

## **PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

### **FEATURES OF THE PUBLIC MECHANISM FOR COUNTERING AND PREVENTING DISINFORMATION IN UKRAINE**

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The present situation in Ukraine demonstrates that the issue of disinformation is critically important for our country. Disinformation is not merely a distortion of facts but a systemic threat that undermines trust in public institutions, sows panic, divides society, and demoralizes citizens. In the context of hybrid warfare, disinformation has transformed into a weapon, and Ukraine is combating it on the informational frontline. The Hybrid CoE study for 2024 emphasizes that the disinformation pressure against Ukraine is carried out through complex multi-level models of influence, while Ukraine's counteraction is «organic and network-structured» [1].

By the public mechanism for countering disinformation one should not understand only governmental actions. The public mechanism is a multi-layered system that encompasses state and non-state institutions, civil initiatives, informational campaigns, educational programs, legal norms, and tools for detecting and debunking false information. Research by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) confirms that civil society in Ukraine has become one of the key actors in such counteraction [2]. Thus, a distinctive feature of the public mechanism in Ukraine is that civil participation plays a crucial role within it.

At present, the following five core characteristics of the public mechanism in countering disinformation in Ukraine can be identified:

1. Adaptability and dynamism.
2. Leadership of civil society.
3. Fragmentation of legal regulation.
4. The role of trust and media literacy.
5. Socio-cultural unifying function.

Threats evolve daily: new narratives, new platforms, new manipulation techniques, and the development of artificial intelligence. The Ukrainian model

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is not based on rigid protocols. On the contrary, it relies on flexibility. According to the Hybrid CoE (2024), this model functions as an adaptive environment in which functional overlap, operational decision-making, and informal channels of information exchange are possible [1]. Such a «living organism of action» constantly adjusts to new challenges and resists them.

The central subject of countering disinformation in Ukraine is civil society. It forms the backbone of the public mechanism. The state certainly acts as an important partner; however, without volunteer initiatives, fact-checking platforms, investigative journalism, and media-educational programs, effective resistance would not exist. NED in its 2023 Shielding Democracy report states that civil initiatives became the first line of response against hostile informational attacks [2]. Therefore, the public often reacts faster than official structures.

Civil society initiatives take shape in the form of fact-checking projects such as StopFake, VoxCheck, Detector Media, Texty.org; volunteer monitoring groups; educational platforms that promote media literacy; and active social media users who expose disinformation in real time. Thus, civil society works at the «frontline of Ukraine's information defense».

Regarding Ukrainian legislation, it remains fragmented: individual norms exist in laws on media, cybersecurity, and information, but there is no specific law on disinformation. CEDEM analytics (2023–2024) directly point to legal gaps, absence of clearly defined accountability, and insufficient regulatory mechanisms for digital disinformation, which complicates coordination among different state bodies in this area [3].

Trust within society is also a key foundation. Even the most accurate debunking has no effect if citizens do not trust the source. IREX research proves that media education can increase the ability of people to recognize implicit manipulative techniques [4]. Since 2014, civil organizations have conducted numerous trainings in media literacy, critical thinking, and analysis of information influence. These are not merely educational activities – they represent strategic defensive infrastructure.

The socio-cultural mission of the public mechanism lies not only in the struggle for factual accuracy, but also in the preservation of national identity. Hybrid CoE in its 2023 research on the role of humor in countering propaganda demonstrates that memes, satire, and cultural narratives serve to unite and enhance the moral resilience of the population [5]. Ukrainians do not simply debunk Russian fakes – they construct an authentic narrative about themselves.

In the Ukrainian context, the public mechanism is not a centralized system with bureaucratic chains, but a flexible network grounded in civic participation, trust, education, and self-organization. It is not a mechanism of state coercion but a form of public partnership and activism, in which society itself is both the

subject and the instrument of informational defense. The Ukrainian experience today stands as an example of democratic resistance in conditions of hybrid warfare, which may be valuable for other nations.

Therefore, despite all the challenges that Ukraine faces, the issue of further improvement remains urgent: in particular, the adoption of a specific law on countering disinformation with clearly defined terminology and procedures of response; institutionalization of cooperation between the state and civil society; systematic integration of media literacy into education; support for independent fact-checking projects; enhancement of transparency in public communication; and development of strategic communications that not only respond to fakes but also form a sustainable and positive narrative about Ukraine.

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