

The political effects of migration-related fake news, disinformation and conspiracy theories in Europe

Attila Juhász

Patrik Szicherle

Budapest, 2017

Contents

- Introduction..... 3
- Key findings 4
- 1. Theoretical frames..... 5
- 2. Discourses on migration 5
- 3. The role of anti-immigration and pro-Russian propaganda 7
- 4. Case examples 9
 - 4.1 False context..... 9
 - 4.1.1 Criminal statistics 9
 - 4.1.2 Sweden, the “rape capital” of Europe..... 10
 - 4.2. Misleading content..... 12
 - 4.2.1. Hardliner immigration policy and border checks 12
 - 4.3 Fabricated content 16
 - 4.3.1 The German government knew about the refugee crisis in advance 16
 - 4.3.2 George Soros behind the refugee crisis 17
- 5. Russian influence and fake news: The “Lisa case”: 20
- 6. Policy debates on migration, fake news and potential solutions 23
 - 6.1 Legal solutions 23
 - 6.2 Self-regulation, civilian initiatives..... 25
 - 6.3 Facebook’s “fake news” filter..... 26
 - 6.4 Fact-checking websites..... 28
 - 6.5 Wikipedia – Wikitribune 28
 - 6.6 The role of mainstream media 29
 - 6.7 Terrorism and responsibility..... 29
 - 6.8 The effects of fake news filters and reframing topics 30
 - 6.9 Education might still prove to be the best solution 31
- 7. Conclusion 32

Introduction

Claiming that the world has entered a post-truth age is slowly becoming a cliché for political scientists. An increasing number of them believe that fake news and disinformation being disseminated to the public hinder normal political discourse. Angela Merkel also referred¹ to the dangers of post-factual politics, and Barack Obama stated² after the 2016 US election that fake news and conspiracy theories have the potential to undermine democracy. CBS television reported³ on an author disseminating fake news and conspiracy theories boasting about his fake news making it possible for Donald Trump to win the elections. According to a study by BuzzFeed,⁴ more people read fake news on the campaign spreading on Facebook than leading news of mainstream media.

The most common explanation claims that the increasing influence of fake news can be traced back primarily to technological developments. According to this, there have always been fake news, but today they have a larger role because the internet and especially social media create bubbles for world views in which not even the most primitive lies and conspiracy theories are debunked due to a lack of critical voices.

Other approaches also direct attention to political motivations. For instance, Peter Pomerantsev, the Ukrainian author⁵ of the book on the operation of the Putin-regime, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible*, believes that politicians do not care if they tell the truth anymore. Thus, it is not fake news or the lies of politicians that concerns him but the fact that political actors nowadays seem not to even make efforts to give an impression of the truth. They do feel obliged to do so, as voters do not punish them for their lies. Politics – says Pomerantsev – increasingly resembles a reality show, where the popularity of politicians is determined by their personality and the feelings they evoke instead of legitimacy and especially not rationality and the respect for facts.

In this study, we analyse the public discourse about international migration. This is a globally relevant topic, the discussion of which is characterised by the use of fake news, disinformation and conspiracy theories all over the world. International migration has also been the favoured topic of populist political forces, and this has become even more characteristic of them in the wake of the 2015 migration crisis. In the following, we introduce a range of case studies on migration-related fake news and disinformation categorised based on the misinformation method used in them, and, additionally, we also discuss what kind of counter-measures and efforts have been implemented recently.

¹ 'Angela Merkels Neues Modewort - Was Bitte Bedeutet "postfaktisch"?', *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, accessed 14 May 2017, http://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/angela-merkels-neues-modewort-was-bitte-bedeutet.2156.de.html?dram:article_id=366689.

² Olivia Solon, 'Barack Obama on Fake News: "We Have Problems" If We Can't Tell the Difference', *The Guardian*, 18 November 2016, sec. Media, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/nov/17/barack-obama-fake-news-facebook-social-media>.

³ Shanika Gunaratna, 2016, and 1:06 Pm, 'Facebook Fake News Creator Claims He Put Trump in White House', accessed 14 May 2017, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-election-facebook-fake-news-creator-paul-horner-claims-responsibility/>.

⁴ Craig Silverman, 'This Analysis Shows How Viral Fake Election News Stories Outperformed Real News On Facebook', *BuzzFeed*, accessed 14 May 2017, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/viral-fake-election-news-outperformed-real-news-on-facebook>.

⁵ 'Why We're Post-Fact', *Granta Magazine*, 20 July 2016, <https://granta.com/why-were-post-fact/>.

Key findings

- The public's mood pushed political actors to the same direction regarding migration policy despite the fact that all countries face different issues and even within countries there are no unified immigrant communities. As a result, dumbing down these complex problems to the level of a cultural issue raises the question of whether this approach helps manage the social concerns connected to migration. The political conflict between the protection of minorities and the recognition of human rights and the nationality, ethnicity or culture-based majority has systemic importance. In the name of their capability to act, governments relegate human rights and procedural norms liberal democracies are built on to secondary importance. **Certain governments use migration to reshape the political system, even to transform a liberal democracy into an autocracy.**
- **The topic of migration also has geopolitical significance.** It is exploited and used by anti-immigration and pro-Russian propaganda to support the Kremlin's geopolitical objectives. **Pro-Russian propaganda media is in large part responsible for the dissemination of migration-related fake news, which fit the pattern of anti-immigration propaganda in general and represent Russian interests in particular.** The topic of migration is suitable to disrupt European unity and shake EU citizens' confidence in European institutions. Russia's national interest is the dissolution of the EU to be able to take advantage of relatively weak EU member states. The Putin-regime thus uses its propaganda media to support the narratives of pro-Russian, anti-EU populist political forces. **Anti-immigration and pro-Russian propaganda repeats and reinforces the narratives of such political parties and contrasts the allegedly stable and peaceful Russia with the ailing West.**
- Fake news and anti-immigrant propaganda underpin the European far right's political vision on immigration: cultural war, the impossibility of integration and all immigrants being public security threats are all views featured both in anti-EU parties' rhetoric and the articles on pro-Russian propaganda sites. **Disinformation methods therefore help propaganda outlets support the immigration policy of far-right parties and they are also perfectly suitable for delegitimising the very foundations of the current European system.**
- Those who disseminate fake news have a wide range of tools at their disposal to misinform their audience ranging from satire to fabricated content. The false context method involves disinformation outlets publishing correct data on a pick-and-choose basis, only selecting the pieces that underpin their views. Misleading information allows disinformation outlets to publish available facts in a way that helps them define an issue on their terms. Fabricated content is 100% false information solely intended to cause harm. **In some cases, fake news articles forged on the basis on any misinformation tool can be used by Russian secret services as a part of active measures implemented to advance Russia's foreign policy goals.**
- The issue of fake news has become the focus of much attention in the wake of the US presidential election in 2016. Since then, significant efforts have been undertaken to counter the influence of disinformation. Legal solutions to ban outlets spreading fake news are harshly criticised by experts due to the such measures restricting the freedom of speech, but anti-hate speech legislation may offer a legal remedy. Some of the most promising initiatives are self-regulation measures implemented by media giants such as Facebook and Google, aimed at filtering out disinformation and cut the financial resources of disinformation outlets. Nevertheless, educating the youth on assessing the credibility of information they read on the internet might prove to be the best solution to restrict the influence of Russian propaganda.

1. Theoretical frames

Moral panic theories give the starting point of our approach, which were born out of the social, cultural and political conflicts of the 1960s. These theories attempt to interpret the “panic reaction” of majority societies to “deviant” groups or cultures they consider to constitute a threat to them. This interpretation panic, as a public phenomenon, is a conscious feeling of being threatened in connection with a given group (in our case the refugees or immigrants) threatening the idealised order and values of a society.⁶ Moral panic refers specifically to the threat to the given society’s central values and norms. However, pertinent theories explain that the formulation of threats and societies’ responses to them are both controlled by so-called “moral entrepreneurs,” and the reactions actually result in solutions given to a certain situation by those in power tailored to the dominant ideologies. The central categories are defined by hegemonic groups who have societal control over morality, panic and deviance. Recent studies have expanded the circle of moral entrepreneurs: while previously this group primarily included the state, media and religious institutions, today similar functions can be fulfilled by social movements and comparable interest groups as well.

This theoretical approach suits the topic of migration quite well, as political campaigns building on it often try to exploit basic fears. This is what makes it possible to talk increasingly about the technical-securitization of the issue. The media plays a crucial role in the construction of the danger, and especially the new media (e.g., blogs, social networks, etc.), which articulated the societal discourse within the new structure of publicity, by giving an ever-expanding space to fake news and conspiracy theories.

2. Discourses on migration

Migration-related fake news, disinformation and conspiracy theories are connected to the not even remotely new political discourse on international migration, and they have an effect through this. In several migratory target countries, the current debate on migration has a precedent such as the case of the Danish caricatures or the Swiss mosques, the French and Belgian burqa-debate, the Sarrazin-debate in Germany, the issue of the terror attack against Charlie Hebdo and other European attacks, the migration crisis escalating in 2015, and, most recently, the American debate on Donald Trump’s immigration policy.

All these indicated the strengthening of the right-wing populist new wave building on anti-immigrant sentiments well in advance. The political forces belonging to these groups do not care about solutions to questions raised by migration, they are only concerned with attaining political power. This is not a new phenomenon either, the first wave of these forces came in the 1970s in Europe, and this political stream has been a challenge to mainstream forces ever since. The discursive strategies of populist political actors on migration build on securitization and protecting culture. Their main topics are: border protection, the terror threat, criminality, the situation of women and the criticism of multiculturalism.

One of the defining layers of the migratory discourse is the public debate on policy. In this regard, an increasing number of politicians and opinion-formers announced the failure of multiculturalism with the obvious goal to open the gates to a new migration and integration policy. However, this rhetorical tool carries considerable risks regarding its social and political effects, while we cannot talk about actual new policy solutions and long-term visions. As a consequence of securitization,

⁶ László Stachó and Bálint Molnár, *Médiaszerek: Tények, Mítoszok, Viták* (Budapest: Századvég, 2009).

migration policies have been used to implement tougher requirements for immigration, stronger selection processes and improving the protection of borders. However, the effects of these are highly questionable. Restricting immigration has been a several-decade-long effort in Europe, which defined immigration policies since the 1970s – mostly without success. This is because the state can rarely influence the dynamics of migratory systems, the consequences of guest worker schemes and colonial empires, and the necessities of labour markets. More restrictions actually generally result in immigrants turning to illegal means, creating a sort of vicious cycle, which gives further impetus to demanding more restrictions.

The second layer of migratory discourses are party political debates, what we may call daily politics. The opinion of political actors on this issue can determine how they are evaluated, their place on the political power field and their ideological classification. Furthermore, the public follows these debates. Regarding party politics, the most important thing on the supply side is not what someone says but rather the ownership of the topic. The advance of anti-immigration populist parties from the 1970s onwards originates mainly in these forces taking over the issue. In terms of demand, Oesh found in a study back in 2008 that in the majority of European countries the presence of immigrants does not primarily generate support for populist parties because there is a competition for welfare but mainly due to the desire to protect national identity and cultural protectionism. This proved to be true in Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Norway, Poland and Slovenia as well. According to the data gathered by the European Social Survey (ESS)⁷, these findings have held true ever since in the majority of European countries. According to Political Capital's ESS-based Right-Wing Extremism Index (DEREX)⁸, the social demand for anti-immigration stances is growing in Europe. The proportion of those with extremely exclusionary views increased the most in three states from the Visegrád Group. In Hungary this value jumped from 45 to 54%, in the Czech Republic it rose from 32 to 39% and in Poland it increased from 18 to 25%. Among the countries that took part in this study, the weight of extremely anti-immigration stances was over 30% in Hungary (54), Lithuania (43), Estonia (41), the Czech Republic (39) and Portugal (31), in countries where experiences with immigrants are less frequent, while cultural fears are higher.

