MONITORING REPORT

April 8 – April 14, 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 8 – April 14, 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 the pro-Russian military blogger Vladlen Tatarsky that took place in St Petersburg at the beginning of April remains one of the essential focal points of pro-Russian disinformation, exploiting the attack to accuse Ukraine of being a terrorist state and targeting the civilian population. However, the number of messages linked to Tatarsky's death is gradually diminishing and it is unlikely to continue dominating disinformation narratives in the monitored geography.

Narratives discrediting Ukraine are on the rise, with particular emphasis on portraying Ukraine as a Nazi state and accusing Ukrainian leadership of mistreating its soldiers and civilians. The rise of Nazism-linked disinformation is particularly evident in the Baltic states, Belarus, Bulgaria and Poland, where the accusations are linked to the anniversary of Volyn massacre that was perpetrated by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in 1943. The historical tragedy is linked to modern Ukraine, portraying the country as a state historically inclined to Nazism; this message is further strengthened by the circulation of videos depicting young men supposedly from Ukraine insulting Poland. The videos, at least some of which are suspected to be fabricated or staged, are promoted as representing Ukrainians in general and are linked to the narrative about supposedly ungrateful Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

Accusations of mistreating Ukrainian soldiers (which were also shared by the pro-Russian actors in Ukraine itself) are generally focused on the hostilities around Bakhmut, which remains contested between the armed forces of Russia and Ukraine. Pro-Russian Telegram channels blame Ukrainian government for sending an increasing number of soldiers to Bakhmut when defending the town is supposedly futile. This narrative is closely linked to the ideas that Ukraine is losing the war and that Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and incompetent. In the Armenian information space, this sub-narrative was promoted by a local pro-Russian channel which quoted a source that was positioned as Ukrainian which used polarizing rhetoric and insisted that soldiers who are skeptical of the Ukrainian military leadership as "cowards" and would be eliminated. Further analysis demonstrated that the source quoted by the Armenian channel is highly likely to be masquerading as a Ukrainian one and is in fact a pro-Kremlin disinformation outlet, given that it repeatedly spreads pro-Kremlin messages and contains errors that are typical for a Russian speaker attempting to write in the Ukrainian language.

The leak of secret Pentagon documentation in the US has also had a substantial impact across the monitored geography, leading to pro-Russian actors accusing the US authorities of incompetence both in domestic and international politics. They have also attempted to employ leaked documents to portray Ukraine as losing the war. Furthermore, it has been stated that the leak is unlikely to seriously affect the potential counteroffensive, the anticipation of which might be a driver behind the increase of disinformation messages claiming that Ukraine will lose the war in an attempt to undermine the upcoming counteroffensive operation.

ARMENIA
Media Initiatives Center

"The West seeks to open a second front against Russia"	**Publications: 2** **Views: 51,795**	The conspiracy theory linking the possible attack of Azerbaijan on Armenian territory to expected Ukrainian counteroffensive appeared in the Armenian information space during the previous round of monitoring and maintains traction.
"Ukraine deliberately stages provocations"	**Publications: 1** **Views: 9,451**	Focused on the assassination of pro-Russian "military correspondent" Vladlen Tatarsky. This sub-narrative echoes the accusations issued by Russian officials who blame Ukrainian secret services and Russian opposition for a "terrorist attack".
"Ukraine mistreats its soldiers/civilians"	**Publications: 1** Views 520	The anonymous Telegram-channel posing as a Ukrainian source, claims that the Ukrainian military will seek to eliminate the soldiers with critical attitude. Shared by Armenian pro-Russian Telegram channels, the initial source is likely to be a part of disinformation channels posing as a Ukrainian military affiliated source and targeting Ukrainian audience.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- Pro-Russian actors continue to spread the conspiracy theory linking the possible attack of Azerbaijan on Armenia to Ukrainian counteroffensive. In doing so, they employ anti-Western rhetoric and fearmongering, exploiting the fear of potential Azerbaijani attack against Armenia.
- Local pro-Russian sources keep echoing the accusations made by Russian authorities who blame Ukrainian secret services and Russian opposition, including Alexey Navalny anti-corruption foundation, for the assassination of Vladlen Tatarsky. They portray Ukraine as a terrorist state and Russian opposition allegedly involved in assassination as a threat to national security in Russia.

Trend changes

In addition to the wide array of anti-Western messages and continuation of the two abovementioned sub-narratives that manifested throughout April 1 – April 7, 2023, a claim was reintroduced that Russia supposedly has some kind of historical right to Ukrainian territories (specifically Crimea), while Ukraine does not have that right. In particular, this was manifested in the claim by an active pro-Russian blogger Mika Badalyan that Ukrainian "Naftogaz", a primary state agency overseeing gas and oil, has no relation to assets in Crimea. The context to this is the Court in The Hague order for Russia to compensate loss of "Naftogaz" assets in the occupied Crimea; Russian media itself recognizes Crimean assets as belonging to Naftogaz or other Ukrainian energy companies before "nationalization" by Russia.

Context

As Armenian information space continues to be dominated by events around Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the war in Ukraine remained peripheral in both news outlets and in social media. As in previous weeks, pro-Russian actors relied quite a bit on Russian sources to spread anti-Western messages and disinformation that discredits Ukraine.

Disinformation messages originating in Armenia itself have mostly focused on linking the war in Ukraine to Armenian-Azerbaijani one in the conspiracy theory about the West being behind both the expected Ukrainian counteroffensive and possible Azerbaijani attack against Armenia. The messages about "second front" against Russia thus remain an important element of Armenian disinformation eco-system.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The most popular post of the week was published by Mika Badalyan and shared by Armenian Vendetta (51,795 views combined). It contained conspiracy theory that emerged in the beginning of April and states that possible Azerbaijani attack on Armenia is "synchronized" with Ukrainian counteroffensive. Some posts claim these events are coordinated from one center (i.e. the West, which is interested to open a "second front" against Russia after failing to do so in Georgia).

The second most popular post shared a claim from Russian propagandist Vladimir Solovyov about Ukraine together with Russian opposition being behind the assassination of the pro-Russian „military correspondent" Vladlen Tatarsky. Heavily dominating the disinformation eco-system throughout the period of April 1 – April 7, the accusations issued by Russian media and state officials remain highly present in the local Armenian sources. They often repeat that Ukraine somehow cooperated with Russian opposition (first of all, Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (ACF)) to kill Tatarsky. This claim is not supported by evidence, and ACF denied it.

Mika Badalyan shared two very similar posts from Solovyov: first during April 1 – April 7, and the second in the period of April 8 – April 14. In the earlier post Solovyov claimed that Ukraine and ACF were behind the attack on Tatarsky, in the newer post he reiterated the accusation by saying „Ukraine and Russian opposition" are responsible for the attack. In the older post Solovyov cited NAC (Russian National Anti-Terrorism Committee) as the source of information, in the newer one - FSB.

"Хроники Армении" [Chronicles of Armenia] page shared a post from a pro-war channel "Parallel Z" claiming that the Ukrainian military brigade threatens to shut the

sceptical Ukrainian soldiers and "cowards" in their tanks, effectively killing them, as "new Ukraine has no place for cowards". They cite a Telegram channel allegedly belonging to the 35th brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine; there is, however, no confirmed information to indicate that the channel is indeed led by an individual or a group of individuals from the above-mentioned brigade. A closer look at its contents, demonstrates mistakes in Ukrainian language that are likely to be made by someone whose native language is Russian; additionally, some of the messages reiterate essential pro-Kremlin narratives about the expected loss of Bakhmut where Russian soldiers supposedly advance. It claims that Russia will retaliate heavily with undisclosed but powerful weapons should Ukraine attempt to retake Crimea, Melitopol and Mariupol, and discredits "Azov". It is highly likely that the channel is a pro-Russian disinformation source that has no connection to the 35th brigade.

Trend prediction

Over the past several weeks of monitoring "Threat of war expanding beyond Ukraine" sub-narrative as well as anti-Western rhetoric and narratives discrediting Ukraine were dominant in the local disinformation eco-system.

This trend is likely to continue, as local disinformation actors often use two strategies to talk about war in Ukraine: 1) tying the Russian-Ukrainian war to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict; 2) sharing Russian sources with anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian claims.

