



CENTER FOR
THE STUDY OF
DEMOCRACY



Countering Kremlin's Media Influence in Europe

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The anti - democratic turn in Europe: Rule of law challenge

- The rise of right - wing populism .
- **Authoritarian state - driven interference** : sharp power leads to democratic backsliding.
- **Technological developments** : (1) market monopolization practices ; (2) socio - political impact .
- A commonly forged **European response** : the challenge of legal fragmentation.

Pro-Russian anti - democratic narratives

- **Four main anti - democratic themes** :
nationalist ; anti - migrant ; misogynist ; economically illiberal narratives.
- **Types of outlets** : (1) directly Russia owned; (2) partisan; (3) broad dailies; (4) outlets not linked to Russian interests.
- **Timeframe** : since the 2014 intensification of the standoff between Russia and the West.
- **Total number of articles** : 2000 (500 per country).

Commonalities of pro - Russian anti - democratic narration

Nationalism

- Russia is a prime anti-fascist power.
- Neo-Nazi practices are being revived in the West.
- Traditional values guard against the excesses of liberalism.
- State sovereignty protects national identity.

Migration

- Migrants pursue economic goals and cannot be termed 'refugees'.
- Migrants represent a security, cultural and economic threat.
- Multiculturalism undermines European civilization.

Pro-Kremlin,
anti-democratic
discursive
ecosystem

Gender

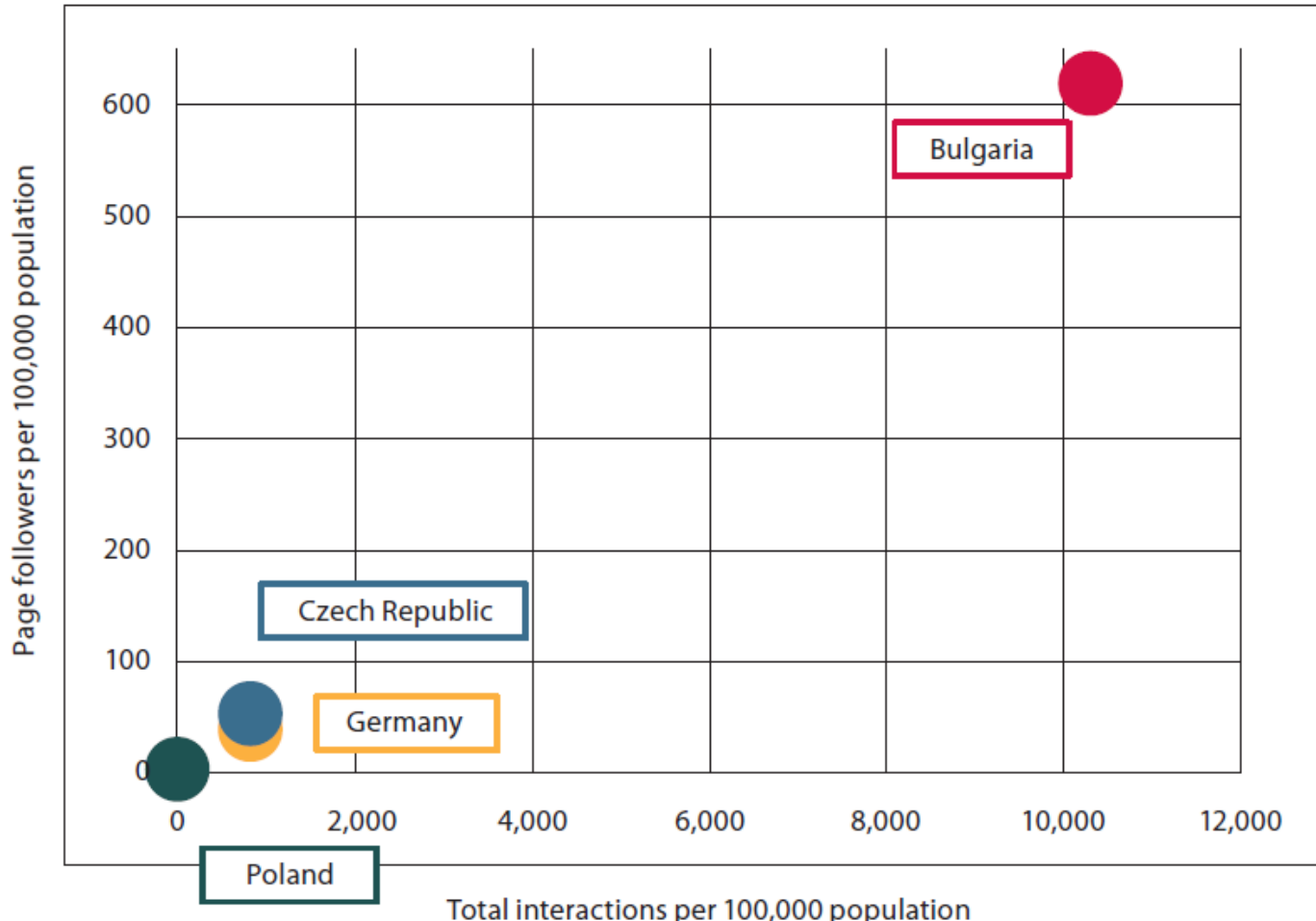
- The West imposes gender ideology.
- Russia defends traditional family values.
- Feminism is a dangerous challenge to demographic survival.
- Gay totalitarianism infiltrates school education.

