



CONCLUSIONS PAPER

THEMATIC RESEARCH MEETING ON THE IMPACTS OF DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS IN THE SAHEL (SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD) AND EFFECTS ON RADICALISATION AND EXTREMIST MOVEMENTS IN THE EU

Authored by: Dr Joana de Deus Pereira, RAN Policy Support

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Thematic Research Meeting (TRM) organised by the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) Policy Support on 12 March 2024 focused on examining the impacts of disinformation campaigns originating from the Sahel region and their consequential effects on radicalisation and extremist movements within the European Union (EU). The virtual meeting brought together a diverse group of experts to examine the many-sided nature of disinformation dynamics and their transcontinental ripple effects, particularly in relation to the Southern Neighbourhood's geopolitical landscape.

During this TRM, experts delved into the origins, strategies, and regional impacts of disinformation campaigns in the Sahel. Discussions highlighted the complex tactics and geopolitical influences, especially from external actors such as Russia, demonstrating how sophisticated disinformation operations have become. The varied motivations behind these campaigns were examined, ranging from political to socioeconomic factors, and their implications for both local and international communities. The second panel bridged the gap between the Sahel and the EU, delving into how disinformation from the Sahel affects radicalisation trends and extremist movements within the European context. It was argued that the transcontinental repercussions of such campaigns require a re-evaluation of strategic policy responses to mitigate these evolving threats. The dialogue facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the channels through which disinformation influences public opinion and societal divisions, thereby exacerbating vulnerabilities to radicalisation in the EU.

This TRM emphasised the urgent need for collaborative and innovative policy measures. It also referred to the critical role of international cooperation, digital literacy, and resilient civil societies in countering the pervasive spread of disinformation and its cascading effects on radicalisation. The event stressed the importance of continued research, dialogue, and strategic policy and programming actions to address these complex challenges in a rapidly changing geopolitical and digital landscape.

KEY OUTCOMES:

Disinformation in the Sahel as a strategic tool for destabilisation: The discussions underscored the sophisticated use of *disinformation campaigns in the Sahel as a means to destabilise the region and manipulate public perception*, highlighting the significant threat these campaigns pose not only to regional stability but also to the security dynamics within the EU. The interconnectedness of global security dynamics was also emphasised, pointing to the direct implications of the Sahel's instability on the EU's internal security landscape.

Russia's Strategic Use of Disinformation: Russia, through proxies like the Wagner Group, has been adept at utilising disinformation to create polarisation, undermine Western influence, and extend its reach in Africa, notably by *capitalising on perceived anti-French sentiments and historic colonial-era sensitivities*.

Challenges Faced by Journalists and Researchers in the Sahel: Journalists and researchers encounter significant *obstacles in accessing unbiased information and conducting fieldwork in the Sahel*. These challenges, compounded by the need to navigate the agendas of various armed groups and the influence of entities like the Wagner Group, underscore the complexities of reporting and researching in the region.

Call for Refined EU Policies and Approaches to Counter Disinformation: It was recognised that there is a need for the EU to rethink and refine its policies and approaches to effectively counter disinformation and extremism in the Sahel region. Speakers called for *more localised programming, deeper engagement with a broader spectrum of local actors beyond commonly preselected interlocutors, and a greater emphasis on respecting and understanding local needs and perceptions to avoid cultural aggression and the perceived imposition of external values by the EU.*

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE WORKSHOP

OPENING REMARKS

The opening remarks set the tone for a pivotal gathering aimed at tackling the nuanced challenges posed by disinformation campaigns in the Sahel and their broader implications for regional stability and EU security. Emphasising the strategic deployment of disinformation as a tool for destabilisation and manipulation, the remarks underscored the significant threats these campaigns pose not only to the Sahel's stability but also to the intricate security dynamics within the EU. Highlighting the global interconnectedness of security issues, it was pointed out how disturbances in the Sahel directly impinge upon the internal security landscape of the EU.

The agenda was structured around two key panels: *"Disinformation Dynamics: Examining the Influence Operations in the Sahel"* aimed to uncover the origins, strategies, and regional impacts of disinformation campaigns; and *"Bridging Continents: Disinformation's Ripple Effects on EU Radicalisation,"* which focused on the impacts of disinformation dynamics in the Sahel on the European context, examining how disinformation influences radicalisation trends and extremist movements within the EU. The following sections reflect the presentations and subsequent discussions.

