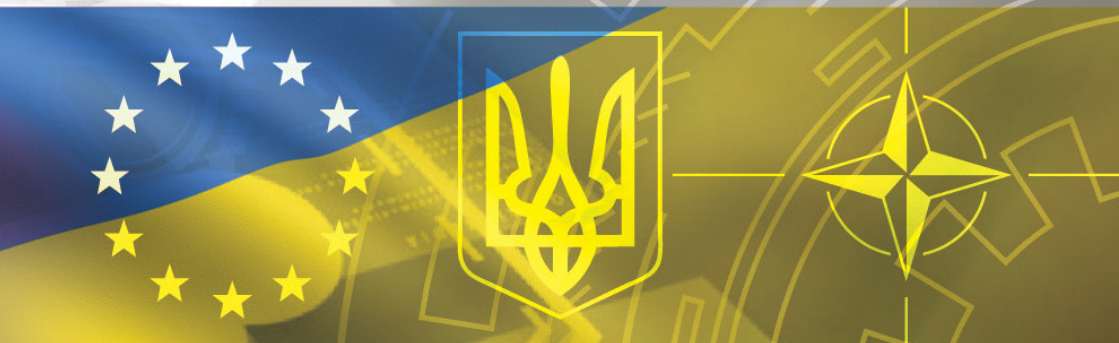




**Strategic communications in the focus  
of Ukraine – EU – NATO  
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This document analyzes the current information threats and opportunities to counter them in Ukraine, the EU and NATO, and the current state and development of cooperation between them in the field of strategic communications. Based on the identified gaps in the development of strategic communications in Ukraine and its cooperation with the EU and NATO, and the forecast of potential problems and directions for the further development of such cooperation are outlined, and recommendations are made for increasing its effectiveness.

The analytical document was prepared by the Centre for Global Studies “Strategy XXI”, headed by its President Mykhailo Gonchar, and with the direct involvement of Executive Director Vitalii Martyniuk, with the support and in cooperation with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Office in Ukraine. The study was initiated in partnership with the European Neighborhood Council (Brussels). Its content is an exceptional responsibility of the Centre for Global Studies “Strategy XXI” and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.



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## Introduction

Peace and stability in Eastern Europe are based on timely detection, prevention and neutralization of both military and non-conventional or hybrid threats in each of the countries and the entire region. Hybrid threats became especially relevant after the beginning of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, mostly based on the use of hybrid warfare methods. They include the use of society and its consciousness in the process of achieving the goals set by the aggressor. Correspondingly, the population, which is under the constant informational influence, needs protection against such hybrid challenges and threats.

The peculiarity of the hybrid war is that it is carried out in disguise and is aimed not at the physical capture of the whole country, although it is not excluded taking control over separate areas or the entire territory, but to obtain patronage over the state that is achieved through influence on the population, politicians, business and power structures. Therefore, countering hybrid threats requires attention to improving the sustainability of society. Strategic communications and information security hold one of the first places in countering hybrid threats, and Ukraine increased its attention to them after the beginning of the active phase of Russian aggression in 2014.

Strategic communications should be defined as a process aimed at ensuring the national security of the state, and this definition includes public diplomacy, public relations, communication with the media, combating disinformation, international and national information activities, civil-military cooperation (CIMIC), actions in cyberspace, information and psychological operations. The list is not exhaustive and may include other types of information, psychological and communication activities aimed at achieving this goal. This publication focuses on the security segment of strategic communications.

In the development of strategic communications at the national level, Ukraine has achieved some success, but it can be strengthened through the synergy and enhanced cooperation with the European Union and NATO, which have been paying attention to this area of activity for a long time and have experience both at the national and regional levels and in the areas of operations and missions, such as NATO mission in Afghanistan.

Strategic communications are one of the priority areas of policy and cooperation between NATO and the EU (EU-NATO Enhanced Cooperation), which this year marks the third anniversary. Each of these organizations has developed cooperation with Ukraine, including security issues. Therefore, it is vital to take into account the directions and accents of the EU-NATO interaction for their coordinated cooperation with Ukraine in the dimension of strategic communications. Increased stability and ability of Ukrainian society and the state of Ukraine to effectively and efficiently counter hybrid threats will make the situation in Europe more stable and secure.

## I. Current information threats in the context of the development of strategic communications in Ukraine, the EU and NATO

In several documents of the **European Union**, there are clear definitions of “hybrid threats” and measures to counter them, where one of the directions is strategic communications as “a systematic series of sustained and coherent activities, conducted across strategic, operational and tactical levels, that enables understanding of target audiences and identifies effective conduits to promote and sustain particular types of behavior.”<sup>1</sup> In practical terms, along with public diplomacy, promotion of politic activities, relations with the media, advertising and training, strategic communications are aimed at countering information challenges and threats, in particular – disinformation. In the EU, this countering is primarily directed against the threats from the East, i.e. the Russian Federation, as it is reflected in several EU documents, for example, the EU Global Strategy, the Joint Framework Document on Countering Hybrid Threats, the EU Action Plan on Strategic Communication<sup>2</sup>, the Report of the Directorate-General for External Policies of the European Parliament titled “EU strategic communication with a view to counteracting propaganda”<sup>3</sup>.

Sources of hybrid threats, as identified in the EU, can exploit vulnerable members of the society by engaging them with radical and extremist ideas through new communication channels. “*Disinformation poisons hearts and minds. We can no longer deny the fact that our institutions and societies are the targets of hostile Kremlin propaganda, which in turn is part of a broader strategy,*” said Anna Fotyga (Member of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group, Poland).<sup>4</sup> Therefore, in the information field, the European Union has identified raising public awareness and counteracting propaganda as a critical objective. The East StratCom Task Force was set up, an EU-STRAT special project was launched, which also works in Eastern Europe, and the EU Anti-Terrorism Internet Center operates within Europol to remove illegal information content.

