

DISINFORMATION, PROPAGANDA AND FAKE NEWS AS NON-MILITARY SECURITY THREATS FOR CONTEMPORARY MODERN HUMAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Today's modern human civilization is significantly influenced by deepening globalization processes, which are reflected to a greater or lesser extent in all spheres of society. With one of the characteristic manifestations of the present, with the dynamic onset of new media, the rapid development and massive use of information and communication technologies, systems and means, another new range of possibilities has emerged, such as disseminating, sharing, but also searching for information and news. At the same time, however, a new range of options has emerged for disseminating misleading information – disinformation – in order to influence people's actions. The spread of disinformation thus represents an extremely dangerous threat today, which can have very adverse consequences for individuals, organizations, and society as a whole. Therefore, the aim of the author of the article is to point out the danger of dissemination of disinformation, the need to look at them as a security threat for a democratic society and the need to take adequate measures to prevent their dissemination.

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INTRODUCTION¹

One of the modern achievements brought about by the dynamic development of human civilization in recent decades and which characterizes our current lifestyle is a mobile phone. An intelligent device without which we can no longer even imagine our everyday life. We probably cannot even remember a person who would not own it. It is a product in the field of modern information and communication technologies, which allows us to be in contact with whoever we want, almost anytime and anywhere in the world, and which offers us a number of different options and functions. Naturally, we perceive the positives associated with its use much more. We are less aware of how smart our mobile phone really is, what it all knows about us and what happens to the information² that passes through it, how it is used or how it is literally misused in some cases. In addition, in recent years, according to Kuchtová, in addition to mobile phones, an incredible number of other technical and technological innovations and intelligent devices have entered the market, which can be interconnected and use their full interface applicable in the public, business and private spheres.³

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² In this context, it can be stated without exaggeration that in today's modern society, information plays the role of the most valuable and profitable goods (e.g. Baričičová, 'Kompetencie policajných manažérov', p. 8), which is directly related to the rapid development of information and communication technologies, systems and means, which allows the exchange of information and data takes place in practically real time, regardless of the place of residence of the participants in the interpersonal communication. Distance, as a limiting factor, loses its importance and significance (e.g. Baričičová, 'Informačná kompetentnosť v kontexte aktuálnych potrieb informačnej spoločnosti', p. 67).

³ J. Kuchtová, 'Aktuálne trendy súvisiace s využívaním moderných technológií', *Aktuálne výzvy kybernetickej bezpečnosti – zborník príspevkov z vedeckej konferencie s medzinárodnou účasťou*, Bratislava, Akadémia Policajného Zboru, 2018, pp. 90–98

Another symbol of modern times are social networks that connect us with families, friends and loved ones, but they can connect us with any other person in the world. The amount of information that social networks obtain, collect, and pass on about us with a careless setup is enormous. We most often encounter their use in the form of commercial online marketing, which through advanced analysis of the information obtained as accurately as possible targets potential consumers obtain and increases the revenue of interested companies through targeted advertising. Unfortunately, there also appear to be fraudulent, malicious, and criminal ways of using/abusing social networks and the information available on them about their users. Identity theft,⁴ the spread of computer viruses,⁵ bank accounts⁶ or cyberbullying⁷ and other cyber threats⁸ are just some of the many negative phenomena we may encounter on the Internet and social networks. Cyber threats are currently perceived very sensitively, as they often affect a huge number of people. The unavailability of internet banking, the failure of the internet, e-mail or the telecommunications network are perceived by ordinary citizens as much more personal and sensitive than armed conflicts in the world.⁹

These negative phenomena usually manifest themselves in some way, and we as users know that we have been abused or even attacked. However, there

⁴ Š. Zachar, 'Anonymizácia komunikácie zmenou IP adresy ako metóda bezpečného prehliadania internetu', *Aktuálne výzvy kybernetickej bezpečnosti – zborník príspevkov z vedeckej konferencie s medzinárodnou účasťou*, Bratislava, Akadémia Policajného zboru, 2018, pp. 217–224.

⁵ M. Kostrec, 'Nebezpečné hrozby v digitálnom priestore', *Aktuálne výzvy kybernetickej bezpečnosti (Special Edition 2020) – zborník príspevkov z vedeckej konferencie s medzinárodnou účasťou*, Bratislava, Akadémia Policajného zboru, 2020, pp. 78–87.

