



## MONITORING REPORT

April 15 – April 23, 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.

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## 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 15 – April 23, 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.

Narratives discrediting Ukraine continue to be on the rise, with a particular focus on labeling it as a Nazi state – a traditional sub-narrative of the Russian disinformation that increased in popularity across the region during the April 8 – April 14 monitoring period and maintains a particularly strong presence in the information fields of Armenia, the Baltic states, Belarus, and Bulgaria. The ongoing wave of historical disinformation is likely to increase in the coming weeks along with accusations of Ukraine being linked to far-right and Nazi ideology particularly. Messaging such as this will likely emerge in Ukraine, where disinformation narratives based on historical events have been prioritized by Kremlin-aligned actors during the period around Victory Day (9 May) in previous years.

The Ukrainian leadership is also increasingly accused of being corrupt and incompetent, a sub-narrative we assess to be primarily targeting Ukraine’s allies with the goal of undermining the supply of Western military aid to the country. While this rhetoric is traditionally present in the Ukrainian disinformation eco-system, its presence has intensified in other countries such as Belarus and Georgia. Such an increase may be tentatively linked to the potential upcoming Ukrainian counteroffensive that pro-Russian actors seem to prepare for by consistently promoting the claims that the Ukrainian leadership has no capabilities and skills to succeed. These messages are naturally combined with the claims that the Russian military is advancing while Ukraine will inevitably lose the war, which means supporting it is futile and only serves to prolong the war. Claims that Kyiv is bound to lose have been present across the monitored geography for some time, however, the week of April 15 – April 23 marked a notable increase in their quantity.

As the abovementioned sub-narratives discrediting Ukrainian leadership gain increasing traction, they start to substitute the messages that pro-Russian actors have been focused on promoting before as they seek new ways of engaging the audience. In particular, the previously potent conspiracy theory that the West plans to open a “second front” against Russia is declining in popularity, although it is still being pushed with limited success by some of the most active pro-Russian actors in Armenia. Similar developments are valid for claims that the import of Ukrainian products, particularly grain, is harmful, - a theory that used to enjoy a substantial level of popularity in Poland and several other states, notably Bulgaria. Exaggerating the impact of Ukrainian

imports on the local markets (which indeed constituted a challenge for the local agricultural systems) and combining these accusations with claims that Ukrainian products are harmful have been a landmark of the cross-regional disinformation system for several weeks. While such claims are still present in Poland and have been, with a substantial delay, picked up in Slovakia, the general intensity and traction of this sub-narrative started to subside.

# ARMENIA

## Media Initiatives Center

"The West seeks to open a second front against Russia"

**Publications:**  
2

**Views:**  
10,675

The narrative manifested in the form of a conspiracy theory about a potential Azerbaijani attack on Armenian-held territory and the expected Ukrainian counteroffensive being "synchronized" by the West, which is also allegedly trying to manipulate Armenia into joining sanctions on Russia.

"The West is using Ukraine as a pawn"

**Publications:**  
1

**Views:**  
8,133

This narrative used fear tactics to promote anti-Western sentiment by claiming that the West orchestrated the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine in 2014, and now prepares to do the same in Armenia to install a puppet government.

"Ukrainians are Nazis"

**Publications:**  
1

**Views:**  
7,527

An Armenian pro-Russian channel supportive of the war in Ukraine attacks the popular writer Narine Abgaryan for supposedly being a "traitor" to Armenia and supporting the government which is accused of weakening the country so that even "Nazi Ukrainians" can attack it.

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

- One of the most active pro-Russian bloggers in Armenia, Mika Badalyan, again repeated the conspiracy theory that emerged in the beginning of April, linking a possible attack on Armenia by Azerbaijan to the expected Ukrainian counteroffensive and portraying them as "coordinated" activities orchestrated by the West. This theory, however, has not received broader traction since it first emerged.
- Anti-Western narratives, depicting the West as a dangerous and manipulative power the goal of which is to destabilize the Caucasus (particularly Armenia), constitute an essential part of the disinformation environment in the country.
- Over the period of April 15 – April 23, 2023 there was no evidence of pro-Russian actors attempting to amplify or promote a particular narrative and no narratives gained noteworthy salience over the others.

## Trend changes

Since the monitoring within Phase 2 of the UWD WG project commenced on February 20, 2023, two major narrative categories have been dominant in the

Armenian information field – anti-western rhetoric and narratives discrediting Ukraine. Both categories, however, were represented by a wide selection of sub-narratives and rarely had a palpably dominant message, regularly switching from one form of bellicose rhetoric to another. This assessment remains valid for the period of April 15 – April 23, 2023 as well.

