

# 2022 Report on EEAS Activities to Counter FIMI

European External Action Service (EEAS)

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# 1. FOREIGN INFORMATION MANIPULATION AND INTERFERENCE (FIMI)

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022 considerably shaped the work of the EEAS in 2022 and the work done by the Strategic Communication, Task Forces and Information Analysis Division (SG.STRAT.2). The strategic and coordinated use of Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI), including disinformation, by the Kremlin to prepare and execute its war of aggression on European soil highlighted the harm that FIMI can cause, in particular when it is used as an instrument of war. Years-long information manipulation, disinformation and censorship pursued by the Kremlin inside Russia enabled and continues to fuel the war against Ukraine. Russia continues to target Ukraine with information manipulation and the international community to break the resolve to condemn the war and impose costs on Russia for its violation of international law.

Audiences in Africa were targeted by the Kremlin to allege that food insecurity was due to Western sanctions and not, as it was in fact, due to Russia's assault on Ukraine, its people and its agriculture. Russia engaged in information manipulation and interference at the global level, such as the United Nations, and has fully instrumentalised its diplomatic network for such activities. Russia received opportunistic support in amplifying its information manipulation by actors such as China.

Russia's use of FIMI in its war against Ukraine has led to an unprecedented reaction from the European Union – sanctions against outlets like RT and Sputnik that are directly controlled by the Kremlin and used as instruments of war propaganda have shown that there is a strong resolve to impose costs for FIMI activities.



The team has developed material about RT and Sputnik, translated into the EU and EaP languages, and amplified by European partners: <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/the-kremlins-weapons-of-deception-7-things-you-need-to-know-about-rt-sputnik/>

The EU has long recognised the importance of tackling FIMI and has stepped up efforts. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Vice-President of the European Commission (HRVP) Josep Borrell has taken up a leading role in the EU strategy to counter FIMI to set out a comprehensive and ambitious vision and approach for the EEAS work. In addition to the Action Plan against Disinformation (2018)<sup>1</sup> and the European Democracy Action Plan (2020)<sup>2</sup>, new impetus was given to the EEAS's work on tackling FIMI in 2022 through the European Strategic Compass (2022)<sup>3</sup> and Council Conclusions on FIMI (2022)<sup>4</sup>. FIMI has also been recognised in the latest G7 statements<sup>5</sup> and in the report on the implementation of the common set of proposals endorsed by the EU and NATO<sup>6</sup>. The United Nations have likewise pointed to information manipulation as a severe threat in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression (2022)<sup>7</sup>.



Against this background, the EEAS has worked closely with the European Institutions, the European Member States, international partners and stakeholders from civil society and private industry to further strengthen the EU's toolbox to prevent, deter and respond to FIMI. While FIMI in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine was the top priority, other regions and actors were likewise at the centre of the work, ensuring a holistic approach. The EEAS looks both at specific actors that are notorious for their use of FIMI and at specific regions, such as the Neighbourhoods. This work also includes support to EU Delegations as well as the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Missions and Operations on the ground. In addition to this actor- and region-specific approach, the EEAS develops actor-agnostic methodologies and strategies that can be applied no matter the source of FIMI or the region where

it is employed, to ensure that the EU is comprehensively prepared for FIMI activities no matter where they come from and who they target. Since the EEAS first started to work on this threat, its budget has been continuously increased, culminating in 14.6 million Euros for 2023. This continued financial growth allowed the EEAS to strengthen existing instruments like EUvsDisinfo project<sup>8</sup> and develop new ones; the current budget enables a broad range of activities, spanning from analysis to resilience building, enhancing the proactive communications and outreach activities as well as cooperation with international partners.

## PURPOSE OF REPORTING ON THIS WORK

This report intends to enhance accountability, increase transparency and inform about the EEAS's work on FIMI. The report will provide insights on how the EEAS implements the actions on FIMI under the Strategic Compass. Additionally, the report complements the many briefings that were offered to the EU Member States in dedicated Council Working Group sessions and public interventions by members of the team, as well as public briefings such as the ones provided to the European Parliament's Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all democratic processes within the EU, including Disinformation (INGE)<sup>9</sup>.

This report will also present the EEAS' work across the broad spectrum of its tasks, from policy development to situational awareness, resilience building, disruption and responses in the area of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). However, this report can only show a snapshot of the broad range of activities and does not claim to be exhaustive.

The following second section provides a retrospective assessment of the 2022 threat environment and the main tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) used to conduct FIMI. The third section dissects the different dimensions and objectives of the EEAS's work and showcases them via select initiatives and accomplishments from the different teams and task forces. This report will also illustrate the type of activities the EEAS is engaged in, and how these respond to the mandate to tackle FIMI.



## 2. KEY FIMI ACTORS AND PRIORITY REGIONS

### RUSSIA/ RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is a culmination of the Kremlin's decade-long information manipulation campaign and interference, including disinformation, to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Nearly all disinformation narratives used by the Kremlin to justify and mobilise domestic support for the invasion can be traced back to 2013-2014 and the Euromaidan protests, in the context of which the Kremlin sought to portray Ukraine as a 'Nazi state', a 'failed state' and 'not a state at all'. In this manner, **pro-Kremlin media have been preparing the soil for the military invasion for years**. The EUvsDisinfo project has been documenting these activities since 2015.

The Kremlin's FIMI activities can be divided into **domestic and international dimensions**; the severity of both cannot be underestimated in the context of the invasion.

