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GEO-POWER-EU

Case study: Anti-European disinformation in Ukraine during the Euromaidan period and the full-scale war of Russia against Ukraine

**GEO-POWER-EU: EMPOWERING THE GEOPOLITICAL EU IN
THE EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD AND THE WESTERN BALKANS**

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ABOUT GEO-POWER-EU PROJECT

GEO-POWER-EU aims to empower the EU to manage security threats in its Eastern Neighbourhood and the Western Balkans amidst a deteriorating geopolitical environment. The project's primary ambition is to surpass current standards and develop a comprehensive EU strategy for these regions, utilising new and reformed policy instruments while considering the strategic ambitions of other geopolitical actors.

To achieve this, GEO-POWER-EU's work plan is built on six specific objectives: proposing adaptations to the EU Enlargement policy to reflect new realities; examining the relevance of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and providing policy recommendations for its reform; assessing the influence of other geopolitical actors, including the United States, Russia, China, and Turkey, in these regions; offering strategic foresight on the prospects of geopolitical competition in these areas; exploring ways to enhance the EU's ability to contain military threats from beyond its borders; and proposing a comprehensive, multidimensional EU strategy to guide relations with Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries.

The project's research aims to advance beyond the current state of the art by developing a new conceptual and policy framework using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Methodologically, GEO-POWER-EU leverages cutting-edge expertise from various disciplines, implementing a multi-stage plan grounded in a participatory and inclusive approach. This approach involves systematic engagement of researchers from third institutions, decision-makers, stakeholders, and citizens—including those from the regions under analysis—throughout the project cycle. More about the project: <https://geo-power.eu/>

LIST OF PARTNER BENEFICIARIES INVOLVED

- European Neighbourhood Council (ENC), Belgium
- University of the Peloponnese (UoP), Greece
- Kentro Erevnon Notioanatolikis Evropis Astiki Mi Kerdoskopiki Etaireia (SEERC), Greece
- Alma Mater Studiorum - Universita Di Bologna (UNIBO), Italy
- Wiener Institut Fur Internationale Wirtschaftsvergleiche (WIIW), Austria
- Sveuciliste U Rijeci (UNIRI), Croatia
- Institut Za Demokratija Societas Civilis Skopje (IDSCS), Republic of North Macedonia
- Univerzitet U Beogradu – Fakultet Političkih Nauka (FPN), Serbia
- Vienneast Consulting Gmbh (VE Insight), Austria
- Democratization Policy Council (DPC), Germany
- Institutul Pentru Dezvoltare Si Initiative Sociale Viitorul (IDIS VIITORUL), Moldova
- Odeskiy Nacionalniy Universitet Imeni I.I. Mechnikova (ONU), Ukraine
- Georgian Foundation For Strategic And International Studies - Gfsis (GFSIS), Georgia
- Utrikespolitiska Institutet Informationsavd (UII), Sweden

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the information sphere, domestic elites also drive disinformation. The study shows that **disinformation is domestically produced, locally adapted, and strategically targeted**, even when foreign actors provide content or amplification. Serbia illustrates this mechanism: leaders frame protests as “Western-orchestrated coloured revolutions” for internal audiences while presenting students’ protests externally as pro-Russian manipulation—two contradictory narratives deployed to maximise political gains. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, ruling elites in Republika Srpska blend ethnonationalist and pro-Kremlin messaging to weaken state authority. In Georgia, the government-backed campaign around the “foreign agents law” portrays Western partners as destabilising actors. Ukraine represents a contrasting case, where civil society and state institutions have built comparatively effective information-resilience structures.

Across cases, patrons use disinformation to **delegitimise opposition, reshape public perceptions of foreign partners, and present different narratives to different audiences**. Foreign sponsors—especially Russia—offer templates and amplification, but domestic elites remain the central translators and deployers. The same actors who negotiate corrosive deals often rely on disinformation to defend them, presenting criticism as “foreign pressure” and portraying China, Russia, or Turkey as pragmatic partners. Material and narrative influence reinforce each other, creating a cycle of dependency that shields elites from accountability.

