

The strategic communications' opportunities of countering Russian electoral disinformation in Hungary

Executive summary

- Central and Eastern European countries are even more vulnerable to Russia than the “hacked” Western states (such as the USA and Germany) due to their strong political and economic dependence on the Russian Federation. Moscow also made it evident that it wishes to help pro-Russian politicians – including Viktor Orbán and Heinz-Christian Strache – and parties that benefit them accede to power or maintain them in their position with the use of information weapons in order to create a pro-Kremlin political block in the EU to approve the aggression in Crimea and lift the sanctions against Russia.
- In Hungary, pro-Russian propaganda definitely sided with the Hungarian government, while opposition parties are already being targeted by Russian disinformation. It is getting harder and harder to distinguish Russian propaganda from the communication of the Hungarian government.
- Russian disinformation activity amplifies the Hungarian government’s anti-NGO, anti-opposition and anti-Brussels narrative focusing on migration and sovereignty. However, growing dependence on Russia in the political, economic and media realms is what really threatens with the loss of Hungarian sovereignty. Hungary’s dependence on Russia is getting more and more similar to states in the post-Soviet space.
- Without depicting the threat posed by international migration and constantly emphasising sovereignty neither the government’s drift away from its Western allies nor its rhetoric connected to it can be justified, and it cannot be explained with the pragmatic benefits of the “Eastern Opening” policy either. The “Eastern Opening”, in fact, is an economic failure except for the enrichment of the pro-Fidesz elite with shady energy deals; no significant Eastern investment have arrived to Hungary, and there is no Russian market to be regained.
- In the Hungarian public space, repulsing the Russian threat can be based upon the historical fear of Russia in Hungarian society rooted in the revolutions of 1848 and 1956, and on Hungarian society’s outstanding political and cultural Western orientation – as shown in several different polls.
- Western experiences suggest that Russian meddling can be brought to a halt once political will is paired with the necessary intelligence, criminal, legislative or media reactions. When state organs become the servants of Russian interests, the opportunities for (opposition) parties rejecting Russian influence become restricted. At the same time, the “Eastern Opening” and corruption scandals connected to it continue to provide a wide window of opportunity in a Western-oriented society for Euroatlantic strategic communication and political measures to oppose the government’s narrative.