SESSION 1: DISINFORMATION DYNAMICS: EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OPERATIONS IN THE SAHEL

The **first speaker** provided an insightful analysis into the **complexities of organised crime and disinformation dynamics within Niger**, shedding light on the reasons why the **Sahel has become a breeding ground for such phenomena, heavily influenced by both state and non-state actors**. This situation has led to a significant confusion and a notable scarcity of reliable sources, complicating efforts to accurately discern the perpetrators of violence and kidnappings. A **troubling trend of journalists, alongside politicians and state actors, becoming targets for kidnappings was highlighted**. **Armed groups leverage this as propaganda tools to gain legitimacy and visibility**, thereby enabling them to compete with other armed organisations. Specifically, the economic motivations behind these kidnappings, as exemplified by groups like **Al-Qaeda operating in the kidnapping trade for financial rather than ideological ends**. It represents a strategic shift by non-state actors towards using such tactics as a source of income, introducing a different level of threats to the region.

Furthermore, it was detailed that there are **significant obstacles faced by journalists and researchers in accessing unbiased information within the Sahel, particularly in rural areas**. These challenges are exacerbated by the perilous conditions on the ground and the compromised nature of information provided by armed groups,

which, while granting access to these regions, often deliver skewed or non-objective insights. The **cooperation between military juntas and groups like the Wagner Group was underscored**, illustrating a **strengthened capacity in information warfare**, yet simultaneously making it difficult to grasp the full complexity of the situation in the Sahel due to each group's distinct agenda. Furthermore, it was noted that **massive online disinformation campaigns, notably coordinated between Wagner and various armed groups, have been identified and often pushing narratives that support military juntas and promote anti-French and Western sentiments**. This situation is further complicated by the technological limitations of governments in Mali and Niger, which lack the capabilities to carry out sophisticated information operations, thereby highlighting Wagner's pivotal role in these disinformation efforts.

The **second speaker** highlighted the crucial role of Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in the Sahel within the ambit of their **"Save Journalism in the Sahel" campaign**, initiated in January 2022. A **significant part of RSF's advocacy work involved publishing a report that outlines the emerging threats to both local and foreign journalists in the Sahel, particularly highlighting the menace of "disinformation mercenaries."** This report exposed the complex network of misinformation adversely affecting journalistic standards and public trust. A **concerning trend identified in Mali was the shift towards "patriotic news coverage"¹ which has begun to erode the foundations of independent journalism**. This trend not only subjects the national media and journalists to scepticism, censorship, and persecution but also poses a substantial threat to the free dissemination of information and journalists' ability to report on critical issues without fear.

It was highlighted that journalists investigating sensitive matters, especially those examining the ties between disinformation campaigns and their human rights implications, such as those linked to the Wagner Group, deal with several dilemmas. The coercive environment has led some journalists, including notable cases like Malick Konate and Serge Daniel, to self-censorship or flee the country to evade the consequences of their investigative reporting. Additionally, the scenario is exacerbated by government-sponsored information campaigns, notably by entities like Pan-African Group for Trade and Investment (GPCI), which play a pivotal role in orchestrating smear campaigns against journalists. These campaigns underscore the state's involvement in manipulating media narratives for specific political objectives. Furthermore, the **expansion of Russian media in the Sahel, with established satellite channels in the Central African Republic (CAR) and plans to widen their reach to Burkina Faso and beyond, underscores a strategic outreach effort**. This expansion, supported through various associations and channels on platforms like Telegram, seeks to launch more disinformation campaigns, fostering closer ties between Russian media, Sahelian outlets, and local governments. It was noted that this collaboration is likely to influence the region's information ecosystem significantly, posing challenges for independent journalism and complicating the efforts to maintain journalistic integrity amid rising disinformation threats.

The **third speaker** started by emphasising that the **disinformation landscape in CAR**, particularly due to Wagner's significant presence, offers a complex comparison with the Sahel region. The communication context in CAR, emerging from the shadows of a brutal civil war that concluded in 2019 with a fragile peace agreement involving 14 armed groups, was outlined. It was highlighted that, formally, CAR's constitution guarantees freedom of expression and of the press; however, the reality starkly contrasts with these guarantees, as the country has experienced a decline in press freedom rankings and an increase in hate speech within local media. Hate speech often targets various groups, including political parties, figures, and external actors, with social media platforms being identified as the primary vessels. Despite internet penetration being only 10% of the population in 2023, the impact of this limited online presence is profound, mainly due to societal fractures and trauma from decades of violence. Furthermore, the limited accessibility of the internet in most of the territory

¹ Referring that several journalists were called to *"preach the right words so as not to demoralise the population and the armed forces"*.

in the Sahel affects the impact of disinformation campaigns online in rural areas, which are more influenced by traditional media.

