EU against disinformation

Understanding a modern anti-disinformation campaign

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Abstract

In March 2015, the European Union decided to respond to the ongoing disinformation campaigns by setting up the East Stratcom Task Force. This thesis applies theories of communication logic, disinformation-defence and EU’s normativity to develop an analytical framework that can theoretically and empirically enhance our understanding of EU’s campaign. A content analysis was used to analyse the material and to categorize different key concepts that derives from the aforementioned theoretical fields. The finding generated by the analysis of the disinformation reviews show that the Task Force uses both media and political logic in its communication. The results also indicate clear traits of a confronting disinformation-defence strategy. Furthermore it is possible to detect a trend among some of the responses that had similarities to another category within the field of disinformation-defence called “ignoring”. Interestingly the reviews do not regularly reference the normative values of the EU. However, this does not prove that the reviews or the Task Force that writes them do not share the normative values. Although the normative values of the EU is not discussed or referenced in the vast majority of the reviews, on several occasions they do defend the EU on the basis of its normative values. This illustrates a certain level of neutrality of the position of the Task Force with regards to the self-identity of the EU. Despite only being active for two years, the East Stratcom Taskforce seems to have found its place among the EU’s arsenal of foreign policy tools.

Keywords: Disinformation, European Union, Foreign policy, Disinformation strategies.
1. Introduction

Given the increase of external disinformation targeting the EU, its member states and Eastern Europe, the European Council decided to let the European External Action Service (EEAS) confront the disinformation-attacks. This initiative has developed into an online-driven campaign conducted by a team called “The East Stratcom Task Force”. Its mission is to combat disinformation that in different ways seeks to delude and polarize the European population (EUvsDisinfo, 2017a).

One of the East Stratcom Taskforce’s objectives is to influence “Eastern Europe” in a more pro-EU manner (EEAS, 2017). At the same time, actors promoting a pro-Kremlin narrative are spreading disinformation campaigns with the intention to increase the already existing polarization in European societies (Boffey & Rankin, 2017). Pro-Kremlin disinformation has increased for the past couple of years and it is targeting Europe with unprecedented aggression (McDonald-Gibson, 2017, Shuster, 2017). According to the Gerasimov-doctrine, amplifying distorted messages through disinformation-campaigns is a tactical tool in Russia’s modern warfare strategy. Creating chaos in civil societies through non-military elements of warfare appears to be one of the central tenets for this doctrine (K. McKew, 2017). EU’s attempt to combat disinformation has been described as a “David and Goliath” story in which an understaffed EU-team is working against an army of paid “internet-trolls” measured by the thousands (McDonald-Gibson, 2017). This thesis will look into how the East Stratcom Task Force responds to the disinformation-attacks from pro-Kremlin actors. The analytical framework will categorize the response and analyse to what extent the response from the Task Force is consistent with the normative self-image that is built and nurtured by the EU itself. The research question therefore is; How has the East Stratcom Task Force responded to disinformation and is the response consistent with the self-identity of the EU?

This thesis has both descriptive and explorative ambitions. The first part of the question “how has the East Stratcom Task Force responded to disinformation?” is descriptive and will be analysed through an analytical framework that categorizes and clarifies the content of the response. The second part will be analysed by applying a framework based on a theory of EU’s normative role in international politics. The purpose is to enhance our understanding of EU’s new anti-disinformation campaign that is run by the East Stratcom Taskforce and thereby learn more about how a modern, online-based, anti-disinformation campaign works. Despite the fact that it is only two years old, the campaign has already been appreciated by various governments, secret services, think tanks and researchers, which proves its necessity (EUvsDisinfo, 2017b).

The identity of the EU is, unlike that of most of its member states, recently constructed. For that reason it is potentially more fragile when it comes to external threats. The identity is built upon the experiences of the last century, particularly the world wars. Through its tumultuous
history a fundament has been formed upon which many of the Union’s policies are built (Wunderlich, 2012:658). Disinformation and attacks on the self-image of states is not new in itself (Mejias & Vokuev, 2017). However, social media has provided new platforms for these attacks to spread and reach larger numbers of people. EU was for some time hesitant to react against the disinformation trend but has since the launch of the East Stratcom Task Force decided to allocate more resources which can be seen as a clear justification of the importance of its role. Understanding how the EU acts to defend the European unity to disinformaton-attacks is empirically important since social media enables actors to affect public opinions in foreign states in a way that is historically unique (Calabresi, 2017). This justifies the empirical relevance of the research question. Furthermore the campaign is new in practice and in its form, which opens for countless academic reasons for studying this particular case. Could the East Stratcom Task Force function as pioneer for a new, more efficient, and modern way of handling informational warfare? What sort of anti-disinformation strategy does the Task Force use?

A study of this nature requires a case study with a well-adapted theoretical approach. In this thesis EU-studies are fused with theories on disinformation as well as communication logic in foreign policy. The topic of EU’s normative role can be challenged in a new way. EEAS has through this campaign, initiated a new platform for EU to spread its message. The goal of this thesis is however not to draw any conclusions regarding to what extent the EU, through the campaign, function as a normative power. It is, on the other hand, interesting to see to what extent the self-identity of the EU echoes through this campaign. The campaign and the Task Force have the potential to amplify the normative messages of the EU through this campaign. In times of ideological confusion the campaign would be a convenient platform to counter disinformation with claims of a strong self-identity. At the same time, it is possible that the Task Force distances itself from an approach reminiscent of a propaganda-like outlet and therefore chooses to not let the normative messages of the EU affect the responses of the Task Force. In that scenario, it would be expected that the Task Force does not let the normative messages of the EU affect the message it carries out in the campaign.

Having settled the purpose and the theoretical and empirical relevance it is time to lay out the structure of the thesis. It will begin by discussing the concept of disinformation as it is the key concept in this thesis. The background will start by describing and contextualising the East Stratcom Task Force, similar actors and also the EEAS, which is the sponsor of the campaign. This part will end by a brief description of Russian disinformation viewed in a historical context. The theory and prior research-section will discuss the literature on the topic and settle the theoretical starting point. The method-section discusses the material and validity and reliability in relation to the analytical framework. The operationalization will clarify how the theories are applied and coded. Lastly, the results will be presented, analysed and discussed before concluding the thesis.
1.1 Defining the phenomenon

The term disinformation has not been defined by the East Stratcom Task Force. It is therefore relevant to look into its potential meanings and ultimately pin down what the concept can mean. James H. Fetzer has been discussing disinformation and the necessity of separating it from misinformation for some time. Much of his writing is based on the JFK-murder and his theory has been developed in that context but is applicable to other situations. According to Fetzer (2004), it is generally the intent that distinguishes disinformation from misinformation. Hence, even if an actor is spreading false information it does not necessarily qualify as disinformation. Disinformation can therefore be referred to as “misinformation with an attitude” (Fetzer, 2004:232). The important distinction between misinformation and disinformation is, in Fetzer’s view, related to lying. In his definition lying consists of individuals who are spreading false information (although they are aware of the fact that they are false) and that the intention is to mislead (Fetzer, 2004:232).

Another distinction worth mentioning is between overt and covert disinformation. If an actor is spreading disinformation from an official website or any other official platform it can be labelled overt disinformation. However if it is written and published from an undisclosed “sender” such as a fake account or an anonymous blog it is covert disinformation. How to separate misinformation from disinformation has been the subject of some debate. According to some, having the intent as a decisive part of the definition implies that there is a certain “shadowy government organisation” behind the message (Fetzer, 2004:238). One of the definitions has been: “carefully contrived misinformation prepared by an intelligence service for the purpose of misleading, deluding, disrupting, or undermining confidence in individuals, organizations, or governments” (Carl, 1990:110).

The problem, that Fetzer highlights, is that of the “intelligence service”. Although an intelligence service may be a probable actor to be conducting this kind of warfare, it substantially narrows the applicability of the concept (ibid). As he points out, the actor must be regarded separately from the source, which offers limited possibilities to pin down the source in the definition.

Fetzer (2004) also discusses a different definition that was written more recently “the deliberate dissemination of false information by persons who may or may not receive compensation but who have a specific agenda to counter truth. To call someone “an agent of disinformation” implicates both them and their agenda” (Fetzer, 2004:238, Cf. J. White, 2001). This partly safeguards the difficult element of the “agent of disinformation”. Despite this, scholars have argued that some agents may be spreading disinformation although they are deceived by an actor themselves. They may have been raised to believe in misinformation or in other ways manipulated which makes them unaware of the fact that what they are spreading is false. Fetzer’s argument resembles Freedman’s (2015) discussion of how to understand a strategic narrative. Hellman & Wagnsson, whose analytical framework will be applied later, conclude Freedman’s argument the following way: “The difference between any narrative and a strategic narrative is that the latter result out of conscious deliberation” (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017: 154).
2. Disinformation in Europe

2.1 EU versus disinformation

EU was at first deliberate and slow-moving in its reaction to disinformation, however the European Council commended the High Representative to work out a plan regarding Russian disinformation in accordance with the other EU-institutions (Missiroli et al, 2016, European Council 2015). The objectives of the East Stratcom Task Force were declared in June 2015 and the team started working in September the same year. (Ibid) This was a response to the increased number of aggressive disinformation campaigns against the EU. The Task Force has nine experts in communication working full-time with the anti-disinformation campaign. Together they release reports on a weekly basis called “the disinformation review”. They use social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook to expose the constant flow of falsified news, conspiracy theories and other kinds of disinformation. The East Stratcom Task Force has been financially supported from the EU communication strategy budget. It was recently reported that the team would get additional fiscal support as a result of rearrangements in the budget of the EEAS (Boffey & Rankin, 2017). It cooperates closely with the EU-delegations that are acting on the mission of EEAS. Multiple partners are activated particularly in the eastern parts of Europe, they include governments as well as non-governmental organisations. In order to reach the non-English speaking people in Eastern Europe the East Stratcom Task Force has launched the site in Russian which according to reports from The European Institute of Security Studies, has been a successful strategy in terms of interactions online (Missiroli et al, 2016:24). Ever since the initial discussions of its launch, the initiative has been met with critique and sceptical opinions from those who do not believe in the campaign. Some sceptics have argued that the team is significantly underfinanced given the magnitude of its mission. Furthermore EU is not known for its communication skills. The bureaucratic language used to be a trademark for EU communication (Valentini & Nesti, 2010:73). One critic claim that they “are incapable of using language ordinary people understand; and sign off on press releases which are unreadable, films that are unwatchable, and websites which are unnavigable.” (Harding, 2015).

