pomeranzev 2016; Janda 2016; Paul & Matthews 2016; Smoleňová 2015; Milo & Klingová 2017; European Parliament 2016.

[18] See the subchapter on education.

[19] Centre against terrorism and hybrid threats. In Czech: Centrum proti terorismu a hybridním hrozbám.

ding the state and its citizens against the foreign influence. This last solution is very much linked to the second one for it is that just recently in the beginning of 2017 that the specialized centre, CTHH, has been, after much debate and controversies, launched in the Czech Republic.

The analysis of the three solutions is going to have the following method. Firstly, I am going to present the solution and how it is supposed to generally solve this issue.

Secondly, I will evaluate the solution based on the four layer definition which I presented at the beginning consisting of the falsehood of the information, deliberate action of spreading the false information, false information supporting Russia's policy and confusing or manipulative element of the text. Every component of the disinformation campaign definition is analyzed within the specific solution and then rated by the color, whether it has a potential to solve the particular component directly (*green*), does not have the potential to solve the component (*red*) or does have the potential but only indirectly (*yellow*).

After these careful evaluations, I am going to present a chart in a form of SWOT analysis of each of the solutions. The strengths of the solution are its strongest sides when countering the disinformation. The weaknesses are where the solution lacks in solving the issue, for example, either by being not complex enough or by the context in which it is to be implemented. The opportunities are the parts where the solution has a potential to create strengths. The threats are possible future weaknesses of the solution which similarly to opportunities may or may not occur.

5.1. Education

Firstly, education in this sense is meant as synonymous to media literacy. It is crucial to differentiate the different groups that need education. On one hand, we have journalists, editors and politicians on whose work largely depends the information environment we live in, and whose ignorance towards the issue can be detrimental to the large portion of the society. As we can see journalists continue to fall for the Kremlin's disinformation tricks. An NGO could provi-

de workshops and training to teach journalists to identify how the Kremlin uses the manipulation techniques (Lucas & Pomeranzev 2016). It is, nevertheless, not the journalists who are most vulnerable. The most vulnerable group is the group of youngsters who are uneducated and who tend to receive the information blindly. This is the part on which I would like to concentrate for it is this particular group that is most prone to manipulation if untaught about the proper way to deal with the internet and information environment.

The research, made by People in Need, of Czech primary and secondary school media literacy education suggests that only 54% of high school students have ten hours of media literacy education. Around 6% have none (Median 2017). This amount of media literacy education is not merely enough to build resilience towards disinformation and to build an informed society able to differentiate valid and invalid sources of information. Furthermore, according to Michal Kaderka, a teacher of media literacy and EDUin fellow, the whole concept of education is more than ten years old and is not teaching children to distinguish fake news, hoaxes and neither it is teaching them how to think critically about the content they are receiving. Even though the official 2020 strategy of the Ministry of Education is taking into account the large amounts of information students get from social media and the internet, and it is saying how important critical thinking is, it does not provide enough measures to implement into the school curriculum to teach students to recognize the false information on the internet. Teachers often have very little time to teach about this issue (ten hours) or they even lack a clear methodology and expertise on how to do it in the first place (MŠMT 2013).

The concept of media literacy education is, therefore, not about teaching who is the hero and who is the foe, but rather teaching that information is a part of a particular mechanism, and it is a commodity which inevitably someone is trying to sell, and that different techniques may be implemented. According to Aneta Martínková, it is, therefore, important to teach to think about the origins of the information. Some experts, e.g. Kamila Zlatušková, suggest creating a timeless book teaching about the issues and helping youngsters navigate and think critically in the world of mass media. Others, like Bob Kartous, working in EDUin, suggest that when preparing teachers to teach

media literacy it is vital to convey the whole concept not in a way that media literacy is not just a new subject to teach, but rather that it should be a complex interdisciplinary education aiming to create resiliency towards manipulation (Kuliš 2017).

Such interdisciplinary approach may be created through modern teaching methods, or an implementation of competitive debating[20] in the school curriculum. Debating allows children to assume a role which they do not have to necessarily agree with, and it, therefore, builds not only argumentation, rhetorical and communicational skills, but also critical thinking and critical research skills.

The most vital part in discussing the disinformation campaign is discussing the goal of it which is to manipulate and change an opinion or to induce emotions. The power of education as a solution is strong because it mainly solves the last component of the definition we have set at the very beginning, and that is the manipulative component.