The discourse of migration has a far larger importance in politics that itself and party politics would warrant. The debates on immigration, in symbolic terms, are not about immigrants but rather about the culture and national identity of receiving societies. This is the third layer of migratory discourses, which, characteristically, – even though it is generally about the social integration of immigrants – ultimately focuses on the differences between cultures. At the same time, it does not consider culture as a dynamic process but rather as an unchangeable state, practically locking the individual into his own culture⁹. One often not well-thought-out trait of debates on immigration is that sharply contradictory stances both consider the absolutisation of culture as their starting point, on the one hand interpreting multiculturalism as incomparable cultures living besides each other and, on the other hand, promoting the primacy of completely exclusionary, culturally homogenous nation states. This is especially dangerous when the crises in certain Near and Middle Eastern countries further aggravate increasing fears of Islam immigration in Europe.

⁷ <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>

⁸ Political Capital created its Demand for Right-Wing Extremism Index (DEREX) based on the databases of the European Social Survey (ESS) in 2010, which has been used and quoted by numerous domestic and foreign researchers since then. DEREX is a value given in percentage points: it indicates the ratio of respondents who could be receptive to far-right ideologies and values and political actions connected to those in a given society based on their attitude and value patterns.

http://politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article_read=1&article_id=315

⁹ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Etnicitás És Nacionalizmus – Antropológiai Perspektívák* (Gondolat, 2008).

The fact that the public mood defines migration policy-related decisions pushed political actors in the same direction, although different receiving countries face different issues in terms of immigration, and even within the countries the situation of every migratory group is different, as there could be large discrepancies between individual group of migrants as well. Therefore, it is an important question if dumbing down this set of issues to the level of a cultural problem helps managing the social problems connected to the integration of immigrants or even the understanding of these issues.

Moreover, it has systemic importance that the protection of minorities and minority opinions, the recognition of human rights politically conflicts with the will of the majority built on a national, ethnic or cultural basis in the frames of migration. In the name of governments' capability to act human rights and procedural norms considered to be the bases of liberal democracies can be relegated to secondary importance referring to the democratic will of the public and to a kind of "special situation". Certain governments can thus use the case of migration to reshape the political system, even to transform a liberal democracy into an autocracy.

3. The role of anti-immigration and pro-Russian propaganda

Besides its systemic relevance, the topic of migration has geopolitical significance, too. Russia operates multiple English-language media (such as RT and Sputnik) in order to give a platform to anti-immigration and anti-EU politicians and opinions, and make these "products" available to the European population. Migration is a highly divisive topic in Europe, which the Kremlin is able to exploit to stir up anti-establishment and anti-EU sentiments in the European states. Naturally, this topic is not only a tool in the hands of the Kremlin, anti-immigration parties and the media controlled by them, as well as other actors within the ranks of civil society, and some European governments also try to capitalise on migration. In Europe, pro-Russian propaganda media are responsible for a considerable portion of migration-related fake news. The tools and tactics of these channels fit the patterns of anti-immigration propaganda in general, with the exception that pro-Russian propaganda media uses the issue of migration to represent Russian geopolitical interests as well. The topic is suitable to disrupt European unity and to shake the confidence of European voters in their governments and European institutions. Dividing the European Union's member states on a number of topics, such as the sanctions against Russia or the energy union, would allow Russia to continue to harvest some of the economic benefits brought about by its relations with Europe. By generating debates among EU member states, the Kremlin is able to weaken the Union and hinder the prospects of further European integration. Consequently, EU member states will continue to have weaker negotiating position against the Kremlin, once again inspiring to take on the role of a global power, in areas such as energy policy. To achieve this goal, the Putin-regime uses the propaganda media at its disposal to support pro-Russian and anti-EU parties.

Just as anti-immigration propaganda in general, the pro-Russian propaganda outlets also tend to connect the European migration crisis with terrorism,¹⁰ criminality and the decline of the Western world. First, they securitize the issue with this tool and, second, they create a stark contrast between Russia, depicted as well-organised, peaceful and strong, and the weak, chaotic West declining into a state of civil war.¹¹

¹⁰ 'How pro-Kremlin Outlets Abuse the Tragedy of Terror | EU vs Disinformation', accessed 14 May 2017, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/how-pro-kremlin-outlets-abuse-the-tragedy-of-terror/>.

¹¹ Péter Krekó et al., *The Weaponisation of Culture: Kremlin's Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Europe* (Budapest: Political Capital, 2017).

Anti-immigration and pro-Russian propaganda media has a wide range of disinformation methods at its disposal. First Draft News collected seven tools capable of misinforming the public,¹² and the following case studies will show examples of how some of these methods work in practice. The scale ranges from satire to completely fabricated stories, conspiracy theories. The content of the articles is sometimes irrelevant to their titles, the photos used might be fake, but the manipulation of available information and putting such information into a false context are also often used tools on anti-immigration and pro-Russian websites.

Anti-immigration and pro-Russian propaganda underpins the European far right's political vision on immigration: it talks about cultural war, the impossibility of integration and, additionally, it promotes a picture of all immigrants being a threat to public security and constituting a terror threat to the population of receiving countries. Through this, propaganda raises migration into the national security domain and thus popularise the immigration policies of the pro-Russian far right, which includes the cessation of free movement within the EU, one of the essential pillars of the Union.

¹² 'Fake News. It's Complicated', *StopFake.org*, 25 February 2017, <http://www.stopfake.org/en/fake-news-it-s-complicated/>.

4. Case examples

4.1 False context

The false context method works because readers do not get to know background information that explains, complements the otherwise correct data. Information promoted by anti-immigration and pro-Russian propaganda would provide a much weaker basis for attacking the West for its allegedly failed immigration policies if the target audience had full knowledge of the facts. Familiarity with the complete background of an issue offers a significantly more nuanced picture, one that still allows for an opportunity to have a balanced debate on immigration.

4.1.1 Criminal statistics

The Hungarian disinformation portal Világlátó and Breitbart reported on German criminal statistics several times.¹³ The possibly Russian secret service-backed Hídfő online portal only mentioned one piece of information from the country's criminal statistics from 2016, namely that the number of immigrants suspected of a crime increased by 52.6% during 2016.¹⁴ In addition, the article details how many "migrants" Germany accommodated in past years, but Hídfő fails to connect the dots: the fact that the number of immigrants suspected committing a crime increased does not automatically mean that a larger proportion of them broke the law than previously.

The report of the German mainstream media outlet FAZ also mentions the growing number of immigrants suspected of committing a crime.¹⁵ Additionally, German Minister of Interior Thomas de Maizière also emphasised that one cannot just gloss over this revelation. The minister admitted that the majority of the perpetrators are young men, but he mentioned that the proportion of criminals in this age group is also higher among Germans. Based on the data, most of the refugees do not commit crimes, most of the cases involve multiple offenders. Furthermore, the minister of interior stressed that the "most vulnerable," such as Syrians, are underrepresented within this group.¹⁶

The police report reveals¹⁷ that the number of crimes committed in Germany increased by 0.7% compared to 2015, but after deducting violations of international law – such as illegal border crossings – from the total the number of cases fell by 0.7%.¹⁸ German authorities count almost 175 thousand suspects among "immigrants" (asylum-seekers, refugees and persons residing in Germany illegally) in total not including international law violations, which amounts to 8.6% of all suspects.¹⁹ The 52.7% increase in the number of suspects between 2015 and 2016 quoted by Hídfő is accurate,

¹³ For example, see: 'Megugrott a Szexuális Erőszakok Száma Németországban – Vajon Mi Lehet Az Oka?', *Világ Látó Hírmagazin*, 24 April 2017, <http://www.vilaglato.info/megugrott-a-szexualis-eroszakok-szama-nemetorszagban-vajon-mi-lehet-az-oka/>; Chris Tomlinson, 'Police Report: Migrant Crime Drastically Increased in 2016', *Breitbart*, 9 April 2017, <http://www.breitbart.com/london/2017/04/09/german-federal-police-migrant-crime-drastically-increased-2016/>.

¹⁴ hidfo.ru, 'Egyre Több Migráns Követ El Bűncselekményt Németországban', *Hídfő*, 25 April 2017, <http://www.hidfo.ru/2017/04/egyre-tobb-migrans-kovet-el-buncselekményt-nemetorszagban/>.

¹⁵ 'Neue Kriminalstatistik: De Maizière weist Pauschalurteile über Flüchtlinge zurück', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 April 2017, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/kriminalitaet/neue-kriminalstatistik-bayern-ist-das-sicherste-bundesland-14985597.html>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ 'Belicht Zur Polizeilichen Kriminalstatistik 2016' (Bundesministerium des Innern, 2017), <http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2017/04/pks-und-pmk-2016.html>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

this means that in 2016 German police suspects 60 200 more immigrants of committing a crime than they did in 2015.²⁰ The situation depicted by propaganda regarding the drastic increase in sexually motivated crime is however untrue: the majority of crimes committed by immigrants are shoplifting and mostly non-violent crimes.²¹ Among those German authorities consider to fall under the term “immigrant” the most criminal offences were committed by Syrians, but they also constitute the largest faction among asylum-seekers by far. The proportion of Syrian citizens in this group was over 35% both in 2015 and 2016.²² Finally, according to Christian Pfeiffer, a criminologist and the former justice minister of Lower Saxony, criminal acts are more likely to be reported to the police in case the attacker is not of German origin, complaints against foreigners are more frequent than those against one’s own ethnic group,²³ which plays a role in the larger increase observed in the number of foreigners suspected of crimes compared to that of Germans.

Consequently, it can be stated that the information shared by Hídfő was grounded in reality and – as the German Minister of Interior admitted - pointed out a real trend. However, the propaganda site did not show the complete picture to the reader, which transfers the pro-Russian far right’s narrative connecting refugees with criminality into a more nuanced issue. It is those fleeing war who are underrepresented among criminals, while the core group of suspects consists of unintegrated men who have no real opportunity to gain a residence permit in Germany.²⁴

To sum up, no matter how hard anti-immigration and pro-Russian propaganda tries to characterize Germany as a nation falling into complete chaos due to the crimes committed by recently arrived immigrants,²⁵ data does not support their claim that it is a nightmare to live in the country.²⁶

4.1.2 Sweden, the “rape capital” of Europe

One of the main narratives of anti-immigration and pro-Russian propaganda regarding Sweden is the high number of rapes in the country, which such news portals link to Sweden’s “open gate” immigration policy.²⁷ The northern country accommodates the highest number of refugees per capita in the world, making it an easy target for the propaganda striving to depict the degradation of the liberal West.²⁸

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² ‘Asyl’ (BAMF, 2017), https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Publikationen/Flyer/flyer-schlueselzahlen-asyl-2016.pdf?__blob=publicationFile.

²³ Deutsche Welle (www.dw.com), ‘Are Refugees More Criminal than the Average German Citizen? | Germany Guide for Refugees | DW | 10.04.2017’, *DW.COM*, accessed 24 May 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/are-refugees-more-criminal-than-the-average-german-citizen/a-38371284>.

