

"Hybrid" Strategy of the Russian Federation toward European Countries: Forms, Content and Possible Countermeasures

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Problem Analysis

Following the temporary occupation of Crimea in 2014 and particularly after the launch of full-scale war against Ukraine in 2022, the Russian Federation has significantly intensified its efforts to destabilize European countries that it has declared "hostile". These efforts extend far beyond accepted global means of promoting interests and influence through "soft power" and increasingly resemble instruments of "hybrid" warfare, through which the Kremlin seeks to weaken the internal resilience of European societies, undermine the fundamental values of the Western liberal order and market economy, confidence in independent press and free elections, achieve division within the unity of the European Union and NATO, primarily regarding support for Ukraine.

The arsenal of Russian Federation means aimed at achieving these goals includes attempts to influence political processes in European countries, use of economic (including energy) pressure and trade war instruments, threats of military force including nuclear weapons, intensification of Russian intelligence services activities and related increases in espionage cases, cyberattacks, number of sabotage acts against military and critical infrastructure of European countries, etc.

The greatest risks from such targeted actions by the Russian Federation arise for post-socialist countries of Central, Southeastern and Eastern Europe located on NATO's "eastern flank", primarily the Baltic states, Poland, as well as Finland, which border the Russian Federation and its ally Belarus. In this context, it is worth noting the gradual increase in Russian military presence near the borders of these countries observed over the past two years, the growing number of violations by Russian air and naval assets of these countries' airspace and waters, as well as sabotage against military and critical infrastructure (including damage to communication cables in the Baltic Sea), etc.

Moreover, Moscow applies against countries of this region (depending on the specifics of the domestic political situation in each) a wide spectrum of non-military pressure means in the spirit of traditional "hybrid" warfare practices, such as artificially inspired migration pressure (particularly on the borders of Poland and Lithuania) or energy supply restrictions (as in Moldova in January this year), information-psychological and disinformation operations, cyberattacks, use of proxy forces, ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking minorities, pan-Slavic and Orthodox movements, inspiring themes of "Russian world", necessity of protecting Russian-speaking citizens, creation and support of puppet quasi-state entities (such as the "Transnistrian Moldovan Republic" in Moldova or "Republika Srpska" in Bosnia and Herzegovina), providing comprehensive support to nationalist, populist and pro-Russian forces, etc. Potentially dangerous in this context are the Balkans, where Russia feeds separatist aspirations of Bosnian Serbs and revanchist sentiments in Serbia regarding Kosovo, maintaining the ability at any moment to transition from soft influence scenarios to harsh destabilization of the situation in this region following the example of Ukraine in 2014.

Favorable ground for Russian "hybrid" activity is also created by widespread Euroscepticism in the societies of most countries in the region, religious conservatism, frustration and nostalgic sentiments for the socialist past, weakness and vulnerability of democratic institutions, high levels of corruption. An additional challenge is also the significant level of Russian capital presence in the economies of these countries, which has persisted since Soviet times and provides the Russian Federation with opportunities to form shadow connections in business environments beyond government control, and in some cases – even exercise control over certain strategic economic sectors (as for example in Moldova, Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria). The phenomenon of Hungary and Slovakia should be noted separately, where, despite both states' membership in the EU and NATO, pro-Russian policy has become part of government doctrine, and their governments act as "Putin's advocates", blocking anti-Russian sanctions at the European level.