[20] By competitive debating I mean WSDC or British Parliamentary format. The main principle is to assume a role of either affirmative or negative side and debate a controversial thesis.

5.1.1. Components analysis[21]

Falsehood of the information	Dissemination as a deliberate action
• An educated citizen is able to determine, whether the text presents an extreme view of the reality, tries to appeal to emotions of the reader, is misusing facts or does not have valid sources. Such a person would, therefore, not be prone to further sharing of the article, and therefore would not be creating further demand for it. On the other hand, he would be prone to reporting the page which could then go on the lists of the unverified and manipulative content in the existing fact-checking applications such as CrossCheck. Without an existing demand from the readers, the originators of the disinformation will not have stimuli to producing the false information since it would not have a desirable effect.	• An educated citizen is able to think about the motivation behind each text he reads. He is able to tell whether perhaps presenting this view of reality is favorable to one particular party. As in the previous component, he is able to recognize manipulative techniques and validity of the information. He is then able to confront the author or the disseminator of the manipulative text and ask question such as why did he share or write the text, thus revealing the motives for the action.
Support of Russia's policy	**Confusion & Manipulation**
• When realized that a text is using manipulative techniques and is favorable to one particular party and a world view a reader can see through the manipulation and the fact that it supports only one particular state policy.	• The strongest part of this solution is that it solves the most burdensome part of the whole disinformation campaign. Media literacy education builds resistance towards manipulation techniques. A citizen is able to verify sources and stop reading at any particular moment when he notices something is wrong with the text. He is not going to be sharing it and creating the confusion in the society for education builds awareness of the impacts of such actions.

[21] For more information on the role of CrossCheck in fighting the false information in France see: Rinehart 2017.

5.1.2. SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
• **An educated society is difficult to manipulate:** It is fairly easy to construct a shocking article about the current issue in a way to produce an emotional response using different manipulative techniques described above. However, a reader that is media literate is, therefore, less likely to fall into this trap because he knows about the techniques and knows what to look for when searching for valid information.	• **Ten hours of media literacy education is not enough:** It is difficult to teach someone to understand subliminal messages, marketing strategies, Facebook algorithms, hoaxes, fake news and critical thinking in such short period of time. It might be a better idea to incorporate this as a concept and teaching it throughout more subjects like history, civics, psychology or even biology. • **Starting with media literacy during high school is too late:** It is too late to start teaching about this issue during high school, and it should be incorporated from first classes of primary school when children already use computers and the internet. • **There are not enough good media literacy teachers:** Even with more hours dedicated to the teaching it is important to have a quality teacher that can teach children interactively while also understanding what he talks about, and not just blindly read of a prepared document.
Opportunities	**Threats**
• **Good and interactive teaching can kickstart and interest to learn more:** A good teacher has an ability to jumpstart a motivation in the young children's minds. It is a general wisdom recognized even by the official strategy of the Ministry of Education that most of the learning happens outside of the school, and this is also the place where children can learn to think critically, evaluate, read carefully and build true resiliency to such efforts.	• **Bad and boring teaching could cause a lifelong repulsion to learning about the issue:** The psychological effect of the first impression is well known. Furthermore, it happened to many of us that we disliked a particular subject only to realize that we disliked it because of the particular bad teacher we had when we were young. Lack of good teachers brings up a threat of creating an aversion towards media literacy education. Without a good reform and good teachers it, therefore, might do more harm than good in combating the disinformation campaign.

5.2. Exposure and rebuttal

This particular solution proposes daily rebuttal of the false articles by think-tanks, watchdog, and analytical NGO institutions. By daily or weekly monitoring the proposers seek to expose the narratives, create a map of the systematic pro-Kremlin disinformation publishers and ultimately to refute the false arguments (Janda 2016). Such measures are already being taken by some of the institutions like European Values in the Czech Republic, Stop Fake in Ukraine or EU East StratCom Team on the EU level. For example, the Kremlin Watch of European Values publishes weekly monitoring of pro-Russian disinformation websites like Parlamentní listy, Svět kolem nás, etc.

Firstly, the team gathers a few pages of articles which possibly contain disinformation. Articles are sorted by topics and contain different websites. The team is divided into the topics and each team member has to check a number of articles within one topic. One has to read the article and check for all the statements made in the article, write a summary, date of the article, author, languages the article has been translated into, websites and links the disinformation has appeared at, and rebuttal of the specific statement using valid sources or pointing out argumentation fallacies. One has to code the article by the topic, manipulative technique – e.g. EU, USA, emotional argumentation, lacking valid sources, using manipulative video or containing a disinformation. The process of checking twenty articles normally takes 4-5 hours of work. Around 30-40 articles are being checked on the weekly basis which obviously cannot over all the disinformation that appears on the internet. (Author 2017).