Despite initial scepticism, the East Stratcom Task Force has since its launch been praised by a large number of European Security experts. The European Values think-tank brought scholars of security policy together and published an article called “The Prague declaration”. The article states that “EEAS East STRATCOM Task Force has proved itself to be the pillar expert body in Europe with specialized knowledge and is widely respected within intelligence and security establishments; therefore, this unit should be transformed from a temporary assignment into a permanent EEAS structure and provided with at least one million Euros for targeted research.” (Janda et al, 2017, bold in original). Although these security experts criticize EEAS and the High Representative Mogherini for not providing the Task
Force with the financial means it needs, the necessity of the East Stratcom Task Force appears to be firmly recognized.

2.2 Other actors

The East Stratcom team is not alone in their endeavour to expose pro-Kremlin disinformation. In the wake of increasing discussions and reports, for instance by the European Endowment for Democracy that discussed the possibilities of countering the biased opinions in the Russian media, other actors are becoming more active. “The Information Warfare Initiative” operates through an online site and collects various examples of disinformation. The initiative is run by CEPA, the Centre for European Policy Analysis. Another site that is similar to EU’s initiative is Stopfake.org. It was founded by former students of the Mohlya School of Journalism in Kiev 2014 and they focus on pro-Kremlin disinformation in Ukraine (Janda et al, 2017).

NATO is one of the organisations that have combatted propaganda of different kinds long before social media became one of the main platforms. Following the launch of the Cominform (Information bureau of the Communist and Workers’ parties) in 1947, the Soviet Communist party could spread propaganda more efficiently, which forced NATO to respond. In 1950 NATIS, the information service of NATO, was created. Just like the East Stratcom Task Force, it was careful to not engage in counterpropaganda. NATIS provided an alternative to the anti-Western narrative and tried to raise awareness of NATO in its member states. Despite the divided political climate between East and West, member states were slightly reluctant to sharing information to help coordinate the project which complicated their work as they were relying on sporadic contributions from government organisations (Missiroli et al, 2016:25).

Nowadays NATO handles strategic communications through Stratcom COE, Strategic communications centre of excellence. Stratcom COE works on a much broader base than the East Stratcom Task Force and their mission includes researching how strategic communications are used and how states can protect against them more efficiently through internal educations and other similar initiatives (Missiroli et al, 2016:25). East Stratcom Task Force is, unlike NATO campaigns and projects, run by a relatively new organization. In order to understand EU’s response it is important to understand the complexity of the diplomatic service that is sponsoring the campaign.

2.3 The European External Action Service

EEAS is in many ways unique in its nature. As it strives to coordinate and establish the role of EU as an international actor, it challenges one of the core institutions in the Westphalian system of states, the sovereignty of its foreign policy (Spence, 2011). The end of the cold war together with the Maastricht treaty paved the way for the Common Foreign and Security
Policy but the institutional concretization was not completed until the launch of the EEAS after the Lisbon treaty (EEAS, 2016).

The mission to coordinate a foreign policy for 28 states with a diverse set of geo-political interests has provided a new case for scholars interested in the EU integration-theories. Despite its unconventional role, EEAS has, according to Spence, been an understudied field in political science even within the branch of European studies (Spence, 2011). However, research has been conducted for instance regarding the resistance of the member states (Pomorska & Vanhoonacker, 2015). Studies have also shown that there are some institutional issues that have stalled the service from making the progress it strives to do. The member states represented in the Council of Ministers is working as a counterbalance to the European Commission when agreeing upon the extent of EEAS’s mission. The Commission is, unsurprisingly to scholars of the EU-integration, positive towards giving the EEAS increased autonomy whereas the member states are unsatisfied by the lack of leadership of the EEAS but still not ready to delegate more executive power to EEAS (Balfour et al, 2015:3). The EEAS is in this regard, consciously held in between an intergovernmental and a supranational integration process. Federica Mogherini for this reason, took it upon herself to find a better balance between the “two seats” as the High Representative of the European Union for foreign affairs and security policy. The High Representative is strategically placed as the vice president of the European commission. It has been, at least for the initial phase of EEAS, possible to conclude that the member states are applying a “pick and choose” approach toward the EEAS in which the intergovernmentalist mentality is mixed with supranationalist trends (Pomorska & Vanhoonacker, 2015, Balfour, Carta and Raik, 2016:200).

Some scholars have described the initial phase of the EEAS as inefficient with lack of direction and purpose. Critics have argued that the service was serving without a clear mission. Catherine Ashton who was the High Representative from 2009 to 2014, stated that leading the EEAS was like “flying an aeroplane while you are still building the wings” (Dittmer & McConnell, 2015:44). Ashton was criticized during her period as High Representative for focusing too much on the three most influential countries in the EU at the time, France, Great Britain and Germany (Ibid:45). Given the somewhat turbulent start in EEAS’s early days it is important for it to prove its necessity. The objectives are vast and sometimes very similar to that of the nation states. The interaction between these has, at times, been restrained by feelings of self-sufficiency mainly from the member states foreign officials (Pomorska & Vanhoonacker, 2015:29). However EEAS will arguably, as the collective European foreign policy organ, be useful when the Union faces problems that surpass the Westphalian frame of classical diplomatic communication. As a new actor in international politics it would strategically strive to cover the “new” elements of foreign policy, which covers hybrid threats, disinformation and cyber warfare.
2.4 Combatting a dangerous trend

Before the theoretical section, the alleged messenger of the disinformation will be presented and the concept of informational warfare and propaganda will be contextualized. Understanding how the actors’ strategies have evolved is important to better comprehend the modern day case of disinformation. Much of the old logic still applies when it comes to informational warfare. However, modern developments have provided more efficient platforms that can channel disinformation faster and to larger amounts of people than ever before (Weiss, 2017).

Disinformation and informational warfare is not a new phenomenon per se. Strategic narratives, informational warfare and disinformation have for some time been part of international politics. EEAS’s campaign is aimed toward disinformation from pro-Kremlin actors. This section will therefore be devoted to contextualising the history and phases of Russia’s control over the media-platforms. Mejias & Vokuev write about Russia’s media in three phases. The first phase was the soviet controlled media in which there was practically no free speech. This phase was followed by a period of increased openness. This period rapidly ended when the communist system collapsed. Today, they see the media environment as a hybrid between the two where most media institutions are run privately but with a clear ideological influence from the ruling party. Instead of frightening the media environment as a third period has been to make sure that the enterprises that own the channels are supportive of Putin’s policies (Meijas & Vokuev, 2017:1030). The Russian strategy regarding modern day technology has since the beginning of the 1990’s followed an operation known as SORM, short for “system for operative investigative activities”. According to the Center for Strategic & International Studies the aim for these programs is to “collect, analyse and store all data that are transmitted or received on Russian networks, including calls, email, website visits and credit card transactions”. (Meijas & Vokuev, 2017:1032, Memmot, 2014). The existence of a Russian communication surveillance of this scale has been denied by the Russian leaders (Memmot, 2014). The history of the planned disinformation strategy is also subject for some debate. The previously mentioned Geramisov doctrine has according to some scholars been active for a long time whereas others claim it is a new strategy that has been catalysed by the surge of social media outlets. Ruslan Pukhov, the head of the Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies in Moscow claims that Geramisov has been misinterpreted by the west and that Geramisov is in fact discussing how the west acts, not laying out a strategy for Russia (Financial Times, 2017). At the same time, comments from the Russian Minister of Defence about using information as “another type of armed forces” support the notion of a planned disinformation strategy (Isachenkov, 2017. EU vs Disinfo, 2017c).

Internet has posed significant threats to any political system or regime that actively attempts to control the media. However Russia has, according to Mejias & Voukev, been active to ensure that they are in control of the political narrative. Moreover they explain how they can
use their influence to make people work for their cause on social media by writing and spreading pro-Kremlin propaganda. The Russian social media machine is allegedly driven by different actors ranging from “internet-trolls”, bloggers and influential enterprises. In the historically infected relationship between Ukraine and Russia, the massive spread of disinformation has amplified the contentious attitudes between Russians and Ukrainians. Stopfake.org revealed how Russian sites have spread photos on civilian casualties and blamed the Ukrainian military. It later transpired that the photos are taken from war zones in Syria (Meijas & Vokuev, 2017:1033). This is one of many reports that shows how far actors are willing to go in their to endeavour to produce disinformation. Regarding the level of certainty, Mejias & Vokuev write that “the existence of Russian armies of paid pro-government Internet trolls is roundly denied, but thoroughly documented” (Ibid). They eventually draw the conclusion that social media can be an effective means for change when the regime has not yet found out how to use it for its own purposes. On the contrary, when social media becomes manipulated and used as an informational weapon it can be equally damaging when spreading disinformation (Calabresi, 2017). The interference in the American election 2016 served as an eye opener to politicians and the public as it displayed the power of disinformation. Social media can provide actors with a direct way of communication to a population, something that did not exist during the cold war (Ibid). Social media is not only used by politically by individuals. Troll-factories and economically sanctioned enterprises aggressively campaign against European states to cause division between political groups and spread conspiracy theories (Meijas & Vokuev, 2017:1039). The member states had different experiences with pro-Kremlin disinformation, which is one explanation for the late reaction regarding the creation of the Task Force. Another problem is that some member states rely on its relation to Russia a lot more than others, which causes difficulties in any endeavour to coordinate a mutual disinformation defence (McDonald-Gibson, 2017).

3. Theory and prior research

Since the Task Force’s campaign against disinformation is only two years old, most of what has been written on the campaign has been short, descriptive texts. For example John R. Haines provide an informative background explaining the events leading up the initiation of the campaign and the East Stratcom Task Force but it does not seek to theoretically understand the campaign or the Task Force (Haines, 2015). In EU policy papers the topic of EU communication has been discussed both in regards to the communication toward Eastern Europe but also strategic communication in the Arab world focusing mostly on responding to increasing radicalisation. EEAS is carrying out a campaign called the Arab Stratcom Task Force aimed at fostering relations between European communities in the region and the Arab-speaking population. Just like the East Stratcom Task Force it works to counter narratives but the Arab Stratcom Task Force focuses more on anti-terrorist propaganda. Hence, the different Task Forces have different orientations depending on what the most pressing issue is in the
region. The policy paper offers overviews as well as insights into the administrative work and the objectives of the different missions (Missiroli, et al 2016).

