KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

PUBLIC LEADERSHIP

IN EUROPE

Unravelling the Web: Exploring Russian Interference targeting the EU during the 2019 European Parliament Elections

Santino Lo Bianco

Occasional Paper

Spring 2024

The Knowledge Centre 'Public Leadership in the European Work Field' is a research platform that focuses on strengthening regional capacities to connect with the wider European work field and to better prepare regional stakeholders for future developments in Europe.

The content in this publication is provided for general information only. It is not intended to amount to advice on which you should rely. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences, Thorbecke Academy or any other institution.

Cover image: Thorbecke Academy / NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences / Monique van Dijk

Contents

Executive Summary

While there is extensive research on how Russian interference – in particular Russian disinformation operation – has played out in different European countries, indications of Russian interference directly targeting EU, its institutions or policies received little attention. This paper argues why there is good reason to assume that the EU, its institutions and its policies are an ideal a target for authoritarian regimes to exploit. It then explores in what ways, if any, Russian disinformation campaigning targeted EU institutions and their policies during the political and electoral campaigns leading up to the European Parliament (EP) elections of May 2019. In this context disinformation campaigning in terms of both network flows and contents ('narratives') have been examined, on the basis of a review of various reports identifying Russian interference and disinformation and of analyses of overall disinformation flows in Europe and the use of a database monitoring occurrences of disinformation.

What has been found is that, there is sufficient evidence to argue that Russia-backed disinformation indeed targeted the EU and it policies during the 2019 EP elections. However, such disinformation remained scarce in terms of size or volume. The number of disinformation cases that could be related to a Russian source and specifically targeting the EU remained limited. Moreover, flows of disinformation primarily circulated within national borders. In terms of user interaction (comments, likes, and shares), however, most of these studies however also showed that the outreach of Russia-sponsored disinformation targeting the EU was considerable. Overviewing the sort of narratives that were disseminated, what can be argued is that Russia was more interested in influencing domestic electoral process for the sake of shaping a pro-Russian discourse in the EU member states, than in discrediting the EU, or undermining it. Rather, the Kremlin leadership sought to form a pro-Russian bloc within EU countries that would be favourable to Russian interests and inclined to spread pro-Russian narratives.

For all the openings and susceptibilities decision making or electoral will formation processes may provide to foreign actors, it seems that targeted Russian influence was sporadic during the 2019 EP elections. There was no carefully orchestrated campaign that built on a carefully developed cross-border network of organizations and disinformation outlets. Rather, interference and disinformation from Russia depended on the efforts of isolated local, Eurosceptic or hyper-partisan media outlets in respective member states of the EU. It would not be far from the truth to state that these local disinformation outlets acted as Moscow's 'useful idiots'.

Unravelling the Web: Exploring Russian Interference targeting the EU during the 2019 European Parliament Elections

Introduction

At the time of writing, Russian interference in Europe has been consistently in today's news. It appeared that a Russia-sponsored website, called 'Voice of Europe', may well have engaged with European politicians – including members of European Parliament – this primarily in order to discourage support for Ukraine in its war against Russia. The scandal has come to light while the EU is preparing itself for the European Parliament (EP) elections in June this year. The still ongoing news coverage of what appears to be a Europe-wide scandal will unquestionably give more impetus to research on how Russian interference campaigns set their sights on Europe. It also raises the question whether there is Russian interference specifically directed at EU institutions and EU policy making and, if so, how such interference is taking place.

In literature, indications of Russian interference directly targeting EU institutions and/or representatives in the period preceding the European Parliament elections of 2019 remained underexposed. To be sure, there is extensive research on how foreign interference – particularly the disinformation campaigns led by Russia – has played out in different European countries. A great deal of them even focused on occurrences of foreign interference during the 2019 EP elections. Some of these studies were primarily interested in how Russian disinformation campaigns took shape in one or several EU countries during that period, often in terms of the kind of narratives being spread (Bendiek & Schulze 2019; Magdin 2020; Marconi 2023). Other studies were mainly interested in the volume and patterns of Russia-sponsored disinformation flows in and across countries in Europe, also during the months preceding the 2019 EP elections (Cinelli et al. 2020; Pierri et al. 2020). Reporting on other modalities of foreign interference such as party financing were also focused on domestic developments in EU countries. For all the interest in the occurrence of Russian interference during the 2019 European campaigns, occurrences of foreign interference that directly target public institutions and policies of the EU nevertheless received little attention.