5.2.1. Components analysis

Falsehood of the information	Dissemination as a deliberate action
• After exposing false articles and news or providing a review of the information provided and rebutting it using argumentation and logic one cannot fully presume to eliminate the false information by itself. An educated citizen can decide not to read and further spread the information, however, rebuttal will never get to all of the citizens, and therefore will not eliminate this component completely or on time to win the psychological advantage of the effect of first exposure.	• The most positive part of this solution is the part where a daily/weekly monitoring of the disinformation campaign can contribute to exposing the authors and disseminators. It is, therefore, further possible to confront them publicly while providing tangible proof of their involvement in such actions.
Support of Russia's policy	**Confusion & Manipulation**
• When an article, author, and disseminators are exposed, it does have benefits of publicly confronting them or providing a founded view of the reality. What is unfortunately not possible is to eliminate the effect the disinformation has had before the exposure and that is supporting the preexisting beliefs of the readers and the pro-Russian element in it.	• Even though a successfully done and government supported rebuttal can contribute to making things straight, if not done properly people tend to stick to their preexisting beliefs and might refuse even well-founded argumentation from a government entity (Heshmat 2015). Furthermore, such rebuttal is very likely going to contribute to more confusion in the society since it creates an alternative view of a specific issue or event and an inexperienced reader might get lost in the information and after some time is not likely to remember what was the disinformation and what was the rebuttal (Paul & Matthews 2016).

5.2.2. SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
• **Forewarning**: Daily monitoring can be helpful in providing a forewarning to the audience and thus helping beat the psychological advantage of first impression propagandists gain (Paul & Matthews 2016). • **Public confrontation of the authors, contributors, and disseminators:** Perhaps the strongest part of this solution is that it allows to build a database of all the contributors, and either publicly confront them afterward or expose them to the public for their deeds. Such action allows also to differentiate between the disseminators of misinformation and disinformation, and thus monitor the motivation of such actions.	• **The high number of channels:** As established in the beginning such monitoring is a very time consuming work and taking into account hundreds of channels and hundreds of articles published it is almost impossible to successfully catch and expose all the disinformation spread. It might there be more effective to battle the narrative rather the arguments. • **Recalling effect:** Even after a successful rebuttal people who have read both the disinformation and the false article will have trouble telling one from the other after a significant period of time has passed (Paul & Matthews 2016).
Opportunities	**Threats**
• **Building the truth narrative**: This solution provides one with an opportunity to start working on the truth narrative. Such an opportunity has a large breach to the first solution and is linked to educating the society about the need to be media literate. To build the narrative correctly, it helps to issue warnings at the time of initial exposure, it helps to refute repeatedly and by corrections provide an alternative story to fill in the gap in understanding the reality after the extraction of the false facts (Paul & Matthews 2016). • **Countering objectives not refuting arguments:** Rather than refuting the arguments concentrating on countering the objective. If the aim of the pro-Russian propaganda would be to undermine willingness to respond to Russian aggression, the correct way to react to be to reaffirm our obligations and strengthen partnerships and promote solidarity.	• **Psychological advantage:** The originators of the disinformation have a psychological advantage by offering the first impression which is difficult to overcome. When people are then faced with facts the act of persuasion triggers the effect of immediate resistance which reinforces their preexisting beliefs. A better way would, therefore, be to show the ways pro-Russian disinformation campaign works rather than refuting the arguments and articles (Paul & Matthews 2016).

5.3. Establishing a national specialized centre

This solution is primarily addressing the issue from the domestic point of view as it sees the disinformation campaign primarily as a threat to national democratic regime. It, therefore, suggests creating a team most likely within the Ministry of Interior consisting of media, foreign policy, security and communication experts. Furthermore, experts (Janda 2016) suggest creating a mix of different expertise and professional from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Defense, Interior, the Army as well as all the intelligence services. Such a team would react in real-time to the disinformation cases with potential impact on national security. They would follow the regular media coverage and search for the potential disinformation. Furthermore, they would publish regularly on the disinformation campaign trends as well as conduct research on this topic. Lastly, they would serve as a national contact point providing and sharing the information for at the moment the issue is being researched only by scholars and NGO's.