**Domestically**, the Kremlin's information manipulation and disinformation activities go hand in hand with the censorship and destruction of independent media within Russia. The Kremlin's grip on the information environment in Russia is

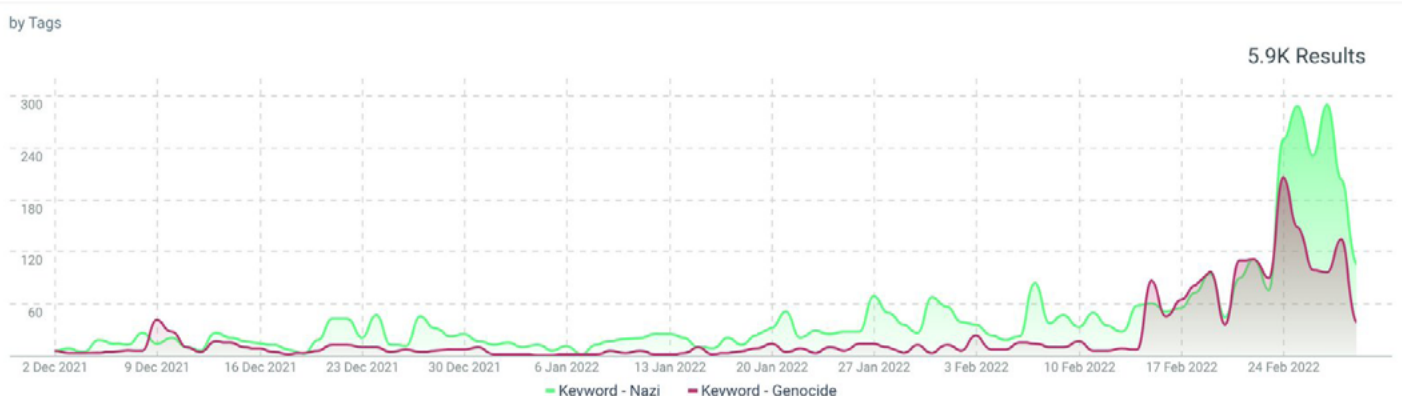
crucial to ensure the absence of any meaningful domestic opposition to the war. The opinion polls conducted in Russia, although they need to be taken with a pinch of salt, give an indication that information manipulation and disinformation combined with the crackdown on independent sources of information have a severe impact on Russian audiences. Pro-Kremlin outlets have also been instrumental in justifying and/or obfuscating war crimes and atrocities committed by Russian soldiers in Ukraine. Narratives supporting the war (which amount to war propaganda) permeate not just political and news content but also entertainment content on Russian media.

**Internationally**, the Kremlin continues to use its information manipulation playbook, in attempts to undermine international support for Ukraine. Above all, the goal is to sow doubt who the aggressor is, hence the focus on disinformation narratives accusing NATO and particularly the US of attempts to encircle and contain Russia via Ukraine. Additionally, through its proxies and manipulative behaviour on social media, pro-Kremlin disinformation actors seek to exacerbate and exploit sensitive issues within the EU societies: migration and refugees; cost of living; energy prices.

### RESULTS OVER TIME:

## KEYWORDS "NAZI" AND "GENOCIDE" IN RUSSIAN STATE-CONTROLLED MEDIA COVERING UKRAINE

#### RESULTS OVER TIME



### Information manipulation and disinformation targeting international audiences have been instrumental in the Kremlin's attempts to weaponise hunger and energy.

The core disinformation allegation is that the Western sanctions are to blame for the global food and other crises.

There is no longer any distance between the Kremlin's diplomatic and disinformation arms. Official social media accounts of Russia's diplomatic representations have been acting as a coordinated disinformation amplification network and are now fully integrated into wider information manipulation ecosystem. Russia is also exploiting its presence in diplomatic fora to amplify and legitimise disinformation claims about Ukraine (such as allegations about biolabs, Ukraine being under Nazi-rule, etc.). In further efforts to confuse and distract, Russian diplomatic accounts on social media have also been promoting disinformation narratives portrayed as fact-checking.



## CHINA

China's information manipulation and interference continues to be diverse and comprises various tactics, including those of a coercive nature. China has been building its presence in the global information environment, which includes increased global presence of its state-controlled media, and targeting overseas Chinese communities. 2022 provided additional evidence of China's use of social media influencers with undisclosed connections to Chinese state-controlled media or other structures, to counter criticisms of China's human rights issues and reshape narratives on topics like Xinjiang. China has been seen using both its own global media footprint, official accounts on social media and economic leverage over other outlets to influence media coverage. While building up its messaging machine, China's parallel aim is to suppress competing, and potentially critical stories about itself, also by using intimidation and harassment. This dual nature of Chinese activities – proactive messaging combined with information manipulation and suppression – is

significant and needs to be looked at comprehensively.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine provided further evidence of China's and Russia's alignment in the information environment. Chinese state-controlled media and official social media channels have throughout the year amplified selected pro-Kremlin conspiracy narratives, for example on the alleged US military biolabs in Ukraine, or alleged links between the US intelligence services and the Ukrainian government with neo-Nazi groups present in Ukraine. The EEAS has identified a number of incidents of disinformation content moving between the Chinese and Russian online



disinformation ecosystems, with content created by one being amplified by the other.

A majority of Ukraine-related reports in international channels of Chinese state-controlled media have been based on official Russian sources – giving a platform to Russian positions internationally, including where Russian media channels have been sanctioned. Like Russia, China has promoted narratives portraying the US and NATO as responsible for the Russian invasion, reinforcing the claim that Russia is not the aggressor. China's state-controlled media has also been blaming Western sanctions, not Russia's war, as the key driver of the global economic and food crisis.

## WESTERN BALKANS

Despite ongoing considerable efforts, the Western Balkans resilience towards FIMI remains weak due to local specifics such as low media literacy, low trust in institutions, limited space for professional journalism and a low level of media freedom. Considering all these factors, Russian FIMI operations have found a fertile ground in some parts of the region. Russia is, with the help of local enablers, positioning itself as the guardian of traditions and common sense and is abusing the vulnerable media landscape, which is suffering significant political and economic pressure. Pro-Kremlin narratives are spread by Russian officials and local enablers. They mostly target aspirations of the Western Balkans countries to join the EU, aiming to affect the attractiveness of the EU in the region by projecting the narrative that sanctions harm the EU while Russian economy remains strong.