BALTICS (RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE)
Civic Resilience Initiative

„X country is Russophobic / Russian culture is being attacked"	**Publications:** 10 **Views:** 6,563	The narrative focused on claiming that Russian-speaking minorities are being attacked in the Baltics through anti-Russian policies and the government's hostile attitude towards the Russian language.
„Ukrainians are Nazis"	**Publications:** 5 **Views:** 4,692	Stories within this narrative focused on labelling Ukraine as a "Nazi" state, calling for the need to de-Nazify the region and justifying Russian invasion.
„NATO/the US/the West is or will be directly involved in the war"	**Publications:** 4 Views 7,941	The narrative focused on the "militarization" of NATO-countries for a supposed war against Russia, with Poland identified as the key aggressor.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- There has been a steady decline in the general viewership of the publications produced by the pro-Russian disinformation sources. A lack of any significant events with extensive media coverage within the Baltics might be the cause for such a decline, which has been observed since April 1, 2023.
- The Russophobia-linked narratives continue to be the most popular narratives in the region, while claims of "Nazification" in Ukraine have become more popular throughout the recent rounds of monitoring. Narratives regarding economic sanctions remain amongst the most popular ones. At the same time, there have been limited or no messages discrediting Ukrainian refugees or conspiracy theories.
- There has been a shift towards portraying Poland (a close ally to the Baltic states) as a hostile aggressive state. More posts have been spotted regarding alleged Russophobia in Poland or how it is supposedly planning to occupy land from its neighboring countries (mostly identified as Ukraine).

Trend changes

Narratives which insist that Russian culture is being attacked remain popular in the local information space. Narratives regarding economic sanctions have also been on the rise since April 1. There has also been increase in narratives regarding military

aid, which mostly focus on trying to "prove" that Western financial and military aid is being misused or stolen in Ukraine. Anti-Western rhetoric continue to be consistently present in the disinformation eco-system of the Baltic states. Throughout April 8 – April 14 much of the rhetoric focused on NATO's supposed plans to go to war with Russia. The "threat of war expanding beyond Ukraine" and a "battlefield event" narratives haven't appeared at all since the middle of March.

Context

The following events have mostly driven the discussion of the so-called "Anti-Russian policies" in the Baltics.

Lithuania's parliament tried to pass a new law which restrict Russian citizens from acquiring real estate in Lithuania (unless these citizens have a permanent or temporary residence permit in Lithuania, or have inherited real estate). This law was vetoed by the President, but Russian and pro-Russian sources continue to speculate about the issue and present it as evidence of Russophobia in the country.

Latvian government considers establishing a Latvian language proficiency exam for Russian-speaking Latvians. Estonia decided to fine Estonians who support Russia in the war against Ukraine. These developments are portrayed as an act of censorship and a crackdown on the rights of the Russian-speaking minority and.

Key sub-narrative analysis

This week the most popular narrative was "X country is Russophobic / Russian culture is being attacked" (10 posts, 6,563 views). Stories within this narrative focus on portraying "anti-Russian" policies in the Baltics as a threat to the Russian-speaking minorities, as they are prevented from expressing their opinion regarding the war or the "oppression" of Russian culture. For example, Estonia's decision to fine Estonians who support the war in Ukraine is being heavily criticized as an act of Russophobia. Other posts try to show how Latvia's courts are supposedly prejudiced against Russian-speakers or how Latvia's teachers despise Russian-speaking students. Lithuania is being criticized for "rewriting history" through exclusion of Russian culture, as the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture have decided to replace Culture Day with World Art Day. The Russophobia narrative has become so normalized that it became being used as a predominant label for the Baltic states and their internal policies.

The second most popular narrative group is "Narratives discrediting Ukraine" (10 posts in total, 11,300 views). Two narratives were recorded within this group: "Ukrainians are Nazis" and "Western society does not support Ukraine". The first narrative labels Ukrainians as Nazis and calls for the de-Nazification of the region. The narrative even went as far as comparing Hitler to Ukraine - that both made "the deadly decision to attack Russia". The other narrative alleges that dozens of volunteers from the Baltics are fighting for Russia in the Zaporizhzhia region of Ukraine. These posts are framed in such a way to show that there are "reasonably minded people" in the Baltics, who support Russia's cause. Another story explains that in July, the Estonian government will lease a cruise ship to Canada, although 900 Ukrainian refugees now live on this ferry. It is framed in such a way to suggest that the Estonians are disinterested in where the 900 Ukrainians will relocate to, while in truth the Estonian government has found alternative accommodation for the refugees currently residing

on the cruise ship. Other posts talked about demonstrations in Berlin in which thousands of Germans allegedly protested against supplying weapons to Ukraine. The protests are used to portray German society as generally unsupportive of Ukraine and against the provision of military aid.

The third most popular narrative group consists of "Anti-Western Narratives" (6 posts in total, 10,396 views). Most of the stories in this group tried to push the narrative that "NATO/the US/the West is or will be directly involved in the war". The "militarization of NATO" is framed as a direct threat to Russia, suggesting that NATO is planning an attack in future. The Kaliningrad region is highlighted as an area that is particularly vulnerable to a NATO attack. Focus is given to Poland in particular, as the narratives attempt to present this close ally of the Baltics as a hostile and aggressive state that is looking to annex land from its neighboring countries (including Ukraine). Some posts even go so far as to state that Poland is looking to reunite the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of the XVI – XVIII centuries.

The two most popular posts came from the Telegrams channel "Rubaltic" and "Шпроты в изгнании І Новости Латвии". [Sprats in Exile|Latvia News]. Both of these posts spread disinformation regarding economic consequences of sanctions. A popular post from Rubaltic gathered 8,635 views. It implied that Latvia does not observe its own sanctions against Russia, claiming that Russian fuel is exported through Latvia to Ukraine under forged documents. The post from "Шпроты в изгнании І Новости Латвии" gained 8,951 views and claimed that sanctions against Russia crush Latvia's tourism sector, implying that sanctions hurt the West more than Russia.

Trend prediction

Looking at the past few weeks and our previous analysis it is safe to assume that the Russophobia-centered narratives will maintain popularity. Narratives discrediting Ukraine have remained the most popular since April 1, and narratives regarding economic sanctions have regained their popularity. We can predict that the top 4 most popular narrative groups should remain the same, while narratives regarding refugees should further decline in popularity.

Looking at important dates for next week, there is only one date of significance, which might change the disinformation landscape. Orthodox Easter was celebrated on the 16th of April. This might give ground for Russian disinformation to spread messages about how Orthodox Christianity is supposedly being attacked in the Baltics.

BELARUS
Belarus Press Club

"The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent"

Publications: 6

Views: 164,764

The channel ZhS quotes Dmitry Medvedev, who advances the narrative that Ukraine lacks sovereignty, that the Ukrainian regime is characterized by Nazism, and that the Ukrainian government is corrupt.

ONT NEWS repeats the parallels between actress Akhedzhakova and Zelensky, saying that perform well on a stage, but not in life.

The ZhS P channel accuses the former adviser to the President of Ukraine, Oleksiy Arestovich, of treason.

The BEREZINA channel is trolling Zelensky and trying to make him look incompetent.

"Belarus is not participating in the war in Ukraine"

Publications: 4

Views: 40,781

The channel "Lyudmila Gladkaya. SB" has posted a video that purportedly depicts a conversation among Russian volunteers in Donbass. In the video, the volunteers express their admiration for Lukashenka and assert that the Belarusians are the only ones who have not lost their minds.

The channels ATN NOVOSTI and Minskaya Pravda have released reports regarding the rehabilitation of children from Donbass in Belarus. These reports emphasize that the children receive both medical and psychological care, while Ukraine calls Belarus an aggressor.

"Ukraine will be divided among other countries"

Publications: 3

Views 123,830

On the ATN_NEWS channel, presenter Andriy Sych says that Warsaw sees the crisis in Ukraine as an opportunity for territorial gains.

The Belarusian Silovik channel, citing the "Niezależny Dziennik Polityczny" portal, writes that Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky has promised Poland the western territories of Ukraine in exchange for support in launching a counter-offensive.

Alexander Shpakovsky says that Poland is allegedly proposing to split Ukraine with Russia.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The "ZhS Premium" channel, quoting Dmitry Medvedev, promotes a number of disinformation narratives, including that Ukraine as a state is "just a misunderstanding" caused by the collapse of the USSR, that the Ukrainian regime is Nazi, and that the Ukrainian authorities are corrupt and stealing Western money.

  Belarusian channels are beginning to adopt the practice of Russian sources who attack Russian celebrities that have expressed support for Ukraine. For example, the "ONT NEWS" channel is trying to undermine the credibility and talent of a well-known actress Liya Akhedzhakova. The channel claims that her merits are

not only her talent, but also a good script and the work of the film directors that eventually brought her fame. The channel compares Akhedzhakova to Zelensky, saying that they are good on stage, but not in real life.

It is worth noting that on April 11, a well-known and experienced "specialist in denunciation" of well-known and popular cultural figures in Russia, the head of the governmental "Federal Project for Security and Combating Corruption" Vitaly Borodin turned to the General Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation with a request to open a case against Liya Akhedzhakova for "treason and discrediting the Russian army". Borodin is well-known for attacking public figures who not loyal to the Kremlin.