Moreover, Viljar Veebel reflects on disinformation and discusses the kind of war type it constitutes. He also elaborates on what should be done and the learning lessons from the Russian information warfare in Estonia 2007. He briefly mentions that the East Stratcom Task Force is a good example of how the EU is taking a first step in combatting disinformation (Veebel, 2015:1-3). Furthermore, Tomáš Čižík has written a book called “Information Warfare- new security challenge for Europe” which encompasses this topic although it does not specify the EU itself, it instead focuses on the member states and the way they individually have been attacked by false information (Čižík, 2017:57). In addition to several articles that have referenced the Task Force in some way, the initiative has gained a fair amount of media attention, particularly during its launch and when it was given additional resources.

Despite being referenced and mentioned, the initiative is arguably important enough to be the subject of a case study. In order to conduct a case study it is important to find for suitable theories. Hellman and Wagnsson’s article “How can European states respond to Russian information warfare?” develop a theoretical framework to better understand the recent disinformation campaigns. Their framework will be applied in this thesis as it can help categorize the material and offer some context to the case.

To improve our theoretical understanding of the EU’s anti-disinformation campaign is, given the limited amounts of research, a valuable purpose.

In this section the theoretical starting points will be explained and used to build an analytical framework. The scope of the topic makes it important to go over the theories and ultimately connect them in a relevant way to the task of this essay. Therefore this section will include theories on EU’s normative power, the mediatization of foreign policy and finally a theory on disinformation.

3.1 EU - a normative actor

The atypical nature of the European Union has forced scholars to handle the EU separately from states (Spence, 2011). When discussing the evolvement of “the normative Europe” Manners argues that no theoretical suggestions were directly challenging the Westphalian system of states that for a long time had been the conventional go-to system for International Relations-scholars (Manners, 2002:235-238). He claims that François Duchêne, who was one of the earlier influences on European integration, opened for Europe to be something other than a military power. However Manners’ argue that Duchêne still regarded EU’s influence of the international society as physical in the sense that Europe is portrayed as an economic power with “empirical capabilities” (Ibid) According to Manners, Duchêne lacked a sense of creativity in the way we interpret what EU is.

The beginnings of the 1990’s ultimately changed the perception of IR-theories. The end of the
Cold War was, and still is, difficult to explain from a realist perspective without acknowledging the ideational elements of actorness. Manners argues that the EU has to be understood as a power of norms and ideas. Galtung as well as Duchêne was one of the proponents of the EU as an idée force. Galtung emphasized the concept of ideological power and actors potential to influence each other’s wills. Manners argues that although the civilian power has been highlighted as an alternative to military power there is still too much focus on to what extent the EU can be seen as a state (Manners, 2002:239). In Manners’ work the most central norms are peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights. In addition to these, there are also minor norms; social solidarity, anti-discrimination and sustainable development (Manners, 2002:242). Manners does not refute the idea of EU as a civilian or military power he instead insists on understanding the way EU creates a new conception of what is normal. That is briefly the starting point for studying the EU as a normative actor.

The idea of EU as a normative power is however not uncontested. Regarding EU’s role as a normative power. Helen Sjursen writes that “the fact that it corresponds very closely to the EU’s own description of its international role could be enough to set the alarm bells ringing” (Sjursen, 2006:235). She is sceptical towards what she considers to be the self-proclaimed role that EU has taken rather than earned. One of the reasons for her disbelief when it comes to the normative dimension is that the there is no criteria or any internationally recognized system that justifies the EU to set the norms. Furthermore, Jörgenssen and Laatikainen (2004) also doubt the normative aspect of EU’s foreign policy, especially the reluctance to see to EU’s self-interest (Sjursen, 2006:239-240). Regardless of what we think about the self-identity of the EU and to what extent it is consistent with the EU’s practices, it is clear that it the concept of EU’s self-identity is prevailing in the field of EU-studies. This thesis is looking into whether or not the response on Pro-Kremlin disinformation is consistent with the self-identity. Discussing to what extent the EU is a normative power would require a different case and a different theoretical approach. In this thesis the self-identity of the EU will be operationalized with the help of the normative values developed by Manners.

Manners and other scholars of European studies argue that EU should be viewed as a normative power. We know that EU is working internationally, through EEAS, and it is trying to spread democratic norms to other parts of Europe and the world. One of the stated objectives for the East Stratcom Task Force is “Effective communication and promotion of EU policies towards the eastern neighbourhood” (EEAS, 2017). Judging from the Task Forces that are in place to counter disinformation, it is apparent that EU is attempting to be a normative power. Therefore the starting point here is that EU is embracing the opportunity to be a normative power. It is however yet unclear if the East Stratcom Task Force is actually representing the normative self-identity defined by Manners in the texts it produces.
3.2 Political logic versus media logic

It is necessary to move beyond the scope of the EU-theories and acknowledge the communicative element. Brommesson & Ekengren write about the mediatization of foreign policy decision-making. They define mediatization, with the help of Schulz (2004), as "a process where the media develops into an independent institution with significant power that permeates other sectors of society and politics loses its autonomy" (Brommesson & Ekengren, 2017:4). They seek to better comprehend when media logic applies. Based on previous research on the field, they strive to elaborate on the general conclusion drawn so far that politics are governed or in their version guided by the media. They reason around concepts developed by Rachel Folz (2011) who highlights uncertainty, identity and resonance. After analysing these concepts and previous research on the field, Brommesson & Ekengren make a division between media logic and political logic. They are divided in process and policy (form and content) and they refer to Meyer’s definition that defines the process part of political logic as “the effort to gain official acceptance within established institutions of one’s chosen program of action” and the policy part “are based on long-term programs that are rooted in ideological beliefs or shared principles” (Meyer, 2002, Brommesson & Ekengren, 2017:28). Media logic is, on the contrary, in its process “formed in an intensive, polarized, sensationalist game” (Ibid). Regarding the policy dimension media logic follows the popular argument within a recent debate and they often pay attention to individuals and security.

In their work Brommesson and Ekengren have investigated to what extent speeches in the UN General Assembly from representatives of Sweden, the UK and Finland have been influenced by media logic. Their finding contradicts the overall trend that politicians in general are increasingly using media logic. Contrary to their hypothesis, politicians from these states have not increased their usage of media logic but they find that topics change very quickly from one year to another (ibid). Brommesson and Ekengren present a method that can help to better understand the EU anti-disinformation campaign and its way of communication. It can offer analytical tools that enable a clearer view on foreign policy communication. It will add a necessary dimension that the EU-theories do not have, particularly since the foreign policy in this case has moved to the unconventional platform of social media and internet where a different logic apply.

3.3 Disinformation and the case of Russia

Having included a theory within the EU-field and one theory of media in relation to foreign affairs, it can be valuable to also include a theory on disinformation that is specifically developed to analyse this kind of informational warfare. The purpose of adding another theory in this section is to get a clearer understanding of disinformation in relation to Russia and pro-Kremlin actors. Hellman and Wagnsson (2017) have developed a framework to understand the responses to Russian information warfare. In their article the EU-campaign is
used to provide background to prove that the governments are seriously concerned with this kind of information warfare. Their framework concludes that there are two major dimensions when it comes to responding to disinformation. First of all there is the division between engaging and disengaging which establishes the more general approach in the response. Secondly, there are outward and inward protections which indicate who the government or the actor is targeting, either its own population or that of the other state or the international community. Within engaging there are two possible courses of action, confronting and blocking. Confronting includes “actively producing and projecting counter-narratives, often in direct response to a particular narrative” (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:158). Confronting is about providing evidence to disprove the disinformation. Refuting a certain narrative can be done in different ways. The difficulty is to find the right balance since it can seem incompatible for a democracy to try to control the narrative (Ibid).

_Naturalising_ is also an outward projecting strategy but it is categorized as disengaging. The most concrete difference from confronting is that it does not strive to compare or put its own narrative in perspective with that of the “opponent”. “The aim is maintain and spread values by being a good example” (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:160). Two potential problems with naturalising are that it can either be too soft or the strategy can be seen as depicting the own narrative as superior (similarly to the risks of confronting).

_Blocking narratives_ is also an engaging-strategy but unlike confronting it is aimed to the state’s own population. Blocking was used in Latvia when the Russian channel _Rossyia RTR_ was banned from broadcasting. Generally, the disadvantage of this strategy is that it can be incompatible with the policies of a democratic state, at least according to the European Council (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:162). Another more practical problem is that it is difficult to actively block a narrative as it can broadcast its message online or in a different state (Ibid, Calabresi, 2017). Finally, _ignoring unwanted narratives_ is the least confronting alternative. This strategy relies on the transparency of the democratic institutions and that people are capable of separating what is true from false by the diversity of the news. The disadvantage is the softness in the approach and the perhaps exaggerated belief in people’s capacity to “de-code narratives” (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:163).

In the article referenced above the East Stratcom Task Force is mentioned to illustrate an engaging strategy with confronting features. The authors compare the EU-campaign with Sweden’s disengaging and ignoring strategy claiming that Sweden risks loosing its strategic foreign policy coherence when the EU is handling disinformation in the opposite way. In that sense they are indirectly calling the campaign _confronting_. The authors continue in a more careful manner by referring to the strategy as an engaging strategy, which makes sense given the format of this campaign. Lessons can be learned from other theoretical fields and scholars when it comes to dividing the analysis in form and content (or policy and content). Bromnesson and Ekengren, as mentioned earlier, make a division that can be equally useful to this case.
When Hellman and Wagnsson describe East Stratcom Task Force as confronting (or at least engaging) they are basing their analysis on the fact that EU responds and counters with an alternative narrative. Here, it could be useful to distinguish between policy and the content. The difference regards what the Taskforce does (the writing of the disinformation reviews) and what is says (the content of the reviews). The Task Force and the anti-disinformation campaign are engaging by nature given that the site directly confronts disinformation. It is outward looking since it is published in English as well as Russian. However to get a better understanding of the actual material that is produced, one can study the Task Forces’ written texts by analysing its content.

Hellman and Wagnsson have not analysed the response per se which supposedly makes it difficult to separate confronting from naturalising when looking at the content of the disinformation campaign. Hence the only conclusion to be made from the outset is that EEAS is not ignoring the informational warfare. It is therefore arguable that the policy is confronting but the process it follows can be either naturalising or confronting. It should be added that these are ideal models that often complement rather than exclude each other (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:166).

