



Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes
"Strengthening Democracies Through Knowledge"

**The 22nd Annual Conference of the
Euro-Atlantic Conflict Studies Working Group of the Partnership for Peace
Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institute**

**"Shaping nations for conflict and war. Propaganda, disinformation and strategic
communication. Implications for policy-makers"**

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Institute for Political Studies of Defence and
Military History
Romania



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Introduction

The 22nd annual conference of the CSWG brought together renowned historians as well as defence and security experts from 19 NATO member and partner countries who discussed against a historical background various propaganda and disinformation techniques used in both conventional and hybrid warfare.

The conference focused on how past experiences in using and countering these techniques could enable contemporary decision makers to promptly identify and adequately respond to them. Therefore, the main questions that informed the conference have been the following ones: What is wartime propaganda? Which are the types of warfare that recently emerged? How could hybrid threats be effectively identified and countered? Which are the characteristics of informational warfare? How are propaganda and disinformation used in the process of preparing nations for armed conflicts? What is the role played by strategic communication in fighting the disruptive effects of propaganda and disinformation?

The format of the conference included an opening session and seven panels organised around key topics for war propaganda and disinformation. The introductory remarks have been delivered by Simona Cojocaru, State Secretary for Defence Policy, Planning and International Relations, who expressed appreciation for the event and emphasised the need for a comprehensive understanding of how, in times of war, disinformation and propaganda operate and influence the behaviour of states. At his turn, Raphael Pearl, executive director of Partnership for Peace Consortium, insisted on the relevance of history for apprehending current events and equally on the continuous dialogue that should exist between military historians and decision makers in view of envisaging the future. Dr. Carmen-Sorina Rîjnoveanu, Director of the Institute for Political Studies of Defence and Military History from Romanian Ministry of National Defence and Co-chair of CSWG, pointed out that understanding the history and the implications of major wars is part of the efforts to increase collective resilience by developing coherent strategies to counter false narratives and build an effective strategic communication. In his address, Niels Bo Poulsen, Director of the Institute for Strategy and Defence Studies from the Royal Danish Defence College, indicated that the issues to be considered at the conference lie at the crossroads between history and security studies and therefore could benefit from progress in both fields. The intervention of Lieutenant General Iulian Berdilă, Deputy Chief of Defence for Operations and Training, highlighted strategic communication as an important field where the conference could contribute by advancing solutions for enhancing its efficiency, particularly in the context of war. As a keynote speaker, Brigadier General

Constantin Spânu, the head of Information and Public Relation Division from the Romanian Ministry of Defence, provided a military perspective on strategies for countering disinformation and illustrated it by reference to strategies employed by the Russian Federation, specifically those it uses in the context of its aggression against Ukraine.

Panel 1: *Propaganda during wartime. Ways and strategies of action*



The presentations delivered in this panel covered propaganda practice from both World Wars with some of them emphasising the object of propaganda activities while others being focused on how they have been conducted or on the structures responsible for their coordination.

The activity of propaganda bodies functioning at the level of armed forces was analysed through an early example taken from the First World War, the k.u.k. Kriegspressequartier, which was set up in 1914 within the Field Army Command of the Austro-Hungarian army and whose main objective was the increase of national and international reputation of the armed forces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The elements of the analysis encompassed its

evolution in terms of growing human and financial resources allocated to it, expanding its area of responsibilities and raising its influence within the armed forces.

A relevant illustration for the potential of military units as propaganda tool was provided by means of the small-size Free French Air Forces (FFAF) created within the Royal Air Force soon after the surrender of France and used by General de Gaulle to encourage resistance against the occupying forces, to maintain the prestige of Free France among the Allies and to enable France to take part in shaping the international order after the defeat of Nazi Germany. Relevant actions designed to promote FFAF included the naming of its squadrons after historical regions of France and the deployment in the Soviet Union of the Normandie squadron which took part in several key battles against the German army.

