

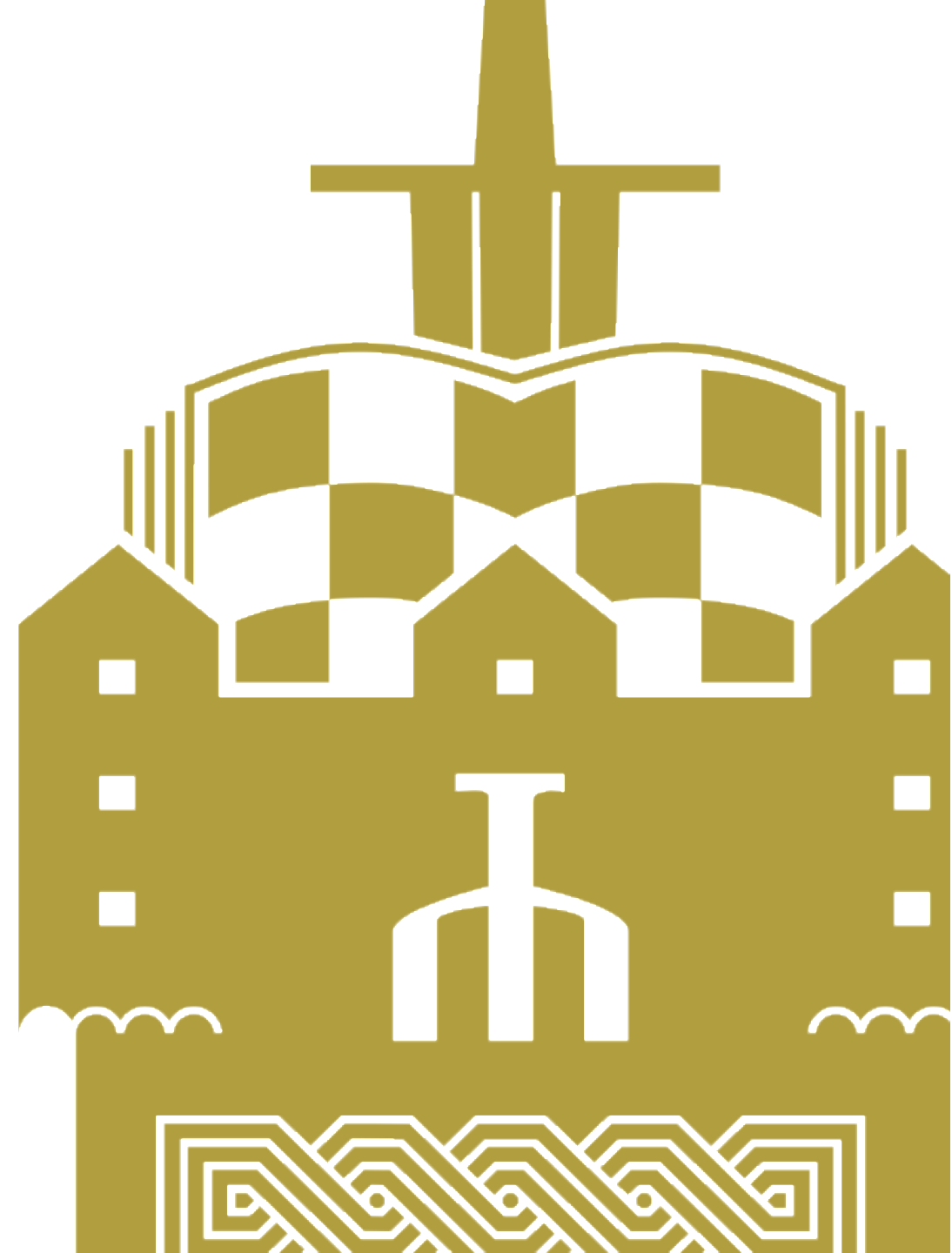


DR. FRANJO TUĐMAN
DEFENSE AND SECURITY
UNIVERSITY

Communicating the Russian Threat: Intelligence Agencies' Public Messaging in Europe (2025)

Lotte Nietzman & Peter Schrijver
Netherlands Defense Academy

Sapere Aude et Agere





DR. FRANJO TUĐMAN
DEFENSE AND SECURITY
UNIVERSITY

Introduction

Sapere Aude et Agere
Communicating the
Russian threat

- Shift in intelligence agencies' communication strategies from covert to overt action.
- This shift coincides with the whole-of-society* approach: Resilience as a shared mission.
- Unclear to what extent this approach is reflected in practice.
- How do European intelligence agencies communicate about the Russian threat through their 2025 annual reports and threat assessments?

* Jermalavicius, T., & Parmak, M. (2014). Societal Resilience: A Basis for Whole-Of-Society Approach to National Security. National Security.



Methodology

- Analysing publications from Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Estonia, Latvia and The Netherlands.
- Traditional intelligence updates or instruments of the whole-of-society approach?
- Thematic analysis* to uncover recurring themes, narrative structures and framing patterns.

Petersen's (2019)** three concepts of Intelligence Communication:

1. Awareness
2. Advice
3. Co-production

* Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. London: SAGE.

** Petersen, K.L. (2019). 'Three Concepts of Intelligence Communication: Awareness, Advice or Co Production?' *Intelligence and National Security*, 34, 3: 317-28.



DR. FRANJO TUĐMAN
DEFENSE AND SECURITY
UNIVERSITY

1. Awareness

Sapere Aude et Agere

Communicating the
Russian threat

- First communication strategy
- The intelligence agency informs the public about threats, risks or strategic trends without explicitly calling for action.
- This may include:
 - A description of Russian threats (cyber, hybrid, espionage, nuclear or sabotage)
 - An explanation of geopolitical contexts (such as China, Iran, Belarus, the Arctic)
 - The monitoring of threat levels or trends, or
 - A chronological overview of incidents or threats.