As previously mentioned the Task Force is operating in Russian as well as in English to reach out to Eastern Europe particularly. Furthermore the objectives of the campaign specify that it seeks to promote European values in Eastern Europe. Therefore we can rule out that the process is only aimed inwards. This leaves us with two alternative strategies, confronting and naturalising that will be further investigated in the analytical framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Outward projection</th>
<th>Inward projection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaging</td>
<td>Confronting</td>
<td>Blocking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengaging</td>
<td>Naturalising</td>
<td>Ignoring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:158)

4. Methodology - conducting a case study

This thesis is conducting a single case study. One can define case studies in different ways, Bromley’s definition suggests that it is a “systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest“ (Bromley, 1990:302). Case studies can be used prospectively and retrospectively although the latter has practical advantages (Zucker, 2009:2). The author therefore has certain freedoms when it comes to the material and how it should be analysed. It is, for the same reason important that the choice of method and material are openly discussed and motivated. This section is devoted to that task.
Generally, the advantage of a case study is its potential to study a case in depth. It allows a deeper and more single-focused perspective on the case of interest. However, studying a single case has implications for the chances of generalizing the findings. Since a single case is studied extensively, it is difficult to generalize the results to other cases (Shuttleworth, 2008). This thesis does not have any generalizing ambitions. With regards to the actor that will be looked into, generalizing could be difficult. The EU is a relatively new actor, the EEAS is even newer and the team that is conducting the campaign has only been in place for two years. The case is atypical and its operation is very time and context specific, which makes a case study the most appropriate approach it. Moreover, the EU and the EEAS have not previously been engaging with pro-Kremlin disinformation. The set-up of this defence is therefore unique as it is a new kind of response to a specific trend from an actor that is new to the topic of informational warfare (Missiroli et al, 2016:25).

In addition to these circumstances the field of cyber warfare is new. Hence, this topic requires in depth-studies of the actors and the campaigns that are evolving. The East Stratcom Task Force is a modern response to the surge of pro-Kremlin disinformation and will therefore contribute as an example of such an actor. The case and its peculiarity for these reasons make the method of case study, with its narrow focus, a suitable approach. A case study does not necessarily have any hypothesis to prove or disprove it can instead be a way of getting new empirical and theoretical findings that can enhance our knowledge of the case and on the applicability of certain theories (Shuttleworth, 2008). In this case the ambition is to get a deeper understanding of how the campaign responds to disinformation, the next section will discuss the material and the research design that will be used.

4.1 Material & research design

Case studies rely on the author to make a just assessment of what the analysed material should include. This is particularly important given that there are not many rules of conduct in case studies compared to other scientific studies (Shuttleworth, 2008). The East Stratcom Task Force communicates in a few different ways. It is partly based on social media where it uploads videos on Youtube and posting updates on Twitter and Facebook. Through email it is also possible to subscribe to a newsletter that is sent out regularly with the latest updates on its work. The Task Force is also active through its website where it posts what it calls the “flagship product of the EU vs Disinformation campaign” (EUvsDisinfo, 2017b). These are the so called the “disinformation reviews”. The reviews capture trends among the disinformation and adjust their analyses to the most recent cases. The reports have two main parts. The first part discusses how the content is false by providing concrete evidence. This is called a disclaimer. The second part tries to locate the origin of the disinformation or at least clarify if it is “pro-Kremlin” disinformation. In that regard it is both a way of describing the latest news and providing an analysis. It is the analysis and, to some extent, the portrayal of the news that is interesting from an analytical point of view. From 2015 the Task Force has, at
this moment, written 36 reviews and they constitute the first-hand material that will be analysed in this thesis.

In order to analyse the material a content analysis will be used. This type of research technique is common in qualitative studies as it is free in its form and applicable to a large variety of empirical cases. Hsieh & Shannon (2005) have discussed different ways of conducting a content analysis. They see three main approaches that can be used, the conventional, the directed and the summative content analysis. The conventional model has an open approach toward the material. It does not have preconceived categories or theories that are in place to guide the author’s analysis. This enables the author to create categories that are well suited for the case. As a research design it is especially convenient to apply this design in a new field of research. The disadvantage is that difficulties in categorizations can lead to decreased credibility of the study (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1279-1280). In the case of defence against disinformation there are theories available to enable a more structured and planned analysis. Therefore this thesis will follow the logic of directed content analysis.

A directed content analysis is more applicable when there is a phenomenon that can be investigated with already existing theories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1281). The theories in the literature of disinformation defence and communication logic provide a fundament and structure for the building of an analytical framework in this case. The directed content analysis requires coding categories properly and using a developed analytical scheme when analysing the material. There are, according to Hsieh & Shannon, two different strategies regarding the analysis. Either the predetermined codes are applied when reading the material the first time or it is done in two steps by starting with what would be an immediate reaction and later apply the codes. This second strategy has the advantage of including the element of “first impression” (Ibid). How to conduct the directed content analysis depends on the research question and the material. Taking into consideration the categories that this thesis uses and the material at hand, the immediate impression is not relevant to this analytical framework. This method is used primarily when trying to detect an emotion which is not applicable to the categories used in this thesis. Hence, the analytical strategy will be more similar to their first proposed strategy.

The third approach is called summative content analysis. It differs from the previous approaches, primarily because it counts certain words in the text. A summative content analysis interprets and analyses the words as well in what is called a latent content analysis. This thesis will not count specific words, however the occurrence of a significant category will be counted as it can provide a sense of how common some of the analytical categories are (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1283-1284).
4.2 Validity, reliability and the making of an analytical framework

In order to answer the research question with a content analysis, an analytical framework will be developed. A content analysis requires an element of coding in order to categorize the findings. A theory can sufficiently facilitate the process of finding relevant ways to code (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 2009:266). By using theory as a base the categories are sprung out of a certain context that makes it easier to find relevant ways to code. Validity can be analysed in two main steps. The initial step is to, with the help of the theories, develop a coding scheme. Secondly, there has to be a standard from which different cases can be compared. There are different ways to define validity and its different forms. Poole & Folger define face validity as a case when “the coding system is logically consistent and the categories clearly defined” (Poole & Fogler, 1981:137).

Reliability can be separated into three categories. The first, and according to Krippendorff (1980) the least reliable test, is to redo the analysis after a period of time. If the results are the same as the first time, it is an indication of strong reliability (Levine-Donnerstein, 2009:271, Krippendorff, 1980:131). The second category is reproducibility which refers to a reliability test in which another person uses the same coding and the reliability will be judged by the similarity of the results. This covers the element of potential human errors more efficiently. It can also prove whether or not the coding was the result of a particular time and context. This means that if there is high validity, the results will be similar even if a different coder analyses the content in a different period of time and in a different place. Finally, accuracy is by some seen as the strongest indicator of reliability as it relates the codes to certain standards thus making it easier to follow and reproduce the same results. The reliability in this study is increased by the strong connection between theory and the development of the analytical framework. Moreover, the theories have made an operationalization easier by clarifying the categories and in some cases they have offered valuable examples. Despite the choice of theories and their applicability in the operationalization, it is important to keep the result and analysis-section transparent in order to make the coding easier to follow.

4.3 Conflicting worldviews

This thesis sets out to explore how EU responds to disinformation through the anti-disinformation campaign carried out by the East Stratcom Task Force. Therefore it is for delimiting purposes that the analysis will not clarify or contextualise the cases that are brought up in the reviews and the actors behind them. Furthermore, the cases that are brought up in the disinformation reviews are often obvious cases of disinformation, the kind that is easily refutable. Just like the Task Force expresses, it is important to not classify the disinformation as Russian per se. The focus in the campaign is the message not the “messenger”. The usage of European sources and reports from EU-sponsored actors will not be further problematized since their purpose is to provide the background to the Task Force not to be part of the analysed material or in any way guide the conclusions. Anti-Kremlin
opinions will be categorically referenced, to avoid bias to the largest possible degree. Moreover, the term “pro-Kremlin disinformation” is used since this thesis will not engage in speculating on the whereabouts of the actor/sender. In line with the position of the campaign, the focus will be the message and particularly the response rather than the messenger. Just like Mejias & Voukev’s article state, Russian disinformation-spread is often denied by Russian officials (Meijas & Voukev, 2017). Regardless of who the messenger is it is possible to conclude that the label “pro-Kremlin” is used as an overall anti-western and anti-EU attitude that permeates the articles that are spreading disinformation on social media and other online-based channels. For a western-born scholar to objectively analyse the interaction of two conflicting world-views is a difficult task. Although this thesis does not normatively analyse the value of the reviews or the disinformation, it is important to be aware of the writer’s own role when conducting studies of this sort.

The East Stratcom Task Force cannot claim to represent the official EU-position in its reviews given the vast amount of rapporteurs and organizations that assist the website. It would be practically impossible to rapport and publish reviews with the current speed if it had to go through the procedures of the EU. The campaign is, at the same time, EU-financed, EU-run and EU-initiated and is working as part of EEAS on the authority of the European Council (EEAS, 2017). The name “EU vs Disinfo” also indicates that the EU wants to be associated with this campaign. It may be that EU does not want to be separated from the team running the campaign since this would make EU vulnerable for backfire when accusing Russian actors of letting other organizations propagate for its cause. In that case this campaign could be dismissed as a pro-EU site instead of being seen as objective. Not holding an official EU-position could therefore be interpreted as a way to safeguard against potential political tensions between EU and a disinformation-outlet or Russian authorities. However, it is currently difficult to draw any conclusions regarding the strategic position of the anti-disinformation campaign.

4.4 Operationalization

This thesis seeks to find out how the East Stratcom Task Force responds to disinformation and to what extent the response is consistent with the self-identity of the EU. How an actor portrays an issue can either follow media logic or political logic. The response can also follow different anti-disinformation strategies. These theories complement each other as the first discuss the communication logic in foreign policy and the latter categorizes certain specific strategies for defending against disinformation. Hence they can, in different ways, answer the question “how” the EU responds. This section will operationalize the essential concepts and develop the analytical framework that will be used to analyse the material.
4.4.1 Operationalizing media logic and political logic

Brommesson and Ekengren’s theory about media and political logic will be categorized and understood with the help of questions that were posed in their analysis of speeches in the UN general assembly. These questions were written by the authors to encapsulate the essence of the different logics. In the framework, political logic and media logic will be conveniently depicted as each other’s opposites.