²⁴ ‘5 Things We Learned from the Latest German National Crime Report’, 24 April 2017, <https://www.thelocal.de/20170424/5-things-we-learned-from-the-latest-german-national-crime-report>.

²⁵ ‘Németország Migránsválsága: 2060-Ra Eltűnik a Ma Ismert Németország | VilágLátó Hírmagazin’, *Világ Látó Hírmagazin*, 28 April 2017, <http://www.vilaglato.info/nemetország-migransvalsaga-2060-ra-eltunik-a-ma-ismert-nemetország/>.

²⁶ “‘Anything but Dramatic’: What Experts Say about Germany’s Latest Crime Report”, 27 April 2017, <https://www.thelocal.de/20170427/anything-but-dramatic-what-the-new-german-crime-report-really-means>.

²⁷ Matti Huuhtanen, ‘Swedes Scrutinize Open-Door Immigration Policy after Deadly Truck Attack’, *Chicagotribune.com*, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-sweden-truck-attack-suspect-20170408-story.html>.

²⁸ George Arnett, ‘Sweden - the OECD’s Highest per Capita Recipient of Asylum Seekers’, *The Guardian*, 2 December 2014, sec. News, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/dec/02/sweden-oecd-s-highest-per-capita-asylum-seekers-syria>.

The news portal Gates of Vienna explains in a long article why Swedish women are afraid of violent attacks and rape in the country.²⁹ The writer – similarly to the vast majority of anti-immigration and pro-Russian sites – emphasises that the number of rapes committed in Sweden is the highest in Europe. However, the reader does not get to know the full context of this statement. Moreover, the article treats the connection between refugees and rape as completely natural. The Hungarian portal Hídfő followed similar logic when it reported on the data published by the Swedish National Crime Prevention Council,³⁰ the Hungarian site also connects migration with the increasing number of crimes. In addition, the Hungarian pro-government 888.hu³¹ and the Russian state-owned propaganda channel Sputnik International³² reported on the same phenomenon, also basing their argument on the “well-known” statistics. The article on the website called Muslim Statistics must be mentioned here too, which stresses that in 2015 the number of rapes in the country increased by a “staggering” 11.7% compared to 2014.³³

All these reports fail to take factors into account that explain the high number and recent increase of sexually motivated crimes reported in Sweden. First, it is useful to have a look at the website of the National Crime Prevention Council, also referenced by Hídfő, where one can find a subsite dedicated to the problems with international comparisons of criminal statistics.³⁴ The article on the issue makes it clear that there are no international standards for measuring criminality. The Swedish method of compiling such statistics have three peculiarities: in the Swedish statistics every reported case counts as a crime even if it was later found not to be one; in Sweden – unlike most countries – every single crime of the same type committed against an individual is counted as a separate case; and attempts at committing a crime are counted together with successful tries. Special attention must be paid to the second point on the list when explaining why the number of sexually motivated crimes is so high in Sweden: if a woman is raped once every day for ten days by her husband it counts as 10 cases in Sweden, while only as one in most other countries.³⁵

There is also an explanation for the large hike in rape numbers in 2005: the Swedish government changed the legal definition of sexual assault in 2005, consequently, it entailed a far wider range of acts than before.³⁶ Furthermore, a similarly drastic increase in the statistics is observable after 2013, which can also be attributed to a legal amendment further widening the definition of rape.³⁷ It is

²⁹ Baron Bodissey, ‘Totalitarian Sweden’, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://gatesofvienna.blogspot.com/2010/09/totalitarian-sweden.html>.

³⁰ hidfo.ru, ‘Svédország: Két Év Alatt Harmincezer Nőt Ért Szexuális Zaklatás’, *Hídfő*, 12 January 2017, <http://www.hidfo.ru/2017/01/ket-ev-alatt-harmincezer-sved-not-ert-szexualis-zaklatas/>.

³¹ ‘Kiderült, Hogy Miért Svédország a Nemi Erőszak Fellegvára’, *888.hu*, accessed 5 May 2017, <https://888.hu/article-kiderult-hogy-miert-svedorszag-a-nemi-eroszak-fellegvara>.

³² Sputnik, ‘More Swedish Women Haunted by Fears of Rape’, accessed 5 May 2017, <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201701111049464215-swedish-women-rape-fears/>.

³³ Ingrid Carlqvist et al., ‘Islamic Sweden Is Now the World’s Second Largest Rape Nation with a 1,472% Increase in Rapes’, *Muslim Statistics*, 3 July 2015, <https://muslimstatistics.wordpress.com/2015/07/03/islamic-sweden-is-now-the-worlds-second-largest-rape-nation-with-a-1472-increase-in-rapes/>.

³⁴ ‘International Comparisons’, text, accessed 5 May 2017, <https://www.bra.se/bra/bra-in-english/home/crime-and-statistics/international-comparisons.html>.

³⁵ ‘Why Sweden Is NOT the “Rape Capital of the World”’, 21 February 2017, <https://www.thelocal.se/20170221/why-sweden-is-not-the-rape-capital-of-the-world>.

³⁶ Ruth Alexander, ‘Sweden’s Rape Rate under the Spotlight’, *BBC News*, 15 September 2012, sec. Magazine, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19592372>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

without a doubt that the proportion of the victims of sexual assaults rose, especially in cities, but it must also be made clear that the term “sexual assault” includes relatively mild crimes such as indecent exposure and also much more serious ones, such as rape.³⁸ However, it must be observed that the number of people convicted for sexually motivated crimes practically barely changed between 2006 and 2015,³⁹ which shows that the “open gates” immigration policy of Sweden has not influenced the number of sex offenders considerably; therefore, new arrivals did not increase the proportion of sex offenders in the Swedish population.

The connection between immigration and the number of reported offences is hard to trace, as the last study on this issue was published in 2005 by the Swedish state, and back then the recent immigration wave was not even on the horizon, although it is true that at the time statisticians found that foreign-born individuals are four and a half times more likely to commit sexually motivated crimes than the native Swedish population.⁴⁰ However, since 2005 successive Swedish governments have continuously rejected to conduct studies on the connections between crimes and the perpetrators’ country of origin, which might allow for speculation.

All in all, it can be stated that Sweden is in no way the “rape capital” of Europe. The fact that the number of sexually motivated crimes reported in Sweden is the highest in Europe can be explained by statistical and legal reasons, while the alleged connection between immigration and the rising numbers is hard to prove.

4.2. Misleading content

The essence of misleading information is to allow disinformation outlets to publish available facts in a way that helps them define an issue on their terms and to put the issue in an alternative frame. This is a method that for instance helps them support the immigration policy of far-right parties and it is also perfectly suitable for delegitimising the very foundations of the current European system, including the Schengen Agreement and the free movement of people.

4.2.1. Hardliner immigration policy and border checks

The European Union’s immigration policy is often criticised harshly by the propaganda media striving to show that the real goal of the union is to encourage immigrants to come to Europe in order to allow itself to liquidate nation states.

Világlátó⁴¹ deduced its theory from a “report” (actually a resolution) of the European Parliament⁴² and through it the portal also connects migration and terrorism. The writer claims the EU would protect immigrants, extend the definition of refugees to economic migrants and set up legal “migration paths” as part of the efforts to combat human trafficking. The portal also mentions a

³⁸ ‘Rape and Sex Offences’, text, accessed 5 May 2017, <https://www.bra.se/bra/bra-in-english/home/crime-and-statistics/rape-and-sex-offences.html>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ ‘What Is the Truth about Crime and Immigration in Sweden?’, *National Review*, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/445237/sweden-crime-rates-statistics-immigration-trump-fox-news>.

⁴¹ ‘Frontex: A Bevándorlók Között Vegyülnek El a Terroristák’, *Világ Látó Hírmagazin*, 9 April 2017, <http://www.vilaglato.info/frontex-a-bevandorlok-kozott-vegylnek-el-a-terroristak-%e2%80%a2-hirmagazin-eu/>.

⁴² ‘Addressing Refugee and Migrant Movements: The Role of EU External Action - P8_TA-PROV(2017)0124’, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2017-0124+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

report of the European Border and Coast Guard (Frontex),⁴³ which admits that terrorists might have infiltrated Europe with the help of the refugee wave. Breitbart deals with the latter topic in much more detail,⁴⁴ the portal wrote that a “staggering number” of terrorists arrived to Europe according to Frontex, which leads the writer to support the opinion of Nigel Farage on the free movement of people increasing the terror threat level based on this particular piece of information.

Although the article published by Világlátó does not mention which resolution it writes about, it is more than likely that they reported misleadingly on the European Parliament’s resolution adopted on April 5. The member states of the EU are under international obligations to protect refugees, which the resolution mentions, but there is no mention of extending the definition of refugees to economic migrants. The European Parliament does want to restrict human traffickers’ space for manoeuvre, which they would achieve mainly by evaluating whether an individual is eligible for international protection outside of EU borders – for example in the given asylum-seeker’s country of origin. The EP would not consider economic migrants as refugees, instead the institution would strive to strengthen the European Blue Card scheme.⁴⁵ The Blue Card only presents an opportunity to skilled third-country nationals who receive a binding job offer before applying for the card. Moreover, the text adopted by the European Parliament stresses the importance of “circular migration,” which is primarily based on temporary employment, after the end of which the immigrant returns to his country of origin. This “temporary worker” system was popular in the European Union in the 1970s and 1980s, but the circular nature of migration was obstructed by member states when they implemented a range of restrictions, encouraging migrants to opt for permanent settlement.⁴⁶ For instance, up to 1991 Moroccan citizens were free to enter Spain as guest workers, but the introduction of visa obligations prompted former temporary workers to settle permanently and use family reunification to bring over their families, resulting in the expansion of the country’s Moroccan population to over 700 thousand.⁴⁷ Therefore, the EP’s resolution does not encourage mass immigration, it rather tries to offer advice on how to better manage it.

The Frontex report discussed both by Világlátó and Breitbart admits that terrorist and foreign fighters who had joined ISIS arrived to Europe together with asylum-seekers during the refugee crisis. The “staggering” number of terrorist however referred to the number of European jihadist fighters who joined ISIS and not to those who entered Europe. Contrary to the claims of propaganda the real problem was not caused by the lack of internal borders but by the failures in the protection of the EU’s external borders. According to Frontex’s report, the union did not have the necessary capacities to protect its external borders in 2015, while Greece did not have the required number of people to register all asylum-seekers and perform background checks on them as a consequence of austerity measures implemented in the country. Both Breitbart and Világlátó failed to mention that the Frontex study sums up every step the EU took in 2015 to remedy the situation. Moreover, the

⁴³ ‘Annual Risk Analysis for 2016’ (Frontex, 2016), http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annula_Risk_Analysis_2016.pdf.

⁴⁴ Donna Rachel Edmunds, ‘EU Border Agency: 1.8m+ Illegal Migrants in 2015, “Staggering” Number Of Jihadis’, *Breitbart*, 6 April 2016, <http://www.breitbart.com/london/2016/04/06/eu-border-agency-1-8m-illegal-immigrants-2015-staggering-number-jihadis/>.

⁴⁵ ‘EU Blue Card Network - EU Blue Card Eligibility and Conditions’, accessed 5 May 2017, <https://www.apply.eu/BlueCard/>.

⁴⁶ SPIEGEL ONLINE, ‘Myths of Migration: Much of What We Think We Know Is Wrong - SPIEGEL ONLINE - International’, *SPIEGEL ONLINE*, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/eight-myths-about-migration-and-refugees-explained-a-1138053.html>.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

recommendations of the EU's border agency to prevent terrorism concentrate on, for example, stopping illegal arms trafficking and not on re-establishing internal borders within the union.