The study also highlights **actors of resistance**: independent media exposing procurement abuses; civil society groups tracking environmental and social impacts; local communities mobilising against destructive mining or energy projects; fact-checking organisations documenting coordinated disinformation campaigns; and anti-corruption bodies that occasionally resist political capture. These counterweights show that corrosive practices face pushback and that policy interventions can strengthen oversight.

CASE STUDY: ANTI-EUROPEAN DISINFORMATION IN UKRAINE DURING THE EUROMAIDAN PERIOD AND THE FULL-SCALE WAR OF RUSSIA AGAINST UKRAINE

1. DISINFORMATION CONTEXT

In modern academic research, disinformation is defined as an important part of the information war. The purpose is to discredit public trust in legitimate institutions and foster disorientation within society (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). In the field of political communication, disinformation is defined as the spread of false or manipulative information (Fossum 2022).

Ukraine is among the first countries that became a target of Russia's hybrid information war, taking on a systemic character. This process received speed after the Orange Revolution in 2004, it escalated significantly during the Euromaidan protests in 2013–2014, and turned to new forms in the wake of the full-scale invasion in 2022 (Brusylovska & Maksymenko 2022). A characteristic constant of this hybrid warfare is that disinformation did not always originate from external sources. A significant part of the information flow was disseminated via internal channels, including local politicians, media channels, and public "experts." This created a hybrid form of disinformation that was difficult to identify as explicitly hostile. From the perspective of theoretical conceptualisation, this phenomenon can be analysed through the concept of "information disorder", which encompasses three categories: misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Studying the case of anti-European disinformation in Ukraine through the lens of the information disorder model and classifications of manipulated content is particularly appropriate. The anti-European narratives and media frames spread in the country contained partial truths or historical facts and were presented in highly manipulative formats.

Ukraine's high vulnerability to anti-European disinformation is linked to a wide range of cultural and systemic factors that the Russian Federation has consistently exploited for decades in its efforts to undermine Ukrainian identity. Russia promoted narratives of a 'shared history, culture, and religion' through its media and political presence in Ukraine, which resonated particularly strongly in border regions with a high level of Russophilia and among older segments of the population. Such an influence is difficult to overcome in a short time: until 2014, Ukrainian society and the state offered little resistance, largely due to the lack of awareness of potential security threats emanating from Russia. After the events of 2014, part of the population continued to maintain loyalty to Russian cultural and geopolitical orientations, often separating Putin's regime from the Russian people or the Russian state.

Additional factors contributing to Ukraine's vulnerability to anti-European disinformation included the regional divide within the country, the concentration of media ownership in the hands of pro-Russian oligarchs, institutional polarisation and fragmentation of political elites, and high levels of trust in religious institutions subordinated to the Moscow Patriarchate. At the

same time, the younger generation has increasingly distanced itself from Russian culture and demonstrates higher levels of media literacy. These structural conditions, which created fertile ground for anti-European disinformation campaigns in 2013–2014, have had a reduced impact after 2022, particularly in the context of Russia’s full-scale military aggression against Ukraine. Nevertheless, even after the invasion, a certain societal vulnerability to anti-European disinformation persists, due to Russia’s long-term structural influence on Ukrainian society, nostalgic sentiments among older generations, the new means of media dissemination through social networks and channels, and the framing of EU policy toward Ukraine during wartime. The case study examines two distinct cases of anti-European disinformation in Ukraine. The first one arose during the Euromaidan protests of 2013–2014. This period was marked by a television-centric media ecosystem and a low level of media literacy. Major television channels such as Inter, UTR, and Ukraina, controlled by pro-Russian oligarchs, together with the ruling Party of Regions and religious institutions, became key transmitters of anti-European narratives. This case has additional importance because it demonstrates domestic political and media actors as central amplifiers, not simply “targets” of foreign influence. The second “full-scale invasion” case covers the period of 2022–2024, in the context of Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine. By this time, the media landscape had shifted toward digital platforms and media literacy had improved significantly due to educational initiatives and fact-checking projects. At the same time, manipulative narratives continued to circulate through anonymous Telegram channels, YouTube influencers, TikTok content creators, and former political figures who retained audiences online.