The reason why the issue of disinformation had been tackled by NGO's and journalists only is clear. The government only now started to recognize this as a legitimate concern, and therefore launched the centre. In 2016 there was no strategy to tackle the disinformation campaign in the Czech Republic. Through launching the new Centre the government is building on the 2015 Security strategy commitment to tackling asymmetric and hybrid threats. The idea is not new, however, mostly nations decide to cooperate when combating such threats. Such was the case of launching the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats whose signatories are Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia 2017).

In the Czech Republic such centre has been opened in January 2017 and is called Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats[22]. The centre primarily works with open source data and exists as a part of the Ministry of Inte-

[22] In Czech: Centrum proti terorismu a hybridním hrozbám. Short version: CTHH.

rior. It has been launched under the existing department using no more financial resources for the department than before. Its goal is to tackle new asymmetric, or hybrid, threats including terrorists, radicalization and foreign disinformation campaigns. Based on its monitoring work, the Centre is going to evaluate detected disinformation and come up with proposals for changes in legislation (Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic 2017).

5.3.1. Components analysis

Falsehood of the information	**Dissemination as a deliberate action**
• The existence of the Centre is likely to contribute in exposing the information, however, the issue is similar to the exposure and rebuttal. Since it does not eliminate the information completely many citizens can still be exposed to it.	• For the Centre specializing in combating disinformation and other hybrid threats, it is fairly easy to look for the disseminators and either confront them directly or cooperate with competent authorities.
Support of Russia's policy	**Confusion & Manipulation**
• An existing pro-Russian disinformation still has a potential to support Russia's policy. Again a confirmation bias is at play and this time we speak about the conspiracy prone citizens who might get suspicious and assume government conspiracy or censorship which will only further raise support of the pro-Russian mood.	• Although the Centre again provides and alternative view on reality, and therefore has a potential to bring even more confusion to the debate it also has a government authority and thus is potentially an organ people trust when it comes to information security.

5.3.2. SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
• **Overarching entity:** Currently states lack an entity that would work as an umbrella to fight the disinformation campaign. Often it falls under the responsibilities of different bureaus which obviously care about the issues they are responsible for, and thus creating either a clash between the bureaus or an empty area.	• **A high number of channels:** Practically such a team would consist of no more than twenty people. Even if when employed on full time it is very difficult to comply fully will all the objectives set. Particularly monitoring all the information channels is very time-consuming since when monitoring one has to read/listen to the information, check for the sources and possible disinformation and then publish a refutation or a recommendation for further actions. Such action is much more time-consuming than the production of the disinformation itself, and combined with monitoring of the channels and fulfilling further objectives of the team seems rather unrealistic.
Opportunities	**Threats**
• **Multi-discipline team:** Mix of experts has a potential to create a mix of different perspectives and knowledge bases. It also has a potential for conflict, however, as the team would consist of experts from all the involved institutions, it could serve as a tool for the perceived ownership towards the body and thus creating a value in cooperation and maintaining of the body.	• **Mistrust:** Establishing the new Centre to fight disinformation is in eyes of many a controversial step. In the Czech Republic, the creation of the Centre was accompanied by censorship accusations and much unproductive debate.

6. Conclusion and final recommendations

In this final chapter, I am going to summarize my findings and present you with my final recommendations towards the implementation of the solutions to face the pro-Russian disinformation campaign.

Most of the experts agree[23] that the first step to countering the pro-Russian disinformation campaign is to recognize that it is there, and it requires our attention as a nontrivial threat. As we have entered the era of technology, populism and generally became addicted to instant gratification our confirmation bias and the crave for instantly plausible information became a target for the efforts of others who benefit from manipulating and creating confusion. In the very beginning, I explained the differences between different kinds of manipulation and argued for the relevance of the case of the Czech Republic. The chapters about character of the problem and relevance of the problem explained in detail how pro-Kremlin disinformation uses the tools of social media and manipulation to exercise the influence in European countries. Cases of Latvia, Netherlands, Germany, France, Slovakia and Sweden prove that the Czech Republic is not an isolated case.