The case of the propaganda campaign that the Czechoslovak government-in-exile to London initiated in the aftermath of the attack of 27 May 1942 in Prague on the prominent Nazi leader Reinhard Heydrich provided an opportunity to consider the difficulties entailed by sustaining from abroad a propaganda effort directed to the population of an occupied state and designed so as not to unnecessarily expose it to retaliation. It was argued that this campaign bore relevant similarities with Western propaganda during the Cold War.

The efficiency of airborne propaganda was assessed in the context of the Second World War by considering the specific purposes, the diverse content and the various targeted audience of the leaflets and news sheets dropped from the air by the United States, the United Kingdom, and Nazi Germany. It was emphasised that these means of propaganda have been adapted to the evolution of the war and directed towards both population from occupied territories and members of the armed forces from the frontline. The aim followed with respect to the population was encouragement while the militaries were urged to surrender and their motivation to continue fighting was intended to be diminished.

Panel 2: *New typologies of warfare. How to comprehend and effectively address the hybrid threats*



The panellists considered the current issue of the hybrid warfare from both a theoretical and a practical point of view. A comprehensive and detailed definition of this type of warfare was put forward, enabling one to unveil the strategy behind it, and a deep analysis of the characteristics of the hybrid warfare conducted by the Russian Federation against Georgia was presented. The role played by crisis management operations in countering hybrid warfare targeting their area of responsibility was also considered.

With respect to the meaning of the hybrid warfare, it was argued that it implied conducting hostile actions in a multitude of domains, including information, and through different means, such as propaganda and disinformation. It was emphasised that the various domains covered by hybrid warfare are creatively combined and various and variable centres of gravity are ascribed to them in order to constitute an elaborated and well concealed strategy. In this understanding, the military domain does not play the central part in the overall strategy, the attribution of threats is made to be very difficult, and the prompt response to threats is blocked by confusion resulting from intentionally blurring the distinctions between war and peace, friend and foe, domestic and external, state and non-state actors. For effectively

countering hybrid threats, it was considered necessary for decision makers, including those from NATO and EU countries, to dispose of a special analytical capacity enabling them to unveil the apparently unconnected elements that constitute the hybrid warfare strategy.

The Russian hybrid warfare directed against Georgia has been approached against the background of the post-Cold War technological advances and the growing role of non-state actors, two elements which increased the impact and the audience of propaganda and disinformation and thus turned these tools into prominent constituents of the hybrid warfare. The Russian Federation was considered to heavily rely on both tools by effectively combining the recent developments in weaponizing information with the Soviet experience in this field, especially in terms of generating confusion. This approach was plainly proved by the case of Georgia which, prior to the 2008 war but especially during and after it, was subjected to propaganda and disinformation campaigns designed to maintain it in the Russian sphere of influence. The Russian Federation disguises its messages by channelling them through organizations and public figures from Georgia. Also, it creates divisions within the Georgian society by exploiting its economic, ethnic, religious, cultural, political and social vulnerabilities. For affecting the relationship between Georgia and its Western allies, it is promoted a Georgian identity that excludes core Western political values and which is said to be endangered by the process of Euro-Atlantic integration.

The hybrid threats and hybrid warfare targeting the area of responsibility associated with crisis management operations, including those conducted by NATO and EU, have been systematized according to the areas of interest within such operations affected by them, namely leadership, international and EU actions, defence capabilities, internal security, economy, security infrastructure and supply, capabilities of and services for the population, mental resilience. To effectively identify and respond to these threats, it was maintained that the personnel involved in such operations need to take part in regular preparedness exercises, to be constantly involved in exchange of information, to establish cooperative relations within the area of responsibility, and to develop situational awareness and dispose of problem-solving skills. Given that disinformation and propaganda could have a serious impact on the success of a crisis management operation, public information campaigns designed to maintain and enhance public confidence in it should necessarily be part of the means at its disposal for countering threats.