In both historical periods, anti-European disinformation campaigns played a different role in shaping internal public discourse, somehow exploiting institutional weaknesses, ideological divisions within the country and security threats to territorial integrity.

The Euromaidan case was triggered by the Ukrainian government’s rejection to sign the EU Association Agreement in 2013, which ultimately led to mass mobilisation of society in support of European integration. In response to this, the anti-European messaging campaign became a major component of state-aligned communication. These narratives were reinforced and localised by Ukrainian political elites, the Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada), and domestic media, particularly owned by pro-Russian oligarchs. During 2013–2014, disinformation campaigns sought to discredit European values, threatening that the EU would erode Ukraine’s traditional culture, endanger its religious identity, and weaken its economic sovereignty (Brusylovska 2015).

The media ecosystem was heavily television-centric: over 90% of Ukrainians relied on television as their primary news source. Approximately 60% of that content came from TV channels (Korbut 2021, p. 8). As a result, an estimated 25 to 27 million people were under the influence of information sources actively disseminating anti-European messages – such as fears of ‘losing cultural identity,’ ‘state collapse as a consequence of EU integration,’ or ‘gay parades becoming the new norm.’ Major TV channels such as Inter, UTR, Ukraine, and UBR were owned or controlled by oligarchs with close ties to the ruling Party of Regions and Russia. These channels actively disseminated anti-European messages, including fears about economic collapse, moral degradation, and civil unrest linked to European integration.

The full-scale invasion case research period takes chronologically frames with the beginning of Russia's war aggression against Ukraine in 2022. The media and political environment in Ukraine had dramatically changed. Pro-Russian TV channels were officially banned, and previously dominant political forces like the Opposition Platform, For Life, were outlawed. Nevertheless, anti-European narratives persisted, adapting to new digital environments, and continued to spread through Telegram channels, YouTube influencers, and anonymous digital systems. These campaigns portrayed Europe as weak, self-serving, exploitative, and morally compromised. While media literacy has improved since 2014, significant challenges remain in countering the emotional and manipulative nature of such narratives.

The hybrid character of anti-European disinformation in Ukraine, generated externally but transmitted internally, demonstrates a persistent vulnerability rooted in institutional fragmentation, regional disparities, and historical-cultural tensions. The goal of this case study is to provide a comparative account of how Russian-aligned anti-European disinformation evolved in both periods, which disseminated it, through which platforms, and what effects it had on Ukrainian society and political processes.

Since 2020, the situation in media literacy among Ukrainian citizens has changed. According to the USAID/IREX Media Literacy Index (2023), Ukraine ranked 12th out of 41 European countries in media literacy criteria. Expert reports show that approximately 49% of Ukrainians regularly verify information and use different sources of news (Korbut 2021, p. 4). The implementation of educational and awareness-raising programs became the key factor for fundamental changes in the vulnerability of the population to fake news and disinformation tools. For example, during 2021-2024, more than 800,000 Ukrainians completed online media literacy courses via platforms such as Filter and Dia. Osvita and EdEra. Media analysis and fake news detection have also been incorporated into secondary school programs within subjects like Civic Education and the History of Ukraine.

As a result, the overall level of media literacy in Ukrainian society has significantly increased, particularly since 2022. This progress has significantly contributed to reducing the impact of anti-European disinformation. Ukrainian society has shown notable adaptability by fostering critical thinking, embedding media educational initiatives into institutional frameworks, and implementing national information security strategies.

This paper is divided into several subsections: an overview of the campaigns; actors, key narratives, and target audiences; strategies and tactics; the impact of disinformation; responses and countermeasures; conclusions and recommendations.

2. DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN

2.1. OVERVIEW

During the Euromaidan period, disinformation was largely centralised, state-sanctioned, and institutionally supported. The Ukrainian government under President Yanukovich, in coordination with media owned by oligarchs affiliated with the Party of Regions, launched an internal campaign aimed at delegitimising European integration. Narratives framed the EU as a corrupting force that would undermine Ukraine's sovereignty, destroy its industry, and erode moral values. Disinformation messages included: 'the EU promotes same-sex marriage and moral decline'; 'European integration will destroy Ukraine's agriculture and economy'; 'the West wants to colonise Ukraine and divide it into regions' (Potapova 2017).