⁶ A. Korauš, P. Kelemen, 'Protection of persons and property in terms of cybersecurity', *Ekonomické, politické a právne otázky medzinárodných vzťahov 2018 – zborník príspevkov z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie*, Bratislava, Vydavateľstvo Ekonóm, 2018.

⁷ L. Réveszová, 'Počítačová kriminalita a dynamika jej vývoja v rokoch 2014–2017', *Aktuálne výzvy kybernetickej bezpečnosti – zborník príspevkov z vedeckej konferencie s medzinárodnou účasťou*, Bratislava, Akadémia Policajného zboru, 2018, pp. 161–173.

⁸ R. Tomášek, L. Tomášeková, 'Kybernetické hrozby a kybernetický terorizmus', *Aktuálne výzvy kybernetickej bezpečnosti (Special Edition 2020) – zborník príspevkov z vedeckej konferencie s medzinárodnou účasťou*, Bratislava, Akadémia Policajného zboru, 2020, pp. 146–152.

⁹ J. Brezula, 'Konceptia kybernetickej bezpečnosti na Slovensku a pripravované legislatívne zmeny v tejto oblasti', *Národná a medzinárodná bezpečnosť – zborník príspevkov z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie*, Liptovský Mikuláš, Akadémia ozbrojených síl generála M.R. Štefánika, 2017, pp. 26–31.

are also situations where we can become victims without our knowledge. As with marketing, where we are targeted by advertising that is tailored to persuade us to buy certain goods or order a certain service, we may be targeted by messages and information that are not true to change our minds. The use of lies or distortion of facts to influence individuals or the public is nothing new. If it is combined with sophisticated means, such as today's modern, so-called "smart" means and technologies, with the environment of social networks and the Internet, or the activity of hackers, there is a new and very strong threat of dissemination of disinformation, which can pose a threat not only to individuals and organizations, but in some cases a security threat to national and international security.

THEORETICAL AND TERMINOLOGICAL DEFINITION OF THE TERM DISINFORMATION

Disinformation, like many other terms, is defined differently. At present, there is no uniform, unified, and generally accepted definition of them, and so in the literature, we can find a relatively large number of definitions differing mainly according to the sector or area of society in which disinformation occurs or is applied. Despite their greater or lesser differences, a common feature of all definitions used is the fact that it is an intentional modification of the information provided with the intention of influencing, deceiving, or misleading the addressees of this information.

Quite often, the definitions found in the relevant dictionaries are used. For example, in the Dictionary of Foreign Words, disinformation is very briefly defined as "incorrect, knowingly distorted information."¹⁰ In the Dictionary of Contemporary Slovak Language, disinformation is already defined more broadly as "false, consciously distorted information, the aim of which is to influence a certain group of people or the entire population."¹¹ The Glossary of Media Education states "disinformation is intentionally incorrect or distorted information secretly implanted in an opponent's

¹⁰ Slovník cudzích slov, 'Dezinformácia', Bratislava, 2021, <https://slovník.juls.savba.sk/?w=dezinformácia&s=exact&c=a861&cs=&d=kssj4&d=psp&d=sss&d=orter&d=scs&d=sss&d=peciar&d=ssn&d=hssj&d=ber nolak&d=noundb&d=orient&d=locutio&d=obce&d=priezviska&d=un&d=pskcs&d=psken#>, (accessed 20 October 2021).

¹¹ Slovník súčasného slovenského jazyka, 'Dezinformácia', Bratislava, 2015, <https://slovník.juls.savba.sk/?w=dezinformácia&s=exact&c=a861&cs=&d=kssj4&d=psp&d=sss&d=orter&d=scs&d=sss&d=peciar&d=ssn&d=hssj&d=ber nolak&d=noundb&d=orient&d=locutio&d=obce&d=priezviska&d=un&d=pskcs&d=psken#>, (accessed 20 October 2021).

information system with the intention of influencing the necessary direction of his activity.”¹²

In the Sociological Encyclopaedia, disinformation is defined as “any distorted, false information used to influence an individual and a certain group of people in a certain desirable way. Usually, it is mainly about evoking a good or bad impression of a person, event, work, phenomenon, negotiations, etc. in a political, ideological, or even purely private interest. It is often aimed at influencing public opinion, and may be created with such intent, but may also arise accidentally or for other purposes, which may not be explicitly disinformation (e.g. when it is caused by tearing a message out of its original context or by placing it in in another context).”¹³ In this context, Mleziva adds “disinformation, if it is to be effective, should also contain some truthful information.”¹⁴