In the chapter on the need for media literacy education it was discussed, how the current system is not reflecting the current needs, and that the concept is more than ten years old, and how it is crucial that we come up with a reform to teach students to think critically about the content they consume. When we look at the components of the disinformation and how this particular solution helps to overcome them, it is not a surprise that out of the three discussed solutions education is the strongest one. An educated citizen is able to navigate through the information environment not getting manipulated and confused and vitally is able to determinate manipulative techniques or validness of the sources he reads. A society consisting of educated citizens is difficult to manipulate and therefore even unlikely to become a target of the disinformation campaign. Reading through the weaknesses and threats in the

[23] See: Lucas & Pomeranzev 2016; Janda 2016; Paul & Matthews 2016; Smoleňová 2015; Milo & Klingová 2017.

SWOT analysis one can conclude that a reform is necessary. Such reform needs to reflect that the learning needs of the students in order to be good and interactive to jumpstart an interest in the minds of the students. It is crucial that media literacy is taught since the early primary school throughout most of the subjects in a form of interdisciplinary education for which even the minister of education of Slovakia is calling (Folentová 2017).

My final recommendation towards using education as a solution would, therefore, be to implement structural reforms reflecting all the above-mentioned issues through teaching media literacy throughout all the subjects while connecting the dots and providing context. A good example of such practice would be an education reform in Finland where the government decided to implement the so-called phenomenon based learning and empowering schools to develop new learning methods[24]. A good tool to connect all the subjects is including competitive debating into the school curriculum which is already a common practice at some private schools in the Czech Republic such as the Open Gate or PORG high schools. Nevertheless, when implementing this solution one has to keep in mind the time scale on which one might expect the changes to occur. Even after the successful implementation, we are still talking about years, and most likely ten or even twenty years of time before significant changes can be awaited.

From the discussion on the exposure and rebuttal solution and its components, it is clear that the process has its benefits while also having many flaws. It is crucial to note that this solution is important, however, based on the analysis not in the current state. While the exposure of the disinformation in the article may lead to the creation of the database of the originators of the disinformation and exposure of the disseminators. Nevertheless, the effects of the disinformation still persist. Such solution does not tackle the most vital part of the campaign, and that is that it creates confusion in the society and manipulates the public by shifting and shaping its opinions. Furthermore, plain rebuttal may contribute to creating even more confusion as the reader will not distinguish between the rebuttal and the disinformation when recalling a memory two months later. While this solution may be viable for providing a fo-

[24] For more information on reforms in Finland see: Kwang 2017 and Strauss 2015.

rewarning to battle the effect of first impression the originators of the disinformation gain, it does come with the weaknesses like the recalling effect or time consumption with regard to a high number of channels the disinformation can be spread though.

In this respect, my recommendation is directed towards the proper use of this tool. Exposure and rebuttal have to be used in the set of tools and not as a solution alone. When used alone and in a non-careful way, it can create confusion in the society and, thereby, benefiting the disinformation campaign by just creating an alternative narrative. Building the truth narrative is important and should be done together with the government's education reform and not just by the NGOs and scholars refuting weekly fake news. Such efforts of rebuttal have to be targeted at the objectives of the disinformation campaign and not the arguments alone. When the efforts of the disinformation campaign are aiming at weakening the will to react to Russian aggression through spreading the false arguments and narrative, our efforts need not only to refute the arguments and narrative at the time and repeatedly, but most importantly to counter the objective of such actions, and therefore strengthening our partnerships and reaffirming our commitments.

The very last solution introduced was to establish a national specialized centre. Such centre would be doing all the things NGO's are doing now plus, of course, the work that has been done before by other departments and bureaus. The existence of the Centre can indeed be beneficial in order to have a department, which can issue statements on potentially dangerous disinformation, and therefore tell the citizens from a position of the government authority that this is indeed a false information. This can be a better alternative to NGO's issuing the same statements, and therefore might help overcome confusion. Nevertheless, the creation of the centre in the Czech Republic was followed by much critique and censorship accusation even from the president (ČTK 2017). Such centre is inevitably going to struggle with the same issues as described in the previous solution, and that is the effect of primary contact, recalling effect, a high number of channels and citizens exposure to the disinformation. The benefits of such a centre are that it creates a mix of experts and a mix of perspectives, which can lead to new innovational solutions. Perhaps

the biggest strength is that it creates and overarching entity to works as an umbrella to fight the disinformation campaign and takes on clear responsibilities for the hybrid threats.