The "ZhS Premium" channel suspects that the well-known blogger and former adviser to the Ukrainian president's office, Oleksiy Arestovich, is being destroyed for saying that "the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine will be worse than the war itself".

The BEREZINA channel allegedly quotes the words and conclusions of the well-known Ukrainian blogger Oleksiy Arestovich, but rewrites them. The channel stated that Arestovich said that "Ukraine needs another president because Zelensky failed" and that he "could not defeat corruption and became a corrupt official himself". Instead, Arestovich noted that no Poles could help Ukraine fight corruption - only the people themselves or Ukrainian politicians could deal with corrupt officials. "We need a person who will not steal to come to power. He won't, and he won't let others do this as well," says Arestovich. –"It is necessary that he does not steal and does not encourage theft. Unfortunately, we haven't had any luck so far. Zelensky has not completely overcome corruption" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nCwSNsxZOE , 23.10)

- Pro-Russian publicist Andrey Lazutkin in the broadcast of the project "Azarenok. Directly" by Grigory Azarenka of the channel "STV. News of Belarus" complains that Belarusian athletes are given unlawful conditions for participation in sports competitions - "you compete without a flag, then you must condemn the military operation, apologise to Ukraine".

  The channel "Lyudmila Gladkaya. SB" publishes a video of the conversation between volunteers in which they admire Lukashenka and say that Belarusians are the only ones who have not gone mad.

  The "ATN NEWS" and "Minskaya Pravda" channels published several reports on the rehabilitation of Donbass children in Belarus. At the same time, it is emphasised that the children are receiving psychological and medical assistance in the country [Belarus] that "Ukraine so cynically and systematically exposes as an aggressor". Positive image of Belarus is created as opposed to the negative and ungrateful image of Ukraine.

- On the ATN_NEWS channel presenter Andriy Sych promoted the idea that Warsaw was an instigator of the war in Ukraine, since the crisis in neighbouring states is seen by Poland as a window of opportunity for territorial acquisitions. The programme also states that the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus is a "coercive measure to enforce peace" against the hostile neighbors. The deployment of tactical nuclear weapons will supposedly allow Belarus not to get involved in an arms race with NATO.

  The Belarusian Silovik channel and a number of Russian media outlets are quoting an article from the Niezależny Dziennik Polityczny portal, whose author

Marek Gala writes that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has promised Poland the western territories of Ukraine in exchange for help in launching a counter-offensive.

It is worth noting that the Niezależny Dziennik Polityczny website is a pseudo-media, engaged in the dissemination of Russian disinformation. According to some journalists, the site's texts are written in poor Polish, saturated with Russian grammatical structures, which may be the result of an unsuccessful machine translation. The editor of the publication, Adam Kaminsky, is a fictitious person. The photo published on his Twitter and Facebook accounts is actually a portrait of Lithuanian traumatologist Andrius Zukauskas. Also, no real Polish journalists from this website or people who know them could be found.

The channel "Shpakovsky. Essentially." quotes an excerpt from a video with Alexander Shpakovsky, who says on the programme "Objective" that Poland is allegedly proposing to divide Ukraine with Russia.

Trend changes

Pro-state Telegram channels have recently started to promote the theme of restoring Belarus' image as a "peaceful country". Government affiliated experts express their support for Russia, both politically and militarily, while simultaneously claiming that Belarus is not involved in the war. These channels express surprise and indignation at the various political, economic, sporting, and personal sanctions imposed on Belarus.

The Belarusian authorities are attempting to justify their involvement in Russia's invasion of Ukraine by portraying Belarus as a peaceful country. This effort is particularly evident in reports of aid from Belarus to children in Mariupol, Gorlivka, and other heavily impacted towns in Donbass. Reports frequently contrast "peaceful Belarus" with countries experiencing wars, conflicts, protests, disasters, and catastrophes.

Lukashenka has also increasingly discussed the need for "peace initiatives" for Ukraine, following the same strategy of portraying Belarus as a peaceful country. Pro-government channels are expected to emphasize the supposed peaceful nature and aspirations of Belarus and offer a peace agreement that aligns with Russian goals but disregards Ukrainian interests.

Context

On April 10th, Alexander Lukashenko hosted another meeting focused on Belarusian-Russian cooperation, where Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu visited Minsk to discuss further agreements following a personal meeting with Lukashenko in Moscow.

On April 13th, the Belarusian head of state continued his regular meetings with leaders from various Russian regions. He welcomed Rustam Minnikhanov, the head of Tatarstan, at the Palace of Independence. Additionally, Alexander Lukashenko held a meeting with Shamil Tarpishchev, the President of the Russian Tennis Federation.

On 14 April Lukashenko met with the heads of supreme courts of foreign states. The delegations arrived in Minsk in connection with the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Supreme Court of Belarus. Among them are representatives of Russia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. At the meeting,

the head of state proposed to the Commonwealth of Independent States partners to carry out a coordinated transformation of the judiciary. On the same day, Alexander Lukashenko presented state awards to 12 judges of the Supreme Court. Quoting Alexander Lukashenko's appeal to the judges of the Supreme Court, the "Pool Pervogo" channel points out that the judicial system could collapse and "if the judges then [in 2020] falter", Belarus would be "worse off than Ukraine" promoting narrative that Ukraine is not a sovereign state.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The West/NATO provoked the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. The channel "Lyudmila Gladkaya. SB" promotes the narrative that allegedly Western "friends" of Kyiv have robbed children of their childhood and are responsible for instigating the war.

Ukrainians are Nazis. The "ZhS premium" channel tries to draw parallels with the crime in Khatyn [not to be confused with Katyn massacre in Poland] during the Second World War, picturing it as a crime committed by "banderists" and linking them to the modern-day authorities in Kyiv who supposedly sympathize with ultra-nationalism.

Ukraine mistreats its soldiers/civilians. The Azarenok. STV" claims that hundreds, if not thousands, of dead soldiers of the Ukrainian Armed Forces are waiting to be awarded the hero's star on the presidential website. According to the channel's author, the deceased fighters are no longer needed by anyone except their families and the state doesn't care about the lives lost in the war.

Ukraine's informational space is controlled by the state authorities / Ukrainian media is lying / Ukraine is autocratic. The "Our Land" channel reposted a message from the Ukraina.ru channel analysing the execution of a Ukrainian prisoner whose head was cut off with a knife. According to the author of the message, the video was fake and it is no coincidence that the footage of the atrocity appeared on the eve of the offensive, as it is supposedly necessary to create an information background and ideologically "pump up" Ukrainian soldiers against Russians.

Western society does not support Ukraine. The BEREZINA channel publishes photos from the Easter march in Berlin, where some posters call for an end to financial support for Ukraine and the war against Russia. It was portrayed as a general reluctance to support Ukraine.

The new narrative may be interesting to analyse. It can be used to justify the refusal of peace initiatives, at least on the part of the Russian elite — "Stopping the war now is a betrayal of Russia". The channel "Azarenok. STV" has published a report by Alexander Dugin, who writes that it is impossible to stop the special military operation and "therefore only a traitor, an enemy of Russia, the people and the state, can want peace in such conditions". Dugin also notes that events on the fronts influence the intensity of patriotism in society, and laments that with the Kyiv regime's counteroffensive, patriotism will receive a blow. Dugin suggests that "the decisive year 2023 will determine the image of our future: what Russia will look like in the next round of its historical existence".

Finally, the narrative that **Zelensky and his team are destroying the Orthodox Church of Ukraine**, which has been popular for several weeks, has found its way into six publications.

Pro-government channels are also using this situation to promote other narratives. For example, the BEREZINA channel [attacks](#) a Belarusian refugee who supports the steps taken by Ukrainian government in the crisis around Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. The channel calls the Ukrainian government Satanists and stresses that if people like this Belarusian refugee came to power in 2020, Belarus would be as degraded Ukraine.

Trend prediction

Religion-focused disinformation targeting Ukraine is likely to remain popular.

Pro-government actors will increasingly begin to claim that Belarus' peace initiatives are based on resolving humanitarian issues.

The justification for the relocation of tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus will also be discussed.

The pro-government speakers anticipate the counter-offensive operations of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, therefore, are no longer prepared to give an absolutely positive assessment of the further developments for Russia.

Bulgaria
Center for the Study of Democracy

"Russian troops are advancing / achieving success"

Publications:
6

Views:
7,397

In the previous round of monitoring this narrative was popular, portraying Kyiv regime in a hopeless state due to alleged Russian military success. Articles mention that Su-34 fighter jets hit Ukrainian saboteurs invading Russian territory, the Russian army has struck a second blow on the bridge over the Sudost river and that a US mercenary was killed in Ukraine.

