



Ukraine War Disinfo Working Group



SUMMARY REPORT

April 1 – April 7, 2023

This report collates insight drawn from monitoring of the narratives trending across pro-Kremlin sites and social media in across twelve countries in Central and Eastern Europe, as they relate to Russia’s war in Ukraine. The data were collected and analysed by a number of NGOs, think tanks and researchers, and collated by the Open Information Partnership (OIP), to promote knowledge sharing across the OIP network and the broader region. The analysis contained in this report is the result of each group’s monitoring, it is not authored by and does not represent the view of OIP, the FCDO or Zinc Network.



Country-By-Country Overview:

- Armenia
- Baltics (Russian Language)
- Belarus
- Bulgaria
- Georgia
- Hungary
- Moldova
- Poland
- Slovakia
- Ukraine

Working Definition of Disinformation:

1. False or misleading information spread deliberately via Hostile State (HS)-backed or HS-aligned outlets.
2. Not-attributable false or misleading information which fits with existing HS narratives, aims or activities.
3. Content based on verifiable information which is unbalanced or skewed, amplifies, or exaggerates certain elements for effect, or uses emotive or inflammatory language to achieve affects which fit within existing HS narratives, aims, or activities.
4. For the purposes of this report, disinformation also can be spread either organically through human ignorance and uncertainty or through poor journalistic standards, as long as the narrative in question verifiably originates with HS-backed or HS-aligned sources.

The following overview summarises developments in disinformation narratives by country, including new or shifting narratives and key cases. These development and insights primarily relate to narratives about the following themes:

- Anti-Western Narratives
- Narratives Discrediting Ukraine
- Battlefield Events
- (Negative) Economic Consequences of Sanctions
- Ukrainian Refugees
- Conditions of Russians and Russian-speaking Minorities
- Threat of War Expanding Beyond Ukraine
- Aid to Ukraine
- Conspiracy Theories

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Open Information Partnership

This monitoring report, produced by the “Ukraine War Disinformation” Working Group of the Open Information Partnership, covers the period of April 1 – April 7, 2023. It provides an overview of the prevailing disinformation narratives identified across select Telegram pages, online news portals, and, in some cases, Facebook groups, that are known to be active creators and purveyors of disinformation content across 12 information environments spanning a geography from Poland to Armenia. Each section highlights the most salient disinformation narratives, emerging trends, and most prolific actors in addition to offering an indication of what trends the data suggests will emerge in the coming weeks.

The assassination of pro-Russian “military correspondent” Vladlen Tatarsky that took place on April 2, 2023 in St Petersburg has driven the rise of a popular sub-narrative accusing Ukraine of attacking civilians and committing war crimes. Messaging based on this theme was particularly salient in Armenia, the Baltic states, Belarus and Ukraine – all of which are united by the presence of a substantial Russian-speaking segment of society. By contrast, on the contrary, in states such as Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia (where the number of Russian-speakers is much lower) this narrative did not enjoy much popularity.

One of the most striking changes to have taken place in this week’s monitoring is a shift in the Baltics’ information space. For the first time in several weeks, the narrative that Russian culture is under attack and Russian-speaking communities are discriminated against did not rank first in terms of publications – although it maintained a substantial degree of its popularity and came in second. Instead, most publications focused on the aforementioned assassination of Vladlen Tatarsky and, in a similar manner to the Russian authorities, ascribed blame to the Ukrainian secret services.

Conspiracy theories have gained increasing traction in Poland and Bulgaria. The claims that Ukrainian grain is contaminated and there is too much of it supplied to the local market has been popular in the Polish information environment at least since March 25, 2023 and is a growing concern in Bulgaria and, to some extent, Slovakia. Throughout the period of April 1 – April 7, this narrative has developed and now extends to claims about contaminated Ukrainian chicken meat. It should be noted that both cases are rooted in existing economic problems, including the rising cost of living. Pro-Russian and far-right disinformation sources, however, portray Ukrainian grain as a sole reason for the problems Polish and Bulgarian farmers are faced with.

Disinformation linked to battlefield events and the ongoing battle for Bakhmut have decreased in popularity, while anti-Western messages with a particular focus on claims that the West has provoked conflict between Russia and Ukraine remain a vital part of disinformation campaigns across the monitored geography. Additionally, the ongoing discussions of a potential Ukrainian counteroffensive have been subjected to a conspiracy theory in Armenia, where one of the most active pro-Russian bloggers claims that it may be “coordinated” with a possible Azerbaijani attack, as the Western governments allegedly pursue different options of opening a “second front” against Russia.

Due to the ongoing Easter celebrations and the unresolved dispute around Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra in Ukraine, disinformation linked to religion remains highly visible, particularly in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine itself, where the religious issues linked to Orthodox Christianity are highly sensitive.

In Ukraine, pro-Russian sources remain dedicated to the attempts to lower the general morale of Ukrainian society by discrediting the local leadership with accusations of corruption and incompetence that remain a leading disinformation narrative in the country for several consecutive weeks. Effort is also made to promote the idea of the ultimate Russian victory based on the exaggerated successes at Bakhmut, which is claimed to be fully under control of the Russian troops and PMC “Wagner”.

ARMENIA

Media Initiatives Center

“The West seeks to open a second front against Russia”

Publications:
4

Views:
22,880

This sub-narrative remained influential in the Armenian information space, with pro-Kremlin bloggers both from Armenia and from Russia itself claiming that the West is trying to open a second front against Russia in Armenia. One post contained a similar claim regarding Georgia.

“Ukrainians are targeting civilians and commit other war crimes”

Publications:
3

Views:
20,131

This narrative was centered on the assassination of pro-Russian propagandist Vladlen Tatarsky, which Russian authorities have accused Ukrainian secret services of carrying out. Local pro-Russian sources echoed the message that Tatarsky was killed by “terrorist Ukrainians”.

“The West/NATO provoked the conflict between Ukraine and Russia”

Publications:
3

Views:
1,621

The West was accused of warmongering in Ukraine and being the ultimate culprit behind the war. In particular, some sources quoted Putin who claimed that US support of “colour revolutions” and “a coup” in Ukraine were the true reason for the war.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- A new conspiracy theory emerged linking the possible attack of Azerbaijan on Armenian territory to the expected Ukrainian counteroffensive. Pro-Russian sources claim that the potential offensive by Azerbaijan and Ukrainian counteroffensive are likely to be “synchronized”.
- One of the most noticeable pro-Russian actors Mika Badalyan actively reposted Russian pro-war channels, including those of “military correspondents”, throughout the period of April 1 – April 7, 2023 to highlight the sub-narrative of the “second front”. In this case, Russian Telegram channels served as a primary source of disinformation, imported into Armenian information space by the local pro-Russian actors.
- While not exceedingly popular in terms of coverage (having only 1,621 views in total), the narrative of the West allegedly provoking the Russian war against Ukraine deserves attention due to the unusual source of these claims – a Telegram channel “dedicated to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps”.

Trend changes

The category of anti-Western narratives and the specific sub-narrative that the West is going to open a “second-front” against Russia remain an integral part of the Armenian disinformation eco-system. Although initially it became visible with the intensification of the protests in Georgia against the “foreign agents” bill and focused on Georgia as a potential military theatre for the new frontline, in Armenia it soon took the country-specific form, at which it remains centered. The predominant idea that the West, having failed to open a second front against Russia in Georgia, will try to do so in Armenia is an important focal point for local pro-Russian sources.

Throughout the period of April 1 – April 7, 2023, more posts emerged trying to depict the possible Azerbaijani attack on Armenia as part of a broader Western plan to create wars against Russia. Only one post contained claims about the West trying to drag Georgia into war. This arguably shows the adaptability of Russian disinformation actors in their attempts to exploit country-specific vulnerabilities; in Armenia such attempts are rooted in the fear of a new potential escalation of hostilities with Azerbaijan.

Context

As in previous weeks, the Armenian information space was dominated by issues related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, with fears still high of a possible Azerbaijani attack. Russian officials were widely cited to say that they are ready to send a monitoring mission on behalf of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) led by Russia, but the Armenian government is yet to agree to such an intervention. Currently, an EU civilian mission is monitoring the border with Azerbaijan and is widely believed to be one of the main factors stopping an Azerbaijani attack.

While not extensively targeted by pro-Russian actors during this monitoring period, the reluctance of the Armenian government to accept the CSTO mission may yet become subjected to disinformation. Russian officials and pro-Russian sources in Armenia, including Mika Badalyan, consistently criticize Yerevan for “turning to the West” and becoming closer to it instead of solidifying its partnership with Moscow. CSTO-related developments remain one of the widely discussed topics in the Armenian information field.

Key sub-narrative analysis

A new noteworthy conspiracy theory emerged which depicted possible Azerbaijani attack on Armenia as equivalent to or coordinated with Ukrainian counteroffensive (3 publications, 32,518 views). On April 3 and 4, Mika Badalyan [published posts](#) claiming that “the offensives of Ukraine and Azerbaijan are controlled from one center and will be synchronized”. On April 6, the theory was shared by popular pro-Kremlin blogger Rybar (and [reposted](#) by Armenian Vendetta) together with his “analytical report” about the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh in March-April, 2023. Rybar wrote that the two events “successfully correlate”; this post received over 300,000 views on his channel.

The so-called analytical report produced by Rybar is a 5-page document which summarizes the main events in Nagorno-Karabakh during the period 01.03.2023-06.04.2023 from the pro-Russian perspective. Rybar criticizes Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan for being pro-Western and blames the Armenian government for “helping” Azerbaijan to

destabilize the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Rybar employs the main narrative of pro-Russian opposition groups in Armenia, suggesting that Pashinyan's government is pro-Western and anti-Russian, its policies are against Armenian interests and Pashinyan is allegedly engaged in a conspiracy with the Government of Azerbaijan to destroy Armenia.

Posts amplifying this conspiracy theory echo the ongoing Kremlin effort to portray the War in Ukraine as being the fault of the West. In Armenia, both Iranian and Russian sources were quoted as saying that the West is the real reason behind the Russo-Ukrainian conflict (though these posts attracted much smaller audience: 3 publications, 1,621 views).

The majority of the disinformation (9 publications, 58,358 views) covered in this report were shared either by "Armenian Vendetta" or by Mika Badalyan and his "Azatagrumb" channel. This is consistent with the monitoring results of previous rounds, throughout which these actors have also demonstrated a high level of activity.

Another active channel spreading disinformation was "Armenia Info" (3 publications, 14,686 views during April 1 – April 7). Although the channel has a very limited audience, one of its posts attacking Russians fleeing mobilization to Armenia was shared by both Mika Badalyan and Armenian Vendetta, receiving 14,277 views – much higher than the usual number of views on the channel. The post in question [labelled](#) them "deserters" and traitors for fleeing mobilization and refusing to fight and ridicules the discussions held by the Russians in Armenia about the necessity to prosecute Vladimir Putin.

In addition to blaming the West for attempts to orchestrate a "second front" against Russia, disinformation actors also spread another traditional anti-Western narrative blaming it for the start of the war in Ukraine. In particular, the Telegram channel ArmeniaInfo [amplified](#) Putin's claim that "American use of technologies such as colour revolutions and a coup d'etat in Kyiv has ultimately led to the Ukrainian crisis and degradation of Russian-Ukrainian relations". The same message was [reposted](#) by the ArmVoice channel where it received 961 views.

