



THE BEACON PROJECT

Vladimir Putin's Kremlin has waged an aggressive campaign of interference across Europe in an attempt to weaken European democracy and political commitment to core transatlantic institutions such as NATO and the EU. Russian meddling ranges from cyberwarfare to sophisticated disinformation campaigns that use unverified, decontextualized and manipulated information to exacerbate societal divisions and enhance support for positions that serve Moscow's strategic needs.

The International Republican Institute (IRI) created the Beacon Project to counter and inoculate against this threat in Europe. Beacon leverages IRI's extensive network of relationships developed over 35 years of the Institute's democracy assistance work in Europe. Beacon is distinct in treating disinformation primarily as a political problem rather than a technical challenge. Accordingly, Beacon focuses on identifying the political, social and economic dynamics that create the environment for disinformation to thrive in Central and Eastern Europe and helping stakeholders to craft effective responses.

The Beacon approach rests on three pillars:

Expose false, manipulative, and corrosive narratives promoted by the Kremlin.

Identify social vulnerabilities among groups receptive to disinformation.

Facilitate a coordinated response by the transatlantic community, European governments and civil society that counters hostile foreign meddling.

In order to counter this threat, IRI seeks to dismantle the underlying conditions that allow disinformation to thrive. In the end, strengthening the institutions of democracy is the most efficient and effective way of addressing the disinformation phenomenon.

Our approach is carried out through the following program components:

Activating Local Partners:

The Beacon Project has built a network of more than 300 active members from 27 countries to address the issue of foreign meddling in European democracy. Our wide-ranging Beacon Network includes individuals from political parties, national parliaments, the European Parliament, governments, tech, civil society and media.

Public Opinion Research:

The Beacon Project has conducted extensive quantitative and qualitative public opinion research focusing on vulnerabilities to disinformation narratives in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Germany. IRI uses this data to show policymakers how hostile actors hijack legitimate citizen concerns through targeted messaging campaigns. Future public opinion research will focus on the Baltic states and the Western Balkans.

Media Monitoring:

Beacon's proprietary >versus< media monitoring tool exposes how disinformation flows through media platforms by empowering monitors to easily collect and analyze data showing the origins of disinformation. >versus< is used by Beacon's in-country partners who have media monitoring activities in place or are interested in building such capacity. Combined with IRI's public opinion research, >versus< provides unique insights into political weaknesses that leave countries vulnerable to meddling by malign actors.

For more information about the Beacon Project, please visit www.iri.org or contact atarascio@iri.org.



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