My recommendation towards creating such a centre would, therefore, be to use already existing resources and alternatives and combat the fake news using them in order to avoid the unproductive public debate about censorship and further mistrust in society towards a new body (Bahenský 2017). Furthermore, the government should explain better, and in time, the benefits of such centre and provide citizens with a clear job description. Moreover, I believe that it would be more productive to support already existing entities, bodies and experts rather than creating something totally new. Support of the NGO's, scholars and existing bureaus at various institutions combatting the hybrid threats seems like a fairly obvious step to follow.

Finally, my aim was to suggest further research implications and kick-start other research into the problematics. I hope that this thesis might be an inspiration for other researchers offering a number of research puzzles and that it might create an incentive for journalists to continue the work of evaluating the solutions proposed to solve the problem of the pro-Russian disinformation campaign.

7. References

7.1.Primary Sources

AIVD. (2017). *Annual report 2016*. Available at: https://www.aivd.nl/publicaties/jaarverslagen/2017/04/04/jaarverslag-2016

Author. (2017). *A series of interviews with the Kremlin Watch team of the European Values think-tank*. Prague.

BIS. (2017). 2016 annual report of the Security Information Service (BIS). Available at: https://www.bis.cz/vyrocni-zprava6c88.html?ArticleID=1117

European Parliament. (2016). *European Parliament resolution of 23 November 2016 on EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties*. Available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2016-0441+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN

Internet live stats. (2017). *Internet users in the world*. Available at: http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/

Median. (2017). *Výuka mediální výchovy na středních školách. Research final report*. Available at: https://www.jsns.cz/nove/pdf/6517001_medialni_vychova_zprava_final.pdf

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. (2017). *Latvia joins the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. Press release of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Republic of Latvia*. Available at: http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/56563-latvia-joins-the-european-centre-of-excellence-for-countering-hybrid-threats

Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic. (2017). *Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats*. Available at: http://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/clanek/centre-against-terrorism-and-hybrid-threats.aspx

MŠMT. (2013). *Hlavní směry Strategie vzdělávací politiky do roku 2020*. Available at: http://www.msmt.cz/file/26624/download/

NATO. (2013). *NATO glossary of terms and definitions*. Available at: http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/doctrine/other/aap6.pdf

Netmonitor. (2016). *Online data (OLA)*. Available at: http://www.netmonitor.cz/online-data-ola

The government of the Czech Republic. (2015). *Security strategy of the Czech Republic 2015*. Available at: http://www.mzv.cz/public/34/39/a/1374375_1258875_Bezpecnostni_strategie_2015.pdf

7.2.Secondary Sources

Anon. (2016). *20 poznatků o fungování české dezinformační scény*. Kremlin Watch Report.

Bahenský, V. (2017) *Sisyfovo centrum na Ministerstvu vnitra*. Association for international affairs. Available at: http://www.amo.cz/sisyfovo-centrum-na-ministerstvu-vnitra/

Bertelsen, B. (2012). *Everything You Need to Know About SWOT Analysis*. [Newmarket, Ont.]: BrainMass Inc.

Berzins, J. (2014). *Russia's New generation warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian defense policy*. Policy Paper. National Defence Academy of Latvia. Center for Security and Strategic Research. Available at: http://www.naa.mil.lv/~/media/NAA/AZPC/Publikacijas/PP%2002-2014.ashx

CEE leaders. (2009). *An open Letter to Obama administration from Central and Eastern European Leaders*. Available at: http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114881,6825987,An_Open_Letter_to_the_Obama_Administration_from_Central.html

Conley, H.A. et al. (2016). *The Kremlin Playbook: Understanding Russian Influence in Central and Eastern Europe*. Lanham: Center for Strategic & International Studies.

ČTK. (2017). *Centrum proti dezinformacím začíná fungovat. Odborníci to vítají, Zeman mluví o cenzuře*. Available at: http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/domaci/2000653-centrum-proti-dezinformacim-zacina-fungovat-odbornici-vitaji-zeman-mluvi-o-cenzure

Ehlers, V. J. (1999). *Information Warfare and International Security*. NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Science and Technology Committee. Draft General Report. Available at: http://www.nato-pa.int/archivedpub/comrep/1999/as285stc-e.asp#fn6

Fallis, D. (2017). *A conceptual analysis of disinformation*. University of Arizona. Available at: http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.569.304&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Folentová, V. (2017). *Plavčan ukázal, ako chce zmeniť vysoké školy: zruší akreditačnú komisiu, rok štúdia navyše sa nebude platiť*. Available at: https://dennikn.sk/725949/plavcan-ukazal-ako-chce-zmenit-vysoke-skoly-zrusi-akreditacnu-komisiu-rok-studia-navyse-sa-nebude-platit/

Gillham, Bill. (2001). *Case Study Research Methods*. London, New York: Continuum

GLOBSEC Trends. (2016). *Stredná Európa pod paľbou ruskej propagandy: skúmanie postojov verejnosti v Čechách, Maďarsku a na Slovensku*. Globsec Policy institute.