Consequently, it is fair to blame the EU for not being ready to manage the migration crisis and failing to solve problems for months, which could be exploited even by foreign fighters returning to the EU. However, with the help of misleading information fake news stories show the problem to be bigger than it actually is, while also describing events in a way that suggests the EU's institutions wish to encourage more people to enter European territory and they are helpless against terrorism, even though the truth is the complete opposite of this.

Looking at the measures taken by the European Union since the eruption of the migration crisis one can observe that the EU is concentrating on reducing the number of migrant arrivals rather than encouraging illegal immigrants to come to Europe.⁴⁸ Since the beginning of the crisis, the EU has set up a European Border and Coast Guard, the tasks of which include – among others – training the Libyan coast guard and cooperation with it to allow local authorities to stop migrants leaving for Europe from Libyan shores.⁴⁹ One of the results of these efforts is that the Libyan coast guard managed to return a ship transporting 500 asylum-seekers to Tripoli with the cooperation of Italian colleagues.⁵⁰ Naturally, it is impossible to draw a far-reaching conclusion based on a single successful action, but training the authorities of the North African country and cooperation with them could, with time, even achieve considerable results in decreasing the number of asylum-seekers reaching Italy.

In addition, the EU is working on compiling a joint list of “safe countries” as well, which would facilitate the evaluation of the asylum-applications of citizens from the countries on the list and the return of rejected asylum-seekers to their countries of origin.⁵¹ EU leaders also decided on reaching Migration Partnership Framework agreements with third countries migrants originate from or ones that are used as transit countries, and these agreements include provisions on the third countries facilitating the repatriation of their own citizens.⁵² The most important step forward in terms of expulsions of rejected asylum-seekers was reaching an agreement with Afghanistan, which for instance resulted in Germany starting to return rejected Afghan asylum-seekers home.⁵³ One additional measure taken in this area is the EU Action Plan on Return, which aims at expediting the deportation of rejected asylum-seekers by making the policies of member states more efficient and,

⁴⁸ ‘A European Agenda on Migration: State of Play March 2017’ (European Union, 2017), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170302_eam_state_of_play_en.pdf.

⁴⁹ ‘European Border and Coast Guard Agency Launches Today’, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://frontex.europa.eu/news/european-border-and-coast-guard-agency-launches-today-CHIYAp>.

⁵⁰ Dezső András, ‘Ötszáz Migránst Küldött Vissza a Tengeren Az Olasz Parti Órség’, 11 May 2017, http://index.hu/kulfold/2017/05/11/otszaz_migranst_kuldott_vissza_a_tengeren_az_olasz_parti_orseg/.

⁵¹ ‘Asylum: EU List of Safe Countries of Origin to Replace National Lists in 3 Years’, *News | European Parliament*, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20160707IPR36205/asylum-eu-list-of-safe-countries-of-origin-to-replace-national-lists-in-3-years>.

⁵² ‘A European Agenda on Migration: State of Play March 2017’.

⁵³ ‘Germany Deports Rejected Afghan Asylum Seekers’, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/12/germany-deports-afghan-asylum-seekers-161215103512214.html>.

furthermore, the plan also recommends member states to detain rejected asylum-seekers who show signs of trying to fraudulently or violently avoid repatriation.⁵⁴

The EU-Turkey migration deal was successful in decreasing the number of illegal immigrants arriving to Greece⁵⁵ and the EU's leaders also supported the closure of the Balkan route,⁵⁶ which are two steps that clearly aim at decreasing migratory pressure and brought about harsh criticism from human rights organisations.⁵⁷

Furthermore, EU leadership launched programmes in origin countries aimed at improving the living conditions of the local population to further decrease incentives for asylum-seekers to set off for Europe.⁵⁸ Making it impossible for human traffickers to operate has been included in the aforementioned programmes, and it is the general goal of the EU as well, ever since the start of the refugee crisis. The union wishes to restrict people smuggling operations by, first, breaking their business model⁵⁹ – improving the socio-economic environment of origin countries and expanding legal migration routes are part of this effort – and, second, by the operations conducted by Frontex.⁶⁰

Moreover, it is hard to blame the EU for the failures of its member states. One of such failures is the so-called “wave through” approach, which involves a member state, for instance Hungary, simply allowing asylum-seekers to pass through its territory.⁶¹ The European Commission spoke out against this approach very early in the crisis and asked member states to stop following it.⁶² Additionally, the Commission was even willing to accept reinstating the Dublin Regulations for Greece – despite Frontex reporting that its authorities are overburdened – and allowing Germany to return asylum-seekers registered in Greece to the Southern European country.⁶³ It is just as important to point out

⁵⁴ ‘European Commission - PRESS RELEASES - Press Release - European Agenda on Migration: Commission Presents New Measures for an Efficient and Credible EU Return Policy’, accessed 5 May 2017, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-350_en.htm.

⁵⁵ ‘Malta PM Wants Turkey-Style Migrant Deals with Other Med Countries’, *EURACTIV.com*, 13 January 2017, <http://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/malta-pm-wants-turkey-style-migrant-deals-with-other-med-countries/>.

⁵⁶ ‘EU Summit Set to Close the Balkan Route to Migrants’, *EURACTIV.com*, 7 March 2016, <http://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/eu-summit-set-to-close-the-balkan-route-to-migrants/>.

⁵⁷ ‘EU-Turkey Deal: A Shameful Stain on the Collective Conscience of Europe’, accessed 5 May 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/03/eu-turkey-deal-a-shameful-stain-on-the-collective-conscience-of-europe/>.

⁵⁸ ‘Malta Declaration by the Members of the European Council on the External Aspects of Migration: Addressing the Central Mediterranean Route - Consilium’, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/01/03-malta-declaration/>.

⁵⁹ ‘European Commission - PRESS RELEASES - Press Release - Commission Announces New Migration Partnership Framework: Reinforced Cooperation with Third Countries to Better Manage Migration’, accessed 5 May 2017, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-2072_en.htm.

⁶⁰ ‘A European Agenda on Migration: State of Play March 2017’.

⁶¹ ‘Bus Fleet in Hungary Carries Defiant Migrants to Austria; Exhaustion, Jubilation at Border’, *Star Tribune*, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://www.startribune.com/refugees-on-train-police-in-2nd-day-of-standoff-in-hungary/324309801/>.

⁶² ‘Implementing the European Agenda on Migration: Progress on Priority Actions’, accessed 5 May 2017, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-271_en.htm.

⁶³ ‘Commission Accepts That Germany Sends Migrants back to Greece’, *EURACTIV.com*, 6 September 2016, <http://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/commission-accepts-that-germany-sends-migrants-back-to-greece/>.

that the EU has gone to great lengths to force third countries to take back their citizens deported from Europe and make the deportation process more efficient. These efforts are markedly important because the perpetrator of the Berlin terror attack in December 2016, Anis Amri, faced deportation twice, but the first time he managed to escape Italy and enter Germany, while the second time the lack of cooperation on the matter by Tunisian authorities and the errors of German ones allowed him to attack the Christmas market in Berlin.⁶⁴

Therefore, the EU does not have an “open gates” immigration policy in any way, anti-immigration and pro-Russian propaganda websites only attempt to convince their readership about the opposite with misleading information and disingenuous presentation of EU documents. Based on the measures taken by the European Union one can conclude that the goal of the community is to decrease immigration to the smallest level possible without breaching any international obligation of the EU.

4.3 Fabricated content

Fabricated content is entirely false, its specific goal is to deceive people and cause harm. The method is perfectly suitable to question the legitimacy of the European Union and forge ties between the policies of mainstream leaders and foreign powers and individuals.

4.3.1 The German government knew about the refugee crisis in advance

An article of the propaganda site Világlátó declares that “Merkel’s plan has been unveiled!”⁶⁵ The writer published the story of a “polish family” that bought a house in Bavaria to later convert it into a hotel. At the time, the German government allegedly already knew about the fact that the property might be set on fire in the future despite the fact that there were no immigrants living there back then, which is why it forced the owners to renovate the house following very tough fire safety regulations. According to the conspiracy theory, the German government was actively looking for large apartments to house the refugees as early as 2011. The question of how the German government knew about the refugee wave that would arrive to Europe in the future is only answered by a mysterious picture entitled “Soros’s map to help migrants”.⁶⁶ The immigration office sent a purchase offer to the “family” in 2014, but the Poles only sold the house when refugees had already been accommodated in settlements around the building, which then did not worth much because nobody wanted to buy property around these settlements. The public harshly opposed the presence of migrants, but in Germany the fine for “hate speech” is EUR 1200, therefore German citizens rather keep quiet and accept whatever happens to them – writes Világlátó.

The article is actually the Hungarian translation of the article of the aforementioned Gates of Vienna portal.⁶⁷ This text also reveals that the “settlement” in question used to be a popular tourist destination, but since migrants were taken there the place has turned into a pile of “trash,” which is a characteristic of the whole of “Muslim” Germany: the norm today is theft, vandalism and trash in the country.

⁶⁴ Kate Connolly, ‘Anis Amri: From Young Drifter to Europe’s Most Wanted Man’, *The Guardian*, 23 December 2016, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/23/anis-amri-from-young-drifter-to-europes-most-wanted-man>.

⁶⁵ ‘Ezt Mindenkinek Tudnia Kell! Merkelről Lehullt a Lepel! Óriási Botrány van Kirobbanóban! | Világlátó Hírmagazin’, *Világ Látó Hírmagazin*, 23 April 2017, <http://www.vilaglato.info/ezt-mindenkinek-tudnia-kell-merkelrol-lehullt-a-lepel-oriasi-botrany-van-kirobbanoban/>.

⁶⁶ ‘Transborder Map 2012’, 2012, http://www.noborder.org/images/transborder_map_front.jpg.

⁶⁷ ‘Advance Requisition of Bavarian “Refugee” Housing — Starting in 2011 | Gates of Vienna’, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://gatesofvienna.net/2017/01/advance-requisition-of-bavarian-refugee-housing-starting-in-2011/>.

The story is a complete fabrication, it offers no proof for its claims about the German state buying apartments for refugees after 2011. The explanation for the starting date, 2011, seems to be that the renovation took place around that time, although this is not stated explicitly in the text, and even back then Germany required the hotel to comply with tough fire safety regulations, because it knew there would be attempts to set refugee housing on fire in the future.⁶⁸ In reality, practically all European hotels have to comply with vigorous fire safety regulations due to the fact that in case of a fire hundreds of people's lives can be in danger. Furthermore, it is essentially impossible to confirm the story in any way, as not even the name of the settlement that was transformed from a beauty spot to "trash" is disclosed.

The basis of the conspiracy theory could be the fact that German government did rent hotel rooms and whole hotels to accommodate refugees, against which a part of the local population protested.⁶⁹ However, the story about the German government purchasing homes for refugees as early as 2011 is definitely a conspiracy, they presumably had to rent hotel rooms exactly because they did not foresee the large number of refugees who arrived to the country. Furthermore, tourism did not "flourish" as much before the refugee crisis, the hotels that housed refugees had not been as profitable in the years before the crisis, those arriving to Bavarian settlements spent less nights there than previously.⁷⁰ Moreover, there is absolutely no evidence that price of Bavarian properties collapsed after the arrival of refugees, for instance in München, which accepted thousands of asylum-seekers, housing prices have practically been on the rise ever since 2014.⁷¹

4.3.2 George Soros behind the refugee crisis

According to pro-Kremlin websites, George Soros is not only the man responsible for the eruption of the civil war in Syria,⁷² which he achieved through organisations financed by his Open Society Foundations (OSF), but also a philanthropist who controls the migration crisis, ready to bring down borders between member states. The main evidence for Soros's activities supporting migrants is the "migrant guide" found by a reporter of Sky News in 2015, which is distributed by an organisation benefitting from financial support from OSF. According to an article of Zero Hedge, Soros is performing such activities to profit from them, he would like to push Europe into social and economic chaos and benefit from it. Based on the conspiracy theory, the other goal of Soros is getting rid of nation states and form a global governance structure in their place.