Media logic is; simplifying, one sided, individualized, focused on winners and losers and often based on feelings (Brommesson & Ekengren, 2017:70-72).

Conversely, political logic applies when an actor is not simplifying the message, seeing two-sides of the narrative, not individualizing the message, not focused on winners and losers and it is often based on political rationale and ideology rather than feelings (Ibid). The questions that are in place to help separate media logic from political logic are borrowed from the original authors of the theory and selected to work with the material at hand. The theory is included since it can help categorize how modern foreign policy communication functions. The questions that will be posed to classify and categorize can be found in the appendix.

Basing an operationalization and the creation of an analytical framework on a theory can increase the chances of high validity in an academic work (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 2009:266). In this case the theory is not only assisting the operationalization, it is in fact the original authors operationalization that is applied. This significantly strengthens the validity between the theory and the coding. A second important element in terms of validity is to use a standard as measurement. Out of these categories simplifying is the most difficult to distinguish since judging a simplification requires knowledge of what “real” circumstance is. Therefore simplified cannot be operationalized in any appropriate manner and will not be part of the final analysis.

The review will be considered one-sided if the analysis in the text is evidently unbalanced. Furthermore a review will also be characterized as one-sided when the opponent’s perspective is not at all considered and there is no interest in regarding how the topic can be debated and discussed. In order to increase both reliability and validity, the result section will provide examples. Individualization is another element related to media logic. It is a way to simplify politics and policies by referring to the people that promote and lead them. With the disinformation reviews as material, individualization will be coded when individual people are emphasized or discussed. We know from the outset that the campaign does not want to analyse the messenger as much as the message. However, if a review mentions and discusses more than one individual, this will be coded as an individualization and therefore a trace of media logic. This is a way to set a standard in the coding that increases the validity and the reliability. Since the reviews are short and only cover two or three subjects on average, it will be enough for it to mention two individuals.

Winners and losers is another common indication of media logic. The question to be posed is: “Are there dramaturgical examples in the review identifying winners and/or losers in a
strategic meaning and/or individual issues?” (Brommsson & Ekengren, 2017:71). This would be a case where the review not only disproves the disinformation but also argues for one side being a strategic winner or loser. It is a type of mediatization that draws on a zero-sum mind-set in which political processes always include a winning and a losing part. *Illustrative adjectives* may be obvious to find but this category will also include sarcasm and humour, when it is used to provoke. Illustrative adjectives, humour and irony are quite easily detectable in these texts and will therefore need no further clarification.

**Figure 4.1 Media logic and political logic**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>MEDIA LOGIC (Yes)</th>
<th>POLITICAL LOGIC (No)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the message simplified?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the message one-sided?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are individuals framed as important?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winners and losers?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrative adjectives?</td>
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### 4.4.2 Operationalizing confronting and naturalising

Hellman and Wagnsson’s analytical framework is applicable when studying a campaign of this sort. The categories are, however, mostly adapted to work on a different level of abstraction. In their current meaning they are written to categorize how actors handle informational warfare on a policy level and with more overview. Looking at the material that this thesis will analyse, it is important that the framework is adapted to work in a content analysis as well. Without rewriting their fundamental meanings the concepts will have to be slightly adjusted for this case.

The main difference between the two confronting approaches is their level of confrontation. Naturalising, which is the strategy used by Germany, focuses more on the own narrative and strives to lead by example. It is more focused on itself rather than the “opponent”. We know that the Task Force writes reports on disinformation, which obviously includes a certain element of confrontation, but naturalising will in this context mean that the review focuses on the EU as well as the opponent. “The aim is to maintain and spread values by being a good example, and the values promoted tend to be depicted as universal” (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:160). Instead of just promoting counter-evidence, naturalising would mean that the point of the review is rather to project a positive narrative of the “self” as credible and trustworthy and in any other way superior” (ibid). For the sake of the validity, the original theory has to correlate with this version of naturalising. Therefore, one can look at the only empirical example of a naturalising strategy that is mentioned in the article, which is Germany.

The most quintessential part in Germany’s naturalising strategy is the way in which a sense of nationalist pride has been combined with typical characterizations of German qualities, which in this case are, accuracy and credibility. From looking at how Germany was analysed, it
seems reasonable to conclude that the characteristics of the EU would be emphasized in a naturalising strategy in this context. The characteristics of the EU are likely to resemble those of its normative power, democracy and liberty. Hence there are two main considerations for a naturalising strategy. First, the strategy would imply the actor to discuss itself in order to win back control over the narrative. The second part relates to the specific characteristics of the EU that also relate to the view of EU as a normative power. Based on the naturalising strategy five assumptions will be made.

1. **Focus is more on EU than the Pro-Kremlin actor/narrative.** This is measured by the amounts of text that is devoted to each actor/narrative.

2. **EU’s known “universal values” are highlighted – democracy and freedom of speech.** If the review discusses EU’s role a promoter of universal norms such as democracy and freedom of speech.

3. **EU is portrayed as credible and morally superior.** This requires the review to not only respond, but to also project a different narrative in which EU is portrayed as superior to the opponent. One example of such a case is when the review defends the EU against criticism of not assisting Syria sufficiently. The review responded by stating that the EU is not only assisting financially, it is the leading donor to the country since the beginning of the conflict. The term *morally superior* will in this context require that the review puts the EU in comparison to other states/international actors.

4. **EU is portrayed as spreading values by leading by example.** In line with being a normative actor the EU wants to be in the forefront and lead by example on different topics. Again, this requires the review to go beyond the disinformation response to exemplify with EU as a leading force in the topic discussed. The difference with the previous point is that it does not require a straight-out comparison. It is more about describing the EU or its policies as leading by example, setting trends or upholding certain standards in its actions.

The overall idea with the naturalising strategy is to reclaim the narrative. There are, as described above, different ways to pursue.

Confronting, on the other hand, is more straightforward when it comes to the response. It means that the response actively creates a counter-frame or an alternative narrative. A confronting strategy differentiates itself by always “setting the record straight”, meaning that it will at all times provide empirical evidence to forcefully disapprove the disinformation. In this context this strategy would in its communication be particularly careful to have reliable sources. Since the disinformation outlet is often using unjust methods, the defence is therefore particularly careful to state its sources, which also is a way differentiate the self from the opponent. (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:159). “The construction of the narrative feeds on being different from “the other”, contrasting oneself to an opponent, sometimes defined as the enemy.” (Ibid).

Signs of confronting would be that;
1. *The disinformation review uses empirical examples.* Stating empirical examples can be used partly to refute disinformation-attacks. It can also be a way to show that the disinformation-attacks are real and not exaggerated and made up.

2. *The sources are clearly stated.*

3. *There is a clear distinction from the “other” which is depicted as hostile.* The “other” in the reviews is most likely to be various disinformation-outlets. This category requires these outlets to be described in a negative manner. Hostile refers to a rather vicious description of an actor.

4. *The EU setting the example.* Hellman & Wagnsson write “they might also strive to replace the negative narrative by projecting positive images on the same subject.” (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:159). This has to be operationalized in the same way as *leading by example* on the naturalising strategy. It is about going beyond a mere response in order to exemplify or argue for that the EU has the most adequate policies and sets the example for others.

These theories will cover the descriptive part of the main question. It will enable us to pin down the way of communicating and the strategy applied. The next part will operationalize the self-identity of the EU, which will help with the second part of the question concerning how the response connects to the normative self-identity of the EU.

### Figure 4.2 Naturalising

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NATURALISING (YES)</th>
<th>No</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU = morally superior?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>EU = leading by example?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>EU = universal norms?</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU in focus rather than Russia?</td>
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</table>

### Figure 4.3 Confronting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CONFRONTING (Yes)</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empirical evidence?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sources stated?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Othering?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>EU setting the example?</td>
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### 4.4.3 Manners’ normative values

Ian Manners’ theory on “Normative Power Europe” is one of the most influential articles on the topic so far (Sjursen, 2007). He helped develop a way to understand EU as an atypical actor working beyond the levels of the Westphalian borders. The main tenets of what
constitutes EU’s normative power are, in this figure below, broken down to several categories that can simplify the operationalization of these rather vast concepts. This figure is taken from Manners article and illustrates a map of the normative basis of the EU.

**Figure 4.4. EU’s normative principles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Founding principle</th>
<th>Task and objectives</th>
<th>Stable institutions</th>
<th>Fundamental rights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Liberty</strong></td>
<td>Social solidarity</td>
<td>Guarantee of democracy</td>
<td>Dignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democracy</strong></td>
<td>Anti-discrimination</td>
<td>Rule of law</td>
<td>Freedoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms</strong></td>
<td>Sustainable development</td>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rule of law</strong></td>
<td>Protection of minorities</td>
<td></td>
<td>Solidarity</td>
</tr>
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(Manners, 2002: 243)

When looking into how the East Stratcom Task Force responds in their reviews, the defining values of the normative principles will be the basis for analysing the self-identity of the EU. *Peace*, which was the first essential value to the EU after the tumultuous period in the 1930’s and 40’s, will not be operationalized although it is worth mentioning as it consistently underlies the normative values of EU (Manners, 2002:242).

*Liberty*, which came second in the preamble to the Treaty establishing the European Communities, is closely related to peace in Manners’ article. They are the remainders of the post-war mind-set that permeated the forming of the Coal and Steel Coalition. The concept of liberty is complex since it has a twofold meaning in the article. Initially, liberty was the concept that together with peace could contrast years of suffering after the two world wars. In that sense liberty can be interpreted as liberating people from the atrocities of war. The second meaning came into force later when the political climate had change and critics of anti-communism had turned into proponents of neo-liberalism. The Single European Act, that was signed in 1986, used the single market to catalyse European integration. *Liberty*, in the second regard, has to do with highlighting *social solidarity* in times of a dominating neo-liberal agenda. Hence, for the reviews to be consistent with *liberty* they will highlight or at least mention EU’s commitment to peace enforcement or its *social solidarity* with people who may be adversely affected by the trends of liberalism (Manners, 2002:242).

The second principle, *democracy*, could be difficult to pin down and define. Fortunately, Manners’ table (figure 4.4) has narrowed it slightly in the second column defining tasks and objectives. The evolution of its meaning is to some degree similar to that of *liberty*. *Democracy* became a leitmotif around the same time as *social solidarity*. In the cold-war period, Western Europe was keen on distancing itself from the communist regime in Soviet.
Increased racism in the 1990’s led to a new meaning of *democracy* that encompasses minorities in society. Thus, to find cases of EU’s normative values in the shape of *democracy*, it is important to locate either the opposition of the communist ideology or the commitment to defend minority groups from discrimination (Manners, 2002:243).