The **government's acknowledgment of the hate speech issues and its attempts to address it have been hindered by economic limitations, contributing to pervasive distrust within the population and the instrumentalization of the youth.** It was pointed out that the **particular vulnerability of rural areas, due to isolation and limited access to information, can become hotbeds for mis-/disinformation and panic at the slightest provocation.** Furthermore, it was noted that a significant portion of the population remains uninformed about the peace agreement's contents and implications, fostering confusion and questions regarding their expectations from both the government and armed groups. The **discourse within CAR sees a significant division between the government and opposition, leading to a pluralistic but poor-quality information environment.** This environment is rife with criticisms against France, MINUSCA, and various political leaders, though it occasionally features opposition leaders critiquing the government and Wagner's influence. The importance of social media in spreading hate speech and its consequential impact on the already fragile social cohesion within CAR was underscored, highlighting the complex challenge of navigating disinformation and its effects in a post-conflict setting.

The **final speaker** outlined Russia's strategic use of deception to engender polarisation and incite disruptions in the Sahel, specifically noting an uptick in misinformation and disinformation in Mali subsequent to the commencement of the Ukraine conflict in 2022. It was argued that **the manipulation of the information space— a tactic previously witnessed in conflict zones like Iraq and Afghanistan —underscores the critical role of managing perceptions in conflict-affected areas. It was said that digital environments have transformed into battlegrounds for information warfare, with Russia adeptly exploiting these domains, far beyond the Sahel.**

Through its military doctrine, which incorporates deceptive measures, denial, and disinformation, Russia has been able to manipulate facts and skew media narratives globally to align with its interests. The speaker highlighted that **the evolution of this doctrine to encompass strategic political and diplomatic means indicates a deliberate effort to influence international perceptions to support the objectives of the Kremlin.** The discussion also touched on **Russia's goals, rooted in its historical self-view as a world power and its current frustrations with Western global expansion.** It was pointed out that Russia's attempts to dismantle Western cohesion and extend its influence in Africa by exploiting the rifts between Western and African regions have been notably evident. In Mali, for instance, it was noted that narratives propagated via Facebook networks have touted Wagner as an alternative to French military presence, coordinating efforts that detrimentally impact Western influence, and target France specifically. Furthermore, the **vulnerability of information spaces to exploitation was underscored, highlighting the significant effect such strategies may have on EU policies and regional perceptions.** The **emergence of anti-Western sentiments, initially stemming from anti-French sentiments, has become more pervasive, exploiting colonial-era sensitivities to Russia's advantage.** This strategy aims to align with African countries' experiences of marginalisation and colonialism, portraying Russia as an empathetic ally against perceived Western neglect.

Finally, the speaker suggested that the extent of Russia's influence should neither be underestimated for its potential impact nor overestimated due to its uneven reach across regions and populations, with traditional media holding sway in rural areas compared to social media's dominance in urban centres like Bamako. It further emphasised the necessity of a coordinated approach for Europe and the EU to counter such narratives effectively, aligning strategic communication with tangible actions to ensure credibility and efficacy in the information space.

DISCUSSION AND Q&A – PANEL 1

During the question-and-answer session, the discussion revolved around the direct references to Ukraine in the Sahel region and the presence of disinformation related to the Ukraine war. It was mentioned that the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali's (MINUSMA's) focus remained on the tactical level, addressing the complexity of peace agreements and evolving influence of jihadist movements in Mali. This has contributed to increased scepticism towards MINUSMA in certain communities. The growing presence of Russia in Africa, seeking economic and financial opportunities, especially in the wake of sanctions post-Ukraine invasion, was highlighted. Wagner's role as a Russian proxy, with a significant influence in Mali and positive perceptions in both CAR and Mali, was discussed, including their leveraging of anti-Western sentiments for economic gains.