Kremlin-directed and pro-Russian narratives find exposure and echo with receptive audience groups. These include, among others, those with an appetite for conspiracy narratives (elite world domination, reptilians, natural medicine, as well as COVID-19 and anti-vaxxer narratives) which have become both the ideal target and disseminators of disinformation narratives and conspiracies related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Russia used information manipulation in attempts to convince audiences – as seen in other regions – of the existence of US-funded bio-labs in Ukraine destined at targeting specifically ‘Russian DNA’, organ trafficking of Russian prisoners of war (POWs) by Ukrainian authorities, and the pervasiveness of Nazi sympathies amongst Ukrainians. Russia’s idealised military superiority (wonder-weapons and almost endless military, and natural, resources) is an equally recurrent topic. These local enablers and multipliers have also helped foster the belief that the West, and the European Union in particular, are facing food, energy, and fuel scarcity.

China actively seeks to shape its image in the Western Balkans, including through increased media presence, investing in activities to present itself as a reliable political and economic partner.

## MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (MENA)

In the MENA region, the work is three-fold: (i) better explain EU policies and positions towards local audiences in the MENA region, including in Arabic; (ii) analyse and respond to foreign information manipulation and interference, including disinformation across the MENA region, including EU misperceptions; (iii) support independent media and

media freedom in the MENA region, with a view to foster healthier information environments.

These three areas reflect the complex environment of the MENA region. Information manipulation and interference is only part of the broader challenge of hybrid threats, which include cyber-attacks and the use of surveillance software as well as targeting of critical voices. The work of the EEAS in the region focusses in particular on FIMI, however it is crucial to understand that the overall threat landscape is broader than this domain. Several actors in the region have acquired capabilities to fight proxy wars also in the information environment. This threat has direct security and stability implications – not only in the region, but also for the EU and Member States in our immediate neighbourhood. As in other regions, the suppression of critical and independent voices can also be observed as part of information manipulation and interference in the MENA region.

The current context of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine demonstrates how the information environment can also be weaponised. This is exemplified by spreading of the Kremlin’s disinformation narratives in pan-Arab TV channels, which prompted the mobilisation of the EU Regional Media Officer to debunk the various false claims from Russian officials and restate the EU position on the war in Ukraine as well as the ongoing crises and conflicts in the MENA region.

## CSDP MISSIONS AND OPERATIONS

FIMI activity is targeting the European Union and its Member States directly, but at the same time the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations are targeted outside of the EU’s territory. The missions and operations often are the first indicators of FIMI activities in specific countries and in many cases can identify information manipulation and interference more quickly. In particular, missions and operations in Sub-Saharan Africa have witnessed Russian information manipulation and interference targeting European Member States and the European Union as such. 2022 has seen in particular the private military company (PMC) Wagner active as a ‘FIMI service provider’ in the regions, targeting EU Member States - such as France - and United Nations Peace Operations through audio-visual materials that were specifically designed by pro-Kremlin actors and amplified further by Wagner.



### 3. PRIORITY DIMENSIONS AND WORK OBJECTIVES OF THE EEAS RESPONSE TO FIMI

#### OBJECTIVE 1: STRENGTHEN SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Comprehensive situational awareness is a key prerequisite for any responses to FIMI activity. It is not about ‘admiring the problem’, but is crucial to identify, catalogue and track incidents and campaigns in a systematic manner that preserves evidence and can build the foundation for decisions at the political level. To deliver on its key role to inform decision making, the EEAS works on a common framework and methodology for the systematic collection of evidence of FIMI incidents as called for by the 2020 European Democracy Action Plan. The objective of a common framework and methodology is to facilitate more efficient knowledge sharing and to promote best case practices in uncovering and researching FIMI activities.

In continuous and close cooperation with European, international as well as private and civil society partners, this framework and methodology was implemented internally in 2022, leading to the detection of almost 400 cases of FIMI incidents and the systematic recording and encoding of information on promoted narratives, used tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs), targets and more. This information, recorded in common, open data standards, already led to the creation of more regular, timely and tailored products shared with EU institutions and Member States and will be the foundation for a more comprehensive insight into the FIMI threat landscape for the EU throughout 2023 and beyond. To communicate about the work on the common and interoperable approach to detection, the EEAS engages with analytical teams and practitioners across all partners. Exemplary in this regard is the creation of a dedicated forum for Member States analysts in the framework of the Rapid Alert System (RAS) in 2022 and the EU-US jointly hosted Analyst Conference within the framework of the Trade and Technology Council (TTC).

Considering that FIMI can be part of broader hybrid activity, it is crucial to cooperate with partners who are experts in other, related domains. Therefore, in 2022 the EEAS worked closely with the **European Union Agency for Cyber Security (ENISA)**, to identify in particular analytical approaches that could facilitate a better, cross-domain information sharing. The joint report “Foreign Information Manipulation Interference (FIMI) and Cybersecurity - Threat Landscape” (2022) <sup>10</sup> highlights how such an approach can contribute to an earlier identification of activity and a more holistic approach to respond.





The EEAS also cooperated with international partners on the analysis of specific aspects, such as gendered disinformation. To support the continuous and outstanding work on FIMI analysis by civil society and academia, the EEAS paved the way for a project for 2023 to facilitate discussions and explore possibilities for the creation of an information sharing and analysis centre/community (ISAC) on FIMI, which should support the development of a FIMI Data Space as called for in the Strategic Compass.

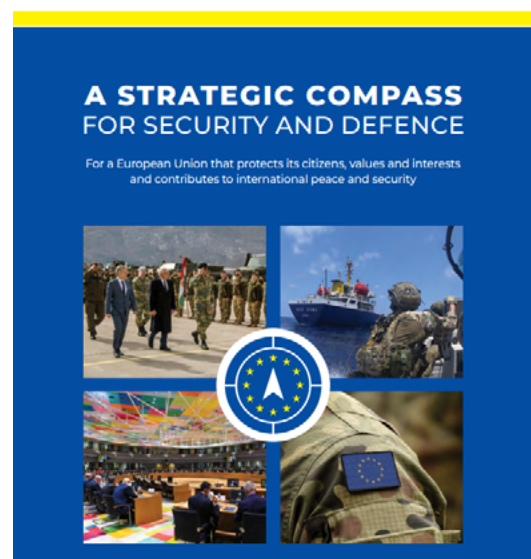
The **EU's Rapid Alert System (RAS)** that has been active since its inauguration in March 2019 and connects EU Institutions and EU Member States on FIMI issues has proven again its usefulness. In particular, FIMI activity related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine was discussed through the RAS and information was shared on a daily basis to foster a common situational awareness. The RAS has also acted as a forum to discuss the advancement of the EU's policy framework to tackle FIMI.