To supplement the above definitions, it can be stated that in the Anglophone language environment we may also encounter several definitions of the term disinformation. For example, in the Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, disinformation is briefly defined as “intentionally providing false information,”¹⁵ in the Cambridge Dictionary as “false information disseminated to deceive people,”¹⁶ and in the MacMillan Dictionary, as “false information to persuade people to believe to something that is not really true.”¹⁷

Disinformation can be distinguished from several points of view. From the point of view of their creation and expression, they can be divided into a) passive and b) active. Passive disinformation consists in withholding or delaying information in order to create a false impression. Active misinformation represents, as it follows from their labelling, the active creation of false information or the modification of the original information or its context. It is their direct active falsification. In terms of objectives, disin-

¹² Slovník pojmov z mediálnej výchovy, ‘Dezinformácia’, Bratislava, 2020, <https://medialnavychova.sk/dezinformacia/>, (accessed 20 October 2021).

¹³ Sociologická encyklopedie, 2017, ‘Dezinformace’, <https://encyklopedie.soc.cas.cz/w/Dezinformace>, (accessed 20 October 2021).

¹⁴ E. Mleziva, ‘Encyklopedie lži, podvádění a klamání s příklady a obrana proti nim’, Praha, Vyšehrad, 2020.

¹⁵ Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, ‘Disinformation’, Oxford, 2021, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/disinformation?q=disinformation>, (accessed 22 October 2021).

¹⁶ Cambridge Dictionary, ‘Disinformation’, Cambridge, 2021, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/disinformation>, (accessed 22 October 2021).

¹⁷ MacMillan Dictionary, ‘Disinformation’, Cambridge, 2021, London, 2021, <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/disinformation>, (accessed 22 October 2021).

formation can be divided into a) strategic, which uses a certain long-term strategic goal, such as the establishment of a new arrangement, order etc., and b) tactical, the use of which is operational and serves to gradually meet the long-term goals.¹⁸

It is clear from the above information that the main feature of disinformation can be intentional conduct, both in the case of passive form, when messages are intentionally concealed or delayed, and in the case of active form, when information is actively created or modified according to the intended purpose.

For better understanding the concept of disinformation, to use it correctly and to avoid confusion with other similar concepts, in particular the concept of misinformation, it is necessary to explain at least the basic difference between the two concepts. While disinformation, as mentioned above, is an intentional act to mislead, deceive or persuade people to believe something that is not true, misinformation lacks that intention. While this is incorrect or misleading, it is not disseminated either systematically or intentionally, or in order to influence the decisions or opinions of those who receive it. Nevertheless, although it is an unintentional act, misinformation may ultimately have the same effect on the population as disinformation, and thus influence the views of the target group based on a false report.

The second, very close concept, closely related to disinformation, is propaganda, which is “the targeted dissemination of biased, misleading information and ideas to promote or support a particular opinion.” It can also be characterized as “the dissemination of information, facts, arguments, gossips, half-truths or lies in order to influence public opinion.” A broad definition of propaganda and an explanation of the term is provided on its website by the Encyclopaedia Britannica. According to it, propaganda represents “a more or less systematic effort to manipulate other people’s faith, attitudes, or actions through symbols (words, gestures, posters, banners, monuments, music, clothing, insignia, hairstyles, coin designs, postage stamps, etc.).”¹⁹ It is intentionality and a relatively high emphasis on manipulation that distinguishes propaganda from ordinary conversation or from the free and easy exchange of ideas. Propagandists have a set goal or set of goals, and in order to achieve them, they deliberately select facts, arguments,

¹⁸ Š. Neumannová, ‘Dezinformace’, <https://encyklopedie.soc.cas.cz/w/Dezinformace>, (accessed 23 October 2021).

¹⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica, ‘Propaganda’, London, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/propaganda>, (accessed 23 October 2021).

or representations of symbols and present them in ways that they think will have the greatest effect. To maximize their impact, they may omit or distort certain facts or simply deceive and try to divert the attention of the reactors (i.e. the people they are trying to control) from everything but their own propaganda.²⁰

In the field of politics, propaganda has different goals, uses various means that are constantly evolving, and combines them with purposes ranging from political persuasion to public diplomacy. Some media may also be a part of propaganda. In the case of government-funded or even directly managed media, their objectivity can be strongly questioned. A typical example of a country with a large share of state-funded media is the Russian Federation. Some Russian media, such as Sputnik and RT, are often evaluated as disinformation and their news production is often referred to as fake news.