"Ukrainians are Nazis"

Publications:
3

Views:
477,648

Pro-Kremlin media outlets and Telegram channels again shared content of Ukrainian soldiers allegedly posing next to Nazi symbols. There were also accusations that Ukrainian soldiers fighting in Bakhmut are actually Nazis.

"Western politicians care about Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens"

Publications:
4

Views
22,858

This sub-narrative increased in popularity, capitalizing on the information from the leaked Pentagon documents to suggest that Bulgaria offered its MiG-29s to Ukraine. In addition, an article mentioned that the US and EU will "punish" Hungary for its relations with Russia.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- 20 out of the 50 monitored posts and publications utilized the **Anti-Western** and the **Discrediting Ukraine** narratives (11 and 9, respectively). The sub-narrative **Russian troops are advancing / achieving success** is again highly popular, with articles claiming that Ukrainian scouting missions towards Yuzhnodonets were thwarted and that Russians captured the tire repair plant in Marinka.

- The number of publications from the **Discrediting Ukraine** narratives is still significant. One of the Telegram groups **КАКВО СЕ СЛУЧВА? [What is going on?]** manipulated a quote by Bill Gates that the "Ukrainian government was one of the worst in the world", further adding that this has not prevented the US from sending 100 trillion USD "without any accountability so that Ukrainian bureaucrats can spend as much as they like". The quote by Bill Gates was originally from an interview that took place in January 2023. His exact words were that the Ukrainian government "before the war" was one of the worst in the world, nobody expected Zelensky to be capable of bringing Ukrainians together, and that

there was little faith in Ukrainian ability to defend itself against Russia. This context was removed from the quote before being spread by the pro-Russian source.

- Two weeks after the elections, there was only one Telegram post from political figures that contained disinformation narratives. The post was from the Pro-Russian Political Party *Revival*'s Telegram account and shared the main priorities outlined by the leader Kostadin Kostadinov. Among them, *Revival* committed to preserve the Bulgarian lev (BGN) and protect of Bulgaria's national interests, seeking a neutral position for Bulgaria regarding the invasion in Ukraine.

Trend changes

The narrative that **Western politicians care about Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens** gained traction this week. Monitored media outlets capitalized on the leaked Pentagon documents and criticized the last permanent Bulgarian government for offering MIG-29s to Ukraine. Furthermore, the ban on *RT France* in France was a motive to attack the Western elite for covering up the "truth" about the "Kyiv regime" that was shared on the platform.

With the developments around the battles for Marinka and Bakhmut, as well as other military actions on Ukrainian soil, the narratives and sub-narratives surrounding the **Battlefield events** are still popular this week.

The sub-narrative that **Ukrainians are Nazis** is again one of the most actively disseminated ones – One article from *Pogled.info* even claiming that Odesa is awaiting a new, second liberation from the new Nazi occupiers.

Context

Monitored Telegram groups and media outlets actively disseminated publications sharing the ***X country is under threat/will be pulled into the war*** narrative (similar to those disseminated during the period April 1 – April 7). In Bulgaria, this narrative is amplified by disinformation about a US bill that supposedly will make the Black Sea area an arena for hostilities. The document was submitted to the US Senate on 15 March under the title "Black Sea Security Act of 2023". However, the original text of the Act does not point out any military-related activities in the *Purpose and Objectives* chapter.

Key sub-narrative analysis

Russian troops are advancing / achieving success: As usual, pro-Russian media outlets and Telegram channels praise Russia's military success and strategic capabilities. The information in the articles is selected to insinuate that a Russian victory is inevitable - either Russia wins the war, or the conflict will lead to World War III. The claim was disseminated, in particular, by Pogled.info and echoes recurring claims made by Russian actors, such as Margarita Simonyan, who repeatedly claim that because Russia is a nuclear state it cannot lose a war – or, if it does, nuclear weapons will be used.

"Ukrainians are Nazis": As usual, the most popular publication of the week was again a Telegram post in Russian from the group **ЗОВ - Заедно Общение Всемир [United Community – For Peace].** The post accumulated 455,917 total views (42% of all the views from the 50

monitored posts) and showed a picture allegedly featuring Ukrainian soldiers in a car, surrounded by Nazi symbols, including a swastika. The image was provided by a pro-war Russian channel "Operation Z: military correspondents of the Russian Spring". There is no confirmation that the soldiers in the car indeed are Ukrainian military personnel or that the picture wasn't edited.

Western politicians care about Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens: Monitored media outlets took advantage of the Pentagon leaked documents to criticize the last regular government of Bulgaria for offering MiG-29s to Ukraine. However, according to a [statement](#)from the Ministry of Defence, there has been no discussion on the free provision of Bulgarian MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine. Such a decision would have led to a deficit of defence capabilities, which contravenes Bulgaria's Constitution, according to the Ministry of Defence. Monitored sources also mentioned Washington's and Brussels' intentions to punish Budapest with sanctions for having friendly relations with Russia. However, this claim is misleading - [Sanctions were imposed](#) on a Russian-controlled International Investment Bank (IIB), also known as the "spy bank", based in Hungary. Although withdrawing its staff from the bank due to being "unoperational", because of the sanctions, PM Orban's government seemed unimpressed by the sanctions.

Trend prediction

As military action unfolds in the eastern part of Ukraine, narratives suggesting that **Ukraine is losing the war** and emphasising **Russia's military success** will continue to be highly popular.

The Kremlin will continue to use their favoured disinformation technique; they cite the opinion of a pro-Russian foreign/local agent or impersonate a legitimate and trusted figure or organisation in order to boost credibility in a narrative. This week this technique was demonstrated by a statement by [**Vitali Averyanov**](#), a writer with a PhD in philosophy and the main co-founder and deputy chairman of the conservative think tank [*Izborsky Club*](#). He stated that the West "woke up the Russian bear earlier than they should have".

With the unfolding military actions there is a chance that narratives connected to **Ukrainian refugees** will gain traction once again.

Georgia

Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS)

"Ukraine is losing the war"	**Publications:** **7** **Views:** **3,681**	One of the core messages of the Russian disinformation in Georgia remains persuading the public that Russia is winning the war.
"Ukrainian government is fighting against Christian church"	**Publications:** **3** **Views:** **833**	The disinformation campaign triggered by the ongoing dispute over the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra that argues that Ukrainian government is fighting against Orthodox Christianity still continues.
"The West is losing interest in helping Ukraine / wants Ukraine to surrender"	**Publications:** **3** Views **328**	This sub-narrative included messages that the US intelligence services are allegedly tired of Ukraine and will stop their support; and that the EU is pressing Zelensky to sign a treaty with Russia and asking China for help to negotiate the end of the conflict.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The sub-narrative that Ukraine is losing the war has remained popular since February 20, 2023 when monitoring commenced. This time it was centered on the vulnerabilities of Ukrainian military shown in the leaked Pentagon documents. Based on these vulnerabilities the claims were circulated that Ukrainian counteroffensive was doomed to fail and that Russia would soon dominate the skies. It also claimed that financially Ukraine no longer exists as a country and cannot sustain successful military operations.
- Disinformation campaign aiming to discredit Ukraine by arguing that Ukrainian government is fighting against Christianity has continued. This time claims included the stories of sudden deaths of officials alleged to be persecuting Christianity, and the argument that Zelensky's "Nazi supporters" are oppressing Christians and that was the reason why Putin started the war. Religion-linked disinformation becomes yet another explanation among the string of excuses produced by Russian officials and pro-Russian actors for why Russia started the war.
- The third most popular sub-narrative was that the West is losing interest in helping Ukraine and wants Ukraine to surrender. One of the relevant messages was linked again to the US leaked documents, suggesting that the US intelligence community is frustrated by Ukraine and is going to scale back its support. Another claim suggested that the EU is urging Zelensky to sign an agreement with Russia by the end of the year, and another piece argued that Europe is now unpersuaded by the efforts of the

US to end the war and by the chances of Ukrainian victory and is turning to China to solve "the Ukraine problem".

Three real life events that influenced the disinformation space in Georgia:
1) The leak of US secret documents that included information regarding the war in Ukraine.
2) The ongoing dispute in Ukraine over the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra and Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate).
3) The US sanctioning four Georgian judges (3 active and one former) for corruption.

Trend changes

The sub-narrative that Ukraine is losing the war remained key message of Russian disinformation in Georgia and it has been popular in one form or another in each and every week. Throughout the period of April 8 – April 14 it was bolstered by the disinformation sources reporting on the leaked US documents.