In accordance with the EU Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) arrangements, the EEAS has regularly provided consolidated **inputs to the Integrated Situational Awareness and Analysis (ISAA) reports**, in order to provide decision makers, including in the Member States, with a clear common picture of the developing situation in Ukraine. In 2022, the EEAS further strengthened its situational awareness by regularly sharing its analytical contributions with the EU Delegations worldwide.

## OBJECTIVE 2: DEVELOP APPROPRIATE POLICIES, STRATEGIES, AND INSTRUMENTS TO RESPOND TO THE THREAT

The EEAS cooperates with EU Member States, international partners as well as other stakeholders on raising awareness of what the threat is, closing the space for allegations that the EU is infringing on freedom of expression in its fight against FIMI. The conceptual definition of FIMI that was developed by the EEAS and presented in the 2021 Activity Report enabled to clearly describe the manipulative behaviour at the core of the threat to security and democracy. The fact that the definition encompasses both the behavioural side with the focus on Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs) and the content side which remains crucial for effective responses, has garnered continued international interest. Both the **G7 Foreign Ministers Communiqué** of May 2022<sup>11</sup> and the **G7 Interior and Security Ministers' Statement** of November 2022<sup>12</sup> draw attention to the threat and call for closer cooperation.

Building on the FIMI conceptual definition and the work on a common analytical framework and methodology, the EEAS has the ambition to constantly develop further the approaches, strategies and policies to tackle FIMI, paying tribute to the fact that the threat changes constantly and rapidly. The concrete actions implemented by the EEAS feed into a considerable effort to strengthen the EU's framework to tackle FIMI, in particular through the **FIMI Toolbox**. Building on the 2020 European Democracy Action Plan, the 2022 **Strategic Compass** called for the EEAS to further develop the EU's FIMI Toolbox, a task that went on throughout the year.



The **Council Conclusions on FIMI** of July 2022 highlight the priority that this work takes. The Toolbox covers the entire scope of potential action, from 1) situational awareness to 2) resilience building, 3) disruption and regulation up to 4) measures of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The Toolbox allows to understand the different instruments that the EU and its partners have at their disposal to prevent, deter and respond to FIMI, and which instruments still need to be developed.

The decision of the EU Member States to impose sanctions on Russian disinformation outlets such as RT and Sputnik, as well as Russian state-controlled TVs has also shaped the work during last year. The systematic evidence collected by the EEAS helped demonstrate that Kremlin-controlled outlets have been used as instruments of war propaganda. The judgment by the European Court of Justice in a case brought forward by RT France confirmed that the sanctions and the grounds for them given by the European Union were valid and remain in place, making it impossible for the outlets in question to operate in the European Union, offline and online. In total, in 2022 the EU has suspended the broadcasting activities and licenses of 9 Kremlin-backed disinformation outlets (Sputnik, RT, RTR Planeta, Rossiya 24, Rossiya 1, TV Centre International, NTV/NTV Mir, REN TV, Pervyi Kanal). Individual sanctions have been imposed on several dozen of Russian propagandists.



A new track that was explored in 2022 is the potential development of **international principles or norms** on FIMI. Inspiration can be drawn from examples in other domains, like the international norms for responsible state behaviour in cyber space<sup>13</sup>. Exchanges with international partners and stakeholders from civil society and private industry have shown great interest in this potential work strand and efforts will continue in 2023.

The development of policies, strategies and new instruments by the EEAS was conducted in close exchanges with the European Institutions and the European Member States. Meetings of the Rapid Alert System and discussions in the **Council Horizontal Working Party on Enhancing Resilience and Countering Hybrid Threats (HWP ERCHT)** ensured close cooperation on files like the FIMI Toolbox and the EU's response to Russian FIMI in its war against Ukraine. Regular briefings to different Council Working Groups on the different actors, regions and topics covered, as well as presentations to the **European Parliament's Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the EU, including Disinformation (INGE/ING2)** committee ensured continuous updates to EU Member States and the European Parliament.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PROVIDE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT TO EU DELEGATIONS AND CSDP MISSIONS AND OPERATIONS

Russia, in light of its war against Ukraine, but also other foreign actors, have stepped up their information manipulation and interference and targeted systematically the EU and its Member States in regions prone to conflict and instability, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Many of these FIMI activities have increasingly targeted the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) strategic and operational actions, in particular the Missions and Operations in the regions of deployment. In 2022, the EEAS started to pilot support to select CSDP missions and operations, both civilian and military, to building resilience against FIMI and with the adoption of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defense<sup>14</sup>, this initiative has become part of the wider efforts to tackle FIMI not only as a strategic communication issue, but also as threat to our common foreign and security policy objectives.

A dedicated team working on this issue has been established, which comprises of four people with relevant expertise in the field, and ensures a permanent liaison with the concerned Missions and Operations on FIMI. Throughout the year, in cooperation with the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC), the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) and EU Member States, the EEAS's work on FIMI has then been gradually mainstreamed to the CSDP deployments in Sub-Saharan Africa (Central African region and Sahel), the Eastern Neighbourhood region and maritime security operations in the Mediterranean and the Western Indian Ocean.

In order to build an effective response to this threat, the current focus lies on increasing the situational awareness of the concerned Missions and Operations on FIMI actors and their TTPs, as well as on building capacity and increasing expertise at mission level, as a long-term strategy. This operational support is complemented by regular training sessions on FIMI in order to increase their threat awareness. Work is currently ongoing to expand the support to missions in the Eastern Neighbourhood, the Horn of Africa, but also to a number of EU Delegations in Sub-Saharan Africa operating in the most hostile and conflict prone environments.

