



Conference

Countering Hybrid Threats: Policy Options for Building Resilience to the Kremlin Playbook in Europe

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Sredets Hall, Sofia Hotel Balkan

Opening Remarks of Dr. Ognian Shentov, Chairman, Center for the Study of Democracy

Dear Ambassadors,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While waging war in Ukraine, Russia has not stopped using its economic clout and posing **hybrid threats to undermine and influence the national policies** of NATO and EU member states as well as other strategically important states.

Bulgaria is constantly exposed to a variety of hybrid threats, including ones related to weapons of mass destruction. Such were last month's cyber attacks by Killnet that targeted state authorities and critical infrastructure (as well as the servers and websites of the Center for the Study of Democracy).

The Kremlin is actively building and constantly employing **informal economic, political and media networks**. These networks are its tools in the process of **state capture** integral to influencing key institutions, bodies and economic sectors, in ways that pushes state's policies to serving Russian interests.

And, of course, Southeast Europe, including Bulgaria, remains among the most vulnerable and largely incapable of tackling the growing Russian threat in the region. The widespread practices of **state and media capture**, as well as the capture of key regulatory bodies, hinder or altogether block response capabilities and weaken resilience of the national governments in the region.

This makes it mandatory to actively and systematically counter the **mechanisms** of the Kremlin's malign economic, political and information influence.

Such counteraction is necessarily based first of all on reforming the **security sector** and the judicial system and also on using a **public-private format**, that is closely engaging civil society and its institutions and our international partners from the EU and NATO with the support of the private sector.

I hope that today's discussion will become a part of this process. I would like to thank all of you for joining us today, and especially our distinguished speakers, the US Department of State – Ambassador Herro Mustafa and Mr. Keith Weber, as well as the Director of Konrad Adenauer Foundation's Bulgaria Office Mr. Norbert Beckmann-Dierkes for the support of today's event.