In the pan-European dimension, one can speak of Russian Federation attempts to form a system of diverse influences on the domestic and foreign policy of European countries, which includes creating networks of loyal political and business connections, pro-Russian public organizations promoting Kremlin ideas, building political alliances with ideologically friendly political groups, disinformation operations (including spreading false information, manipulating public opinion using pacifism, anti-Americanism, Russophile sentiments, religious conservatism, Euroscepticism, migration factors, etc. inherent in the societies of various states), cyberattacks. Through such instruments Moscow seeks to transform the political system of European countries, promoting a model of "illiberal democracy" – an essentially authoritarian form of governance with formal preservation of democratic institutions. Under conditions of the greatest military challenges in 80 years, post-COVID and migration crises in the EU, intensification of domestic political contradictions within individual countries, Putin's model of power based on nationalist slogans is viewed by a new generation of European political forces as a template for effective response to existing internal and global challenges. An example of such Russian Federation strategy success can be Hungary, whose political system can already be characterized as "illiberal democracy". Hungarian leader V. Orbán conducts policy aimed at undermining European integration and the EU's common foreign policy (including regarding support for Ukraine), considers V. Putin his comrade, and Russian influence in Hungary is currently the largest among European countries. The situation in Serbia is close to that of Hungary, where the semi-authoritarian government of President A. Vučić persistently promotes the position that Russia is Serbia's "historical ally", and its EU integration should not contradict support for "traditional historical ties with Russia". Today Serbia is the Kremlin's closest ally in the Balkans; this country has observer status in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), actively develops military cooperation with the Russian Federation, including conducting joint military exercises, implementing cooperation in military production, etc.

To multiply the Hungarian and Serbian examples to other European countries, the Russian Federation invests significant resources in building political networks that would be capable of influencing European policy development on the Russian track in medium and long-term perspectives. In this work, an important role is played by Russian

Federation diplomatic missions, foreign representations of "Rossotrudnichestvo", the Gorchakov Foundation and branches of other non-governmental organizations. To finance official and unofficial events, bribe politicians, the Kremlin uses offshore accounts where money from illegal operations of Russian officials and businessmen settles. According to estimates published by European Parliament deputies in December 2016, more than \$200 million of Russian money "laundered" through just the exposed "global laundromat" scheme went toward influencing European politics, media and civil society, while the total volume of money spent on similar purposes annually may reach \$1 billion.

These political connection networks function, as a rule, covertly, with emphasis placed on supposedly "independent" political actors who, through their calls to lift sanctions and move closer to Moscow, criticism of the EU and NATO, legitimize the Russian view of world events. Indicative in this context is Russian Federation interaction with numerous European political movements of various orientations (from far right to ultra-left and populist) promoting ideas of nationalism, Euroscepticism, anti-Westernism, "traditional values", xenophobia, neutrality. Besides the mentioned strategy of transforming Europe's political landscape, these parties are used to justify Russian domestic and foreign policy on the international arena. To this end, the Russian Federation often directly finances loyal political forces, but most often provides its information channels for promoting ideas important from the standpoint of Kremlin interests.

There is evidence proven by French prosecutors of the French far-right party "National Rally" receiving Russian financial assistance of 9 million euros in 2014 through the First Czech-Russian Bank connected to Russian oligarch G. Timchenko, who is close to V. Putin.

Overall, among European parties of various ideological orientations that support the Russian Federation in one way or another, one can name the far-right "Freedom Party of Austria", far-right "National Rally" and "Reconquête", ultra-left movement "La France Insoumise" of J.-L. Mélenchon (France), far-right "Alternative for Germany", post-communist "The Left" and ultra-left "Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance" (Germany), far-right "Northern League" and populist "Five Star Movement" (Italy), post-communist Bulgarian Socialist Party, far-right "Revival" and "Attack" (Bulgaria), far-right "UK Independence Party" (UKIP) and British National Party, ultra-conservative "Fidesz" and far-right "Jobbik" (Hungary), ultra-left "SYRIZA" and far-right "Golden Dawn" (Greece), far-right "Party for Freedom" (Netherlands), far-right "Slovak National Party" and left-nationalist populist Smer-SD (Slovakia), far-right "Confederation" (Poland), far-right "Alliance for the Union of Romanians", SOS and "Party of Young People" (Romania), left-populist "Podemos" (Spain), conservative "Serbian Progressive Party" and nationalist "Serbian Radical Party", numerous communist parties and movements that cooperated with Moscow since Soviet times, etc. Many of them have significant representation in national parliaments and the European Parliament, and some are part of ruling coalitions or, like "Fidesz" in Hungary, form executive power, thus can directly influence their states' policies. Marginal political forces not represented in their countries' parliaments are used by the Kremlin primarily to promote Eurosceptic narratives, criticize the EU and transatlantic ties, support lifting sanctions from the Russian Federation, stopping Western aid to

Ukraine, etc. Thus, particularly, the British far-right party "UKIP" received Kremlin support for the "Brexit" campaign, which ultimately led to Great Britain's exit from the EU.