These themes were systematically disseminated via national television and regional press. Religious institutions such as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) reinforced these messages by warning of spiritual danger associated with Western liberalism (Brusylovska 2018). The government's own statements and public discourse amplified these fears, presenting pro-European protestors as extremists manipulated by foreign intelligence services. Disinformation thus functioned not only as an ideological tool but as an instrument of regime preservation, aimed at suppressing mass mobilisation and justifying repressive responses.

Following the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022, anti-European disinformation campaigns shifted in format but retained familiar messaging. As traditional media tools were suppressed through government bans, campaigns adapted to a digital-first model. Anonymous Telegram channels, YouTube influencers, and pro-Russian Facebook groups became the primary vectors. Key narratives in this period included: 'the EU supports Ukraine only to weaken Russia'; 'Ukraine is fighting Europe's war, not its own'; 'European support is conditional, hypocritical, and short-term'; 'Western aid leads to debt slavery and loss of independence' (Litra 2024).

The realisation process was changed fundamentally to emotional targeting and rhetorical framing. Disinformation was now delivered through platforms optimised for algorithmic spread. Content was personalised for different audiences: elderly users received nostalgic messages about the Soviet past and Orthodox unity; youth encountered memes and cynical satire about the EU's failures (VoxCheck 2023). The new generation of disinformation narratives was less explicit and more insidious, disguised as opinion, scepticism, or "balanced analysis." This created informational ambiguity and made fact-checking efforts more difficult, as the disinformation did not always present provable falsehoods, but rather manipulated emotional context, selectively presented facts, and implied distrust of Ukraine's European path. In both periods, the goal of the campaign was not merely to oppose Europe but to fragment Ukraine from within: to discredit the idea of European integration by exploiting social fault lines, regional divides, and political cynicism.

2.2 ACTORS, KEY NARRATIVES AND TARGET AUDIENCES

Anti-European disinformation campaigns in Ukraine relied heavily on domestic actors who either deliberately or structurally served as amplifiers of externally generated narratives. These actors shifted across the two observed periods, but their role remained critical in legitimising and disseminating disinformation within Ukrainian society.

In parliament, according to Brusylovska (2014), discussions were deeply polarised: opposition factions (Batkivshchyna, UDAR, and Svoboda) actively promoted a pro-European discourse, while the Party of Regions, the Communist Party and allied MPs portrayed the EU as a threat to the national economy, morality and sovereignty. However, after 2022, these information narratives had no political cover in institutions: in the Verkhovna Rada, the Cabinet of Ministers, and the central media broadcast a stable pro-European position, and public support for EU accession exceeds 85% (Динаміка ставлення українців 2023). Former politicians and political media actors (Anatoliy Shariy, Yevgeniy Murayev, Olena Lukash, and Tetiana Montyan) have partially retained an active audience on social networks and messengers, particularly Telegram, YouTube and TikTok. TV channels controlled by pro-Russian oligarchs were the leading broadcasters of disinformation during 2013-2014: Inter (Firtash/Lyovochkin), Ukraine (Akhmetov); UBR, 112, Tonis and others.

After the start of the full-scale war in 2022, the Ukrainian political space underwent profound transformations. The Verkhovna Rada adopted a series of decisions to ban pro-Russian political forces (in particular, the Opposition Platform — For Life) and to close TV channels that had been spreading destructive or manipulative messages for years (in particular, ZIK, 112, NASH).

