

# **The danger of fake news for Common Security and Defence Policy.**

Essay

created for the CSDP Olympiad 2024  
in National University of Public Service – Budapest

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Lisbon, November 2023

## **Abstract and Keywords**

Currently, the European Union faces several challenges that have implications for its security and defence, where Member States need help dealing independently with current threats. However, due to technological advances, these threats have evolved and used conventional and unconventional means simultaneously. Therefore, strengthening the Common Security and Defence Policy becomes increasingly crucial.

This essay was carried out within the scope of the 7<sup>th</sup> Common Security and Defence Policy Olympiad and aims to identify the danger of fake news for the Common Security and Defence Policy. To this end, the derived questions were defined as “What is the role of the EU in combating disinformation present in the Russia-Ukraine conflict?” and “How does Russia use fake news to gain an advantage over Ukraine?” to provide an answer to the central question of this essay “What is the danger of fake news for the Common Security and Defence Policy.”

A systematic review of the literature was used to carry out this test. Through this study, it was possible to conclude that fake news presents itself as a threat to the Common Security and Defence Policy, affecting society and endangering the security of States.

**Keywords:** Common Security and Defence Policy; European Union; Fake News; Russia; Ukraine

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## 2. Preface

I am a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant at the Military Academy attending the Portuguese Army's Artillery training, and I joined the Military Academy – Portugal in October 2019. During my journey at the Military Academy – Portugal, I had the privilege of participating in an international semester at the United States Military Academy at West Point.

It is an honour to participate in the European Initiative for the Exchange of Young Officers, inspired by Erasmus, at the 7<sup>th</sup> CSDP Olympiad – organized by the National University of Public Service.

As a soldier, it is essential to note that knowledge is never too much, so improving it should always be a priority. This way, “The danger of fake news for Common Security and Defence Policy” was studied. The answer to the question posed is considered extremely crucial since we increasingly live in a world where threats are no longer just conventional, but hybrid threats are also emerging. Therefore, I decided to accept the challenge and address this topic due to the inherent complexities of fake news, namely, the impact of fake news on current conflicts and how it shapes perceptions and impacts realities. To this end, the central question of this essay is, “What is the danger of fake news for the Common Security and Defence Policy?”. For this purpose, a systematic literature review was followed to identify and select relevant knowledge for the starting question.

### 3. Introduction

This essay was carried out within the European Initiative for the Exchange of Young Officers, inspired by Erasmus, at the 7th CSDP Olympiad – organized by the National University of Public Service (NUPS).

Manipulation, disinformation, rumours, and conspiracy theories have existed since the dawn of communication in society. However, it is essential to note that fake news is also related to the fraudulent way in which information is produced, distributed, and used by digital communication, given the growing advancement of communication technology, facilitating the manipulation of news, and contributing to a decrease in the credibility of the media.<sup>1</sup> The manipulation of public opinion to affect the natural world has been increasingly common with misinformation and fake news.<sup>2</sup>

Many studies have reported other concepts associated with this topic: i) information pollution,<sup>3</sup> ii) manipulation of the media,<sup>4</sup> or even iii) information warfare.<sup>5</sup> However, in all of them, there is a common concern that fake news damages the public sphere and democracy since people's attitudes have already been shaped even when fake news is proven false.<sup>6</sup>

Fake news can also be presented as news, which has raised increasing concerns in countries where press freedom is under threat (such as Russia, China, Turkey, Libya, Poland, Hungary, Thailand, and Somalia, among others), where political leaders justify media scrutiny through fake news.<sup>7</sup> In this way, politicians denigrate the news, remove

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<sup>1</sup> Kalsnes, B. Fake News. Page Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication. <https://oxfordre.com/communication/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-809>. [26-10-23].

<sup>2</sup> Gu, L. Kropotov, V. & Yarochkin, F. (2017). The Fake News Machine: How Propagandists Abuse the Internet and Manipulate the Public. Trend Micro.

<sup>3</sup> Wardle, C. & Derakhshan, H. (2017). Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making. Council of Europe.

<sup>4</sup> Warwick, A. & Lewis, R. (2017). Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online. Data & Society Research Institute.

<sup>5</sup> Khaldarova, I. & Pantti, M. (2016). Fake News. Journalism Practice. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group. Volume 10. No. 7/2016.

<sup>6</sup> Thorson, E. (2016). Belief Echoes: The Persistent Effects of Corrected Misinformation. Political Communication. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group. Volume 33. No. 3/2016.