Regarding Ukraine, the proliferation of articles in the Sahel that reflect pro-Russian narratives on the war in Ukraine and in Syria was noted, alongside an uptick in news about China's involvement in the gold and diamond industries. Wagner's pivotal role in aiding the CAR government to thwart armed group advancements in 2021 has left a lasting impression on the region's perception of Wagner.

The potential for recruiting local influential figures to understand local perspectives was queried, alongside questions about the baseline for current concerns over information manipulation post-Ukraine war, indicating a broader interest in understanding the dynamics of information flows and perceptions in the region.

Additional insights included observations on new dynamics and trends, especially how Wagner might affect public perceptions and polarisation, particularly in Mali, which relies on armed groups as active networks. The widespread use of WhatsApp in CAR was mentioned, though it was pointed out that mobile phone usage has not been uniformly adopted across the population; rather it is more common among those engaged in politics, residing in main cities, and literate in French. Journalists' resilience in gathering and publishing information despite threats was commended. However, the challenges journalists face when working in remote areas, especially the pressure to adopt and/or spread the narratives of armed groups, were discussed. It also illustrated the complex landscape of information manipulation and the proliferation of disinformation through social media, highlighting instances where journalists have inadvertently employed falsified sources.

PANEL 2: BRIDGING CONTINENTS: DISINFORMATION'S RIPPLE EFFECTS ON EU RADICALISATION

During the second panel, the **first speaker** started with an **in-depth analysis challenging prevailing perceptions about the role of the West in the global information landscape**. It was proposed that considering whether the West has lost the 'battle of information' necessitates acknowledging an ongoing conflict within the informational space, characterised by diverse actors employing distinct strategies and campaigns. This notion raised questions about the Western self-image as liberators and standard-bearers of the free world, suggesting that such a view is not only controversial but has also been utilised by other actors to question Western legitimacy.

It was noted that the effectiveness of disinformation has emerged as a central concern, steering the dialogue towards a more introspective examination of why disinformation campaigns find fertile ground, rather than focusing solely on countering narratives favourable to rivals like China or Russia. It was posited that **the real defeat in the information battle might stem from the West's failure to penetrate the veil of illusion maintained by those truly responsible for anti-democratic uses of information, suggesting a potential neo-colonial bias in the presumption that the Sahel, or Africa more broadly, lacks the agency to produce its own disinformation**. Additionally, **the financial models underpinning media and online platforms were critiqued for inherently**

fostering mis-/disinformation by prioritising profitability over truth, with such models being especially vulnerable to manipulation and less regulated in Africa. This led to a reflection on **how disinformation in the Sahel is predominantly amplified by African influencers who leverage narratives provided by external powers like China, Turkey, and Russia**, yet these narratives often originate from within African societies themselves.

The **suppression of dissenting voices and opposition by Sahelian autocrats was highlighted as a historical issue, underscoring that the contemporary focus on "evil adversaries" as the primary disseminators of disinformation** overlooks the endemic socio-political and economic failures of the region's elites and their international partners. This backdrop provides a conducive environment for disinformation to flourish. The **imperative to more robustly support independent press and cultivate a critical perspective towards Western activities in the region was underscored as a means to address the roots of disinformation**. It was suggested that democratic societies, when feeling threatened, may too readily attribute blame to external actors without adequately focusing on the defence of fundamental rights and freedoms, thereby neglecting the internal factors that contribute to the spread of disinformation. Moreover, the discontent and mistrust harboured by African populations towards the West and the EU were identified as critical factors enabling the proliferation of disinformation. However, it was noted that not all Western interventions are rejected outright.

In seeking solutions, it was **emphasised that the surge in disinformation is tied not only to disillusionment with democracy but also to a broader search for new narratives that challenge traditional authorities and seek alternatives to Western and EU partnerships**. This search is driven by a desire for a new understanding of the world, one that provides hope and a sense of pride, offering an alternative to perceived failures by traditional elites and external partners in addressing social justice, public services, and living conditions. The speaker concluded with a call for a nuanced approach to understanding disinformation, advocating for an examination of the social and political dynamics within populations that contribute to the appeal of disinformation, rather than attributing it solely to the machinations of external actors.