Another propaganda site claims that Soros is following the "melting pot" theory, which equals to the dissolution of nation states and their unification.⁷³ The businessman allegedly wants to use the settlement of refugees in Europe to dissolve nation states and create the United States of Europe. George Soros organises immigration through the organisations financed by him, one article for

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ 'Welcome to Germany: Inside the Bavarian Refugee Hotel', accessed 5 May 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/09/germany-bavarian-refugee-hotel-160906102358425.html>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ 'Immobilienpreise Im Süden Deutschlands: Kein Ende Der Preissteigerung in Sicht', accessed 5 May 2017, <https://www.drklein.de/immobilienpreise-im-sueden-deutschlands-kein-ende-der-preissteigerung-in-sicht.html>.

⁷² 'How George Soros Is Playing Both Ends Of The Syrian Refugee Chaos', *MintPress News*, 15 January 2016, <http://www.mintpressnews.com/212798-2/212798/>.

⁷³ VilágLátó, 'Soros: "Magyarország a Legerősebb Akadály a Tervem Eléréséhez!" Az Is Kiderült, Miért!', *Magyar Közösség*, 8 May 2017, <https://magyarkozosseg.net/soros-magyarorszag-a-legerosebb-akadaly-a-tervem-elerehez-az-is-kiderult-miert/>.

example claims that Frontex admitted in an official statement that these organisations aid human traffickers.⁷⁴ Finally, Hungary is in the way of the American philanthropist's plan because the shortest route for migrants to reach Europe goes through the country.

Accordingly, propaganda sites depict a picture of George Soros in which he wants to settle millions of migrants in Europe either because of his economic interests or his hatred of nation states. The guide mentioned by Zero Hedge cannot be tied to OSF and as one activist distributing it told Sky News the guide only helps ensure that migrants are safe throughout their journeys, and they would set off for Europe even if it did not exist.⁷⁵ There is no evidence of the organisation distributing the guide, Welcome to Europe, getting money from Open Society Foundations and, moreover, the writer cannot prove that George Soros wishes to implement his preferred global governance structure by starting a European economic crisis, as Europe's answer to large economic crises has traditionally been a turn to nationalist parties, protectionist economic policies and sealed off nation states. Therefore, starting an economic crisis would be a highly counter-productive enterprise for Mr. Soros.

According to Russian propaganda, George Soros uses his organisations to achieve his goal and a good proof for this is Frontex's statement confirming that NGOs do help immigrants. However, this claim is also misleading: the European border agency only said that their activities encourage human traffickers to "force even more migrants on to unseaworthy boats" heading towards Italy.⁷⁶

Additionally, George Soros himself summed up his vision on migration in seven points, which do not serve the purpose of encouraging illegal immigration at all, but the exact opposite of that.⁷⁷ Furthermore, Soros, the man who according to propaganda is attempting to introduce global governance through promoting migration, declares that he is against the idea of mandatory quotas because it benefits neither the refugees nor the receiving countries,⁷⁸ which makes it rather hard to accuse him of trying to introduce global governance by admitting that he wishes to leave the right of deciding on the settlement of refugees in a given territory in the hands of the receiving nation state. The main points of Soros that serve the purpose of stopping illegal immigration are the following:⁷⁹

1. The Union should accept refugees directly from frontline countries, and if it was willing to take as few as 300 thousand refugees a year it would improve the chances of asylum-seekers with well-grounded claims enough to deter them from setting off for Europe. Entering European territory would "disqualify them from legal admission".
2. The EU must restore control over its borders, because the chaotic events that have taken place as a result of the problems of border protection alienate public opinion.
3. EU countries should implement common processes in border protection, the evaluation of asylum applications and refugee resettlement, as these steps would deter them from migration within Europe.
4. The EU should finance job creation programmes in Africa to reduce incentives for migration.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ 'Sky Finds "Handbook" For EU-Bound Migrants', *Sky News*, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://news.sky.com/story/sky-finds-handbook-for-eu-bound-migrants-10346437>.

⁷⁶ Patrick Wintour Diplomatic editor, 'NGO Rescues off Libya Encourage Traffickers, Says EU Borders Chief', *The Guardian*, 27 February 2017, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/27/ngo-rescues-off-libya-encourage-traffickers-eu-borders-chief>.

⁷⁷ George Soros, 'Saving Refugees to Save Europe', *Project Syndicate*, 12 September 2016, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/comprehensive-european-refugee-plan-by-george-soros-2016-09>.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

5. George Soros rejects the idea of mandatory quotas, because they force immigrants on countries that do not want them and immigrants would have to live where they have no intention to.⁸⁰ This suggestion alone is enough to debunk the claims of propaganda sites regarding Soros's intention to form a United States of Europe by settling migrants in the continent, because even in the world of Russian propaganda the American businessman would have to support settling "migrants" in all EU member states to achieve his goal.

It is obvious that these measures are not about encouraging mass immigration, but about managing migration. It must be added that if the union was willing to take in refugees directly from the frontline countries the refugees would not only be less motivated to start the costly and long journey but the EU itself could perform US-style background checks on asylum-seekers to filter out terrorists from applicants. This method has been highly successful in America: since September 11, 2001, 750 thousand refugees have been relocated to the United States and not a single one has been detained for terrorism-related offences.⁸¹ As stated above, Frontex itself admitted that it is practically impossible to monitor asylum-seekers entering European territory; thus, the recommendations of George Soros would actually benefit the EU.

⁸⁰ George Soros, 'Bringing Europe's Migration Crisis Under Control', *Project Syndicate*, 10 April 2016, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/surge-funding-european-refugee-crisis-by-george-soros-2016-04>.

⁸¹ Alex Altman, 'This Is How the Syrian Refugee Screening Process Works', *Time*, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://time.com/4116619/syrian-refugees-screening-process/>.

5. Russian influence and fake news: The “Lisa case”:

The so-called “Lisa case” involved a 13-year-old girl of German and Russian origin who went missing for more than a day. When Lisa was found she told the police she had been raped and beaten by three Middle-Eastern men who only let her go after more than 30 hours.⁸² This story was first published by a Russian TV channel that claimed the police is unwilling to start investigating the case and convinced Lisa to say she seduced those men.⁸³ In reality, authorities started investigating the crime, which proved to be unsatisfactory for Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov: on a press conference he said “It’s clear that the girl did not disappear voluntarily for 30 hours”⁸⁴ and expressed hope that “‘migration problems’ wouldn’t drive authorities to ‘paint over reality with political correctness’”.⁸⁵ Lisa finally admitted to having made up the entire story in the presence of policemen and her family, she most likely spent the time at the home of a 19-year-old male friend.⁸⁶ Russian propaganda media however did not delete or modify its articles on the Lisa case they published on the internet even after the police had described the real events in detail.⁸⁷

The report by the Russian state TV spread with remarkably quickness through Russian propaganda media all the way to mainstream outlets and the social media campaign following it managed to mobilise the Russian minority in Germany and the German far right as well. The consequence of this activity was protests organised against immigration and Angela Merkel in front of the German Chancellery and in front of refugee housing in several cities,⁸⁸ including demonstrations taking place days after the rape claim was confirmed as false.⁸⁹ Pro-Russian channels actually continued to claim that there had been a cover-up,⁹⁰ practically repeating Lavrov’s allegations.

This case is a good example of the involvement of Russian secret services in disseminating propaganda. In Soviet times the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party or the KGB were the competent authorities in issuing permits for the dissemination of “forgeries,” and these functions today are performed by the FSB and SVR – writes Yehven

⁸² Andreas Rinke and Paul Carrel, ‘German-Russian Ties Feel Cold War-Style Chill over Rape Case’, *Reuters*, 1 February 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-russia-idUSKCN0VA310>.

⁸³ *Австрия Временно Приостанавливает Действие Шенгенского Соглашения Из-За Случаев Насилия В Германии. Новости. Первый Канал*, accessed 8 May 2017, https://www.1tv.ru/news/2016-01-16/3330-avstriya_vremenno_priostanavlivaet_deystvie_shengenskogo_soglasheniya_iz_za_sluchaev_nasiliya_v_germanii.

⁸⁴ Damien McGuinness, ‘Russia Steps into Berlin “Rape” Storm Claiming German Cover-Up’, *BBC News*, 27 January 2016, sec. Inside Europe Blog, <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-eu-35413134>.

⁸⁵ Deutsche Welle (www.dw.com), ‘Russia Wants Explanation over Germany’s Handling of “Teen Rape” Case | News | DW.COM | 26.01.2016’, *DW.COM*, accessed 8 May 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/russia-wants-explanation-over-germanys-handling-of-teen-rape-case/a-19005535>.

⁸⁶ Adam Withnall, ‘Russian-German Girl “Admits Making Up” Claim She Was Raped by Refugees in Berlin’, *The Independent*, 31 January 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russian-german-girl-admits-making-up-claim-she-was-raped-by-refugees-in-berlin-a6845256.html>.

⁸⁷ Jakub Janda, ‘The Lisa Case: STRATCOM Lessons for European States’ (Federal Academy for Security Policy, 2016), https://www.baks.bund.de/sites/baks010/files/working_paper_2016_11.pdf.

⁸⁸ McGuinness, ‘Russia Steps into Berlin “Rape” Storm Claiming German Cover-Up’.

⁸⁹ Janda, ‘The Lisa Case: STRATCOM Lessons for European States’.

⁹⁰ Origo, ‘Megtalálta Putyin Német Ügynökeit’, <http://www.origo.hu/>, accessed 8 May 2017, <http://www.origo.hu/nagyvilag/20160421-haromszazan-varnak-putyin-utasitasara-nemetorszagban.html>.

Fedchenko in a study on Russian “active measures”.⁹¹ The writer quotes Ladislav Bittman, a former agent of Czechoslovak intelligence who left the service for the West, who says that forgeries were used to manipulate public opinion even in the Soviet era. This matches the opinion of the head of German intelligence, Hans-Georg Maassen, who said in connection with the Lisa case that the Kremlin strives to “influence public opinion and decision-making processes,” because “we will have parliamentary elections this year” in Germany.⁹² Weakening the European Union is without a doubt in the interest of Russia, and the most significant obstruction to this goal is clearly German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The topic of migration sharply divides the German nation – as almost all other nations –,⁹³ which Russia can exploit by active measures similar to this case. Newsweek quotes a former opposition MP, Ilya Ponomarev: the news outlet writes that Putin’s Chief of Staff Alexei Gromov is responsible for the coordination of state propaganda, he is the person instructing the editors in chief of Moscow’s mainstream media, “and his orders are as strict as any in the army.”⁹⁴

This centrally coordinated nature of propaganda activities could explain why Sergei Lavrov took a stance on the issue so visibly. It is natural that a foreign minister monitors cases affecting his citizens abroad, but it is rare that high-ranking politicians comment on ongoing investigations and question their results. Lavrov’s goal presumably was nothing but to add fuel to the fire and – most importantly – decrease citizens’ trust in Angela Merkel and German authorities. Vladimir Putin himself mentioned that information has become a weapon that helps influence public opinion,⁹⁵ and – as it is explained above – it is hard to find a better topic than immigration to achieve this goal. It must be added to this explanation that only half a month before the Lisa case started Germany had been shocked by the – very real – events in Cologne, when over one thousand women were assaulted sexually, mainly by men with foreign backgrounds,⁹⁶ which led the popularity of Angela Merkel to drop to its nadir.⁹⁷ This was probably the development that encouraged Russian secret services to implement this active measure, as the drop in Merkel’s popularity could be exploited to prop up the support of the pro-Russian Alternative for Germany (AfD), which was constantly gaining in popularity around that time, before the state elections in 2016.⁹⁸

⁹¹ Yehven Fedchenko, ‘Kremlin Propaganda: Soviet Active Measures by Other Means’, *StopFake.org*, 21 March 2016, <http://www.stopfake.org/en/kremlin-propaganda-soviet-active-measures-by-other-means/>.