The third principle is *the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms*, which is included in the Treaty Establishing of the European Community. Manners, does not provide any background to this particular value. Therefore the European Commission will be the main source for this operationalization. When discussing the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms they specifically target “discrimination based on sex, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation” (European Commission, 2017). Manners add that one of the newer developments in this field is the element of sustainable development (Ibid). This was an addition that followed the Rio Earth summit in 1992 and was incorporated in the Amsterdam treaty 1997. To be categorised as the third category of the normative values, the review has to make reference to EU’s anti-discriminatory policies.

The final principle is the *rule of law* that came into force during the same period as the previous two. *Rule of law* covers the legal security aspect and the protection of minorities, which is also covered by the later take on the principle of *democracy*.

It may seem farfetched to suggest that the Task Force would go to the root of the problem in all cases and relate back to the principles in every given case. It is, however interesting to see to what extent the normative values permeated the analysis in this campaign (Ibid).

### 4.4.4 Analytical framework

The questions in the figures are shortened. In the appendix it is possible to read the questions in their entirety.

**Figure 4.5. The analytical framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MEDIA LOGIC (Yes)</th>
<th>POLITICAL LOGIC (No)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Is the message simplified?</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The explanatory part about EU’s self-identity will be categorized below. Whenever nothing is marked it is because it is difficult to tell. If nothing is said about the principle it will be marked “not mentioned or referenced”. It should be stated that the reviews handle a large range of different questions and that there are certain topics that are not suited for these principles to be discussed. Therefore the third column “topics discussed not relevant to the principles” is included. To respond to the question “is the response consistent with the self-identity of the EU?” it is necessary to remember that it is not always a given chance for the review to do so.

**Figure 4.6 Normative values**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mentioned or referenced in the review</th>
<th>Not mentioned or referenced</th>
<th>Topics discussed is not relevant to the principles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for human rights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rule of law</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 5. Results and analysis

In this section the results will be presented and analysed in a division based on the different theories, starting with the logics of foreign policy communication. Examples will be provided to motivate some of the categorizations and give context to the analysis of the material. This is also a way to strengthen reliability, as the examples will make it easier to follow the process and repeat a similar analysis when more material is available. Given that there is an
element of individual evaluation, the examples serve as guidelines for the interpretations. The first section will illustrate and discuss to what extent the texts included the logics of foreign policy communication. This will be followed by a section that presents and analyse the disinformation strategies. Finally, findings related to the normative values will be analysed and discussed before the conclusion.

5.1 The logics of foreign policy communication

In order to find out which communication model the reviews used, four questions were posed. Figure 5.1 show the results found for media and political logic in the disinformation reviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MEDIA LOGIC (Yes)</th>
<th>POLITICAL LOGIC (No)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Is the message one-sided?</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4 (2 unclear cases)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Are individuals framed as important?</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Winners and losers?</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Illustrative adjectives?</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the modern forum and the overall trend of more media logic it seems evident that, according to these parameters, the reviews lean toward a political logic rather than media logic although it is even. However, writing in a one-sided way is a very clear indication of media logic that, arguably, is more important than for example discussing winners and losers.

**One sided reviews?**

The reviews are written in a one-sided manner with few examples of any attempt to balance the narrative. Almost none of the reviews were to be categorized as anything but one-sided, which in regard to the analytical framework indicates an element of media logic. The reviews are strict when condemning the pro-Kremlin attacks regardless of what the subject is. One of the few examples of when the review admits to anything of what the disinformation outlets have been saying is the following quote:

What was new this time around was that France was also targeted. As usual, a grain of truth is to be found in the middle of all of the disinformation: a small trace of radioactive Iodine-131 of unknown origin was indeed in January detected over large areas in Europe – but it was deemed by most as so small and without any health implications that it had no news value. (Review nr.11)

Here, the Task Force explains how some of the disinformation is built upon “a grain of truth” that is later exaggerated for political purposes. One could argue that the material at hand does not offer much room to discuss potential interpretations since the disinformation often deliver extreme statements. However, there are few signs of dialogue or debate within the reviews even on topics that have and can be debated, for instance the democratic deficit of the EU.
Another quote that sufficiently represents the position of the campaign is from the 21:st review called “The world in black and white” the quote says:

In fairy tales, things have to be black and white and easy to understand. The villain is always cruel, horrible and insidious; the hero is pure, fair, and honest. A look at the pro-Kremlin disinformation campaign shows us a similar picture. (Review nr. 21)

The last quote further solidifies the assumption that the Task Force is unwilling to debate and discuss the weekly accusations.

The pro-Kremlin outlets enjoy accusing others of being Nazi… But practically anything and anyone opposing the Kremlin’s interest can be “Nazi” e.g. the anti-Soviet uprising in Hungary 1956. (Review nr. 4)

Individuals framed as important?
The only cases in which the reviews mention individuals are when they are the subjects of the disinformation. On average, the reviews do not personalize the analysis in their counterarguments. It is possible to conclude that for the responses, individuals are not framed as important in general. This result is an indication of political logic in which the messenger attempts to discuss politics on a broader scale to avoid fixation of particular people within the decision-making procedures. This question can also include individual actors and, as previously mentioned, the campaign is coherently using pro-Kremlin outlets broadly and, discussing what “they” write. Although the different outlets are mentioned on numerous occasions it remains clear that they have not become fixated on any given actor. So, the pro-Kremlin label is used continuously but the campaign occasionally calls out Russian authorities and specific TV-shows. This confirms that the campaign has, through its wide net of contributors, managed to collect a broad base for collecting and disproving disinformation. Furthermore, it also indicates that it has succeeded in its attempt to analyse the message rather than the messenger and that it does not hesitate to confront official Russian sources as well as disinformation outlets. The reviews that have been applying individualization have, on the limited space provided, discussed two or three individuals in relation to disinformation. Each disinformation review summarizes the last week’s disinformation trends. By looking at the table of disinformation-cases it is evident that the Task Force can choose to ignore the individual cases and still have significant material to discuss. Hence we can conclude that individuals are not entirely ignored but they are not in any way emphasized in the majority of the reviews.

Winners and losers
Describing winners and losers in a strategic meaning is another typical indication of media logic. In the case of the reviews there were almost no signs of such a strategy. Even in cases where EU’s member states were attacked on such notions the response did not fall into the same pattern. In most cases the Task Force has referred to sources that claims the opposite instead of counteracting in some kind of similar manner. Throughout the writing of the reviews,
it has started to use increasing amounts of sarcasm and links instead of pure empirical counterevidence.

Much of the disinformation that the Task Force responds to is being written to convince states of the dangers of joining the EU. This response below combines the unwillingness to use the winners and losers dimension of the EU-membership and at the same time the element of humour.

And the favourite narrative about EU orchestrating colour revolutions was revived once again. Thus, in a Moldovan disinformation-oriented outlet, the readers were convinced that if the country refuses to join the EU, Brussels will punish it with a Maidan. We are sorry to disappoint, but it is not in EU’s capabilities to instigate a nation-wide revolution. (Review nr. 28)

Illustrative adjectives
The majority of the reviews do not have clear cases of illustrative adjectives however a significant amount of the reviews are written with an amount of sarcasm to emphasize the absurdity in some of the claims. Out of the communication logic-categories this was the most even category. Although this reaffirms the tilt towards political logic it should be stated that some of the cases have rather strong indications of illustrative language usage. Some of these are exemplified below. This indicates that the Task Force has a lax attitude towards how the reviews are written or that the authors have interpreted the role of these reviews differently. An explanation for the sarcastic tone may be that the reviews generally counters an extreme type of disinformation that they find is not worthy of anything other than a sarcastic reply. One common example of this sarcasm is to refer to reoccurring disinformation claims as “old favourites”, in the same quote we find example of illustrative language in the word “preposterous”.

We have once before summed up some of the preposterous claims in pro-Kremlin disinformation about Mr. George Soros. He has previously been accused of controlling the US Government and of abolishing the office of the president in the Czech Republic, among other things. This week we saw both some old favourite myths about Mr Soros reappearing and some new ones being invented. (Review nr. 22)

Another example of a sarcastic/humoristic expression is in the 26:th review “But the main dish of disinformation this week was a mix of several favourite pro-Kremlin ingredients: historical revisionism, NATO, Nazis and the Baltic states.” (Review nr. 26).

In addition to the usage of illustrative expressions and sarcasm, some of the reviews have an almost taunting attitude towards the disinformation that is discussed.

In another outlet it was stated that Poland was reluctant to accept Ukrainian travellers and in an especially confusing Sputnik article…” (Review nr. 23).

One of this week’s pieces managed to bring together no less than three beloved components of pro-Kremlin conspiracies. (Review nr. 29)
From the collected material we can see that the reviews shift between political logic and media logic. The analysed material is different in its form compared to a political speech (which Brommesson and Ekengren looked at). In these reviews several accusations are refuted and the format may form its ability to be two-sided. However, when faced with criticism there is no discussion on how things may be interpreted or alternative perspectives of an event. Therefore it can be concluded that the reviews are one-sided but with little interest of discussing individual actors or winners and losers in a strategic sense. Finally, the reviews often use illustrative language and sarcasm, which is in line with media logic as opposed to political logic. This is not found the majority of the cases but often enough to consider it a pattern. Through the analytical frame it is therefore possible to conclude that the communication from the East Stratcom Task Force does not entirely fit into either of the communication logics that were operationalized. This may be due to the unconventional platform and mission that they are working on. The Task Force is not working under the pressure of being politically correct, as it has been stated that they do not express official EU-statements. At the same time, it is not unbound from any kind of political influence since the Task Force is created and working for the EEAS and consequentially, the EU. This combination of not having to represent the EU-position but at the same time be part of a EU-sponsored project may be what has caused this fusion between political and media logic.