The disinformation campaign that Ukrainian government is fighting against the Christian church has remained active, albeit its popularity has somewhat decreased since its peak. This might be related to the fact that the disinformation ecosystem was mainly consumed by the leak of the US secret documents and that the topic has been circulating for quite some time already, losing its impact.

The sub-narrative that the West is losing interest in helping Ukraine / wants Ukraine to surrender was new amongst the top three in Georgia. However, it was more or less related to the main message of the Russian disinformation that Ukraine is losing the war and further strengthens this idea.

Context

Information from the leaked US documents regarding Ukraine's battlefield issues and alleged wiretapping of its allies by the US was widely reported. Not all of those reports represent disinformation as they were usually in line, or in some cases even direct translations, with the reporting in the Western media; however, they occupied much of the space in the disinformation ecosystem.

Messages that the West forces Georgia to open the second front against Russia and that the West, particularly the US, interferes in Georgia's internal affairs by sanctioning Georgian judges were overshadowed by information related to the US leak. However, these messages have not disappeared completely and remained in the disinformation ecosystem.

It is noteworthy that the ruling Georgian Dream party has not been pushing the narrative that a "Global War Party" is trying to drag Georgia into the war during April 8 – April 14, which had an impact on the popularity of this sub-narrative. That might be explained by domination of two other topics – the US sanctioning Georgian judges and more recently, BBC's investigation regarding David Kezerashvili.

David Kezerashvili is a former Georgian defense minister and wealthy businessman who was arrested in absentia in Georgia on charges of using his ministerial office to accumulate personal wealth to the detriment of the state. However, he claims that the charges are politically motivated. He owns opposition-affiliated TV channel and, as he claims, finances several Georgian opposition parties. BBC's investigation concluded that he is behind

the "billion-dollar scam" - a global fraudulent trading network that robbed its customers by operating scam call centres.

Key sub-narrative analysis

One of the notable pieces of disinformation indeed concerned the "second front" conspiracy:

Pro-Russian propagandist Arno Khidirbegishvili claimed that the Western diplomatic corps had urged the heads of all branches of government in Georgia to initiate military operations against the Russian Federation even before the war in Ukraine had started. He stated that the West had demanded Georgia's immediate participation in the military actions, as soon as they would inevitably start in Ukraine. According to him, the West expected Georgia to attack the Russian military bases in Tskhinvali, Java village, and Gudauta in Abkhazia. Khidirbegishvili argued that if the pressure on the Georgian government continued, as he believed it would, then the government would undoubtedly make public the scandalous evidence of the US pressure.

"He claimed that after the success of the "foreign agents revolution," which is how he describes the result of protests against the "foreign agents" bill, the US State Department continues to use CSOs, independent media, and opposition groups - all labeled as foreign agents by the ruling party and pro-Russian actors - to undermine the Georgian government. According to Khidirbegishvili, the reason for appointing Kelly Degnan as the US ambassador to Georgia in 2020 was that Ukraine's preparations for a large-scale war with Russia had entered the final phase, and Georgia was assigned the role of the "second front." He suggests that this is why Kelly Degnan, who was the political adviser to the Commander-in-Chief of the US Naval Forces in Europe and Africa, was sent to Georgia as the US ambassador.

Arno Khidirbegishvili is the editor-in-chief of the pro-Russian webpage Saqinform.ge (Gruzinform.ge). He is notorious with his overtly pro-Russian views and conspiracy theories. Khidirbegishvili usually targets the US ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan. He often attacks the opposition and the CSOs, while sometimes being supportive towards the ruling Georgian Dream party but sometimes also criticising it. He is also sometimes quoted by Russian disinformation sources on the issues related to Georgia.

Pro-Russian newspaper „Georgian World" reported that the Russian army had captured Leopard tanks in the Kherson region, but could not carry over the river and decided to sink it in the swamps. Additionally, the article stated that Russian soldiers have noted German air systems being used towards Kherson, which were supposedly operated by mercenaries from Germany. Publications like this are aimed at discouraging the Western states from sending weapons to Ukraine for the fear that they will be captured and destroyed by Russia.

The pro-Russian Telegram channel WorldPolitics, based on "Niezależny Dziennik Polityczny," claimed that Zelensky promised Ukraine's western territories to Warsaw in exchange for help in military actions against Russia. The Telegram post cites Polish fringe media, which suggests that Zelensky supposedly has no choice because his pre-announced counteroffensive is doomed to fail. According to the channel, this is an example of Ukraine trying to find assets to pay the West, which even includes territorial concessions. The author further added that this arrangement is beneficial for Russia.

Trend prediction

The message that Ukraine is losing the war is highly likely to remain as one of the core messages of the Russian disinformation.

The disinformation campaign that the Ukrainian government is fighting against the Orthodox church is likely to continue as the issue related to the UOC MP still remains on the agenda in Ukraine. However, if the situation will not escalate and its prominence in Russian information space will reduce, so will the popularity of that narrative in Georgia.

The "second front" conspiracy is not disappearing from Georgian general information space, but as there has been other hot topics in Georgia its popularity has somewhat faded. However, the message remains mainstream and if the ruling party decides to use it again, it might regain its popularity.

Hungary
Political Capital

"Military aid unnecessarily prolongs the war/endangers civilians"	**Publications:** 4 ——— **Views:** 8,209	This is a recurring pro-Kremlin sub-narrative, spread by pro-government and far-right sources. They claim that weapon transfers to Ukraine are only prolonging the conflict.
"Aid to Ukraine is weakening/endangering the countries that provide it"	**Publications:** 4 ——— **Views:** 4,992	This sub-narrative is also recurring, claiming that Ukraine is not a sovereign country due to its financial dependence on Western powers who support it at the expense of their own citizens.
"Ukraine mistreats its soldiers/civilians"	**Publications:** 3 ——— Views 12,570	This sub-narrative is shared by the Hungarian government and tries to equate the responsibility of Russia and Ukraine in the war, and portray both sides as equally bad.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- Narratives discrediting Ukraine were once again the most popular category of the week. These included denying the sovereignty of Ukraine or even its existence as a nation, calling Ukrainians Nazis, alleging religious persecution in Ukraine, presenting Ukraine as warmongers who don't want peace.
- Narratives about battle events were also quite prominent, emphasising the alleged defeat of the Ukrainian forces in Bakhmut for the sixth week in a row, uncritically quoting Prigozhin's statement that Russia has achieved its objective, and denying or trivialising the video of the execution of a Ukrainian POW.
- Narratives regarding military aid were prevalent, all claiming that military aid prolongs the conflict and escalates the war.

Trend changes

In terms of recurring narratives, Zelensky's supposed persecution of Orthodox Christianity remains popular, accusing Ukrainian government of repression of the Orthodox Church.

The narrative that the West instigated the war is no longer so widespread (for example, it is no longer quoted by the Hungarian government). However, throughout the period of April 8 – April 14 there was one case of a Facebook video about 3 American senators visiting Ukraine in 2016, arguing for American aid to bolster Ukrainian defence against Russia. Published by a pro-Russian source **Orosz Hírek**, it received four thousand angry reactions and hundreds of angry comments that reveal widespread anti-American and anti-Ukrainian sentiments among certain groups of the electorate.

Context

There are a lot of narratives operating under the same false assumption that Russia wants peace. Various forms of this narrative are "Both sides are equally at fault for the war", "Russia wants peace, but the West wants to keep fighting", "Ukraine does not want peace," or "Military aid unnecessarily prolongs the war/endangers civilians". These narratives omit Russia's explicit strategic goal of annexation, ethnic cleansing and demilitarisation/forced neutrality of Ukraine. It is not Biden nor Zelensky preventing peace, but Putin, who has shown he will only withdraw forces if he is forced to do so on the battlefield.

As expected, the Hungarian government-organised and far-right media is not ready to condemn Russia for the video depicting the beheading of a Ukrainian soldier. Government-organised media and government-aligned and independent far-right media such as Hirado and Szent Corona Radio immediately made claims about Ukrainian war crimes, trying to portray Ukraine and Russia as equally responsible for violating the rules of war. Furthermore, they stressed that the video might not be authentic, is very blurry, and is definitely outdated. In one case it is even claimed regarding the beheading that "Ukraine is accusing Russia of doing things that Ukraine itself is doing".

A government-organised news source PestiSracok reported that Russia is winning the war. It claimed the Ukrainian defenders of Bakhmut are retreating, which has been claimed every week for six weeks now. There are also quotes of Prigozhin saying Russia should dig in to protect its territorial gains, supposedly having already achieved its military and strategic goals. The article does not mention the Ukrainian counterattack last autumn and does not compare the Kremlin's rhetoric from last year with this statement, which clearly shows that they have not achieved their goals. Instead, the article suggests that Russia has already won, and a counteroffensive is not necessary or useful. This once again serves to undermine support for military aid to Ukraine from the West.