While some attention is given to other modalities of foreign interference, this paper mainly explores to what extent and in what ways, if any, Russian disinformation campaigns have targeted EU institutions and their policies. The study focuses on the period leading up to the European Parliament elections of 23-26 May 2019. With this objective, the paper

argues first why there is good reason to assume that the EU, its institutions and its policies, are just as ideal a target for authoritarian regimes to exploit as any country in the EU. It then examines reports of (or attempts of) Rusisan disinformation campaigns during the months leading up to the 2019 EP elections.

For this, the findings from these reports have been cross-checked with data retrieved from a database run by East StratCom Task Force. The database – called *EUvsDisinfo* Database – is specifically tailored for tracking disinformation activities that can be traced back to Russian interference operation. This agency operates under the aegis of EU's European External Action Service. It was set up in 2015. And its role is to address and counter Russia's disinformation campaigns. Both the reports and the *EUvsDisinfo* database[1] have been scanned for the volume, contents ('narratives') and 'logistics' of Russia-sponsored disinformation that targeted EU institutions, EU politicians and officials and EU-related policies.

Why exploring foreign interference directly affecting the EU?

Numerous studies have focused on how authoritarian states interfere with political and electoral campaigns in other (mostly democratic) states. Various foreign interference modalities – ranging from spreading false propaganda, hacking voting systems, party financing, instrumentalization of issues (such as migration or energy supply) or direct (hybrid) attacks on public infrastructures – were examined (see e.g. Bateman et al. 2021; Bressanelli et al. 2020; Desouza et al. 2020; Jasper 2020). Most of these studies, however, have focused on the occurrence of foreign interference within the domestic context of countries. There is good reason to believe that authoritarian states in foreign interference and disinformation campaigns have also set their sights on institutions and processes at the EU level.

One of the reasons to believe that the EU may as such form an ideal target of disinformation and influence campaigns led by foreign actors, is because of its compound, multi-level system of governance and power allocation. As a governance mechanism that (perhaps only) thrives on consensus building and non-majoritarian decision making between more

---

[1] The *EUvsDisinfo Database* has been scanned on occurrences of Russia-sponsored disinformation in the period between 1 January 2019 and 1 July 2019. It covered the EU region and its member states. The tags used for filtering the data were: *'EU elections 2019'; 'EU regulations'; 'European Commission'; 'European Parliament'; 'European Council'; 'European values'; 'EU disintegration'* and *'European Union'*. The overall number of disinformation incidents detected that could be related to Russian interference and were specifically targeting the EU was 39.

or less autonomously operating member states (Hix 1999; Majone 1998; Moravcsik 1998), the EU provides many openings for third countries to exploit. It cannot be ruled out that foreign actors may exploit divisive issues among EU partners with the intention of disrupting consensus-building and decision-making processes at EU level, this in order to undermine the operational capacity of the EU. Institutional constraints require EU decision making structures to heavily rely on outside expertise, which makes EU policy making particularly vulnerable to interference operations (Woll 2006). Such operations, focusing on policy making at EU level, may involve a multitude of organizations having access to EU's decision making structures (Giovannini et al. 2022).

Whilst in the short term interference and disinformation operations may seem less harmful – for instance those aimed at lifting sanctions imposed by the EU – in the long run they are likely to undermine EU's decision making capacities (Karlsen 2019). The difficulty of finding this out is that foreign interference operations in general are covert by nature and their (harmful) effects can only be ascertained in the long term (2019: 2).

Another reason to consider EU susceptibilities to foreign interference and disinformation in their own right are the harmful effects that could be ascribed to what has been called the problem of 'double allegiance' in the EU. While 'primary allegiance' of citizens to their domestic governments remains immune to the fortunes of 'secondary allegiance' to the EU, the latter is easily affected by the conditions of 'primary allegiance' in the domestic arena (Van Kersbergen 2000; De Vries & Van Kersbergen 2007). This offers a perspective of a politically and electorally wavering EU that provides the foreign actor with a wide range of openings and narratives to exploit, which in the case of the EU means: spreading false narratives that may differ from member state to member state (Bentzen 2018).

