



Countering Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference: Albania and the Enlargement Context

Tirana, 27 July 2026 | Tirana International Hotel

Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) has become one of the defining challenges to democratic governance, public trust, and European security. Foreign state and non-state actors increasingly exploit digital platforms, coordinated online campaigns, artificial intelligence, and information ecosystems to manipulate public discourse, undermine trust in democratic institutions, deepen societal divisions, and influence political processes without crossing traditional military thresholds.

This conference is dedicated specifically to FIMI as one of the key components of the European Democracy Shield. It will situate the challenge of foreign information manipulation within the broader democratic resilience agenda of the European Union.

As Albania advances through the final stage of its European Union accession negotiations, strengthening resilience against FIMI is both a national security priority and an essential element of democratic consolidation in line with the European Union's evolving security architecture. Candidate countries should be seen not only as beneficiaries of EU initiatives, but also as active contributors to Europe's collective response, given their exposure to hybrid pressure, external influence operations and contested information environments.

The Albanian case will therefore serve as a practical lens through which to examine how candidate countries can identify vulnerabilities, strengthen institutional preparedness and contribute to the wider objectives of the European Democracy Shield. In this context, the discussion will also consider how Albania, EU Member States, and other enlargement partners can work more closely to counter foreign information manipulation, protect electoral integrity, and foster a whole-of-society approach to safeguarding democratic institutions.

To address these challenges, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs is organizing this high-level conference to bring together European and Albanian policymakers, representatives of EU institutions experts, academics, journalists, technology specialists, and

civil society representatives to examine the evolving FIMI threat landscape, the European policy response, and practical measures to strengthen resilience in Albania and across enlargement context.

The Conference will explore the European experience in countering FIMI, its evolution as a key component of hybrid threats, and the policy instruments developed by the European Union to strengthen democratic resilience and safeguard the integrity of the European information space, including the EU FIMI Toolbox and the European Democracy Shield initiative. It will also examine how these frameworks and best practices can support Albania's efforts to build institutional resilience and further align with the EU's security and democratic governance agenda as it advances towards membership.

The conference aims to move beyond diagnosis toward practical solutions, fostering cooperation between public institutions, media, academia, civil society, technology platforms, and international partners to strengthen resilience, protect democratic discourse, and reinforce Albania's role as a reliable European partner in countering hybrid threats. It will also seek to produce practical recommendations for government institutions, independent media, civil society organizations, and international partners, supporting Albania's EU accession process through a strong emphasis on democratic resilience, institutional preparedness, and the protection of democratic processes.

Objectives

- Strengthening shared understanding of FIMI as a distinct hybrid threat to democratic governance, electoral integrity, public trust and European security.
- Examine how the European Democracy Shield and related EU tools can support candidate and potential candidate countries, and how enlargement partners can contribute their own experience and expertise.
- Assess Albania's information environment as a practical case for identifying vulnerabilities, institutional needs and opportunities for cooperation.
- Promote a whole-of-government and whole-of-society response involving public institutions, independent media, academia, civil society, fact-checkers, technology platforms and international partners.
- Identify practical recommendations for strengthening institutional preparedness, media resilience, media literacy, election integrity and public awareness.

To guide the discussion, participants may wish to reflect on the following questions:

How is FIMI reshaping democratic governance and European security, and what makes it a distinct hybrid threat in today's digital information environment?

How can EU initiatives under the European Democracy Shield be made more accessible and operationally useful for candidate countries and potential candidates?

How can Albania, as an EU candidate country, strengthen institutional preparedness, media resilience and societal awareness against FIMI, while contributing its own experience to Europe's broader security agenda?

Which forms of cooperation between EU institutions, Member States, enlargement partners, media, academia, civil society, fact-checkers, and technology platforms are most effective in detecting, exposing, and countering FIMI and protecting democracy?

