Not Russian to do anything? The EU Response to Strategic Narratives and Disinformation in the Wake of the Russia-Ukraine Crisis

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Abstract

As soft power has become a catch-all term, so the academic theory has progressed to aid precision. This study applies Roselle et al.’s theory of strategic narratives to examine why the European Union (EU) has struggled to successfully combat Russian use of strategic narratives and disinformation in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine crisis. It is demonstrated that this policy-making failure is a consequence of three inter-connected factors. First, that the EU did not consider Russian use of strategic narratives a particularly significant problem; second, that due to both internal and external constraints the EU lacked sufficient capacity to produce an effective policy response; and third, that the EU did not prioritise tackling Russian strategic narratives, both in terms of its overall foreign policy priorities and more specifically, with regard to the Russia-Ukraine crisis. This study has important policy implications for how the EU can conduct public diplomacy going forward, both in the Eastern Neighbourhood and more broadly.