



## Progress report on establishing national clusters

*National clusters differ significantly in structure and modus operandi from country to country, depending on local circumstances. Although the principle target is Russian disinformation and influence, where appropriate clusters also consider other sources of interference where these interact with the Russian. This is especially true in some countries of Chinese and Daesh influence.*

### **Integrity Spain**

Our first cluster, set up in January 2017, is headed by an academic currently at CIDOB, a Barcelona-based think tank. The inaugural seminar was co-sponsored by HQ NATO and addressed Russian malign influence in Eastern Europe and North Africa. A second inaugural session was held soon thereafter at the ECFR think tank in Madrid to ensure a balanced national coverage. This cluster draws its participants from academia, the media, civil servants and military and several political parties. Its main means of influence is through academic papers and especially through articles, written by independent journalists in newspapers like *El Pais*, based on material provided anonymously by the cluster. This cluster produced a major study on Russian influence in the Catalan referendum process which was circulated privately to key influencers in Spain, including the PM's office, and throughout Europe on the Integrity Initiative network.

### **Integrity France**

Initial contact in France in early 2016 with representatives of the Centre d'Analyses, Prevision et Strategie (CAPS) of the French Foreign Ministry who provided the opportunity for staff of the II to brief desk officers from the MOD/MFA and Services concerned with Russian malign influence on the French political system. On the recommendation of the II the MFA sponsored a programme at IFRI in Paris studying Russian influence. II has continued to feed material on this issue into the CAPS on an informal basis and the French MFA has invited participants from the II programme to attend some of its public and private events addressing Russian disinformation.

Separately a cluster has been established independent of government, on the basis of a newly created not-for-profit organisation, led by an individual who is a lecturer at the HEDN. She has a close network of people who are knowledgeable and interested in Russian influence in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in France. The cluster's main means of influence is through select journalists and academics producing articles and policy papers. A cluster member who is a professor at the Sorbonne has produced analyses of Russian influence in the French political system. A



secondary method of dissemination is through a network of discussion groups on International affairs operating in provincial

cities up to 200km from the capital. There is an academic link to the University of Lorraine where the cluster is promoting the study of Russian disinformation. The cluster leader is regularly invited to relevant workshops organised by the CAPS.

### **Integrity Germany**

This cluster is headed by a noted academic, recently retired from the SWP, with the collaboration of a think tank, the Zentrum Liberale Moderne, recently set up by a former parliamentarian in Berlin. The development of the cluster has been based upon the work of a public relations specialist from the UK, partly resident in Berlin. Early last year this individual produced a study of Russian influence in Germany in both English and German language. The German version was circulated in senior German political circles, including the Chancellor's office. The English version was circulated across the II wider network. This study is now being updated again, with two subtly different versions in preparation for national and international audiences. The cluster has also supported the production of works studying Germany's special vulnerability to Russian influence. The depth of this vulnerability and the intensity of Russia's efforts make Germany a very hard, as well as most important, target.

### **Integrity Italy**

The newly-formed Italian cluster is headed by an Italian professor who is also linked to the Italian Atlantic Committee. He and his colleagues have recently produced a study on Russian influence in and around the recent elections in Italy and are currently working on a study to explain the vulnerability of Italy to Russian influence. The main means of dissemination of information is through individuals in academic positions and through a series of Atlantic clubs – International affairs discussion groups in several cities across Italy. The sensitivities of the political situation in Italy, and the extent of Russian influence in political parties, means that the cluster must develop cautiously, feeling its way and seeking the best means of having a positive impact.

### **Integrity Greece**

Greece is an especially sensitive country in which to operate, given its current political and economic challenges. These, plus its recent history, make it too particularly vulnerable to Russian influence and disinformation efforts. Consequently, our Greek cluster is developing in a unique way. We have two totally separate expert groups co-ordinated from London. The Athens group is comprised of



journalists who operate very discreetly and whose main means of dissemination is articles and a website. They have produced a good study of the Russian influence in Greece through Oligarchical channels. A second group is based within the University of Thessaloniki, where the professor has established a media observatory tracking articles on Russian influence and measuring media and public attitudes to

Russia. Their first product was a study of the responses in Greece to the Skripal affair. Dissemination is through academic publication and courses. Other separate groups may be formed.

