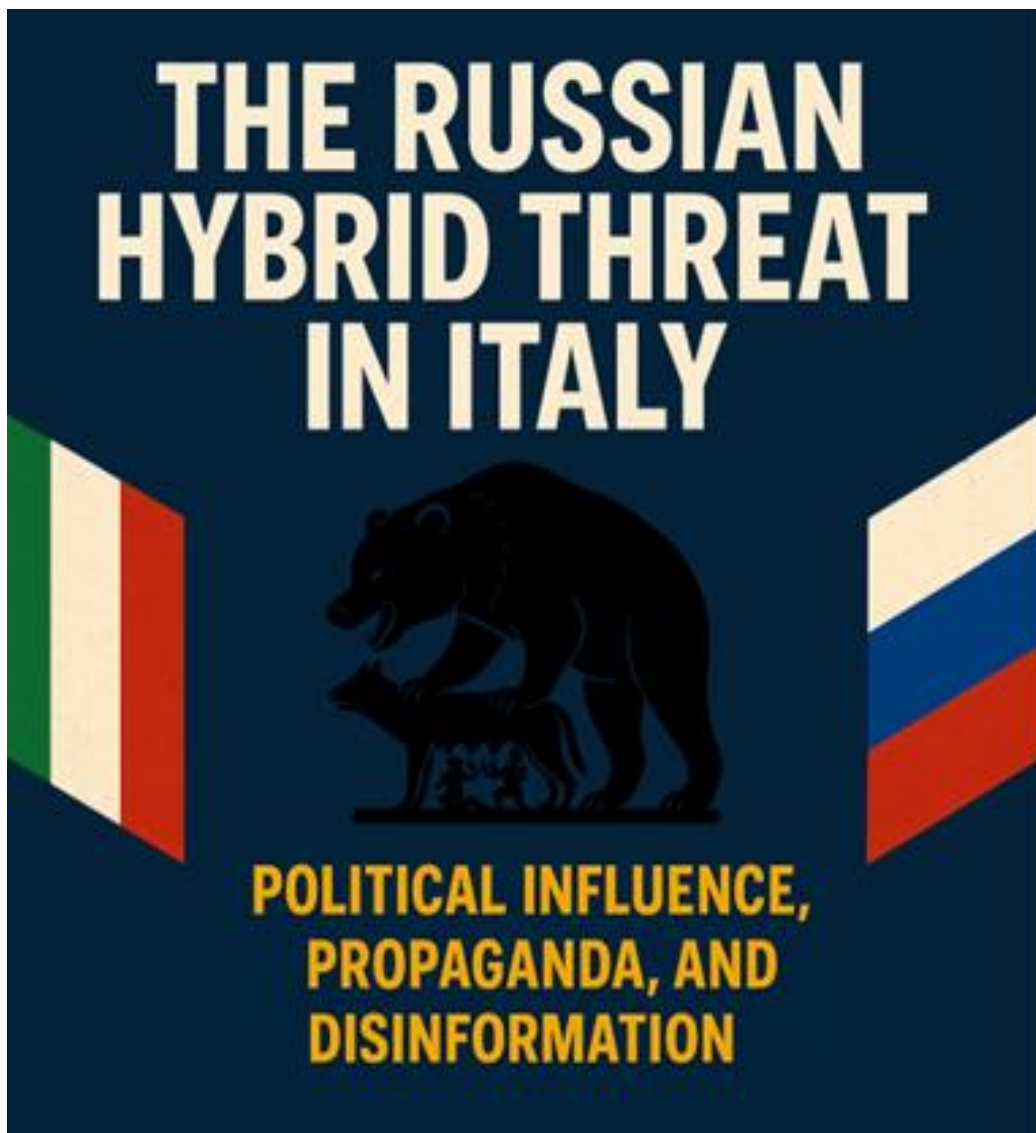CCIPR Papers 01/2025

The Russian Hybrid Threat in Italy:

Political Influence, Propaganda and Disinformation

Joseph Di Vincenti

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Abstract

In recent years, Italy has emerged as one of the European Union's most exposed fronts to Russian influence operations. Following the large-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Italian intelligence reports have identified the Russian Federation as the main actor behind the so-called hybrid threat, carried out through political, economic, informational, diplomatic, and cyber instruments. This study examines the Russian hybrid threat in Italy, structured around three main lines of action: political influence, propaganda, and digital operations. The analysis reconstructs the strategic framework and objectives of these operations, and examines the main channels and tactics employed. The aim is to provide an integrated overview to better understand how the Russian hybrid threat operates in a specific national context, and which tools can strengthen democratic resilience and collective security.