Gregor, M. & Vejvodová, P. (2016). *Analysis of manipulation techniques on selected Czech websites*. Research report. Masaryk University, Faculty of social studies.

Heshmat, S. (2015). *What is confirmation bias?*. Psychology today. Available at: https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/science-choice/201504/what-is-confirmation-bias

Janda, J. (2016). *Full-Scale Democratic Response to Hostile Disinformation Operations: 50 Measures to Oust Kremlin Hostile Disinformation Influence out of Europe*. Kremlin Watch Policy Paper.

Janda, J. & Víchová, V. (2016) *How to distinguish the pro-Kremlin disinformation*. Kremlin Watch Report. Available at: http://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/How-to-distinguish-pro-Kremlin-disinformation.pdf

Johansson, R. (2003). *Case study methodology*. Royal Institute of Technology. Available at: http://www.psyking.net/HTMLobj-3839/Case_Study_Methodology-_Rolf_Johansson_ver_2.pdf

Johnson, C. (2015a). *Russia's info-war: the home front*. European Union Institute for Security Studies. Available at: http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert_18_Russia_s_info_war.pdf

Johnson, C. (2015b). *Russia's info-war: theory and practice*. European Union Institute for Security Studies. Available at: http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert_22_Russia_s_info-war.pdf

Kris. (2017). *Litva má strach. Ruská propaganda si podle armády připravuje půdu pro obsazení Pobaltí*. Available at: http://www.info.cz/svet/litva-ma-strach-ruska-propaganda-si-podle-armady-pripravuje-pudu-pro-obsazeni-pobalti-7325.html

Kuliš, J. (2017). *Potřebujeme lepší mediální výchovu*. Survey. Available at: http://denikreferendum.cz/clanek/24920-anketa-potrebujeme-lepsi-medialni-vychovu

Kwang, T. W. (2017). *How is Finland building schools of the future?*. Available at: https://www.enterpriseinnovation.net/article/how-finland-building-schools-future-309928159

Lucas, E. & Pomeranzev, P. (2016) *Winning information war: Techniques and Counter-strategies to Russian Propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe*. A Report by CEPA's Information Warfare Project in Partnership with the Legatum Institute. Available at: https://cepa.ecms.pl/files/?id_plik=2773

Macfarquhar, N. (2016). *How Russians pay to play in other countries*. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/30/world/europe/czech-republic-russia-milos-zeman.html

Mackinnon, A. (2017). *Czechs Struggle to Sort Facts From Fears Over Russian Influence*. Available at: https://codastory.com/disinformation-crisis/information-war/czechs-struggle-to-sort-facts-from-fears-over-russian-influence

Milo, D. & Klingová, K. (2017). *Vulnerability Index: Subversive Russian Influence*. Globsec Policy Institute. Available at: http://www.cepolicy.org/sites/cepolicy.org/files/attachments/globsec_vulnerability_index.pdf

MSG Experts. (2017). *SWOT Analysis - Definition, Advantages and Limitations*. Management study guide. Available at: http://www.managementstudyguide.com/swot-analysis.htm

NATO. 2016. *Internet trolling as a tool of hybrid warfare: The case of Latvia. NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence study*. Available at: http://www.stratcomcoe.org/internet-trolling-hybrid-warfare-tool-case-latvia-0?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=kremlin_watch_monitor

Nimmo, B. (2016). *Identifying disinformation: An ABC approach*. Institute for European Studies. Policy Brief. Available at: http://www.ies.be/node/3612

Paul, Ch. & Matthews, M. (2016). *The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It*. Available at: http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE198/RAND_PE198.pdf

Respekt. (2017). *České dezinformační weby*. In: Respekt speciál. Dezinformace: 27 textů o světě, kde pravda ztrácí sílu.