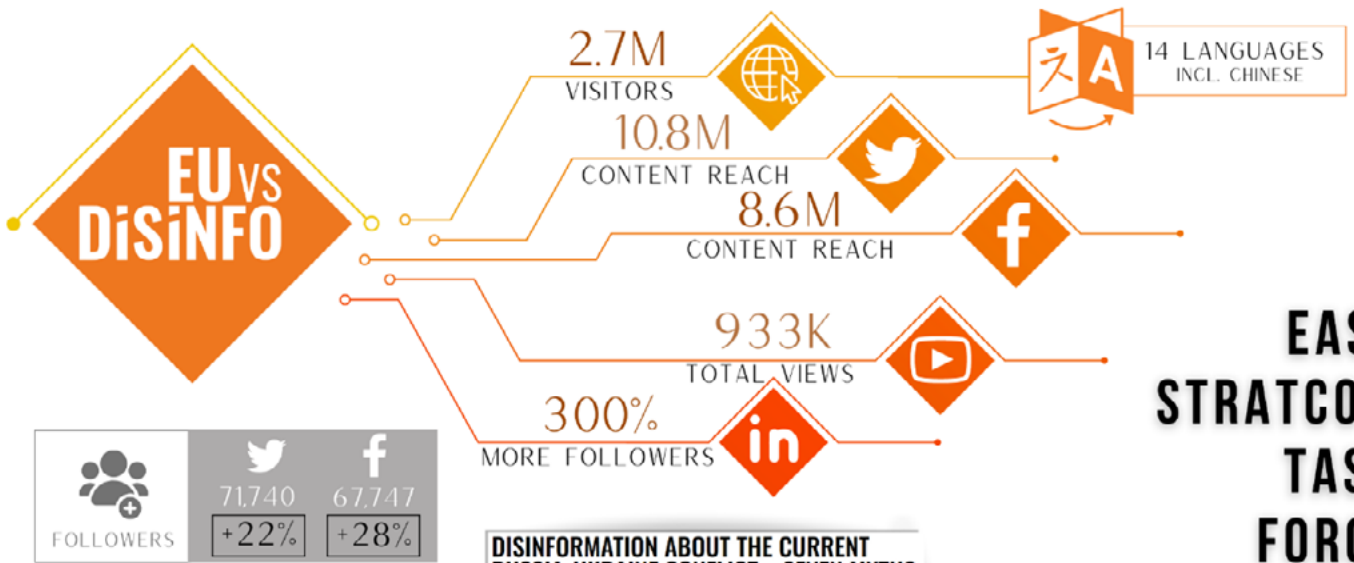
#### **OBJECTIVE 4: STRENGTHENING PUBLIC RESILIENCE AND AWARENESS OF FIMI IN THE EU AND BEYOND**

The EEAS raised awareness of its work on FIMI in many public speaking engagements, inside and outside of the European Union. The team has given over 120 public presentations and workshops in person and online; the East StratCom Task Force alone directly reached out to over 13000 people in the EU and beyond. Working closely with other EEAS colleagues, three public discussions on Twitter Spaces were organised: with Ukrainian fact-checkers and journalists as well as with Head of EU Delegation to Ukraine. The EEAS also joined among many others events organised by the Europe Direct Centres as well as the Stratcom Centre of Excellence, the Committee of the Regions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, the Free Press for Eastern Europe, the Czech Presidency to the EU along with numerous events organised by EU Delegations, the European Digital Media Observatory, the European Parliament.

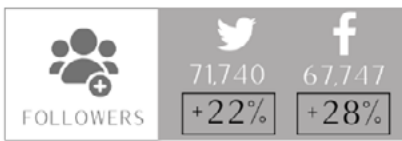
The EUvsDisinfo website raises awareness of pro-Kremlin information manipulation and disinformation, and it attracted **over 2.7 million visitors in 2022. Millions more (estimated 20 million) were reached via the EUvsDisinfo social media accounts.** EUvsDisinfo awareness raising products have been made available and consistently shared with the EU Delegations, the European Commission and the European Parliament Representations, the European Member States and international partners. With the help of partners, selected EUvsDisinfo products have been translated into multiple languages, including all the official EU languages, as well as Ukrainian, Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Russian, Chinese, Arabic and others.

EUvsDisinfo has also launched a dedicated section documenting China's FIMI activities and the convergence of Russian and Chinese disinformation efforts, in addition to a section dedicated to exposing information manipulation and disinformation about Ukraine. To give an additional platform for civil society voices from Ukraine, elsewhere in the Eastern Partnership region and beyond, EUvsDisinfo now features a guest section<sup>15</sup>.





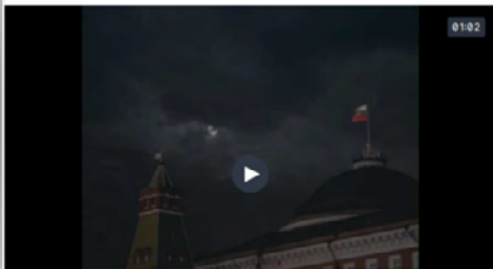
**EAST  
STRATCOM  
TASK  
FORCE  
2022**



**DISINFORMATION ABOUT THE CURRENT RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT – SEVEN MYTHS DEBUNKED**

**MOST POPULAR**

The Kremlin keeps fabricating pretexts for its aggressive behaviour against Ukraine, both on the ground and in the information sphere. We know this playbook and we will not be deceived.



**f** VIDEO ABOUT UKRAINE PUBLISHED BEFORE 24 FEB  
830K REACH



ARTICLE ABOUT 7 DISINFO MYTHS  
100K VIEWS IN EN  
100K VIEWS IN RU



**▶** SILENT NIGHT VIDEO  
223K VIEWS IN RO  
178K VIEWS IN RU



**▶** DEBUNKING RUSSIAN MFA  
709K IMPRESSIONS

To mark the Global Media and Information Literacy Week in October 2022, the EEAS has also launched “LEARN”<sup>16</sup>, a dedicated webpage explaining the mechanisms, tactics, common narratives and actors behind disinformation and information manipulation. “LEARN” draws on expertise of EUvsDisinfo and is available in English, Ukrainian and Russian. Moreover, EUvsDisinfo raises awareness about disinformation targeting democratic Belarus and crackdown on independent media and organisations taking place under Lukashenka regime.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has added another layer of complexity to the regional multifarious problems in the **Western Balkans** region. The work in this region envisages engagement on advancing the understanding of EU values and positions, specifically addressing the communication challenges related to the Russian aggression against Ukraine through contributions at public events in the region, hosting study groups, providing background briefings to journalists and by supporting local studies on disinformation. The EEAS has also produced the fourth edition of its very popular campaign ‘Europeans making a difference’ that reflects and underpins the Union’s enhanced engagement in the region and with its citizens.