The narrative was additionally pushed by the Azatagrumb channel, which is led by the aforementioned Mika Badalyan. The channel (3,803 subscribers) [reposted content](#) from "Channel IRGC [Islamic Revolution Guard Corps]" that compared Azerbaijan halting its embassy work in Iran and expelling Iranian diplomats with the unnamed "provocations" of the Ukrainian authorities on behalf of the West aimed at "dragging Russia into war". While somewhat ambiguous, since hostilities between Russia and Ukraine are active and ongoing, the post clearly blames the West for warmongering and provoking Russia into conflict.

Trend prediction

The posts and narratives which depicted Armenia's main adversary, Azerbaijan, as somehow connected to Ukrainian counteroffensive will likely be present in the future. This helps depict Ukraine as hostile towards Armenia and unworthy of support, while Russia is depicted as a brotherly nation suffering an attack just like Armenia. Such a manipulative depiction of the two conflicts also serves as a convenient framework for voicing threats of the war spreading beyond Ukraine, as the language of threats has traditionally been present in Russian communication with the Armenian public. For many years Russian and local pro-Russian actors were consistent in creating the image of Russia as the 'savior' of Armenia. That is, telling the Armenian public that it has no other choice but to be pro-Russian because when Azerbaijanis/Turks attack, there will be no one except Russia to save the country. Consequently, this narrative states that bad relations with Russia are extremely damaging to the national interests of the Armenian state.

BALTICS (RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE)

Civic Resilience Initiative

„Ukrainians are targeting civilians and commit other war crimes“

Publications:
6

Views:
9,252

The narrative was centered on framing the murder of pro-Russian propagandist Vladlen Tatarsky in St. Petersburg's Street Food Bar №1 café as a terrorist act, initiated by Ukraine and demonstrating the lawless nature of the Ukrainian state.

„X country is Russophobic / Russian culture is being attacked“

Publications:
6

Views:
14,190

The narrative was predominantly focused on portraying Latvia as a Russophobic state where the locals supposedly are forced to learn Ukrainian instead of speaking Russian and government-issued warnings of the potential dangers of traveling to Russia are portrayed as Russophobia.

„Ukrainians are Nazis“

Publications:
5

Views:
7,321

The stories within the narrative were centered around sticking the “Nazi” label on Ukraine and calls for the need to denazify the region. Accusations of Nazism were also largely linked to the assassination of Vladlen Tatarsky.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- This week there was the biggest focus on narratives discrediting Ukraine since the project commenced on February 20, 2023, which heavily revolved around the incident in St. Petersburg, where pro-Russian propagandist Vladlen Tatarsky was assassinated in a café linked to the leader of PMC “Wagner” Evgeniy Prigozhyn.
- For the first time in 4 weeks there weren't any statistical anomalies recorded from the Telegram channel “Антифашисты Прибалтики” (Antifascist Baltics), which led to an overall decreased number of views.
- While narratives regarding economic sanctions were on the rise recently and typically overshadowed narratives discrediting Ukraine, during the period of April 1 – April 7, 2023 the opposite occurred and anti-Ukrainian narratives became more salient.
- The Russophobia-centered narrative continues to be among the most popular ones. However, its popularity was lower this week compared to the previous monitoring periods.

Trend changes

The narrative claiming that Russian-culture is under attack and that the Russian minority is persecuted in the Baltic states continues to be among the most popular ones, as it has been since the beginning of this monitoring research. However, compared to the previous monitoring periods the overall intensity of this narrative has somewhat subsided.

Narratives regarding economic sanctions, which have been continuously increasing in popularity for the past few weeks, dipped throughout April 1 – April 7. Anti-Western rhetoric continues to be stable in popularity, although not being able to compete with allegations of Russophobia and exploitation of economic grievances. The viewership of the relevant posts for the anti-Western publications of different forms has been amongst the lowest since February 20, 2023. The “Threat of war expanding beyond Ukraine” and “Battlefield event” narratives haven’t appeared at all.

Context

On 2 April 2023, a bombing occurred in the Street Food Bar №1 café on Universitetskaya Embankment in Saint Petersburg, Russia. The establishment is reportedly linked to the leader of PMC “Wagner” Evgeniy Prigozhyn. Russian “military blogger” and propagandist Vladlen Tatarsky, real name Maxim Fomin, died as a result of the explosion and 42 people were injured, 24 of whom were hospitalized. Six of them are in a critical condition.

Russia's National Anti-terrorism Committee (NAC) accused Ukrainian intelligence services and supporters of Alexei Navalny of being behind the attack, which was echoed by Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, who called it a "terrorist act". Ukrainian presidential advisor Mykhailo Podolyak blamed the attack on "domestic terrorism" and "an internal political fight", while Navalny's allies rejected the accusation and said it was more likely that Russia's own intelligence services were behind the attack. The National Republican Army (NRA) claimed responsibility for the attack. NRA is an alleged paramilitary structure formed after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russians who are critical of the invasion itself and the policies of current regime in Moscow. No specific information about NRA and its existence is available from sources other than Ilya Ponomarev, a former representative of Russian opposition who has fled to Ukraine. Ponomarev was the first person to publicly mention NRA and its existence after the assassination of Daria Dugina in August 2022. NRA has “claimed responsibility” for attacks both on Dugina and Tatarsky, as well as for a number of other incidents, however, there is no evidence to support these claims so far.

Key sub-narrative analysis

This week the most popular narrative group focused on discrediting Ukraine (12 posts in general, 12,887 views). The dominant sub-narrative insisted that Ukraine attacks civilians and commits other war crimes, portraying the incident in St. Petersburg as a Ukrainian terrorist act. This strengthened the narrative that Ukrainians are Nazis and it is Russia’s duty to “denazify” the country.

The bombing of a café in St. Petersburg was not only linked to Ukraine, but also to the West, claiming that they helped in orchestrating the whole event. In turn, the Kremlin was then able to utilize this narrative to spread distrust and discredit certain people or groups in Russia itself, calling them out as potential Western collaborators. The Ukraine-Nazi

connection created by the Russian disinformation machine is so deeply ingrained in Russian and pro-Russian messages on Ukraine that it no longer needs any explanation or proof. Interesting to note that this narrative was mainly pushed by 3 Telegram channels – Rubaltic, Baltic Tea (Балтийский Чай) and Antifascist Baltics (“Антифашисты Прибалтики”). In such publications, two out of three leading narratives of the week were combined – accusing Ukrainian of targeting civilians and committing war crimes as well as accusations of Nazism.

The second most popular narrative was “X country is Russophobic / Russian culture is being attacked” (6 posts, 14,190 views). Stories within this narrative mainly revolved around showcasing the exclusion of Russian culture in Latvia as a direct threat to the Russian-speaking minority. This narrative is being pushed through some absurd means, including some posts stating that Latvia's government is forcing citizens to learn Ukrainian instead of using Russian language. Furthermore, the warnings of Latvia's Security Services warnings to Latvians traveling to Russia are being viewed as a Russophobic political stance. Such messages contribute to the narrative that the Kremlin will not tolerate the existence of an openly anti-Russian state on its borders, inciting fearmongering within the Baltic region.

Anti-western messaging decreased throughout the period of April 1 – April 7, 2023 (6 posts in total, 4,766 views). The stories within the narratives were pretty diverse, covering topics from the alleged Western incompetence to NATO's weaknesses and its involvement in the war. The latter narrative was trying to prove that 2 NATO soldiers were wounded in the war. However, those 2 men were volunteers from Lithuania and not soldiers of NATO, which pro-Russian disinformation actors attempt to portray as having “boots on the ground”.

As usual, the most popular post came from the Telegram channel “[Антифашисты Прибалтики](#)” (Antifascist Baltics). However, its viewership is significantly smaller compared to previous monitoring periods. Previously, the most popular posts from this group gathered 350,000+ views. This week, however, the publication managed to get only 5,000 views. As with the period of March 25 – April 1, 2023, the most popular post spread the “Russophobia” narrative. It stated that there is a war happening seeking to destroy the Russian people and that the Western elite will allegedly like a world in which there will be no Russia, putting Russian-speaking minorities in danger. NATO is accused of concentrating forces near the borders of Russia in order to destroy the country and its people.

Trend prediction

Looking at the past few weeks and our previous analysis, it is safe to assume that the Russophobia-related narratives will continue to be among the most popular ones. Narratives discrediting Ukraine have risen in popularity, mainly due to the incident in St. Petersburg, and have become more salient than narratives regarding economic challenges including the impact of sanctions. If no major unprecedented events happen, we expect for the economy-focused disinformation to retain its previously high traction as efforts to discredit Ukraine trend downwards.

Looking at important dates for next week, a few may be pointed out to have a possible altering effect on the information landscape in the Baltics. The 8th of April marks Estonia's Independence Demonstration anniversary. This might give ground to call Estonia's sovereignty in question. The 11th of April marks International Day of the Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camp Inmates, which might give ground to incite disinformation that would accuse the Baltic states of Nazism.

BELARUS

Belarus Press Club

“Ukrainians are Nazis”

Publications

:

4

Views:

76,263

The murder of Vladlen Tatarsky (Max Fomin) in St Petersburg has become part of the agenda. The pro-Lukashenka channels did not miss the opportunity to accuse all the structures hated by the Russian authorities (the opposition, Alexei Navalny's anti-corruption foundation, the National Republican Army and, of course, the Ukrainian special services) of Tatarsky's murder.

The ZmeyMarinych channel draws parallels between the exhibition of the Ukrainian Military Museum in New York, which presents the shoes of the dead Russian soldiers, and the collection of belongings of prisoners in Auschwitz.

“Ukraine will be divided among other countries”

Publications

:

2

Views:

98,543

The channel "Pul Pervogo" quotes the words of Sergei Naryshkin, director of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation, who said that the Polish leadership is eager to take control of the eastern part of the Ukrainian territories.

The author of the channel "Shpakovsky. Essentially." expressed the opinion that Zelensky is handing over Ukrainian statehood to Poland.

“The West/NATO provoked the conflict between Ukraine and Russia”

Publications

:

1

Views

211,558

Ukrainian blogger Tatyana Montyan, in an interview with the ONT NEWS channel, said that Western countries had unleashed a war in Ukraine and that the supply of weapons by the West would not allow the conflict to end.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The "Yellow Plums" channel [published](#) the last video of pro-Russian propagandist Vladlen Tatarsky (Max Fomin), who was killed in St Petersburg, which it calls "Tatarsky's testament". In the video, Tatarsky calls to "put an end to this state [Ukraine] once and for all", and also states that "Russia is now facing a terrorist state [Ukraine]". The channel promotes the idea that the revenge on Ukraine will be many times greater than the crime it has supposedly committed.
- After a meeting with Alexander Lukashenko (the meeting was also attended by the head of the Belarusian KGB, Ivan Tertel), the director of the Russian Foreign

Intelligence Service, Sergei Naryshkin, [stated](#) several times that Poland was waiting for a favourable moment to take control of the former Polish territories that are now in the western part of Ukraine.

- Pro-Russian blogger of Ukrainian origin Tatyana Montyan [mentioned](#) in an interview to the "ONT NEWS" channel that Belarus has become a second home for those who fled the horrors of war and "Ukrainian nationalists". She also said that the West provoked a war in Ukraine and the countries of the West are prolonging the conflict with their arms supplies.

