



Report



**EU-PACIFIC TALKS:  
THE WEAPONISATION OF  
INFORMATION:  
THE FUTURE OF RISK IN  
THE DIGITAL ERA?**

---

Petra Pospíšilová

October 2023

## About EUROPEUM

EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy is a non-profit, non-partisan, and independent think-tank focusing on European integration and cohesion. EUROPEUM contributes to democracy, security, stability, freedom, and solidarity across Europe as well as to active engagement of the Czech Republic in the European Union. EUROPEUM undertakes original research, organizes public events and educational activities, and formulates new ideas and recommendations to improve European and Czech policy making.



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**



## Report

In an age where information flows freely across digital channels, the weaponisation of information has emerged as a powerful force with the potential to manipulate public opinion and challenge the very foundations of democratic systems. In our latest discussion in the **EU-Pacific Talks**, we delved into the future of digital risk and the weaponisation of information. The debate examined the roles that the two regions, Europe and the Indo-Pacific, play in confronting the complexities of disinformation and cybersecurity threats. Certain countries' experiences were in the spotlight to provide valuable insights into their proactive approaches to countering disinformation and their focus on cybersecurity.

## Complexity of Disinformation

**Linda Monsees**, a Senior Researcher at the Institute of International Relations Prague, touched upon the complex landscape of disinformation. She emphasised the significance of considering the larger ecosystem in which it operates. She underscored that disinformation is never isolated but operates within specific contexts and is often connected to ongoing political tensions and societal divisions. The ecosystem is critical to understanding the true nature and impact of disinformation. This is linked to the need to distinguish between disinformation driven by profit-seeking and specific foreign interventions with geopolitical motives. Understanding the underlying motives of disinformation is essential to developing effective countermeasures. By understanding the motives behind disinformation and maintaining a nuanced view of the threat, we can create more effective strategies and protect the integrity of public discourse.

During the discussion, Ms. Monsees also highlighted that many disinformation tactics are not entirely new but evolved from older forms of propaganda. This indicates that disinformation campaigns often start with traditional, analogue

means and move into the digital realm. The democratic structures and principles must continuously defend themselves against anti-democratic forces. Using Taiwan as an example, there is a palpable fear related to disinformation, with a focus on preserving democracy, especially regarding the upcoming elections in 2024. This brings us to the point that a critical aspect of effectively combating disinformation and its impact on society is emphasising shared values and preserving democracy.

## Europe's Digital Dilemma

In discussing the necessity of distinguishing disinformation, **Markéta Gregorová**, a member of the European Parliament, Pirates, Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, addressed the crucial need to distinguish between various disinformation campaigns originating from different countries. Ms. Gregorová placed a significant focus on China's distinct and highly sophisticated strategies. These strategies involve a range of tactics, such as spreading its influence in research institutes and universities to gain knowledge, sometimes through illicit means. China's approaches also include the establishment of embassies for intimidating political opposition and, surprisingly, the establishment of Chinese police stations within European countries. Furthermore, China employs commercial propaganda as a means to set public opinion. Chinese disinformation campaigns primarily serve the interests of the Chinese Communist Party and, therefore, exercise more extensive influence over the message it wants to communicate, even to international audiences.

In the debate, one of the key topics that came to the forefront was the lack of regulation in the digital space. Ms Gregorová raised an essential concern about the "lack of substantial political discussion" on this matter. Her insights shed light on the pressing need for comprehensive regulation and more in-depth political deliberation to effectively address the challenges associated with disinformation

and cybersecurity. As for the European Union's role in this issue, it has taken steps to regulate which entities can engage in commercial activities within its borders, particularly concerning critical infrastructure. This intensified scrutiny began with discussions regarding 5G technology and has since extended to concerns about platforms like TikTok. Nonetheless, a crucial and frequently overlooked aspect of the conversation is the inability of particular member states to be proactive. Many member states have not established clear definitions of disinformation and practical measures for addressing it. Instead, they rely on the European Union to take the lead in this regard.

## Japan's Shifting Strategies

**Kyoko Kuwahara**, a Research Fellow at the Japan Institute of International Affairs, provided valuable insights into Japan's evolving approach to countering disinformation. Ms. Kuwahara acknowledged that Japan needed to catch up in developing specific countermeasures to combat disinformation. One reason was the relatively low threat perception of disinformation, primarily due to Japan's linguistic isolation and language barriers. However, the changing geopolitical landscape has prompted Japan to rethink its stance. Even though Japan is not currently facing a significant security threat related to disinformation, the discussion highlighted various potential areas where disinformation could grow into a substantial problem. These areas include the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of artificial intelligence, concerns over Russian aggression, and the contingency surrounding Taiwan. In response, Japan has begun ramping up its efforts to combat disinformation, recognising the importance of effective communication and public information management. Ms. Kuwahara emphasised that the security environment in the Indo-Pacific is currently the most severe and complex since the Second World War. Recognising these challenges, the Japanese government launched its new National Security Strategy approximately a year ago. This strategy places an increased focus on Japan's ability to address foreign

disinformation campaigns and deepen security cooperation with like-minded countries. This cooperation extends to various levels, including intellectual exchange, joint research, and collaboration on combating disinformation.

## Conclusion

A central theme throughout the discussion was the belief that addressing disinformation should be a whole society effort involving the government, social society, and the private sector. Comparatively, Taiwan was highlighted as a prime example of a nation with a more advanced whole-society approach to countering disinformation. According to Ms. Kuwahara, it includes activities such as information monitoring, fact-checking services, and international cooperation through think tanks. The speakers also stressed the importance of media literacy education in equipping the public with the skills to assess information critically. During the discussion, Ms. Monsees noted that individuals sharing disinformation often display a high degree of skepticism and a lack of trust in various entities, including the state and private companies. Therefore, the approach to addressing disinformation should not only focus on critical thinking but also on promoting shared values and the significance of democracy.