Author

Joseph Di Vincenti: through his academic and professional journey, he has developed a multidisciplinary background that brings together politics, communication, and data analysis. He has taught in high schools and collaborated with universities, foundations, and NGOs. His research focuses on digital propaganda, online disinformation, and their impact on democratic societies. He can be reached via LinkedIn or by email at josephdv97@gmail.com

Keywords

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Italy as the EU's Vulnerable Front

In recent years Italy has often been described as the vulnerable front of the European Union in the face of Russian influence campaigns, due to a combination of historical political and economic ties with Moscow and widespread public goodwill toward the Kremlin.

After the large scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Italian intelligence reports to Parliament began explicitly identifying Russia as the main actor behind attacks linked to the so called hybrid threat. This refers to threats carried out by state actors through a combination of coordinated and synergistic activities in various domains, including diplomatic, military, economic, informational and intelligence fields (SISR, 2023, 2024, 2025). In recent years, sections dedicated to this topic, once marginal, have become the focus of official documents.

In Russian strategy, information is regarded as a fully fledged battleground, on par with the military, economic or diplomatic spheres. This means using news, images and narratives that are true, distorted or outright false to shape perceptions, influence decisions and guide behavior. This is why the term information warfare is used: it is an approach that does not require tanks or missiles but can produce equally significant strategic effects, especially in politically fragile or culturally permeable contexts (NATO, 2020).

The European External Action Service (EEAS) has also noted how Moscow has intensified its Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) operations, which are coordinated and coercive actions aimed at undermining trust in EU governments, fueling internal polarization and reducing support for Kyiv and NATO (EEAS, 2023). An analysis conducted by Logically (2025), a company specializing in digital threat intelligence, identified Italy as a focal point of the Russian influence network in Western Europe.

The Kremlin's hybrid and influence operations in Italy pursue a set of strategic objectives that intertwine geopolitical and economic dimensions.

The first objective is to undermine European and transatlantic cohesion. Italian intelligence reports highlight that one of the main aims of the Russian hybrid threat is to undermine European cohesion and citizens' trust in EU and NATO institutions (SISR, 2023). International

observers often perceive Italy as a relatively easy target for Kremlin disinformation and as a potential Trojan horse in Europe, partly due to its historical ties with Moscow (Roberts, 2022).

Second, it is to influence Italian politics, both domestic and foreign. In recent years Rome has adopted a firm stance in support of Ukraine and has begun reducing its energy dependence on Russia. It has also strengthened its international presence, particularly in Africa, through initiatives such as the Mattei Plan, which aims for fair and sustainable partnerships. This vision clashes with the Russian approach, which is based on supporting unstable regimes and using militias to gain influence. In this context Moscow sees Italy as a direct rival in the competition for Africa (Rossi, 2025).

Last, it concerns the economic dimension. Before 2022, forty percent of Italian gas came from Russia, along with oil and coal. The European sanctions following the invasion severely hit the national economy, hurting key sectors such as exports and manufacturing and driving up energy prices. This economic pressure fuels domestic discontent and provides fertile ground for Kremlin narratives claiming that sanctions harm Europe more than Moscow (Financial Times, 2023).

These objectives are pursued through three main operational lines. The first is political influence, exercised through relationships with parties and leaders as well as soft power initiatives that strengthen the Russian presence in national debates. The second is propaganda, which combines the insertion of pro Kremlin narratives into Italian media with the dissemination of content produced directly by the Russian regime. The third consists of cyber operations and online disinformation campaigns, tools capable of quickly reaching public opinion and destabilizing the country's information environment.

Russian Political Influence in Italy

Russian political influence in Italy goes beyond propaganda and disinformation. It includes attempts to penetrate political institutions, exploit existing social and political divisions, and cultivate relationships with key actors to achieve strategic goals. Compared to other Euro-Atlantic countries, Italy has historically been more receptive to pro-Kremlin narratives.