Religious institutions of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate also contributed to spreading panic and disinformation narratives. Most of the religious publications served warning messages about the moral danger of ‘Western liberalism’ and ‘multiculturalism’, which potentially contained ‘permissiveness’ (Brusylovska 2018). For example, in his December 2013 sermons, Metropolitan Pavel condemned Europe as ‘spiritually dead’ and ‘imposing sin as the norm’ (Brusylovska 2018). Sermons in churches reinforced stereotypes about the immorality of the West, while contrasting this with the ‘spiritual unity’ of Ukraine and Russia. In rural areas, where access to independent information was limited, and trust in the church and local leaders remained high, these messages had a particularly strong impact. Leaflets, local newspapers, sermons and interpersonal communication within communities created an information environment in which European integration was perceived as a cultural and economic threat. Despite the institutional weakening of pro-Russian forces after 2022, anti-European messages continued to circulate in the domestic information space, thanks to the media activity of former political figures and their infrastructure (Key Narratives in Pro-Kremlin disinformation 2022).

In autumn 2013, Ukraine was embroiled in heated political debates concerning the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU at the upcoming summit in Vilnius. Anti-European discourse was shaped not only by the media, but also by official legislative language – wording in resolutions, ministers' arguments, and assessments by ‘experts’ at government hearings. The majority in parliament, namely deputies from the Party of Regions, the Communist Party of

Ukraine and some other deputies, voted in line with the narrative of rejecting the EU for the sake of ‘economic stability’. As Brusylovska notes, “the PR’s rhetoric showed an attempt to make the pro-Russian vector neutral, a ‘pragmatic alternative’, although in reality it was deeply emotionally charged and aimed at heightening fears” (2023). It is believed that control over leading television channels allowed the authorities to partially mobilise public opinion against Euromaidan. The media broadcast reports about ‘paid extremists’, ‘the nationalist threat’ and ‘the catastrophic consequences of integration with the EU’. Such messages were coordinated with statements by members of parliament and thus appeared to be the official position of the state (Yekelchuk 2015).

An analysis of Inter TV channel broadcasts between 22 November and 31 December 2013 revealed the systematic use of phrases such as ‘fascist coup’, ‘American project’ and ‘Europe – spiritual decline’. Some media outlets actively broadcast predictions about the ‘deindustrialisation of Ukraine in the event of signing the agreement with the EU’ and the ‘loss of the Russian market’ (Khoma, Fedushko & Kunch 2024).

Such arguments were presented under the guise of ‘expert analysis’ with the participation of Dmitry Dzhangirov, Viktor Medvedchuk and others. A media narrative discrediting the protesters became particularly active: they were ‘Nazis’, ‘unemployed westerners’ and ‘agents of the State Department’. These narratives not only delegitimised the protest itself, but also shifted the focus to the geopolitical threat from Europe, presenting it as a ‘destabilising force’. The primary target audience for the spread of anti-European disinformation in Ukraine during this period was, first and foremost, the Russian-speaking population of the country and the regions bordering Russia.

During the full-scale war, anti-European narratives were reoriented towards new formats of disinformation. The primary channels for transmitting information were Telegram, YouTube, Viber, and Facebook, which enabled more precise segmentation of messages for different population groups (VoxCheck 2023). For older groups (pensioners, middle-aged people), the main message disseminated was ‘Europe’s betrayal’, which exploited fears of Ukraine being left to its own devices, economic hardship and the threat of physical destruction (The myth of betrayal 2025).

These messages were actively disseminated through Telegram channels, local Viber groups and even through church community chats.

- o ‘Europe is not saving us, it is only giving us the bare minimum,’ which undermines trust in EU assistance.
- o ‘We are being led into a war of foreign interests,’ which replicates the narrative of Ukraine as a buffer between the EU and Russia.
- o ‘Ukraine will lose its sovereignty by integrating into the EU,’ which directly appeals to the rhetoric of 2013, but in a new context.
- o ‘The EU dictates terms to us even in war,’ which links international support to external control (Stent 2025).

Young audiences, on the other hand, became the target of mixed propaganda: on the one hand, memes and satirical videos aimed at discrediting European aid and European values; on the other, aestheticized messages about ‘neutrality’ as Ukraine’s only sensible strategy. During

discussions on Ukraine's EU membership status, messages were actively disseminated claiming that Ukraine would 'never become a member of the EU' and that European integration itself was an 'empty promise' (EEAS StratCom's responses to foreign information manipulation 2023). At the same time, in the frontline regions (Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, and Kharkiv oblasts), Telegram channels spread messages that 'the EU is prolonging the war' because 'European elites are making money from arms supplies' and 'Europe wants to exhaust Ukraine for its own benefit' (Brusylovska & Maksymenko 2022).