<sup>7</sup> Erlanger, S. "Fake news," Trump's obsession, is now a cudgel for strongmen. Page The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/12/world/europe/trump-fake-news-dictators.html>. [19-09-23].

credibility, and present it as fake news, deliberately breaking all the trust that society has in the media based on freedom of expression and freedom of the press.<sup>8</sup>

Political motivation has increasingly been identified in fake news, often called propaganda, where political actors use fake news in news format to influence society's perceptions.<sup>9</sup> Propaganda can then be defined as “[...] *the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intention of the propagandist.*”<sup>10</sup>

The current Russia-Ukraine conflict provided favourable circumstances for fake news to grow and spread. In this way, misleading rumours about i) war crimes, ii) refugees, and iii) the president of Ukraine himself were abundantly disseminated online.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, false and misleading posts about the war in Ukraine continue to stand out, going viral on the leading social media platforms, as is the case with posts on X, formerly Twitter, published by subscribers with a blue tick, which they pay for their false content to be publicized by other users.<sup>12</sup> Thus, we can verify that not only is the Russia-Ukraine conflict an armed conflict but also an online propaganda war, where both i) the authorities, ii) political figures, and iii) individual users take advantage of social communication to promote fake news to gain an advantage over their opponents and shape perceptions and realities.<sup>13</sup>

This essay has its central question: “What is the danger of fake news for the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)?”. Additionally, its primary purpose is to identify the role of the EU in combating disinformation present in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, as well as to understand how Russia uses fake news to gain an advantage concerning Ukraine.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf.: Kalsnes, B. (2018). Op. cit.

<sup>9</sup> Woolley, S. & Guilbeault, D. (2017). Computational Propaganda in the United States of America: Manufacturing Consensus Online. Computational Propaganda Research Project. University of Oxford. No. 5/2017.

<sup>10</sup> Jowett, G. & O'Donnell, V. (2012). Propaganda and Persuasion. SAGE Publications. 5<sup>th</sup> edition. P. 7. [sic].

<sup>11</sup> Holroyd, M. Ukraine war: Five of the most viral misinformation posts and false claims since the conflict began. Page Euronews. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/08/24/ukraine-war-five-of-the-most-viral-misinformation-posts-and-false-claims-since-the-conflic>. [02-10-23].

<sup>12</sup> Sardarizadeh, S. Twitter Blue accounts fuel Ukraine War misinformation. Page BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66113460>. [05-10-23].

<sup>13</sup> Cf.: Holroyd, M. (2022). Op. cit.

## 4. Current State of Research

### 4.1. Hybrid Threats

The concept of hybrid warfare translates into the combination of conventional warfare with unconventional warfare, as it extends beyond the battlefield, incorporating i) economic warfare, ii) diplomatic warfare, iii) political warfare, and iv) information warfare (psychological, cyberspace, and fake news).<sup>14</sup> This idea has been emerging and arousing more and more interest in the scientific community due to the use of unconventional techniques as part of a combat strategy in various domains (political, economic, diplomatic, IT, psychological, and cyberspace), who intend to prevent and reverse the actions of an adversary without engaging in open conflict.<sup>15</sup> Allied with this concept, the term hybrid threats also emerged, which has been developing to keep up with developments brought about by i) technological advances in the world of communications and ii) the ability of international actors to increasingly use all types of tools to advance their geopolitical influence.<sup>16</sup>

The concept of hybrid threat first emerged in 2008 when the US Army Chief of Staff established it as an adversary that integrates numerous combinations and dynamics of irregular, terrorist, and criminal capabilities.<sup>17</sup> Later, in 2010, this was once again highlighted in official documents from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), where it is characterized as “[...] *hybrid threats are those posed by adversaries, with the ability to simultaneously employ conventional and non-conventional means adaptively in pursuit of their objectives.*”<sup>18</sup> In 2016, the European Union (EU) presented its definition of a hybrid threat as “[...] *mixture of coercive and subversive activity, conventional and unconventional methods, [...] which can be used in a coordinated manner by state or*

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<sup>14</sup> Hoffman, F. (2009). Hybrid Warfare and Challenges. Joint Forces Quarterly. National Defense University Press. Volume 52. No. 1/2009.

<sup>15</sup> Treverton, G. et al. (2018). Addressing Hybrid Threats. Swedish Defense University. 1<sup>st</sup> edition.