AGENDA

09:15 – 09:30 | Opening Session

Welcoming remarks - **H.E. Mr. Ferit Hoxha**, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs

Keynote Address - **H.E. Mr. Edi Rama**, Prime Minister of Albania

09:30 – 10:50 | Panel I: FIMI in Europe: The New Frontline of European Security

This panel will provide an overview of FIMI as an increasingly important hybrid threat to democratic societies, clarifying the distinctions between misinformation, disinformation, and coordinated foreign influence operations. It will examine how foreign actors exploit digital platforms, artificial intelligence, coordinated inauthentic behaviour, and cross-platform information campaigns to manipulate public discourse and undermine democratic institutions. Drawing on the experience of European institutions, NATO, enlargement partners, and leading international experts, the discussion will examine how democratic societies are responding to the growing challenge of foreign information manipulation and interference. It will explore the European Union's evolving policy framework, including the European Democracy Shield and the FIMI Toolbox, while highlighting practical approaches to strengthening democratic resilience through institutional cooperation, independent media, academic research, and civil society.

Moderator: Mr. Miroslav Sazdovski - Senior Analyst, the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats

Panellists:

1. **Mr. David Colon** - Professor, Sciences Po Paris, leading expert on FIMI
2. **Mr. Andy Pryce** (VTC) - Senior Fellow, Center for European Policy Analysis
3. **Mr. Uldis Elksnītis** - Strategic Communication Officer, DG COMM, European Commission
4. **Mr. David Satter** (VTC) – Journalist, historian and former senior fellow of the Hudson Institute and the Johns Hopkins University
5. **Ms. Natalia Arno** - President and Founder of Free Russia Foundation.

Q&A

10:50 – 11:10 | Coffee break

11:10 – 12:30 | Panel II: Albania, enlargement and FIMI: vulnerabilities, preparedness and practical responses

This panel will examine the Albanian information environment and its resilience to an increased foreign information manipulation environment. It will explore the country's evolving media and social media ecosystem, patterns of information consumption, and the impact of online polarization on democratic discourse. Building on this foundation, the discussion will assess how foreign actors are or may seek to exploit domestic political tensions through coordinated influence campaigns, state-sponsored media, distorted narratives, inauthentic online behaviour and artificial intelligence in targeted disinformation campaigns. The panel will also discuss practical measures to strengthen democratic resilience, protect public debate, and safeguard Albania's democratic institutions against foreign information manipulation.

Moderator: Mr. Remzi Lani – Executive Director of Media Institute, Albania

Panellists:

1. **Mr. Richard Kuchta** - Senior Analyst on the ISD Germany team
2. **Mr. Valeriu Pasa** - Chairman, WatchDog.MD Community
3. **Mr. Bohdan Nahaylo** - Chief Editor at Kyiv Post
4. **Ms. Iris Luarasi** - Member of Parliament, Subcommittee on Public Information Integrity and Disinformation
5. **Ms. Klodiana Kapo** - Executive Director of Faktoje.al

Q&A

12:30 – 12:40 | Closing Remarks

H.E. Mr. Ferit Hoxha, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania

13:00 | Lunch

About the speakers:

Panel I: FIMI in Europe: The New Frontline of European Security

Miroslav Sazdovski

Senior Analyst, the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats

Miroslav Sazdovski is a Senior Analyst at the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, where he focuses on foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), hybrid threats and strategic communications. His work supports NATO and EU Allies in understanding and responding to information threats, with particular emphasis on democratic resilience, resilience-building and the evolving information environment. He regularly contributes to international research, training and policy discussions on countering malign influence and strengthening institutional preparedness against hybrid challenges.

David Colon

Professor, Sciences Po Paris

David Colon is Professor at Sciences Po Paris and one of Europe's leading scholars on the history of propaganda, media and information warfare. He is the author of several acclaimed books, including *Propaganda* and *La Guerre de l'information*, and serves on the Steering Committee of the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on Information Integrity. His research explores the evolution of influence operations, strategic communication and Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI), combining historical perspective with contemporary security challenges. He regularly advises public institutions and international organisations on information resilience and democratic security.

Andy Pryce (VTC)

Senior Fellow, Center for European Policy Analysis

Andy Pryce is a Senior Fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), specialising in European security, Russian influence operations and democratic resilience. A former senior official in the UK Government, he has extensive experience in national security, strategic communications and countering hostile state activity. His work focuses on helping governments and institutions understand and respond to Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI), hybrid threats and the evolving security challenges facing Europe and the transatlantic community.