The two main disinformation actors in the Armenian information space remained pro-Russian blogger Mika Badalyan and an anonymous pro-Russian Telegram channel Armenian Vendetta. Interestingly, throughout the period of April 15 – April 23, 2023 both actors made an effort to repost publications made by a relatively new pro-Russian Telegram channel Tsitsak (established around four months ago). This channel has small audience (869 subscribers as of April 23, 2023) and promotes a similar worldview to that of Mika Badalyan and Armenian Vendetta (i.e., anti-Western/pro-Russian position, sympathy to Armenia's former president and current opposition leader Robert Kocharyan). Such steps might be perceived as an attempt to introduce a new actor into the network of pro-Russian Telegram channels in Armenia. See the details of amplified publications below.

## Context

The Armenian information space continues to be dominated by events around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and concerns that Azerbaijan might attack Armenia again. The period of April 15 – April 23 was also marked by the scandal at European Weightlifting Championship in Yerevan: A man burned an Azerbaijani flag during the opening ceremony of the championship.

As tensions around Nagorno-Karabakh remain high, Ukraine-related topics are secondary in the information sphere. Disinformation actors rely on anti-Western rhetoric to blame the Western governments for meddling in the internal affairs of both Ukraine and Armenia and apply fearmongering tactics to persuade the target audience not only that Ukraine is used as a pawn by the hostile West, but also that the same fate awaits Armenia. The key approach employed by pro-Kremlin actors in Armenia is to promote anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian messages to weaponize and exploit the fear of another potential confrontation with Azerbaijan.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

The most popular post of the week was [published](#) by Mika Badalyan (9,716 views) and contained another repetition by Badalyan of claims that the expected Ukrainian counteroffensive is somehow “synchronized” with a new potential Azerbaijani attack on Armenian-held territory. Badalyan started spreading this claim in early April, writing in various posts that the West is behind both the anticipated Azerbaijani attack and the expected Ukrainian counteroffensive, and plans to use this opportunity to open a “second front” against Russia.

Some local and Russian channels (including Russian “military correspondent” and analyst Rybar, who is a popular source for Armenian pro-Russian actors, including Mika Badalyan) shared these claims. Interestingly, Russian political commentator Andrey Areshev, whose quotes were [posted](#) by ArmVoice Telegram channel (959 views), also “predicted” an Azerbaijani attack coinciding with the Ukrainian counteroffensive.

However, despite a certain level of effort to promote it, this conspiracy theory does not seem to be gaining a larger audience or considerable traction.

Both Andrey Areshev and Telegram channel Tsitsak ([reposted](#) by Mika Badalyan, 8,133 views) claimed that the West is trying to “turn Armenia into Ukraine”. Areshev thought this is done by sending EU monitoring mission to Armenia: the mission previously worked in Ukraine and now is in Armenia “with evident aim” of destabilizing it and setting the ground for the coup in a supposedly similar to Revolution of Dignity (2014) in Ukraine. The Tsitsak channel also made a detailed prediction of a new “revolution” supposedly orchestrated by the West to take place in Armenia with the goal of installing a Western puppet government.

In another post (reposted by Armenian Vendetta, 5,197 views), Tsitsak [argued](#) that the West is preparing for a new war and the rapid defeat of Armenia in order to achieve a supplemental victory over Russia. This is supposedly due to Western leaders knowing that the counteroffensive in Ukraine is doomed to fail and, as a result, they need another victory over Russia to compensate for this. Such messaging aims to undermine the prospects of (and support for) the Ukrainian counteroffensive and spread anti-Western sentiment in Armenia.

Another channel, Mina Z (administered by Russia-based marketing specialist and former president supporter Mina Khachatryan) attacked popular writer Narine Abgaryan for her critical response to the burning of the Azerbaijani flag in Yerevan, mentioned above. Abgaryan was accused of supporting the current Armenian government which lost the war against Azerbaijan and supposedly turned Armenia into a weak state that anyone can attack, even “Nazi Ukrainians”. While the key subject of the publication is to promote resentment towards the current government, utilization of “Nazi” rhetoric deserves attention as well.

## Trend prediction

As it can be seen from this and earlier reports, disinformation actors are often connected to or sympathise with the former Armenian President and current opposition leader Robert Kocharyan. Kocharyan is vividly and openly pro-Russian in his position and is believed to have a vast network of media sources affiliated with him. The War in Ukraine is being depicted in these sources much like in Russian pro-war channels, with the key difference being attempts to adapt the narratives to the local Armenian context in order to discredit Ukraine and the West more successfully by positioning them as warmongers, supporters of Azerbaijan etc.

Pro-Kocharyan channels, while having attacks on the current government and promotion of Kocharyan as their top priority, are naturally inclined to share Russian talking points and publications from Russian sources about international developments, including the war in Ukraine. This will likely remain one of the main disinformation “paths” particularly on Telegram, where pro-Russian channels are of abundance.