⁹² Stefan Wagstyl, ‘German Politics: Russia’s next Target?’, *Financial Times*, accessed 8 May 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/31a5758c-e3d8-11e6-9645-c9357a75844a>.

⁹³ Konstantin Richter, ‘Germany’s Refugee Crisis Has Left It as Bitterly Divided as Donald Trump’s America’, *The Guardian*, 1 April 2016, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/01/germany-refugee-crisis-invited-into-my-home-welcoming-spirit-divided>.

⁹⁴ Bill Powell, ‘Pushing the Kremlin Line’, *Newsweek*, 20 May 2014, <http://www.newsweek.com/2014/05/30/pushing-kremlin-line-251587.html>.

⁹⁵ Fedchenko, ‘Kremlin Propaganda’.

⁹⁶ Rick Noack, ‘The Emerging Facts about the Mass Sexual Assault in Cologne That Has Left Germany Shocked’, *The Independent*, 11 July 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/cologne-new-years-eve-mass-sex-attacks-leaked-document-a7130476.html>.

⁹⁷ Philip Oltermann, ‘Deadly Attack on German Soil Is Worst Fear for Angela Merkel’, *The Guardian*, 20 December 2016, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/20/angela-merkel-supporters-fears-berlin-attack>.

⁹⁸ Jon Stone, ‘Germany’s Right-Wing Anti-Immigration Party Has Surged to New High on the Back of the Refugee Crisis’, *The Independent*, 13 January 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/germanys-right-wing-afd-party-surges-to-new-high-as-concern-of-refugee-rises-a6810726.html>.

AfD achieved remarkable results in the state elections held in 2016 in Germany, although obviously not only because of this single active measure.⁹⁹ Despite the fact that AfD is currently slipping in the polls,¹⁰⁰ it is not unthinkable that the Russian secret service will support forces standing against the archenemy, Merkel, in the 2017 general election in Germany.

⁹⁹ Alberto Nardelli, 'German Elections: AfD's Remarkable Gains Don't Tell the Whole Story', *The Guardian*, 14 March 2016, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/datablog/2016/mar/14/german-election-afd-gain-remarkable-cdu-angela-merkel>.

¹⁰⁰ Emily Tamkin, 'Germany's Far-Right Party Hits New Low in Polls', *Foreign Policy*, accessed 8 May 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/23/germanys-far-right-party-hits-new-low-in-polls/>.

6. Policy debates on migration, fake news and potential solutions

6.1 Legal solutions

One possible solution to stop fake news is making it impossible for real or supposed distributors of fakes to operate. In April 2015, 40% of Moldovans got their news from Russian sources. A considerable proportion of Moldovan TV channels redistribute Russian-made contents to Moldovan viewers, which led to the continuous rise of pro-Russian opinions.¹⁰¹ The government wanted to solve the problem by implementing an obligatory local content requirement for Moldovan media. This led critics to conclude that the measure would restrict the freedom of speech and editorial freedom as well;¹⁰² thus, the legislative proposal – in its original form – was voted down. Experts argued that Russian propaganda must be fought with “high-quality programmes,” although it is not easy to produce such content in the case of Moldova.¹⁰³

It is not only in Eastern Europe where this approach was tried, it happened in California as well, where Democratic representative Ed Chau submitted a bill to the Californian Assembly that would practically have outlawed mistakenly publishing something that could influence the election.¹⁰⁴ This would have been the Democratic representative’s answer to the “fake news scandal” in the 2016 US presidential election.¹⁰⁵ The analysis of the Electronic Frontier Foundation points out the fact that the problem of fake news cannot be remedied by a “bad law”.¹⁰⁶

The German federal government has proposed a new law, which has not yet come into force, that would allow authorities to fine social media companies in case they fail to delete hate speech and forgeries from their websites within 24 hours.¹⁰⁷ Facebook stated that the proposal is both unconstitutional and non-compliant with EU law, as it would transfer “responsibility for complex legal decisions from public authorities to private companies”.¹⁰⁸ The American NGO Human Rights First criticises the legislative proposal because suppressing free speech tend to reinforce the ideology of extremist groups.¹⁰⁹ Facebook’s Head of Public Policy for Central and Eastern Europe Gabriella Cseh said on a joint conference organised by Political Capital and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung that the German measure could prompt social media sites to remove any content users criticise without selection. She

¹⁰¹ ‘Who Really Rules the Airwaves in Moldova?’, *StopFake.org*, 2 April 2016, <http://www.stopfake.org/en/who-really-rules-the-airwaves-in-moldova/>.

¹⁰² ‘Restrictions on Foreign Broadcasters in Moldova Breach International Standards on Media Freedom, OSCE Representative Says | OSCE’, accessed 9 May 2017, <http://www.osce.org/fom/253346>.

¹⁰³ ‘Who Really Rules the Airwaves in Moldova?’

¹⁰⁴ Dave Maass, ‘California Bill To Ban “Fake News” Would Be Disastrous for Political Speech’, *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, 27 March 2017, <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2017/03/california-bill-ban-fake-news-would-be-disastrous-political-speech>.

¹⁰⁵ Olivia Solon, ‘Facebook’s Failure: Did Fake News and Polarized Politics Get Trump Elected?’, *The Guardian*, 10 November 2016, sec. Technology, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/nov/10/facebook-fake-news-election-conspiracy-theories>.

¹⁰⁶ Maass, ‘California Bill To Ban “Fake News” Would Be Disastrous for Political Speech’.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Germany Plans to Fine Social Media Sites over Hate Speech’, *Reuters*, 14 March 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-fakenews-idUSKBN16L14G>.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Facebook Says Germany’s Plans to Tackle Fake News Would Make Companies Delete Legal Content’, *The Independent*, 30 May 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/facebook-germany-fake-news-law-tech-companies-delete-legal-content-social-media-hate-speech-fine-a7763081.html>.

¹⁰⁹ Erika Asgeirsson, ‘German Social Media Law Threatens Free Speech’, *Human Rights First*, accessed 2 June 2017, <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/blog/german-social-media-law-threatens-free-speech>.

praised the Dutch approach to removing forgeries from social media. In the Netherlands, a group of civil society organisations monitor illegal content and tell Facebook if something needs to be removed.¹¹⁰ However, this solution still fails to offer a remedy to the main problem with legal solutions to the issue of fake news, namely the potential restriction of free speech.

Cseh also mentioned the French presidential campaign. She claimed that Facebook does not examine the content of posts, only if it is shared by real users.¹¹¹ During the French election campaign the company deleted over 30 thousand Facebook profiles because they were created exclusively to disseminate fake news on Facebook. This method does not have a significant effect on free speech, albeit it is also considerably less effective. Nevertheless, states could require social media companies to delete fake users from their sites, which could effectively slow down the dissemination of fake articles.

The Czech Republic went in a different direction. The Czech government established a unit within the Czech Ministry of Interior, called the Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats, based on the recommendations made in a National Security Audit, which identified disinformation campaigns as an internal security threat.¹¹² The Centre does not work as a law enforcement agency, and does not have authority to censor or remove any media content, it only has the competence to “inform about serious cases of disinformation and will provide expert opinions for the public and for government institutions”.¹¹³ Slovakia has established a unit within the police department dealing with cyber-crime to deal with fake news and propaganda,¹¹⁴ and recently added another unit with similar goals to the Ministry of Interior.¹¹⁵ However, Radovan Bránik, a Slovak security policy expert, claimed that the number of people working on countering massive Russian propaganda efforts is too low, the issue requires a “more complex” approach and institutional backgrounds.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, it is unclear how and on what legal basis the police could step up against fake news, forgeries and those disseminating fake news.¹¹⁷ The European Union has also set up a propaganda monitoring centre, the East StratCom Task Force (StratCom) to proactively develop “strategic communications campaigns” and promote a “positive EU narrative”.¹¹⁸ Moreover, the centre also conducts fact-checking and

¹¹⁰ ‘A Magyar Választás Körüli Minden Kérdésre Ott van a Válasz a Facebook Naplófájljaiban’, *24.hu*, 24 May 2017, <http://24.hu/kozelet/2017/05/24/a-magyar-valasztas-koruli-minden-kerdesre-ott-van-a-valasz-a-facebook-naplofajljaiban/>.

¹¹¹ ‘Az Álhírek Kormányzati Eszközökkel Való Visszaszorítása Komoly Veszélyeket Hordoz Magában’, *Budapest Beacon*, 24 May 2017, <http://hu.budapestbeacon.com/kiemelt-cikkek/az-alhitek-kormanyzati-eszkozokkal-valo-visszaszoritasa-komoly-veszelyeket-hordoz-magaban/>.

¹¹² ‘Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats - Terorismus a Mëkké Cíle’, accessed 19 May 2017, <http://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/clanek/centre-against-terrorism-and-hybrid-threats.aspx>.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Botos Tamás, ‘A Szlovák Rendőrség 12 Szakértőt Alkalmaz Az Álhírek, Dezinformációk, És Az Orosz Propaganda Terjedése Ellen’, *444*, 22 March 2017, <https://444.hu/2017/03/22/a-szlovak-rendorseg-12-szakertot-alkalmaz-az-alhitek-dezinformaciok-es-az-orosz-propaganda-terjedese-ellen>.

¹¹⁵ ‘Szlovákia Az Orosz Propaganda Egyik Fontos Célországá’, *Ujszo.com*, 21 March 2017, <http://ujso.com/online/kozelet/2017/03/21/szlovakia-az-orosz-propaganda-egyik-fontos-celorszaga>.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ ‘Questions and Answers about the East StratCom Task Force - Eeas - European Commission’, *Eeas*, accessed 19 May 2017, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/2116/Questions-and-Answers-about-the-East-StratCom-Task-Force.

propaganda analysis.¹¹⁹ The problem is that – similarly to the Czech and Slovak initiatives – the unit has very few members and its budget is only EUR 800 000, which had to be relocated to StratCom from other parts of the Union’s budget, as EP members struck down an amendment that would have granted an extra EUR 800 000 to the European External Action Service (EEAS).¹²⁰ This indicates that the political will to take the Russian disinformation campaign seriously and provide funding for counter-efforts was at that point lacking in the European Union. MEPs later accepted a resolution suggesting that StratCom should be reinforced, and more must be done in fields of awareness-raising, education, information literacy and education,¹²¹ pointing to the fact that the attitudes and awareness of MEPs on the topic is changing in the right direction. Nevertheless, no considerable developments have come to light in terms of the goals set out by the resolution since it was adopted.