2.3. STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

During both historical case periods: the Euromaidan case (2013–2014) and the full-scale invasion case (after 2022), the strategy for disseminating anti-European narratives changed in line with transformations in Ukraine's media ecosystem and political institutions.

During the Euromaidan period, traditional media outlets were the main platforms for spreading disinformation: TV channels Inter, UT-1, TRK Ukraine, and ICTV (Detector Media 2014). Legislative and executive state authorities also became platforms for voicing arguments that legitimised the anti-European position of Yanukovych's government (Brusylovska 2023).

After 2022, anti-European information campaigns moved to the digital sphere of social media channels, with Telegram, YouTube, TikTok, Facebook and regional Viber groups becoming the main platforms. Anonymous channels linked to former politicians or bloggers spread messages about 'Western selfishness,' 'disappointment in the EU,' and 'Brussels' venality' (Khoma, Fedushko & Kunch 2024).

The strategies and tactics used to spread anti-European disinformation are examined in the works of Ukrainian and foreign researchers after the Revolution of Dignity and during Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine.

Among the techniques used, the following main ones can be identified, which were characteristic of both periods. The tactics described partly correspond to the classification TTP: Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures:

1. Discursive manipulation:

- historical references as manipulative content (e.g., associating the EU with neo-colonialism) (Антиєвропейські наративи Кремля 2025);
- manipulative emphasis;
- repetition of emphatic messages without citing sources (Paul & Matthews, 2016);
- pseudo-analysis – involvement of experts in talk shows broadcast on television channels in 2013-2014 and analysis without sources in Telegram channels by anonymous authors;
- 'neutral opinion' or 'healthy criticism' in analytical posts to avoid a pro-Russian tone.

2. Platform and technological manipulation:

- use of bots and trolls under social media posts to simulate support for posts;
- use of memes and sarcasm (TikTok videos).

3. Emotional framing:

- emotional framing, namely nostalgia and fear;
- emotional clichés (Khoma, Fedushko & Kunch 2024).

2.4. IMPACT OF DISINFORMATION

With the start of the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian society perceived the position of the US and Europe as fairly consolidated. This corresponds to the concept of the ‘collective West,’ which is quite understandable in post-Soviet Ukraine. The collective memory of the Cold War confrontation between the West and the USSR is still vivid. The resurgence of a similar phenomenon was perceived as a crucial factor in the genuine support for Ukraine. By the end of 2024, the situation began to change in two respects. First, there were differences in the positions of individual EU member states from the general pro-Ukrainian line. Second, the election of Donald Trump as US president caused many to doubt the unity of the West's position. In 2024 and 2025, the very concept of the West was used much less frequently in Ukraine. The policies of the US and Europe are not yet completely, but significantly more divergent in the eyes of Ukrainians. The primary concern for Ukrainians in this context is whether the EU will be able to adequately replace the US as Ukraine's military partner, should the need arise.

The degree of susceptibility to anti-European disinformation in Ukraine underwent a significant transformation between the periods of Euromaidan and full-scale war. These changes in society occurred primarily as a result of the transition to the use of other sources of information in everyday life.

In 2013-2014, attitudes towards European integration in Ukrainian society were highly polarised. Only 39% of respondents supported Ukraine's accession to the EU in December 2013. At the same time, 30-35% preferred accession to the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan (Razumkov Centre 2013).

It should be noted that over 90% of Ukrainians received their news from television, of which about 60% of channels were controlled by pro-Russian media owners, including Inter, UT-1, TRK Ukraine, and ICTV (Detector Media 2014). Thus, approximately 25–27 million people were influenced by sources that actively spread anti-European messages, including fears about the ‘loss of cultural identity’, ‘the collapse of the state due to European integration’ or ‘gay parades as the new norm’ (Detector Media 2014).