In the discussion on the impact of disinformation in the Sahel region, the **second speaker** elaborated on the **complexities journalists face in Mali**, amid **escalating disinformation fuelled by both internal crises and external influences**. The Sahel is depicted as a battleground for international narratives, with some parties framing the discourse as a choice between Western methods versus alternatives, such as those proposed by Russia. This polarisation is evident across various media platforms and public discourse. The speaker highlighted the **myriad of challenges since 2011, including military coups and climate crises, which have been accompanied by a rise in disinformation**. This situation is exacerbated by the media's role in spreading fake news and polarisation. A particular challenge noted is the ease with which media platforms can be created online, which complicates the public's ability to discern legitimate journalism from other forms of content dissemination.

A critical issue identified is the **lack of resources and expertise among media practitioners in Mali for effective fact-checking and verification of information**. To combat this, initiatives have been undertaken to ensure information is verified and accessible in Mali's diverse linguistic landscape, including broadcasting in French, Bambara, Tamasheq, Peul, and Songhai. The speaker further discussed the importance of training for journalists, emphasising the need for media practitioners to have the necessary tools and knowledge to debunk mis-/disinformation. These training initiatives aim to improve journalists' abilities to provide accurate reporting and contribute to a more informed public discourse. Furthermore, the **current climate of fear and diminishing of press freedoms for critical voices was addressed, underscoring the need to protect journalists, especially those scrutinising government actions or challenging mainstream narratives**. The speaker also touched on the

responsibility of media to serve not merely as tools for propagating certain agendas, but as independent entities committed to delivering factual, impartial information to combat disinformation effectively.

The speaker concluded by underlining the **essential role of media in fighting disinformation through rigorous fact-checking, multilingual dissemination of accurate information, and training journalists to uphold high standards of reporting in the face of political and social challenges.**

The **final speaker** delved into the **sophisticated landscape of information dissemination within the Sahel region, drawing a crucial distinction between information, communication, and propaganda to understand the dynamics at play in the realm of disinformation.** The delineation posited was that information involves the professional treatment of news with rigorous verification processes, primarily undertaken by journalists and researchers. Communication was defined as an institutional tool aimed at promoting an actor or an institution, with a significant focus on convincing internal audiences, including a nation's own populace. Propaganda, on the other hand, was characterised by its ideological nature, often engaging in a broader battle over the treatment of news.

Highlighting the complexity of these interactions, **the discussion stressed the longstanding expertise of certain actors, notably Russia, in wielding propaganda effectively and leveraging well-honed methods that extend beyond mere technological prowess in media.** It was argued that the communication strategies predominantly employed by Western actors and multilateral organisations stand little chance against the sophisticated propaganda apparatuses of experienced players like Russia. This disparity is further exacerbated by the application of double standards by liberal democratic actors concerning norms, standards, and principles they advocate globally. **Specific instances were cited, including the contrasting reactions to military coups in Mali and Chad, to illustrate Western partners ambiguous support for democracy in the region.** Such inconsistencies, it was contended, undermine the coherence of messages promoted internationally, particularly when the same actors who advocate for democracy support regimes that diverge from democratic norms. Likewise, attention was also drawn to the **pre-existing fake news phenomena in Mali**, predating the significant involvement of external actors like Wagner in the region. Mis-/disinformation narratives attributing various local grievances to foreign actors illustrated the complexity of information campaigns with roots in local contexts and external influences.

The critique extended to the EU's communication efforts, suggesting they often miss the mark by failing to resonate with local realities and priorities. The speaker advocated for a communication strategy that not only employs local languages but also addresses **issues pertinent to local audiences**, moving beyond a narrow focus on Western priority themes like climate change, women, LGBTIQ+, and youth that may **not align with local priorities.** To conclude, the speaker drew attention to **the importance of re-evaluating the methodologies and content of communication strategies by Western and international actors to more effectively counter the sophisticated propaganda mechanisms employed by states like Russia.** This re-evaluation calls for a greater emphasis on supporting local media landscapes and allowing them to highlight issues of genuine importance to their communities, thereby fostering a more authentic and impactful discourse.

DISCUSSION AND Q&A – PANEL 2

In discussing the diminished relevance of jihadist groups in certain regions, the conversation pivoted towards the broader narratives of political, and not necessarily violent, Islamism. It was highlighted that the current stability sought by the West in the Sahel is increasingly predicated upon conservative values and autocratic figures. It has moved the focus away from groups like Wagner to why states such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and

Russia gain significant traction in Africa by promoting conservative values that resonate deeply with the African populace. This shift underlines the power of autocratic policies and the influence of conservatism globally.