Not least, being an aggregate of 27 national elections, the European Parliament electoral process – as one of EU's defining moments in opinion formation – is more than likely to provide openings in its institutional set-up to interfere in public debate. At the time of the 2019 EP elections, former European Commissioner Julian King warned that *"given the dispersed nature and comparatively long duration of the European Parliament elections, they present a tempting target for malicious actors"* (Politico 2019). There are various openings to exploit in that light. For one, there are considerable divergences in the rules of the modality of voting (Bendiek and Schulze 2019). While some EU member states only permit voting by ballot paper, others are experimenting with alternative voting, such as electronic voting or voting via internet. Loopholes may be found that enable foreign actors to tamper with results affecting the outcome of the overall electoral campaign in the EU. Divergences also exist in terms of election finance rules. In a majority of member states in the EU, there exists a legal ban on foreign donations to political parties and candidates. However, some do not have such a ban at all (Bressanelli et al. 2020; Soula 2023).

Indications of Russian interference in the 2019 EP elections

In the months preceding the European Parliament (EP) elections of 23 and 26 May 2019, the authorities of both the EU member states and the EU itself were well aware of the risks and threats of interference and disinformation from Russia. Since 2014, following Russia's annexation of Crimea, its aggressive interference campaigns in Ukraine and the Flight MH17 crash, the EU and its member states already stepped up their efforts to address the threat of Russian interference. Indeed, with the adoption of a series of three consecutive 'Foreign Policy Concepts' (FPC's) since 2008, the Russian foreign policy shifted from a collaborative involvement in the Euro-Atlantic region towards an ever more open and aggressive confrontation with – in how the Kremlin perceived – an exclusive western, US-led dominance (Svarin 2016).

There was widespread acknowledgement of various – sometimes strong – indications that Russia interfered with previous electoral and democratic processes in Ukraine and, later on, in other countries. In the US, it was publicly reported that a Russian company called Internet Research Agency – also known as 'Glavset' – led influence operations during the US presidential elections of 2016. As many as 126 million American citizens were then targeted (Mueller 2019: 26). In the UK, a parliamentary committee identified a dissemination of over 260 anti-EU media articles and postings conducted by Russian state-controlled news agencies Russia Today and Sputnik during the Brexit Referendum of 2016 (House of Commons Select Committee 2018).

Even though, at the time, Russian foreign policy shifted towards a more open and aggressive confrontation with the Euro-Atlantic community – specifically US and NATO – it did not entirely abandon a cooperative relationship with the EU altogether. Kremlin leadership formally maintained a "intensive and mutually beneficial dialogue" with the EU (Russian Presidency 2016). Still, the image of the EU as a geopolitical adversary in Kremlin circles was then already latent (2016: 136). Actually, indications of Russian interference did make the news back then. Instances of Russian funding of local political parties or campaign organisations came to light in the years preceding the 2019 EP elections. They were primarily found across various European countries in far-right, populist circles, where politicians were usually considered more sensitive to Russian arguments on topics such as Crimea, Ukraine and EU sanctions against Russia. And they happened well before the European elections of 2019.

Already in 2016, in Germany, a leaked Russian policy paper showed that the AfD politician Markus Frohnmaier, who was elected to the Bundestag in 2017, received financing from Kremlin leadership and worked for it (Focus 2016). Since 2014, in France, the leader of the far-right nationalist

party National Rally Marine Le Pen took loans in millions of euros from Russian banks (Chiappa 2023). In Italy, the then Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Matteo Salvini was reported to have discussed with a high-level delegation from Russia on Russian funding – via an opaque gas purchase agreement – to help his right-wing party 'Lega' joining the 2019 EP election campaign (Nardelli 2019; Rettman 2019). In Austria, Russian influence came to light – during the run-op to the 2019 European elections – when a leaked footage showed how Hanz-Christian Strache, head of the far-right Freedom Party and vice chancellor in the Austrian coalition government, offered government contracts to a woman he believed to be a niece of a Kremlin-backed oligarch and showed interest in illegal donations offered by the woman to his party (Ward 2019). In exchange, Strache would award her with a 50 percent stake in an influential Austrian newspaper.

