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Thank you Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Shaheen, members of this committee for the opportunity to join you and for the personal investment so many of you have made in our shared vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace. Your bipartisan support, your visits to Ukraine, the assistance you and your fellow Senators have provided are truly making a difference in the region.

We have all heard popular Kremlin refrains asserting there are no Russian soldiers in Ukraine; that Ukraine is on the verge of collapse; or Americans, and *not corrupt leaders*, are the cause of domestic discontent overseas.

While many of these claims can easily be refuted, their around-the clock dissemination attempts to sow doubt, confusion, and suspicion and question even the most basic truths.

The Kremlin sponsors these efforts with a sophisticated \$1.4 billion-a-year propaganda apparatus at home and abroad, which claims to reach 600 million people across 130 countries in 30 languages. The Russian government also funds think tanks and outside organizations in its neighboring states to help achieve its goals of promoting the Kremlin's false narratives; portraying the West as a threat; and undermining trust in independent media as well as Western institutions and values.

In the face of the Kremlin's attack on the truth, the free flow of reliable, credible information is the best defense. This is why the State Department has focused its efforts on supporting independent media; improving access to high quality, objective information; exposing false narratives; and building the capacity of civil society. After all, truth should be discovered, not dictated.

Strong independent journalism is a key element in any democracy and will eventually prevail over disinformation and propaganda.

In my remarks today, I will expand upon these areas and describe how we use our public diplomacy tools and foreign assistance to amplify fact-based messages and support credible, independent voices and to improve access to credible information. Finally, I will focus on our diplomatic and security engagements that

reinforce the positive story our Allies and partners in Europe tell about our Transatlantic relationship and commitments.

In FY 2015, the State Department and USAID allocated \$66 million dollars in U.S. foreign assistance funding to sustain civil society and independent media in the Eurasia and Southeast Europe region, of which more than \$16 million supports independent media. In addition to our foreign assistance funds, we have also dedicated \$4 million from the public diplomacy budget to bolster our staff and programming. These funds help our partners who are susceptible to Russian aggression build democratic principles, independent media, and a civil society intolerant of corruption.

In FY 2016, President Obama is requesting a 26 percent increase to the State Department and USAID foreign assistance budget in this sector, proposing \$83 million to surge our support for civil society and independent media in countries most vulnerable to Russian pressure.

This increase is needed in countries that continue to be under threat of democratic backsliding, especially where the Kremlin's influence is strong and growing—not just in Russian-speaking areas, but also in the Western Balkans. Increasingly, reports indicate that Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro are targets of Russian pressure and disinformation. This is not new, but susceptibility is increasing.

We are putting our current public diplomacy and foreign assistance resources to good use, mainly towards programming focused on delivering our messages and supporting local, democratic voices throughout the region.

## **The Audience**

In Western and Central Europe, we work with our European partners to underscore allied unity and bolster resolve to work together on global challenges. We also offer Western journalists opportunities to view the realities on the ground in countries, like Ukraine, where the Kremlin tries to distort the facts.

For Russian-speaking audiences, especially in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, we offer information and programming alternatives while bolstering the capacity of civil society and independent journalists to identify and tackle disinformation. This population is particularly vulnerable to disinformation since Russian is the 10th most-spoken language in the world—the 5th most when counted as a second

language — and since ninety percent of all Russian language news, entertainment, and sports in the world are produced in Moscow and controlled by the Kremlin.

Inside Russia, we work with media – traditional and social – to reach the public and maintain a dialogue with the Russian people through programs that accurately describe U.S. policy, society and values. Embassy Moscow is at the forefront of this engagement and has increased its non-governmental exchanges budget by \$2 million, and its English language programming by \$400,000.

Yet, our work to connect with ordinary Russian citizens continues to be hampered by the Kremlin. All 29 American Corners in Russia were closed down over the last two years, and the Library of Foreign Literature ended our long-standing (22-year) partnership last month, closing the American Center there.

The outcry from ordinary Russians angry about losing this cultural tie with America was immediate and loud. Thanks to them and the efforts of our Embassy team, we relaunched a new American Center on Embassy grounds, and had a huge turnout at its first public event. Our hope is that we can continue to provide an undistorted view of American literature, culture, entertainment, and values to those who seek it in Moscow.