Rettman, A. (2017). *Sex and lies: Russia's EU news*. EU Observer. Available at: https://euobserver.com/investigations/137595

Rinehart, A. (2017). *CrossCheck Newsroom starts fighting false information in France*. First draft news. Available at: https://firstdraftnews.com/crosscheck-starts/

Smoleňová, I. (2015). *The pro-Russian disinformation campaign in the Czech Republic and Slovakia: Types of media spreading pro-Russian propaganda, their characteristics and frequently used narratives*. Prague Security Studies Institute.

Stahl, B. C. (2006). *On the Difference or Equality of Information, Misinformation, and Disinformation: A Critical Research Perspective*. Informing science

journal. De Montfort University. Available at: https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/10007.pdf

Stake, Robert. (1995). *The Art of case study Research*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage.

Stake, Robert. (1998). "Case Studies" in: Norman Denzin & Yvonna Lincoln. (eds.): *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage

Strauss, V. (2015). *No, Finland isn't ditching traditional school subjects. Here's what's really happening*. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2015/03/26/no-finlands-schools-arent-giving-up-traditional-subjects-heres-what-the-reforms-will-really-do/?utm_term=.7f0fdc8addfb

Tamkin, E. (2017). *The real Russian threat to Central Eastern Europe*. Foreign policy report. Available at: http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/03/30/the-real-russian-threat-to-central-eastern-europe-2/

Třešňák, P. (2017). *Myslitelé ze savany: Lidský mozek není ustrojen k objektivnímu zvažování informací*. In: Respekt speciál. Dezinformace: 27 textů o světě, kde pravda ztrácí sílu.

Víchová, V. et al. (2016). *Výkladový slovník pojmů souvisejících s dezinformačními kampaněmi*. Kremlin Watch report. Available at: http://www.evropskehodnoty.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/V%C3%BDkladov%C3%BD-slovn%C3%ADk-pojm%C5%AF-souvisej%C3%ADc%C3%ADch-s-dezinforma%C4%8Dn%C3%ADmi-kampan%C4%9Bmi-1.pdf

Volchek, D. & Sindelar, D. (2015). *One Professional Russian Troll Tells All*. Radio Free Europe. Available at: http://www.rferl.org/a/how-to-guide-russian-trolling-trolls/26919999.html

Yin, Robert. (1994). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage.

Annex

Analysis of the common narratives on NATO, EU, Russia and media

TOPIC	ZEM & VEK DISCUSSION	PORTAL AERONET	PRINT MAGAZINE VĚDOMÍ	CZECH SPUTNIK NEWS
NATO	• Is controlled by economic interests of a small group of people • Wants to build new military base in Slovakia -> Slovakia will be the center of offensive against Russia • Military Bases are an alien power	• Is provoking Russia at its borders -> will be followed by an invasion • Is ignoring facts (that there was no invasion of Ukraine) -> initiating confl ct in eastern Ukraine	• Its problem is that American secret services are superior to other services. • Joining NATO decreased Slovakia's defense capacity: reforms after joining NATO -> now unable to defend its borders	• NATO needs to adopt structural changes in the future • Expansion to East (plus color revolution) -> decrease Europe's influence and security structure • Is unjustly accusing Russia of breaching Minsk agreement
EU	• There is no freedom and democracy in EU • Election are only illusory –> people cannot control anything	• Is in the midst of self-destruction • One of the largest collapses of all times • Cooperated with the USA on creation of wars • Is threatened by conflict in the Ukraine - needs to leave it	• Will be drawn in periods of conflicts and peace	• Eastern partnership is a failure • France triggered war in Libya (resulted in failure) • Morally responsible for deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea (unethical asylum policies)
Media	• Are venal and corrupt • Controlled by financial elites • They lie -> we cannot trust them	• Alternative media are being silenced • Czech media is biased • Opinion poll agencies are biased	• Mainstream media silent about certain facts (victims of terrorism) • Media in the US are using propaganda on its citizens • Are puppets of politicians • Mass media are heavily using propaganda and manipulation • Are creating virtual reality	• Its coverage of crises in Ukraine is only marginal and bias
Russia	• Is not perfect • It has solely its interests in mind • It started fewer conflicts then the USA -> is less aggressive and more peaceful	• Will be attacked by the USA • Is not threatening any state in Europe	• Is being transparent about its interest – needs neutral Ukraine (unlike the USA, who sow the seeds of conflict to stay in power)	• Is being ignored on G8 platform – sign of Russian weakness • Is concerned about the presence of destabilizing external powers in Macedonia • Is open to deepening business ties with CR

Source: Author based on Smoleňová 2015