DR. FRANJO TUĐMAN
DEFENSE AND SECURITY
UNIVERSITY

Sapere Aude et Agere

Communicating the
Russian threat

1. Awareness

Denmark: “In the current situation, it is less likely that Russia is intent on launching destructive cyber attacks against Denmark in which the purpose is to create serious and far-reaching consequences for critical societal functions.”

→ A description of Russian threats (cyber, hybrid, espionage, nuclear or sabotage)

Estonia: “Should the war in Ukraine end favourably for Russia, or if hostilities are frozen, it is almost certain that Russian military units will be permanently stationed along Estonia’s borders in greater numbers than be-fore 24 February 2022.”

→ The monitoring of threat levels or trends



DR. FRANJO TUĐMAN
DEFENSE AND SECURITY
UNIVERSITY

2. Advice

Sapere Aude et Agere
Communicating the
Russian threat

- Second communication strategy
- The intelligence agency gives direction to the behaviour of citizens, businesses or institutions through explicit recommendations or implicit warnings.
- This may include:
 - Warnings for the commercial sector about sanctions or the export of certain products
 - Recommendations for governmental or military readiness
 - Calls for vigilance or the strengthening of defensive measures, or
 - Policy suggestions regarding cyber resilience or one's information position.



DR. FRANJO TUĐMAN
DEFENSE AND SECURITY
UNIVERSITY

2. Advice

Sapere Aude et Agere

Communicating the
Russian threat

Latvia: “The transport sector will continue to face the current challenges related to decrease in cargo turnover and necessity to reorient from the former intense cooperation with Russia and Belarus to new sources of cargo flows.”

→ Warnings for the commercial sector about sanctions or the export of certain products

Norway: “Risiko, NSM's annual risk assessment, aims to help Norwegian enterprises manage security risks by providing information about vulnerabilities, threats and security measures.”

→ Recommendations for (governmental or military) readiness

Netherlands: “The Dutch services believe that the threat posed by Russia to Europe will grow rather than diminish, even if the war in Ukraine is brought to an end. This underlines the importance for the Netherlands, for NATO and particularly for the EU member states to build up military striking power as quickly as possible.”

→ Calls for vigilance or the strengthening of defensive measures



DR. FRANJO TUĐMAN
DEFENSE AND SECURITY
UNIVERSITY

3. Co-production

Sapere Aude et Agere

Communicating the
Russian threat

- Third communication strategy
- An intelligence agency that uses the third strategy might argue that security is partly dependent on the actions of citizens, businesses and/or other societal institutions. A shared responsibility is stated or implied.
- This may include:
 - References to ‘total defense’, resilience and cooperative responsibility
 - Encouragement for alertness or collaboration amongst public actors, or
 - Explicitly laying responsibility with companies (such as compliance with sanctions) or citizens.



DR. FRANJO TUĐMAN
DEFENSE AND SECURITY
UNIVERSITY

3. Co-production

Sapere Aude et Agere

Communicating the
Russian threat

Sweden: “Countries whose societal model is based on democracy, the rule of law, civil society and the market economy are [thus] facing systemic confrontation. This requires society as a whole to have the capacity to coordinate across administrative boundaries in order to address a wide range of threats without compromising fundamental values.”

→ References to ‘total defense’, resilience and cooperative responsibility

Finland: “Businesses may be unwittingly involved in circumventing sanctions and export restrictions as Russian procurement routes become more complex and increasingly linked to the EU internal market. Enterprises should always pay particular attention to unusual procurement efforts or contacts.”

→ Explicitly laying responsibility with companies (such as compliance with sanctions) or citizens



Observations

	Awareness	Advice	Co-production
Estonia	X	X	X
Denmark	X		
Finland	X	X	X
Latvia	X	X	X
Netherlands	X	X	X
Norway	X	X	
Sweden	X	X	X

- Denmark and Norway: situational reporting & background awareness
- Netherlands: monitoring threats while working in an ‘ecosystem’ with private sector
- Sweden and Finland: total defense approach & joint public-private expertise
- Baltic States: public participation & business compliance



Beyond Co-production*

Service	What they Do	What makes It forward-leaning
UK Defence Intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ X/Twitter updates on Russo-Ukrainian war: Russian military, leadership, IMINT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Shift from secrecy to proactive transparency; counters disinformation, builds public trust via open intel sharing.
IDF Spokesperson's Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Releases intercepted calls/recordings (HUMINT/SIGINT) on social media to expose Hamas actions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Selective disclosure of classified info; shapes narratives, justifies ops.
HUR (Ukraine)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Publishes audio intercepts of Russian soldiers on multiple platforms to highlight crimes/morale issues, corruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ High-visibility releases (near-daily); shames adversaries, degrades enemy efforts through public humiliation.

* Schrijver, Peter, Lotte Nietzsche, and Peter B.M.J. Pijpers. 'Birdwatchers on Social Media: The Mediatisation of Intelligence Organisations'. Security and Defence Quarterly. <https://doi.org/10.35467/sdq/196516>.



DR. FRANJO TUĐMAN
DEFENSE AND SECURITY
UNIVERSITY

Sapere Aude et Agere

Communicating the
Russian threat

Conclusion

- The public is not only informed about threats and risks but is also given specific directions of behaviour through explicit recommendations or implicit warnings.
- The Baltic States are most forward leaning which can be explained by their immediate exposure and vicinity to Russian pressure.
- Nevertheless, the whole-of-society approach is not so much reflected in practice as it is in policy circles.