Energy

- EU energy legislation unfairly targets Russia.
- Turkish Stream and Nord Stream II benefit Europe.
- EU energy diversification is unfeasible.
- Cooperation with Russia brings prosperity.

Pro-Russian narratives on social media

Official Russian diplomatic missions' Facebook presence in Bulgaria, Poland, Czechia, Germany.



➤ The Kremlin's social media strategy: **Bulgaria on target** .

Source: CSD based on Pulsar tool.

Specific national vulnerabilities to Russian disinformation

Bulgaria :

- **Considerable Russian media foothold** through local oligarchic proxies and substantial economic footprint.
- EU and NATO membership as a **deterrent** to ubiquitous dissemination of Russian narratives.

Czechia :

- **Euroskepticism** and political - economic ties to **Russia**: proliferation of pro-Kremlin content on anonymous websites.

NB. Recent downturn in relations.

Poland :

- **Acute vigilance** of Kremlin activities.
- **Coincidence of narratives** rather than deliberate local strategy/ demand.
- **Historical soft spot** : Russian amplification of anti-Ukrainian and anti-German sentiments.

Germany :

- **Putinversteh**er ; anti - American undercurrent; **business ties to the Kremlin.**
- Globalization and liberalism as **economically threatening** and **anti - national.**

Best practices and gaps in tackling disinformation

Bulgaria :

- Limited resilience capacity.
- Political inaction.
- EU initiatives – slowly and reluctantly taken up.
- Civil society takes the lead.

Czechia :

- Political acknowledgement of the Russian disinformation threat.
- EU initiatives receive significant attention.
- Active civil society.

Poland :

- Political polarization, government control on public media.
- EU initiatives – not widely discussed.
- Civil society takes the lead.

Germany :

- State-led initiatives are primary.
- EU policy proposals receive less attention.
- Limited cooperation between government and civil society.

Resilience assets against disinformation

Governance framework	Civil Society	EU
Political recognition of the problem of disinformation and comprehensive threat assessment	Active NGO sector	Establishing partnerships and fostering consensus among member states on media-related policy issues
Legislative initiative; well-defined and timely legal provisions in the sphere of media regulation	Well-organized journalistic advocacy	Ensuring fair opportunities for member states to put forward their policy initiatives on the EU level
Well-resourced and independent media regulatory bodies	Public awareness of the problem of disinformation	Increasing the competencies of the EU; creating more binding legal provisions
Enforcement capacity	Building of cross-cutting horizontal links among civil society actors engaged in combating disinformation	Effective communication of EU policy proposals; increasing Rule of Law enforcement capacity

➤ **Cooperative and coordinated strategy through a variety of stakeholders.**

Towards an integrated, multi - stakeholder approach

Governance framework:

- Comprehensive risk assessment of national vulnerabilities to disinformation.
- Legislation clarifying boundaries of offensive discourse.
- Transparency of ownership – anonymous websites.

Civil society:

- Create and disseminate counter - narratives.
- Research psychological mechanisms behind receptivity to disinformation.
- Deliberative councils to address social and political polarization.

The EU:

- Close rule of law governance gaps in EU member states.
- Strengthen and integrate different tools for countering Russian interference.
- Stem the flow of illicit authoritarian capital flows into European media.



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Read the full report at csd.bg





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Thank you

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