The concept of fake news can be explained very simply by a simple translation from English as fake, fraudulent, or untrue news. This simplified explanation can lead to various debates, because from a journalistic point of view, the report should always be true and should not be made public unless it is verified from several credible sources.²¹ In this context, it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that the identification of fake news itself can be very difficult. This is because a fraudulent, false report is usually combined with real and verifiable facts to make it credible. Allcott and Gentzkow define fake news as “news contributions that are deliberately and verifiably misleading and may mislead the reader.”²²

Fake news does not represent a revolutionary discovery in the field of communication or journalism, they have been occurring for a very long time, but it came to the deep public subconscious mainly in connection with the US presidential election in 2016 and specifically with the person of Donald Trump. According to Gregor et al., it is a “term which refers to intentionally false or misleading information that appears in the media or on social networks.”²³ Although this concept is currently profaned, it is part

²⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica, ‘Propaganda’.

²¹ A. M. Dragomirová, ‘The Fake News Phenomenon in the Social Media Era’, *Strategic Impact*, no. 64/65, 2017, pp. 54–65.

²² H. Allcott, M. Gentzkow, ‘Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election’, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2017, pp. 211–236.

²³ M. Gregor et al., *Nejlepší kniha o Fake News, dezinformacích a manipulacích!!!*, Brno, CPress, 2018.

of the fundamental issue of disseminating disinformation and influencing public opinion.

Although the terms fake news and disinformation may have the same effect, it is clear from the above definitions that they are different. While fake news is understood as a form, disinformation is understood as content. While fake news is the designation of a report, media or news post or post on a social network, disinformation forms the content of such a report or post that is false or misleading. In practice, some political figures use the term fake news as an argument against unfavourable news on their person or even superiorly against the entire news medium, with whose outputs they do not agree.

COMBATING THE SPREAD OF DISINFORMATION, PROPAGANDA, AND FAKE NEWS AS SECURITY THREATS TO A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

The basic goal of propaganda, disinformation or fake news is to try to influence real people. To achieve this goal, a strategy is needed that includes a wide range of individual steps that need to be planned to achieve the desired success. It is very important for the disseminator to specifically identify the target group that the propaganda, disinformation, or fake news are to reach, and to select suitable content that corresponds to the set goal. One of the main elements is the choice of appropriate means to be used for disinformation purposes. The primary platform for the dissemination of propaganda, disinformation and various fake news today is the Internet, in the network of which their dissemination is mainly spread by various disinformation websites and social networks.

The significance of this problem is illustrated by the fact that e.g. in the United States, nearly two-thirds of adults draw news almost exclusively from social media.²⁴ In addition, compared to the past, this percentage is constantly increasing every year. Although accurate data are lacking, it is highly likely and there is no reason to doubt that this trend is also present in Europe and other parts of the world. Millions of Europeans or inhabitants of other continents have created a profile on Facebook. These numbers have also shown a growing trend in recent years, with an increasing number of interactions taking place in the online environment of the Internet.

²⁴ J. Gottfried, E. Shearer, 'News Use Across Social Media Platforms', *PEW Research Center*, 2020, <http://www.journalism.org/2020/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2020/>, (accessed 24 October 2021).

The Internet has become a huge milestone in communication and information transmission. Burkhard describes it as a truly democratic and honest way of sharing information, because in a way it limits the power of information power holders, e.g., media moguls, while controlling content available via the internet is difficult but not impossible.²⁵ Anyone with an internet access and a desire to share his or her thoughts or ideas can do so today. Initially, this required an expertise in programming and coding, but the market later brought many software tools to enable even individuals without special knowledge to create a website and publish or transmit information.

Today, there are millions of actors disseminating information, the volume of which is becoming enormous and exhausting. Democratization in the field of information gives space without exception to everyone, including dubious actors with a biased or different point of view or with uneducated and limited views. Since true news can look exactly like false, biased, altered, or satire, information overload is then like when we have essentially no information, because one does not know what information to pay attention to.

Associated with the myriad of information we are overwhelmed today is the fact that people today are unable to understand all the things around them. Examples are technologies and their operation (how a mobile phone works, what happens to data after uploading “to the cloud,” how a hybrid engine works etc.), but also health issues (suitability of vaccination, side effects of vaccines or specific drugs) or historical facts. The effect of disinformation and fake news in various fields means that people are more prone to being affected and influenced by them and are unable to distinguish between facts and fiction.