Trend changes

This week there are more stories directly concerning Belarus. The state channels have been talking about Belarus being allegedly exposed to constant hostile operations by Polish and Ukrainian special services, and about Ukrainian and Polish spies and "Belarusian traitors" operating in the country. Pro-governmental analysts argued that Belarus is the only country offering peaceful solutions to the military conflict. It was also stressed that Ukrainians are grateful to Belarus, which has become their second home.

Such rhetoric assists in portraying Ukrainian authorities as hostile against their own population and portrays Russia and Belarus as guarantors of security for Ukrainian civilians.

Besides, against the background of an investigation into the damage to the Russian A-50 reconnaissance aircraft in Machulishchi airfield, the narrative of the alleged interference by foreign special services in the internal affairs of Belarus has advanced noticeably.

Context

There were few newsbreaks during the week, which did not give the pro-Russian and pro-governmental sources in Belarus substantial ground for disseminating narratives to discredit Ukraine.

A noticeable amount of the pro-government channels promoted an "investigative film" about the KGB investigation into the damage to the Russian A-50 reconnaissance aircraft in Machulishchi. The jet was reportedly damaged as a result of an explosion in early March, and Belarusian authorities blamed Ukrainian secret services for the incident. The investigation allows Belarusian government and pro-Lukashenko media to recycle the accusations of foreign powers, particularly Ukraine, meddling in the internal affairs of Belarus.

Also, to reinforce and substantiate the theses put forward, the authors made references to the main media event of the past week - Alexander Lukashenko's message to the people of Belarus and the National Assembly, in which he voiced a number of false claims and disinformation messages. In particular, Lukashenko's speech included claims of the decaying and morally corrupt West, accusing the West of provoking a war between Russian and Ukraine and using Ukraine as a pawn as well as other traditional messages such as "Ukrainians are Nazis" and "Ukrainians committed genocide in the Donbas region".

The three main themes dominating the disinformation eco-system in Belarus throughout the period of April 1 - April 7 were: 1) the investigation into the murder of Vladlen Tatarsky in St Petersburg; 2) discussion of the ongoing conflict over the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra in Ukraine; and 3) ongoing accusations that the leadership of Ukraine, Ukrainian military personnel, and foreign mercenaries are Nazis.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The three most viewed messages were from the "ONT NEWS" and "Pool Pervogo" channels, which promoted the topics already mentioned: the [explosion](#) of the aircraft in Machulishchi (230,000 views); the [interview](#) of Ukrainian-born blogger Tatyana Montyan, where she claimed that the West is to blame for the war in Ukraine (212,000 views); and the [interview](#) with Sergei Naryshkin about the possible territorial claims of Poland on Ukrainian territory (95,000).

The publicist Yuri Voskresensky, who consistently voices pro-Russian messages, is becoming increasingly popular, both on screen and across various Telegram channels. [Speaking](#) on the ATN_NEWS programme "Editors' Club", he accused Zelensky of not signing a ceasefire, which is supposedly why civilians in Ukraine are suffering today, and emphasised that Ukraine's leadership does not care about its people and Ukraine does not want peace.

Yuri Voskresensky in his channel also [claims](#) that the Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin lost the parliamentary elections allegedly because "she did not give a damn" about internal affairs and dived headlong into the "Ukrainian case", and the Europeans were tired of pumping the "Ukrainian junta with money and weapons". Voskresensky promotes the narrative that "Western politicians care about Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens", and predicts that "all kinds of idiots" will be removed from power in the next two years.

The "ZhS premium" channel, [quoted](#) the words of Oleksiy Danilov (Secretary of Ukraine's National Security Council) that "a diplomatic solution to the conflict will be the political assassination of Zelensky", and accused Zelensky and the Ukrainian leadership of rejecting all peace initiatives, and that the United States is pressuring Zelensky to continue fighting "to the last Ukrainian".

Analyst of the pro-government Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies Olga Lazorkina in the release of the program "Objective" of the channel "ONT NEWS" [expressed](#) the opinion that Belarus is almost the only actor which makes proposals for a peaceful settlement of the Ukrainian conflict.

Channel "Lyudmila Gladkaya. SB" in a report from the village of Nikolsky, located near Ugledar in the east of Ukraine, [claims](#) that the Nikolsky Monastery is allegedly shelled by the Ukrainian neo-Nazi military, and the clergy were bullied, beaten and killed.

Trend prediction

Should there be no major events to become natural focal points for the attention of media, it can be assumed that pro-government channels will continue to concentrate anti-Ukrainian narratives around the theme that Belarus is a peaceful country, is not taking part in the war and is offering peace initiatives, while Western countries and their intelligence services are acting against both Belarus and its' peace proposals.

With further arms deliveries to Ukraine and a possible counter-offensive operation by the Ukrainian Armed Forces, there will be more and more talk about the need for negotiations, that peaceful Ukrainian citizens will suffer without negotiations, and that the responsibility for this lies on the shoulders of the Ukrainian leadership and its Western "puppeteers".

With a high probability, the leadership of Ukraine will be accused by pro-government channels and the so-called war correspondents of not ceasing hostilities during Orthodox Easter.

Bulgaria

Center for the Study of Democracy

“Russian troops are advancing / achieving success”

Publications:
5

Views:
5,388

Ukrainian authorities are in a hopeless state due to Russia’s military success. Articles mention that a Russian flag has been raised over the Bakhmut administration, 50 AFU soldiers were supposedly killed in Yuzhnodonetsk and the advances made by the Wagner group are celebrated. This sub-narrative was also popular during the previous periods of monitoring.

“Ukrainians are Nazis”

Publications:
4

Views:
21,600

Pro-Kremlin media outlets and Telegram channels focused on emotional disinformation, sharing a video showing a Ukrainian soldier next to Nazi symbols and quoting Georgian leader Irakli Garibashvili regarding the “failure of the plan to *Ukrainianize* his country”. According to him, Kyiv planned to restore the Saakashvili regime in Tbilisi.

“NATO/the US/the West is or will be directly involved in the war”

Publications:
3

Views:
140,603

The sub-narrative intensified in comparison to the previous round of monitoring, mainly utilizing the narrative that the Kyiv regime, NATO and the EU are trying to intimidate and destroy those who speak the truth. An [article](#) mentioned a Russian hypersonic missile destroying Ukrainian underground headquarters where NATO officers and staff were supposedly based.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- 22 out of the 50 monitored posts and publications utilized the **anti-Western narratives** and the **narratives discrediting Ukraine**, which were top categories for the period of April 1 – April 7, 2023 (13 and 9 publications, respectively). The sub-narrative that the **Russian troops are advancing / achieving success** is again highly popular, with articles claiming heavy artillery strikes near Kremennaya caused heavy AFU losses and that Bakmut is legally captured by PMC Wagner.
- 10 days having passed after the elections, there was no disinformation shared by political actors present in the monitored sources. Currently, the political parties in Parliament are trying to form a government – a hard task, especially having the pro-NATO WCC-DB coalition losing in the elections to the conservative populist party GERB.

Trend changes

- Monitored media outlets claimed that the Western and Ukrainian “propaganda machines” have already worked out disinformation plans and preparations for the upcoming counteroffensive of the Ukrainian armed forces. Pro-Russian sources also insist that Kyiv preparing for counter-

offensive action means more cannon fodder, implying that Zelensky does not care about Ukrainians.

- Numerous **Conspiracy theories** gained traction during the period of April 1 – April 7 – for example, an article claiming that *the seal of the Antichrist is on the forehead of Zelensky and his cursed Western demonic gang* gained traction. Also, Telegram groups posted [footage](#) from a Kyiv court where Metropolitan Paul, the governor of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, is being put under electronic monitoring by having to wear an ankle bracelet. The video's description states that this demonstrates the purposeful anti-Christian policy of Ukraine and the efforts from the West to divide Slavs/Orthodox Christians.

Context

Telegram groups and media outlets monitored actively disseminated publications utilizing the ***X country is under threat/will be pulled into the war*** narrative. In Bulgaria, the aforementioned rhetoric is amplified by the [recent working meeting](#) in the Pentagon between the head of the Bulgarian national parliament and representatives of the US Department of Defense. The meeting was utilized to disseminate panic, implying that Bulgaria is preparing for war and is negotiating NATO air support above Sofia in order to protect the capital from air strikes or terrorist attacks. Furthermore, the pro-NATO coalition of WCC-DB was numerous times labelled as the [coalition of war](#).

Key sub-narrative analysis

As usual, the most popular publication of the week was again a Telegram post in Russian from the group **ЗОВ - заЕДНО ОБЩение всеМИР [ZOV – United Community for Peace]**. The [post](#), which accumulated 139,484 total views, showed an interview with the UN Secretary General's spokesman Farhan Haq on the topic of the legitimacy of the US military presence in Syria. Although not directly linked to Ukraine, it is still disseminated as yet another proof of the US interfering in the internal affairs of other countries and establishing military bases in them, which is what the Russian and pro-Russian sources predict Ukraine will be used for by Washington.

Ukrainians are Nazis: the sub-narrative was also highly popular during April 1 – April 7, 2023. The Kremlin has consistently utilized this disinformation trope throughout the war to vilify and dehumanize Ukrainians. The news outlet [Pogled.info](#) systematically publishes outright pro-Kremlin disinformation and often includes "Nazi spectre" messages against Ukrainians. This week, [Pogled](#) also published an [article](#) quoting the PM of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili claiming that Kyiv planned to restore the Saakashvili regime in Tbilisi and for the latter to materialize, Ukrainian and Western politicians allegedly provoked Georgian youth to participate in Euromaidan-style "street riots".

NATO is or will be directly involved in the war: The narrative was utilized even more often in comparison to the period of March 25 – April 1, 2023. This type of disinformation falsely claimed that Russia is fighting the collective West in Ukraine and gained traction after Ukraine launched a successful counter offensive against the Russian invaders in the Kharkiv region in 2022. Pro-Kremlin disinformation amplifiers particularly like to deploy this narrative whenever Ukraine receives military support from its Western partners. Furthermore, pro-Russian outlets and Telegram groups in Bulgaria disseminate disinformation about Zelensky's government allegedly oppressing Ukrainians and claim that the blood of the dead and

wounded is on the hands of Western leaders, who support such a tyranic rule. A great example of the latter can be again seen in an article from [Pogled.info](https://pogled.info).

Trend prediction

With military actions unfolding in the eastern part of Ukraine, narratives depicting **Ukraine losing the war** and **Russia having military success** will continue to be highly popular. The often utilized Kremlin disinformation technique of using the opinion of a foreign agent of Russian influence or impersonating a legitimate and trusted figure or entity in order to create false credibility surrounding a narrative will again be used – this week, a statement from former U.S. Army officer [Scott Bennett](#) in which he states that Ukraine, the US, UK and Israel may be behind Tatarsky's murder and that this was a joint operation of these countries was used.

With the developing military actions still ongoing, there is a chance that narratives connected with **Ukrainian refugees** will intensify even further.

Georgia

Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS)

"Ukrainian government is fighting against Christian church"

Publications:

7

Views:

7,958

The ongoing campaign to discredit the Ukrainian government in regard to the crisis around Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra by claiming that it is fighting Christianity and the Orthodox Church with brutal force continued in this monitoring period.

"Ukraine is losing the war"

Publications:

9

Views:

6,445

Various messages that try to change the perception of Ukraine's successful resistance to the Russian invasion by persuading the Georgian public that Ukraine is losing the war is the core of pro-Russian disinformation in Georgia.