Of the various strategies of foreign interference, spreading disinformation is considered one of suitable instruments in the context of elections and democratic process in general (Bader 2018). Spreading false information with the intention to change perceptions or to undermine political opponents during election helps to sway voting behaviour and the process of public will formation. To be sure, other foreign interference instruments may just be as useful in manipulating electoral process. Micro-targeting of voters with ads or hacking e-mail accounts in order to discredit opponents proved to be effective instruments during the Brexit referendum campaign in the UK in 2016 and the presidential elections in the US of the same year (see e.g. Bentzen 2018; Berghel 2018; Mueller 2019).

Well-aware of the risk of Russian interference and the disruptive effects it had on democratic process in the US and the UK, the EU and its member states took several measures ahead of the 2019 EP elections. In October 2018, a Code of Practice on Disinformation was signed by several social media platforms including Facebook, Google, Twitter and Mozilla, leading tech companies and the advertising industry. In this self-regulatory instrument the social media providers committed themselves to the objectives of fighting disinformation as set out in a communication issued by the European Commission a few months before. On the basis of this document, they agreed to observe transparency rules in political advertising or disactivating purveyors of disinformation.

In December 2018, the EU also adopted an Action Plan against Disinformation. One the measures envisaged in the Action Plan was the establishment of the Rapid Alert System (RAS), which consisted of a network of national contact points for sharing insights on disinformation campaigns, providing real-time alerts on detected disinformation campaigns, and coordinating responses. Another measure rolled out on the basis of the Action Plan was the introduction of a network bringing together national representatives with competence in electoral matters. Their focus was on a range of topics related to ensuring free and fair elections, including data protection, cyber-security, transparency and awareness raising.

For all the measures taken, occurrences of Russian disinformation targeting EU and the elections was nevertheless reported across various countries in the EU. It should be noted right away that such occurrences were detected in quite low proportions. According to one report focusing on the volumes of fake propaganda circulating on Twitter and Facebook, less than four per cent of disinformation across seven language groups was for instance detected in Twitter (Marchal et.al. 2019). Only a very few Russian websites (notably 'RussiaToday' and 'SputnikNews') could be linked to disinformation outlets across Europe, according to this study. Moreover, four narratives – out of the twenty – that were spread by these Russian disinformation sources, featured EU-related topics or Euroscepticism.

Another study, that focused on patterns of disinformation flows on Twitter across 18 countries, found that exchanges rarely crossed national borders (Cinelli et al. 2020). This indicates that exchanges with Russian sources would have been rather negligible. More or less the same patterns during the pre-election period were found in analyses focusing on disinformation flows in individual countries – that is: negligible volumes of exchanges between Russian sources and European disinformation outlets with little regard for EU-related topics (Pierri et al. 2020; Magdin 2020; Memo98 2019; Avaaz 2019). In terms of user interaction (comments, likes, and shares), most of these studies also showed that the spread of disinformation, including Russia-sponsored disinformation, outperformed by far and large information produced by professional websites such as those owned by official news agencies or political parties. EU-related disinformation on Facebook in the English language sphere, for instance, drew as much as four times the volume of shares, likes, and comments (Memo98 2019: 4). This finding provides ground for the assumption that even though evidence of Russian sponsorship remains scarce, the outreach of the few disinformation outlets that are actually connected with Russian sponsorship, can be significant.

Some of these studies also reviewed the contents of disinformation – or 'narratives' – that were exchanged and amplified, primarily on social media (Avaaz 2019; Memo98 2019; Marchal et.al. 2019; Soula 2023; Institute for Strategic Dialogue 2019) The overall pattern that emerges from these studies, is that whenever a connection was identified between a Russian disinformation source and local disinformation outlets in Europe, also called 'echo chambers', the focus rather was on spreading a pro-Russian narrative than on narratives vilifying the EU, its policies or its institutions. However, this overall finding does not preclude that in cases where disinformation could be traced back to Russian sponsorship, the EU was not targeted at all.

In that – quite limited – context, instances of co-occurrence of pro-Russia and anti-EU narratives were found primarily in far-right, populist or Eurosceptic circles backed by Russian sponsorship (Marchal et.al. 2019; Szicherle 2019). Overlooking the disinformation cases monitored by the *EUvsDisinfo* Database, the targets of Russia-sponsored disinformation

varied both in terms of contents and audiences. In terms of contents, there were fabricated stories of failing EU policies creating calamities in EU countries – such as the claim that the EU and Eurozone would be responsible for the economic downfall of member states – and those of EU policies that would intentionally harm national interests of the member states. Another category of narratives was directed at downplaying the effectiveness of EU sanctions against Russia and refuting the soundness of EU allegations of Russian disinformation.