During the Cold War, despite being on opposite sides of the military divide, Italy and the USSR maintained strong economic and political ties. The Italian Communist Party (PCI) held enormous cultural and political influence, becoming the largest communist party in the Western

world. It promoted anti-American and anti-capitalist ideas that remained deeply rooted in Italian society for decades. With Vladimir Putin's rise to power in 1999, Russia found support in the Italian ideological current known as "rossobrunismo", a synthesis of fascism and social-communism marked by extreme nationalism. Over time, this current gained relevance, fueled by the populist and sovereigntist wave, and penetrated mainstream political and media debates (Di Pasquale & Kashche, 2025).

This historical and ideological openness to Moscow was further reinforced during the governments of Silvio Berlusconi, who played a central role in consolidating Italy–Russia relations. Across his three non-consecutive terms as prime minister, Berlusconi maintained an open dialogue with Moscow and portrayed himself as a bridge between the West and Russia. His personal relationship with Vladimir Putin went beyond official diplomacy, including private vacations, a long-standing friendship, and shared positions on major international issues (Speranza, 2018). Berlusconi consistently advocated for Russia's integration into Western structures, supporting its inclusion in the G8 and closer alignment with NATO and the European order (Carrer et al., 2023). Leveraging his ownership of the Mediaset media empire, he influenced Italian public perceptions of Russia, with editorial lines in several outlets often echoing those of Russian state media such as Sputnik and RT (Speranza, 2018).

Italy's political environment remained fertile ground for narratives favorable to Moscow, with parties across the spectrum adopting positions that aligned with Russian strategic interests. The Five Star Movement (M5S) has been one of the main political forces through which pro-Russian positions were expressed. Known for its direct democracy approach and innovative use of technology to mobilize political support, it was funded by Casaleggio Associati, a technology firm that managed platforms later used to spread disinformation and Russian propaganda (Nabozhniak et al., 2023). Founder Beppe Grillo actively shared Russian propaganda on his blog and promoted political missions to Russia (Nabozhniak et al., 2023). Most notably, Giuseppe Conte, former prime minister and current M5S leader, has maintained a Eurosceptical and occasionally pro-Russian stance on foreign policy, advocating stronger ties with Moscow and amplifying some Russian narratives (Nabozhniak et al., 2023).

In 2019, Russia attempted to finance the far-right League party through a fuel trade deal that would have diverted part of the proceeds to support the party ahead of the European elections. Although the agreement never materialized, the so-called Metropol case raised serious concerns about the risk of direct Russian capital interference in Italian politics. Matteo Salvini,

leader of the League, has consistently advocated lifting sanctions and strengthening ties with Moscow, repeatedly expressing admiration for Vladimir Putin and, on some occasions, even declaring a preference for the Russian president over Italy's head of state Sergio Mattarella, the European Union, and NATO. In 2015, he appeared at the European Parliament wearing a T-shirt bearing Putin's image (Linkiesta, 2022). While he has never condemned the annexation of Crimea, after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 he adjusted his public stance, calling Putin a "war criminal" yet continuing to oppose sending arms to Kyiv (La7 Attualità, 2024).

Following the 2022 elections, Giorgia Meloni became Prime Minister at the head of a coalition with the League and Forza Italia. Although she had previously expressed sympathy for Moscow and support for the Sputnik vaccine, Meloni has adopted a pro-Ukraine stance, meeting with President Zelensky and visiting Kyiv in 2023. However, her governing allies have maintained a more cautious approach, particularly regarding sanctions and military aid, with roughly one-third of Parliament occupied by parties considered close to Moscow, while even the Democratic Party remains divided over military support for Ukraine (Carrer et al., 2023).

Beyond direct political influence operations, Russia has employed soft power tools in Italy, combining cultural, symbolic, and seemingly benign cooperation initiatives to strengthen its image and sway.

One early example is the "From Russia with Love" operation in March 2020, during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moscow sent military medical brigades, ventilators, masks, and disinfection equipment, accompanying the convoy with a strong media and symbolic component, including the display of Russian and Italian flags. While presented as a humanitarian gesture, several NATO and Italian military officials raised concerns that the operation could serve propaganda purposes or be used to collect sensitive information (Giuffrida & Roth, 2020; Reuters, 2020).

Russian soft power has also manifested in the cultural sphere. In June 2021, a four-year agreement was signed between the Umbria Region, the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, the city of Perugia, the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Perugia, and the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg. The deal included exhibitions, internships, and workshops aimed at promoting Umbrian heritage and Renaissance art, but in a context of growing international

scrutiny over Moscow's cultural strategies, such initiatives were also seen as potential long-term influence tools (Imam, 2020).