The fact that the abovementioned attempts to provide legal solutions for pro-Russian propaganda have all been launched between 2015 and 2017 shows that states both within and outside of the EU have realised the danger posed by hybrid threats very recently despite Russian Army Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov de facto announcing Russia would use disinformation as a military tool in 2013,¹²² and the political will to provide the necessary resources in terms of funding and manpower seems to be missing at this point. The Brexit campaign and the US presidential election has shown that the dissemination of false information might have an effect on voters’ choices and, consequently, fake news could be used to support the policies and the goals of anti-EU political forces. Thus, the European Union and its member states should commit themselves to ensure their own security by combatting pro-Russian propaganda efforts with the necessary means. If EU institutions really believe that Russia poses a threat to the European Union, then they must increase the budget for counter-propaganda activities considerably and as soon as possible.

Instead of banning fake news sites, implementing legislation against hate speech and enforcing them in courts could be the proper legal solution, which could provide a legal basis for law enforcement bodies to step up against fake news. As pro-Russian media often builds its activity on inciting hatred between different groups and nations, fake news factories themselves offer this opportunity to legislators and the justice system.

6.2 Self-regulation, civilian initiatives

Besides the abovementioned solutions, joint platforms must be created for media operating in a given territory to offer them a chance to self-regulate. Media giants, such as Google or Facebook, local content providers and companies, advertising agencies could take part in these forums. The goal of self-regulation is to cut the financial resources of outlets disseminating fake news by not

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Daniel Boffey and Jennifer Rankin, ‘EU Escalates Its Campaign against Russian Propaganda’, *The Guardian*, 23 January 2017, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/23/eu-escalates-campaign-russian-propaganda>.

¹²¹ ‘MEPs Sound Alarm on Anti-EU Propaganda from Russia and Islamist Terrorist Groups | European Parliament’, *News | European Parliament*, accessed 19 May 2017, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20161118IPR51718/meps-sound-alarm-on-anti-eu-propaganda-from-russia-and-islamist-terrorist-groups>.

¹²² Fedchenko, ‘Kremlin Propaganda’.

advertising on these sites or not providing advertising surfaces to them – Google and Facebook have already taken steps to achieve this objective.¹²³

A similar initiative has been undertaken by the Slovakian internet-marketing agency NetSuccess, the goal of which is to diminish the income of outlets spreading disinformation and fake news from advertisements. The civilian-business project essentially filters out websites that harm the business image of their clients.¹²⁴ The Slovak company concentrates on online portals publishing content that does not breach the law. The persons responsible for the initiative compiled a black list of websites, which technically blocks the advertisements of their clients to show up on these surfaces with the help of a plugin. The black list is put together by a team of experts, including university professors, political scientists, media experts, selected by the agency. The list is compiled in a completely transparent process and based on a pre-determined set of criteria.¹²⁵ Some other Slovak advertising agencies joined the initiative, consequently the black list has been used for over 100 thousand campaigns so far.¹²⁶

A group of volunteers started to filter Facebook in Lithuania. The informal internet army that calls itself “elves” was created as a balance to Russia’s infamous internet trolls. The person who started the initiative, Ricardas Savukynas, told AP that he realised there were an unusual number of Facebook groups spreading Russian propaganda in Lithuania, which in turn encouraged him to start the “elves”.¹²⁷ The group monitors social media, reports fake accounts and, in addition, Savukynas writes a blog debunking Soviet nostalgia and conspiracy theories. The elves are naturally only a small player in Lithuania’s efforts to counter propaganda, but the group has achieved results in filtering out fake accounts used to spread fake news.

6.3 Facebook’s “fake news” filter

One of the largest recent initiatives against fake news has been launched by Facebook.¹²⁸ The company sends certain news stories reported as fake by users to independent fact-checking organisations to evaluate them, and if they confirm that the text contains false claims Facebook will flag the story publicly as “disputed by 3rd party fact-checkers”.¹²⁹ Facebook claims that such content will – with the help of the social media site’s algorithms – show up less on the walls of Facebook

¹²³ Nick Wingfield Isaac Mike and Katie Benner, ‘Google and Facebook Take Aim at Fake News Sites’, *The New York Times*, 14 November 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/15/technology/google-will-ban-websites-that-host-fake-news-from-using-its-ad-service.html>.

¹²⁴ NetSuccess, ‘Konspiratori.sk’, accessed 11 May 2017, <https://www.konspiratori.sk/>.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ ‘Lithuanian “Elves” Combat Russian Influence Online’, *AP News*, accessed 11 May 2017, <https://apnews.com/27ce7f001bde4ccb9415ce4a0de74af1/lithuanian-elves-combat-russian-influence-online>.

¹²⁸ Olivia Solon and Julia Carrie Wong, ‘Facebook’s Plan to Tackle Fake News Raises Questions over Limitations’, *The Guardian*, 16 December 2016, sec. Technology, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/dec/16/facebook-fake-news-system-problems-fact-checking>.

¹²⁹ Amber Jamieson Olivia Solon in San Francisco, ‘Facebook to Begin Flagging Fake News in Response to Mounting Criticism’, *The Guardian*, 15 December 2016, sec. Technology, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/dec/15/facebook-flag-fake-news-fact-check>.

users.¹³⁰ This system is currently being tested, at this time photos, videos and personal blogs are not being monitored, but Facebook has promised they will reassess the system later.¹³¹

The initiative is especially important in light of the fact that in the last months leading up to the US presidential election “fake news” received more interactions from users than the articles published by mainstream media.¹³² A joint Ipsos and BuzzFeed survey found that 83% of those considering Facebook as their main source of news believed the fake news featured in the questionnaire to be accurate.¹³³ Furthermore, the more a Facebook user clicks on articles matching his own worldview, the more such content shows up on his wall,¹³⁴ consequently, it is possible that a social media user practically does not meet any other viewpoints.¹³⁵

Facebook and other tech giants developed a code of conduct against illegal hate speech in cooperation with the European Union.¹³⁶ IT companies agree to work together with the European Commission and EU members to “tackle illegal hate speech online” and pledged that they would review most valid notifications for illegal hate speech within 24 hours and take the necessary action with regards to them. Moreover, tech giants agreed to cooperate with civil society organisations and “trusted reporters” from EU member states to “help provide high quality notices”.¹³⁷ In light of Facebook’s role in the spread of fake news stories leading up to the US presidential election, the tech company decided to implement its fake news filtering programme in Germany¹³⁸ and France¹³⁹ in early 2017, two key EU member states facing elections in 2017.

Gabriella Cseh, Facebook’s head of public policy for Central and Eastern Europe, told the audience on a conference organised jointly by Political Capital and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung that the main task for Facebook is to help users to have an authentic conversation on their platform, including discussions on public life in a safe environment without being attacked for stating their opinion.¹⁴⁰ According to Cseh, Facebook is going to publish information on how to recognise fake news on Facebook. The social media giant believes it is important that users recognise what they are reading, no matter if it is a serious article, satire or a forgery.¹⁴¹ Cseh added Facebook is experimenting with expanding their fake news filter by introducing the story to readers clicking on a fake article from another

¹³⁰ Amar Toor, ‘Facebook Launches Fake News Filter in France’, *The Verge*, 6 February 2017, <https://www.theverge.com/2017/2/6/14520172/facebook-fake-news-filter-france-election>.

¹³¹ Solon and Wong, ‘Facebook’s Plan to Tackle Fake News Raises Questions over Limitations’.

¹³² Craig Silverman, ‘This Analysis Shows How Viral Fake Election News Stories Outperformed Real News On Facebook’, *BuzzFeed*, accessed 5 May 2017, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/viral-fake-election-news-outperformed-real-news-on-facebook>.

¹³³ Craig Silverman Singer-Vine Jeremy, ‘Most Americans Who See Fake News Believe It, New Survey Says’, *BuzzFeed*, accessed 5 May 2017, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/fake-news-survey>.

¹³⁴ Solon, ‘Facebook’s Failure’.

¹³⁵ For more information, see: ATV, ‘Heti Napló Sváby Andrással 1. Rész - 2017.04.30.’, *ATV.hu*, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://www.atv.hu/video/video-20170501-heti-naplo-svaby-andrassal-1-resz-2017-04-30>.

¹³⁶ ‘Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online’ (European Commission, 2016), http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/hate_speech_code_of_conduct_en.pdf.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ ‘Facebook to Roll out Fake News Tools in Germany’, *BBC News*, 15 January 2017, sec. Business, <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-38631847>.

¹³⁹ Toor, ‘Facebook Launches Fake News Filter in France’.

¹⁴⁰ ‘A Magyar Választás Körüli Minden Kérdésre Ott van a Válasz a Facebook Naplófájlijában’.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

perspective,¹⁴² which could be extremely useful in breaking down the barrier around those who only read content that match their worldview.

It must be stressed that flagging false content and providing a link to the article debunking false claims in itself does not necessarily achieve results. Facebook should attach a short, easily understandable argument against the points made by the disinformation article to the message displayed to users to potentially encourage readers to also read the article debunking the fake story besides the disinformation, which is something the company is already experimenting with.

6.4 Fact-checking websites

A plethora of fact-checking websites is available in English,¹⁴³ but the number is much lower in smaller countries in local languages. The essence of these sites is to check the contents of politicians' statements and articles, and explain to what degree those match reality. Organisations specialising in this kind of activity would be essential in the fight against fake news, therefore, it is important that fact-checking organisations receive adequate funding and to make the content produced by them available in EU member states' languages. Based on an article of The Washington Post, it can be concluded that fact-checking is a sufficient tool to correct disinformation circulating among voters, especially if the analysed statement was made by "one of them," a politician from a party supported by the reader. The research compiled by the Post also reveals that debunking negative statements had the largest effect on people.¹⁴⁴ Consequently, the articles of fact-checking websites could be used by the fake news filters of social media sites to flag articles containing disinformation.

If Facebook does not connect the short summaries of fact-checking articles with its system flagging fake news it is possible that a considerable part of Facebook users will never meet any proof debunking the claims of fake news stories or the work of fact-checkers, which would make it almost impossible to convince the reader about the falseness of disinformation. One study concluded that the Facebook audiences of disinformation sites and fact-checking outlets are almost completely distinct and, additionally, fake news spread faster on Facebook than the ones debunking it – contrary to Google, which gives primacy to the latter.¹⁴⁵ In conclusion, the chance for flagging a fake story leading to results in itself is low, but it would help convincing the target audience if they saw short counter-arguments against disinformation articles.

6.5 Wikipedia – Wikitribune

The founder of Wikipedia, Jimmy Wales, decided to launch a free online portal, Wikitribune, based on the cooperation of professional journalists and volunteers.¹⁴⁶ The goal of this is to avoid having to publish clickbait titles and content due to the portal being free and the lack of advertisements on it. There are however problems with the model, for instance it is hard to treat professional journalists and volunteers equally, the idea that the core tasks of journalists should be done by volunteers could

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ For example: „Fact-checking U.S. politics”, *PolitiFact*, elérés 2017. május 5., <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/>

¹⁴⁴ ‘Sometimes Political Fact-Checking Works. Sometimes It Doesn’t. Here’s What Can Make the Difference.’, *Washington Post*, accessed 5 May 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/06/03/sometimes-political-fact-checking-works-sometimes-it-doesnt-heres-what-can-make-the-difference/>.

¹⁴⁵ Liliana Bounegru et al., ‘A Field Guide to Fake News’ (Public Data Lab, 2017), <https://fakenews.publicdatalab.org/download/SAMPLE-field-guide-to-fake-news.pdf>.