NATO, for its part, takes a more detailed approach to strategic communications, focusing on the military and security component. The director of the NATO Information and Documentation Center in Ukraine, Barbora Maronkova, in her interview to Ukrinform, explained: “*Strategic communications sound difficult, but it is elementary. It is all about coordinating positions and being able to speak in one voice*”.<sup>5</sup> The active development of strategic communications in the Alliance began with its operation in Afghanistan and expanded into all NATO activities

1 [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/578008/EXPO\\_IDA\(2016\)578008\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/578008/EXPO_IDA(2016)578008_EN.pdf)

2 <http://archive.eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Action%20Plan.pdf>

3 [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/578008/EXPO\\_IDA\(2016\)578008\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/578008/EXPO_IDA(2016)578008_EN.pdf)

4 [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/59610/node/59610\\_uk](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/59610/node/59610_uk)

5 <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/2556092-barbora-maronkova-direktor-centru-informacii-ta-dokumentacii-nato-v-ukraini.html>

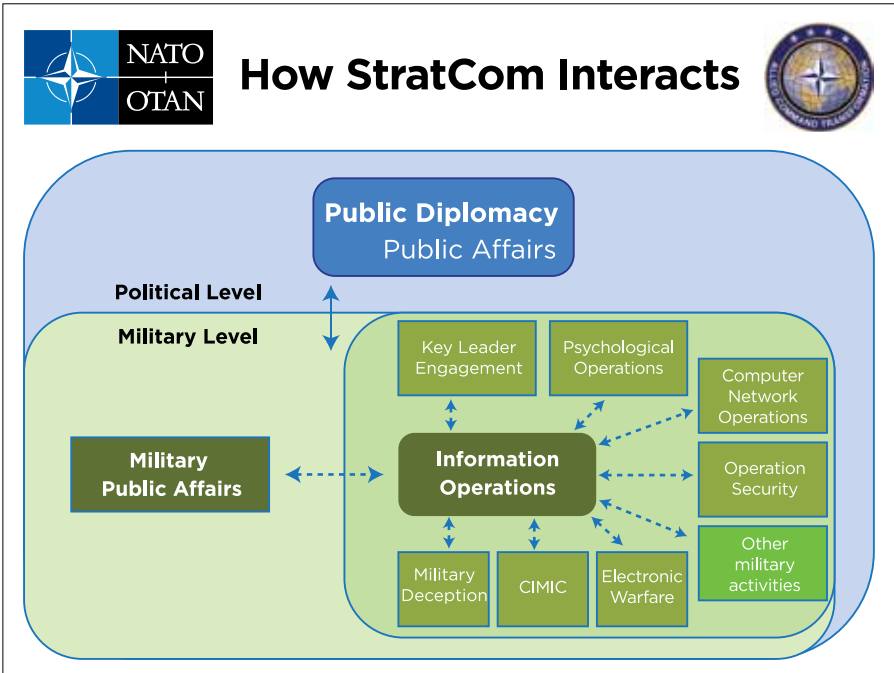


Figure 1. Strategic communications in NATO.

Source: <https://publicintelligence.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/nato-stratcom.png>

The Alliance has identified the following components of strategic communications (Figure. 1):

- Public Affairs and Military Public Affairs;
- Public Diplomacy and Military Support to Public Diplomacy;
- Press and Media;
- Information activities of international military cooperation;
- Civil-military cooperation (CIMIC);
- Actions in cyberspace, including social media;
- Involvement of key leaders in information events (Key Leaders Engagement);
- Internal communication (work with staff/internal PR)
- Information Operations;
- Psychological operations (PSYOPS);
- Informing about the situation and documenting the events on a battlefield;
- Intelligence support awareness events;

- Show of Force;
- Military deception (MILDEC);
- Operation Security;
- Electromagnetic weapon (EMW).<sup>6</sup>

According to this list, strategic communications in the Alliance are also based on information activities.

However, unlike the EU, NATO focuses on military component and operations. Meanwhile, countering disinformation is always in the Alliance’s focus. Therefore, in the Declaration of the 2018 Brussels NATO Summits, strategic communications were defined as a part of the policy of containment and development capabilities of the Alliance, and disinformation was a significant hybrid threat: “*We face hybrid challenges, including disinformation campaigns and malicious cyber activities.*”<sup>7</sup>

As emphasized in the report of the EU Institute for Security Studies “Strategic communications: East and South”<sup>8</sup>, the primary purpose of Russia’s information influence on Europe is the conviction of Europeans that there is no threat from Russia, and the EU should focus on threats from the South. To this end, the Russian propaganda machine worked to strengthen the migration crisis in Europe, anti-immigration sentiments, ethnic and religious hostilities. This information impact culminated in January 2016, when the Russian media actively inflated the “Lisa case”<sup>9</sup> and the situation around the violations of public order by illegal migrants at the railway station in the German city of Cologne.<sup>10</sup> It took a long time to overcome the consequences of the flow of disinformation from Russia. At the same time, Russia is trying to discredit the EU in the eyes of the inhabitants of the post-Soviet space, comparing the EU with the Soviet Union, and linking the process of European integration with the loss of independence and sovereignty. Information attacks of the Russian Federation are also carried out in the following areas: “decline” of Christian values in the EU; weakness of European politicians and institutions; instability in European countries; economic crisis; disagreements within the EU and NATO.

As a result, the information sphere has become one of the critical areas in NATO enhanced cooperation with the EU, which includes joint counteraction to hybrid

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6 <http://goal-int.org/rol-strategichnix-komunikacij-v-protidii-gibridnij-vijni-proti-Ukraini/>

7 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_156624.htm?selectedLocale=uk](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm?selectedLocale=uk)

8 <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0415-strategic-communications-east-and-south>

9 <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2016/Also-in-2016/lisa-case-germany-target-russian-disinformation/UK/index.htm>

10 <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2016/01/11/8016293.shtml>



threats in the South and the East. “*We have increased our ability to respond to hybrid threats: we reinforce our preparedness for crises, we exchange timely information including on cyber-attacks, we confront disinformation, we build the resilience of our members and partners, and we test our respective procedures through parallel and coordinated exercises,*” the Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation of July 10, 2018, stated.<sup>11</sup>

In Ukraine, there is also enough coordinated approach to the definition of strategic communications. It is fixed in the Military Doctrine of Ukraine and the Doctrine of Information Security of Ukraine<sup>12</sup>: “***Strategic communications*** are coordinated and appropriate use of the communicative capabilities of the state-public diplomacy, public relations, military relations, information and psychological operations, activities aimed at promoting the goals of the state.” Some aspects of the development of strategic communications are indicated in other documents in the sphere of security and defence: Annual national program of cooperation between Ukraine and NATO, Concept for Development of the Security and Defence Sector of 2016, Strategic Defence Bulletin and other.