<sup>16</sup> Sari, A. (2018). Blurred Lines: Hybrid Threats and the Politics of International Law. Hybrid CoE Strategic Analysis 4.

<sup>17</sup> Fleming, B. (2011). The Hybrid Threat Concept: Contemporary War, Military Planning and the Advent of Unrestricted Operational Art. School of Advanced Military Studies: United States Army Command and General Staff College. Dissertation.

<sup>18</sup> Understanding hybrid threats. Page European Parliament. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_ATA\(2015\)564355](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_ATA(2015)564355). [25-09-23]. P. 1.



*non-state actors to achieve specific objectives while remaining below the threshold of formally declared warfare.*"<sup>19</sup>

The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, Hybrid CoE, in cooperation with the EU and NATO, states that these threats have the following characteristics: i) planned and synchronized action that systematically exploits the fundamental weaknesses of democratic institutions and nations through a variety of techniques; ii) activities that analyse both detection and attribution thresholds and the various interfaces, that is, a) war-peace; b) internal-external security; c) local-state; and, d) national-international; and, iii) actions aimed at influencing various types of decision-making.<sup>20</sup>

Additionally, hybrid threats present themselves fundamentally within the scope of cyberspace, presenting a dual function: i) catalyst domain and ii) communication vector. As a catalyst domain, it enables the analysis of resident technology as a source of observation, supervision of the situation, and intervention between system communications; as a vector of communication, it ensures the manipulation of society, stimulating disorder and distrust among the population.<sup>21</sup> Cyberattacks are then evidenced by cyberespionage, cybercrime, and cyber-manipulation, where malware actions, system sabotage, and information collection through phishing or sniffing actions are frequent. Allied to the dominance of cyberspace, disinformation and propaganda are decisive factors when discussing hybrid threats, as they take advantage of the information available on social networks or the media to manipulate it.<sup>22</sup> Despite these catalytic domains, this type of threat can be reflected across the entire spectrum of threats if they are used together to achieve objectives,<sup>23</sup> such as i) propaganda, ii) fake news, iii) strategic leaks, iv) funding organizations, v) political parties, vi) organized protest movements, vii) proxies and unacknowledged war, and viii) paramilitary organizations.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> European Commission. (2016). Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats to a European Union response. European Commission. P. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Hybrid threats as a concept. Page Hybrid CoE. <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/hybrid-threats-as-a-phenomenon/>. [10-10-23].

<sup>21</sup> Cf.: Sari, A. (2018). Op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Duarte, F. (2020). Non-kinetic hybrid threats in Europe – the Portuguese case study (2017-18). Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy. Emerald Publishing. Volume 14. No. 3/2020.

<sup>23</sup> Alves, A. (2020). A Prevenção e o Combate às Ameaças Híbridas: Impacto para as Forças Armadas Portuguesas. Instituto Universitário Militar. Dissertation.

<sup>24</sup> Cf.: Treverton, G. et al. (2018). Op. cit.

## 4.2. Fake News in the European Union

Fake news presents a considerable challenge for the EU since the EU can be the target of i) internal campaigns carried out by citizens belonging to Member States or ii) external campaigns carried out by state or non-state agents. These campaigns, therefore, involve political will as well as a coordinated response from i) EU Member States, ii) European Institutions, iii) social media platforms, iv) means of communication, and v) European citizens.<sup>25</sup>

Since 2015, fake news has been a threat to the EU. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to changes in the lifestyle of European citizens and given technology a crucial role, increasing its inherent risks. Due to the excessive use of technology, an infodemic emerged characterized by the “*rapid dissemination of false, inaccurate or misleading information about the pandemic*”<sup>26</sup> thus creating “*significant risks to personal health, public health systems, effective crisis management, the economy, and social cohesion.*”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The European Union and Disinformation: Framework. Page Eurocid. <https://eurocid.mne.gov.pt/artigos/uniao-europeia-co-combate-desinformacao#toc-a-uni-o-europeia-ea-desinforma-o-enquadramento>. [09-10-23].

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. P. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. P. 1.

## **5. Research Gap**

Research on fake news is a field in constant evolution and, although its study is increasingly being taken into account due to the real impacts that are increasingly being felt, there are still several gaps to be explored, namely i) the development more effective algorithms and systems to identify and combat fake news in real time, ii) investigation of the psychological effects of fake news, iii) the development of effective strategies and interventions to combat fake news, iv) the development of tools and techniques that help people contextualize the information they find online, and v) collaboration between governments, technology companies, researchers and civil society organizations in order to effectively combat fake news on a global scale.