Panel 3: *Informational warfare. Fighting the enemy from the inside*



This panel discussed informational warfare as it operated during the Cold War, in its aftermath and in the world of today. The presentations addressed both the offensive and the defensive side of this instrument and allowed for elements of continuity and peculiarities in employing it to be emphasised.

The psychological defence conducted during the Cold War in NATO member countries was approached from the perspective of Denmark. It was emphasised that, during that period, the psychological defence, defined as “the battle for the hearts and minds” of different populations, was a relevant aspect in addition to the military, political and economic competition between the two ideological blocks. The analysis highlighted the fact that, at NATO's initiative, psychological warfare and defence activities became in the 1950s a concern for its member states in their preparations for a potentially tense situation. In this context, Denmark developed and implemented a psychological defence that was guided by the question: how much can the government limit the press in a war situation, while respecting its freedom?

Thus, to answer this question the press and media were initially seen as part of the total defence, participating with elements of the state apparatus in possible war efforts. Later on, the media no longer had a representation in the state organizations, being released from the specific psychological defence recommendations developed by the state, but being still legally responsible. Despite this evolution in the relationship between media and state authorities, in a wartime context the media could function alongside the government institutions. It was suggested that today state authorities in Denmark should focus less on censorship and control of information and devote more attention to the traditional media's role in securing trustworthy news and also to the digital literacy of population which enables it to critically navigate through the growing flow of information at its disposal.

The high relevancy of informational warfare for achieving military success was analysed in the context of Slovenia's war of independence. The informational warfare was defined as including actions such as controlling one's own information space, protecting access to information, and acquiring and using adversary information. The approach followed by the democratically elected government of Slovenia began with developing a critical information infrastructure (television and radio) that allowed information to be broadcasted even during the war. In this way, the adversary could be demonized, the image of the newly formed state as a victim was successfully shaped, the evolution of the war was constantly presented, and the mobilization of the population could be done. Even if the armed conflict ended after ten days, the informational warfare continued and was especially directed towards gaining support for Slovenia on the part of international community.

The countering of covert influence operations was discussed from the viewpoint of indicators enabling one to clearly distinguish between Russian agents of influence (*agentura vliyaniya*), from people taking part in them without being aware of what they are involved in. The urgency to develop indicators of this type follows from the intense use by the Russian Federation of influence operations in view of weakening the international support for Ukraine and the ability of Ukraine to repel the aggression. There has been put forward a covert foreign influence risk-based assessment model, similar to the one introduced in the USA in 2021 by National Security Presidential Memorandum 33(NSPM-33), which operated with four criteria for assessing the degree of risk and with four corresponding levels of risk. These criteria are the following ones: direct exercise of influence, which can be beneficial to the enemy country, connections with persons/organizations already identified as posing a high degree of threat, participation in activities financed by a hostile government directly or through related person or organization, and connections with hostile government or related persons or organizations.

Depending on the specific contents of these criteria, the level of risk could be *very high*, *high*, *average*, and *low*.

Panel 4: *Preparing for war. Propaganda and disinformation*



The topics addressed during this panel considered how national authorities reacted to propaganda and disinformation from abroad and how they used propaganda in relation to domestic audience. The broad experience of Denmark in countering propaganda and disinformation in various historical contexts was presented. Also, the discussions covered the rationales, means and long-term consequences of information operations conducted during the Second World War and in its aftermath by the Dutch authorities in view of consolidating the morale of their own nationals and, in the second half of the 1980s, by the military officials from Czechoslovakia for the purpose of consolidating their domestic influence.

