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## **EU'S REPUTATIONAL SECURITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL<sup>13</sup>**

In the recent past, the image of a country was usually linked to economic achievements and failures. It was believed that its improvement was primarily aimed at ensuring economic performance, i.e. growth in investment, international trade, exports, by increasing visibility and reputation. In this line of thought, the concepts of national brand and national branding emerged and developed, followed by Simon Anholt's concept of competitive identity [1]. The latter takes into account the failures of expensive national branding projects in various countries and emphasises the combination of three key elements – strategy, substance and symbolic actions – to achieve a tangible outcome. In other words, we cannot create the image of an international actor from scratch unless its history and identity are taken into account (substance), presented through successful and relevant campaigns (symbolic actions), and integrated into the overall strategy of public diplomacy and international promotion.

The beginning of the 2020s has significantly changed the priorities in international politics, diplomacy and international communication. The issue of security came to the fore, and many experts began to draw scenarios of a new round of global confrontation with the possibility of its escalation into World War 3. In this connection, the understanding of the meaning and objectives of strategic communications and public

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diplomacy is also changing. One of the responses to the new challenges was the development of the concept of reputational security by Nicholas Cull, a well-known researcher of propaganda and public diplomacy. It is outlined in his articles [2; 3] and the book of 2024 titled “Reputational Security: Refocusing Public Diplomacy for a Dangerous World” [5]. According to Cull, reputational security is “a place on the high ground in the global imagination” that determines the active response of the international community in case of danger to this country [2, p. 29].

Undoubtedly, such security is most important for vulnerable states and those whose position is shaky and uncertain due to large-scale external threats (Ukraine is one of these states [4]; the peculiarities of the development of its reputational security in times of the war are highlighted in our article [7]). On the other hand, in today’s international politics, with all its dramatic twists and turns, few countries can feel safe, as the events after Donald Trump’s coming to power in 2025 have clearly demonstrated. From the first days of the new US administration, and even before that, the persons associated with the US government began to launch information attacks on foreign countries (Canada, Panama, Denmark) and political leaders (Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy). All of this is done to put pressure on foreign countries, including through influence on their internal political situation and by exaggerated coverage of their internal political issues. Thus, reputation destruction, which used to be a tool of radicals, secret services and authoritarian rulers, has gradually entered the mainstream and become an integral element of today’s international relations.

In this regard, let us pay attention to an older example of the destruction of country’s reputational security (or so-called counter-branding), which is discussed in the article by James Pamment [6]. He explores how a third party can interfere with the communication of a state with foreign publics within its public diplomacy, which results in significant damage to its reputation. This refers to the international disinformation campaign carried out by a Swedish non-governmental structure that accused this country and its leaders of crimes against humanity, gross negligence and incompetence for the decision not to

impose strict restrictive measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such an unexpected activity on the part of a domestic or foreign actor can significantly harm a state (or an international organisation) and create challenges for the implementation of its policy. This is especially crucial for the European Union, as it sets ambitious and far-reaching goals. It is quite natural that these goals are not always in line with the interests of many other actors, which turns them into competitors, opponents, or even enemies.

The European Green Deal incorporates many of these goals, including a zero pollution ambition for a toxic-free environment, mobilising industry for a clean and circular economy, preserving and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity, etc. [8, p. 3]. Obviously, these goals cannot be achieved solely within the Union, but rather the EU believes that over time, the achievement of these goals will become a global trend. That is why Section 3 of the document setting out the European Green Deal is devoted to the issue of the EU's global leadership. Among other things, it states that “the EU will continue to promote and implement ambitious environment, climate and energy policies across the world. It will develop a stronger ‘green deal diplomacy’ focused on convincing and supporting others to take on their share of promoting more sustainable development” [8, p. 20].

Since such policy involves large-scale and profound economic and social transformations, both political leaders and publics around the world have to be convinced. However, the task will be extremely difficult, given the growing opposition from various political actors, including those who are trying to destroy the EU's reputation. Examples of this could be the US's decisive and rapid withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement at the initiative of Trump and his plans to abandon the development of clean energy in favour of fossil fuels. Or it could be the large-scale and repeated protests of Polish farmers, which are held under the slogans “Down with the Green Deal” and “Stop Euroterror”.

This undermines the reputation of the European Union and trust in its ability to respond to current challenges, as well as trust in the scientifically proven data on the environment and climate on which its policies are based. Instead, various conspiracy myths are being spread about the natural causes of current climate change, which can be

regarded as a huge problem not only for the EU but for the whole world. Therefore, in the nearest future, it is vital for the EU and its Member States, which share the values of the European Green Deal, to clearly identify threats to their reputational security and develop a system of countermeasures that covers not only “defensive” strategies, but also seizing the initiative and taking a proactive stance, since ambitious goals in today’s world cannot be achieved without a bright and clear image and a willingness to defend one’s ideals and values in a sharp confrontation.

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