Additionally, it is crucial to investigate the impact of fake news in terms of security and defence, specifically in i) protecting democracies, ii) guaranteeing political stability, iii) ensuring cybersecurity, iv) protecting public health (infodemics), v) protecting the rights of citizens, and vi) prevent the weakening of EU cohesion.

## **6. Research Questions**

The central question (CQ) of this article is:

- CQ: “What is the danger of fake news for CSDP?”

Additionally, derived questions (DQ) are:

- DQ1: “What is the role of the EU in combating disinformation present in the Russia-Ukraine conflict?”
- DQ2: “How does Russia use fake news to gain an advantage over Ukraine?”

## 7. Methodology

A systematic literature review is characterized by the synthesis of research carried out to identify and select knowledge relevant to the essay's central question and evaluate the results obtained by the research.<sup>28</sup>

Systematic reviews use an explicit, systematic approach filtered to maximize reliability and minimize bias to draw reliable conclusions for decision-making. These reviews follow a structured, predefined process and require a rigorous methodology for reliable results. The general objective of conducting such reviews is to identify the available evidence on the topic to be addressed.<sup>29</sup>

In this way, the present work is characterized as a systematic literature review. This methodology is a valuable approach to research as it is a methodology that guarantees validity and reliability.<sup>30</sup>

Additionally, this work followed a qualitative strategy to evaluate, compare results, and promote expanding current knowledge on the topic. Additionally, it sought to explore a complex range of factors impacting the research's core.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, to carry out this essay, a central question, and three derived questions were formulated to complete and respond to the central question.

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<sup>28</sup> Munn, Z. et al. (2018). Systematic review or scoping review? Guidance for authors when choosing between a systematic or scoping review approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*. Volume 18. No. 143/2018.

<sup>29</sup> Higgins, J. et al. (2019). *Cochrane handbook for systematic reviews of interventions*. Wiley Blackwell. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

<sup>30</sup> Creswell, J. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage Publications. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

<sup>31</sup> Cf.: Ibid.

## 8. Research and Results of Research

### 8.1. Russia-Ukraine conflict: The other side of the war

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, completely devastating this country. Additionally, economic insecurity has been generated throughout the world.<sup>32</sup>

Consequently, on March 8, 2022, during a debate at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France, Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, stated that *“Information manipulation and interferences is something that the Russian propaganda machine is actively using to follow Russia’s military campaign in Ukraine, spreading false information among their own population about why this invasion has taken place and what is the situation in Ukraine.”*<sup>33</sup> Josep Borrell also believes that one of the problems that has been getting worse is the manipulation of information, which demonstrates an abuse of power, stating that *“The state media and “the ecosystem” around them are being used as instruments to push these narratives, to manipulate and to mislead [...] it is not just bombing houses, infrastructure, the bodies of the people; they are bombing their minds, they are bombing their spirits.”*<sup>34</sup>

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is characterized by a daily struggle to control information in cyberspace. This is due to the transformation of cyberspace as the primary form of communication, which has complicated Vladimir Putin’s efforts to maintain absolute control over the media as his official channel for disseminating information.<sup>35</sup> In this way, Russian leaders are repressing independent media, with Russia creating a law that provides for the application of sanctions with sentences of up to 15 years, criminalizing *“false information about the war,”*<sup>36</sup> thus making it impossible for Russian citizens to access any independent information about what is happening in Ukraine as

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<sup>32</sup> Demirjian, K., & Edmondson, C. Russia-Ukraine War. Page The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/news-event/ukraine-russia>. [15-10-23].

<sup>33</sup> Disinformation: Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the EP debate. Page European Union External Action Service. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/disinformation-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ep-debate\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/disinformation-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ep-debate_en). [10-10-23]. P. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. P. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Barreto, R. The other side of War: disinformation. Page UNION. <https://officialblogofunio.com/2022/03/22/the-other-side-of-war-disinformation/#more-5593>. [15-10-23].

<sup>36</sup> European Union External Action Service. (2022). Op. cit. P. 3.

well as the behaviour of the Russian armed forces.<sup>37</sup> In this way, it is possible to verify that Putin intends to transform all types of Russian media into his official channel to, through disinformation, influence public opinion and hide the true motivations for the invasion of Ukraine, achieving social domination.<sup>38</sup>

## 8.2. Fake News in the conflict

As previously presented, domination of cyberspace has increasingly become an objective to be achieved by Vladimir Putin. To illustrate this action, several fake news spreads across various media are presented, which aim to demonstrate the misleading advertising used by the Russian media.