Key sub-narrative analysis

Military aid unnecessarily prolongs the war/endangers civilians (4 cases, 8,209 views). The most popular narrative this week was a recurring one, echoed by the Hungarian government since the beginning of the war. This narrative presents those who support arms shipments to Ukraine as being in favour of conflict, and those opposing it as being on the side of peace.

In reality, advocating for the abandonment of Ukraine while continuing to buy Russian gas makes the Hungarian government pro-Russia, not pro-peace. This narrative does not account for what would happen in Russian-occupied territories and what are Russia's explicit goals regarding Ukrainian civilians. Nor does it account for future Russian actions after the Western abandonment of Ukraine. This narrative was shared by Hungarian foreign minister Péter Szijjártó and prime minister Viktor Orbán. There was even a case where Medvedev explicitly said he agrees with Orbán on this and how much he admires him. The rhetoric of the domestic opposition being in favour of war and financed by the USA is once again present in these cases.

Ukraine is not a sovereign state (4 cases, 4,996 views). This narrative was used to argue for the legitimacy of the Russian invasion by denying the agency and sovereignty of the Ukrainian people. In one case, Orbán claimed Ukraine is a financially non-existent country, claiming that its survival depends on other nations lending it money and providing financial aid. In other cases, Medvedev uses this narrative in an almost genocidal way. He says Ukraine will completely cease to exist after the war. Reference to Ukraine as a country implies total annexation; if referring to Ukraine as a people, it implies large-scale ethnic cleansing. He further claims the existence of Ukraine is the result of accidental misunderstandings during the breakup of the USSR, thereby denying both the history of Ukrainian statehood and national identity and the 1991 referendum in which Ukrainians chose to form their own country. He also claims that Ukraine will cease to exist because nobody in the world needs Ukraine to exist. Hungarian and Russian disinformation clearly deny the sovereignty of the Ukrainian state to argue against continued support for its survival against the invasion.

Ukraine does not want peace (3 cases, 12,570 views). This narrative is closely linked to other narratives that either equate the responsibility of two states in a war, or call for peace in terms that primarily blame Ukraine or the West rather than Russia. The first case was a Calvinist Bishop and former government minister for Fidesz, Zoltán Balog, urging for peace. He said we need to mentally and spiritually support the soldiers who are forced to fight, implying that two equally bad governments were forcing their soldiers to fight for equally bad reasons. He then criticised both countries for not being friendly enough with the other. To clear any confusion about whom he supports, he ended the sermon by criticising Ukraine for "marginalising" its Hungarian minority. The head of a Fidesz-aligned opinion polling company also implied that the West is attacking Hungary because, unlike Ukraine, it wants peace.

Trend prediction

It seems that the anti-Christian Ukraine narrative will become increasingly 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. It is also likely that disinformation narratives regarding the videos of Ukrainian POW executions will intensify as the Kremlin tries different ways to deny its responsibility. Meanwhile, it remains to be seen whether Hungary's exit from the International Investment Bank will spark a series of disinformation publications.

MOLDOVA
WatchDog.MD

„X country is Russophobic / Russian culture is being attacked"	**Publications:** 6 **Views:** 27,507	Two main stories fuelled this sub-narrative: reports about the church tensions in Ukraine between pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian priests and believers; and the return of vlogger Nikoglai to Moldova, who did a manifestation in support of Ukraine and against the Russian aggression.
"Western politicians care about Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens"	**Publications:** 3 **Views:** 11, 686	Two Telegram channels redistributed videos of Romanian farmers protesting against cheap Ukrainian grain and the 'policy of the government and the European Commission'. Another post pointed out that the Moldovan president started her address to the nation with information about Ukraine instead of focusing on Moldova.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The topic of the alleged persecution of Orthodox communities subordinated to the Moscow Patriarchate continued, as predicted last week. While the main focal point seems to be the "Russophobia" of Ukrainian authorities, there is also a strong undertone about the intentional division of Slavs and Orthodox peoples.
- As usual, the main direction or messages seem rather opportunistic, adjusting to whatever topical event seems most suited for manipulation (such as the Nekoglai case).

Trend changes

Apart from the main topic of Russophobia, there have been no other major sub-narratives. The topics and messages have been spread out more evenly, with no clear priorities during April 8 – April 14.

Overall, most of the monitored sources and narratives seem to have been pursuing the same directions during April 1 – April 7. To a certain extent, there was a comeback of more international-focused topics, such as CIA's expectation of increased Chinese support for Russia, Viktor Orban's claims that the war will stop when the EU and the US stop financing Ukraine, or a post mocking the EU's incapacity to transfer seized Russian assets to Ukraine. However, all these publications are rather scattered thematically, so it is difficult to pinpoint a certain sub-narrative being pushed more than others.

Context

There have been no major social or political events over the past week that would affect the informational space and disinformation trends in a significant way.

Somewhat surprisingly, there has been no significant echo from the debates in Romania about the date of Easter celebrations, which has brought to the fore inner church divisions. One group, which favors Western ideals and moderation, proposes adjusting the date of Easter to coincide with other Western Christian denominations. In contrast, a hardline conservative faction, which opposes the West and globalization, advocates for keeping the traditional calendar. These conservative messages are aligned with Russian disinformation and pro-Russian actors in Moldova have previously circulated favorable content from Romania.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The new story for the Russophobia sub-narrative was the action in support of Ukraine organized by Moldovan-born vlogger Nikoglai, who had made his career in Russia, but returned to Moldova after being prosecuted for a parody about Russian soldiers. The vlogger spoke on a megaphone against Russia, suggesting that Moldovans are brothers not with Russians, but with Ukrainians. The style of this manifestation is provocative by Moldovan standards and very easy to exploit. Another video shows Nikoglai admitting that he made money in Russia and suggests he is a hypocrite and a sell-out, thus belittling the relevance of his anti-war message.

Despite the flashiness of the Nikoglai affair, the main topic for the Russophobia sub-narrative remained the alleged persecution of Orthodox communities by the Ukrainian government and Ukrainian nationalists. One publication claims that cowardly Ukrainian 'recruits who avoided mobilization' made up the most of a crowd demanding the transfer of a church from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) to the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

Another publication by "Gagauzian Republic" channel deplores criticizes the fact that in one of the churches formerly belonging to UOC MP religious service took place with Ukrainian flags, shouts and applauses, with the suggestion that such nationalistic fervour has no place in a home of God.

There is also a publication that makes fun of a Moldovan TV station's story about the church tensions in Ukraine. The post labels the TV station as 'part of the Soros network' and suggests that the TV station is lying and that Orthodox communities are not leaving UOC-MP because of its ties with Russia that are no longer welcome by the majority of Ukrainian people, but because of the persecution by Ukrainian authorities.

The latter commentary belongs to Bogdat Țîrdea, a Socialist MP that is one of the most active producers and redistributors of pro-Russian disinformation among the Moldovan Telegram channels. He was a 'pioneer' of anti-Soros conspiracy theories long before this was a thing in Moldova (Țîrdea ironically being a former beneficiary of a Soros scholarship). His Telegram channel is the perfect gateway into the pro-Russian disinformation network on Telegram, as he frequently reposts publications from other channels.

Trend prediction

The issue of alleged religious persecution in Ukraine will likely continue because Orthodox Moldovans celebrated Easter on April 16th and then they celebrate the Easter of the Dead one week later, so religious sensitivities are increased during this period.

The elections in Găgăuzia, the information space of which is dominated by pro-Russian narratives, are still to have an echo at the national level.

If the Romanian church tensions regarding the date of Easter celebrations continue, some messages of the hard conservative camp might be taken up by the Moldovan pro-Russian disinformation network.

POLAND
Fakenews.pl

"Ukraine sells low quality/contaminated/too much grain to the West"	**Publications: 5** **Views: 61,978**	Continues to be the top sub-narrative (now for 3 consecutive weeks). Various far-right and pro-Russian sources have covered the topic of Ukrainian grain (and meat) being sent to Europe under low tax/no tax agreements to support Ukraine. These sources claim that the grain is contaminated/low quality or there is too much of it, this week pushing the narrative that Polish market is already collapsing as a result.
"Ukrainians are Nazis"	**Publications: 3** **Views: 94,518**	A relatively new narrative, claiming that Ukrainians are Nazis, referencing the Volyn Massacre of 1943, and blaming modern-day Ukraine for Nazism.
"The West is profiting on the war in Ukraine"	**Publications: 3** Views 65,180	A consistent narrative, but one that is increasing in frequency. Pro-Russian sources were this week pushing the narrative that the West is responsible for starting the war, and that it did so in order to profit from arms sales.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The sub-narrative hyperbolizing the negative effects of no tax/low tax imports of Ukrainian grain and occasionally stating that the grain is contaminated remains the top sub-narrative observed this week, continuing the trend of the past 3 weeks. However, despite the substantial attention paid to the narrative by disinformation actors, audience engagement figures are decreasing.
- The number of publications mentioning the Volyn Massacre (1943) is increasing, linking the attacks perpetrated against the Polish population by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army to modern day Ukraine, accusing it of Nazism and occasionally combining these accusations with a narrative about "ungrateful Ukrainian refugees".