# BALTICS (RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE)

## Civic Resilience Initiative

„Ukrainians are targeting civilians and commit other war crimes“

**Publications:**  
8

**Views:**  
13,530

This narrative is pushed through 3 levels: (a) Ukraine is supposedly bombing civilians in Donetsk; (b) Ukraine is attacking Russian journalists and Orthodox believers; (c) Ukraine is organizing terrorist attacks within Russia. All three levels push the idea of Ukraine as a bloodthirsty terrorist state with no regard to civilian life, either Ukrainian or Russian.

„Sanctions hurt the West more than Russia“

**Publications:**  
5

**Views:**  
14,830

This narrative is centered around the debate on Ukrainian grain imports in Europe, framing it as a clear indicator on the ineffectiveness of sanctions against Russia and how they are causing internal tension within the EU.

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

**Publications:**  
5

**Views:**  
11,317

The narrative was centered on showcasing how the Baltic states are supposedly oppressive and discriminating against Russians, framing it as an act of Nazism or genocide against Russian-speaking minorities.

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

- For the first time since February 20, 2023 the “Ukrainians are targeting civilians and commit other war crimes” narrative was the most popular of the week. This narrative only spiked in popularity this week (15-23 April) and the week spanning from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> of April. Preceding April, the narrative was mostly absent from the Baltics information field.
- Narratives discrediting Ukraine have shot up in popularity – they took up almost half of the disinformation post space in the Baltics this week.
- The Russophobia-focused narrative remained among the leading trends of disinformation, as it has been since February 20, 2023. This illustrates the extent to which this narrative is among the central pillars of Russian disinformation in the region.
- Accusations of Nazism in regard to Ukraine have remained popular since the 20<sup>th</sup> of March.

## Trend changes

Narratives discrediting Ukraine, especially the “Ukrainians are targeting civilians and commit other war crimes” narrative, have reached their peak in popularity (within the timeframe of this project) during the period of April 15 – April 23.



While the anti-Western, economic sanctions and Russophobia narratives continue to be stable in their popularity, narratives regarding aid to Ukraine or the threat of war expanding beyond Ukraine have become less popular. Narratives regarding Ukrainian refugees or conspiracy theories continue to be mostly absent from the monitoring data sample, suggesting a low degree of engagement among the local disinformation actors and their audiences.

## Context

Several weeks ago, Lithuania's parliament tried to establish a new law which would see a limitation for Russian citizens and legal entities established and controlled by them to acquire real estate in Lithuania, unless these citizens have a permanent or temporary residence permit in Lithuania or the right to real estate is acquired through inheritance. This law was vetoed by the President. However, this veto was overturned by the parliament.

This paved the way for Russian disinformation to frame this news as another act of Russophobia in the Baltics, which affects not only Russian citizens but ("potentially in the future") the Russian-speaking minority within the region. The bill in general has become one of the most important stories for the pro-Russian actors to rely on and they followed all the legal developments closely, consistently accusing Lithuania of Russophobia and violation of human rights.

Russia asked Western nations to soften their sanctions in exchange for renewing a deal to let Ukraine export its grain. The deal has enabled Ukraine to transport millions of tons of food through the Black Sea despite the ongoing war. Ukraine is a major global exporter of sunflower, maize, wheat and barley. When Russia invaded in February 2022, its naval vessels blockaded Ukraine's ports, trapping some 20 million tons of grain. That forced global food prices to all-time highs.

However, the new deal led to prices dropping lower than they were before Russia's invasion. This causes concerns for local markets within the EU, which cannot compete against such low prices. The situation is particularly acute in Poland and Bulgaria, however, Russian actors in other countries also actively promote the idea that Ukrainian grain is harmful and the beneficial course of action for the local farmers is to lift sanctions off Russia.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

This week, the most popular narrative was "Ukrainians are targeting civilians and commit other war crimes" (8 posts, 13,530 views). Stories within this narrative can be categorized in three groups: (a) Ukraine is bombing civilians in Donetsk; (b) Ukraine is attacking Russian journalists and orthodox believers; and (c) Ukraine is organizing terrorist attacks within Russia.

The first group [refers](#) to bombings in Donetsk region, attributing the blame for the deaths of civilians to Ukraine without any hard evidence. It is a repetition of an old narrative blaming Ukraine for supposedly attacking "peaceful civilians" in Donetsk and Luhansk. The second group of stories are used to try and promote the idea that Ukrainians are seeking to attack, threaten and even systemically kill Russian journalists in Ukraine or even in Russia. It is linked to the third group of messages that refer to the bombing in the Street Food Bar №1 café on Universitetskaya Embankment in Saint

Petersburg, which happened on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April. Pro-Kremlin actors are still [accusing](#) Ukraine of orchestrating the terrorist act that killed pro-Russian propagandist Vladlen Tatarsky. Stories are framed in such a way as if to show that Ukraine will do even more terrorist attacks within Russia's territory.