The fight against disinformation, propaganda and fake news is thus becoming more and more at the centre of public discourse, both at the international and national levels. International organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) consider the spread of various types of propaganda and disinformation to be one of today’s most serious non-military security threats, and the fight against their proliferation has become an integral agenda of their activities. Both organizations, but also their member states, respond individually to this threat. An example is the creation of a NATO Cooperative

²⁵ J. M. Burkhardt, ‘How Fake News Spreads’, *Library Technology Reports*, vol. 53, no. 8, 2017, pp. 10–13.

Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence²⁶ at the NATO level or a European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats²⁷ at the EU level. At the level of technology companies, there are mainly discussions about the responsibility of social networks for the dissemination of propaganda, disinformation, and fake news on their platforms. Acceptance of some responsibility for their dissemination suggests Facebook's decision to take measures that will identify misleading and false messages as disinformation if they are disseminated on this platform.²⁸

Disinformation, propaganda, and fake news pose non-military security threats that go beyond the individual impact on the individual consuming misleading information. They can also be identified at the society level. One of the most significant threats is the negative impact on democratic processes and their distortion in individual countries, within which various disinformation and fake news are widespread. This adverse effect can be illustrated in several areas.

One of the first negative effects is the increasing polarization of society. This effect is closely linked to the already mentioned increasing use of social networks, which are becoming the primary source of information and news in combination with the setting up of the operation of these platforms. Social networks are set up to show their users the most relevant information and messages that their closest contacts can share, and therefore lead to the creation of information bubbles. Such closure in information bubbles leads to the increased polarization of political views within society.²⁹ Excessive confinement in information bubbles, which results in drawing news from ideologically homogeneous sources, in some cases even leads to the adoption of extremist views.³⁰

²⁶ NATO, 'Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence', Brussels, 2021, <https://ccdcoe.org>, (accessed 25 October 2021).

²⁷ EU, 'The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats', Brussels, 2021, <https://www.hybridcoe.fi>, (accessed 25 October 2021).

²⁸ A. Jamieson, O. Solon, 'Facebook to begin flagging fake news in response to mounting criticism', *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/dec/15/facebook-flag-fake-news-fact-check>, (accessed 25 October 2021).

²⁹ A. Mitchell, 'Political Polarization & Media Habits', *PEW Research Centre*, 2014, <http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/>, (accessed 25 October 2021).

³⁰ B.R. Warner, 'Segmenting the Electorate: The Effects of Exposure to Political Extremism Online', *Communication Studies*, vol. 61, no. 4, 2010, pp. 430–444.

Another problem associated with disinformation in the online environment is the pretense of online support for ordinary citizens – the so-called political astroturfing. An analysis of the 2010 U.S. running and political support of candidates in the Twitter social network and its users showed that some political campaigns, which were presented as spontaneous and based on ordinary citizens, were organized centrally using social bots – fake software-driven accounts that they look like real people.³¹ The appearance of mass support creates an impression of legitimacy for political campaigns and political candidates, who would otherwise remain marginal. Thousands of social bots on Twitter have also been identified in support of Brexit in the run-up to the UK referendum on the EU.³²

Another type of political astroturfing is the use of coordinated discussants who comment on and share politically motivated articles in a digital environment. This is an issue that is academically very complicated to explore and that is largely unexplored. In the environment of the Slovak Republic, several cases of false debates supporting political parties such as Smer SD, Sieť and Tip were mapped.³³

Finally, disinformation and fake news influence individuals' political decisions. Decision-making processes always take place based on the available information available to the decision-maker. If disinformation and fake news are also a part of this package, the decision will be affected. In this case, an analogy can be made with the declining number of vaccinated children against measles and the increasing influence of the anti-vaccination movement in connection with the fight against coronavirus.³⁴

One of the most significant and publicized examples of the spread of political propaganda, disinformation, and fake news in the run-up to the election campaign is the example of the 2016 US presidential election, in which Donald Trump won. The BuzzFeed web portal analysed all the news

³¹ J. Ratkiewicz, 'Detecting and Tracking Political Abuse in Social Media', <http://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM11/paper/view/2850/3274>, (accessed 25 October 2021).

³² P. Howard, B. Kollanyi, 'Bots, #StrongerIn, and #Brexit: Computational Propaganda during the UK-EU Referendum', <https://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/1606/1606.06356.pdf>, (accessed 26 October 2021).