### **Integrity Netherlands**

We initially set up the cluster based in The Hague Centre for Security Studies, supported by the Dutch MOD and launched at a major conference in Summer 2017. Unfortunately, this initiative has come to nothing due to internal politics within the think tank, causing the expert cluster leader to find alternative employment in SHAPE. We are now in the process of establishing a new cluster, assisted by the former cluster leader and Institute for Statecraft Fellows resident in the Netherlands. It is currently coordinated from London.

### **Integrity Lithuania**

Lithuania has become particularly important in our network due to its expertise in dealing with Russian malign influence and disinformation. We currently have four centres of expertise in Lithuania. Since 2015 we have had a close link with the Lithuanian Armed Forces Stratcom team, currently drawing on their expertise, with the support of the Lithuanian Chief of Defence, to educate other national clusters on effective methodologies for tracking Russian activities. We initiated a link between this team and the UK 77 Bde, resulting in 77 Bde adopting the Lithuanian techniques. With the support of the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry, we have established a research group in the Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis which is producing studies of new aspects of Russian malign influence. We are sponsoring a network of “Elves”, set up to counter Russian Trolls and now developing its ability to help other clusters set up analogous organisations in their country. Also through the MFA and contacts in the National Library, we have developed a good working relationship with Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. This gives us access to the Andrei Sakharov Centre through which we can access Russian civil society, and to experts who are developing new tools for analysis of social media. These four centres of expertise will henceforth be coordinated by a long standing Fellow of the Institute based at the Lithuanian National Library.

### **Integrity Norway**



In Norway, with assistance from colleagues in the Norwegian Atlantic Committee, we are building a cluster in Oslo, headed by a former civil servant. This cluster has a link to an independent NGO working with civil society based in Tromsø and operating in the High North, as Russian influence in Norway has a different character in the North from that in the capital, and needs to be addressed accordingly.

### **Integrity Serbia and Integrity Montenegro**

We initially hoped to set up a Western Balkans cluster but soon realised that countries in the region, whilst keen to cooperate with each other, would not accept to do so if any one country was perceived to be in charge. Consequently, we will build clusters in each Balkan country as we can, linking them regionally as well as into the wider international network. In both Serbia and Montenegro we are working with the local chapters of the Atlantic Treaty Association. Cluster leaders are currently preparing a programme of proposed activities for our consideration and are writing an analysis of the background situation in their countries as regards Russian means and extent of influence and disinformation.

### **Estonia, Latvia, Portugal, Sweden.**

We are currently meeting with relevant experts in these countries to identify potential cluster members and leaders. In Latvia we are also in contact with the NATO CoE, and in Estonia with Tallinn Technical University, to this end. In Sweden we have identified an academic to head the cluster and are working with FOI to benefit from their experience and expertise on Russia for the benefit of the whole programme.

### **Belgium.**

Our main institutional partner since the inception of the programme in 2015 has been the Institute for European studies at the Free University of Brussels (VUB-IES). In addition to providing our crucial academic base, giving us increased authority and credibility through its rigorous research, teaching programme, conferences and high quality policy papers, the VUB-IES acts as the de facto Brussels cluster. Its work has established the study of disinformation and malign influence internationally as an accepted, legitimate subject of academic study. Through VUB-IES the Integrity Initiative is firmly linked into the EU East Stratcom Taskforce, the EU Disinfo Lab and the European Parliament. The VUB-IES also supports our programme's collaboration with HQ NATO, NATO's International Confederation Reserve Officers (CIOR), the Atlantic Treaty Association and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. These international organisations support the programme, especially by facilitating the distribution of material and providing access to influential individuals. The VUB-IES also provides a



valuable direct link for our programme with major national think tanks such as Egmont, Chatham House, Clingendael etc.

