



FROM PROBLEMATIC CONTENT TO MANIPULATIVE BEHAVIOUR

November 19, 2025

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KEY EVENTS

On November 19, 2025, Siim Kumpas presented, *Shifting the Perception: From Problematic Content to Manipulative Behaviour*, at the 2025 West Coast Security Conference, followed by a question-and-answer period with audience members and CASIS Vancouver executives. The session examined the evolving nature of Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI), the structural architecture underpinning such operations, and the European Union's policy and operational responses led by the European External Action Service (EEAS).

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Counter-FIMI strategies must shift from a narrow focus on problematic content toward a broader understanding and addressing of manipulative behaviour. FIMI operations represent coordinated, intentional, manipulative activity designed to distort information ecosystems and undermine democratic processes. Addressing these threats requires behavioural analysis, structural mapping of FIMI networks and ecosystems at large, and a multidimensional policy response. FIMI tactics, techniques and procedures are rapidly evolving and increasingly complex, necessitating more sophisticated analytical and response frameworks.

BACKGROUND

Mr. Kumpas stated that the European External Action Service (EEAS) conceptualises FIMI through an analytical structure known as the ABCDE framework. This methodology first examines the Actors (A) involved, establishing attribution context and identifying state or proxy participation. It then assesses Behaviour (B), including planning, preparations, execution, and

assessment strategies deployed by adversaries. The third component analyses Content (C)—the narratives, themes, and disinformation strands promoted. Finally, the framework evaluates the Degree (D) and Effect (E) of operations, measuring scale, reach, and societal impact. These components allow analysts to move beyond isolated narratives toward systemic understanding of FIMI.

Mr. Kumpas presented a four-block architecture model illustrating the layered structure of FIMI operations. At the overt level are official state communication channels and government-controlled media outlets. A second layer includes state-controlled but ostensibly independent outlets. A third layer consists of covert state-linked channels, such as networks operating under informal affiliations. A fourth layer involves covert state-aligned actors whose content is amplified by state-controlled platforms without clear formal ties. This architecture demonstrates how overt and covert mechanisms blend, creating ambiguity and complicating attribution.

Mr. Kumpas described how the European Union employs a comprehensive toolbox to counter FIMI; situational awareness, resilience-building, regulatory disruption, and diplomatic action. Measures include interoperable monitoring and analysis mechanism, threat level awareness raising, political attribution, restrictive measures, private-sector engagement, and supporting independent journalists and relevant civil society actors. He stressed that regulatory initiatives such as the European Media Freedom Act seek to safeguard media pluralism and transparency.

Mr. Kumpas pointed to EUvsDisinfo, the world's biggest publicly accessible database documenting Russian disinformation and FIMI campaigns, as the EEAS flagship initiative. The EU has also launched the European Democracy Shield, consolidating efforts under three pillars: integrity of the information space, protection of free and fair elections, and strengthening independent media. These initiatives aim to enhance overall democratic resilience.

Question and Answer

Are our strategies countering disinformation reducing the cadence or volume of disinformation? To what extent do you feel disinformation has been countered and where strategies could improve further?

Mr. Kumpas suggested that elimination of disinformation is unrealistic. The proliferation of AI-enabled content production has dramatically increased the speed and scale of manipulation while lowering its cost. Rather than attempting to eradicate disinformation, policymakers should prioritise long-term resilience and making it as difficult and costly as possible for the adversaries to use FIMI.

He emphasised that information literacy must become a foundational societal skill, on par with reading, writing, and mathematics. Empowering individuals to recognize manipulative techniques and behavioural patterns is more sustainable than reactive takedown strategies. In his assessment, the objective is not content suppression but societal inoculation against manipulation.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- Countering FIMI requires shifting focus from isolated content to coordinated manipulative behaviour and systemic influence architecture.
- The EEAS applies the ABCDE framework to analyze actors, behaviours, content, and operational effects.
- FIMI operations operate across overt and covert layers, blending official state channels with deniable proxy networks.
- The European Union employs a multidimensional response combining diplomatic action, regulation, monitoring, sanctions, and resilience-building initiatives such as EUvsDisinfo and the European Democracy Shield.
- Information literacy and societal resilience are more sustainable countermeasures than attempts to eliminate disinformation entirely.

FURTHER READING

Willoughby, I. (Interviewer), & Kumpas, S. (Interviewee). (2024). An Interview with Siim Kumpas. Havel Channel, *@knihovnavaclavahavla1*. YouTube. 12th International Conference in Honour of the Laureate 2024 Václav Havel Human Rights Prize.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jy91MrWUTO0>



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