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Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman**
House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing:
“Undermining Democratic Institutions and Splintering NATO: Russian
Disinformation Aims”
March 9, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

This morning we examine Russia’s systematic attempts to undermine and discredit Western democratic institutions, with one goal being to splinter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

In January, the U.S. Intelligence Community produced a report which found that “Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election.” Thankfully there is no evidence to suggest Russia interfered in our voting and tallying process. But Members of Congress rightfully have many more questions surrounding Russian meddling. So it is appropriate that the intelligence committees, on a bipartisan basis, are working to get to the bottom of this. We need answers. And we need to make sure it doesn’t happen again.

Indeed, the Intelligence Community report warns “Moscow will apply lessons learned...to future influence efforts worldwide, including against U.S. allies and their election processes.” Here in the U.S., our midterm election will be here before we know it. And with elections on the horizon in France, Germany, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, and perhaps Italy, European intelligence services are sounding the alarm about Russian attempts to skew the outcome with targeted disinformation and propaganda. In France, for example, one pro-European candidate has reportedly been the subject of “hundreds and even thousands” of hacking attacks against his party, and outlets such as RT and Sputnik are spewing false news to undermine his candidacy.

This isn’t new. The Committee is joined today by Toomas Ilves, a former Estonian president, who led his country as Russia inflamed ethnic passions and directed disinformation and cyber-attacks against Estonia. Russia’s media war against the Baltic States goes back over a decade.

What is new is that Russian disinformation has been growing in sophistication, intensity, reach and impact. According to the Center for European Policy Analysis – also represented today – “Russia’s information warfare does not crudely promote the Kremlin’s agenda. Instead it is calibrated to confuse, befuddle and distract.” They go on to note that “Russia aims to erode public support for Euro-Atlantic values in order to increase its own relative power.” Russia has deployed its arsenal of trolls, propaganda, and false information to a new level. These techniques have even become enshrined in official Kremlin doctrine.

Moscow’s strategic objective is to break apart the NATO alliance; to boost Russian geopolitical influence in Western Europe. The stakes are high: if Kremlin-backed politicians take power in France, it could potentially spell the end of the European Union. Even for those who might approve of that

development, I think we can all agree the future of the EU should be left to the Europeans – not manipulators in Moscow.

So how do we push back? Last Congress, when this Committee held a hearing on Russia’s “weaponization of information,” U.S. international broadcasters were on the air with a mere 30-minute television news program in the Russian language, called Current Time. Now, two years later, this Russian language show is running six hours of live programming daily – but still can’t provide data on target audience and market penetration. In December, the President signed legislation authored by myself and Mr. Engel – and pushed by this Committee - to empower a CEO to run all U.S. international broadcasting. The CEO should use its new authority to prioritize this threat and the Committee should look at other steps we can take to intensify U.S. international broadcasting.

And more should be done to hold those hacking accountable. And why not go on the offense to release information exposing corruption at the Kremlin?

I want to thank all of our distinguished witnesses for their participation in today’s important discussion. I’m afraid it is no exaggeration to say the long-term future of the European security order and America’s role as an Atlantic power is at risk. Last month, the Russian foreign minister called for a “post-West world order.” Unless the United States stands solidly with its allies to better challenge this Russian disinformation assault, that disturbing call could come true sooner than we would like.