### **Near-Term: Messaging**

On a daily basis, our efforts help audiences identify objective reporting over the Kremlin's noise.

To do this, we employ a combination of short term messaging strategies with medium and long term programs to boost resilience and build capacity to recognize and reject Russian propaganda. The State Department has implemented a rapid response system to support our overseas posts in times of heightened Kremlin propaganda. Armed with the facts, our embassies are able to adapt the content and materials we supply to their own audiences and amplify the truth rapidly.

For example, a few days after the shoot down of the MH17 airliner in July of last year, Embassy Moscow plugged into the State Department's network of 130+ Russian language officers and released hourly messages and content from journalists on the ground to help negate the rampant obfuscation and conspiracy theories being blared by the Russian news media.

Similarly, in September 2015, after photoshopped images alleging U.S. Ambassador Tefft's presence at a Russian opposition rally were released, Embassy Moscow responded by producing a photo collage of the same picture of the ambassador altered to show him at various events - including landing on the moon. The embassy's success in discrediting the risible attempt at propaganda went viral, reaching over one million Russians, and forcing the Russian news outlet that shopped the image to withdraw its own story.

This kind of "rapid response" counter messaging, while necessarily reactive, is crucial to defend against the manipulation of truth. But the best defense against Russian propaganda gaining traction is proactive. It is designed to instill strength and independence in local communities and allies fighting propaganda on the front lines and it encourages higher standards of journalism.

For Ukraine, we are constantly reviewing our policies and needs through a department-wide working group organized by Deputy Secretary Blinken. Under Secretary Stengel and I cochair this group, which meets weekly to maintain a focus on Ukraine's successes in the face of overt Kremlin aggression and messaging distortion. Through this consultative process, we update our Embassies daily on current policy priorities, messages, and programs, and all State elements work to communicate our policy and support for Ukraine as one voice.

To reach the broader Russian-speaking population, the Department spokesperson's office last week launched a Russian-language version of its Twitter feed. Now, our official statements reach audiences in the region directly, without having to be interpreted by third parties. Along these lines, we are also engaging directly with independent media within Russia. State has placed interviews of more than a dozen Assistant Secretaries, Special Envoys, and other senior officials in such outlets this fiscal year.

### **Partnering with Others on Messaging**

The U.S. is not alone in dealing with Russian disinformation. To correct untruths not only in Ukraine and Russia, but across Russian-speaking communities, we are joining forces with our partners in the EU to identify, analyze, and debunk Russian disinformation where and when we find it; highlight Ukraine's progress in building its democracy, fighting corruption, and advancing reform; bolster the Russian-speaking areas of Europe seeking to resist disinformation; and fortify transatlantic unity through institutions like NATO and the EU.

Through a group of messaging experts from like-minded countries – known as the “Friends of Ukraine” – we regularly consult on messaging campaigns, media trends, and Kremlin propaganda tactics. Friends of Ukraine (FoU) is a growing 20+ member network of governments and multilateral organizations committed to responding to disinformation in real time through multiple voices. Efforts by the FoU have helped to keep Ukraine on the front burner, even when the Kremlin’s media machine has tried to distract its audiences with other topics.

NATO also is active in this area through its Strategic Communications Center of Excellence in Riga, Latvia. The newly-opened Center designs programs to advance StratCom doctrine development and standardization, conducts research and experimentation to find practical solutions to existing challenges, identifies lessons from StratCom operations, as well as enhances training and education efforts and interoperability throughout the Alliance.

And, our partners at The European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU’s diplomatic corps, have started a new Strategic Communications unit, which directs public diplomacy messaging and programs throughout the Eastern Partnership countries. I visited Brussels recently and met with the leadership of this new unit, and was impressed by their team and the content and campaigns they are developing. We are committed to helping one another share content and distribute information through EU and U.S. channels, and this spring I hope to bring the State Department and EU teams together to enhance this much-needed collaboration.

### **Long Term: Building Capacity**

While rapid response counter-messaging is a critical element of our strategy, local independent voices and a strong independent media are the real answer to free and democratic societies throughout the region. State Department and USAID programs support free media in the region to provide open, objective, accessible information to all. Exchange and assistance programs provide critical tools and increase access to a variety of local news sources, high-quality fact-based content, and honest investigative journalism.