Date	Event
May 2013	The existence of Russian armies of paid pro-government Internet trolls is widely documented, although officially denied. Yevgeny Prigozhin, known as the “ <i>Kremlin chef</i> ,” denied any involvement with media outlets considered affiliated with him. However, in 2013, Russian journalists managed to infiltrate a “ <i>troll factory</i> ” in St. Petersburg, where hundreds of journalists worked under false identities, praising Putin, and attacking the opposition on forums, social media, and in comments in national media outlets and international. <sup>39</sup>
February 2014	The Russian Prosecutor General and his deputies are taking measures through Roskomnadzor (telecommunications regulatory agency) that aim to block websites containing dangerous content or promoting public protests without a court decision. In March, Russian authorities blocked three opposition websites, i) Grani.ru; ii) Kasparov.ru; and Daily Journal. <sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Cf.: Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Cf.: Barreto, R. (2022). Op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> Garina, I. Trollsbane. Page Novaya Gazeta Europe. <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2023/07/06/trollsbane-en>. [19-10-23].

<sup>40</sup> Barry, E. Russia Blocks Web Content Amid Tension Over Ukraine. Page The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/14/world/europe/russia-blocks-web-content-amid-tension-over-ukraine.html>. [20-10-23].

May 2014	Forty-six pro-Russian protesters died in a fire at the House of Trade Unions in Odessa. A local doctor, Igor Rozovski, claimed on Facebook that Ukrainian nationalists prevented him from providing care to the injured. However, the story's credibility has been questioned as Rozovski's Facebook account was created shortly before the story was published on May 3, and his profile photo showed a dentist from Russia. The user account was later deleted. <sup>41</sup>
May 2014	A LifeNews journalist, Ermina Kotandzhyan, shared on Twitter a photo of an eight-year-old boy, claiming that he had been injured in the shooting at Donetsk airport. However, the photo is unrelated to the events in Donetsk; it was taken in April 2013 in the Syrian city of Aleppo, Syria, following an incident involving government forces. This is not the first time that the image of this deceased boy has been wrongly presented as a child victim of the conflicts in eastern Ukraine, as it was previously used to illustrate a similar case in Sloviansk on May 10, 2014. <sup>42</sup>
July 2014	The Channel One broadcast a story in which a woman from Sloviansk claimed that Ukrainian soldiers crucified a 3-year-old boy to terrorize the city's population. However, this information was not confirmed through investigations. <sup>43</sup>
October 2021	Russian media reported an alleged statement by Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna during an Atlantic Council meeting. He reportedly called the Ukrainians a " <i>cheap way to fight Russia.</i> " Tsahkna emphasized the importance of Ukraine in Europe and the threat that the war with Russian

<sup>41</sup> Fake: Nationalists Prevented Paramedic from Saving a Wounded. Page Stopfake.org. <https://www.stopfake.org/en/fake-nationalists-prevented-paramedic-from-saving-a-wounded/>. [19-10-23].

<sup>42</sup> Fake Photos Appeared on the Internet, of Children who were Supposedly Killed in Eastern Ukraine. Page Stopfake.org. <https://www.stopfake.org/en/fake-photos-appeared-on-the-internet-of-children-who-were-supposedly-killed-in-eastern-ukraine/>. [19-10-23].

<sup>43</sup> Mejias, U. & Vokuev, N. (2017). Disinformation and the media: the case of Russia and Ukraine. Media, Culture & Society. Sage Publications. Volume 39. No. 7/2017.



	troops posed to the region without stating that Ukrainians were used as a cheap tool in the fight against Russia. <sup>44</sup>
October 2023	Some Russian media claim that the United Nations (UN) accuses the “Kyiv regime” of convicting innocent people in around six thousand criminal cases of cooperation with Russia. However, these are not accurate, as they are based on the words of Russian Human Rights Commissioner Tatiana Moskalkova and not UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Nada Al-Nashif. The UN report focuses on human rights violations during the Russian attack on Ukraine. It expresses grave concern that the occupying power may have coerced some people to be detained or sentenced due to Russia’s aggressive policy in the occupied territories. <sup>45</sup>
October 2023	Russian media outlets distorted part of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s speech to the leaders of the ten countries participating in the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF). Zelensky highlighted the importance of regional cooperation in the Black Sea region, citing Ukraine’s strategic partnership with Romania, Moldova, Bulgaria, and Turkey to promote geopolitical stability in Europe as Russia actively destabilizes the region. However, Russian media outlets distorted Zelensky’s words, claiming that Ukraine “asked Tbilisi to increase Kyiv’s security at Georgia’s expense” and persuaded Georgia to “go to war.” <sup>46</sup>
October 2023	The president of the United States of America (USA) gave a speech in which he highlighted the need to support Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression and expressed solidarity with Israel due to Hamas terrorist attacks. He called for assistance for Ukraine and Israel, which face