To cover the mentioned Kremlin contacts, structures of Russian ruling parties "United Russia" and LDPR are actively used, as well as private initiatives like oligarch K. Malofeev's foundation, known for its connections with Russian military intelligence.

Along with party structures, influence agents from among current and former European politicians who have close personal ties with the Putin regime, often accompanied by political corruption, are actively used to promote Russian interests in Europe. Classic examples of such influence agents can be current government leaders of Hungary V. Orbán and Slovakia R. Fico, presidents of Serbia A. Vučić and Bulgaria R. Radev, former German Chancellor G. Schröder, French President N. Sarkozy, Italian Prime Ministers S. Berlusconi, French Prime Minister F. Fillon, Bulgarian Prime Minister S. Stanishev, thanks to whom Moscow was able to significantly increase its presence in these countries' economies, build networks of hidden connections within their political and business classes, creating levers of dependence, and gain influence on political decision-making at both national and pan-European levels (as examples, one can cite France and Germany's veto of the NATO Bucharest summit decision on granting Ukraine and Georgia Membership Action Plans in 2008, or V. Orbán's attempts to block aid provision to Ukraine from NATO/EU in 2022-2024 or his current veto on opening negotiations regarding Ukraine's EU membership).

An important role in this process is also played by pro-Russian networks of experts, journalists and lobbying institutions that openly support policies of reconciliation with Moscow. Most extensively such networks functioned in "old" Europe countries, primarily in Germany and France, whose governments until 2022 were quite loyal to cooperation with the Putin regime. In Germany, the most well-known Russian lobbyist until recently was the German-Russian Forum created in 1993, whose board included a wide spectrum of German politicians and businessmen, including its chairman, former Prime Minister of Brandenburg and influential SPD functionary M. Platzeck. The Forum organized the "Petersburg Dialogue" and actively advocated for lifting the sanctions regime against Moscow.

After the start of the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine, the German-Russian Forum was officially dissolved in November 2022.

Among other influential Kremlin lobbyists in Germany until 2022, it is worth mentioning the Eastern Committee of German Business, in which representatives of German business working in the Russian Federation traditionally hold significant weight. In 2016, the public forum "Dialogue of Civilizations" was established in Berlin, designed to propagate the Russian view of world events and lobby Kremlin interests. Co-organizers of the project were former chairman of the board of "Russian Railways" (RZhD) V. Yakunin, former Secretary General of the Council of Europe W. Schwimmer, and former head of the Russian representation of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, political science professor at Göttingen University P.-W. Schulze.

In France, in the powerful segment of pro-Russian public organizations and think tanks, one can note the Institute of Democracy and Cooperation headed by N. Narochnitskaya – a historian and former State Duma deputy who in 2009-2012 headed the "commission to counter attempts to falsify history to the detriment of Russian interests". The Kremlin also actively uses long-existing joint cultural institutions, as well as the influence of the Russian diaspora in France that emigrated here after the 1917-1920 civil war in Russia and during the Soviet period. Similar structures exist in other European countries.

It should be noted that since the beginning of the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine, the public activities of these networks have somewhat decreased due to changes in Europe's political mainstream, but they continue to function in the shadow dimension, trying to continue promoting ideas beneficial to Moscow.

Moscow also actively influences Russian-speaking populations of European countries and attempts to use the multi-million Russian diaspora for its purposes, among whom a large number are supporters of Putin's policy. Massive propaganda is conducted toward Russian-speaking communities through TV and social networks, various Russian organizations actively operate (for example, "Night Wolves"), funds are directed toward developing political projects such as "Unity – Einheit" (party of Russian Germans) in Germany. An important role in this context is played by the "Russian Orthodox Church", which through its extensive network of parishes abroad promotes chauvinistic ideology of the "Russian world" in Russian-speaking Christian environments, based on the foundations of Kremlin imperial policy. In recent years, active recruitment by Russian intelligence services of European state citizens from among ethnic Russians and Russian speakers for espionage, sabotage acts and other subversive activities against their countries of residence has been observed.