The event ‘Media integrity in the age of disinformation’ (Sarajevo, 7 April 2022), organised by the EEAS in cooperation with the EU Delegation to BiH, brought together leading international journalists and young journalists from the Western Balkans

In the **Western Balkans** region, the EEAS has worked with EU delegations on developing impactful communication strategies and actions including to understand how hybrid influencing is affecting the region. Throughout the year, a special focus was given to multi-layered and sustained strategic communication efforts and engagement that pre-empt and prevents rather than merely reacts to rapidly evolving threats. Considering

the high complexity of the region, the EEAS also focused on more long-term, sustained, resourceful and highly specialised strategic communication engagement. This context demands advanced strategizing to support the region in dealing with FIMI activities that have been evolving and increasing since the Russian aggression on Ukraine.

Concerning the **MENA region**, the EEAS’s work on comprehensive situational awareness regarding the FIMI threat landscape feeds directly the work on proactive communications. The analysis of adversarial narratives and malign behaviour is highly valuable in the development of EU communication as well as in the decision-making process in terms of EU policies and projects to be implemented in the MENA region. The work of the EU Regional Media Officer (RMO) provided an additional tool for the EU to engage with Arabic-speaking audiences. The RMO consolidated his presence among media in the region and expanded his social media activities on his two platforms (‘EUinArabic’ on Twitter and ‘eubilaraby’ on Instagram). The focus lies on amplifying the HRVP’s activities and engaging with the audience, especially with youth.



In 2022, the context of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine demonstrated the added value of the @EUinArabic tool for **the MENA region**. The Russian invasion of Ukraine elicited great interest among pan-Arab media. The RMO made it a priority to explain the EU’s response and counter Russian FIMI activities. Since February 2022, the RMO conducted more than 150 interviews with pan-Arab channels on the Russian invasion of Ukraine to counter FIMI led by the Kremlin in the MENA region on several fronts ranging from the origins of the conflict to the negative impact of the war on food and energy security in the Southern neighbourhood. In liaison with EU Delegations, the EEAS’s holistic approach to Strategic Communication in this region has proven very effective in integrating the analysis of FIMI and disinformation narratives into the development of tailored messages to debunk the disinformation from the Kremlin, targeting MENA audiences. Against this challenging context, the RMO succeeded in addressing FIMI directly by reinvesting the space so far left unoccupied and representing the EU perspective in a tense anti-West and anti-EU media and social media landscape.



## OBJECTIVE 5: RESILIENCE AND CAPACITY BUILDING IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

Supporting **Ukraine**'s strategic communication efforts has been and remains a priority. The EEAS works very closely with the government of Ukraine, civil society and media partners. Together with the Service of Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI), the Support Group for Ukraine and the EU Delegation in Ukraine, the Division designed support projects to help Ukraine's strategic communication efforts following Russia's full scale invasion. In addition, dedicated communication campaigns, such as "ARTvsWAR"<sup>17</sup> and "Faces of Ukraine"<sup>18</sup>, helped show another dimension of the war and contributed to keeping Ukraine as well as EU's support to the country as a prominent topic amongst EU audiences.

During the last year, the EEAS has directed its efforts at strengthening **Moldova**'s resilience to FIMI. Working in close cooperation with the EU Delegation in Moldova, it has supported the strategic communication of Moldova's government and strengthened the capacity of Moldova's Audiovisual Council – a regulatory body in charge of overseeing the media and informational space. Moldovan officials and civil society representatives participated in trainings to better address the threat of FIMI and financial support has been delivered to independent media and civil society organisations countering FIMI and disinformation.

In June 2022, the EEAS brought approximately 80 representatives of fact-checkers, journalists and civil society organisations from the Eastern neighbourhood and Central Asia to Brussels.

This two day event allowed the participants to share experience and best practices in fighting FIMI and disinformation and learn new tools and approaches to build resilience against the threat. The EEAS also cooperated closely with the Czech Council Presidency and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in organizing the Fourth edition of the **Eastern Partnership Media Conference**. The event gathered more than 100 journalists and media professionals from Eastern Partnership countries and participants from EU Institutions and EU Member States to engage in discussions on how to strengthen the resilience of the independent media and professional journalism. Countering FIMI and disinformation featured prominently among the topics. The EEAS also contributed to **providing support to independent media and civil society organisations** countering disinformation in Ukraine and Moldova and supported DG NEAR in steering the Eastern Partnership's regional EU4Independent project. Journalists from Eastern Partnership countries were invited to raise awareness about the EU and its policies and to foster regional contacts.

The EEAS has been instrumental in providing support to **Russian independent media** forced to flee the ever more repressive Russian regime and has also worked to reaching Russian audiences with messages countering Kremlin information manipulation and disinformation.

During the last year, the EEAS's work in the **Western Balkans** region has remained fully engaged on identifying and analysing main FIMI trends as well as on implementing a wide scope of actions that contributed to awareness-raising and resilience building. All actions focused on increasing the capacity of the region to deal with the rapidly evolving, and multiplying FIMI challenges. In addition to providing content





for the EEAS digital communication channels focused on the Western Balkans, the work has focused on narrowing the space for and on countering information manipulation that is increasingly hostile towards the EU in some parts of the region. The EEAS has implemented a wide range of strategic communication actions and engagements with the key local stakeholders, including journalists, fact-checkers, broader civil society actors but also government structures. One of the crucial elements was securing joint communication strategies and implementation of action plans around key moments in EU-Western Balkans relations that included EU institutions, Member States as well as Western Balkans partners. This included proactive and factual communication as well as capacity building of institutions in the region to deal with FIMI threats. In the reporting period, among other activities, the EEAS has engaged with over 250 journalists discussing the most effective ways of supporting and practicing professional journalism in the region, which is of key importance for fighting FIMI.