<sup>44</sup> Manipulation: Estonian Foreign Minister considers Ukrainians a “cheap way to fight Russia”. Page Stopfake.org. <https://www.stopfake.org/ru/manipulyatsiya-glava-mid-estonii-schitaet-ukraintsev-deshevym-sposobom-borby-s-rossiej/>. [19-10-23].

<sup>45</sup> Manipulation: The UN said Kiev condemns the innocent. Page Stopfake.org. <https://www.stopfake.org/ru/manipulyatsiya-v-oon-zayavili-cto-kiev-vynosit-prigovory-nevinovnym/>. [19-10-23].

<sup>46</sup> False: Zelensky called for improving Ukraine’s security “through the war in Georgia”. Page Stopfake.org. <https://www.stopfake.org/ru/fejk-zelenskij-prizval-povysit-bezopasnost-ukrainy-za-schet-vojnny-v-gruzii/>. [19-10-23].

	terrorist threats, with an emphasis on security and investment for U.S. citizens. However, pro-Kremlin media outlets distorted Joe Biden's statements, claiming that he admitted to deceiving the world by hiding behind the fight for democracy and describing assistance to Ukraine as an investment in the U.S. military-industrial complex. <sup>47</sup>
October 2023	Pro-Kremlin resources claimed that American political scientist Francis Fukuyama told Radio Liberty that Ukraine will not be able to regain all lost territories and that the war may be prolonged. However, Fukuyama did not make these statements in the Radio Liberty interview. He noted that the only way for Russia to withdraw from the occupied territories is through Ukraine's victory. Additionally, he mentioned that Ukraine may need help recovering 100% of its territories and that the war may be prolonged. However, he made it clear that this is a question that only Ukrainians can answer. <sup>48</sup>

Table 1: Fake News in the conflict<sup>49</sup>

### 8.3. European Union response

The EU strongly opposed Russia's military aggression. The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, demonstrated his support by stating on March 1, 2022, that *"It is not only Ukraine that is under attack. International law, rules-based international order, democracy, and human dignity are also under attack. This is geopolitical terrorism, pure and simple."*<sup>50</sup> Additionally, in March 2022, the EU adopted the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, which states that Russia represents *"a long-term and direct threat to European security."*<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> False: Biden admitted that money "for the death of Ukrainians" is an "investment" for the US. Page Stopfake.org. <https://www.stopfake.org/ru/fejk-bajden-priznal-cto-dengi-na-gibel-ukraintsev-eto-investitsii-dlya-ssha/>. [19-10-23].

<sup>48</sup> Manipulation: Ukraine will not be able to return all "lost territories" – Fukuyama. Page Stopfake.org. <https://www.stopfake.org/ru/manipulyatsiya-ukraina-ne-smozhet-vernut-vse-poteryannye-territorii-fukuyama/>. [19-10-23].

<sup>49</sup> Table created by the author.

<sup>50</sup> Herman, V. Russia. Page European Parliament. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/177/russia>. [17-10-23]. P. 3.

<sup>51</sup> A Strategic Compass for Security and Defense. Page European Union. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic\\_compass\\_en3\\_web.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic_compass_en3_web.pdf). [17-10-23]. P. 18.

