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To whom it might concern,

I am hereby sending over suggestions for your committee. It is based on the research done by the European Values Think-Tank based in Prague, Czech Republic.

My profile:

I am Head of the Kremlin Watch Program & Director of the European Values Think-Tank in Prague, Czech Republic. I am also an advisor to the Czech Interior Ministry & coauthor of the Czech policy on countering hostile foreign influence (mainly meaning Russian disinformation), with details available here: <http://www.europeanvalues.net/vyzkum/policy-shift-overview-czech-republic-became-one-european-leaders-countering-russian-disinformation/>

We are happy to be at your disposal

Yours,

Jakub Janda

A. The phenomenon of using digital technology to deliberately spread falsehoods online:

When dealing with the problem of deliberate spreading of falsehoods in Europe, we are dealing mainly with Russia and its allies. Much of the disinformation in Europe comes from original Russian sources that present poorly digested information designed to provoke and to push an agenda that the Kremlin finds favorable. You can read about the most popular narratives that Russian disinformation machinery pushed during 2016 in our article *Six Outrageous Lies Russian Disinformation Peddled about Europe in 2016*¹.

B. The motivations and reasons for the spreading of such falsehoods, and the types of individuals and entities, both local and foreign, which engage in such activity:

As far as Russia is concerned, disinformation operations are only one part of the Kremlin's complex toolkit of instruments used to influence the internal affairs of targeted countries. These instruments, together with model examples, are depicted in a table on page 4 of our report *Kremlin Hostile Disinformation Operations: Situational report on Czech Republic and Central European context*², which also describes both local and foreign actors involved in disinformation campaigns and the relationship between them. In general, in order to achieve its goals in the Czech Republic, the Kremlin uses extremists and fringe politicians, who share and spread pro-Russian propaganda and disinformation. The threat gets especially urgent if three interests get in one line: the domestic economic interest of those who systematically publish disinformation (e.g. money from ads), the domestic political interest of those who share the same view as the Kremlin (e.g. promoting EU exit referendum), and the geopolitical interest of the Kremlin.

As written in our study *Mechanisms of Influence of the Russian Federation into Internal Affairs of the Czech Republic*³, we identify three primary interests of the Russian Federation in the Czech Republic: strengthening of Kremlin's political allies; undermining public trust towards democratic politicians and institutions, and legitimizing extremists and disinformation projects; and undermining public support for EU and NATO membership.

Foreign actors can use multiple platforms to conduct disinformation operations, be it social media, classic disinformation channels, mainstream media or even third parties and unwitting persons. To illustrate, our report *The Kremlin's Platform for "Useful Idiots" in the West*⁴ examines the strategy and impact of the Kremlin-funded

¹ <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/six-outrageous-lies-russian-disinformation-peddled-about-europe-in-2016>

² <http://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Kremlin-Hostile-Disinformation-Operations.pdf>

³ <http://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Mechanisms-Of-Influence-Of-The-Russian-Federation-Into-Internal-Affairs-Of-The-Czech-Republic.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Overview-of-RTs-Editorial-Strategy-and-Evidence-of-Impact-1.pdf>

international broadcasting network RT. What is noteworthy about RT, besides other things, is that it disguises its malicious objectives by claiming to uphold traditional liberal-democratic ideals like free speech, critical journalism, and independent thought, which makes its messaging more difficult to counter.

C. The consequences that the spread of online falsehoods can have on Singapore society, including to its institutions and democratic processes:

In the Czech Republic, disinformation operations seem to be quite successful. A quarter of Czechs believes disinformation, which results in figures such as that four of ten Czechs blame the USA for the crisis in Ukraine, although there are Russian troops occupying part of Ukrainian territory. Already, 53% of Czechs say that there is pro-Russian and anti-Russian propaganda in the Czech public space and we cannot trust anything.

If disinformation isn't countered properly, it can have rather worrying impacts. The public may lose trust in democratic institutions, in free media, and in democratic political parties, which is already happening. In contrast, anti-establishment political powers are gaining ground. In Europe, we see that due to the result of exposure of citizens to fabricated disinformation stories, it is almost impossible for European governments to find constructive policies to deal with issues such as migration. Moreover, disinformation operations are one of the reasons for the deteriorating trust in the European Union.

In the already-mentioned paper *Mechanisms of Influence of the RF into Internal Affairs of the Czech Republic*⁵, we also outlined the possible scenarios which we might face in the Czech Republic if the threat of disinformation and Russian influence is underestimated. These scenarios include, among other things, silencing of the public broadcasting media; politicians becoming more submissive to pro-Kremlin narratives; or specific bodies of Czech state getting penetrated by the influence the Kremlin's influence (which is already happening in the Office of the President as our pro-Russian president Miloš Zeman has recently managed to win his second term).

D. How Singapore can prevent and combat online falsehoods, including:

a. the principles that should guide Singapore's response:

Disinformation and other influence operations are an attack on the targeted country's sovereignty and must be dealt with accordingly. Although long-term measures, such as improving media literacy, are very important, the gravity of the threat calls for swift actions.

b. any specific measures, including legislation, that should be taken:

⁵ <http://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Mechanisms-Of-Influence-Of-The-Russian-Federation-Into-Internal-Affairs-Of-The-Czech-Republic.pdf>

In our paper *Full-Scale Democratic Response to Hostile Disinformation Operations*⁶, we laid out 50 specific measures which should be taken by EU & NATO institutions, by national governments, and by the civil society in order to oust the Kremlin's hostile disinformation influence out of Europe. We also prepared a strategy proposal for the Interior Ministry of the Czech Republic called *Recommendation for the Czech Strategy Against Systematic Disinformation Campaigns of Foreign Powers*⁷, which contains universally useful recommendations. Furthermore, in our *Framework Guide to Tools for Countering Hostile Foreign Electoral Interference*⁸, you can find specific measures for enhancing the resilience of the democratic electoral process to disinformation operations and other threats.

⁶ <http://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Full-Scale-Democratic-Response-to-Hostile-Disinformation-Operations-1.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Recommendation-for-Czech-strategy-against-other-powers-systematic-disinformation-campaigns1.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/35-measures-in-15-steps-for-enhancing-the-resilience-of-the-democratic-electoral-process-1-1.pdf>