In terms of societal resilience in the **MENA** region, the EEAS further advanced with the nurturing of and engagement with the network of local experts coming from civil society, academia and media with a view of following the evolution of the multi-faceted FIMI threat in MENA while amplifying the reach of their projects in terms of awareness raising. Such a forum is also an occasion to include the views and needs of local actors in the EU actions aimed at protecting freedom of expression online and offline in the MENA region.

EEAS has also initiated work to cooperate with civil society organisations and provide support to independent media outside of EU's immediate neighbourhood, for example in the **Indo-Pacific region**.

## **OBJECTIVE 6: COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS**

One of the **key pillars for the EEAS's work to prevent, deter and respond to FIMI is the cooperation with likeminded partners**. This focuses in particular on sharing information, policy approaches as well as cooperation on specific campaigns and projects. It is not a purpose in itself – the nature of FIMI is global and oftentimes targets democracies collectively. This can include attacks against the European Union, NATO or “the West”. In particular Russia's attempts to manipulate information at the level of the United Nations, such as the Security Council, shows that an approach focussed on the EU alone cannot be enough.

Cooperation with likeminded partners around the world is crucial to build a broad understanding of the harm that FIMI does to the international community and that cooperation is a key in successful responding to the threat.

The EEAS has a long-standing cooperation with international partners like the United States and Canada, but also exchanges with other likeminded partners on a bilateral basis. **The EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC)** in its Working Group 6 has a track on tackling FIMI – it focuses on a stronger cooperation facilitated by a more common analytical approach. This is a long-term goal that will help the EU make exchanges of information on FIMI more efficient and comparable, ultimately contributing to a stronger basis for potential joint action. The EEAS and the EU Delegation in Ottawa worked with Global Affairs Canada to **scope potential for multi-stakeholder engagement towards the development of international norms** on foreign information manipulation and interference, through a series of roundtables organised by the EEAS.<sup>19</sup>

Cooperation with international organisations like **NATO**<sup>20</sup> likewise has a long tradition: EU and NATO staff consistently exchanged in-depth reporting, real-time insights and worked hand-in-hand to maintain shared situational awareness of hostile activities in the information environment, including through the EU Rapid Alert System. During analyst exchanges such as the EU-led international cooperation calls and regular ad-hoc meetings, staff continuously shared assessments of the information environment, including on Russia's war on Ukraine. Staff closely monitored hostile information activities, and identified information manipulation and disinformation, in advance of and during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, using the insights to inform both organizations' strategic communications approaches and other response options. Staff tracked China's StratCom activities providing political support to Russia and their amplification of Russian messaging. The NATO-led Information Environment Assessment Tiger Team fostered close coordination and cooperation with EU staff regarding capability development.

Multilateral cooperation, in particular in through the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism, but also other networks was further strengthened. In the framework of the G7 RRM, the EEAS works on communicating and explaining its approach to FIMI, including the proposed conceptual definition and the common analytical framework and methodology. The EEAS supported the work of the Analytics Working Group and shared insights into its methodology to identify and categorise FIMI activity.

The EEAS progresses in its cooperation with the Hybrid Centre of Excellence in Helsinki and the StratCom Centre of Excellence in Riga. It supported both Centres of Excellence in their work on the report “Foreign information manipulation and interference defence standards: Test for rapid adoption of the common language and framework DISARM”<sup>21</sup>. Furthermore, the EEAS facilitated the involvement of government and civil society representatives from Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in the Countering Disinformation War Game co-organized by the Hybrid Centre Helsinki and the StratCom Centre in Riga. Additional work has been done with EU Hybnet<sup>22</sup> on a common approach to identify and analyse information manipulation and interference, and build resilience to such activity. This work feeds into the broader work of the EEAS on a common analytical framework and methodology.

2022 saw preparations for closer cooperation with the United Nations on the topic of FIMI. In the 2021 Report “Our Common Agenda”<sup>23</sup> by the Secretary General, it was acknowledged that the “ability to cause large-scale disinformation and undermine scientifically established facts is an existential risk to humanity”. The report also suggests a global code of conduct that promotes integrity in public information. Work led by the UN Department of Global Communications offers many possibilities for increased

cooperation, as do other work strands of the UN itself and its bodies, such as the work on disinformation by UNESCO and UNDP. Cooperation with other international partners who work on the topic will likewise be explored, based on initial exchanges, to ensure mutual awareness of ongoing work strands and to identify possibilities for closer engagement.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Since the EEAS first started to build its capacity to prevent, deter and respond to FIMI in 2015, considerable progress has been made to increase capacities and capabilities to be more effective in dealing with these threats. 2022 has shown that the EEAS is well prepared to identify and push back against FIMI activity, in close cooperation with EU institutions, Member States and international partners. Additional areas of engagement and increased efforts have been identified.

This report highlights that during 2022, the EEAS has supported its 6 objectives in tackling FIMI with in total 46 projects across the Task Forces and Teams of the EEAS STRAT.2 Division. This includes, amongst others, projects of media monitoring in the priority regions, data analysis of FIMI, research, strategic communication projects, conferences to enhance resilience and to raise awareness, cooperation with partners, as well as the further development of the EUvsDisinfo capacity. Following up on the Strategic Compass, the EEAS intensified its work to develop a FIMI Data Space, which could be facilitated by a FIMI ISAC. These projects are crucial to countering FIMI; the majority of the outcomes are combined within the teams and further used to support the work of Delegations, geographical desk of the EEAS, Member States and like-minded partners.



# ANNEX

## 1. OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT DOCUMENTS FOR EEAS' S WORK ON FIMI

### II. Council conclusions on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) of 18 July 2022, summary of relevant parts<sup>24</sup>.