According to the definition in the Ukrainian documents, strategic communications are aimed at ensuring the national security of Ukraine and implementation of the state interests, including the information sphere, that requires a clear definition of cyber threats to the state, because the information sphere is a main dimension of Russia’s hybrid war, which considers information-psychological instruments as a kind of weapons of mass destruction.

In Ukraine, Russia is using the following awareness-raising mechanisms: rapid and extensive filling of the combat zone with controlled by Russian media in the case of need; an attempt to monopolize control over the channels of news provision from the combat zone; producing fakes; sending of the Russian cultural celebrities to the area of combat actions; the use of hired foreign journalists, etc. All these mechanisms are supported with adequate financial resources. The budget of “Russia Today” has grown significantly for recent years and is approaching \$2 billion, according to unofficial data.<sup>13</sup> It does not include Sputnik, Interfax and many other Russian media networks. A relatively new information tool of the Russian Federation - “Sputnik”, distributes information in more than 30 languages in dozens of countries, mainly in Europe, and in some countries, it became a local news-maker.

Russia’s propaganda against Ukraine is directed at the pro-Russian population of industrial regions of Ukraine with a focus on target groups of Russian-speaking

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11 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_156626.htm?selectedLocale=uk](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156626.htm?selectedLocale=uk)

12 <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/47/2017>

13 <https://www.5.ua/polityka/shaleni-tsyfry-iakyi-biudzhet-prokremlivskoho-russia-today-a-iakyi-v-mininformpolityky-184151.html>

citizens, civil servants, the intellectual elite, and the elderly people. Russia is active in social networks to spread pro-Russian messages. The Russian Federation continues to carry out special information operations throughout Ukraine, using a variety of channels, including non-forbidden in Ukraine media resources and social networks. Russia has developed a powerful propaganda apparatus for the Ukrainian audience, including persons acting from within the state. The primary propaganda efforts of the Kremlin are aimed at discrediting the leadership of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Army, the foreign policy of the state, the restoration of Ukrainian power in the liberated territories, work with internally displaced persons, and the ongoing process of reforming the country.



Figure 2. Russian propagandist media

Source: <https://dt.ua/UKRAINE/rosiya-vidilila-25-mln-rubliv-na-propagandu-v-dnr-203766.html>

In the EU and NATO, major information threats are considered more generally as disinformation and propaganda. In Ukraine, as recorded in the Doctrine of Information Security, actual threats are more detailed: information operations to undermine the defense capabilities of Ukraine and destabilize the socio-political and socio-economic situation; operations to undermine the image of Ukraine in the world; expansion of the information infrastructure of the aggressor state in Ukraine; information domination of the aggressor state in the temporarily occupied territories; dissemination of calls for radical action, promotion of isolationist and autonomist concepts of coexistence of regions in Ukraine. The threats include problematic issues in the sphere of information security of Ukraine, namely the inefficiency of the state information policy and the lack of development of the national information infrastructure of Ukraine.

They are mostly challenges, and they should be supplemented by: low level of coordination central governmental bodies in the information area and their work with the media; unformed policy of information support for the consolidation of national identity in Ukraine in terms of work with population of Ukraine, especially in the occupied territories; insufficient financial and technical support of the state bodies and media of Ukraine for prompt and timely response to the relevant acts of information aggression.

In addition to the threats generalized in the Doctrine of Information Security of Ukraine, it is necessary to list other actual information threats, in particular:

- formation of Russia’s channels of information and propaganda to discredit the Ukrainian authorities aimed at the target areas: 1) citizens of Russia; 2) citizens of Ukraine in the occupied territories; 3) other citizens of Ukraine; 4) the Western countries, the partners of Ukraine in countering aggression; 5) the population of the countries within the orbit of influence of Russia<sup>14</sup>;

- overt and covert use of democratic norms and principles of the freedom of the media for information discreditation of Ukraine and its attempts to shape the international support to counter Russian aggression (*Example: In December 2018 the Russian media, including media abroad, spread disinformation about the alleged preparation of the Ukrainian forces to use the banned chemical weapons, trying to discredit Ukraine*<sup>15</sup>);

- political and lobbying activities in the West, used by Russia for the formation of doubts about the position of the EU on the extension of the sanctions against the Kremlin and in support of Ukraine, and also actions to legitimize the annexation of Crimea (*Example: On 26 may 2019 on a YouTube channel, a video on how in 2022 Romania can occupy Chernivtsi region and part of the Odesa region of Ukraine appeared; General Prosecutor Office of Ukraine launched criminal proceedings on a special information operation of the intelligence services of the Russian Federation*<sup>16</sup>);

- increased use by the Kremlin of the information channels of the Russian Orthodox Church – the UOC-MP with the creation of new propaganda and disinformation flows to Ukraine with the purpose of demoralization and disorientation of the population, and the reduction of its resistant capacity to the aggressor (*Example: In December 2018, the SSU reported that, during searches*

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14 <https://geostrategy.org.ua/ua/analitika/item/1401-hibrydni-zagrozy-i-syspilna-bezpeka>

15 <http://tass.com/world/1035166>

16 <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2019/06/04/novyna/polityka/hpu-porushyla-spravu-cherez-video-pro-zaxoplennya-rumuniyev-bukovynty>

*in several administrative offices of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, materials to incite religious hatred were discovered<sup>17)</sup>*;

- the use of the Ukrainian television channels and other media to broadcast pro-Russian narratives in limited manner or under opposition slogans (*Example: In September 2018 Ukrainian TV channel website 112.ua posted a quote of the representative of the party “Za Zhyttia” (For Life) Serhiy Bogolyubov: “Ukraine does not fulfill the Minsk agreements”<sup>18)</sup>*);

- citizens receive information from Russian information channels, especially television and Internet sites (*Example: According to the research of the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology held in September 2018, 18,2% of Ukrainians use at least one Russian social network, and 54% of Ukrainians don't consider that using Russian social networks is dangerous<sup>19)</sup>*);

- the formation of an isolated socio-cultural and informational reality in the occupied territories of Ukraine, blocking access of the inhabitants of these territories to the Ukrainian information content (*Example: According to the report of the Crimean Human Rights Group based on the results of the monitoring carried out in March-April 2019, signals of the seven Ukrainian radio stations are fully or partially jammed in 20 settlements of the Northern Crimea<sup>20)</sup>*);

- the use of the Ukrainian experts and opinion leaders by Russia to form a negative information image about the Ukrainian expert environment and delegitimize the primary evidence of Russian aggression (*Example: As reported by the publication “Komsomolskaya Pravda”, the Ukrainian experts participate in a TV show on Russian television as “whipping boys” for the appropriate fees, including Vyacheslav Kovtun, who is one of the most paid - monthly he receives from 500 to 700 thousand Russian Rubles<sup>21)</sup>*);

- dissemination of information products to form the lines of division in society, the imposition of feelings of discrimination and insecurity, the preparation of a social base for the protests and provocations (*Example: In February 2019 Russian edition of RT published the news under the title “The European Parliament said about the link between the Church disunity in Ukraine and the Poroshenko's election campaign»<sup>22)</sup>*).