The abovementioned categories of narratives varied with the audience for which they were intended. For instance, the narrative that the Eurozone would trigger financial and economical downfall was mainly intended for Italian audience. This audience, at the time, was largely sceptical of EU's monetary policy. And the story that EU policies would be harmful for national interest was primarily tailored for Polish audience, which was very protective of national sovereignty. These co-occurrences suggest that while Russia sources may well have facilitated the dissemination of disinformation, in Europe the outlets of disinformation– often referred to as 'echo chambers' – were local and familiar with domestic susceptibilities. A total of 39 cases during the six-month period preceding the 2019 EP elections were reported to have the EU, its institutions or its policies as their subject (*EUvsDisinfo* Database). In only 28 of these cases, the EU or its policies was a primary target.

Co-occurrence of pro-Russia and anti-EU narratives was particularly present in Middle and Eastern European countries. A study reviewing Facebook posts by political parties in these countries, during the period preceding the EP elections, found that pro-Russia and anti-EU narratives often went hand in hand (Memo98 2019; Szicherle 2019). Another study concluded that in the Višegrad countries, Russia can avail of a wider range of narratives in order to influence public discourse than in Western Europe (Bokša 2019). This was to be ascribed to widespread feelings of longing for Slavic unity or restoration of old 'Soviet-style' ties with Moscow – which has sometimes been referred to as 'Ostalgia'[2] (2019: 3-4). In a study on disinformation campaigns led by the English-language versions of RT and Sputnik International targeting audiences in the Višegrad countries, it was concluded that there existed a "convergence of anti-EU narratives in official Kremlin-backed and local disinformation media" (Szicherle 2019: 27-28).

---

[2] 'Ostalgia' is a German word combining 'Ost' (in German "east") and 'nostalgia'. The term, which has previously been used in the former area of East-Germany is nowadays used in relation to the Višegrad countries, referring to a positive imagery of the pre-1989 communist past.

This was particularly the case in Hungary. There, it was found that government-controlled media and a few Kremlin-backed fringe outlets disseminated both anti-EU sentiments and pro-Russian views (2019: 15-16). It was however also noted that in Hungary the EU itself was not the target, but rather its policies – especially in the area of migration. It was observed that the political discourse was largely set by the focus on migration-related issues by the ruling party Fidesz (Memo98 2019). More or less the same happened in Slovakia. There, it was not the EU as such but rather pro-EU politicians who were the target of Russian-backed disinformation. During the presidential elections there, which coincided with the campaigns leading up to the EP elections, pro-Russian media outlets tended to scoff presidential candidates who supported Slovakia's EU membership (2019: 19). Also in Poland, where EU-related discourse on occasion took an identitarian turn (centring on such issues as the protection of "national sovereignty and traditional values"), the overall tone was not toxic in relation to the EU. Disinformation rather centred on the preservation of a sovereign Poland in a united Europe (2019: 60).

Conclusion

Some limitations in this explorative study will have to be taken into account. As this paper primarily draws on reports that focus on disinformation dissemination, far from anything conclusive can be said on the magnitude and seriousness of overall Russian interference operation. In addition to detected disinformation cases, a few incidents of illicit party financing with Russian money have been reviewed. That is, cases that were considered to have consequences for the EU. They after all involved the financing of Eurosceptic politicians or political parties. Both the identified flows and narratives of disinformation and reported cases of illicit party financing may very well have been part of what could have been a much bigger interference operation of which the scope and aim cannot be ascertained with this study. Let alone the possibility of investigating whether – or not – such a possible overall interference campaign would also have had as its primary target the undermining of EU institutions and EU policies. As has been pointed out earlier, foreign interference involve operations that are covert by nature and the effects of which can only be ascertained in the long term.