More recently, in July 2025, conductor Valery Gergiev's planned concert at the Royal Palace of Caserta, part of the "Un'Estate da Re" festival, was cancelled following public protests. Gergiev, a well-known supporter of Vladimir Putin, had been the subject of a petition signed by over 16,000 citizens and an open letter endorsed by 700 intellectuals. Italy's Culture Minister justified the decision by stating that "art is free, propaganda is not," signalling the perception of political instrumentalisation risks even in musical events (Giuffrida, 2025; Reuters, 2025).

These episodes demonstrate that Moscow's influence in Italy is exercised through a blend of political ties, cultural diplomacy and targeted gestures designed to project a favourable image of Russia. Political connections and soft power initiatives do not operate in isolation but interact with and reinforce another decisive component of Moscow's strategy, namely the dissemination of strategic narratives and propaganda, which works in parallel to shape public perceptions and influence the national debate.

Channels and Strategies of Russian Propaganda in Italy

The historical and political ties examined in the previous chapter have made Italy particularly vulnerable to Russian propaganda. This vulnerability is reinforced by a deep-seated mistrust, and in some cases outright hostility, towards NATO, the United States, and the European Union, which characterises large segments of Italian society. Adding to this is a limited culture of national security and a poor understanding of Russia's domestic and foreign policy, even within the political sphere (Di Pasquale & Kashche, 2025).

Italy is currently among the Western countries most exposed to the Kremlin's strategic narratives. Even after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which Rome officially condemned, pro-Russian narratives, often disseminated by prominent commentators and public figures, continue to exert a significant influence on political, media, and cultural debates (Crippa, 2022). A study of major school textbooks found that they contained narratives closely aligned with those promoted by Russian propaganda to legitimize the war of aggression against Ukraine (Di Pasquale & Kashche, 2025). These include portraying Kyivan Rus as the origin of the "Russian nation"; depicting Ukraine as a failed state; framing the annexation of Crimea as

a legitimate "reunification" following a referendum; presenting NATO encirclement as the cause of the Kremlin's current policies; describing a "Russian region" that encompasses Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and the Baltic states; and equating Eastern European culture with Russian culture.

The Guardian has described the penetration of Russian narratives into Italian media as "a success for Kremlin propaganda." Compared to other Western European countries, Russian propaganda has enjoyed disproportionate exposure in Italy, aided by the format of political infotainment talk shows. Originally introduced on Silvio Berlusconi's Mediaset channels and later adopted by RAI, this format is designed to encourage heated discussions and maximise audience share (Tondo, 2023). Among the most influential Italian figures in spreading or amplifying pro-Kremlin narratives are Marc Innaro, RAI correspondent and frequent guest on current affairs programmes; Alessandro Orsini, a LUISS academic whose television appearances during the invasion echoed Kremlin claims about NATO expansion; and Vittorio Nicola Rangeloni, reporter and foreign fighter in the Donbas, who manages the longest-running Italian-language YouTube channel dedicated to the conflict (Nabozhniak et al., 2023).

Pro-Russian voices in Italy are not limited to domestic figures. National media have repeatedly hosted official representatives of the Russian government such as Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and spokesperson Maria Zakharova, ultranationalist ideologue Aleksandr Dugin, state media journalists such as Olga Belova (Russia 24), and hostile propagandists such as Yulia Vityazeva (NewsFront), known for inflammatory remarks during the Eurovision Song Contest (Tondo, 2023). This media environment has shaped public opinion: an IPSOS poll (2023) found that nearly half of Italians prefer not to take sides in the conflict, while ECFR data show that Italy has the lowest level of trust in President Zelensky among EU member states, with 27 percent of the population attributing responsibility for the war to Ukraine or the United States (Krastev & Leonard, 2022).

Beyond influencing Italian media debates through commentators and public figures, the Kremlin actively disseminates state-produced propaganda despite the European Union ban on RT and Sputnik in 2022. To do so, it employs an elaborate network of proxy channels, which according to the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD, 2025) increasingly integrate offline and online vectors into a single coordinated strategy. Proxy networks refer to websites, channels, or entities that act as intermediaries or alternatives, allowing propaganda content to bypass official restrictions and continue circulating.