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17 <https://www.unian.ua/politics/10364304-pid-chas-obshukiv-u-primishchennyah-upc-mp-znayshli-broshuri-z-propagandoyu-foto-video.html>

18 <https://112.ua/politika/bogolyubov-donbass-neobhodimo-vozvrashhat-putem-vypolneniya-minskih-soglasheniy-463170.html>

19 <https://detector.media/infospace/article/142133/2018-10-29-18-ukraintsiv-koristuyutsya-prinainmi-odnieyu-rosiiskoyu-sotsmerezheyu-opituvannya-kmis/>

20 <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-v-krymu-ukrainskie-radiostantsyi-glushat-rossijskimi/29935810.html>

21 <https://www.crimea.kp.ru/daily/26744.7/3772307/?see-also.number=1414#see-also>

22 <https://russian.rt.com/ussr/article/605957-evroparlament-vybery-ukraina-raskol>

Sending the right message in the situation of a conflict like this one waged by Russia against Ukraine has proven to be a challenge not only for Ukraine but also for NATO and the EU. Therefore, effective counteraction to the expressed threats requires the formation of messages necessary to counter Russian aggression, which is essential not only for Ukraine but also for NATO and the EU. Ukraine, the EU and NATO need a clear vision and definition of these threats coming from one source - the Russian Federation. For both organizations, strategic communications have not become something new, but their importance for the formation of a safe environment is constantly growing in the context of Russia's information attacks against Ukraine and other European countries.

## II. Strategic communications in the process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine

Strategic communications in Ukraine’s cooperation with the EU and NATO occupy one of the priority places. Some strategic documents in this dimension have been approved and are implemented. At the end of April 2016, with the aim to improve the coordination of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration and the development of strategic communications, for the first time in the history of Ukraine, the post of the Deputy Prime Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration was created in the Government, to which Ivanna Klymush-Tsyntsadze was appointed.

Almost immediately after the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU came into full force on September 1, 2017, in October of the same year, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the 2018-2021 European Integration Communication Strategy and annual action plans for its implementation.<sup>23</sup> *“The large scale of the process of the European integration of Ukraine and the implementation of the provisions of the Association Agreement, the impact of these processes on the life of every citizen defined the need to conduct a powerful explanatory and communication work,”* this Strategy reads.<sup>24</sup> One of the identified priorities is “countering disinformation aimed at discrediting Ukraine’s relations with the EU and Ukraine’s future membership in the EU.”

During the 20th Ukraine-EU Summit, which took place on July 9, 2018, in Brussels, a joint decision to strengthen the work on strategic communications was reached.<sup>25</sup> The development of such cooperation was specified during the Association Council meeting on December 17, 2018: *«The Parties agreed on the importance of countering disinformation and interference in the elections, and discussed the possibilities of cooperation in this area».*<sup>26</sup> The EU leading institutions to implement these solutions are the EU Delegation to Ukraine and the EU Advisory Mission in Ukraine. They focus on the dissemination of information about the EU, the development of governmental structures in the field of strategic communications, enhancing their communication with non-governmental organizations and security structures with the population, as well as to counter disinformation.

In December 2018, the EU Plan to counter disinformation was presented, and it identified Russia as the primary source of information threats. It is planned to increase the budget of the EU External Action Service for strategic communications from 1.9 million euro in 2018 to 5 million euro in 2019, and its staff to counter disinformation is planned to be increased by 50-55 people in the two years period.

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23 <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/83-2019-%D1%80>

24 <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/779-2017-%D1%80#n10>

25 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/36086/joint-statement-eu-ua-summit-2018.pdf>

26 <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/storage/app/media/uploaded-files/UKR.pdf>

Particular attention is paid to the East StratCom Task Force.<sup>27</sup> In March 2019, the European Union created a system of rapid identification of disinformation. The European Commission, the EU Council, the European Parliament and member countries are involved in it. This step was crucial for the preparations of the European Parliament elections in May 2019. *“It is critically important to work together to confront those who are trying to manipulate our elections,”* wrote the European Security Commissioner Julian King.<sup>28</sup> Work in the system was limited only for the European Union, but, meanwhile, cooperation with partners is previewed. Ukraine, which is at the forefront of countering Russian propaganda, can be a partner of the EU in this dimension.

Cooperation between Ukraine and the EU in countering disinformation and propaganda began earlier. To address these issues, in 2017 the East StratCom Task Force created an informal working group with the government of Ukraine to help it to define strategic communications and launched an initiative to support the Ukrainian media. Analysis of the web site of this EU group ([www.EUvsDisinfo.eu/](http://www.EUvsDisinfo.eu/)) shows that disproof of Russian propaganda are mostly the facts concerning Ukraine. In January 2019, the EU foreign Ministers discussed the development of cooperation in this area with international organizations and other countries, including Ukraine.

With the aim of supporting Ukraine to solve some of the problematic issues, on behalf of the EU several projects like “EU Mythbusters Twetter Feed”, “Disinformation Review” and “Center for the exchange of the news in Russian language in Prague” were implemented, where journalists from different countries spread the news in Russian and help each other in investigations of disinformation and dissemination of their results.