In addition, pro-Russian television channels (Inter, UT-1, TRK Ukraine) covered over 70% of the audience in the southern and eastern regions, providing significant institutional support for

disinformation narratives. These media outlets regularly broadcast news and television shows that include messages about loss of identity, threats to traditional values, and economic instability, such as ‘the EU will destroy the Ukrainian village,’ ‘Ukraine will lose its religious identity,’ or ‘European integration leads to the legalisation of perversions’ (StopFake 2015).

In regions where there was historically lower trust in Western institutions and a higher level of cultural affinity with Russia, such messages found a favourable environment. As a result, anti-European narratives could significantly influence public opinion, shaping neutral or negative attitudes towards integration with the EU.

After the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Ukrainian citizens' attitudes towards integration into European institutions changed. Surveys by the Rating group (2023) and the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (2022) show consistently high levels of support for EU accession, ranging from 86% to 91%.

At the same time, support for Euro-Atlantic integration has grown significantly: over 81% of respondents support the EU, and 87% of respondents support NATO membership, which was previously a political taboo. Despite the decline in television audiences, which were traditionally used to spread disinformation, anti-European messages have not disappeared.

They have transformed into anonymous Telegram channels, disinformation blogs on YouTube, and publications by marginalised political figures who lost their official platforms after 2022. However, the influence of these sources is limited due to high levels of distrust and the expansion of fact-checking initiatives (VoxCheck, 2023).

2.5 RESPONSES AND COUNTERMEASURES

Countering anti-European disinformation in Ukraine differed in 2013–2014 and the years of full-scale war. During Euromaidan, the government was effectively a source of disinformation, and Ukraine had no centralised strategy to counter anti-European propaganda.

Most initiatives to debunk disinformation came from civil society and journalistic communities. After the 2014 Revolution of Dignity, the Ukrainian state systematically recognised for the first time the threat posed by hybrid forms of information influence, in particular anti-European disinformation broadcast through both external and internal media resources. In response to these challenges, an institutional framework was established to counter destructive narratives in the public sphere.

In 2015, the Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine (MIP) was established as the first state body with a mandate to coordinate national information policy. Its emergence marked the institutionalisation of the issue of information security (Yekelchik 2017). At the same time, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) was given the power to monitor information threats in the domestic media space, including digital platforms and social networks. In 2019, the Centre for Strategic Communications and Information Security was established as an analytical structure under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine. The Centre's

main tasks are to monitor disinformation narratives, develop counter-narratives, and provide analytical support for information security (EEAS StratCom's responses to foreign information manipulation 2023).

At the legislative level, a number of decisions were adopted in 2022–2023: updating the Law of Ukraine “On Media” (2023), which provides for expanding the powers of regulators in the fight against fake news and propaganda; the NSDC's decision to sanction more than 80 Telegram channels that contributed to the spread of anti-European or anti-state ideologies; the introduction of systematic state monitoring of the information space, in particular through the mechanisms of the National Council on Television and Radio Broadcasting and the SBU. These measures have significantly limited the scale of anti-European disinformation, even in a decentralised digital environment where traditional regulatory mechanisms are less effective. At the same time, the role of educational and public tools that strengthen society's information immunity is growing.

One of the first projects was the StopFake initiative, launched in 2014 as a volunteer platform for fact-checking and exposing disinformation (Anti-EU Narratives through the Russian–Ukrainian War 2023). Although StopFake began operating after the culmination of the Euromaidan events, its experience was based on the lessons of that period, when the need for professional fact-checking became apparent. During the Revolution of Dignity itself, student communities played the role of informal counter-initiatives, in particular the Euromaidan SOS group, which, in addition to monitoring human rights violations, was involved in refuting fake news on social media (Polegkyi 2023). Facebook communities such as Euromaidan, Informational Maidan and Maidan Online were active, organically creating counter-narratives in response to propaganda messages.

In response to the new wave of anti-European disinformation that accompanied Russia's invasion in 2022, Ukraine already had a much more developed arsenal of counter-strategies and tools. An important factor was the creation of institutional infrastructure in the field of strategic communications.

The Centre for Strategic Communications and Information Security, established in 2021 under the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy (StratCom Ukraine 2023), plays a key role. The Centre monitors the information space on a daily basis, publishes analytical reports and coordinates the interaction between state bodies and civil society in the field of countering disinformation.