"The West is interfering in Georgia's internal affairs"

Publications:

3

Views:

1,663

The message that the West is interfering in Georgia's internal affairs has been consistently present in recent months. This time, particular focus was on disseminating disinformation that the US and the EU are organising a revolution in Georgia.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The campaign to discredit the Ukrainian government by stating that they are fighting against Christianity and the Orthodox Church continued for the third consecutive week. The pattern of the campaign is similar – it includes messages that the Ukrainian government is persecuting Christianity and using force against Orthodox priests and that Ukrainian government and police is doing nothing to contain, and is even encouraging, violence towards Orthodox parishioners. This disinformation trend remains rooted in the crisis around Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and promotion of misconceptions about the religious situation in Ukraine, particularly the role of Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) in supporting Russian influence in the country.
- The sub-narrative that Ukraine is losing the war has been the basis of Russian disinformation in Georgia since the full-scale invasion began. The messages suggesting Ukraine's inevitable defeat were based on the comments from American pro-Russian figures and messages stemming from Kremlin-affiliated sources, and out of context quotes of the Western and Ukrainian officials. Additionally, a fake story claiming that the leaked US documents show that Russia only lost 16-17.5 thousand soldiers has been circulated by the local pro-Russian media.
- The sub-narrative that the West is interfering in Georgia's internal affairs included stories that the US sanctioning Georgian judges for corruption means that the US is interfering in Georgia's internal affairs, that the US and the EU are organising

revolution in Georgia, and that the EU is spending millions to recruit young people to later use them in their cause against Georgian national interests. The ongoing dispute around the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra is still the having the most impact on disinformation ecosystem in Georgia. The US has sanctioned 4 Georgian judges (3 active and one former) by imposing travel restrictions for involvement in corruption. This unexpected development has sparked anti-US messaging accusing the US of interfering in Georgia's internal affairs.

Trend changes

As predicted, the sub-narratives that Ukraine is losing the war and Ukraine is fighting against Christianity have remained popular. Disinformation is consistently used to claim that the Ukrainian government is persecuting Orthodox priests, using force against them and encouraging violence towards the parishioners.

Also, the same trend continues in regards to the sub-narrative that Ukraine is losing the war – it is mainly based on cherry-picked content from the Western media, the comments of Western pro-Russian actors and Russian sources.

The sub-narrative that the West is interfering in Georgia's internal affairs is a new-comer into the top three compared to the period of March 25 – April 1, 2023, although this sub-narrative has been popular previously.

The sub-narrative that the Western society does not support Ukraine has not disappeared completely but has been less popular for the priod of April 1 – April 7, 2023.

Context

The Georgian public has a very high degree of solidarity towards Ukraine and its resistance as Georgians widely believe that Russia's invasion is illegal and represents an act of brutal aggression. To change these attitudes and preserve the myth of Russia's military prowess, pro-Russian disinformation is consistently disseminating various messages that suggest that Ukraine is losing the war and Russia will eventually win. Also, to discredit Ukraine and its government and change the perceptions of Georgians, pro-Russian actors exploit the sensitiveness of Georgian society towards religious matters and the ongoing dispute around Kyiv Pechersk Lavra.

The recent development regarding the imposition of sanctions on Georgian judges by the US administration is among the hottest topics on the agenda. The sanctioned judges had quite a bad reputation amongst Georgian society and the Georgian Dream-led messaging campaign is trying to divert the attention from the problems in the judiciary system by repeatedly claiming that by imposing sanctions, the US is interfering in Georgia's internal affairs.

Notably, the sanctioned judges have also been actively involved in this disinformation campaign accusing the US of meddling into affairs of other countries. This creates fertile ground for pro-Russian sources to peddle the same message they have been trying to popularise for years.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The most active sub-narratives concerned the Ukrainian government allegedly fighting against Christianity, the West interfering in Georgia's internal affairs and Ukraine losing the war:

- Based on RT, the Georgian pro-Russian webpage GeWorld [reported](#) that the EU has set up funds of 2.5 million Euros for the coordination and support of youth in the Eastern Partnership countries for the goal of selecting young people that they will later use for their own interests.
- To display that Christianity is being persecuted in Ukraine, a Telegram channel BekaNews [posted](#) a video claiming that some Ukrainians are demanding Orthodox parishioners to be killed.
- The same source [claimed](#) that Sergey Surovikin, a Russian military commander, has been successful in luring Ukraine into the trap in Bakhmut - making Zelensky send more troops there and getting them systemically destroyed by the Russian forces, creating a bloodbath for Ukrainian troops.
- Pro-Russian Telegram channel WorldPolitics [posted](#) a video and stated that the situation in regard to Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra "... is a war with God. This will end in the destruction of Ukraine and there will be Kyivan Rus".

Messages discrediting Ukraine were also shared by Crossroadwar, a pro-Russian Telegram Channel of Zurab Makharadze – one of the leaders of Alt-Info, which is among the most successful disinformation actors in Georgia. Makharadze is one of the founders and masterminds behind the group and has been its leader. He has been selected as the chairman of the political party – Conservative Movement – formed by the Alt-Info group.

However, several months ago he disappeared from the TV screens and then stepped down from his position in the party due to being embroiled in a personal family scandal that contradicted the ultra-conservative views that he and his party has been advocating for. After leaving the party positions in the Conservative Movement, he returned as a director of media group Alt-Info and has continued spreading disinformation.

He has openly advocated for alliance with Russia and has been the leader of anti-Western and pro-Russian protests, including the recent one when the protesters stole and scorched the EU flag hanging outside the Parliament building, and violent alt-right rallies, such as July 5, 2021 anti-LGBT rally when protesters physically assaulted more than 50 journalists.

Trend prediction

If the ongoing dispute around the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra and UOC MP continues, the campaign to discredit Ukraine by claiming that its government is fighting Orthodox Christianity is highly likely to remain in place. Even if the situation is resolved, the campaign may still persist if the issue will be popular with the Kremlin-affiliated Russian sources as Georgian pro-Russian disinformation is usually dependent on them.

The message that Ukraine is losing the war has been actively pushed in one form or another and there are no signs of the trend changing any time soon, unless there would be some major battlefield developments, such as a successful Ukrainian counterattack that would make the narrative obsolete.

The sub-narrative that the West is interfering in Georgia's internal affairs is likely to escalate with a particular focus on the US. These messages are already mainstream due to the active involvement of Georgian Dream party in disseminating them.

Hungary

Political Capital

“Ukrainians target civilians and commit other war crimes”

Publications:
4

Views:
20,097

This is a recurring pro-Kremlin sub-narrative trying to claim that Ukraine is committing war crimes while failing to address or even recognise Russia's war crimes. Pro-government and far-right sources spread it based on the story that supposedly a Ukrainian HIMARS missile killed 2 civilians in the Donetsk region.

“Aid to Ukraine is weakening/jeopardising the countries that provide it”

Publications:
4

Views:
12,891

This sub-narrative is a recurring one, misrepresenting data about military aid to Ukraine and claiming that it is causing escalation or depleting the resources of Western powers, leaving them weak and ultimately undermining their own security.

“Ukraine mistreats its soldiers/civilians”

Publications:
4

Views:
8,774

This sub-narrative is a continuation of the pro-Kremlin narrative alleging that Zelensky is prosecuting Christians in relation to the crisis around Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. This narrative was spread by all three categories of actors: pro-government, far-right, and pro-Kremlin.

Contextualising most popular narratives

- Narratives discrediting Ukraine were once again the most popular category. The three topics regarding which such rhetoric was used were alleged war crimes by Ukraine, Zelensky's crackdown on leaders of the pro-Kremlin Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), and Ukraine supposedly not wanting peace. Government-organised and far-right media all engaged in these narratives.
- Anti-Western narratives were also quite popular. These mostly boiled down to the West escalating the war, preventing peace, provoking the conflict in the first place, and using Ukraine as a pawn in their fight against Russia. These messages were spread by government-organised and far-right media.
- Finally, narratives regarding battlefield events were quite prevalent, too. Examples include Ukraine losing the war, Russia capturing Bakhmut for the fifth week in a row, and denial or relativisation of Russian war crimes. This narrative was also spread by government-organised and far-right media.

Trend changes

One of the most popular narratives of March 25 – April 1, 2023, claiming that Zelensky is persecuting Christians, appeared to be just as popular throughout this monitoring period. This is naturally used to whip up hatred among Hungarian Christians against Ukraine.

While just out of the top three, the sub-narrative of Russia “wanting peace but the West preventing it” that emerged throughout March 25 – April 1 was quite widespread this week, too, with four such cases. Two of the four people using this narrative were Chinese officials, one Hungarian MP, and a Hungarian government-aligned influencer. As noted last week, this is a very powerful language, framing Hungary/China/Russia as those fighting for peace and the West as bloodthirsty warmongers escalating the conflict.

For the fifth week in a row, multiple articles celebrated Bakhmut being captured by the Russian military, although in fact it does not fully control the city. Russian forces make minor advances every week while suffering extremely high casualties.

Context

The Hungarian government is adamantly sticking to its message on the economic aspect of the war. As detailed in the report for March 25 – April 1, they blame sanctions for high energy prices in Hungary. Hungarian government officials fail to mention that Hungary is still buying Russian gas, that Hungary voted for the EU sanctions, and that Hungary has the highest rate of inflation in the EU. The government narrative claiming that Europe needs Russian gas and can't survive without it ignores the fact that in 13 months, Germany has successfully eliminated its dependence on Russian gas, unlike Hungary.

In some cases, Hungarian government-organised and far-right media still refuse to recognise Russian war crimes. Instead, they once [said](#) (Szent Korona Rádió) these are “events referred to as war crimes by some”. In another [case](#) (Pesti Srácok), a Russian government official saying the mass deportation of children is Western disinformation was quoted in such media. The author did not refute these claims nor provide any context.

Key sub-narrative analysis

Ukrainians target civilians and commit other war crimes (4 cases, 20,097 views). Two articles using this narrative were about [a HIMARS rocket killing a civilian in Russian-occupied territory](#). Although it is unclear at the moment if this has happened, articles frame the story as evidence of the ruthless Ukrainian government deliberately targeting innocent civilians. Civilian casualties are an unfortunate reality of war, but there is no evidence Ukraine is engaging with the same level of organised terror as Russia is, nor is there any mention in the article about why the Ukrainian army might choose to strike a Ukrainian city (because Russia occupies it).

Furthermore, there was [a Hungarian state-owned media article containing no less than five disinformation narratives](#), most of them in this category, all uncritically quoting Russian politicians and generals. These included characterising the Bryansk incursion as a terrorist attack by Ukraine which deserved the retaliation it received later, writing about Ukrainian casualties in Bakhmut without mentioning Russian ones, then the same regarding daily casualties in general, the abovementioned HIMARS story, and finally, a completely invented story, which not even Russian media is claiming to be true. This story involves

Ukraine firing a huge artillery barrage on its own soldiers who have surrendered to the Russians, killing 14 of them. There is no source for this anywhere, not even from pro-Kremlin media, using searches for the city (Avdiivka), region (Donetsk), the brigade (54th Mechanized) or the people claiming it (Pushilin, Putin, Konashenkov) or any of the terms involved in the story. And finally, there is [a video of a Russian propagandist arguing for using nuclear weapons](#) against Ukraine because “they are killing our people, shelling our cities and villages”. Ukraine attacking Russian occupying forces in its own country is framed as an attack against Russians.