The EU Advisory Mission to Ukraine is carrying out activities to train law enforcement officers on strategic communications. In 2018, the training was held with the police of dialogue, in particular in the East of Ukraine. In 2017 and 2018, the two-day training on strategic communications was held for representatives of the press services of the National Police from all regions of Ukraine. The emphasis was on modern trends in the media, new communication tools, and active development of messages. *“Today, information can either destroy the organization or consolidate its positive reputation. Therefore, an effective and “proactive” communication is a critical component of the work of the police,”* the Head of the EUAM Kestutis Lančinskis said during the mentioned training.<sup>29</sup>

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27 [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-internet-fakenews/plan-to-combat-fake-news-proposed-as-eu-elections-approach-idUSKBN1O41LM?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews&utm\\_source=Twitter&utm\\_medium=Social&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+Reuters%2FworldNews+%28Reuters+World+News%29](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-internet-fakenews/plan-to-combat-fake-news-proposed-as-eu-elections-approach-idUSKBN1O41LM?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews&utm_source=Twitter&utm_medium=Social&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+Reuters%2FworldNews+%28Reuters+World+News%29)

28 <https://twitter.com/JKingEU/status/1107562567650689024/photo/1>

29 <http://www.euam-ukraine.eu/ua/news/euam-provides-strategic-communications-training-for-police-spokespersons-from-all-ukrainian-regions/>

The EU Delegation in Ukraine focuses on dissemination of information about the EU and its cooperation and assistance to Ukraine; establishing sustainable communication with the civil society; providing timely coverage of events and decisions in the EU; and supporting media freedom. In particular, the EU Delegation created a system of online consultations with representatives of civil society and developed the EU Roadmap for interaction with the civil society in Ukraine.

NATO’s cooperation with Ukraine in the sphere of strategic communications is substantial and documented. Creation and development of opportunities in the sphere of strategic communications for the defense of the state is one of the tasks of the Alliance in assisting Ukraine. NATO assists both government agencies and civil society organizations, including implementation of the Strategic Communications Partnership Road Map between Ukraine and NATO. This document was signed in September 2015 by the Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine and NATO Secretary-General. The document is a framework that allows implementing various programs and projects. It provides trainings of personnel, assistance in the development of specialized structures and legislation, research, helps to inform the society about events in the state and counteract Russian propaganda. The Road Map is the only agreement of this kind between NATO and the partner country and provides advisory assistance for the development of Ukrainian authorities, their security risk management and response to risks through the introduction of strategic communications.

The practical implementation of the Road Map was launched in 2016, at the first meeting of the working group on the development of the strategic communications framework and coordination mechanisms held in March jointly by the Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine (MIP), the NSDC and the NATO Information and Documentation Centre in Ukraine. A plan for the implementation of the Road Map for the short term was developed. Strategic communications advisers have been introduced in selected ministries, to which foreign experts have been invited.

Strategic communications became part of the Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine (CAP), approved by the heads of state and government at the meeting of the Ukraine-NATO Commission on July 9, 2016, in Warsaw.<sup>30</sup> The CAP aims to consolidate and increase NATO’s assistance to Ukraine, which should allow better ensuring of its security and carrying out the necessary reforms, in particular in the security and defense sectors. NATO has committed itself to support capacity development in this area by assisting both government agencies and non-governmental organizations, including through the implementation of the Road Map.

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30 [https://mfa.gov.ua/mediafiles/sites/nato/files/7\\_.pdf](https://mfa.gov.ua/mediafiles/sites/nato/files/7_.pdf)



NATO’s cooperation with Ukraine in the field of strategic communications is aimed at developing a culture of strategic communications, ensuring effective and transparent government communications in Ukraine with a high level of confidence in them, especially in the security and defense sector. Capacity development projects in strategic communications include training and seminars, information trips abroad, etc. Every year hundreds of representatives of security and defense agencies participate in them. NATO-Ukraine cooperation also includes advisory support for the development of key policy documents on strategic communications.

Playing a leading role in Ukraine-NATO cooperation in the field of strategic communications, the NATO Information and Documentation Center (NIDC) annually holds several events, maintains active cooperation with Ukrainian non-government organizations and think tanks. Thus, in 2017-2018, NIDC organized 19 training events and provided advisory assistance on strategic communications to the national academies of Ukraine. It contributes to the information campaign to support Ukraine’s accession to NATO as part of the Concept of improving public awareness of Ukraine’s cooperation with NATO for 2017-2020. However, in the East of Ukraine, there is still a mostly negative attitude towards the Alliance, which requires information campaigns there with a focus on NATO practical actions to help the population affected by the fighting.

Ukraine also maintains a high level of cooperation with the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, which is located in Riga (Latvia). *“We have powerful institutions that help us a lot, for example, the Strategic Communications Center of Excellence, which is located in Riga, Latvia. This centre has become a hub for research and analysis in this area,”* Barbora Maronkova, Director of NIDC, said in an interview with the News Agency “UKRINFORM” in October 2018.<sup>31</sup> The Centre in Riga assists Ukraine in the form of advisory visits and trainings. An important step, according to the MIP, should be a change in approaches to Euro-Atlantic integration in favor of more considerable publicity and openness to Ukrainian society. Also, one of the most critical dimensions of strategic communications in the coming years should be deepening of relations between politicians and experts and NGOs.

Considering the nature of the current war, the information environment will continue remaining at the forefront of Ukraine’s cooperation with NATO. However, taking into account the experience gained by Ukraine in countering Russian propaganda, this cooperation should be bilateral, since Ukraine in this area is already more a source of knowledge than a consumer. At the same time, as MIP Adviser on strategic communications Alina Frolova noted during the international round table *“Ukraine-NATO: non-military cooperation as a joint response to hybrid threats”* on February

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31 <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-polytics/2556092-barbora-maronkova-direktor-centru-informacii-ta-dokumentacii-nato-v-ukraini.html>

9, 2017, in Kyiv<sup>32</sup>, Ukraine should adopt the experience of NATO countries in protecting its information space in various aspects.

Coordination of the EU and NATO actions in the development of cooperation with Ukraine in the field of strategic communications is essential. Such coordination between NATO and the EU will support Ukraine and other partners in their efforts to increase resilience so that they can defend themselves against internal, hybrid and information threats. Strategic communications also play a central role in providing signals of unity and solidarity with partners, in increasing awareness of both organizations, and in combating disinformation. Well-coordinated cooperation in the triangle NATO-EU-Ukraine will be an evidence of the successful implementation of the concept of strategic communications for each of the parties.