Another important instrument for strengthening Russian Federation influence in European countries is forming a model of mutual economic ties based, on one hand, on providing preferences to loyal European companies and businesses for work on Russian Federation territory (thus transforming them into Russian lobbyists in their countries), and on the other hand – on promoting interests of Russian state monopolies, large companies and businessmen close to the Putin regime in European markets. This primarily concerns significant investment projects in energy, banking, telecommunications and transport sectors, where the interests of the ruling Russian elite are concentrated. Besides gaining profit, an important factor in signing new contracts is the prospect of creating economic dependence on the Russian Federation and preventing market diversification where Russian products predominate. To protect its capital investments, Moscow actively works with European business representatives, political parties and international organizations, while the financial capabilities of "Gazprom", "RZHD", "Rosneft", "Lukoil", and individual representatives of the Russian oligarchy allow manipulation of public opinion and political systems of European countries.

A distinctive feature of Russian Federation economic activity in Europe is use of corruption schemes for concluding non-transparent deals, granting contracts to related persons, obtaining various permits and protecting projects from antitrust service

inspections. The practice of using "shell companies" and offshore accounts is widespread, which does not allow reliable assessment of the real scale of Russian Federation economic activity in European countries. Bulgaria provides an illustrative example, where among foreign investment origin countries the first two positions are occupied by Luxembourg and the Netherlands, but actually the largest share is [comprised](#) of "Lukoil" investments operating through these countries' offshore systems. A means of Russian Federation economic influence is also financing local business associations and individual influence groups capable of protecting Moscow's interests. Most often these are large businessmen, representatives of chambers of commerce and industry, or former high officials who moved to work in the private sector. The amounts of remuneration paid by the Kremlin to such persons exceed salaries in European companies, and their services are used to lobby not only economic but also political interests. Thus, G. Schröder after resigning from the German Chancellor position in 2005 became chairman of the "Nord Stream" Shareholders Committee, and in 2017 was simultaneously elected chairman of the board of directors of Russian oil company "Rosneft" with a total annual income, according to various [estimates](#), of \$1-1.8 million. (Against the backdrop of the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, he refused to leave these positions despite calls to do so from across the German political spectrum, including Chancellor O. Scholz). Another former high official, ex-French Prime Minister F. Fillon has been on the board of directors of Russian oil company "Zarubezhneft" since 2021. Until 2022, large European companies that conducted business in Russia acted as Russian lobbyists – such as German E.ON, BASF (both are Gazprom shareholders and participated in the "Nord Stream" project implementation), Commerzbank, French Total, Areva, Gaz de France, Danone, Leroy-Merlin, Auchan, Yves Rocher, Renault, Société Générale (some of which still work in the Russian Federation despite French government calls to cease such activities), Austrian Raiffeisen Bank (still works in the Russian Federation), OMV, Frequentis A.G., Astron Industriebeteiligungs GmbH, Diamond Aircraft Industries GmbH, Italian Eni SpA, Ariston, etc. Overall, according to expert [estimates](#) (as of 2021), the Russian Federation spent at least \$3.5 million annually on officially registered lobbyists in EU structures alone.

At the same time, in recent years alongside "soft power" instruments, the Russian Federation increasingly applies levers of economic (particularly energy) pressure such as stopping Russian gas supplies to "hostile" European countries in 2022 to provoke collapse of their economic systems (it should be noted that over the past 20 years Moscow has repeatedly used this "weapon" against Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries). Such Kremlin steps fully fit into its "hybrid" strategy of influencing European countries to force them to change their policies in Russian interests.

But the most effective in the context of promoting Russian influence strategy remain information instruments. For information influence on European countries, the Russian Federation uses a state media network that broadcasts in both Russian and an increasing number of European languages. Russian Federation television channels and news agencies in foreign broadcasting widely use distorted facts and fakes presented from the perspective of pluralism of opinions inherent in European media journalistic standards. Given the low popularity of Russian channels such as "RT" or "Sputnik" among European viewers, as well as sanctions imposed on them after the start of the

Russian Federation's war in Ukraine, their main messages are multiplied through social networks, Telegram channels and an extensive network of websites specially maintained for this purpose. Russian narratives in Europe have historically focused on several key areas: undermining trust in EU institutions, exacerbating political disagreements, spreading disinformation related to security and defense policy, and influencing public opinion on issues such as energy dependence and sanctions. Additionally, ideas of historical revisionism and various conspiracy theories are often promoted through social networks. Through such targeted disinformation campaigns, the Kremlin attempts to shape public discourse on certain issues important to it while simultaneously undermining trust in traditional news sources and promoting its own narrative about international events.