Trend changes

Sub-narratives similar to the discreditation of Ukrainian grain imports have started to emerge, mostly regarding chicken. Claims that imports of Ukrainian meat are destroying the Polish economy throughout the period of April 8 – April 14 were combined with the "Ukrainian leadership is corrupt" sub-narrative, suggesting that Ukrainian oligarchs are the true beneficiaries of the exports.

Pro-Russian sources started to use TikTok and Snapchat videos of young Ukrainians to antagonise the Polish population against refugees and enforce the "Ukrainians are Nazis" rhetoric. Videos of young men insulting Poland and Poles and glorifying Ukrainian nationalism are widely circulated, but at least some of them are presumed to be fake and/or staged.

Context

Sub-narratives around the economy continue to dominate the information space in Poland, and are presented as a key reason that the Polish economy is weakening. A notable change that occurred in the period of April 8 – April 14 is that disinformation sources started portraying Ukrainian oligarchs as key perpetrators, and beneficiaries, of the cheap grain exports that harm Polish farmers. This also allows disinformation sources to promote the idea that Ukraine is corrupt.

As the anniversary of Volyn tragedy approaches, it is likely that disinformation actors will intensify the spread of "Ukrainians are Nazis" sub-narratives, as they have already started doing. A new tactic used to support this narrative is the wide dissemination of videos depicting supposedly young Ukrainian men insulting Poland and Polish people – see details below.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The most popular economy-focused sub-narrative remains unchanged. While the import of Ukrainian grain under no taxes or low taxes has indeed been a problem for the Polish farmers, it is depicted as bring the Polish economy to the brink of collapse, all the while being ignored by Warsaw and Kyiv. A similar sub-narrative about Ukrainian meat imports has been promoted this week.

This week a new spin on the topic of refugees and the "Ukrainians are Nazis" sub-narrative has been observed: the dissemination of the videos of young Ukrainians insulting Poland or Poles. These videos are disseminated to give the impression that all young Ukrainians are nationalists and want to destroy Poland and its values.

Additionally, various sources have claimed that Ukrainians are Nazis, sharing videos about the Volyn Massacre in 1943 and stating that "another" genocide is already being planned in Kyiv by the current Nazi regime.

1. One video of a young Ukrainian insulting Poland and Poles was particularly popular and went viral on Polish far-right channels, including the 3 most popular and interconnected pro-Russian channels:
   a. Olej w Głowie https://t.me/Olej_w_Glowie/28879,
   b. Ruch Oporu Polska https://t.me/ruchoporupolska/14129,
   c. Wiadomości Czasów Ostatecznych https://t.me/WiadomosciCzasowOstatecznych/13568.

2. A prior plan to name a Kyiv street after Volodymyr Kubiyovych, a geographer and historian who also contributed to the creation of the Ukrainian Waffen-SS Nazi divisions, alarmed the Jewish community in Ukraine and was covered in the Jerusalem Post and Polish media (https://www.rp.pl/historia-

[swiata/art38294481-jerusalem-post-kijow-moze-nazwac-ulice-na-czesc-tworcy-dywizji-ss](https://...)). The topic was not very popular in mainstream media, but it was used by pro-Russian channels to claim that "Ukrainians always were and still are Nazis". Wolne Media was a key proponent of this narrative, for example: https://wolnemedia.net/ukraincy-chca-go-czcic-polska-milczy-a-izrael-reaguje/ and https://wolnemedia.net/wolodymyr-kubijowycz-kolaboracja-w-cieniu-stepana-bandery/.

It should be noted that the Israeli Ambassador to Ukraine had a conversation with Kyiv mayor Vitalii Klychko in the middle of April 2023, and stated that as a result of this conversation Klychko promised that the street will not be named after Kubiyovych.

Trend prediction

As ever, more narratives discrediting Ukrainian refugees and suggesting they are Nazis are predicted. Given the small drop in pro-refugee sentiment amongst Poles demonstrated by recent opinion polls, it is a very convenient moment for pro-Kremlin disinformation sources to exacerbate wider tensions.

Economy-related sub-narratives are also predicted to continue to gain momentum due to soaring inflation rates.

Slovakia
Infosecurity

"Western leadership is incompetent"	**Publications:** **2** ───── **Views:** **20,334**	This sub-narrative was spread by one actor – an opposition pro-Russian politician Ľuboš Blaha (a disinformation outlet shared his post). It was connected to the Pentagon leak that Blaha highlighted as a sign of the US domestic and international incompetence.
"The West/NATO provoked the conflict between Ukraine and Russia"	**Publications:** **2** ───── **Views:** **16,802**	This sub-narrative was spread by two different actors who both claimed that the US is responsible for the war in Ukraine. They also claimed that it is a terrorist state which attacks other countries. This sub-narrative has maintained its popularity since April 1..
"Ukraine is not democratic"	**Publications:** **2** ───── Views **11,720**	Both publications spreading this sub-narrative shared a video of Tucker Carlson, who claimed that Ukraine is the least democratic place in Europe. The video was shared by two different actors as a sign that even American politicians recognize that Ukraine is not a democracy and is hypocritically helped by the West only to deter Russia.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- Similarly to the period of April 1 – April 7, no one sub-narratives was particularly dominant. However, in general the category of anti-western sub-narratives is still the most prevalent in the Slovak disinformation landscape.
- One of the main topics in the Slovak media were the leaked Pentagon documents, but majority of the publications covering the story were not spreading disinformation.
- There has been an increase in publications spreading narratives discrediting Ukraine, particularly via accusations that Ukraine is not a democratic state.

Trend changes

There were no publications spreading sub-narratives about military aid to Ukraine throughout the monitoring period April 8 – April 14. These sub-narratives were dominant several weeks ago – reacting to the Slovak government's decision to send MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine. Since these sub-narratives have lost their prevalence, there has not been a single dominant sub-narrative to replace them.

Since then, the predominant trend of disinformation in Slovakia is anti-Western rhetoric that takes shape via numerous sub-narratives. These include: claiming that the West

is losing its dominance, that the West provoked the war in Ukraine, and that the western media is lying/spreading disinformation, amongst others.

Narratives discrediting Ukraine have been on the rise compared to the period of April 1 – April 7, however, similarly to anti-Western messages they don't have a single focal point. Disinformation actors falsely claimed that Ukraine is not democratic/is the least democratic state in Europe, that Ukraine is weak, or that it is corrupt.

Context

Many publications in the Slovak information space covered the leaked US military documents but the majority of these publications were not spreading disinformation and pro-Russian actors did not heavily promote the issue. Our hypothesis around this is that the Slovak disinformation space is not able to mobilise itself and adapt to spreading new sub-narratives fast enough. It is therefore possible that we will see some false narratives connected to this event emerge in the future.

One of the most popular claims of the week, accusing the US government of incompetence in regard to the Pentagon leak, was published by Hlavný Denník. Hlavný Denník is a Slovak disinformation outlet spreading pro-Russian disinformation. The outlet also has connections to Národná koalícia (National coalition), a small opposition party. Its members have regularly published their opinions in Hlavný Denník in order to gain more popularity, particularly around the European Parliament elections in 2019 and before the parliamentary elections in 2020.

Additionally, Slovak disinformation sources continue uncritically citing Russian officials and other public figures, in particular Yevgeniy Prigozhyn. Throughout the period of April 8 – April 14 this a particular feature of Hlavné Správy's output. Hlavné Správy is known for mixing disinformation content with factual articles based on information from credible sources, making it difficult for readers to distinguish whether an article is sharing disinformation or not. The outlet was also recognized as dangerous by the National Security Office in Slovakia, which after the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine had the authority to block outlets spreading dangerous pro-Russian disinformation, including Hlavné správy, and the aforementioned Hlavný Denník. The National Security Office has since lost this authority. Two of the authors of Hlavné Správy are also known for their direct connections to Russia.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The most popular sub-narrative claimed that Western leadership is incompetent was spread by opposition pro-Russian politician Ľuboš Blaha, who is a member of a political party, Smer-SD, currently leading the pre-election polls (there are upcoming parliamentary elections in September 2023). He published his post on Telegram, which he has been using since Facebook blocked his page due to spreading harmful disinformation, bullying and hatespeech. His post was later shared by a disinformation outlet Hlavný Denník, where it received 4,110 views.