Within the framework of the Enhanced cooperation between the EU and NATO, there are currently three main areas of interaction with partner countries: security of ammunition storages, cybersecurity, strategic communications. These joint efforts will enhance the resilience of non-Alliance partners to potential aggression, as well as contribute to their reform process. The Third progress report on the implementation of the list of joint proposals, which was approved by the EU and NATO on December 5, 2016 and supplemented on December 6, 2017<sup>33</sup>, determines that information exchanges and discussions on formats for further cooperation in the Western Balkans, the East and the South are taking place in the sphere of strategic communications. Information exchange, including informal political consultations between staffs, on the three pilot countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Moldova and Tunisia), will also take place for Ukraine, Georgia and Jordan.<sup>34</sup>

Cooperation in strategic communications between the EU and NATO institutions develops. Separately stands out the collaboration between the EU Strategic Communications Task Forces and the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. Therefore, it is vital to develop trilateral cooperation between Ukraine and both organizations.

The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Helsinki, Finland) promotes closer coordination between the EU and NATO on countering hybrid threats, including the informational component – propaganda and disinformation. Both organizations hold joint meetings, participate in the activities of the Center, attend the meetings of the Steering Committee of the Center, and are involved in exercises and trainings. Under the auspices of the Centre, recommendations were developed

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32 [http://ucipr.org.ua/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=516:ukra-na-nato-sp-lna-nevyskova-sp-vpracya-u-protid-g-bridn-y-v-yn&catid=16&Itemid=186&lang=ua](http://ucipr.org.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=516:ukra-na-nato-sp-lna-nevyskova-sp-vpracya-u-protid-g-bridn-y-v-yn&catid=16&Itemid=186&lang=ua)

33 [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2018\\_06/20180608\\_180608-3rd-Joint-progress-report-EU-NATO-eng.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2018_06/20180608_180608-3rd-Joint-progress-report-EU-NATO-eng.pdf)

34 [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2018\\_06/20180608\\_180608-3rd-Joint-progress-report-EU-NATO-eng.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2018_06/20180608_180608-3rd-Joint-progress-report-EU-NATO-eng.pdf)

to strengthen further EU-NATO cooperation, where strategic communications were one of the five areas. Ukraine is developing cooperation with this Centre but has not yet joined its activities.

The NATO Representation to Ukraine now chairs the donor coordination group for the security and defense sector and works closely with the EU Advisory Mission to Ukraine on strategic communications, and the NATO Information and Documentation Centre conducts joint trainings. NATO personnel also work with the EU support group for Ukraine to identify specific projects, including the sphere of strategic communications.

Ukrainian government bodies continue to develop strategic communications, but now it would be an exaggeration to talk about their effectiveness, especially concerning compliance with the policy of “one voice” in the international environment. Also, Ukraine requires precise mechanisms of strategic communications in various areas, which can be developed with the help of the EU and NATO, as defined in the NATO-Ukraine Strategic Communications Partnership Road Map.

### **III. Prospects of the EU-NATO cooperation with Ukraine in the area of strategic communications**

Strategic communications will continue to be one of the critical areas of cooperation between Ukraine and the EU, Ukraine and NATO, and NATO and the European Union. Meanwhile, the strengthening of cooperation in this dimension requires more attention to the trilateral Ukraine-EU-NATO format, considering the further development of cooperation between the EU and NATO and the deepening of Ukraine’s integration to both organizations.

First of all, it is necessary to identify the **probable problem areas of strategic communications between Ukraine, the EU and NATO**. Elections to the European Parliament, new members of the European Commission, change of power in Ukraine after the presidential and parliamentary elections with the emergence of new politicians, many of whom do not have enough professional experience and knowledge, actualize the topic of strategic communications between governmental agencies of Ukraine, the EU and NATO. Some strategic challenges for the sides of this triangle of relations will be actualized in the coming year. The mutual understanding between the parties in both bilateral and multilateral formats will be needed as never before, especially considering the fact that Russia continues its destructive policy towards all these parties. First of all, we are talking about the need to establish strategic communications on the following issues:

- continuation of Russia’s hybrid-type aggression against Ukraine by:
  - *granting Russian citizenship to residents of Donbas - both on the occupied territories and areas controlled by the Government;*
  - *actions on the transformation of the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea into “Russian lakes” using a doubtful motivated navigation restriction;*
  - *escalation of pressure on Kyiv to push it to unilateral implementation of the Minsk agreements in the Russian interpretation with the recognition of the so-called “LPR/DPR” as parties to the conflict;*
- probable “gas attack” in the winter of 2020, taking into account likely termination of the Russian gas transit to the EU through the territory of Ukraine and the completion of gas pipelines Nord Stream 2 and TurkStream – so-called “Problem 2020”;
- Russia’s use of civil infrastructure to covertly spread its military presence under the pretext of protecting it from subversive and terrorist threats;
- security of Ukraine in the period after the end of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty;

- Russia continues subversive activities against the EU and NATO from within with the use of various actors of influence to disrupt the functioning of organizations and prevent Ukraine’s integration to them.

The problem to some extent lies in the dimension of Ukraine’s relations with NATO and the EU, but, above all, with the United States as a strategic partner.

Shortcomings of strategic communications of the authorities in the past on various issues had severe consequences for Ukraine. The lack of strategic communications with the United States, the Great Britain, Poland, Germany and France in 2014, in the conditions of domestic political turbulence and the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine, was one of the reasons that instead of the Budapest format on Security Assurances to Ukraine, the Normandy format of negotiations and the Minsk process were initiated. The US, as the initiator of the Budapest Memorandum, appeared absent in these formats and Russia tried to play a role of a mediator like Germany and France, although it was a party to the conflict in reality. The issue of Russian occupation and illegal annexation of Crimea was left out of the negotiating process, and Russian aggression against Ukraine was written in the EU official documents as the “conflict in and around Ukraine”, followed by the interpretation of the “internal civil conflict” by some European politicians.