Since the beginning of the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russian information influence campaigns in Europe have taken on the character of information warfare using information operations that currently remain a serious problem in terms of their negative impact on the security situation in the region. Among the most widespread [narratives](#) promoted within Russian information operations, one can note:

- ▶ blackmail and intimidation of European countries with "use of nuclear weapons", "inevitability of World War III";
- ▶ accusations against NATO countries of supporting Ukraine, which allegedly "prolongs the war and leads to its escalation", threats of using military force against them for their "denazification" (Poland and the Baltic countries are named as the most likely targets);
- ▶ constructing an image of the EU as an organization that "cannot be trusted", ready to "sacrifice Eastern Europe if the war spreads there";
- ▶ speculations on topics related to the right of nations to self-determination, controversial historical issues, etc., forming a negative image of Ukraine as a "dangerous enemy of Europe" that allegedly "will attack the EU after winning the war with the Russian Federation";
- ▶ various discrediting campaigns against Ukrainian refugees aimed at forming negative attitudes toward them and Ukraine as a whole in European countries' societies and reducing their support levels, etc.

The effectiveness of these narratives and their reception in European countries varies depending on local political climate, media literacy levels among the population, and effectiveness of these countries' governments' efforts to counter disinformation.

Additionally, Russia actively participates in various forms of operations to influence electoral processes in almost all European countries. Russian interference in foreign elections is not a new phenomenon. The Kremlin has a history of using disinformation, propaganda, cyberattacks and other tactics to interfere in democratic processes worldwide. The Brexit referendum in Great Britain (2016), presidential elections in the

USA (2016, 2024), presidential and parliamentary elections in France (2017, 2022), presidential elections in Moldova and Romania (2024) are striking examples of Russian interference in electoral processes in Western democracies. In this context, it is worth mentioning the 2024 electoral campaigns in Moldova and Romania, during which Russian Federation interference was targeted, large-scale and particularly aggressive. Thus, to distort the results of presidential elections in Moldova and disrupt the referendum on this country's EU membership (October-November 2024), technologies of voter bribery through the Telegram network of pro-Russian fugitive oligarch I. Shor were widely used, which numbered over 100,000 people and was used to provoke mass protests, sabotage the electoral process, spread Kremlin propaganda, etc. Money for bribes went to cards of one of the Russian banks and could only be withdrawn on the territory of unrecognized Transnistria. Additionally, on voting day there were mass flights of Moldovan citizens from Russian territory to certain polling stations abroad, as well as numerous cyberattacks on computer systems at polling stations in several European states aimed at reducing votes from pro-European oriented electorate. Overall, according to official [estimates](#) by government structures of the Republic of Moldova, the Kremlin spent at least 100 million euros on interfering in the country's democratic processes. To influence the electoral process during presidential elections in Romania (December 2024), a large-scale aggressive viral campaign of fake news was launched through popular social networks Telegram, X, TikTok in favor of little-known far-right pro-Russian candidate C. Georgescu, aimed at increasing his electoral ratings. Russian propaganda spread narratives about "usurpation of power by European elites", "loss of Romanian sovereignty", fakes about Moldova and Ukraine interfering in Romanian elections, promoted the thesis of far-right victory in Romania as part of a broader "struggle of European countries to return to democratic principles". As a result, significant distortion of first-round voting results thanks to these technologies led to their cancellation by Romania's constitutional court and announcement of repeat elections, which became an unprecedented case in this country's modern history.