¹⁴⁶ ‘WikiTribune’, *WikiTribune*, accessed 5 May 2017, <https://www.wikitribune.com>.

undermine the entire profession.¹⁴⁷ Jimmy Wales would like to publish news on “events around the world” with ten journalists, which seems a number too low to cover such a large topic.¹⁴⁸ It could also cause problems that journalists would have to check the recommendations of volunteers, which could take up a lot of their time as well. Nevertheless, even if Wikitribune fails to fulfil its goals it could teach volunteers how to think like a journalist.¹⁴⁹

6.6 The role of mainstream media

Mainstream media often follows the migration-related narratives promoted by pro-Russian sites, albeit from an entirely different viewpoint. The mainstream regularly writes about the connections between terrorism and immigration¹⁵⁰ and the EU’s “open gates policy”.¹⁵¹ In contrast to this view, the EU stressed the importance of protecting its external borders and the fight against human trafficking very early in the migration crisis.¹⁵² Furthermore, the migration deal between Turkey and the EU practically punished those who arrived to the EU illegally, as they essentially relocate Syrian refugees from Turkey who did not previously try to enter the EU illegally.¹⁵³ These tougher measures are rarely reported by the mainstream.

As a result of the EU-Turkey deal, the number of migrant arrivals to Greece decreased considerably, but human rights organisations criticised the agreement because they do not consider Turkey as a “safe third country”.¹⁵⁴ The European Union’s vision on migration includes decreasing incentives encouraging illegal immigration, protecting the external border, bolstering the Libyan coast guard to restrict migrant flows in the Mediterranean Sea and signing agreements similar to the Turkey deal with other third countries.¹⁵⁵ Consequently, mainstream media should not only focus on migrants as human beings but also on migration as a policy field and describe the immigration-related measures taken by the EU and its member states to a greater extent. This would allow them to prove that the “liberal” immigration policy depicted by Russian propaganda is closer to Viktor Orbán’s policies than it is to the views of human rights organisations.

6.7 Terrorism and responsibility

Mainstream media must also pay more attention to the problem of terrorism. It is not enough to note that refugees are not terrorists in itself, the media could share more information with the population of member states about the possible directions of counter-terrorism measures. The recent refugee wave – as the abovementioned Frontex report notes – gave an opportunity for

¹⁴⁷ Adrienne LaFrance, ‘The Problem With WikiTribune’, *The Atlantic*, 25 April 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/04/wikipedia-the-newspaper/524211/>.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ For example: ‘Confronting the Terrorist/Refugee Narrative’, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://www.europenowjournal.org/2017/01/31/confronting-the-terroristrefugee-narrative/>.

¹⁵¹ For example: ‘Tíz Nap Maradt Az EU Megmentésére’, *Napi.hu*, accessed 5 May 2017, http://www.napi.hu/nemzetkozi_gazdasag/tiz_nap_maradt_az_eu_megmentesere.610934.html.

¹⁵² ‘Delivering on Migration’ (European Commission), accessed 5 May 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/2-years-on-migration_en.pdf.

¹⁵³ Kamal Ahmed, ‘Migrant Crisis: EU-Turkey Deal Comes into Effect’, *BBC News*, 20 March 2016, sec. Europe, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35854413>.

¹⁵⁴ ‘The EU-Turkey Deal: Europe’s Year of Shame’, accessed 5 May 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/03/the-eu-turkey-deal-europes-year-of-shame/>.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Taking Action on the Central Mediterranean Route’ (European Commission, 2017), https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/malta-migration-summit_feb2017.pdf.

terrorists, EU citizens fighting in Syria to enter the territory of the European Union, but the majority of terrorists were born in the Union and became radicalised there.

Consequently, it is necessary to pay special attention to deradicalization programmes,¹⁵⁶ which are one of the fundamental steps in preventing terror attacks. Such deradicalization efforts are tough because not even researchers can provide a lot of information on the process of radicalisation, there is no pre-determined “schedule” for becoming an extremist.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, mainstream media outlets can single out successful initiatives in this area and introduce them to the public. One deradicalization programme that is worth mentioning is the Aarhus programme. The essence of this is that citizens can call a hotline if they believe someone is becoming radicalised. Afterwards, police investigate if this really is the case. Then, if suspicions are confirmed, the individual suspected of radicalisation is put in touch with a mentor, who tries to reverse the process through discussions with and other assistance provided to his mentoree. The focus of the Danish approach is dialogue and the police in Aarhus also contacted the leaders of the mosque that most individuals who left the city for Syria had ties to. The results so far have shown that this approach works, the number of people leaving the town to join ISIS practically dropped to zero, although the critics of the programme say that there is no scientific evidence that proves it works.¹⁵⁸

The mainstream media also deals with the anti-migration rhetoric of European politicians,¹⁵⁹ but they rarely mention that this phenomenon has an effect on national security as well: hardliner anti-immigrant and, most importantly, anti-Islam messages – like the anti-Muslim statements of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán – help extremist Islamist organisations’ recruiting efforts, as it allows them to really frame their activity as a fight between the Muslim world and the West.¹⁶⁰

Mainstream media can also write about the issues of the operation of and cooperation between European secret services.¹⁶¹ Very few articles available on the internet highlight the failures of counter-terrorism operations. For instance, French secret services could have prevented multiple terror attacks if they did a better job in monitoring individuals suspected of radicalisation.¹⁶²

6.8 The effects of fake news filters and reframing topics

Mainstream media outlets could reframe the debate on migration and terrorism through the abovementioned topics, which could allow them to present European integration as a solution to problems, for example regarding the establishment of a European intelligence agency. By reframing this debate and using fake news filters the influence of fake news could be repulsed; thus, state-

¹⁵⁶ ‘Confronting the Terrorist/Refugee Narrative’.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ ‘How Denmark Is Trying to Subvert the Call to Terror’, *Star Tribune*, accessed 5 May 2017, <http://www.startribune.com/how-denmark-is-trying-to-subvert-the-call-to-terror/388563371/>.

¹⁵⁹ Staff and agencies, ‘Hungarian Prime Minister Says Migrants Are “Poison” and “Not Needed”’, *The Guardian*, 27 July 2016, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/26/hungarian-prime-minister-viktor-orban-praises-donald-trump>.

¹⁶⁰ Jennifer Williams, ‘Trump’s “Muslim Ban” is a Huge Gift to ISIS’, *Vox*, 29 January 2017, <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/1/29/14426892/trump-muslim-immigration-refugee-ban-isis-terrorism>.

¹⁶¹ ‘Juncker Warms to the Idea of an EU Intelligence Agency’, *EURACTIV.com*, 23 March 2016, <http://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/juncker-warms-to-the-idea-of-an-eu-intelligence-agency/>.

¹⁶² Leela Jacinto, ‘How France Can Fix Its Homegrown Terror Problem’, *Foreign Policy*, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/27/can-france-fix-its-homegrown-terror-problem-lyon-yassin-sahli/>.

organised Russian propaganda would be restricted in exploiting immigration to further Russian national interests.

6.9 Education might still prove to be the best solution

Regardless of all the abovementioned methods, it is – as Peter Pomerantsev says – imperative that readers are able to recognise fake news without having to rely on fake news filters to hide disinformation from their sight.¹⁶³ This is especially important nowadays, as parents might be unable to teach their children how to distinguish fake news from reality on the internet pertaining to the fact that the older generation grew up with reputable hard-copy sources, in an era when distributing fake news was an elaborate process.¹⁶⁴

According to a study by Stanford, today's youth are "digital natives," meaning they get their news primarily from the internet, yet the majority of them are unable to differentiate between fact and disinformation, sponsored content or real news.¹⁶⁵ Stanford's researchers subsequently started working on developing a curriculum in cooperation with teachers to be able to improve student's understanding of how to assess information they find on the internet.¹⁶⁶ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) education director, Andreas Schleicher, also concluded that schools need to help students understand the online world.¹⁶⁷ As a result, the OECD has proposed to introduce a competency test that would assess young people's analytical and critical skills,¹⁶⁸ including their ability to distinguish between fake and fact.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ Peter Pomerantsev, 'Why We're Post-Fact', *Granta Magazine*, 20 July 2016, <https://granta.com/why-were-post-fact/>.

¹⁶⁴ Chris Weller, 'This Education Startup Is Teaching Kids How to Spot Fake News', *Business Insider Deutschland*, accessed 15 May 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.de/newsela-teaches-kids-how-to-spot-fake-news-2017-1>.

¹⁶⁵ Sue Shellenbarger, 'Most Students Don't Know When News Is Fake, Stanford Study Finds', *Wall Street Journal*, 22 November 2016, sec. Life, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/most-students-dont-know-when-news-is-fake-stanford-study-finds-1479752576>.

¹⁶⁶ 'Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning' (Stanford University, 2016), <https://sheg.stanford.edu/upload/V3LessonPlans/Executive%20Summary%2011.21.16.pdf>.

¹⁶⁷ Sean Coughlan, 'Schools Should Teach Pupils How to Spot "Fake News"', *BBC News*, 18 March 2017, sec. Education & Family, <http://www.bbc.com/news/education-39272841>.

¹⁶⁸ Haroon Siddique, 'Teach Schoolchildren How to Spot Fake News, Says OECD', *The Guardian*, 18 March 2017, sec. Media, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/mar/18/teach-schoolchildren-spot-fake-news-says-oecd>.

¹⁶⁹ Coughlan, 'Schools Should Teach Pupils How to Spot "Fake News"'.

7. Conclusion

Migration is not a new topic in Europe, European governments as well as mainstream and populist parties have all put the issue on their agenda since the 1970s, constantly demanding more and more restrictive immigration regulations. Efforts to restrict migration failed, because states cannot influence the dynamics of migratory systems. The migration-related discursive strategies of populist political forces have not changed considerably either: they talk about border protection, the situation of women, criminality and the terror threat without being able to offer effective solutions to any of these issues.

However, two new developments aid the cause of populist, anti-EU forces. First, the internet and in particular social media offers a platform where the populist discourse and messages on migration can be spread with relative ease. Second, a revitalising Russia inspiring to at least weaken the European Union supports populist narratives through its pro-Russian propaganda machinery present all over Europe. Migration, especially in the wake of the migration crisis, proved to be a topic that anti-immigrant and pro-Russian propaganda can easily exploit in fake news stories.

Propagandists have a wide range of tools at their disposal to misinform their readers. These tools range from simple satire to fully fabricated content. Every one of these disinformation methods, as the examples above show, can be used to serve a wide range of purposes. In some cases, fake news can be disseminated as a part of an active measure implemented by Russian secret services aimed at lowering the trust of EU citizens in the institutions of respective member states or mainstream politicians, or to simply provoke chaos and confusion. In order to counter these propaganda efforts, the European Union and its member states must increase their commitments to this cause both in terms of financial resources and manpower.

As social media creates “echo chambers” for people with similar views,¹⁷⁰ – rendering it unlikely that people meet opposing worldviews, opinions, news – the best way to combat disinformation might be education, helping children learn how to assess what they read. With the help of teachers and curricula developed by experts, together with legislative bills requiring schools to fight the phenomenon by education instead of seeking to punish those who spread disinformation¹⁷¹, the next generation might be able to counter the effects of Russian propaganda simply by having the knowledge to distinguish between lies and the truth.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ California Newspaper Publishers Association, ‘Fighting Fake News with Education’, accessed 15 May 2017, <https://cnpa.com/fighting-fake-news-with-education/>.