5.2 Disinformation strategies

Traits of both strategies, naturalising and confronting, could be found in the reviews. The confronting strategy could be measured on a larger scale since it did not require a certain topic to be operationalized. The idea with naturalising, on the other hand, is that the respondent of the message discusses itself, in this case the EU or EEAS, rather than the opponent. However only about ten of the reviews discussed the EU. It is, of course, possible to discuss the outcome among the reviews that dealt with the EU and also why the campaign is not more keen on including the EU in its reviews. Regardless of what the reason for not discussing the EU more is, the model when the EU is discussed is presented below:

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NATURALISING (YES)</th>
<th>No¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU = morally superior?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU = leading by example?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU = universal norms?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU in focus rather than Russia?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ This is an approximate of the cases where EU was at all discussed otherwise the number would be 36 minus the number of “yes”—cases.
The figure illustrates that even in the cases where the EU is discussed, the reviews are not, on average, depicting EU as superior. It is especially apparent that the focus is on the pro-Kremlin actors or Russia rather than the EU. However, in some of the reviews the EU is, when countering an accusation, not just defended but also depicted as “superior” and “leading”. When the EU was accused by the Russian ambassador to the EU for not assisting in aid to Syria the Task Force responded the following way;

In fact Russia has twice vetoed UN Security Council resolutions aiming to secure the delivery of humanitarian aid to Aleppo ([http://bit.ly/1O5yESF](http://bit.ly/1O5yESF)). The EU is the leading donor in the international response to the Syrian crisis since the beginning of the conflict ([http://bit.ly/2hr9zZ3](http://bit.ly/2hr9zZ3)). (Review nr. 1)

The parts about the EU were in all cases short and in most cases they sought to disapprove the disinformation rather than to change the entire view of the EU. EU was only elaborated on in a few cases. Regarding the focus on the topics more was written on Ukraine than EU, which indicates that the Task Force was not interested in defending the EU itself more than any specific state within Europe. They did not seek to naturalise the opponent by referencing the EU although they, on a few occasions, used EU as an example of an actor promoting universal norms. The democratic procedures of the EU was defended in the fifth review

True, the EU’s bureaucracy, like any other, is made up of appointed officials. But if the criticism concerns the politicians, we find it important to recall that the Members of the European Parliament are elected by the 500-million strong populations of the EU Member States and that the European Council constitutes the Heads of Government of the Members States, all of whom have been elected in their respective countries. (Review nr. 5).

Another instance was when the democracy index was referenced to defend two EU-member states, Estonia and Germany, from criticism.

And we saw Angela Merkel’s democratic credentials questioned as she was accused of being a dictator. Estonia was also accused of being a fascist state, along with being blamed for Russophobia. Last time we checked, both Estonia and Germany were doing pretty good on democracy rankings. (Review nr. 25).

When looking at the results from “confronting”, the results are clearer, partly because all the reviews could be analyse through the categories that defined the confronting strategy thereby the selection was larger. The average review followed this pattern:
The reviews use empirical evidence to back their claims and to disprove the disinformation. They are particularly thorough when it comes to providing the source of the pro-Kremlin disinformation. The empirical evidence is often reports from different newspapers such as Deutsche Welle or The Guardian. Other sources used are official reports from the UN, National foreign ministries and OSCE. The sources are consistently linked in the review together with a statement, which enables the reader to easily access the source. Unlike some of the variations in the language use that was discussed previously, the empirical evidence and the reference system is the same throughout the reviews. The reviews are based on the reports from the same week, which has been summarized and disproven by links from sources including links to the disinformation-outlet, which makes the process more transparent as it is open for anyone to make an interpretation with the information available. The most used source is the EU, either through the EEAS-website or the European Commission or Europa.eu (which is run by the communication department of the Commission). It often cites itself from previous reviews. The potential problem with using the EU as the main source is that the campaign risks loosing its chance to be seen as objective. However, that may be an impossible endeavour since the campaign already is so strongly associated with the EU. Furthermore, the campaign uses different kinds of sources ranging from Buzzfeed news to official statements from Human Rights Watch, Nato and International Criminal Court. This has the risk of reducing the trustworthiness of the reviews as they can be accused of lacking consistency in their usage of sources.

Regarding othering, which is defined as “depicting the opponent as hostile”, the reviews generally do not depict other actors as hostile. One of the reasons for this is the focus on the disinformation. The reviews are short and they often bring up a few different “stories” that they refute. This does not permit a lot of time discussing the messenger. On several occasions however, they clarify what their opinion regarding these outlets are;

But as we have explained in the past, the aim of Russian disinformation does not have to be to persuade an audience to believe, but rather to confuse, distort, blur, and undermine the very concept of truth (Review nr. 13)

As mentioned earlier, the Task Force often uses the term “Pro-Kremlin” but it does not hesitate to confront Russian authorities when it has the chance:

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2 Sources were provided in regard to the disinformation but the review did not respond or in any way reference sources to counter the disinformation.
But the highlight of this week’s wave of pro-Kremlin disinformation was the fact that the Russian Ministry of Defence used images from a computer game as its irrefutable evidence that the US is supporting ISIS (Review nr. 36).

Lastly, just like with the naturalising strategy, the EU is not often used to “set the example”. The EU is only discussed when it is directly targeted by a disinformation campaign and only in some of those cases is the EU at all discussed.

**Opening for other combinations**

When summarizing the results we see that in the case of the disinformation reviews, traits of the confronting strategy are more apparent. Confronting fits well with the way the disinformation was met with empirical evidence and sources. This, together with occasional “otherings” of the disinformation outlets and condescending remarks regarding Russian authorities fits with the operationalization of the confronting strategy. Naturalising is not as commonly used since that strategy focuses more on the “self” than the opponent’s claims in order to take back control over the narrative. At the same time, there are several cases in which neither of the strategies could properly explain the material.

Some of the attacks were neither confronted nor naturalised in the reviews. The review simply restates some of the most vicious allegations and leave them uncommented. The review often links to the “Disinformation cases reported in the previous week” which is the myth-debunking section of the website where the pieces are being disproven. In some cases the review leaves it up to the reader to look the campaign up among last week’s disinformation to find out the response. The reviews tend to respond this way when the disinformation is considered particularly unexpected and unjustified. Here are two examples to illustrate such a case.

Last but not least we heard that tens of thousands of Ukrainian weapons are smuggled into Poland with the purpose of building an underground Ukrainian army. (Review nr. 32)

We also saw the allegation that member states had orchestrated the diplomatic row between the Netherlands and Turkey last week deliberately to bring about the disintegration of the Union – with the explanation that Germany wants to create the “new Europe”. And of course, we heard once more the hackneyed allegations that the EU supports neo-Nazis. (Review nr. 12)

Given that naturalising is the less aggressive strategy compared to confronting, a possible interpretation could be that naturalising could also include this type of passive reaction. It would also be possible to combine naturalising or confronting with other strategies developed by Hellman and Wagnsson. For instance their usage of ignoring did not apply well with the material for this thesis since it is a non-replying tactic, which is not aimed outwards. However, the idea of not replying directly, is, in a fusion with confronting, potentially a way to understand some of the responses in the reviews. The idea would be to confront the argument by presenting the most obscene parts from the disinformation-outlet and leave it uncommented or with comments such as “It goes without saying that neither of the claims are substantiated with some evidence.” (Review nr. 22). Hellman and Wagnsson write that an
ignoring strategy relies on a strong “democratic state (that) possesses adequate resources in its very constitution and through its institutions and government agencies in order to deal with information warfare, including for example hostile narratives disseminated on social media platforms” (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:162). This presupposes that the public can separate the truth from disinformation, and that they have been provided with the necessary tools to do so (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:163). Furthermore the ignoring strategy can, in this case, be well suited to understand how the team did not focus on itself and its role as EU-messengers. In the ignoring strategy “No or little emphasis is therefore given to the construction of a national coherent strategic narrative” (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:162).

Whenever the reviews leave disinformation uncommented it could be, in accordance with the ignoring strategy, because they believe the people to be capable of seeing through the “lies”. The confronting element is still necessary given that the reviews actually focus mostly on exposing the disinformation through empirical evidence. It is also necessary to include confronting since according to the ignoring strategy there is no need for agencies or campaign of this sort (Ibid). The authors express that it is not just possible but also likely for an actor to have more than one strategy, which supports the idea, that features of the ignoring strategy are being combined with a confronting strategy (Hellman & Wagnsson, 2017:163).

5.3 The normative self-identity

There are around five cases in which the normative self-identity of the EU is expressed. The democratic institutional structure of the EU was defended when outlets were claiming that the EU is undemocratic due to the fact that the institutions consists of unelected civil servants. In addition to the previous quote, here is another example of when the review is defending the democracy of the EU, which is one of the most central normative values.

“First of all, as the EU is made up of its member states, the policies are in fact decided by the member states together with the European Parliament which gathers democratically elected representatives of all 28 member states. Secondly, as the EU does not have any security forces of its own – who would enforce the alleged violence? EU bureaucrats perhaps?” (Review nr. 25).

Just like with the case of naturalising, it is more difficult to generalize the responses that concern the EU since they are fewer. Another similarity to naturalising is that EU was not at all discussed whenever the criticism did not target the EU specifically. Although this may seem logical, there were many instances where it could have used EU as a counterexample of several claims. For example when Italy was accused of spreading “western values” by allowing sex cruises, this was mentioned and left uncommented, possibly considered too outrageous to counter. In that case there would have been room to argue for what the western values are (Review nr. 33).

This is just one example of when there would be room for the review to take a more pro-EU stance, rather than to just recite what has been written. Naturalising, and leading by example
(in the confronting scheme) as well as promoting the normative values are not prioritised in the writings of the reviews. However, it does not mean that there are no conclusions to be drawn from these results. It is indicative of a certain degree of indifference towards the active promotion of the normative values. One could have argued that the Task Force wants to gain credibility by appearing as an objective voice and that it therefore is hesitant when it comes to promoting the EU. The difficulty with this argument is that the reviews are one-sided and noticeably biased. The reviews are not consistently objective which makes it hard to argue that objectivity would be an argument for not wanting to include the normative values more.

Another potential explanation is that the Task Force simply does not want this platform to be the messenger of the normative values. Given that the team, according to several security experts, is understaffed in regards to their task, it is more likely to focus solely on the debunking of disinformation (Jabko et al, 2017). Expanding on the self-identity of the EU may not be a priority in that situation, especially when some of the claims are not even considered worthy of a response.