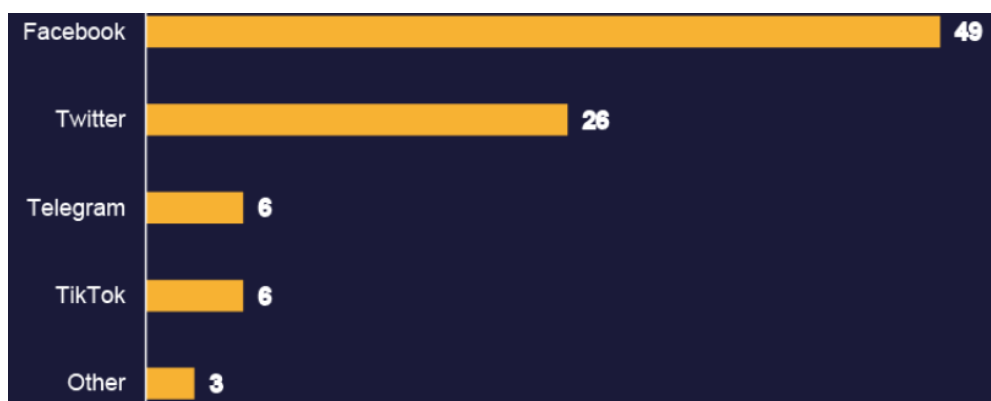
To support Ukraine, the EU adopted several measures, including combating fake news. Since March 2022, the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) has published regular insights highlighting key disinformation trends related to the conflict in Ukraine. Two thousand three hundred nine reviews have been provided by EDMO’s fact-checking network partners from February 24, 2022, to the present.<sup>52</sup>

Figure 1 shows the percentage of categories in the fact-check analysis published by the EDMO network between 06/06/2023 and 09/06/2023.



**Figure 1:** Share of categories in the fact-checking analysis published by the EDMO network between 06/06/2023 to 06/09/2023<sup>53</sup>

Additionally, Figure 2 shows the number of misinformation items by platform (Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Telegram, and Others).



**Figure 2:** Number of disinformation items per platforms (Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Telegram, Other)<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Periodic Insights and Early Warnings. Page EDMO. <https://edmo.eu/weekly-insights/#1654869497590-90215e34-4246>. [23-10-23].

<sup>53</sup> Cf.: Periodic Insights and Early Warnings. Op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> Cf.: Ibid.

#### 8.4. Sanctions applied by the European Union

It is increasingly common for intermediaries to act in place of government actors (individuals, entities, or groups that play roles within a government or on behalf of a government), as is the case with the Russian Channel One, which is characterized as “*as a proxy for Russian strategic narratives.*”<sup>55</sup> This is due to political propaganda efforts to create distrust among the population about which sources of information are reliable, which, in the long term, decreases trust in the media.<sup>56</sup> In 2015, the EU created a website called EU vs. DiSiNFO “*to better forecast, address, and respond to the Russian Federation’s ongoing disinformation campaigns affecting the European Union, its Member States, and countries in the shared neighborhood.*”<sup>57</sup> Thus, The EU has expressed apparent concern about expanding the Russian government’s disinformation and propaganda efforts, which aim to maintain or increase Russia’s influence over the EU to weaken and divide it.<sup>58</sup>

Russia Today and Sputnik present themselves as a considerable threat to the public security and order of the EU, as they are an active part in supporting Russia’s attack on Ukraine. In this way, the EU adopted sanctions against the Kremlin’s means of disinformation and manipulation of information, namely, the suspension from March 2, 2022, by the EU Council of distributing the state broadcasting media of Russia Today and Sputnik across the EU. This sanction includes all means of transmission and distribution, i.e., i) satellite, ii) IPTV (Internet Protocol Television), iii) digital platforms, iv) websites, and v) applications, and all relevant licenses, authorizations, and distribution agreements. These immediate measures cover all EU Member States.<sup>59</sup>

At the time, the President of the European Commission, Ursula Von Der Leyen, stated, “*In this time of war, words matter. We are witnessing massive propaganda and disinformation about this outrageous attack on a free and independent country. We will not let Kremlin apologists pour their toxic lies justifying Putin’s war or sow the seeds of*

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<sup>55</sup> Khaldarov, I. & Pantti, M. (2016). P. 3. Op. cit.

<sup>56</sup> Cf.: Kalsnes, B. (2018). Op. cit.

<sup>57</sup> Mission. Page EU vs. DiSiNFO. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/about/>. [27-10-23]. P. 1. [sic].

<sup>58</sup> Cf.: Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ukraine: Sanctions on Kremlin-backed outlets Russia Today and Sputnik. Page European Commission. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_22\\_1490](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_1490). [30-10-23].

