



STUDY PROGRAMME

European Interdisciplinary Studies, Natolin campus (Advanced Academic Master)

YEAR

2023-2024

COURSE TITLE

Strategic Communication in a Digital Age

SEMESTER

1

COURSE PROFESSOR(S)

RUNGULIS Janis

ACADEMIC ASSISTANT(S)

SZATTERS Konrad

COURSE TYPE

Workshop

MAJOR(S)

Not applicable

ECTS CREDITS

no ECTS

TEACHING HOURS

8

INDIVIDUAL & GROUP STUDY TIME

TUTORIAL(S)

COEFFICIENT

not applicable

LANGUAGE(S)

EN

COURSE OBJECTIVE

The aim of the course is to enhance participants' knowledge of the European Union's strategic communication vis-à-vis its Eastern Neighbourhood as seen through the lens of the present-day digital communication environment.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

The course aims to develop a critical understanding of the concept and practice of strategic communication as well as explain how the EU and other international institutions have developed their work in this regard. The course will discuss the successes and challenges of proactive communication, countering foreign information manipulation campaigns, the practice of fact-checking, and making the most out of using social media for that purpose. To appreciate this complex field from multiple perspectives and topics, students will discover how the different EU Member States approach these issues.

RECOMMENDED PREPARATION

A list of suggested readings can be found below.

TEACHING METHOD(S)

Workshop-style teaching will combine academic study with current practice, enabling students to develop and apply skills whilst gaining a good understanding of the subject area, thereby enhancing their career potential in this field. Teaching materials include real-life examples such as communication campaigns run by the EU in its Eastern Neighbourhood or wider, an overview of tools and methods that the EU and EU Member States are using for countering foreign information manipulation campaigns, a digest of relevant fact-checking initiatives, and a list of useful references.

Groupwork includes the development of a communication campaign, a simulation of a hybrid attack, and a discussion on crisis communication. The classes use real-life feedback software to make exchanges more engaging, as well as discussions on analytical articles, topical videos, and relevant

studies. The teaching style is highly participatory and interactive providing practical tips illustrated with case studies. Students are expected to engage in short-term assignments.

ASSESSMENT METHOD AND CRITERIA

Not applicable.

COURSE CONTENTS

Over the past decade, strategic communication has started to establish itself within the European Union as a key element for successful policy-making and a pillar of effective security. Political leaders are highlighting the importance of addressing disinformation in their speeches; academia and think tanks produce an increasing number of studies; officials from stratcom departments meet and discuss strategic communication issues; experts dealing with disinformation provide regular analysis and practitioners are delivering targeted communication campaigns to convince populations of certain narratives. So, what is strategic communication within this context? A security policy, a communication practice or a research focus? Is it fighting disinformation, supporting independent media or communicating your own policies better? What does it take in practice to be successful in strategic communication? How can the EU respond better to the threat of disinformation? How do social media and online platforms help in this regard? What happens to communication in a crisis situation or in a war?

The course is to provide the students with understanding of strategic communication from a practitioner's real-life point of view:

- EU's approach to strategic communication vis-à-vis its Eastern Neighbourhood with a focus on digital communication.
- The threat of Kremlin's information manipulation campaigns as seen from inside the European Union institutions, including the lessons learned from COVID-19 and the significance of disinformation around Russia's war in Ukraine.
- Practical examples of EU's strategic communication in action in the Eastern Neighbourhood; what more can be done with new tools and more resources? How to use social media for your advantage?
- Different responses and strategic communication activities carried out by state actors and international organisations.

Groupwork 1: How to develop a communication strategy /campaign? How to ensure its success online?

Groupwork 2: How to respond to a hybrid attack? What are the key elements of crisis communication?

COURSE MATERIALS (readings and other learning resources/tools)

Texts in this section provide a general overview of the key concepts and developments in the field of strategic communication as well as on the EU's response to pro-Kremlin's disinformation campaigns.

- Strategic Communication, 2018 By Jesper Falkheimer, Mats Heide
- Elsa Hedling; Transforming practices of diplomacy: the European External Action Service and digital disinformation, International Affairs, May 2021.
- The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency; Countering Information Influence Activities: A Handbook for Communicators, 2018.
- Anneli Kimber-Lindwall and James Pamment; Fact-checking and debunking: a best practice guide to dealing with disinformation, NATO Stratcom, 2021
- By East Stratcom Task Force, at European External Action Service; EU's main campaign page against disinformation: EUvsDisinfo.eu

- EU's campaigning page in the Eastern Neighbourhood - EU NEIGHBOURS east project, funded by DG NEAR, European Commission
- Strategic Communications Hybrid Threats Toolkit, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2021. <https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/strategic-communications-hybrid-threats-toolkit/213>
- Guide for public communicators on pro-Kremlin disinformation, East Stratcom Task Force, European External Action Service, 2020. https://euvsdisinfo.eu/uploads/2020/04/EEAS_EUVSDISINFO-Handbook.pdf

Further readings:

- How Is the EU Tackling Disinformation and working on Strategic Communication?

Official EU documents, policy statements, and reports regarding the European Union's counter-disinformation activities and strategic communication, beginning with the March 2015 Council Conclusions that established the East Stratcom Task Force.

Action Plans against Disinformation

- EEAS and European Commission (2018)
- Code of Practice against Disinformation
- European Commission (2018)
- European External Action Service, page on countering disinformation around COVID-19
- EEAS (2021)
- European Commission: Tackling online disinformation
- European Commission (2021)
- March 2015 Council Conclusions
- European Council (2015)