

Report on the Findings from July to August 2016

Slovak Foreign Policy Association has concluded the first two months of the project “Information warfare in the Internet: Exposing and countering pro-Kremlin disinformation in the CEEC” under the leadership of the Center of International Relations in Poland.

The main conclusions so far have showed that the Russian disinformation campaign in Slovakia is slowly decreasing in number of articles. The well-known websites such as *Zem a Vek* or *Slobodný vysielateľ* have not published many articles in terms of quantity comparing to previous months. One of the explanation could be the summer holiday season. However, that is not to conclude that the strong narrative has ceased to be pushed in Slovakia. On the contrary, the “big picture” narratives, including anti-EU and anti-NATO rhetoric are still present in some articles, mostly posted by *Hlavné správy*.

The project focuses on techniques used in the articles. One example of how the information machine likes to manipulate its targeted audience is to take completely unknown people from non-existing or low bar think tanks or NGOs and present them as reliable. Simply putting the word “famous” in front of the name of the person makes them interesting for the readership to share the article. However, when searching online for their articles there are usually very few results. The “experts” do not possess the education or experience to provide quality analysis of the geopolitical problems between Russia, the EU, and NATO.

One positive note is that Slovak people are becoming more aware of the presence of Russian influence in the country. The Ministry of Interior recently released a statement that it is acknowledging such influence over the society. Also, there are multiple projects currently under way in Slovakia. NGO and think tanks are creating common platforms to analyze informational warfare in the region, not only those with Russian origins.

As the project continues it will be important to focus more on the analysis of the website content and their background, including financing. At the same time it is crucial not to slip into the anti-propaganda paranoia which may distract relevant actors from their work.