Through disinformation and propaganda campaigns, Russia seeks to intensify social and political tensions in countries' societies before elections, discredit politicians undesirable to it and thus increase prospects for political candidates who sympathize with Russian interests. This may include spreading false information about competitors or parties, stealing and publishing confidential documents from their headquarters to sway public opinion in favor of pro-Russian figures. Another key goal of Russian influence operations is to undermine trust in democratic institutions and sow doubts about the legitimacy of electoral processes. By questioning the honesty and transparency of elections, the Russian Federation attempts to create a sense of chaos and uncertainty among voters, deepen societal divisions, create grounds for long-term destabilization of domestic political situations in various countries. Additionally, it should be emphasized that such campaigns are components of a more comprehensive systemic Russian Federation policy aimed at bringing to power political forces that shake European unity and undermine support for Ukraine in the long term.

A separate direction that is gaining increasing importance in current information society conditions are cyberattacks on European institutions backed by the Russian government. Under "hybrid" warfare conditions, the scale and intensity of Russian

cyberattacks against European countries have significantly increased and acquired overtly hostile orientation. Criminal activity of the Russian Federation in European cyberspace over the past three years has created a wide spectrum of risks and threats to European countries' security, including conducting cyberattacks on critical infrastructure objects (banks, power plants, media, government and large corporation servers, etc.); cyber espionage; interference with civilian and military communication systems operations; cyber vandalism and DDoS attacks aimed at disrupting computer systems functioning. Additionally, the Russian Federation [uses](#) cyberattacks for propaganda or cyber manipulation as one of the information warfare methods, attempting to exercise indirect influence on target countries (especially in combination with disinformation campaigns and political measures).

In its interference in European countries' affairs, Moscow widely engages intelligence services operating according to a clearly distributed list of tasks. The Russian Federation Foreign Intelligence Service performs traditional intelligence functions – obtaining information important to the Russian Federation on political and economic issues and other sensitive information. The Russian Federation Federal Security Service protects diplomatic missions and operational activities of Russian networks. Main Operational Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, besides gathering information about European countries' military forces (especially NATO member countries), is also responsible for conducting special operations, such as the failed organization of a coup in Montenegro (October 2016) or attempts to destabilize the situation in North Macedonia by provoking through disinformation campaigns inter-ethnic conflict between Macedonian and Albanian communities (March 2017). According to a [report](#) by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) of the US Department of Homeland Security, beginning in late February 2022, a unit of Main Operational Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces – the 85th Main Special Service Center has been involved in a series of cyber operations against European logistics companies, IT enterprises and transport infrastructure providing coordination, transportation and delivery of foreign aid to Ukraine.

Russian military intelligence is suspected of organizing numerous sabotage acts in European countries and recruiting civilians (including Ukrainian refugees) for this purpose based on a business model, signing contracts with them (often paid in cryptocurrency) to carry out vandalism, arson, mass riots, sabotage, murders, etc. aimed at destabilization, creating chaos and atmosphere of fear, changing Europe's political landscape. According to a new [study](#) by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the number of such crimes in Europe over the past three years has increased more than 10-fold, allowing them to be discussed as a new dimension of "hybrid" warfare. Specifically, Russian intelligence services recruit executors of such crimes, "disposable" agents, through specialized Telegram groups, without direct personal contacts (which further complicates their identification). Their target audience includes people ready to cooperate for ideological or financial motives, mainly migrants or low-income individuals accustomed to occasional "gray" earnings with low pay levels, Ukrainian refugees, minors who in most cases do not even realize they are working for Russian intelligence. According to [information](#) from British newspaper The Guardian, in April 2024 British police arrested five men for a series of arson attacks on Ukraine-

related logistics facilities. Other arson attacks that local authorities linked to probable intentional actions by the Russian Federation occurred over the past year in Great Britain, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, France and Germany (including arson of a shopping center in Warsaw, paint factory in Wrocław, Ikea center in Lithuania). In April 2024, two persons with dual Russian-German citizenship were arrested in Germany for planning sabotage acts against military and industrial facilities, including a US military base in Grafenwöhr used for training Ukrainian military personnel. Overall, according to [data](#) provided by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 2024 alone Russia was involved in at least 37 attempts at sabotage, vandalism, provocations, external interference and murders in European countries (including numerous acts of vandalism against cars of pro-Ukrainian politicians and journalists in Germany, Estonia and other European countries, an increasing number of attacks using cold and firearms, vehicle attacks during mass events, sabotage on railways and against underwater critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea, assassination attempts on European politicians and industry leaders, such as Rheinmetall German company CEO A. Papperger, etc.). By attacking Ukraine-related objects and using Ukrainian refugees for such purposes, the Russian Federation seeks, among other things, to disrupt international support and aid to our state, discredit it and undermine trust in it from Western partners.