Blaha's post's headline reads: "Make America serious again". In his post he says: "A 21-year-old avid Minecraft player is said to be responsible for the leak of hundreds of top-secret American documents. This wouldn't happen even in Burkina Faso. There are only two

options. Either they are really so stupid that a young boy has access to super-secret information that decides the fate of the war, who gleefully sends out US military plans to his adolescent friends. Or, again, it's just an intelligence game and the Americans needed an excuse to stop military action against Russia, which they simply cannot win." Later he continues by saying that the first option makes the US a banana republic. Ľuboš Blaha has long been an uncritical supporter and admirer of Russia, the USSR and Putin. He has a similarly uncritical attitude towards China.

The most popular publication this week was published by a disinformation outlet Hlavné Správy and received 36,422. The article shared quotes from Prigozhin, saying that Russia has supposedly already achieved all its goals in Ukraine and that there is a deep state which wants to push Putin into making an agreement with the USA. Prigozhyn argues that the Russian military should seize the opportunity to secure the Ukrainian territories it has already occupied in the face of a potential Ukrainian counteroffensive.

Trend prediction

We expect the leaked US documents to continue being one of the main topics in the disinformation space, highlighting the problems experienced by the Ukrainian military and using them to suggest that Ukraine is losing the war. The US is likely to be blamed for provoking the war or prolonging the conflict by supplying Ukraine with weapons, as both sub-narratives can be easily linked to the Pentagon leak. It is expected that anti-Western messages will continue to form a substantial part of the disinformation landscape.

Ukraine
Detector Media

"Ukraine is losing the war"

Publications: 8

Views: 4, 574,120

The main message of posts is that Ukrainian troops are being defeated in Bakhmut. The propagandists claim that the defence of Bakhmut is meaningless and that the losses of Ukrainian soldiers are enormous. In addition, the Ukrainian army is holding Bakhmut allegedly only because it is Zelensky's order. The Russian military has supposedly inflicted such heavy losses on Ukraine near Bakhmut that a counteroffensive is impossible.

"Ukraine mistreats its soldiers/civilians"

Publications: 6

Views: 3, 369,782

Key messages suggested that Ukrainian authorities were taking repressive measures against believers and clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. There were also attempts to discredit Zelensky, saying that he ordered the murder of a famous Ukrainian soldier with the codename Da Vinci, even though he supported the president's position. A separate topic is that Zelensky is allegedly sending a massive number of Ukrainian soldiers to their deaths in Bakhmut.

"The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent"

Publications: 5

Views 1, 852,494

Key messages were: corruption and incompetence of the Ukrainian authorities. In particular, it was stated that the Ukrainian oligarch Gerega allegedly visited Russia for negotiations. The Ukrainian ambassador to Bulgaria was also targeted for alleged incompetence (as in the previous round of monitoring). In addition, posts suggested that losses on the frontline were the fault of Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian government.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The most popular disinformation category, as usual, was narratives discrediting Ukraine, which appeared in 31 posts out of 50. This category of narratives included the second and the third most popular sub-narratives of April 8 – April 14: "Ukraine

mistreats its soldiers/civilians" in 6 posts, and "Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent" in 5 posts.

- The main focus was that the Ukrainian authorities are supposedly treating civilians poorly by mobilizing them and sending them to Bakhmut, where they will be killed.
- The publications also covered "repressive measures" against the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and suggested that Ukrainian authorities are detaining priests in order to exchange them for Ukrainian prisoners of war.
- In addition, disinformation actors emphasized the supposed incompetence of the Ukrainian government and military, both in Ukraine and abroad, particularly the Ukrainian Ambassador to Bulgaria, Olesya Ilashchuk, against whom misogynistic rhetoric was used.

Most of the news in the country currently relates to events on the front line, in particular at Bakhmut. Additionally, protests by representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate's Orthodox Church continue in Ukraine. A considerable number of posts were dedicated to this topic, alleging that the Ukrainian government discriminates against people based on their religion.

Trend changes

The sub-narrative that Ukraine is losing the war has been popular for the past few weeks due to the tense situation on the frontline, particularly in Bakhmut. The authors of these posts try to distort reality and create the impression that the situation on the frontline is terrible, that there is no one left to fight in Ukraine, and that the Ukrainian authorities are mistreating their people by sending them to the front lines. This sub-narrative is likely to remain popular in the coming weeks, as it is advantageous for Russia to promote the idea that Ukraine is losing, and that Russia and its army supposedly have the upper hand.

Another popular sub-narrative is that the Ukrainian government is incompetent and corrupt. These two sub-narratives often intertwine, as the authors of disinformation posts accuse Ukrainian officials of betraying their people and making decisions for their own benefit, rather than for the benefit of Ukrainians. Both narratives are well established in the Ukrainian information space.

Context

Most news in Ukraine currently relates to events on the frontline, particularly in Bakhmut. Pro-Russian experts are again trying to promote the idea that Ukraine is losing the war, and that Ukrainian leadership is incompetent, because it allegedly makes bad decisions around conduct of hostilities.

Additionally, protests by representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate's Orthodox Church continue in Ukraine. A considerable number of posts is dedicated to this topic, that remains relevant due to the Easter celebrations. Allegedly, the Ukrainian government discriminates against people based on their religion.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The most popular messages were about Bakhmut, claiming that there is no military need to hold the city, and that Zelensky only needs it to maintain his image. The propagandists suggested that the Russian army had already captured 75% of the city and that Ukrainian troops were suffering significant losses, and that the government was therefore sending soldiers to their deaths.

Messages about the alleged incompetence of the Ukrainian government and military command include accusations of corruption and the futile defence of Bakhmut, where too many Ukrainian soldiers are dying. There were also messages about the incompetence or betrayal of individual officials or oligarchs. The main protagonists here are Volodymyr Zelensky, his entourage and the military leadership, oligarch Gerega, and Ukraine's Ambassador to Bulgaria Olesya Ilashchuk.

The ambassador was accused of lacking proper education and objectified for her appearance and clothing. The propagandists used misogynistic rhetoric, insinuating that she was a prostitute. These messages are aimed at discrediting the Ukrainian authorities in the eyes of Western partners. While there is a public debate about whether Ms Ilashchuk is indeed qualified for the position of an ambassador, pro-Russian sources use polarizing, misogynistic language, ridiculing Ukrainian diplomacy as a whole.

As for the messages about Ukraine supposedly committing war crimes, they focused primarily on the assassination of Russian propagandist Vladlen Tatarsky that took place earlier in April. According to the Telegram channels spreading pro-Russian disinformation, Tatarsky was ordered to be killed by Ukrainian intelligence, and Zelensky rewarded those involved. In addition, pro-Russian 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.

Posts on the Orthodox Church included accusations that Zelensky and Ukrainian leaders are arresting church clergy to exchange them for Ukrainian prisoners. Pro-Russian sources also claimed that in Kamianets-Podilskyi the police sided with protesters against Zelensky's order to liquidate Orthodox churches of the Moscow Patriarchate. The posts also portrayed people who protested in support of the government's decision as Satanists and humiliated them.

The most popular post, however, belonged neither to the category of the most popular narrative, nor to the category of the most popular narrative. At a meeting with Polish President Duda, Volodymyr Zelensky allegedly agreed on the creation of a single state for Ukraine and Poland. In reality, the Ukrainian and Polish governments have long been discussing closer bilateral relations, including simplifying the border control. Similar messages promoting the idea that Ukraine will be divided between different states were spread mainly by Telegram channels that systematically and regularly promote Russian disinformation. 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 that include a number of channels such as "Legitimny" and "Resident" spreading messages about alleged aggressive plans of Poland towards Ukraine along other false and manipulative claims.

Trend prediction

It is likely that next week the situation on the front line, particularly at Bakhmut, will continue to dominate. There is potential for news to emerge about a possible counterattack by the Ukrainian army. Russian disinformation occasionally reacts to such news and tries to manipulate the topic pre-emptively. Additionally, there may be posts aimed at discrediting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and his team. These posts are likely to be disseminated, for example, on anonymous Telegram channels that regularly promote pro-Russian rhetoric, such as the channel of pro-Russian blogger Anatoliy Shariy, and so on.

List of Narrative and Sub-Narrative Headings:

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

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

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

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

3. 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

4. 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

5. 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

6. 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

8. 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 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
@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
@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
http://ruchnarodowy.net/	Poland
http://wolnemedia.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/Zdrojj	Slovakia
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
@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.obiegtivi.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/gartuliideaa/	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
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