**Communication from the governmental agencies of Ukraine on measures to counter disinformation in Ukraine**

In general, the main challenges raised by the spread of disinformation include complication of critical perception of information flow by the population, growth of distrust for official news and data, gradual decline in confidence in democratic institutions. At the same time, disinformation should be regarded as a part of a wider set of problems related to influence operations through manipulation of public opinion. These can be of foreign and domestic origin and aim to influence citizens in a democracy by effectively robbing them of their free agency.

Targeted dissemination of disinformation and distribution of fake information has become an urgent threat to Ukraine that accompanies armed aggression by the Russian Federation as a part of its 'hybrid' war against our country. Russian state-sponsored disinformation campaigns conducted by its special services and other agencies in the domestic information space of Ukraine aim to strengthen its own position among the Ukrainian public through promotion of the distorted view of reality, pressure Ukraine's state institutions into particular course of actions, artificially amplify objective differences in views and opinions among Ukrainian citizens, aggravate social and political situation in the country. Combined with Russia's continued armed aggression and temporary occupation of Ukraine's territories, such practices constitute a direct threat to its constitutional order as well as sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Russian wide network of promotion of tailored propaganda content aimed at Ukraine includes, among others, controlled media and Internet resources, news aggregators and concentrators, blogs and individual influencers. Leading social media networks as well as messenger and video hostings services have become useful tools in spreading disinformation targeted at Ukraine's audience. There is also a widespread evidence of Russian special services' widespread use of botnets and other instruments of rapid dissemination of disinformation

Over the last several years, Ukraine has taken a number of steps to combat Russian disinformation, namely by amending correspondingly a set of strategic documents (National Security Strategy of Ukraine and Doctrine of Information Security of Ukraine), restricting access to the Russian TV channels and social media platforms (VKontakte, Odnoklassniki) imposing economic restrictions on certain Russian citizens who promoted false anti-Ukrainian narratives, regulating the spread of film and printed material produced in Russia.

In total, the mentioned measures had a negligible effect in terms of combating disinformation as Russia has successfully adapted to the changes. For instance, after the restriction on Russian's social networks, the intelligence services of the Russian Federation began the use of Telegram channels, YouTube, and to a lesser extent, Facebook, to spread new disinformation. A network of Ukrainian channels that distribute almost the same narratives as Russian television has been created (although the broadcast of the mentioned channels in the cable network has been recently suspended due to involvement of their owner in financing of terrorism and imposition of corresponding sanctions by the National Defense and Security Council of Ukraine).

All the mentioned limitations have proven to be mostly declaration of position and not "restrictions" per se. Hence, there is no reliable data that would point to their direct aggravated effect on human rights, including the rights to freedom of opinion and expression

As of today, the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine is in the process of elaboration of a national system for countering disinformation and manipulative information. A wide field of experts is involved in the process, including representatives of civil society and human rights institutions. It is expected that among others measures, principal attention will be paid to improvement of society’s media culture and media literacy through coordinated awareness campaigns, development of the national media literacy platform, dissemination of various informational and methodological materials/guides (with examples of ways to conduct fact-checking, identify internet-bots etc.).

Ukraine expects that the mentioned activities conducted in a systemic manner will significantly decrease the influence of disinformation on the society. These measures will be implemented in strict accordance with legislation of Ukraine and its international human rights obligations foreseeing a set of necessary counterweights that would provide a balance between combating disinformation and upholding the right to freedom of expression.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that one of the groups most susceptible to Russian disinformation is linguistic minorities who, due to the lack of command of the state language, are detached from mainstream media and lack access to balanced information sources. It is not only ethnic Russians though who are at risk, but also representatives of other minorities who speak predominantly Russian. These patterns bring new light upon the importance of the state language policy, which along with promotion of languages of national minorities, is expected to foster resilience to artificially constructed propaganda narratives coming from the Russian government and its proxies.

With regards to measures taken by the social media companies, the practices of blocking fake profiles and activities of fact-checkers were only partly effective (only small bots are usually detected and deleted). Most users have proven to pay limited attention to labels pointing to disinformation (the efficiency increased, however after some platforms began to warn about the blocking of accounts in case of failure to delete information that was marked as fake). Social media platforms are also often prone to "attacks" by bots through an artificial increase in the number of false complaints. The effects of changes in algorithms of social media are difficult to estimate due to limited information about criteria that affects their functionality. In sum, the effectiveness of the social media companies' activities aimed at combating disinformation is difficult to estimate and would benefit from higher level of transparency.

Assessing the effectiveness of certain actions aimed at counteracting Russian aggression in the information sphere, including their effect on human rights, remains an urgent task for both government agencies and the scientific and expert community of Ukraine. Based on the country's experience, restrictive measures, though often necessary, can be effective only to a certain extent and cannot serve as a substitute for promotion of national resilience to disinformation - a set of long-term measures which includes, but is not limited to, media and digital literacy campaigns, efforts to encourage critical thinking and trust in democratic practices.

At the international level, Ukraine and other countries that have become objects of continuous disinformation subversion activities by the Russian Federation and other authoritarian state actors would benefit from an effective system for the early detection of such threats, based in particular on information monitoring and sharing with interested international partners. There is also a growing need for a higher level of attention by the UN human rights mechanisms to adverse effects of disinformation and other influence operations on human rights as well as for elaboration of clear guidelines on ways of countering these malicious practices in line with international human rights norms and principles.

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