Independent fact-checking projects have made a significant contribution, in particular VoxCheck, which in 2022–2024 created a series of specialised programmes to combat disinformation in the regions (Ukraine 2024). For example, the VoxCheck WarTime FactChecking project (VoxCheck 2023) includes a systematic analysis of fake news circulating on regional Telegram channels and local media.

Kuzmenko (2025) highlights the importance of emotionally oriented countermeasures against disinformation. In this context, civil society initiatives such as Internews Ukraine (<https://internews.ua/>) and Detector Media (<https://en.detector.media/>) have developed special

campaigns to increase the information resilience of audiences through emotional engagement and narrative reconstruction.

Particular attention was paid to working with vulnerable groups in 2022–2024. For example, in cooperation with local media in the Odessa, Kharkiv and Mykolaiv regions, training programmes for journalists on recognising fake messages were implemented (StopFake 2023). Information campaigns were also actively implemented for internally displaced persons, who were one of the main targets of Russian anti-European propaganda.

At the same time, significant challenges remain. Despite progress in regulating the media landscape, platforms such as Telegram remain virtually unregulated. Anonymous channels with thousands of followers continue to spread anti-European messages, often using proxy narratives and manipulative emotional images (Brusylovska & Maksymenko, 2023). Thus, during the full-scale war, the Ukrainian state and civil society have significantly expanded the range of tools to combat anti-European disinformation. At the same time, the effectiveness of countermeasures remains uneven, and resilience to new forms of disinformation remains a critical challenge for further strategic efforts.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISINFORMATION

An analysis of two critical historical phases: the Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014) and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (after 2022) demonstrates that anti-European disinformation in Ukraine was not exclusively an imported phenomenon. In 2013–2014, anti-European disinformation had a clear institutionalised form. Official government channels, parliamentary debates and television channels served as platforms for broadcasting its narratives. After 2022, the strategy and implementation of disinformation transformed; the audience reached a decrease due to the closure of leading television channels, and political legitimisation disappeared due to the ban on pro-Russian parties.

After 2014, Ukraine gradually developed its own institutional response to hybrid information threats. First, the Ministry of Information Policy and the Centre for Strategic Communications were established, followed by the Centre for Countering Disinformation under the National Security and Defence Council, digital fact-checking services, and online media literacy courses. At the education level, programmes for pupils and students were introduced, and educational platforms such as Дія.Освіта and Фільтр were created. These initiatives have significantly increased resilience to manipulation, especially among young people and the urban population. The most noticeable result of these transformations has been a change in public opinion. While in 2013 only 39% of Ukrainians supported the course towards European integration, according to 2023 polls, this figure exceeded 86%. Support for NATO membership has also remained stable at over 80%, which was considered a political taboo in the 2010s. The rise of critical thinking, the growing role of civil society and the emergence of independent think tanks have shaped a new phase of information security based on a combination of state, public and educational efforts.

3.1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Further counteraction to anti-European narratives can be based on two levels:

1. International:

- To counteract right-wing conservative and nationalist views on general European integration processes;
- To support and funding mechanisms for Ukrainian/EU narratives in the broader information space; to invest in strategic communication and resilience;
- To create new EU projects in the fields of science, education, and culture through platform engagement and platform cooperation (Telegram, YouTube/TikTok);
- To strengthen the actions of EU institutions in supporting Ukraine in the war and in its European integration aspirations;
- To provide information about Ukrainian history and culture, and the daily lives of Ukrainians in Ukraine and in the EU;
- To wage a full-scale information war in response to direct Russian information aggression;

- To support independent media ecosystems, including support for European-oriented independent Russian-language factual content where relevant.

2. Ukrainian:

- To improve monitoring and public reporting on narrative trends; to intertwine the information and discourse spaces;
- To institutionalise coordination between state and civil society; to broader horizontal cultural, social, scientific and educational interactions;
- To strengthen local community information hubs (IDPs, frontline areas);
- To expand literacy and critical thinking programmes to older and rural audiences; to support vulnerable groups and displaced populations.

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