The issue of striking a balance between preserving the freedom of speech and providing an adequate response by national authorities to deliberate misinformation was considered by reference to how hostile propaganda and disinformation have been countered by the Danish

authorities in different periods. Their reaction to the actions of Nazi Germany between 1933-1939, to the Soviet propaganda during the Cold War, to the 2004 Mohammed cartoon crisis, and to the misinformation conducted by the Russian Federation since 2014 have been discussed against the background of the longstanding tradition of the Danish society to impose few restrictions to free speech and to respond with restraint to hostile actions of other states. Based on these particular situations, it was concluded that Denmark adopted an approach that can be characterized by constancy over a long period of time, and which involved the use of measures such as: isolating the target groups, relying on a free media and non-governmental organizations, the surveillance carried out by the police and the counter-intelligence services, as well as diplomatic efforts. The effectiveness of disinformation and propaganda was considered to depend on the existence of a weak and fragmented society and it was underlined that minorities should not be regarded as mere instruments of external powers and that legitimate concerns within the society should not be confused with external propaganda and disinformation.

The building of the will to fight within a society was considered in the particular context of the situation in Netherlands after its defeat by Nazi Germany in 1940. The need to raise the national morale was widely acknowledged during the German occupation when it became apparent that its low level was the main cause for the inadequate military resistance to invading forces. Following Operation Market Garden, the *Militair Gezag* information section began to act for raising the will to fight within the population and to this purpose it hailed the contribution of Dutch military personnel to the Allied war effort. Later on, the information activities were conducted under the supervision of the government with the objective of consolidating the national morale for resisting communism and fighting in Indonesia, but the information strategies adopted raised concerns about their compatibility with democratic principles. The information operations conducted by the Dutch authorities in the early Cold War provided an opportunity for reflecting on the balance between their short-term benefits and their negative consequences that manifest today under the form of controversies within the Dutch society on topics such as the moral standing of the war of decolonization.

The military propaganda narratives put forward by authorities from East European communist states towards the end of the Cold War were approached by considering how they have been used and elaborated in Czechoslovakia. A central element shaping these narratives was the deep-rooted fear of Czechoslovak military leadership, also shared by the rest of Soviet satellite states from Europe, that NATO countries were modernizing their armed forces in view of launching an aggression against communist states. On the one hand, this feeling of insecurity

would have been due to the lack of non-ideological understanding of the long-term trends of the military budgets of the NATO member states. On the other hand, fear steamed from the constant appeal to the Soviet interpretation of post-war history. Consequently, the feeling of fear of the West was disseminated by propaganda activities targeting the population of Czechoslovakia and aimed at maintaining its confidence in the modified historical reality upheld by the Soviets. The propaganda effort expressed the conviction of the members of the Warsaw Pact that, back in 1987, NATO was already engaged in a broad psychological warfare against them.

Panel 5: *Media as a tool of warfare. Shaping perceptions and behaviours*



This panel investigated means of propaganda and its role during both world wars and in the context of contemporary profile of the war shaped by the new media tools. The image of the Russian Empire in the Bulgarian society and the promotion in Romania of the national unity ideal both illustrated how propaganda operated during the First World War. Also, the image of the Soviet Union built by Bulgarian and Slovak authorities and the justifications provided by them for the war against it exemplified propaganda approaches from the Second World War. The difficulties in countering informational warfare in contemporary democratic states was a topic discussed in connection to the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The image of the Russian Empire/Soviet Union that, during the two World Wars, was built by its adversaries was illustrated by means of propaganda activities of the Kingdom of Bulgaria. It was mentioned that, during the First World War, the Bulgarian state did not pursue a policy of portraying the Russian Empire as an enemy given that the Bulgarian public opinion, which strongly supported democratic and humane principles, was not supportive of extreme positions. However, the traditional favourable image of the Russian Empire faded away as the military confrontations with it increased. The Second World War brought about a different situation when the propaganda activities coordinated primarily by the Intelligence Department of the Army Headquarters created an exclusively negative image of the Soviet Union presented as the source of all evil things affecting Europe and Bulgaria since 1917. Within this narrative, the Soviet Union was presented as planning to spread communism across the whole Europe and to harm vital interests of Bulgaria.