Critics such as Harding, who believes it is pointless for EU to try to propagate for its cause, may be satisfied with the outcome since it shows that the Task Force is focused on combatting the myths and not just “talking” and promoting values. The communication style is more straightforward, less policy like, and the old normative values are not overly emphasized in the reviews. The EU has recently decided to grant the Task Force additional funding, which suggests that the EU is satisfied with the work done by the Task Force so far (Rankin, 2017). It supports the idea that this campaign against disinformation could be the start of a new type of defence against the vast amounts of existing disinformation outlets. The East Stratcom Task Force has, in this regard, succeeded in persuading the forces within the Union that were hesitant of its necessity. The additional funding will possibly enable the team to allocate more resources and time to the “flagship product” of the campaign, which is the disinformation review. What this will mean for the development of the reviews can only be speculated at this moment.

This thesis set out to answer the question “How has the East Stratcom Task Force responded to disinformation and is the response consistent with the self-identity of the EU?” From the analytical framework it is possible to draw some conclusions. The analysed material is one-sided but it does not frame individuals or individual actors as important. Furthermore it does not follow a narrative based on winners and losers and it occasionally uses illustrative language and humour. It is on the basis of these findings, possible to conclude that the response from the East Stratcom Task Force follows both media logic and political logic. There are, in addition to this, several indications of a confronting strategy in which sources and empirical evidence are used to counter the Pro-Kremlin disinformation. Occasional “otherings” also points toward a confronting strategy although they are not as consistent. The naturalising strategy did not prove to be equally applicable since the responses did not turn the focus over to the EU as would be expected of such a strategy.
The theories have helped categorize and label the content of the material. They have been separated in terms of their descriptive and their explorative ambitions. It is, however, possible to also analyse how the descriptive part of the question relates to the self-identity of the EU. This means making connections between how the Task Force responds to the disinformation reviews and to what degree that is related to their self-identity. Credible political actors are arguably keen on communicating with political rather than media logic since the actors using political logic often seek to “gain official acceptance” (Brommesson & Ekengren, 2017:28). The Task Force uses both media logic and political logic in its responses. The media logic is used forcefully and at times condescendingly, to disprove the outlets that are creating the disinformation campaigns. At the same time, the reviews do not engage in some of the main characteristics of media logic, such as a winner-loser narrative and individualization of political questions.

What does this say about the way the Task Force wants to be perceived? It could have been assumed that when working on an EU-mandate the linguistic-style may be affected. EU is known for a bureaucratic use of language and correctness in its communication (Valentini & Nesti, 2010:73). The East Stratcom Task Force Team has for that reason been surprisingly free in its usage of illustrative language. There are different ways to interpret the melange between political and media logic. The Task Force must be aware that they are competing on persuading the same people that the disinformation-campaign is targeting. Hence, unlike other EU-documents, that often follow a “bureaucratic communication culture”, these reviews are not written to convince the political establishment (ibid). It is rather a direct way of communicating to grass-root movements and people outside of the political sphere. For that reason, there is reason to apply a more appealing communication-method than what scholars of the EU have been accustomed to. Concerning the self-identity, one suggestion is that the EU gave an exterior group this mission in order for the team to be freer and not constrained in any way by representing the official EU-position. It appears that the Task Force is not constrained by a strong loyalty toward the normative values of the EU, although it may agree with these principles, as some of the quotes have demonstrated. Depending on how we understand the relation between the Task Force and the EU one can draw different conclusions. Either this campaign is being held with an arms length from the EU to give it the space it needs to defend against vicious attacks or perhaps the Task Force is developing a new way of communication that has the potential to change some of EU’s bureaucratic communication-culture.

The disinformation strategy applied has clear traits of confronting. Apart from the confronting strategy there are also signs of an ignoring strategy, which opens for an interesting theoretical mixture. It is difficult to argue that the Task Force is applying a naturalising strategy given the almost categorical negligence of the EU in the reviews. The results did not provide many clear-cut labels to give the Task Force from analysing the reviews. It could be that the categories are too ideal in their nature and that real empirical cases will often fall in between the categories. Both Brommesson & Ekengren and Hellman &
Wagnsson confirm that their theories are not mutually exclusive which partly explains the occurrence of mixed results.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has discussed EEAS’s campaign against disinformation that is carried out by the East Stratcom Taskforce. The purpose of this thesis has been to better understand the way the campaign responds to disinformation. Through theories of disinformation strategies and communication logic, the descriptive part of the question was answered from different theoretical angels. It was concluded that the East Stratcom Task Force responds with a mixture of political and media logic. One potential explanation for this finding is that the team is finding a balance between the two logics similarly to how the team itself is balancing between finding its own voice and representing the EU.

Media logic fits well in an informational warfare-context where polarizing and sensationalist statements are part of the discourse. At the same time, confronting and naturalising strategies include an element of differentiation from the opponent by setting an example. There were few indications of this element in the analysed material. The disinformation reviews show that with a mixture of political and media logic in combination with a confronting strategy, it is possible to respond forcefully without necessarily using the same rhetoric as the opponent. To analyse how the reviews are consistent with the self-identity of the EU, Manners’ values were operationalized. The results indicate that the reviews are not taking any clear position when it comes to the self-identity. There are examples of when the EU is defended with arguments that are in line with the self-identity, but the normative values are by no means highlighted throughout the writing of the reviews.

The self-identity of the EU could play a part in how the reviews are written. The Task Force has shown that EU-communication does not have to be affected by the bureaucratic communication culture that has existed in the past. The Task Force’s communication-model appears to be self-developed to suit its mission. The reviews increase their credibility by consistently referencing articles to empirically support their arguments. Given the surge of disinformation-outlets and the alternative narratives that they create, this may be a vital ingredient for a successful anti-disinformation campaign. At the same time it is possible to detect reoccurring signs of othering and illustrative language. This together with its one-sided narrative implies that the Task Force is not afraid to present its pro-EU stance. The allocation of resources to the Task Force indicates that the EU is positive towards how the campaign has turned out. The EU vs disinformation-campaign has in this regard, started to find its place among EU’s arsenal of foreign policy tools.

The forever changing nature of international relations and the rapid increase of mass-communication platforms open for many new paths of research. The East Stratcom Task
Force is in different ways an important and interesting empirical case to study. It can offer new insights in the field of informational warfare as well as in more specific areas such as disinformation-defence. This thesis has indicated that there are signs of confronting as well as occasional elements of naturalising. Hence the juxtaposition of different disinformation-defence strategies should be further explored.

There is reason to believe that the field will continue to expand as the increase of disinformation continues. A different methodological approach could have resulted in different results. For example, a conventional content analysis with categories applied after and during the reading of the material might have opened for other findings. The advantage with not using pre-conceived categories in this thesis would have been less time and focus devoted on the EU’s role in the reviews. On the other hand, the fact that the reviews spend little time discussing the EU is an interesting result in itself and therefore part of the analysis of this paper. Moreover, the logics of foreign policy communication have great potential to give insights into the field of disinformation. The way media logic often simplifies messages in order to polarize and create sensationalist narratives is reminiscent of how disinformation outlets work. Thus, the theories are not entirely disconnected although they cover different aspects. A larger n-study would have the potential to use more categories, particularly on the difference between media logic and political logic where there are many more aspects that could be included.

Understanding how anti-disinformation campaigns work can be done in multiple ways. Studies regarding how the anti-disinformation campaign is perceived in Eastern Europe would most likely be a welcomed contribution to the field of informational warfare. Also, scholars of EU-studies are likely to be intrigued by the changing dynamics of the EEAS and in relation to this case, how the Task Force challenges the conventions of the EU’s foreign policy. More disinformation reviews have been published since the analysis of this thesis was conducted. The increased amount of material will also enable a study focused on the evolvement of the disinformation-campaigns in Europe and specifically how the Task Force change over time depending on resources and the overall political climate. The theories and the analytical framework used in this thesis, hopefully have potential to contribute to future research within the field.
Appendices

Political logic versus media logic
These questions are based on the questions used by Brommesson & Ekengren in “The mediatization of Foreign Policy, Political Decision and Humanitarian Intervention”. (Brommesson & Ekengren, 2017: 70-72).
“Does the review refer to two or more sides of the problem being discussed?” (Brommesson & Ekengren, 2017:70)
1. Yes (PL)
2. No (ML)

Are individuals framed in the review as important actors?
1. Yes (ML)
2. No (PL)

Are there dramaturgical examples in the review identifying winners and losers in a strategic meaning and/or individual issues?
1. Yes (ML)
2. No (PL)

“Are adjectives or illustrative descriptions used that can be assumed to generate feelings of “outrage, identification, empathy caring, sympathy or compassion”?” (Brommesson & Ekengren, 2017:72)
1. Yes (ML)
2. No (PL)

Naturalising and confronting

Naturalising
Is the EU construed as morally superior?
1. Yes
2. No
3. Unclear

Is EU portrayed as spreading values by leading by example?
1. Yes
2. No
3. Unclear

Does the review reference universal values such as democracy and freedom of speech?
1. Yes
2. No

Does the review focus more on EU than the Pro-Kremlin actor?
1. Yes
2. No

Confronting
Is the disinformation directly confronted by empirical evidence?
1. Yes
2. No
Are the sources clearly stated?
1. Yes
2. No
Is the “other” depicted as hostile?
1. Yes
2. No
3. Unclear
Is the EU used to contrast rather than to set example?
1. Yes
2. No
3. Unclear
Liberty
Does the review make reference to EU:s commitment to peace enforcement, peace generally or social solidarity within the Union?
1. Yes
2. No
Democracy
Does the review make reference to EU:s role as proponent of a democratic ideology or its commitment to protect minority groups?
1. Yes
2. No
Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms
Does the review make reference to EU as anti-discriminatory to minorities?
1. Yes
2. No
Does it mention or indicate the overall responsibility of sustainable development, climate etc?
1. Yes
2. No
Rule of law
Does the review make reference to EU as anti-discriminatory to minorities?
1. Yes
2. No
References & material


Janda, J. 2017. “Prague Declaration on seven urgent steps proposed by Western security experts.” European Values Think-Tank. Available at http://www.europeanvalues.net/declaration/ [22/11 2017]


Veebel, V. 2015. ”Russian Propaganda, Disinformation and Estonia’s experience” Foreign policy research institute. 1-3 FRPI E-notes


Material

The disinformation reviews

December


January


4. And you are a Nazi, too! 27/1-2017 Available at https://euvsdisinfo.eu/and-you-are-a-nazi-too/ [13/11-2017]

February


March


April


May


**June**

19. The circle is square! 1/6-2017. Available at https://euvsdisinfo.eu/the-circle-is-square/ [15/11-2017]


**July**


**September**


October


November