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# EU Group Claims To Have Unearthed 15-Year-Old Indian Disinformation Operation

Monday 21 December 2020, by [The Wire \(IN\)](#) (Date first published: 10 December 2020).

**The operation targeted international institutions and served Indian interests primarily through resurrecting “dead media, dead think-tanks and NGOs”, the report by EU DisinfoLab says.**

**New Delhi:** A European Union (EU) non-profit group researching disinformation campaigns has said it has unearthed a 15-year-old influence operation “targeting international institutions and serving Indian interests”, which was done primarily through resurrecting “dead media, dead think-tanks and NGOs” - and in some cases, “dead people”.

In 2019, EU DisinfoLab had published a study that claimed to have uncovered an Indian influence network covering [“265 fake local news sites in more than 65 countries”](#).

That study began as a probe into possible Russian disinformation when articles published on *Russia Today* were republished on a website, ‘EP Today’, which led the investigators to the network of sites and NGOs, largely linked to the New Delhi-based Srivastava Group.

This business firm was apparently the [main backer of the Delhi-based ‘think tank’, International Institute of Non-Aligned Studies \(IINS\)](#) that had sponsored a group of right-wing members of European Parliament (MEPs) to visit Kashmir in October 2019 — the first time any politicians (including Indian ones) were allowed to visit the former state after it was placed in lockdown following the scrapping of Article 370 in August that year.

Following up on its earlier study, the group now says it has found evidence of a 15-year-old influence operation by Srivastava group.

In the latest investigation report — [“Indian Chronicles”](#), released on Wednesday — the EU DisinfoLab claims to have identified over 10 NGOs accredited to the United Nations Human Rights Council, which are apparently being managed by the Srivastava Group. Most of these seem to have been genuine NGOs which went into decline and whose identity has been “hijacked”, as per the authors of the report.

For example, in May 1938, the Canners International Permanent Committee was founded to promote the “consumption of canned food” and ceased to exist in 2007. However, the domain name of the organisation was registered on January 10, 2016, “the same day as the registration of other accredited NGOs domain names, and it is hosted on the IP address with several other Srivastava-owned websites”.

Accredited to UNHRC, the organisation has been making “pro-Indian and anti-Pakistan” oral interventions. “The core theme of the original NGO - “canned foods” - was totally diverted to undermine Pakistan at the Human Rights Council,” said the report.

Another UN-accredited NGO to have a presence on the servers used by the Srivastava Group, the report said, is the Commission to Study the Organisation of Peace (CSOP).

This organisation had been inactive from the late 1970s, before it was revived in 2005. “Shockingly, we discovered that the organisation had not only been revived. Its former Chairman and “grandfather of international law in the US”, Louis B. Sohn, who passed away in 2006, seemingly attended a UN Human Rights Council meeting in 2007 and participated in an event organised by ‘Friends of Gilgit-Baltistan’ in Washington D.C. in 2011,” the report says.

These groups were organising side events in the European parliament or UN offices, which were used to bring in MEPs “using causes such as minorities rights and women’s rights as an entry point”.

Further, the report claims that the “actors” behind the operations registered over 550 domain names of NGOs, think-tanks, media, European Parliament informal groups, religious and Imam organisations, obscure publishing companies and eight public personalities.

EU DisinfoLab claims to have found a new fake media - ‘EU Chronicle’ - which is largely a platform for MEPs to sign pro-India articles. “In less than 6 months of existence, already 11 MEPs, most of them already involved with EP Today, have written or endorsed op-eds at a remarkably high pace for EU Chronicle”.

These op-eds in EU Chronicle were then [repackaged](#) by news agency ANI. “Without *Times of Geneva* and 4 News Agency which stopped their activities following our previous investigation, ANI remains the only press agency to extensively cover the activities of dubious NGOs in Geneva”.

This media coverage, the report observed, was primarily targeted at Indian nationals “with an extensive coverage of these barely known ‘media’, MEPs and ‘NGOs’ in Europe”.

Summarising their findings, EU Disinfo Lab said that their investigation details “activities of a fake zombie-NGO and that of a fake specialised media can then be repackaged, distorted and amplified by malicious actors to influence or disinform globally, using loopholes in international institutions and online search engines”.

The researchers clarified that they were aware that the findings of the report would be used by vested interests, in a reference to Pakistani authorities. “Let us bear in mind that it is not because one side uses dodgy influence campaigns that the other side does not - and a simple Google search will lead you to read about inauthentic behaviours supporting Pakistani interests,” they add.

This report, they noted, was not a judgement about the situation of human rights in Pakistan or undermine the credibility of minority movements.

Asserting that there is no such thing as ‘good disinformation’, the authors claimed the “report simply shines a light on how Indian stakeholders have used these struggles to serve their own interests”.

While the report did not point any specific fingers at Indian intelligence agencies, it noted that there were “several elements that suggest the possible involvement of other stakeholders” in the influence operations. These elements were identified in the report as the close relationship between ANI and the Indian government, a Srivastava group firm’s alleged involvement in offering information warfare services only to Indian agencies and apparent threats made against a speaker at UN by a Srivastava group member, followed by interrogation by Indian security agencies.

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