Aid to Ukraine is weakening/endangering the countries that provide it (4 cases, 12,891 views). Two of the four articles are predicated on a misunderstanding of scale. One claims [the US is pouring money into Ukraine](#), weakening itself. However, the claim refers to a 500 million USD package, which is insignificant in US budgetary terms. The second one implies that [aid to Ukraine is largely to blame for Germany’s national debt](#): in reality, that aid has a value of 6 billion USD while the national debt is above 2 trillion USD. A third article misrepresents data about military aid and [claims that the US spent more on Ukraine in one year than on Afghanistan in 9 years](#). The article misinterprets the cited graph and claims that the former is around 45 billion dollars while the latter was around 43 billion over a 9-year period. Contrary to the claim, the chart compares the annual military expenditure of the U.S. in the war in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2010 and the military aid provided to Ukraine in 2022. The fourth article using this sub-narrative is based on statements by Hungarian foreign minister Péter Szijjártó, who [claims that Europe is weakened by its support for Ukraine](#). However, increased defence spending and a weaker Russia both result in a geopolitically stronger Europe.

Ukraine mistreats its soldiers/civilians (4 cases, 8,774 views). Articles and Telegram messages in this category were quite similar to last week’s. They mostly focused on the [Ukrainian government’s crackdown on the pro-Kremlin Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate \(UOC-MP\)](#). In all three cases, these were framed as a crackdown on Christianity itself and as an example of religious persecution. The existence of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), to which the majority of Ukrainian Christians belong, is omitted from the narrative. However, Ukraine, an Orthodox majority country with a democratically elected government, is not persecuting Orthodox Christianity. Only a few religious leaders with explicit ties to the Kremlin have been placed under house arrest.

Trend prediction

It seems that the anti-Christian Ukraine narrative will become recurring and will likely be used in the following weeks. Additionally, as the Russian progress around Bakhmut slows, pro-Kremlin actors will still try to claim victory while aiming to undermine (military) support for Ukraine.

MOLDOVA

WatchDog.MD Community

„X country is
Russophobic / Russian
culture is being attacked”

Publications:

6

Views:

86,379

The main story exploited by this sub-narrative was the crisis around Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and the house arrest of Metropolitan Pavel. Several videos in defence of the Moscow-linked Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate were distributed, including a young girl's prayer and a Romanian-language address of a priest.

„X country is under
threat /will be pulled
into the war”

Publications:

4

Views:

11,069

Continuing the trend from previous weeks, this time around the sub-narrative focuses on President Sandu's pro-Ukrainian statements, an unconfirmed visit of British intelligence chiefs in Chişinău, and an EU security mission to Moldova.

„Ukrainians refuse to
fight”

Publications:

4

Views

35,013

The story of a group of Moldovans taking bribes from Ukrainian men to smuggle them across the border re-empowered this sub-narrative. The story is used as an evidence that Ukrainians don't want to fight and morale is low.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- Anti-Ukrainian themes not only remained dominant, but significantly increased their lead over other categories of disinformation.
- The stories surrounding the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra have brought religious issues to the forefront, which also fits into a wider narrative about the decadent, immoral West fighting to destroy traditional, moral, Orthodox values in this region supposedly protected by Russia. Ukrainian authorities are portrayed as oppressing religious freedoms in the country, and Orthodoxy is generally understood as only being valid if it's "approved" by Moscow.
- The sub-narrative about Ukrainians refusing to fight usually resurfaces whenever there is a relevant news story from the border police, as during this period, but it is not usually one of the most popular sub-narratives.

Trend changes

Narratives discrediting Ukraine have strongly dominated the information space of Moldova, to an extent not really seen in recent weeks. Even anti-Western narratives with their typically strong presence have been relegated to the background compared to the flood of anti-Ukrainian themes, be they that Kyiv is persecuting the Orthodox monks, or that they stage provocations against Moldova and Transnistria, or that they don't care

about their own people, or that ordinary Ukrainians don't want to fight. The variety of discreditory messaging makes it difficult to establish a specific predominant theme, however, messages blaming Ukraine for "repressions" against UOC MP have generally been the most significant.

In terms of anti-Western narratives, the news about the German industrial giant Rheinmetall opening a support hub for Ukraine in northern Romania was [shared by](#) anonymous Telegram channel "Republic of Gagauzia", but received surprisingly little commentary. One possible explanation could be that it is left up to the reader to interpret the news: maybe it means the West is getting involved in the war, maybe it means Western aid is so inefficient they need this support hub. However, given the editorial policy of the channels sharing the story, the interpretation of their readers is all but guaranteed to be a negative one as channels sharing this story have a core pro-Russian readership.

Context

The disinformation messages about the alleged "persecution" of monks from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra are very well-timed, as they are more likely to resonate during the period of the Easter holidays, when even people who are not regular churchgoers have an increased sensitivity to religious matters. It also fits with the really wide narrative of Russia as a defender of traditional values against the perverted West, which is also heavily promoted in Moldova.

Echoes of this discourse also come from Romania, as pro-Russian channels continue to distribute conspiracy-based statements from far-right politicians like Diana Șoșoacă against the "globalists" and "Sorosists" and allegedly in support of the church and Christian values.

The lack of impactful stories undermined the sub-narrative about escalation in Transnistria, which continued nevertheless to be a major topic – perhaps out of the inertia of the previous monitoring periods. Attention towards this narrative despite the lack of real life events to support it is driven by the profound sensitivity of Moldovan society towards the possibility of war reaching their country.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The crisis around Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra has driven several sub-narratives spread by the pro-Russian actors throughout April 1 – April 7, 2023. The main one is the alleged Russophobia of the Kyiv authorities, who are supposedly taking the monastery from the monks by force in an act of religious discrimination. Attempts are made to portray the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) as innocent victims of the Kyiv regime. The complexity of the religious situation in Ukraine, as well as UOC MP links to Russian Orthodox Church and its destabilizing influence throughout the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, is not explained, which may lead the unfamiliar audience to believe the narrative that Ukrainian authorities are being discriminatory towards parishioners of the UOC MP.

Secondly, there are the stories about [the house arrest](#) of Metropolitan Pavel or the "disappearance" (supposedly at the hands of the Ukrainian secret services) of [a woman](#) who opposed the monks' eviction. This particular story was posted by "Komsomolskaya Pravda Moldova", a branch of the notoriously pro-Kremlin Russian newspaper, which claims "there

is no connection” with a woman praying in front of the Lavra and that she may have been kidnapped by Ukrainian security services. There is no evidence to support this accusation, but it paints the picture of a ruthless, authoritarian government that does not care about its own people.

[The video](#) of a young girl allegedly praying in defense of the Pecherska Lavra monks is intentional emotional manipulation. She actually is singing an Easter-theme chant, but the “Republic of Gagauzia” channel portrays her as a defender of Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, claiming that the “light and kindness” presented by this girl will triumph as opposed to the supposedly darkness and evil of Ukrainian authorities.

Finally, there is also [a video](#) of a monk’s address in Romanian, asking for support against the eviction of UOC MP from the Lavra, a message obviously targeted at religious audiences in Moldova and Romania. Some posts directly mentioned that there are Moldovan monks at Pecherska Lavra as well, although whether this is true remains unknown.

The advantage of this topic is that it does not directly relate to the war, so it aims to influence the opinion of Orthodox believers about the Kyiv government regardless of their thoughts about the war.

Finally, the sub-narrative that Ukrainians refuse to fight, which is not typically present in the Moldovan information space, spiked due to the reports of a group of 5 Moldovan men being detained for assisting Ukrainian men to illegally cross the border for the price of \$3,000 each. These messages were neutral in wording and shared [in Russian](#) by Noi MD|News of Moldova and [in Romanian](#) by Ungureanu 112 channel. Standalone, they don’t have essential impact, however, they were accompanied by “Republic of Gagauzia” [posting](#) a story about a Ukrainian man allegedly cutting off his fingers to avoid mobilization, but was mobilized anyway.

Trend prediction

The Easter holidays provide fertile ground for religious and moral themes to be preyed upon by disinformation actors, so we can expect the stories about Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra to continue circulating and fueling various anti-Ukrainian messages for at least one more week or two.

The sub-narrative about Ukrainians refusing to fight will likely drop back to the bottom in terms of popularity, unless there are further incidents to fuel it.

Additionally, anti-Western narratives is likely to regain some traction, as such messaging witnessed an uncharacteristic decline during the period of April 1 – April 7.

POLAND

Fakenews.pl

“Ukraine sells low quality/contaminated/too much grain to the West”

Publications:

7

Views:

71,929

Various far-right and pro-Russian sources keep promoting the topic of Ukrainian grain (and meat) being sent to Europe under low tax/no tax agreements to support Ukraine. Sources claim that the grain is contaminated/low quality or there is too much of it, leading to local market instability in Poland and other countries.

“Ukrainian refugees are a threat to Poland’s security”

Publications:

5

Views:

56,657

Sharp increase in one of the narratives traditionally employed by the far-right and pro-Russian actors to foment hostility towards Ukrainian refugees and Ukraine in general

“Ukraine will not become a member of NATO”

Publications:

4

Views

95,196

New sub-narrative with various sources quoting “the leaks” from US and/or NATO structures, claiming the US decided to never let Ukraine join NATO as the war is too profitable to finish it.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The conspiracy theory about the negative impact of Ukrainian grain gained traction in the Polish information space during the period March 25 – April 1, 2023 and remains the most popular sub-narrative for two consecutive monitoring rounds. Views of the relevant publications decreased, but the number of publications themselves increased, marking the efforts of pro-Russian sources to push the narrative.
- The narrative about Ukrainian refugees being a threat to Polish security gains more popularity, most likely based on the latest polls indicating the slowly declining will of Poles to support Ukrainian refugees – although it should be noted that overall this still remains high.
- Finland joining NATO triggered Russian disinformation to aggressively claim that Ukraine could never do so, mostly because the war is supposedly very profitable for the West.

Ongoing pre-parliamentary elections campaigns still keep on boosting malign narratives with the focus on those discrediting Ukraine. Other triggers that influenced the information environment were Finland joining the NATO and the visit of President Zelensky to Warsaw.

Trend changes

The conspiracy theory about Ukrainian grain has rapidly grown to dominate the information field and the number of relevant publications increased compared to the period of March 25 – April 1, 2023.

A new story to boost the narrative was president's Zelensky visit to Warsaw, various sources claimed that thousands of infuriated farmers who are suffering because of the Ukrainian grain imports will disrupt the visit, but it never happened. Nonetheless, the number of views decreased, showing that the effort to boost the topic is not sufficient or the audience is getting bored with the narrative.

The effort to build antagonism between the Polish population and Ukrainian refugees is still present, and the numbers of views pertaining to the relevant publications almost tripled, indicating that the topic is still gaining popularity and remains a sensitive issue to be exploited by the pro-Russian actors.

Context

The abovementioned conspiracy theory about Ukrainian grain started to be used as a model example for new sub-narratives. This week's example is a similar conspiracy focused on Ukrainian meat products – it is almost identical to the grain one, but covering chicken meat instead. It is highly probable that pro-Russian sources will push the narrative, only changing the subject to create an impression of various Ukrainian products destroying Polish market.