As for disinformation during the 2019 EP elections, there is sufficient evidence to argue that Russia-backed disinformation indeed targeted the EU and it policies. However, such disinformation remained scarce in terms of size or volume. The number of disinformation cases that could be related to a Russian source and specifically targeting the EU remained limited. Moreover, flows of disinformation primarily circulated within national borders. And these disinformation flows concentrated primarily on exchanges between Russian sources and local Eurosceptic local outlets that were sympathetic to the Kremlin leadership. In terms of user interaction (comments, likes, and shares), however, most of these studies

however also showed that the outreach of Russia-sponsored disinformation targeting the EU was considerable.

Overviewing the sort of narratives that were disseminated, what can be argued is that Russia was more interested in influencing domestic electoral process for the sake of shaping a pro-Russian discourse in the EU member states, than in discrediting the EU, or undermining it. Rather, the Kremlin leadership sought to form a pro-Russian bloc within EU countries that would be favourable to Russian interests and inclined to spread pro-Russian narratives. An objective that was perfectly explicable in a context where Russia unlawfully annexed Crimea, 'liberated' the Donbas region and was held responsible for the crash of Flight MH17. True, whenever 'homegrown' Eurosceptic disinformation coincided with Russian objectives (i.e. disseminating pro-Russia narratives), Russian leadership would certainly not have desisted from making good use of such local anti-EU sentiments.

For all the openings and susceptibilities decision making or electoral will formation processes may provide to foreign actors, it seems that targeted Russian influence was sporadic during the 2019 EP elections. There was no carefully orchestrated campaign that built on a carefully developed cross-border network of organizations and disinformation outlets. Rather, interference and disinformation from Russia depended on the efforts of isolated local, Eurosceptic or hyper-partisan media outlets in respective member states of the EU. It would not be far from the truth to state that these local disinformation outlets acted as Moscow's 'useful idiots'.

The context now – during the run-up to the EP elections of June 2024 – is significantly different. In view of the open confrontation with Russia because of the war, EU's massive financial support for Ukraine, the weapon deliveries to Ukraine and the sanctions imposed on Russia, Russian interference campaigns targeting the EU, its institutions or its policies may now follow a more aggressive course. Exploring the current trends of disinformation in the run-up to the 2024 EP elections would not only yield a different picture. It may also tell more on the long-term trends effects of Russian interference targeting the EU in general, when compared with the findings on targeted disinformation during the 2019 EP elections.

Reference list

- Avaaz (2019) *Report: Far Right Networks Of Deception* (Accessed: 27 October 2023).

- Bader, M. (2018) 'Disinformation in Elections' in: *Security and Human Rights*, n. 29, pp.24-35.

- Bateman, J., E. Hickok, L. Courchesne, I. Thange, J.N. Shapiro (2021) *Measuring the Effects of Influence Operations: Key Findings and Gaps From Empirical Research*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

- Bendiek, A. and M. Schulze (2019) *Disinformation and Elections to the European Parliament*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin.

- Bentzen, N. (2018) *Foreign influence operations in the EU*. European Parliamentary Research Service (Accessed: 25 September 2023).

- Berghel, H. (2018). 'Malice Domestic: The Cambridge Analytica Dystopia'. In: *Computer*, 51(5), 84-89.

- Bokša, M. (2019) *Russian Information Warfare in Central and Eastern Europe: Strategies, impact, countermeasures*, German Marshall Fund (Accessed: 27 November 2023).

- Bressanelli, E., A. Di Palma, G. Inglese, S. Marini, E. Repetto (2020) *Institutions and foreign interferences*. European Parliamentary Research Service (Accessed: 17 April 2024).

- Cerulus, L. (2019) 'Europe's Most Hackable Election'. *Politico*, 16 January 2019 (Accessed: 15 April 2024).

- Chiappa, L. (2019) ' Le Pen's National Rally pays off Russian loan ahead of EU elections'. *Politico*, 19 September 2023 (Accessed: 15 January 2024).

- Cinelli M, S. Cresci S, A. Galeazzi A, W. Quattrociocchi, M. Tesconi (2020) 'The limited reach of fake news on Twitter during 2019 European elections'. *PLoS ONE* 15(6): e0234689.

- Desouza, K.C., Ahmad A., Naseer H., Sharma, M. (2020) 'Weaponizing information systems for political disruption: The Actor, Lever, Effects, and Response Taxonomy (ALERT)' in: *Computers & Security*, 88.