The role of satirical cartoons in shaping public opinion was analysed in the context of the First World War by means of studying how, during the period when Romania opted for neutrality (1914-1916), the most important Romanian satirical magazine contributed to prepare Romanians for the entry into war. It has been indicated that the advantage of using this tool for building support for the ideal of forging the unitary national state lied in its accessibility which enabled it to reach a large number of people and, consequently, to have a significant impact on national public opinion. The study of satirical cartoons has also made possible a better understanding of the relationship existing at that time in Romania between politics and society.

The use of propaganda during the Second World War for building the image of the enemy was discussed by reference to how the Slovak Republic, an ally of Nazi Germany, presented Hungary, Poland and the Soviet Union to its public opinion, including to the members of its armed forces. The focus was on how the Office of the Propaganda and, in the military field, the Cultural and Propagation Department, conducted the propaganda campaign for convincing the Slovak public to support the war against the Soviet Union. To this purpose, the war was described as being fought to protect the European countries from a Soviet invasion and to comply with the moral duty of opposing an inhuman regime threatening the very heart of European civilization. A particularity of the Slovak propaganda was the importance attributed to the religious aspects of the war that were designed to turn it into a war for defending Christianity.

It has also been highlighted the threat to democratic states represented by the informational aggression conducted by autocratic regimes through various means provided by technological advancements. In connection to the aggression of the Russian Federation against

Ukraine, the difficulties of countering the cognitive dimension of war were discussed by reference to how the freedom of speech should be dealt with under such circumstances in order to protect it while preventing it from providing an essential advantage to the enemy. It was suggested that democratic states should enhance their capabilities to identify the presence of the enemy behind national entities delivering public messages and, for this purpose, to ensure a high level of transparency in the financing of media and political parties. With respect to external actions designed to provide protection against informational war, it was mentioned the need for the exact meaning and threshold of informational aggression to be agreed upon at the level of NATO and for the Alliance to dispose of adequate means to react to it.

Panel 6: *Strategic communication: how to “fight” against the enemy*



The presentations delivered in this panel illustrated specific case studies highlighting the importance of strategic communication for fighting the enemy. The role of strategic communication was analysed in different historical periods, both in peacetime and wartime, and also from the standpoint of an aggressor and from the viewpoint of a country that expects to be subject of aggression.

Strategic communication has been considered in the framework of peace operations, particularly those ones conducted by NATO, by taking into account that securing the approval of the wider international public opinion for this type of operations became highly important

in the post-Cold War as a result of several peculiar factors: advancements in the field of information technology, the constant increase of the importance of mass media and the growing sensitivity of public opinion for human rights issues. In this regard, NATO's shortcomings in strategic communication conducted during operations in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan resulted in the failure of its forces to generate sufficient public support and highlighted the limitations of traditional military operations. For this reason, NATO began to focus more on public affairs, public diplomacy and strategic communication activities, which became an integral part of its political strategies and mandate delivery. It was argued that the success of peacekeeping operations conducted by NATO depended on various factors including the delivery of messages by local proxies rather than by officials, the focus of messages on how the peacekeepers could fulfil their mandate and the use of radio to communicate these messages. In addition, the officials should not only inform local communities, but be informed by them, which means moving towards a more dynamic dialogue between the two entities. Last, but not least, the strategic communication should be integrated into the long-term planning of a peacekeeping mission.

The domestic strategic communication during the Second World War was analysed by looking at the actions of the French Military High Command during the so-called Phoney War (1939-1940), a period of great uncertainty where the boundaries between an ally, a neutral and an enemy were unclear. The vision on defence of the French military authorities was based on the need to articulate modern warfare and democracy, to reduce the number of casualties in the trenches and to reveal to the rest of the world that France did not wage a war of aggression. However, the whole campaign was a failure, which can be explained by the dichotomy between strategic planning and strategic communication. The diverse war objectives that have been put forward led to a lack of purpose for the French troops and finally resulted in the moral collapse of the French army in early 1940.