The rise in popularity of the “Refugees are a threat to Poland's security” sub-narrative is not surprising. It was mostly caused by two factors: decreasing Polish willingness to help refugees (passing time, economic problems) and more disinformation relying on facts out of context and playing precisely on this change of attitude. Indeed, the presence of larger numbers of Ukrainians lead to the statistically normal rise of Ukrainians-related crime, but various pro-Russian sources picture every such occurrence as an anomaly and a great threat to the security of Poland. Yet, the overwhelming majority of Poles keep a very positive attitude towards Ukrainians.

Key sub-narrative analysis

Examples of the most crucial sub-narratives for April 1 – April 7, 2023.

1. “Polish farmers claimed to prepare a big blockade and protest during Zelensky's visit in Warsaw” due to the grain conspiracy theory: <https://t.me/ruchoporupska/13948> and <https://t.me/infokju/47370>. Both publications gained approximately 4,600 views in total. The blockade never happened and was only a suggestion of one of the leaders of one of the farmers' associations, who said that they "could do it, but there are many plans and ideas". The channel described it as a planned, big event.
2. “Ukrainian grain will soon lead to the poverty of European farmers” and the problem is not specific to just Poland: <http://t.me/infokju/47273>. The publication

received 2,700 views. This is speculation and exaggeration of the problem. The farmers are already being (or will be) compensated in Poland and there is no evidence that the grain will “completely destroy Europe’s grain market” as the demand is high.

3. “Ukrainian chicken meat imports increased by 94% possibly leading to the massive bankruptcy of Polish farmers”: <http://pch24.pl/nie-tylko-zboze-wkrotce-moze-zalamac-sie-rynek-drobiu-chodzi-o-import-z-ukrainy/>. The publication received 7,950 views. It is speculation, as imports are increasing but they were long-planned and at this point, there is no evidence that the meat market “may totally collapse”.
4. “Zelensky disappoints Polish farmers ignoring the grain problem during his visit in Warsaw”: <http://wolnemedi.net/wizyta-prezydenta-zelenskigo-gesty-i-slowa>. The publication received 44,705 views. It was never planned that Zelensky will publicly address the grain problem during his visit or make any declarations with the Polish prime minister as it is one of many topics. The problem was discussed during the meeting, and it would be difficult to expect any big declarations just after Zelensky left Warsaw. The text is making the impression that the problem is totally ignored and that Zelensky's visit was meaningless.

Much of the relevant disinformation was shared by two Telegram channels - Kanat informacyjny and Ruch Oporu Polska.

Kanat informacyjny is a relatively old Telegram channel that is directly linked to Russian/Belarusian state-run disinformation operations – one of many similar sources of we currently observe. It spreads far-right and pro-Russian content among the growing group of subscribers (almost 10k at the moment). It has a relatively big audience due to posting in high-quality Polish, as many other channels in the network are just machine-translated from Russian.

Ruch Oporu Polska has over 6k subscribers and mostly shares far-right, conspiracy, and nationalist content. It is not directly linked to Russia or Belarus, but frequently crossposts Kremlin’s disinformation narratives, especially if it is anti-Ukrainian. It is run by contributors to the Salon24.pl far-right outlet, such as Łukasz Grysiak, or known nationalists like Robert Trybuła.

It is important to note that the Ukrainian grain problem does exist in Poland and Europe. Some farmers do have problems due to low-taxed or non-taxed Ukrainian products flooding the market and there are protests, although not very big or spectacular.

The formal investigation started due to an entrepreneur selling 66 tons of Ukrainian technical grain (only for the production of livestock feed) marked as Polish grain for human consumption. After that, Polish media started to investigate which companies import the grain and it resulted in exposing the whole network of government-linked importers benefiting from low prices and general low-quality of the product, supposed to just transit Poland.

To sum up, Ukrainian cheap grain became a problem in Poland, but pro-Russian channels tend to exaggerate it, speculate, over-dramatize, or describe every piece of news about it to create the impression that the problem is much bigger than it really is.

Trend prediction

With no doubt the “grain sub-narrative” will remain popular in some form or another. It may change to meat, coal or other products, but the mechanism and sources spreading the narrative will stay the same. It is highly suggested to add it to the reporting template in the form of “Ukraine sells low quality/contaminated/too much products to the West” or similar.

More narratives and actions discrediting Ukrainian refugees are predicted. The major actors spreading the grain-related and anti-refugee narratives will remain far-right Telegram sources and political parties, trying to build their capacity and win more votes before this fall’s parliamentary elections.

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Slovakia

Infosecurity

“The EU and/or NATO and/or the West are weak and will break apart”

Publications:

2

Views:
20,965

The predominant messages claimed that NATO is weak and doesn't have a chance against the Russian military and insisted that the USA loses its influence in the alliance – and joining it, therefore, doesn't gain anything. The latter claim has long been popular with the Slovak disinformation actors.

“Western media is lying”

Publications:

2

Views:
11,124

Yet another sub-narrative consistently present in the Slovak information space was promoted by the far-right politicians that accused the Western media of being biased and spreading lies.

“The West/NATO provoked the conflict between Ukraine and Russia”

Publications:

2

Views:
2,010

Promotion of this sub-narrative was based on the uncritical sharing and popularization of the Chinese quotes that the West and NATO allegedly bear responsibility for the war in Ukraine. The quotes were shared by far-right sources that are sympathetic to Russia as well as to China.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- Throughout the period of April 1- April 7, 2023 there was not a single sub-narrative that dominated the Slovak information space. Instead, it was filled with varying disinformation messages, mostly anti-Western in their nature.
- Many anti-Western publications spread the idea that the West/USA/NATO is fascist, controlling or is somehow involved in the war in Ukraine. While there is no dominant specific image, the West in general is portrayed as undemocratic and negative.

Trend changes

Throughout the period from March 20 to April 1, the dominant focus of the pro-Russian disinformation actors was on the supply of military aid to Ukraine – specifically, the Slovak government's decision to send MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine. Many pro-Russian and far right actors claimed that such decision is against the Slovak constitution, therefore it is a crime or that it is dragging Slovakia into the war in Ukraine. Because it was such a strong and popular topic, there was a prediction that it will retain its popularity throughout the period of April 1 – April 7, 2023.

The issue, however, has subsided and the Slovak disinformation eco-system returned to the traditional focus on anti-Western rhetoric. Interestingly, very few publications were centred on Finland's accession to NATO – there was only one

publication indirectly reflecting on this topic, claiming that if NATO continues its expansion, Russia will destroy all its members. This claim may be linked to the idea expressed in one of the predominant sub-narratives of the period – the message that NATO is weak and doesn't have a chance against the Russian army, which is portrayed as being capable of destroying the armed forces of NATO member-states. However, no particular attention was paid to Finland as a new member of the consistently vilified alliance.

Instead, anti-Western publications promoted claims that discredited the West in one way or another, either painting it as “fascist” or accusing the Western media of lying, including on the issues of Russian war against Ukraine.

Context

During the last few years, since a new government was formed in Slovakia and Zuzana Čaputová became the Slovak president in 2019, the disinformation actors have been consistently accusing them of working in favor of US' interests and neglecting Slovak citizens. Portraying local governments as puppets of the West that do its bidding at expense of citizens is an overwhelming trend in Russian disinformation targeted externally, and Slovakia is no exception to this rule.

Since 2019, pro-Russian actors consistently claimed that the Slovak government receives “instructions” on leading the country either from Washington DC directly or from the US embassy. These narratives are spread not only by disinformation outlets and social media pages, but also by some opposition politicians who are using it to gain more supporters and popularity. The same actors are simultaneously strongly pro-Russian and justify the Russian violence in Ukraine. We can often see these sub-narratives being dominant at times when there is no other topic or event to which the disinformation actors react and comment on, as they form one of the key pillars of pro-Russian messaging in the country.

Key sub-narrative analysis

This week there were multiple equally popular sub-narratives, but most of them belonged to the category of anti-western narratives. However, the one sub-narrative which got the highest number of views, claimed that NATO is weak and will break apart contrasted this alleged weakness with the supposed might of Russia. It is stated that Russian military will crush NATO if the alliance continues to expand, and that Russia is the only country in the world that can destroy all NATO countries.

This message was [published](#) by Hlavný Denník, which is a Slovak disinformation outlet consistently spreading pro-Russian messages. The outlet also has connections to Národná koalícia (National coalition), a small opposition party. Its members regularly published their opinions in Hlavný Denník and this way tried to gain more popularity mostly before the European Parliament elections in 2019 and before the parliamentary elections in 2020. The party defines itself as relying on “national” and “Christian” ideas and was in cooperation with the far-right “People's Party Our Slovakia” .

Another important publication [was made](#) by InfoVojna, a Slovak disinformation outlet spreading pro-Russian narratives. Their message insisted that the US is going through a financial crisis that will undermine its global hegemony. According to the Slovak Ministry of Defense's information from 2020, it was the second most popular disinformation website in Slovakia. The portal also uncritically provides space for Slovak far-right politicians, serving as a disinformation hub in the local information space.

However, the most popular publication of April 1 – April 7, 2023 claimed the West is fascist and is attacking the “peace and freedom” that come from the eastern states such as Russia and China. The claim [was made](#) by a strongly pro-Russian politician Ľuboš Blaha who claimed that fascism is once again emerging and that it is again coming from the West. In fact, Blaha made two posts on the similar topic, accusing the West of fascism and aggression; in combination they had 44,336 views.

Blaha’s main communication channel has become Telegram after Facebook blocked his profile because of spreading disinformation, bullying and hate speech. He has also long been an uncritical supporter and admirer of Russia, the USSR and Putin. He has a similar uncritical attitude towards China. He is a member of Smer-SD party which is currently leading in the pre-election polls of popularity.

Trend prediction

In case there are no sudden military/political developments, pro-Russian sources are likely to keep utilizing anti-Western messages, including the claims that West has provoked the Russian war against Ukraine and the Slovak government is following “instructions” from the US is a dangerous course of action for any country.

The upcoming parliamentary elections in September 2023 have substantial influence on the local information space and are likely to generate anti-Western rhetoric from the far-right parties in an attempt to mobilize their voters.

Ukraine

Detector Media

“The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent”

Publications:
5

Views:
1,447,552

The main message of the posts was the alleged unprofessionalism of the Ukrainian authorities, particularly the Ambassador of Ukraine to Bulgaria, Olesya Ilyashchuk, and the Vice Head of the Kyiv Regional Administration, Vitaliy Vlasnyuk.

“ Ukrainians are targeting civilians and commit other war crimes”

Publications:
5

Views:
2,933,675

The sub-narrative focused on accusing Ukraine of terrorism, primarily in regard to the death of Russian propagandist Vladlen Tatarsky. In addition, pro-Russian Telegram channels claim that Ukrainians are responsible for other war crimes, including an attack on the Bryansk region in Russia by jet planes, and that the Ukrainian army is bloodthirsty.