Offline, the Kremlin relies on a network of cultural associations, especially in areas with strong traditional support for the League party (Kazmin & Ricozzi, 2024). While formally independent, these associations organise events such as photo exhibitions and screenings of documentaries produced by Russian state media. The choice of dates and locations sometimes coincides with sensitive occasions such as Holocaust Remembrance Day, in an apparent attempt to provoke controversy and maximise visibility, exploiting the backlash to reinforce narratives about "censorship" (Savoia & Ntousas, 2024). In some cases, screenings are held privately, with registration via WhatsApp and addresses disclosed only at the last moment (ISD, 2025). For example, the group Donbass Italia claims to have organised more than 70 screenings of RT documentaries across Italy. The Cultural Association Russia Emilia-Romagna has held photographic exhibitions praising the "reconstruction" of occupied territories (Savoia & Ntousas, 2024). Other groups, such as Veneto-Russia and Verona per la libertà, have promoted billboard campaigns with pro-Kremlin messages. Some associations have gone further, such as Vento dell'Est, which arranged a cultural exchange between an Italian school and an institution in the Donbas (Kazmin & Ricozzi, 2024).

Online, the Kremlin's strategy is built on an interconnected ecosystem in which public social media platforms, encrypted messaging services, and proxy websites work in synergy to circulate and sustain its narratives. Social media, especially X (formerly Twitter), often serve as the first point of contact. Here, pro-Kremlin content circulates widely, reaching a large and diverse audience. According to the ISP (2025), in just two months, Kremlin-produced or Kremlin-amplified content on X reached approximately 1.84 million Italian users, with high levels of engagement. This flow of information can funnel the most receptive users into less visible and less moderated spaces.

Telegram occupies a central role in this second stage, hosting the most entrenched pro-Russian propaganda community in Italy. The platform is used not only to share unmoderated pro-Kremlin content but also by cultural associations to coordinate attendance at events and screenings. An analysis by Logically Intelligence (2025) shows that the Italian pro-Kremlin Telegram ecosystem comprises thousands of chats and channels, characterized by minimal moderation and a high circulation of toxic and polarizing content. Within these spaces, ideologically disparate communities—from the far right to the radical left—coexist, united by their adherence to pro-Russian geopolitical narratives.

In parallel, the Kremlin relies on a network of proxy websites designed to circumvent the EU ban on RT and Sputnik and to continue distributing state propaganda. This infrastructure, known as the Pravda Network, consists of over 150 domains, many registered in occupied Crimea. In 2024 alone, it published millions of articles (Tokariuk, 2025), serving both as an archive and as an amplifier for Russian state media content. A significant portion of this output is not intended for human readers but is designed to feed artificial intelligence algorithms in a process known as "LLM grooming," aimed at influencing language models (Tokariuk, 2025).

This interconnected network represents not only the main vehicle for pro-Kremlin propaganda in Italy but also the infrastructure through which coordinated disinformation campaigns and hostile digital activities can be conducted.

Cyber and Disinformation Threats

Russian hybrid operations against Italy have increasingly targeted the digital domain, combining cyberattacks on strategic assets with coordinated disinformation efforts. These actions aim to erode public trust in institutions, disrupt essential services, and manipulate political discourse.

Cyberattacks against Italian infrastructure have become more frequent in recent years. In late 2024, the pro-Russian hacking group Noname057(16) launched a wave of distributed denial-of-service attacks that disrupted the websites of major banks such as Intesa Sanpaolo, Banca Monte dei Paschi, and Iccrea Banca, as well as Milan's Linate and Malpensa airports (Reuters, 2025). Earlier, in 2022, pro-Russian hackers targeted the Italian Senate, the National Health Institute, and other government agencies, temporarily taking their websites offline (Reuters, 2022). That same year, Italian police foiled attempts to disrupt the Eurovision Song Contest in Turin after intercepting communications among hackers (Reuters, 2022).

Beyond direct infrastructure attacks, Russia has invested heavily in online disinformation operations. These campaigns are often organised through "troll farms," where individuals are hired to operate fake accounts and spread false or misleading content to infiltrate online communities, alter public debate, and promote propaganda. During the war in Ukraine, Russian trolls used these tactics to justify Moscow's military intervention, targeting both domestic and international audiences (Zannettou et al., 2018).