A similar situation of substitution of concepts occurred in 2009 when Russia resorted to the use of gas as a weapon against Ukraine, and later against the EU countries. Thus, absence of an official reaction at the beginning, diplomatic lethargy and lagging reactive actions of Ukraine in the winter of 2009 against the background of the massive Russian propaganda and lobbying efforts of Gazprom in Europe became of the main causes of inadequate conclusions of the European Commission regarding the nature and reasons for the “gas attack” against the EU during two weeks and Ukraine during three weeks. The European Commission officially left open the question, “what happened in January 2009: did Russia stop gas supplies to the EU or did Ukraine interrupt transit.” Brussels limited itself to stating: “On the night of January 6-7, all supplies from Russia through Ukraine to the EU were stopped. Gas supplies from Russia to Europe were absent from 7 to 20 January.”<sup>35</sup> Later events of January 2009 were called the “gas crisis”, the responsibility for which was assigned to both sides - Russia and Ukraine. Such approaches of the EU created a “temptation effect” for Russia to further use of energy resources and pipelines as a non-military component in hybrid wars. None of the gas crises, neither in 2006 nor in 2009, could be prevented nor resolved by legal mechanisms. The crisis was resolved by political means – through pressure

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35 Commission Staff Working Document. Accompanying document to the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning measures to safeguard the security of gas supply and repealing Directive 2004/67/EC. The January 2009 gas supply disruption to the EU: an assessment. Brussels, p. 4

from Brussels and Moscow on Ukraine regarding quick signing of a new contract between Naftogaz and Gazprom, followed by the restoration of gas transit. As of today, in the context of “Problem 2020” there are signs that the scenario of “General pressure of strong parties on a weak one” may repeat, although the EU’s attitude to Russia would have to be transformed in the light of the events for the last five years.

In 2010, the Centre for Global Studies “Strategy XXI” in collaboration with NATO completed the project “Energy Resources and their delivery infrastructure: the potential for inappropriate operations in Europe”. The project team analyzed primary documents of the Russian Federation: National Security Strategy, Military Doctrine, Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation and others, and the actions of the Russian Federation during the gas crisis of 2009. Some key findings made in 2010 are still relevant today. As it was noted in the EU Global Strategy of 2016, “Today terrorism, **hybrid threats**, climate change, economic volatility and **energy insecurity** endanger our people and territory.”<sup>36</sup>

The provisions of a number of official documents of the Russian Federation (the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020, Military Doctrine, Energy Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2030, the Program for the effective systemic use of foreign policy factors for long-term development of the Russian Federation) contain ambiguous provisions and don’t promote trust to Russia as a prospective partner. The documents of the “pre-Crimean” period, such as the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020 and the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, did not perceive the process of accession of new members to NATO and the implementation of global functions by the Alliance. Based on this rejection, the Russian Federation formulated the task of countering through “neutralization of possible military dangers and military threats by political, diplomatic and other non-military means.” This increases the likelihood of using the energy and infrastructure potential of the Russian Federation as non-military means in case of aggravation of relations with some member states, as well as with NATO and the EU as a whole.

The gas crisis of 2009 was accompanied by the large-scale information-psychological campaign and PR-support of the actions of Gazprom by the authoritative international PR-agencies (Gavin Anderson, GPlus Europe, and Ketchum). It was paid off. Russian propaganda stamps like “Ukraine interrupted transit to Europe”, “Ukraine is an unreliable transit chain”, “Northern and southern flows are ways out of transit problems” were fixed in the European mass consciousness. The propaganda thesis - about “theft” of gas by Ukraine was and remains especially widespread. Even former European Commissioner for Energy

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36 [https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/eu-information-russian/7822/-----\\_ru](https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/eu-information-russian/7822/-----_ru)

Gunter Etinger in August 2014 used rhetoric about the possibility of “stealing gas” by Ukraine, predicting a possible gas crisis in the winter of 2015, although this forecast was not justified.

The position on “illegal extraction of energy resources exported by Russia on transit routes through the territories of foreign countries”<sup>37</sup> as a threat to Russian economic and foreign policy was fixed in the Doctrine of Energy Security of the Russian Federation taken into force by the Decree of V. Putin signed in May 2019. Therefore, Russia strengthened its legal ground (from the point of understanding of Moscow) to stop gas transit through Ukraine starting from 2020.

Concerning Russia’s use of civil infrastructure to spread its military presence, it should be noted that there is a lack of understanding in Europe of the risks what such policy of the Kremlin can carry. The construction of a bridge across the Kerch Strait was the reason for the Kremlin to expand the list of tasks not only for the Black Sea fleet, but also for the Air forces, Russian Guard Troops, FSB, and intelligence agencies of the Russian Federation. On November 25, 2018, the capture of three Ukrainian boats with crews in their attempt to pass the Kerch Strait demonstrated that Russia was ready to use military forces in flagrant violation of international law. It can be confidently stated that the construction of the Nord Stream 2 in the Baltic and the TurkStream in the Black Sea will be used by Russia to justify the increase and diversity of its military presence in the waters of both seas and on the coast. The reason may be a need to protect strategically crucial marine infrastructure, joint and mutually beneficial Russian-German, Russian-Turkish and Russian-Bulgarian relations in the gas trade, and neutralize threats from NATO, the United States, Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic States, which, according to Russian propaganda, are ready to resort to aggressive actions to block/destroy the new infrastructure, to the emergence of which they actively opposed.

The final cessation of the operation of the INF Treaty since August 2, 2019 means for Ukraine final disappearance of formal restrictions on the development of that class of missiles for the needs of national defense in the context of the ongoing aggression of the Russian Federation. Ukraine has preserved and develops the technological capacity to produce different classes of missile technology. The Ukrainian authorities should provide their vision to NATO partners with an emphasis on the fact that the development of non-nuclear missile strike systems with a range of up to 2,500 km is in the interests of strengthening the Eastern flank of the Alliance.

Countering Russian aggression, especially its information component, increases the importance of the development of the system of strategic communications. To do this, Ukraine requires the formation of a shared vision of the concept of strategic communications, the involvement of all actors and the creation of a full-fledged

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37 <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/rsskwUHzl25X6IijBy20D0j88faOQLN4.pdf>

and long-term mechanism for the training of relevant specialists, research and implementation of their results. The EU and NATO help Ukraine to perform these tasks. However, at the strategic security level, the Alliance is more involved that points the need to strengthen work with the EU.

At the tactical level, development of strategic communications in Ukraine, certain coherence of the EU and NATO and the distribution across sectors can be noted. The Alliance is more focused on the military-security component, and the European Union works deeply in the sectors of human security through EUAM and public communications through the EU Delegation. Despite this separation of dimensions, precise coordination of the actions of both organizations is essential, and Ukraine itself must ensure that there is no duplication of their efforts. Therefore, the adoption of normative legal acts on strategic communications, starting with the national concept or strategy and directions of sectoral policies, and the formation of administrative and organizational mechanism in Ukraine become priorities, without which the relevant assistance of the EU and NATO will be ineffective. The Alliance is ready to assist in these tasks, as defined in the NATO-Ukraine Strategic Communications Partnership Road Map. Ukraine should initiate projects on strategic communications in the framework of the EU PESCO cooperation mechanism and join the NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence, following the model of the almost completed process of joining to the NATO Centre on energy security.