³³ F. Struhárik, 'Prochádzkovi v kampani na webe pomáhajú falošní diskutéri. Nie je to prvý raz', <https://dennikn.sk/346480/prochazkovi-kampani-webe-pomahaju-falosi-diskuteri-nie-prvy/>, (accessed 26 October 2021).

³⁴ P. Hotez, 'Texas and Its Measles Epidemics', <http://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1002153>, (accessed 26 October 2021).

that the three largest right-wing and three largest left-wing party sites on the social network Facebook were sharing in the seven working days just before the election. He found that while right-wing sites shared up to 38% of messages that contained disinformation or a combination of true and misleading messages, it was 19% for left-wing portals.³⁵

However, the mapping of disinformation and fake news in connection with the US presidential election in 2016 has shown that disinformation and fake news are not disseminated solely for propaganda purposes. The profit from the sale of advertising was also a frequent motive for their dissemination. BuzzFeed has identified more than a hundred pro-Trump websites (established and registered in North Macedonia) that have produced and disseminated various disinformation and fake news. The goal of the operators of these sites was to maximize visits to these portals in order to maximize the profit from advertising sales. The high attendance was provided by misleading news about the presidential candidates (in favour of Donald Trump and against Hillary Clinton), which reached the highest social media audience.³⁶ The production and dissemination of various disinformation and fake news in favour of the candidate Trump for the purpose of producing economic profit, but of course also for the purpose of political profit, this was primarily identified in the domestic environment within the United States.³⁷

A joint report by the US intelligence services – the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the National Security Agency (NSA) – in January 2017 found that a huge amount of disinformation and fake news appeared on social networks during the presidential campaign to discredit Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. The report states that several of these activities were most likely

³⁵ C. Silverman, 'Hyperpartisan Facebook Pages Are Publishing False And Misleading Information At An Alarming Rate', *BuzzFeed News*, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/craig-silverman/partisan-fb-pages-analysis>, (accessed 26 October 2021).

³⁶ C. Silverman, L. Alexander, 'How Teens In The Balkans Are Duping Trump Supporters With Fake News. BuzzFeed News', <https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/how-macedonia-became-a-global-hub-for-pro-trump-misinfo>, (accessed 26 October 2021).

³⁷ C. Dewey, 'Facebook fake-news writer: 'I think Donald Trump is in the White House because of me'', *The Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2016/11/17/facebook-fake-news-writer-i-think-donald-trump-is-in-the-white-house-because-of-me/>, (accessed 26 October 2021).

(not 100% certainty) sponsored by the Russian government.³⁸ However, the content of the published e-mail reports of the American Democratic Party leadership on the Wikileaks portal also drew attention to several other problems connected with the dissemination of misleading information within the democratic primary elections. Among the most serious was the spread of disinformation this time supporting Hillary Clinton and, conversely, undermining the candidacy of Bernie Sanders by the Democratic leadership.³⁹

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt about the presence of propaganda, disinformation, and fake news in the digital public sphere, including within European and other developed democracies. Several mechanisms and tools used by Russian, Chinese or other foreign propaganda are relatively well mapped – whether in influencing democratic processes or in disseminating disinformation and fake news. The issue of their dissemination is a very complicated area in which many different themes intersect. The current spread of propaganda, disinformation and fake news via the Internet and social networks is an extremely dangerous threat that can have very adverse consequences for individuals, organizations, and society as a whole. Social networks connect us with the whole world, provide us with a lot of information, but at the same time make us vulnerable. It is therefore very important for democratic states and their competent institutions to support prevention and education in the field of media literacy and information work. Raising awareness of disinformation and fake news, improving the ability to recognize and detect them, and eliminating their dissemination as much as possible would certainly mean fewer opportunities for populism, radicalism, extremism, xenophobia, or any division of society based on misleading information. The involvement of the relevant institutions of democracies in this issue is therefore not only desirable but even necessary. On the other hand, we must all realize that their possibilities are not endless, not everything will be solved for us by the state, so it is necessary that we ourselves contribute to

³⁸ National Intelligence Council, 'Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections. Intelligence Community Assessment', Washington, 2017, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf, (accessed 27 October 2021).

³⁹ M. Shear, M. Rosenberg, 'Released Emails Suggest the D.N.C. Derided the Sanders Campaign', *New York Times*, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/23/us/politics/dnc-emails-sanders-clinton.html>, (accessed 26 October 2021).

suppressing the amount, power and impact of propaganda, disinformation, fake news, and its disseminators on our lives.

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