- De Vries, E. & K. Van Kersbergen (2007) 'Interests, Identity and Political Allegiance in the European Union. in: *Acta Politica* 42, pp. 307–328

- Reiter F. (2019) '[Markus Frohnmaier: Wie Putin einen „unter absoluter Kontrolle stehenden" AfD-Abgeordneten installierte](#)'. *Focus.* 2 August 2019 (Accessed: 10 April 2024).

- Giovannini, N., M. Zangoni (2022) [Undue Influence: An Investigative Report on Foreign Interference by the United Arab Emirates in the Democratic Processes of the European Union](#). *Droit au Droit* (Accessed: 2 September 2023).

- House of Commons Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport (2018) *['Disinformation and "Fake News": Interim Report'](#)*. UK Parliament (Accessed: 11 December 2023).

- Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2019) *2019 EU Elections. Information Operations Analysis: Interim Briefing Paper*, London.

- Jasper, S. (2020) *Russian cyber operations: coding the boundaries of conflict*, Georgetown University Press, Washington DC.

- Karlsen G.H. (2019) 'Divide and rule: ten lessons about Russian political influence activities in Europe', *Palgrave Communications*, Palgrave Macmillan, vol. 5(1), pages 1-14.

- Magdin, R. (2020) 'Disinformation campaigns in the European Union: Lessons learned from the 2019 European Elections and 2020 Covid-19 infodemic in Romania'. *Romanian journal of European affairs*, 20(2), 49-61.`

- Majone, G. (1998) 'Understanding Regulatory Growth in the European Community', in Hine, D. and Kassim, H. (eds) *Beyond the Market, The EU and National Social Policy* (London: Routledge) 14-35.

- Marchal N., Kollanyi B., Neudert L.-M., Howard P. N. (2019) *Junk news during the EU parliamentary elections: Lessons from a seven-language study of Twitter and Facebook*. Oxford Internet Institute, Data Memo 2019.3. Oxford.

- Marconi, F. (2023) [Disinformation ahead of the EU Parliamentary Elections: A snapshot from Bulgaria, Germany, and Italy](#). European Policy Centre. Discussion Paper (Accessed: 8 April 2024)

- Memo 98 (2019), *Monitoring of posts by political parties on Facebook - European Parliament*

- *2019*, 9 June 2019, Bratislava (Accessed: 27 October 2023).

- Moravcsik, A. (1998) *The Choice for Europe. Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- Mueller, R.S. (2019) *Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election*, Volume I and Volume II, Washington, D.C. (Accessed: 11 December 2023).

- Nardelli, A. (2019) 'The Explosive Secret Recording That Shows How Russia Tried To Funnel Millions To The "European Trump"'. *Buzzfeed*, 10 July 2019 (Accessed: 15 January 2024).

- Hix, S. (1999) *Political System of the European Union*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Pierri F., Artoni A., Ceri S. (2020) 'Investigating Italian disinformation spreading on Twitter in the context of 2019 European elections'. *PLoS ONE* 15(1): e0227821.

- Rettman, A. (2019) 'How Russia offered to fund Italy's Salvini'. *EUobserver*, 25 February 2019 (Accessed: 15 January 2024).

- Russian Presidency (2016) *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, Moscow (Accessed: 18 December 2023).

- Soula E. (2022) The Many Faces of Foreign Interference in European Elections. German Marshall Fund (Accessed: 4 October 2023)

- Svarin, D. (2016) 'The construction of 'geopolitical spaces' in Russian foreign policy discourse before and after the Ukraine crisis', *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 7, 129–140

- Szicherle, p., Lelonek, A., Mesežnikov, G., Syrovátka, J., Štěpánek N. (2019) 'Investigating Russia's role and the Kremlin's interference in the 2019 EP elections', *Political Capital and Friedrich Naumann Stiftung*, Budapest.

- Van Kersbergen, K. (2000) 'Political allegiance and European integration', *European Journal of Political Research*, 37, 1–17

- Ward, A. (2019) 'How a scandal involving a far-right politician brought down Austria's government', *Vox*, 21 May 2019 (Accessed: 15 January 2024).
- Woll, C. (2006) 'Lobbying in the European Union: From Sui Generis to a Comparative Perspective', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13(3), 456–469.