Moreover, the **discussion underscored that the fight for social conservatism in the region is not merely a battle of religious conviction but a struggle for African pride and the re-establishment of African societies based on their historical and cultural foundations.** Despite violent jihadists' adeptness at disseminating messages and narratives, including mis-/disinformation about their mythology and justifications for their actions, their relevance is questioned in the face of these emerging dynamics.

The discourse further explored **the EU's efforts to counter extremism and disinformation, critiquing the effectiveness of its policies over the last decade.** Methodologies commonly employed, such as the theory of change and logical frameworks, were criticised for being detached from local realities and, consequently, being ineffectual and a wastage of resources. The conversation called for a re-evaluation of these approaches, emphasising the need for more localised programming and engagement with a broader spectrum of local actors beyond traditional, including Western, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and agencies. This would entail a deeper understanding and **respect for local needs and perceptions**, steering clear of cultural aggression and the imposition of external values that often alienate local communities.

The speakers collectively advocated for a more integrative approach that prioritises the voices of local actors, allowing them to articulate their challenges and propose indigenous solutions. Underscoring **media literacy for the general population, not just journalists, was suggested as a means to empower individuals to critically evaluate information, thereby combating disinformation more effectively.** This comprehensive perspective calls for a significant policy introspection at the EU level, recognising the need to align more closely with the aspirations and perceptions of African communities and to foster a more democratic and inclusive approach to addressing the challenges facing the region.

CONCLUSION

KEY CONCLUSIONS FROM THE MEETING INCLUDE:

1. Need to better acknowledge disinformation campaigns as a critical element of modern conflict and geopolitical strategies, in light of its profound impacts on regional stability and global security dynamics.
2. The requirement to better understand and integrate local contexts, narratives, and voices in formulating responses to disinformation; including emphasising the role of local journalists, researchers, and community leaders as essential stakeholders.
3. The strengths that diverse and collaborative approaches offer for tackling disinformation – for instance by bringing together expertise from journalism, research, policy-making, and local communities to foster a holistic understanding of the phenomena and development of more effective counter-strategies.
4. The discussions underscored the imperative for the EU and other international actors to critically assess and adapt their policies and strategies in light of the nuanced challenges posed by disinformation, ensuring they are grounded in the realities of the Sahel region and beyond.

5. The importance of recognising the role of independent journalism and traditional media, the empowerment of local media landscapes as foundational to combating disinformation, alongside the promotion of media literacy among the general population to foster critical engagement with information.

In conclusion, the event not only elucidated the many-sided nature of disinformation campaigns in the Sahel and their broader impacts but also catalysed a crucial dialogue on the need for innovative, inclusive, and locally informed approaches to counter these challenges. Moving forward, the insights garnered call for a concerted effort among all stakeholders to deepen collaboration, support local capacities, and refine policies to effectively address the evolving landscape of disinformation and its implications for regional and international security.

ZOOMING IN ON NATIONAL DYNAMICS

Niger

- Niger faces challenges from both state and non-state actors influencing the disinformation landscape, with a noted impact on regional stability.
- The country sees journalists, politicians, and state actors as targets for kidnappings by armed groups, leveraging such actions as propaganda tools for legitimacy and competition among organisations.

Mali

- Mali lacks the sophisticated technological capabilities to carry out complex information operations, making external support, such as that from Wagner, crucial in their disinformation efforts.
- Massive online disinformation campaigns, often coordinated between Wagner and various armed groups, push narratives that promote military juntas and anti-French and Western sentiments.
- Journalists and researchers face significant barriers in conducting fieldwork, especially in rural and vulnerable areas, due to logistical and bureaucratic hurdles, and often have to navigate through the ideologies of armed groups.

Central African Republic (CAR)

- Wagner's significant presence in CAR, especially after the 2019 peace agreement, has been pivotal in shaping the disinformation landscape and influencing local narratives, despite formal constitutional guarantees for freedom of expression and of the press.
- The country has seen an increase in hate speech within local media, targeting various groups, and utilising social media as a primary vessel, despite low internet penetration.

Burkina Faso

- With plans to widen the reach of Russian media to Burkina Faso, there is an anticipation of increased disinformation campaigns that may influence the region's information ecosystem and challenge independent journalism.