In its report “Threats to Stability in Wider Europe”, the European Neighborhood Council (ENC) recommended strengthening the links between civil society organizations and improving dialogue among ordinary citizens living in the EU and the Eastern Partnership region. At both the public and governmental levels, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova should be involved in cooperation with their neighbors in Europe, with regard to the shared values, in particular spheres of information sharing, public involvement in monitoring in the EaP countries, trainings and cooperation through the mechanisms used by the EU in the regions of protracted conflicts.

For the development of strategic communications, with the assistance of the EU and NATO, it is necessary to move to practical steps aimed at deepening ties between Ukrainian politicians, state authorities and representatives of the expert and public circles. On the one hand, the role and influence of the civil society should increase; on the other hand, state institutions should effectively use the opportunities of experts and NGOs for the development of the state.

In conditions of the hybrid war, Ukraine, the EU and NATO must work together to protect their information borders and ensure information security. At the same time, Ukraine should start not only from the current need of protection from



Russian propaganda, but also consider this issue comprehensively, with the prospect of building the future information space of the state and its national narratives. As noted by the representative of the NATO StratCom Center of Excellence Dace Kundrate at the international round table “Ukraine-NATO: Non-Military Cooperation as a Response to Common Hybrid Threats” in February 2017 in Kyiv<sup>38</sup>, in countering the propaganda and disinformation the following points are essential: raising public awareness of the dangers of aggression; prevention of information flows, which go beyond the usual human awareness; consideration of the speed of information dissemination through social networks; development of cooperation between information volunteers; correspondence of information messages to real actions.

The information sphere should become a field not only for NATO and the EU assistance to Ukraine but also for adoption and taking into account practical knowledge and experience that Ukraine has gained in countering Russian propaganda to guarantee common information security. One of the areas of cooperation between Ukraine, the EU and NATO should be raising awareness of the population of neighboring member countries of both organizations to improve their public opinion about Ukraine and effectively counteract Russian propaganda, which is actively spread by the Kremlin. It is essential to continue active cooperation with the EU StratCom East Task Force, effectively use of public diplomacy tools, involvement of NGOs, experts and cultural figures. Strengthening cooperation with European think tanks to counter Russian propaganda will help to increase mutual awareness of the societies of Ukraine, the EU and NATO member states, strengthen security, increase trust, and defend common values.

The European Union can get an added value by including Ukraine to its system of rapid identification of disinformation, which will allow Brussels to respond more effectively to information threats, because most of them come from Russia, and Ukraine is the main target of its attacks. Information products produced by StratCom East Task Force should be translated into all languages of the EU countries for better distribution. Their translation into the languages of the partner countries, including Ukrainian, contributes to their dissemination in Ukraine. In parallel, the EU should continue supporting independent Ukrainian media through technical assistance, trainings and exercises.

At the national level, Ukraine should distinguish the direction of the temporarily occupied territories. With the assistance and support of the EU and NATO, it is advisable to develop a communication strategy for them, which should be part of the process of return and reintegration of these territories. Ukraine can use NATO experience in returning territories which are temporarily controlled by illegal armed

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38: (<https://www.kas.de/veranstaltungen/detail/-/content/ukraine-nato-nichtmilitaerische-zusammenarbeit-als-gemeinsame-antwort-auf-hybride-bedroehunge>)

groups to government control and guaranteeing the social security of the local population and internally displaced persons. A communication strategy should be based on public confidence to central and local authorities and international organizations, in particular, the EU and NATO. At the same time, Ukraine can share with the EU and NATO its experience in strategic communications in the combat zone in the East of Ukraine and countering information threats in the context of non-conventional and armed aggression.

Ukraine is developing strategic communications, but they should become one of the critical areas of activity and be perceived in Ukraine not as a public relations campaign, but as strategic planning process. Properly built strategic communications with the United States, NATO and the EU on all critical issues will be crucial for Ukraine’s partnership in the Transatlantic and European formats.

## Conclusions

The development and accessibility of the media, social networks and personal communications have made it easier for the aggressor to influence social activities, as creation of a protective shield for the society of a victim state has become more difficult. The aggressor is not considered as an open enemy, but it disguises its actions as “taking care” of specific groups of people and “special” regions. Instead, the leadership of a victim state and its patriots are portrayed as a “war party” in the aggressor’s media. Also, using mass media and disinformation in the international arena, the aggressor creates an image of Ukraine as a state, in which “civil conflict” takes place, but the aggressor acts as a “peacemaker”. All this hinders the active and effective resistance of the state institutions to the aggression.

In the context of Russia’s hybrid war against Ukraine, when society became the object of attacks, effective counteraction can be achieved only through close cooperation with the public, especially civil society organizations, increasing confidence in its actions and informing about the situation in and around the country. In other words, it is essential to develop strategic communications.

A shield that should protect the Ukrainian people from hybrid threats from Russia requires Ukraine to strengthen internal unity, associated, in particular, with a vast truthful public awareness of sensitive topics, including historical ones, which aggressor uses or can use to achieve its goals. Therefore, non-governmental organizations, experts and academics, independent media should be involved in ensuring the security of society and the development of sustainable strategic communications.

Intuitively protecting themselves from external expansion, the Ukrainian society and state structures have got the experience of development of communications. The entire population of the country joined the defense by creating, developing and deepening ties with security and civil governmental structures that reached its peak in 2014. However, over time, this involvement began to decrease because citizens gradually returned to everyday life. At this stage, the priority task was to create a functioning system of strategic communications in the state, which can be assisted by the European Union and NATO.

With the support of the EU and NATO, Ukraine is working out the mechanisms of strategic communications in the state, using their experience, knowledge

and technical assistance. These two organizations are not standstill. They are developed internally and interact with each other on the principles of mutual complementarities. Threats to Ukraine, the EU and NATO are similar, and their source of origin is the Russian Federation. Therefore, Ukraine must deepen cooperation on strategic communications with each organization separately and in the context of their mutual cooperation.



## **Strategic communications in the focus of Ukraine – EU – NATO cooperation under the present conditions**

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