Uldis Elksnītis

Strategic Communication Officer, DG COMM, European Commission

Uldis Elksnītis works as an information and communications officer for the European Commission's Task Force for Strategic Communications and Countering Information Manipulation, currently focusing on delivering tangible results under the European Democracy Shield, especially on building democratic resilience and countering foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI). He has previously served as a seconded national expert on strategic communications at the European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force, developing the EUvsDisinfo platform and focusing on understanding Russia as a FIMI threat actor. Prior to joining the EU institutions, Uldis accrued a decade of diplomatic experience working on a broad range of security policy issues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia and the Delegation of Latvia to NATO.

David Satter (VTC)

Journalist and Author

David Satter is an American journalist, historian and author widely recognised as one of the foremost Western experts on Russia and the Soviet Union. A former Moscow correspondent for the Financial

Times and Radio Liberty, he has spent nearly five decades analysing Russian politics, authoritarianism and information manipulation. He is the author of six books on Russia and continues to contribute to leading international publications on Russian affairs, democracy and political influence.

Natalia Arno

President and Founder, Free Russia Foundation

Natalia Arno is President and Founder of the Free Russia Foundation, an international organisation dedicated to promoting democracy, civil society and human rights in Russia and across the wider region. She is widely recognised for her work on democratic resilience, Russian influence operations and support for democratic actors living under authoritarian regimes. Through her leadership, the Foundation has become a leading voice on countering Kremlin influence and strengthening transatlantic cooperation in support of democratic values.

Panel II: Albania, enlargement and FIMI: vulnerabilities, preparedness and practical responses

Remzi Lani

Executive Director of Media Institute, Albania

Remzi Lani is one of Albania's most distinguished media experts, analysts and public intellectuals. Founder of the Albanian Media Institute, he has spent more than three decades working on media development, democratic governance, freedom of expression and strategic communication across the Western Balkans. He has advised numerous international organisations and regularly contributes to debates on media resilience, disinformation and democratic transformation in Southeast Europe.

Richard Kuchta

Senior Analyst, Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD Germany)

Richard Kuchta is a Senior Analyst at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD Germany), specialising in online extremism, information operations and digital platform regulation. His work combines digital investigations with policy analysis, focusing on emerging influence campaigns, platform governance and the implementation of the EU Digital Services Act. He regularly presents his research to European institutions, governments and civil society organisations working on democratic resilience and countering Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI).

Valeriu Paşa

Chairman, WatchDog.MD Community

Valeriu Paşa is Chairman of the WatchDog.MD Community, one of Moldova's leading public policy think tanks. A recognised expert on strategic communication, elections and countering disinformation, he has led nationwide initiatives to strengthen societal resilience against foreign information manipulation and interference. He has also contributed to the development of Moldova's National Security Strategy and the establishment of the country's Centre for Strategic Communication.

Bohdan Nahaylo

Chief Editor, Kyiv Post

Bohdan Nahaylo is Chief Editor of the Kyiv Post and a British-Ukrainian journalist with more than four decades of experience covering the Soviet Union, Ukraine and international affairs. A former

senior official with the United Nations and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, he is widely recognised for his expertise on Russian information operations, Ukraine's resilience and the role of independent media during conflict.

Iris Luarasi

Member of Parliament, Chair of the Subcommittee on Public Information Integrity and Disinformation

Iris Luarasi is a Member of the Albanian Parliament and Chair of the Subcommittee on Public Information Integrity and Disinformation. A former academic, journalist and civil society leader, she has long worked on media, education and democratic participation. She currently leads parliamentary efforts aimed at strengthening Albania's institutional response to disinformation and protecting the integrity of the public information space.

Klodiana Kapo

Executive Director, Faktoje

Klodiana Kapo is Executive Director of Faktoje, Albania's first independent fact-checking organisation and a member of the European Fact-Checking Standards Network and the International Fact-Checking Network. An experienced journalist and media manager, she leads initiatives to strengthen media accountability, fact-checking and public resilience against disinformation while promoting professional standards in journalism.