“Russian troops are advancing / achieving success”

Publications:
5

Views:
2,852,384

The main message of the posts is that Ukraine is losing Bakhmut. Russian disinformation claims that the Bakhmut campaign is a failure of Ukraine, and no one wants to continue it, except for Zelensky and Western leaders. The messages are mocking in their nature, using dehumanizing epithets for Ukrainian soldiers.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The most popular category of disinformation was typical for the local network of pro-Russian Telegram channels – narratives discrediting Ukraine. Relevant messaging appeared in 10 posts across the channels monitored. This category of narratives included the two most popular sub-narratives: “The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent” and “Ukrainians are targeting civilians and commit other war crimes”. They both had the same number of posts – 5.
- The primary focus was that the Ukrainian army allegedly is committing war crimes but the authorities are trying to hide it. In several posts, the disinformation actors claimed that Russian propagandist Vladlen Tatarsky was killed on the orders of the Ukrainian Chief Intelligence Service and Ukraine terrorizes and exterminates “journalists”.
- The posts also referred to alleged Ukrainian repressions against the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, continuing the rhetoric that was on the rise during March 25 – April 1, 2023 in regard to the crisis around Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra.

Trend changes

Throughout the period of April 1 – April 7, 2023, similarly to March 25 – April 1, one of the most popular sub-narratives was about the corrupt and incompetent nature of the Ukrainian government. Additionally, there were many posts about the so-called oppression of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. In this case, the situation has not changed as protests near the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra continue. Pro-Russian Telegram channels consistently try to accuse the Ukrainian government of oppressing the Orthodox Church, the killing of Russian propagandist Tatarov, and so on. The Ukrainian leadership is systematically portrayed as unprofessional, corrupt and, at the same time, bloodthirsty while also being unable to properly conduct military operation. [For example, Zelensky was also accused of wanting to prolong the war.](#)

Context

One of the prominent trends of Russian disinformation for April 1 – April 7, 2023 was quite expected. The focus of pro-Russian actors on the death of Vladlen Tatarsky, who was killed with an explosive during the meeting in St Petersburg organized in a restaurant linked to the owner of PMC “Wagner” Evgeniy Prigozhyn sparked a wave of accusations stating that Ukraine supports terrorism. For example, the pro-Russian channels claimed that Zelensky had awarded the person responsible for Tatarsky's murder, although no such evidence exists and the actors as well as motivations behind the murder of Tatarsky remain unknown. There is a possibility that the attack was organized on behalf of the Russian authorities since Tatarsky, who was heavily involved in destabilization of Ukraine and the start of Russian hybrid war in 2014, started disclosing sensitive information about that period in his Telegram channel that undermined claims of Russian disinformation that the so-called “DNR” and “LNR” were a result of “civil war” in Ukraine and not of the Russian hybrid invasion.

The messages focused on religious issues are also predictable given the importance of Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, the sensitivity of Ukrainians towards religious issues and the ongoing crisis around the church that is to be vacated by UOC MP and become a part of the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Russian actors repeatedly label the actions of Ukrainian government as discrimination and religious persecution.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The most popular sub-narratives were “The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent”, “Ukrainians are targeting civilians and commit other war crimes”, and “Russian troops are advancing / achieving success”. The most popular messages from these categories were focused on the alleged incompetence of Ukrainian leaders, Ukrainian army supposedly committing war crimes, including the murder of Vladlen Tatarsky, and the “repressions” of the Ukrainian authorities against the UOC MP. The Battle for Bakhmut remains a long-standing focal point of battlefield-related disinformation.

The messages about the alleged incompetence of Ukraine's government and military leaders include both traditional accusations of concealing war crimes, corruption, and the hopeless defense of Bakhmut, where many Ukrainian soldiers are dying, and new messages about the incompetence or betrayal of some specific officials. The main targets here are

Volodymyr Zelensky, his entourage, and the state's military leadership, as well as Ukraine's Ambassador to Bulgaria, Olesia Ilashchuk, and the vice head of the Kyiv regional administration, Vitalii Vlasiuk. The ambassador was accused of lacking proper education and objectified for her appearance and clothing in which she appeared during her video address. While there is indeed a debate within Ukrainian society about the professional qualities of the Ambassador, Russian sources exploited this case to present Ukrainian leadership as totally incompetent.

As for the messages about Ukraine supposedly committing war crimes and targeting civilians, the pro-Russian channels focused primarily on the murder of Russian propagandist Vladlen Tatarsky. According to Russian disinformation Telegram channels, Tatarsky was ordered to be killed by Ukrainian intelligence, and Zelensky rewarded those involved. In addition, the relevant sources wrote that Ukraine was committing war crimes in Russia, including an attack on the Bryansk region with jet aircraft. The vocabulary of the posts often includes the words "Ukrainian terrorists" and "bloodthirsty Ukrainian military," as well as attempts to dehumanize the Ukrainian military.

Messages related to the Orthodox Church accuse Zelensky and Ukrainian leaders of seizing churches by force, in particular in the city of Khmelnytsky, and the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra,. For the second week in a row pro-Russian actors speculate that Ukrainian leadership may give orders to physically exterminate the UOC MP leadership, similarly to have it supposedly was done to Tatrasky.

As for the traditional messages about Bakhmut, pro-Russian sources write that there is no military need to hold Bakhmut for Ukraine, and that Zelensky only needs it to maintain his image. They also point out that the Russian army has "practically captured" the city, and Ukrainian troops suffer significant losses that are portrayed as futile. In reality, Bakhmut is strategically important from the military point of view.

The [most popular post](#), however, does not belong to any of the predominant categories of disinformation. Published by the "Legitimny" channel that is believed to be run by the Russian FSB, it claims that the West is pushing Ukraine to launch a counter-offensive as soon as possible in the spring, not summer, despite Zelensky's refusal. The main focus is that Western partners will no longer support Ukraine in 2024. This and similar messages were spread mainly by the Telegram channels that systematically and regularly apply such rhetoric. Some of them are disguised as Ukrainian, but back in 2022, the SBU compiled a list of telegram channels funded and coordinated by Russia's special services.

Trend prediction

Next week, posts may again be related to the confrontation between the patriarchates in Ukraine, as the situation may escalate before and on Easter day. As provocations are expected, they may become a fruitful ground for the pro-Russian sources to yet again portray Ukrainian leadership as undemocratic, oppressive and ready to discriminate on the religious basis.

There may also be posts about the potential counteroffensive of the Ukrainian army that has been expected for some time. Russian disinformation is likely to again portray the Ukrainian government as one that does not care about its people; as incompetent and willing to send people to their deaths in a counteroffensive it supposedly won't be able to manage and that is ordered by the Western puppeteers.

List of Narrative and Sub-Narrative Headings:

1. ANTI-WESTERN NARRATIVES

- 1a. The EU and/or NATO and/or the West are weak and will break apart
- 1b. The West is using Ukraine as a pawn
- 1d. The West is losing interest in helping Ukraine / wants Ukraine to surrender
- 1e. The West/NATO provoked the conflict between Ukraine and Russia
- 1f. NATO/the US/the West is or will be directly involved in the war
- 1g. The West is profiting on the war in Ukraine
- 1h. The West will fight until the last Ukrainian
- 1i. Western leadership is incompetent
- 1j. The West/US is responsible for the sabotage of Nord Stream
- 1k. Western media is lying
- 1l. The West is trying to divide Slavs/Orthodox Christians
- 1m. Western countries/institutions ignore the will of their people
- 1n. Western politicians care about Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens
- 1o. The West is hypocritical to criticize Russia's actions
- 1p. Non-aligned countries are choosing to side with Russia over the West

2. NARRATIVES DISCREDITING UKRAINE

- 2a. Ukrainians are Nazis
- 2b. Ukrainians are targeting civilians and commit other war crimes
- 2c. Ukraine was planning to attack Russia first
- 2d. Ukrainians refuse to fight / have low morale
- 2e. The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent
- 2f. Ukraine is blackmailing Western governments
- 2g. There are tensions among Ukraine's leadership
- 2h. Ukrainians are pretentious/demanding/ungrateful
- 2i. Ukrainian civil society wants to make concessions to Russia
- 2j. Ukraine's leadership does not care about its people
- 2k. Ukrainians do not support Zelensky
- 2l. Ukraine mistreats its soldiers/civilians
- 2m. Ukraine's informational space is controlled by the state authorities / Ukrainian media is lying
Ukraine is autocratic
- 2n. Ukraine does not want peace
- 2o. Ukraine deliberately stages provocations
- 2p. Ukraine should not/will not become a NATO/EU member
- 2q. Ukraine is not a sovereign state
- 2r. Ukrainian volunteers are corrupt
- 2s. Life under Russian occupation is better than under Ukrainian rule / 1ak. Russia is liberating Ukraine
- 2t. X country should not help Ukraine due to their past historical conflicts
Ukrainian victory is impossible
- 2u. Western society does not support Ukraine

3. BATTLEFIELD EVENTS

- 3a. Ukraine is losing the war
- 3b. Russia is not fighting at full capacity
- 3c. Russian troops are advancing / achieving success
- 3d. Reports of Russian war crimes are exaggerated/fake news
- 3e. Russia is not to blame for the global food crisis

- 3f. Recognizing Russia as a terrorist state will not help Ukraine
- 3g. Belarus is not participating in the war in Ukraine
- 3h. Mobilization in Russia has been successful
- 3i. Ukraine "referendums" are legitimate
- 3j. Russia's losses in the war are small
- 3k. Russia is only targeting military infrastructure

4. UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

- 4a. Ukrainian refugees are a threat to host countries' security
- 4b. Ukrainian refugees are spoiled/ungrateful
- 4c. Ukrainian refugees are prioritized over the host country citizens/inhabitants
- 4d. Ukrainian refugees abuse the aid being provided

5. ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF SANCTIONS

- 5a. Sanctions hurt the West more than Russia
- 5b. Russia is unaffected by sanctions
- 5c. The West is to blame for inflation and the energy crisis
- 5d. Europe is threatened by an energy crisis
- 5e. The West does not follow/circumvents its own sanctions policy
- 5f. Western citizens do not support sanctions against Russia

6. CONDITIONS OF RUSSIANS AND RUSSIAN-SPEAKING MINORITIES

- 6a. Ukrainians discriminate against/terrorize Russian speakers
- 6b. X country is Russophobic / Russian culture is being attacked
- 6c. The West and its proxies are inciting Russophobia

7. THREAT OF WAR EXPANDING BEYOND UKRAINE

- 7a. WW3 is imminent
- 7b. The West seeks to open a second front against Russia
- 7c. X country is escalating the war
- 7d. The world is at risk of nuclear war/disaster
- 7e. X country is under threat/will be pulled into the war
- 7f. X country should maintain neutrality / align itself with Russia

8. AID TO UKRAINE

- 8a. Western military/financial aid is being misused/stolen
- 8b. Ukraine will use Western weapons to kill Russians/attack Russian territory
- 8c. Military aid unnecessarily prolongs the war/endangers civilians
- 8d. Aid to Ukraine is weakening/endangering the countries that provide it
- 8e. Western military aid is ineffective/will not influence the outcome of the war
- 8f. Ukraine is taking aid away from other countries in need

9. CONSPIRACY THEORIES

- 9a. There are Western biological weapons labs in Ukraine
- 9b. The war in Ukraine is part of a global conspiracy
- 9c. The war in Ukraine is staged/a hoax
- 9d. Western governments are using the war in Ukraine to limit the freedoms of their citizens
- 9e. Western leaders/institutions are Satanist
- 9f. Zelensky is a drug addict

- 9g. Ukrainians engage in organ trafficking
- 9h. Russia has a new secret weapon
- 9i. Ukraine will be divided up among other countries

Methodology

The Ukraine War Disinformation Working Group is partnered with LetsData for data collection and methodological development.