Conclusions

Thus, over the past ten years the Russian Federation has developed and refined a wide arsenal of means to influence the domestic situation in European countries. Besides traditional diplomatic and military means, Moscow widely uses newest instruments – support for populist political projects, cyber weapons, economic pressure and information attacks through media resources and social networks, which since the beginning of the Russian Federation's full-scale aggression against Ukraine have acquired the character of systemic "hybrid warfare" using various special operations against European states that Moscow has declared "hostile". Such operations, unlike pre-war years, are no longer hidden and in the spirit of "soft power", but bear demonstrative, aggressive and increasingly brutal character with overt intention to achieve destabilization, chaos and atmosphere of fear of large-scale continental war. The Kremlin's ultimate goal is changing Europe's political landscape, establishing friendly political regimes in the continent's most influential countries, weakening sanctions and stopping support for Ukraine, promoting its economic interests and weakening NATO and the EU. The ability of European countries to develop effective instruments for countering Russian interference and pressure will determine not only their further stable and peaceful development, but also our state's capability to continue resisting Russian aggression. Preserving European unity, the anti-Russian sanctions regime and capabilities to strengthen pressure on the Kremlin is a critically important condition for ultimately forcing the Russian Federation to stop aggression and achieve just peace in the interests of all continental states.

Recommendations

Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

- ▶ organize thematic public events and conduct active information activities in European countries highlighting the true goals of Russian foreign policy, especially in countries where pro-Russian political forces are popular (speeches and commentaries at conferences, columns in local media, leaflet distribution, social media posts);
- ▶ promote development of cooperation between Ukrainian think tanks and leading European analytical institutions for conducting joint research on developing common instruments to overcome Russian aggression, risks and threats resulting from Russian Federation implementation of "hybrid" war strategy against Ukraine and Europe;
- ▶ expand cooperation in strategic communications with the European External Action Service, governments of EU and NATO member countries, through more active use of public diplomacy mechanisms on this track involving civil society and Ukrainian diaspora capabilities;
- ▶ promote establishment of horizontal connections between political and public movements of Ukraine and key European countries.

Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine:

- ▶ jointly with the Center for Countering Disinformation under the National Security and Defense Council develop an "information hygiene" handbook that, using Ukraine's example, reveals mechanisms for combating information aggression, explains information warfare mechanisms, develops countermeasures to false claims, for transmission to interested structures of European countries working in the field of countering Russian information influences;
- ▶ disseminate through foreign language publications Ukraine's experience in confronting Russian hybrid aggression, detecting fake news and countering disinformation campaigns;
- ▶ coordinate creation and functioning of international consortiums of investigative journalists, civil society activists, think tanks that would reveal facts of Russian Federation political and economic interference in European countries' internal affairs, activities of hidden networks controlled by the Kremlin in these countries.

Security Service of Ukraine, Ukrainian intelligence agencies:

- ▶ establish contacts and information exchange with European intelligence services to prevent "active measures" by Russian intelligence services and identify Russian intelligence agents among European politicians, businessmen and other influence agents, as well as in Russian-speaking environments (including among Ukrainian refugees), prevent their recruitment for espionage, sabotage acts, subversive activities on European territory, etc.;
- ▶ expand cooperation with corresponding structures of European countries in cybersecurity, coordinate with them on detecting and countering Russian cyber operations against European infrastructure, particularly that ensuring coordination, transportation and delivery of foreign aid to Ukraine, establish information exchange to prevent and neutralize Russian cybercrimes, particularly cyberattacks on critical infrastructure objects, cyber espionage, interference with civilian and military communication systems operations, cyber manipulation, interference in electoral processes, etc.