*division in our Union.*”<sup>60</sup> Additionally, Josep Borrell stated that “*Systematic information manipulation and disinformation by the Kremlin is applied as an operational tool in its assault on Ukraine. It is also a significant and direct threat to the Union’s public order and security. Today, we are taking an important step against Putin’s manipulation operation and turning off the tap for Russian state-controlled media in the EU.*”<sup>61</sup>

## **8.5. Action Plan against disinformation**

In January 2018, the European Commission appointed 38 experts to a high-level group on fake news and disinformation to advise the commission on understanding and combat the phenomenon of fake news and disinformation.<sup>62</sup> However, 34 new experts appointed to review the Action Plan from 2018 to 16 June 2022 have signed and presented a new Action Plan against disinformation, following European Commission guidance published in 2021.<sup>63</sup>

The 2022 Action Plan against disinformation presents a broader range of commitments and measures to be taken by online platforms to combat disinformation. This Action Plan is fundamental for a safer, more reliable, and transparent environment.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, “*The Code will strengthen the measures to reduce manipulative behavior used to spread disinformation (e.g., fake accounts, bot-driven amplification, impersonation, malicious deep fakes), and establishes a stronger cooperation among signatories to fight the challenges related to such techniques.*”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ukraine: Sanctions on Kremlin-backed outlets Russia Today and Sputnik. Op. cit. P. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. P. 1.

<sup>62</sup> European Commission. (2018). A multi-dimensional approach to disinformation. Directorate-General for Communication Networks, Content and Technology.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. P. 2. [sic].

## **9. Discussion of Results (pros and cons) and personal Conclusions**

With the development of this essay, it was possible to achieve the initially proposed objectives. So, responding to DQ1, “What is the role of the EU in combating disinformation present in the Russia-Ukraine conflict?” It was possible to understand that fake news is a susceptible topic and has dramatically concerned the EU. In this way, there were numerous efforts made by the EU to combat this problem, namely i) the adoption of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, ii) the publication of regular insights highlighting the main disinformation trends related to the conflict in Ukraine, since March 2022, through EDMO; iii) the creation of the EU vs. EU website. DiSiNFO; iv) the suspension from March 2, 2022, by the Council of the EU, of the distribution of the state broadcasting media of Russia Today and Sputnik throughout the EU, including all transmission and distribution media; and v) the presentation of the 2022 action plan against disinformation, which presents a wide range of commitments and measures to be taken by online platforms.

Regarding DQ2, “How does Russia use fake news to gain an advantage over Ukraine?” and, considering the various fake news presented that portray misleading advertising used by the Russian media, it was noted that Russian strategies mainly involve the use of old/false news/events, as well as their decontextualization, such as the basis for distorting history for Russian benefit. In this way, Russians can take advantage of the media and gain an advantage over their Ukrainian opponents. Until the news is proven false, citizens’ perceptions and realities have already been shaped to Russia’s benefit.

Finally, answering the CQ of this essay: “What is the danger of fake news for the CSDP?” It is possible that Russia views propaganda and disseminating misleading information as instruments of its foreign policy. Thus, this country’s fake news and propaganda present themselves as a threat to the CSDP, affecting society and endangering the security of States. Therefore, specific threats are inherent, namely i) established international alliances are put at risk; ii) electoral systems become rigged; iii) trust in democracy is destroyed; and iv) a destabilization of the government is created through unrest.

Concluding, EU security and defence go far beyond conventional threats since today’s concerns do not correspond to past threats. The world is constantly changing, so the CSDP

must adapt and consider hybrid threats, such as fake news, because this is the only way the EU can deal with contemporary threats.

## **10. Annexes**

### **10.1. List of abbreviations**

CQ – Central Question

CSDP – Common Security and Defence Policy

DQ – Derived Question

EDMO – European Digital Media Observatory

EU – European Union

IPTV – Internet Protocol television

JEF – Joint Expeditionary Force

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NUPS – National University of Public Service

UN – United Nations

USA – United States of America



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## 11. Affidavit

I declare that I have written the present essay independently and on my own. I have clearly marked any language or ideas borrowed from other sources as not my own and documented their sources. The essay does not contain any work that I have handed in or have had graded as a previous scientific paper earlier on.

I am aware that any failure to do so constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism is the presentation of another person's thoughts or words as if they were my own – even if I summarise, paraphrase, condense, cut, rearrange, or otherwise alter them.

I am aware of the consequences and sanctions plagiarism entails. Among others, consequences may include nullification of the essay, exclusion from participation in the CSDP Olympiad. These consequences also apply retrospectively, i.e., if plagiarism is discovered after the essay has been accepted and graded. I am fully aware of the scope of these consequences.

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joana Falcão Pinto". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a dotted line.

(2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Joana Pinto, Undergraduate)

Lisbon, Portugal in November 2023