We are proud of the exchange programs and “tech camps” we sponsor to link and train regional and transatlantic journalists and other opinion leaders. By November, we will have trained 120 “Tech Camp” alumni—60 in Prague and Riga and 60 more in Kyiv—who will go on to support strong independent journalism by sharing best practices and resources.

We are also working with the EU to cooperate on supporting the creation of new regional programs to support Russian-language media, based on the European Endowment for Democracy's (EED) Feasibility Study on Russian Language Media Initiatives.

Altogether, in FY15, the State Department and USAID allocated approximately \$16 million to support independent media. Already, we have success stories that we are proud of including:

- Launching a yearlong investigative journalism training and exchange program for up to 75 journalists from the Baltics.
- The Regional Investigative Journalism Network, supported by USAID and DRL, which connects local investigative journalists throughout the region and helps them investigate and report on cases of corruption and misuse of government authority.
- And, the five-year Ukraine Media (U-Media) Project, which promotes the development of a free, vibrant and professional media sector in Ukraine and also serves as a watchdog in the public interest. The U-Media program has adapted to the changing context in Ukraine by promoting balanced political coverage across Ukraine through local content production, exchange visits, public discussions, and webcasts with special attention to the South and East. Local media partners also monitor and publicize intimidation and attacks on civic activists and journalists and government interference in independent media coverage of Ukrainian politics.

While training and exchanges are critical to our efforts, information is also impeded by the lack of communications infrastructure in many areas tied to Kremlin-sponsored programming.

To help build capacity, the Broadcasting Board of Governors' (BBG) new Russian-language news program, Current Time, is on air in nine countries via 25 major market commercial, satellite, and public media outlets.

Nearly two million viewers in Russia are watching Current Time online weekly, and BBG's digital media engagement has grown by an average of 2.5 million Russian-speakers per week.

A popular BBG program, “Footage v. Footage,” is devoted to pointing out inconsistencies in Russian reporting and debunking myths.

BBG has also helped to bring about a contract with PBS Distribution for nearly 400 hours of Russian-language public media content to Ukraine, Lithuania and Estonia.

These stations will air these programs for Russian language speaking audiences starting in November of this year.

In late August, BBG also donated its recently developed “Fly Away FM System,” which is suitable for use as low power FM transmitters.

While BBG’s contributions, our exchanges, and public diplomacy programming are vital to our strategy against Kremlin disinformation, we must continue to ensure our commitments and support to our allies so that we continue to have a positive story to tell.

### **Resilience for the Future**

Ultimately, countering disinformation is a security issue, especially when the goal of Russian disinformation and propaganda is to destabilize, distract, and divide our allies.

Addressing this problem is an important part of our diplomatic effort to promote a Europe whole, free, and at peace.

The Baltic States are primary targets of Russian disinformation, especially since all three – Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia—are valued NATO Allies. Just as we are cooperating with them to counter Russian disinformation, we work together in the realm of collective defense.

The combination of our diplomatic efforts ensures that the U.S. not only has a positive story to tell, but that others will be able to hear it over the Kremlin’s noise.

Despite Moscow’s significant investment in disinformation, its efforts have limited effectiveness abroad. A Pew research poll published in August indicates that a median of only 30% of those polled outside of Russia see Russia favorably. Putin himself is viewed even less favorably, with only 24% of respondents having confidence that Putin will do the right thing in world affairs.

Here in the United States, we have not seen evidence that the Kremlin's misinformation has gained any traction: A recent Pew poll indicated 75% of Americans have no confidence in Putin to do the right thing in world affairs.

This reveals that even while Europe, and in particular Ukraine, works through tough challenges and fights disinformation, our work together continues to speak more loudly than Russia's meddling.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Shaheen, members of this committee, America's investment in public diplomacy is about more than fighting a single country.

It's about protecting the rules-based system across Europe and around the world. It's about saying no to borders changed by force, to big countries intimidating their neighbors or demanding a sphere of influence.

I thank this subcommittee for its bipartisan support and commitment to public diplomacy and to a Europe whole, free and at peace.

I look forward to your questions.