### **Armenia**

Following the popular, quiet “revolution” in Armenia, we are exploring how we might safely establish an Integrity Armenia. One of the Institute’s Associates who is of Armenian origin is acting as informal adviser to the new PM, MFA and NSA. He is investigating the possibilities, including a journalist friend as a likely cluster leader. The delicate political situation requires that this be done with the utmost caution.

### **Middle East/North Africa**

The aggressiveness of Russian policy in key ME/NA countries (including Syria) and its importance for Russian influence in Europe obliges us to include an understanding of this region in our programme. We have a small research team in Jordan, comprising a political analyst and an investigative journalist, who are well disposed towards the West and keen to track and expose Russian activity in the region. We also have a specialist (former FT North Africa correspondent) on N Africa, the Sahel and Maghreb to track Russian influence in these areas for its implications for Europe. The work of these individuals is throwing up very interesting and relevant information on Russian strategy in the MENA region, including towards Iran and the Gulf, which is also most relevant to Russia’s dealings with the US, UK and Europe. A recent exploratory visit to Israel has identified the need to take the Israeli attitude into account too. We are considering which Israeli think tanks and media sources we might be able to work with safely on this in the light of current Israeli politics.

### **Moldova**

Russian interference in Moldova makes this a very important country in which to establish a cluster, as well as creating extreme difficulties for a cluster to function safely. We have identified a cluster leader, an astute political analyst whom we know and trust. He has provided us with several insightful analyses of the deteriorating situation in the country and is currently working out how to set up a cluster in such a way as to avoid attracting the enmity of the ruling powers.

### **Malta**



Malta is one of the most important channels for Russian influence into Europe via corruption, organised crime and money laundering. Russian interests are often represented by Azerbaijani and other former USSR countries' interests. This, too is a seriously difficult country in which to work. We are working discreetly with the relatives of the recently murdered journalist and the owner of a local newspaper to explore if and how we can develop a cluster to track and expose Russian and associated influence in Malta.

### **Ukraine**

Ukraine, like Lithuania, is a significant contributor of content to our programme through its front-line experience and active institutions. Rather than establishing a local cluster, we are co-ordinating our activity with Ukraine from London, with frequent visits to the country. We work with Stopfake on identifying especially Russian faked visual information and on developing a programme to teach discernment to schoolchildren to help defend society against disinformation. Such a programme has wide applicability across Europe and we are also working on this project with the Free University of Brussels, the University of Chester, Tallinn Technical University, and the UK Information Assurance Advisory Council. We also work with the Research Centre of Modern Conflicts, a group of reserve officers who are expert in Russian hybrid warfare and the integration of infowar into kinetic operations. We have brought this group to UK twice; they have been invaluable in helping to educate British military audiences in understanding this form of warfare through Russian eyes. We are currently in discussion with the Democracy Studies Centre (partly funded by the German Foreign Office) as a potential vehicle for undertaking projects on our behalf to serve our wider programme.

### **Czech Republic**

As the Czech Republic is well served by the European Values think tank, we have not so far seen the need to establish a cluster there, but have found it more cost-effective to link with this organisation and support its activities. However, given the recent political trajectory of Czech politics, it may become necessary to review this decision in due course.

### **USA, Canada**

The Integrity Initiative has the opportunity to develop the programme into North America, based on the Institute's subsidiary, the Institute for Statecraft and Governance, which has a simple office in DC and is in the course of registering as a US 501 c 3 not-for-profit organisation.

Given that Washington is already well served by institutions such as ACUS, CEPA and the like, it has been established that, were we to pursue this option, there is a serious need for clusters in major cities across the US. Our preliminary investigations have demonstrated that this option is both desirable and eminently feasible.



In Canada, the aim would be to establish clusters both in Ottawa and in key Provincial capitals.

**Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Hungary, Cyprus, Austria, Switzerland, Turkey, Finland, Iceland, Denmark**

We are in the initial stages of establishing contacts in all these countries with a view to setting up national clusters in each of them.