The spread of Russian disinformation in Italy predates the war in Ukraine. A study analysed Twitter activity in the five months leading up to the 2019 European elections, collecting a large dataset of tweets linking to thousands of articles from disinformation websites, many tied to Russian outlets such as RT and Sputniknews. The most common topics focused on divisive issues such as immigration, national security, and nationalism. The study found that Russian-linked disinformation formed part of an international network that shared and repurposed content, suggesting coordinated dissemination tactics. While the impact on the broader electoral debate was limited, this content circulated intensely within a small but tightly interconnected community aligned with Italy's conservative and far-right political spheres. (Pierri et al., 2019)

Automated accounts amplify the reach and persistence of such operations, making them more effective and harder to counter. Research into the role of Twitter bots during the 2022 Italian general elections examined thousands of tweets and comments linked to Italy's main political parties and found that approximately 12 percent of participating accounts were bots. These automated profiles amplified pro-Kremlin narratives, distorted the framing of war-related topics, and engaged with real users in ways that influenced perceptions, particularly in the month before the elections (De Faveri et al., 2023).

EU DisinfoLab and Qurium identified one of the most sophisticated Russian disinformation campaigns to date, known as Operation Doppelgänger. Since at least May 2022, this network has cloned the websites of legitimate media outlets, including ANSA, The Guardian, Bild, and 20 Minutes, to publish fabricated articles, videos, and polls. The operation used spoofed domains, geo-blocking, smart redirects, and coordinated amplification across platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to spread Kremlin-aligned narratives. Technical evidence linked the campaign to infrastructure based in Russia. Although the operation was highly sophisticated from a technical standpoint, its actual impact on public opinion was limited (Alaphilippe et al., 2022).

Another large-scale operation was Operation Overload, a disinformation campaign active since at least August 2023 that targeted more than 800 organizations and sent over 71,000 emails in nine months. Its objective was to exhaust the resources of fact-checkers, newsrooms, and researchers by exploiting credible information channels to push Kremlin-aligned narratives. The campaign relied on a coordinated strategy of anonymous emails sent directly to journalists and fact-checkers, containing links to false content and anti-Ukrainian stories hosted on sites

within the Pravda Network. In parallel, Overload used networks of bot accounts on X (formerly Twitter) and Telegram channels to amplify the content, displaying clear signs of coordinated behaviour. A distinctive feature of the campaign was the use of "content amalgamation," the combination of articles, images, and videos into multi-layered narratives that were distributed across multiple platforms to create a sense of urgency and pressure journalists into covering the story. To increase credibility, Overload also impersonated real media outlets and individuals, tying false news to genuine events in order to enhance public trust (Kuster & Alaphilippe, 2024).

Operation Undercut, conducted by Russia's Social Design Agency (SDA), is an ongoing covert influence campaign active since at least late 2023. One of its core tactics is the creation and distribution of AI-generated multimedia content, including videos, images, and voiceovers, designed to mimic the style and branding of genuine news outlets. This approach seeks to confuse audiences and undermine trust in legitimate media. The content, adapted into multiple languages, integrates material produced by Kremlin propaganda and has included deepfakes such as a supposed Hamas member threatening the Paris 2024 Olympics and fabricated images accusing President Zelensky of purchasing a villa during the G7. The overarching narratives aim to depict Ukraine as corrupt and incapable of effectively managing Western aid, suggesting that such resources are diverted for personal gain. The Israel–Gaza war has been used to distract public attention, create internal divisions, and weaken allied cohesion. At the same time, tensions have been stoked in Europe and the United States to turn the issue of Ukraine into a polarising topic (Insikt Group, 2024).

According to Italy's Intelligence System for the Security of the Republic (SISR), in September 2022 Meta dismantled a vast Russian disinformation operation aimed at influencing European public opinion, including in Italy. The campaign promoted four main narratives: portraying Moscow as a responsible actor threatened by NATO expansion; blaming the West for the crisis by ignoring Russia's security demands; delegitimizing Ukraine's government as a puppet of the West accused of grave human rights violations in Donbass; and undermining trust in President Zelensky's ability to manage the conflict, with the goal of creating rifts between Ukraine's political leadership and its armed forces. In Italy, this operation exploited overlaps between "no-vax" and "no-pass" networks and pro-Kremlin messaging, amplified through Telegram channels, local influencers, and antagonistic movements, including conspiracy groups such as QAnon (SISR, 2022).

In the following years, these tactics evolved. In 2023, SISR reported an expansion of Russian hybrid activities in the energy sector, aimed at obstructing diversification efforts and maintaining Europe's dependence on Russian gas. These actions were accompanied by campaigns designed to influence public opinion on energy prices, inflation, and the cost of raw materials, as well as by cyberattacks and propaganda operations intended to delegitimise NATO and support the war in Ukraine. From October of that year, Russian narratives shifted focus to the Israel–Hamas conflict, portraying it as more urgent than the war in Ukraine in an attempt to foster the perception of declining Western support for Kyiv (SISR, 2023).