LetsData is an AI solution anticipating communication risks and opportunities in the face of ill-intended information campaigns. As a trusted technological partner within the UWWDG, LetsData provides sophisticated data collection, processing, and analysis capabilities for further in-depth exploration.

LetsData uphold privacy and security principles regarding data collection and processing. To ensure this, we only use public data allowed to be collected and processed by each social media and website. The Ukraine War Disinformation Working Group analyses data from media outlets, public Telegram channels and public Facebook groups and pages. Within the project, we analyse all publications concerning Ukraine in 12 countries encompassing 200 pro-Russian sources:

1. Armenia - Telegram and media outlets
2. Baltics: Russian language segment of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania - Telegram and media outlets
3. Belarus - Telegram and media outlets
4. Bulgaria - Telegram and media outlets
5. Georgia - Telegram, media outlets, Facebook
6. Hungary - Telegram, media outlets, Facebook
7. Moldova - Telegram and media outlets
8. Poland - Telegram and media outlets
9. Slovakia - Telegram, media outlets, Facebook
10. Ukraine - Telegram and media portals

This assignment of channels is designed to provide a focus on Telegram as a relatively under-monitored but major and exponentially growing platform for disinformation, while still providing insights for countries in which Telegram is yet to develop a significant audience and Facebook is still the primary disinformation platform. To make results cross-country comparable, 20 sources will be used for each country. For countries analysing media outlets and Telegram channels, 5 media outlets and 15 Telegram channels will be analysed. In some cases, for instance, in Ukraine, there are 20 Telegram channels, with 5 Telegram channels being the channels of pro-Russian media that duplicate the website content. For countries analysing media outlets, Telegram channels and Facebook pages, 5 media outlets, 15 Telegram channels and Facebook pages will be analysed.

Data sampling

To analyze pro-Russian disinformation, a sample of 50 publications per week for each country will be created based on two criteria. The first criterion will be the source type: media outlet or social media: with 70% of the publications in the sample coming from Telegram/Facebook and 30% from web sources. The second criterion will be the reach of the posts, with half of the posts in each category (media outlet, Telegram, and Facebook) having the highest number of views. The other

half of the publications in each category will be selected randomly to diversify the content and increase the capacity to comprehend the diversity of pro-Russian narratives.

The final sample for countries monitoring media outlets and Telegram will consist of the following:

- 15% top media outlets publications;
- 15% random media outlets publications;
- 35% top Telegram posts;
- 35% random Telegram posts.

The final sample for countries monitoring media outlets, Telegram and Facebook, will consist of the following:

- 15% top media outlets publications;
- 15% random media outlets publications;
- 17,5% top Telegram posts;
- 17,5% top Facebook posts;
- 17,5% random Telegram posts;
- 17,5% random Facebook posts;

List of sources per country

| Source | Country |
|--------------------|---------|
| @VardanGukasyan | Armenia |
| @bagramyan26 | Armenia |
| @reartsakh | Armenia |
| @ArmenianVendetta | Armenia |
| @military_arm | Armenia |
| @mikayelbad | Armenia |
| @xaytarak_official | Armenia |
| @sisumasis | Armenia |
| @infoteka24 | Armenia |
| @togarma301 | Armenia |
| @Artsakh_Daily | Armenia |
| @armmirotvorec | Armenia |
| @RadarARM | Armenia |
| @infocomm | Armenia |
| @civilnetv | Armenia |
| @newsamarm | Armenia |
| @rusyerevantoday | Armenia |

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| @togarma301 | Armenia |
| @armeniasputnik | Armenia |
| @LurerH1 | Armenia |
| @pppaskov | Bulgaria |
| @The_Smart_Village | Bulgaria |
| @druschbaFM_Bulgaria | Bulgaria |
| @InfodefBULGARIA | Bulgaria |
| @bulgariaz | Bulgaria |
| @svobodik | Bulgaria |
| @otizvora | Bulgaria |
| @istinabg1 | Bulgaria |
| @vazrazhdanebg | Bulgaria |
| @simeonoffkss | Bulgaria |
| @todorangelov | Bulgaria |
| @dianadeleva | Bulgaria |
| @ocelqvane | Bulgaria |
| @ronyrony | Bulgaria |
| @ivaivatta | Bulgaria |
| @pogled | Bulgaria |
| | |
| @NewsFrontBulgaria | Bulgaria |
| @trudnews | Bulgaria |
| @snabgorg | Bulgaria |
| @informiran | Bulgaria |
| https://kuruc.info/ | Hungary |
| https://www.origo.hu/ | Hungary |
| https://pestisracok.hu/ | Hungary |
| @magyarjelen | Hungary |
| https://hirado.hu/ | Hungary |
| @kurucinfo | Hungary |
| @toroczkai | Hungary |
| @szentkoronaradio_official | Hungary |
| @nzona3 | Hungary |
| @bodiabel | Hungary |

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| @bedezsolt | Hungary |
| https://www.facebook.com/oroszhirek.hu/ | Hungary |
| https://www.facebook.com/pestisracok.hu/ | Hungary |
| https://www.facebook.com/szamokadatok/ | Hungary |
| https://www.facebook.com/kkemenymag1 | Hungary |
| https://www.facebook.com/bayerzs | Hungary |
| https://www.facebook.com/elemi.hu/ | Hungary |
| https://www.facebook.com/magyarnemzet.hu/ | Hungary |
| https://www.facebook.com/stefideri | Hungary |
| https://www.facebook.com/bohardanielriporter | Hungary |
| https://aif.md/ | Moldova |
| @Noi.md Новости Молдовы | Moldova |
| @Accent_TV | Moldova |
| https://unimedia.info/ | Moldova |
| @KP.MD: "КП" в Молдове | Moldova |
| @tirdea | Moldova |
| @Ungureanu112 | Moldova |
| @Republic_Of_GaGauZia | Moldova |
| @moldavskii_piston | Moldova |
| @indexMD | Moldova |
| @gabrielcalin | Moldova |
| @romania_ru | Moldova |
| @dragosgalbur | Moldova |
| @MoldovaPolitics | Moldova |
| @turnulmaya | Moldova |
| @ivanovnamd | Moldova |
| https://www.facebook.com/groups/1874167932813420 | Moldova |
| https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100086182868245 | Moldova |
| https://www.facebook.com/latebuimistru | Moldova |
| https://www.facebook.com/ionchicu.md | Moldova |
| http://3droga.pl/ | Poland |
| @narodowcy | Poland |
| http://pch24.pl/ | Poland |

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| http://ruchnarodowy.net/ | Poland |
| http://wolnemedi.net/ | Poland |
| @project_veritas | Poland |
| @anna_news | Poland |
| @WiadomosciCzasowOstatecznych | Poland |
| @siostryjasnowidzki | Poland |
| @polska_grupa_informacyjna | Poland |
| @ndp_pl | Poland |
| @infokju | Poland |
| @monikacichocka | Poland |
| @legaartiswsparcie | Poland |
| @OSTATNISPRAWIEDLIWI | Poland |
| @nwk24pl | Poland |
| @Olej_W_Glowie | Poland |
| @ruchoporupolska | Poland |
| @wolna_polska | Poland |
| @kanalstraznikow | Poland |
| https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/ | Slovakia |
| https://bajecnezeny.sk/ | Slovakia |
| https://www.hlavnydennik.sk/ | Slovakia |
| https://spisiakoviny.eu/ | Slovakia |
| http://www.ereport.sk/ | Slovakia |
| @casusbellilive | Slovakia |
| @DKdenneSpravy | Slovakia |
| @zemavek | Slovakia |
| @InfoVojnaOfficial | Slovakia |
| @kulturblog | Slovakia |
| @ZvodkaOnline | Slovakia |
| @vimanadark | Slovakia |
| https://www.facebook.com/ChmelarEduard | Slovakia |
| https://www.facebook.com/heredos/ | Slovakia |
| https://www.facebook.com/Spacek.republika | Slovakia |
| https://www.facebook.com/draxlerjuraj | Slovakia |
| https://www.facebook.com/Zdroji | Slovakia |

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| https://www.facebook.com/hricalubos1 | Slovakia |
| https://www.facebook.com/Infovojna | Slovakia |
| @LubosBlahaSmer | Slovakia |
| @montyan2 | Ukraine |
| @rezident_ua | Ukraine |
| @legitimniy | Ukraine |
| @readovkanews | Ukraine |
| @ASupersharij | Ukraine |
| @ZE_kartel | Ukraine |
| @mriya24 | Ukraine |
| @spletnicca | Ukraine |
| @ukraina_ru | Ukraine |
| @stranaua | Ukraine |
| @dark_k | Ukraine |
| @skosoi | Ukraine |
| @sheptoon | Ukraine |
| @JokerDPR | Ukraine |
| @EQUILIBRIUM2019 | Ukraine |
| @OpenUkraine | Ukraine |
| @mediakiller | Ukraine |
| @OlgaSharij | Ukraine |
| @Novoeizdanie | Ukraine |
| @Vestnik_Konservatora | Ukraine |
| @yuryvoskresensky | Belarus |
| @pul_1 | Belarus |
| @sewerfsefsd | Belarus |
| @belarusian_silovik | Belarus |
| @sputnikby | Belarus |
| @mlynby | Belarus |
| @ontnews | Belarus |
| @ATN_BTRC | Belarus |
| @Nashazemla | Belarus |
| @shpakouski | Belarus |
| @Azarenok_TV | Belarus |

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| @dzermant | Belarus |
| @vashy_slivy | Belarus |
| @glav_tur | Belarus |
| @berezina_bel | Belarus |
| @ZhivetZheBelarus | Belarus |
| @lgbelarussegodnya | Belarus |
| @minskctvby | Belarus |
| @BISRby | Belarus |
| @zmeymarini4 | Belarus |
| http://geworld.ge/ge/ | Georgia |
| @SputnikGeorgia | Georgia |
| https://ge.news-front.info/ | Georgia |
| http://www.obieqtivi.info/ | Georgia |
| https://sezonitv.ge/ | Georgia |
| @worldpolitkal | Georgia |
| @beqanews | Georgia |
| @crossroadwar | Georgia |
| @realoba | Georgia |
| @power_of_light_Q | Georgia |
| @PolitNewsN1 | Georgia |
| https://www.facebook.com/groups/2534318576632286 | Georgia |
| https://www.facebook.com/qartuliideaa/ | Georgia |
| https://www.facebook.com/PatriotuliGverdi/ | Georgia |
| https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100083209576803 | Georgia |
| https://www.facebook.com/groups/399500355414390 | Georgia |
| https://www.facebook.com/groups/534652040223283/ | Georgia |
| @SputnikAbkhazia | Georgia |
| @sputnikossetia | Georgia |
| @rubaltic | Baltics |
| http://respublika.lt | Baltics |
| http://grani.lv | Baltics |
| http://dv.ee | Baltics |

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|---|---------|
| http://obzor.lt | Baltics |
| @balt4post | Baltics |
| @antifalivland | Baltics |
| @news_lv | Baltics |
| @estlatlitv | Baltics |
| @baltictea | Baltics |
| @volna_lt | Baltics |
| @topbalt | Baltics |
| @baltologija | Baltics |
| @zhemchuzhina_new | Baltics |
| @zkbalt | Baltics |
| @volna_lv | Baltics |
| @baltiknews | Baltics |
| @free_baltic | Baltics |
| @latvijasbalzams | Baltics |
| @russkaya_litva | Baltics |