

The Western Balkans and EU-NATO cooperation: how to counter foreign interference and disinformation?



An online event co-organised by the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU and the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS).

09:00-12:15 CEST, 7 October 2021

CONCEPT

The Western Balkans region has experienced an intensification of foreign interference and disinformation over the past few years. Certain domestic, regional and international actors have sought to challenge the EU's and NATO's present and historical credibility in the region, sow disinformation about the Covid-19 pandemic and attempt to undermine elections and referenda in the region. In certain cases, foreign interference in elections has taken the form of propaganda campaigns, supported by foreign intelligence activities. Such tactics prey on historical and cultural perceptions and myths and relative fluidity with which information travels across borders in the Western Balkans.

The aim of this webinar is to assess how the EU and NATO can better cooperate with each other to counter foreign interference and disinformation campaigns in the Western Balkans. This meeting of experts from the EU, NATO and regional actors will outline and analyse the actors that are responsible for foreign interference and disinformation campaigns in the region. The webinar will also reflect on the tools and tactics used by these actors in the Western Balkans. In this respect, the webinar will engage with existing EU and NATO strategies but it will also focus on areas where EU-NATO cooperation can be enhanced. Accordingly, the discussions will be guided by the following questions:

- > In what ways is the Western Balkans a target of foreign interference and disinformation campaigns? What tactics and tools are used by actors to perpetrate these challenges in the region?
- > How can the EU and NATO support and work together with the region to prevent and counter foreign interference and disinformation campaigns? What new approaches can be developed?
- > How do regional actors view foreign interference and disinformation campaigns in the Western Balkans region? What more do they expect from the EU and NATO as partners?

PROGRAMME

09:00-09:05

Welcome remarks

Gustav LINDSTROM

Director, EU Institute for Security Studies

09:05-09:15

Keynote speech

Uroš LAMPRET

State Secretary, Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Slovenia

09:15-10:30

Session I – Foreign interference and disinformation: a regional perspective

Speakers

Amer KAPETANOVIĆ

Head of Political Department, Regional Cooperation Council

Katja GERŠAK

Executive Director, Centre for European Perspective

Lutz GUELLNER

Head of Division, Strategic Communications, European External Action Service

Moderator

Daniel FIOTT

Security and Defence Editor, EU Institute for Security Studies

10:30-10:45

Break

10:45-12:00

Session II – Tools and tactics: what EU-NATO response?

Speakers

Vladimír BILČÍK

Representative from the European Parliament, Member of the Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the European Union, including Disinformation

Sanda SVETOKA

Senior Expert, NATO Strategic Communication Centre of Excellence

Rasmus HINDRÉN

Head of International Relations, European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats

Moderator

Daniel FIOTT

Security and Defence Editor, EU Institute for Security Studies

12:00-12:15

Closing remarks

Uroš ZORKO

Defence Policy Director, Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Slovenia