The way the Russian Federation designed its strategic communication in relation to its aggression against Ukraine was subjected to a comprehensive analysis. Four targeted audiences have been identified: the Russian society, where the public opinion was the main focus, the Ukrainian society, especially the elite and the ethnic Russian minority of Ukraine, the West, where public opinion was also the primary target, and the Global South, where the elite was the central target. For each of these audiences and depending on the changing circumstances, the Russian Federation uses strategic level narratives, aiming at justifying its political and strategic goals and which are usually logical and coherent and tactical level narratives that are more ephemeral and developed to answer the changing situation. The main characteristics of

the Russian strategic communication are the high number of messages and channels through which they are distributed, the combination of truth and disinformation, the delivery of the messages at a fast, continuous, and repetitive pace, and the lack of any attempt at consistency. The limited success achieved by Russia's strategic communication in the case of Western states was grounded in some genuine admiration of Russian culture, art and history among intellectuals, the economic interests among political and business elites, and some Ukrainophobia in certain European countries. The countering of its propaganda should not be done by refuting each of its narratives but by creating a coherent, more positive and more compelling counter-narrative, neutralizing its agents of influence, limiting the access to the target audience and providing it with adequate education for resisting propaganda.

Panel 7: Countering disinformation. What lessons can we learn?



The countering of disinformation was discussed in different historical contexts that included the Second World War, the Cold War and the present-day events. It was considered how the Four Freedoms have been used to create public support for the objectives assumed by

the Allies in relation with Nazi Germany and how Hungarian communist authorities fabricated the history of the 1956 revolution. There have been also presented the potential benefits of using the blockchain system against online disinformation and the negative effects entailed for the democratic electoral process by populism spread with the help of social media.

One prominent information campaign conducted by Allies during the Second World War had as its starting point the publication in 1943 of the four famous paintings by Norman Rockwell illustrating the Four Freedoms (freedom from fear, freedom from want, freedom of speech, freedom of religion) described by US president Franklin D. Roosevelt in his 1941 *State of the Union Address*. Based on the overwhelming public response to these paintings, the Office of War Information launched an information campaign directed at both domestic audiences and foreign publics and aiming at combating the Nazi and Fascist propaganda. Within this campaign, the Four Freedoms have been used as a shorthand for the war goals of the Allies and for presenting them in a way that could win the heart and minds of the people. Later on, during the Cold War, the United States continued to rely its information campaigns on the concept of freedom which became the cornerstone of its image.

The disinformation used by communist authorities from Soviet satellite states to consolidate their control over their population is well illustrated by the campaign which, after the 1956 Anti-Communist Revolution in Hungary, was led by the communist regime to rewrite the memory of this event by portraying two convicted women, Piroska Janko and Ilona Toth, as symbols of "counter-revolutionary" cruelty. Thus, the Hungarian officials decided in 1957 to conduct a campaign by means of newspapers for changing the popular perception of these two women from heroes into traitors. In what was presented as an action designed to counter disinformation, the government launched fabricated stories by Soviet and Hungarian experts which functioned as elements of the psychological warfare against the ordinary citizens. These narratives offered ready-made new interpretations which later became part of the official history of the 1956 revolution promoted in the Kádárist era.

The countering of disinformation by using new technological solutions was discussed by assessing the applicability in this field of the blockchain model. The need for introducing innovative ways to protect people from disinformation was considered to result from the developments in this field which encompassed the online spread of disinformation, misinformation, false news, media deepfakes, and grey and black propaganda. Blockchain would thus make possible the labelling of the online content by indicating what is contained in the information, whether its source is credible, and where the information is gathered from, so that people would be able to track information and create a decentralized system to rate its

sources. However, to give blockchain such a use requires significant improvements in scalability enabling the handling of millions of transactions per second.