The issue of Russian hybrid threats has taken on greater prominence compared to previous years, moving from a secondary topic to one of the central themes of the annual intelligence assessment, now addressed in the opening sections of the document (SISR, 2024). In 2024, Russian disinformation broadened its thematic scope to include the European Parliament elections and Italy's G7 presidency. In the lead-up to the European elections, campaigns sought to delegitimize EU institutions and national governments, portraying them as distant from citizens and guilty of betraying electoral promises, while oversimplifying and distorting the causes of economic and social discontent to fuel distrust and disengagement. The goal was to encourage abstention or support for political forces opposing continued military and economic aid to Ukraine. During Italy's G7 presidency, Russian propaganda labelled the leaders' joint declaration as "Russophobic" and accused EU member states of subservience to the United States. A distinctive feature of these operations was the systematic anchoring of pro-Russian narratives to local political, economic, and social issues to make them more persuasive, combined with the mobilization of pro-Kremlin influencers and commentators who ensured their dissemination and legitimization across both traditional media and online platforms (SISR, 2024).

Conclusions

The Russian hybrid threat consists of a coordinated set of political, economic, informational, diplomatic, and cyber tools aimed at undermining Euro-Atlantic cohesion, influencing national political decisions, and exploiting economic vulnerabilities.

The analysis has shown that Italy is considered by the Russian Federation to be a strategic target and a vulnerable front of the European Union, due to deep historical, cultural, and economic ties. In the Italian context, this penetration has also been facilitated by political

connections cultivated over the years and by *soft power* operations that have entrenched a persistent anti-Western sentiment within national culture, making it easier for Kremlin narratives to take hold.

Pro-Kremlin propaganda thus finds fertile ground in an information ecosystem marked by distrust toward NATO and the United States and by a media offering based on talk shows that host commentators and journalists ready to amplify Russian narratives. At the same time, a more radicalized segment of society is reached through proxy networks of associations and online channels, which ensure that this propaganda machine achieves resilient and widespread dissemination.

This is complemented by cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns targeting institutions, seeking to influence electoral processes and shape public opinion by exploiting international crises, domestic divisions, and sensitive issues such as security, the economy, and energy, with the aim of weakening national cohesion and support for Western alliances.

Between 2023 and 2024, in response to the evolving hybrid threat landscape, Italy complemented its monitoring activities with a comprehensive strategy to counter Russian interference, combining international cooperation, operational tools, and regulatory strengthening (SISR, 2024; SISR, 2025).

At the European level, it actively participated in the work of the *Horizontal Working Party on Enhancing Resilience and Countering Hybrid Threats*, contributing to improving the awareness and resilience of EU member states in the face of manipulation and interference campaigns. It also adopted the *Hybrid Toolbox*, a set of operational instruments designed to quickly detect and neutralize foreign interference and information manipulation campaigns (SISR, 2024).

Internationally, Rome supported the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the *G7 Rapid Response Mechanism*, with the aim of protecting democratic institutions from coordinated attacks and ensuring a rapid and coordinated response among partners (SISR, 2025).

At the bilateral level, Italy signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the United States to coordinate actions against hybrid threats, providing for the exchange of intelligence information and cooperation on cybersecurity technologies (SISR, 2025).

On the regulatory front, the entry into force of the *Digital Services Act* strengthened the legal framework, imposing greater transparency and accountability obligations on digital platforms to ensure a safer online environment less permeable to disinformation (SISR, 2025). At the national level, authorities provided direct support to the government and public administrations to monitor the transparency of institutional communication and prevent digital interference, maintaining a balance between security and freedom of expression to avoid such countermeasures being exploited within hostile narratives (SISR, 2025).

The Russian hybrid threat to Italy is concrete, structured, and multidimensional, and requires a fully European approach based on cooperation, coordination, and common tools. Its countering cannot be limited to reactive measures but must integrate prevention, resilience, and response capacity. Democracies function only if citizens are informed, aware, and able to recognize manipulation: defending the public sphere from propaganda and disinformation means safeguarding the quality of debate and the freedom of choice. Strengthening cooperation within the European Union and in strategic bilateral partnerships is therefore essential to guarantee national security and contribute to European stability.

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