Among others, the Council conclusions:

- Welcomed the ongoing efforts by the High Representative and the European Commission in the development of an EU FIMI Toolbox;
- Enhanced cooperation both within the EU and in support of partner countries, as well as in our Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations;
- Invited the High Representative and the Commission, with the full involvement of Member States to elaborate tailored approaches to increase the EU's engagement at the multilateral level with and within the United Nations and other international and regional organisations, in line with the Strategic Compass;
- Stressed the need to increase our resilience capacities and cooperation both within the EU as well as of our CSDP missions and operations and in support of partner countries; reiterates that, by 2024, all CSDP mission and operations will be fully equipped with capabilities and resources to deploy relevant instruments of the FIMI Toolbox;
- Emphasised the importance of enhancing cooperation with like-minded partners, such as NATO, the G7 as well as civil society and private sector and of increasing efforts within the UN framework;
- Called for a strengthened engagement of EU Delegations and the diplomatic network of Member States across the EU neighbourhood and beyond.
- Welcomed the work done by the EEAS SG.STRAT.2 and its task forces;
- Called for the High Representative and the Commission to present options, in full respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, for well-defined measures that could be taken against FIMI actors when this is necessary to protect EU public order and security.

### III. Conclusions of the European Council meeting (15 December 2022), summary of relevant parts<sup>25</sup>.

The Conclusions in particular:

- Underlined the importance of the transatlantic bond as reflected in both the EU's Strategic Compass and the NATO Strategic Concept;
- Called for an acceleration on the work on the Strategic Compass;
- Called for the swift implementation of the EU Hybrid Toolbox, thereby strengthening the Union's ability to counter hybrid threats and campaigns effectively;
- Called for civilian CSDP to be strengthened, with a view to the adoption of a new Civilian CSDP Compact by May 2023.

### IV. European Parliament resolution of 9 March 2022 on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation, summary of relevant parts<sup>26</sup>.

The resolution in particular:

- Provides for general support for the work of the EEAS SG.STRAT.2 Division in particular, when it comes to specific developing work strands: common definition; common methodology and the FIMI Toolbox;
- Suggests further improvement to the work of the EEAS SG.STRAT.2 Division in particular concerning a broader geographic scope and the EU Rapid Alert System;
- Called for raising costs on perpetrators.



## ENDNOTES

- 1 More information on the Action Plan against Disinformation (2018) is available here: [https://commission.europa.eu/publications/action-plan-disinformation-commission-contribution-european-council-13-14-december-2018\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/publications/action-plan-disinformation-commission-contribution-european-council-13-14-december-2018_en)
- 2 More information on the European Democracy Action Plan (2020) could be found here: [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/european-democracy-action-plan\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/european-democracy-action-plan_en)
- 3 More information on the European Strategic Compass (2022) is available here: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en)
- 4 The Council Conclusions (2022) are available here: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11429-2022-INIT/en/pdf>. Additionally, the legislative proposal for a Media Freedom Act (2022) is available here <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/european-media-freedom-act-proposal-regulation-and-recommendation>, the Proposal for a Regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising (2022) is available here <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52021PC0731> and the Proposal for a Directive on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded or abusive court proceedings (2022) is available here <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022PC0177> all add to the strength of the EU's framework.
- 5 More information is available here <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2022elmau/2022-05-06-rrm-data.pdf> and here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/g7-foreign-ministers-meeting-in-germany-2022-communique/g7-foreign-ministers-meeting-in-germany-2022-communique>
- 6 Available here : [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220620-progress-report-nr7-EU-NATO-eng.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220620-progress-report-nr7-EU-NATO-eng.pdf)
- 7 The Report (2022) is available here <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a77288-disinformation-and-freedom-of-opinion-and-expression-during-armed>
- 8 More information on the project is available here: <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/>
- 9 More information about the INGE Special Committee is available here <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/inge/about>
- 10 More information on the joint report is available here: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/disinformation-european-external-action-service-and-eu-agency-cybersecurity-join-forces\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/disinformation-european-external-action-service-and-eu-agency-cybersecurity-join-forces_en)
- 11 More information could be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/g7-foreign-ministers-meeting-in-germany-2022-communique/g7-foreign-ministers-meeting-in-germany-2022-communique>
- 12 The Statement is available here: <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2022/11/19/g7-interior-and-security-ministers-statement>
- 13 EU Statement on this: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/eu-statement-%E2%80%93-un-open-ended-working-group-ict-rules-norms-and-principles\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/eu-statement-%E2%80%93-un-open-ended-working-group-ict-rules-norms-and-principles_en)
- 14 Strategic Compass, SECURE Chapter – “By 2024 all CSDP Missions and operations will be fully equipped with capabilities and resources to deploy relevant instruments of this [ EU FIMI] Toolbox”
- 15 <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/guest-content/>
- 16 <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/learn/>
- 17 [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/artvswar\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/artvswar_en)
- 18 [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/faces-ukraine-wrap-video-0\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/faces-ukraine-wrap-video-0_en)
- 19 More information is available here: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/05/16/joint-declaration-following-the-third-eu-canada-joint-ministerial-committee-meeting/>
- 20 More information about the cooperation with NATO is available here: [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220620-progress-report-nr7-EU-NATO-eng.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220620-progress-report-nr7-EU-NATO-eng.pdf)
- 21 More information is available here: [https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/20221129\\_Hybrid\\_CoE\\_Research\\_Report\\_7\\_Disarm\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/20221129_Hybrid_CoE_Research_Report_7_Disarm_WEB.pdf)
- 22 More information on the EU Hybnet is available here: [https://euhybnet.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/EU-HYBNET\\_Policy-Brief\\_-\\_Information-Manipulation-and-Interference\\_Feb-2022.pdf](https://euhybnet.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/EU-HYBNET_Policy-Brief_-_Information-Manipulation-and-Interference_Feb-2022.pdf)
- 23 The Report could be consulted here: [https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common\\_Agenda\\_Report\\_English.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf)
- 24 The Council Conclusions are available here: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11429-2022-INIT/en/pdf>
- 25 More information on the Conclusions is available here: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/60872/2022-12-15-euco-conclusions-en.pdf>
- 26 The text of the resolution is available here: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0064\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0064_EN.html)