The consequences of populism promoted by online means have been addressed with reference to the upcoming 2024 elections in the United States and the European Union. Populism, which is built around the dichotomy good people - corrupt elites, rely on social media where insufficient regulations makes possible for the democratic framework in both the United States and the European Union to be bypassed. The fact that millions of American and EU citizens use social platforms on a daily basis helps populism to become a new normality that severely threatens democracy. In the case of 2024 elections in the United States, the election of a populist president is a considerable challenge since there is a directly proportional relationship between the threat of populism and the power of the country where such a leader wins office. Equally, in European Union, the accession to power of populist figures would affect the integration process and the support for EU institutions. Consequently, it was maintained that governments should no longer ignore populism and must counter it by including the populist threat into the security culture.

Key Takeaways and Recommendations



The conference yielded several significant takeaways and recommendations for policy-makers based on the insights and discussions concerning propaganda, disinformation, and strategic communication in warfare:

- ❖ **Make better use of historical insights to understand typologies of hostile informational actions:** Drawing lessons from historical case studies on propaganda, disinformation, and strategic communication based on specific historical experiences may provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of different tactics and countermeasures. It is also improved the understanding of how propaganda employs history in order to create false narratives and misuses past to give raise to ambiguous

realities. Consideration should be given to the fact that the dichotomy current foe/historical friend, often employed in propaganda campaigns, is deeply rooted in history.

- ❖ **Promote media literacy and critical thinking:** Invest in educational programs to enhance media literacy and critical thinking skills among the general population because a well-informed public is better equipped to recognize and counter disinformation. Knowledge of the past enhances critical thinking by enabling one to resist false or misguided historical narratives and to counter various attempts to speculate on historical facts for creating ambiguity and generate fear among population. Both media literacy and critical thinking make people more receptive to fact-based governmental strategies designed to debunk false information and present a coherent and genuine perspective on disputed facts.
- ❖ **Avoid misinterpretation of domestic grievances:** There has to be operated a clear distinction between legitimate concerns raised within a society, including by minorities, and external propaganda and disinformation so that genuine domestic problems can be identified and adequately addressed. In the specific case of minorities, such a distinction prevents them from being perceived as mere instruments of external influence.
- ❖ **Securing trustworthy of information:** For effectively counter disinformation in a world which provides people with a huge variety of sources of information, the focus should be less on censorship and control of the media and more on its role in securing trustworthy news. Ensuring a high level of transparency in the financing of media and political parties enables democratic states to enhance their capacity to identify the presence of hostile actors behind national entities delivering public messages. Special attention is to be provided to striking a right balance between protecting the freedom of speech as an essential democratic principle and preventing it from providing an essential advantage to the enemy.
- ❖ **Tailoring national counter-strategies to peculiarities of disinformation campaigns:** Response to disinformation has to take into account that disinformation usually implies the distribution of ideas through a high number of messages and channels, a mix of

truth and disinformation, the delivery of messages at a fast, continuous, and repetitive pace.

- ❖ **Gaining public opinion support for armed conflicts related decisions:** Build strong domestic support for decisions to initiate or conclude participation in an armed conflict given that favourable public opinion is an essential element for their successful implementation.
- ❖ **Building resilience among the military:** Special attention should be devoted to strengthening motivation and the morale of the military which are constantly targeted by the enemy through disinformation campaigns. As history plainly proves, military equipment and manpower, even when they are superior to the enemy, are insufficient for successful deterrence and defence when the will to fight among the military is at low levels.
- ❖ **Develop instruments for assessing covert foreign influence:** For measuring the risk posed to a state by agents of influence it could be used a covert foreign influence risk-based assessment model which operates with four criteria: direct exercise of influence, which can be beneficial to the enemy country; connections with persons/organizations already identified as posing a high degree of threat; participation in activities financed by a hostile government directly or through related person or organization; connections with hostile government or related persons or organizations. Depending on the degrees of these criteria, the risk could be categorised as: very high, high, average, and low.
- ❖ **Use the blockchain model for countering disinformation:** Blockchain, when significant improvements in scalability would be available, makes possible the labelling of the online content by indicating what is contained in the information, whether its source is credible, and where the information is gathered from. People would thus be able to track information and create a decentralized system to rate its sources.