The second most popular narrative was "Sanctions hurt the West more than Russia" (5 posts, 14,830 views). The narrative focused on the cheap Ukrainian grain import debate within the EU. Poland and Hungary tried to impose bans on Ukrainian grain imports, claiming that the measures were necessary to protect their farming sectors from cheap imports. However, The European Commission has rejected these bans stating that it was not up to individual member states to make trade policy.

This whole issue paved the way for Russian disinformation to incite economic and political instability within the region. Economic instability is shown as a result of the EU's sanction policies having cut off previous ties with Russia, which previously created a stable grain export. Political instability is shown through claims that even Ukraine's closest allies such as Poland have started to question their alliance as it led to a situation in which their own country "is suffering".

Meanwhile, the EU is being criticized for its hypocrisy of how in a situation of an overabundance of Ukrainian grain and food on European markets, the EU does not buy this grain and deliver it free of charge to countries in need, rather than paying compensations to their own farmers. This issue allowed pro-Russian disinformation actors to use one of its main forms of attack – to showcase the West's hypocrisy in their beliefs or values and its realization in politics. The relevant post was [published](#), for example, by one of the most active pro-Russian Telegram channels "Sprats in Exile|Latvia news".

The third most popular narrative was "X country is Russophobic / Russian culture is being attacked" (5 posts, 11,317 views). This week the Baltics were mainly attacked on two fronts – (a) Lithuania's new "anti-Russian" law and (b) Latvia's decision to ban the celebration of the 9<sup>th</sup> of May.

The Lithuanian parliament pushed through the president's veto and issued a new law, which sees limitation for Russian citizens and legal entities established and controlled by them to acquire real estate in Lithuania. This paved the way for Russian disinformation actors to frame this news as another act of Russophobia in the Baltics, which affects not only Russian citizens but ("potentially in the future") the Russian-speaking minority within the region. Pro-Russian rhetoric even went so far as to claim that soon the Baltics will start to take away property from the Russian-speaking minority.

Meanwhile, Latvia decided to ban the celebration of Victory Day on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May. On this day, Russia celebrates the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany. Latvia's decision provided an opportunity for Russian disinformation actors to claim that (a) Latvia supports Nazi regimes as they now do not allow celebrations of victories over fascism and (b) Russian culture is being attacked due to the current impossibility to partake in the important Russian celebrations for the Russian-speaking minority. Latvia's reasoning, however, was to avoid the potential provocations and discourage the use of pro-Russian symbols at the event, as it has become heavily politicized by the Kremlin in its efforts to weaponize the "Immortal regiment" movement and use V-Day as an occasion to spread more disinformation accusing other countries of Nazism.

The most popular post came from the Telegram [channel "Rubaltic"](#). It gathered 15,349 views and claims that the non-profit organizations Glory to Ukraine and

Everything for Victory stole 1.5 million euros donated by the people of Estonia. The attack on both non-profits is important to note, considering that both organizations have become among the leading organized efforts of Estonians to support Ukraine on the civic society level. Undermining trust in these organizations would have substantial effects. However, the target audience of Rubaltic was unlikely to reach out to these organizations with donations anyway, given the consistent pro-Russian position of the outlet and the corresponding Telegram channel. In order for such a defamation campaign to be successful, messages of alleged theft have to leave the narrow circle of pro-Russian sources. Whether such a development will take place remains to be seen.

## Trend prediction

Looking at the past few weeks and our previous analysis, it is safe to assume that the Russophobia narrative will continue to be amongst the most popular ones. Narratives discrediting Ukraine have remained popular since the 8<sup>th</sup> of April. The Ukrainian grain issue took up more space within the Baltic Russian-language information environment and pushed down the popularity of Anti-Western narratives, which have been amongst the most popular ones for 5 weeks. This allows us to predict that these top 3 most popular narrative groups are likely to remain the same.

Looking at important dates for next week, international Labor Day is still celebrated in the Baltics on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. This might pave the way for Russian disinformation to push the narrative about the poor working conditions or economic status in the region with more determination. This could play particularly well with the Ukrainian grain issue and the economic-political problems that it entailed. The 1<sup>st</sup> of May also marks Latvia's Constituent Assembly Convocation Day, which is considered a public holiday. This might allow Russian disinformation to push narratives, delegitimizing Latvia's sovereignty, or frame the Russophobia narrative through this lens.

# BELARUS

## Belarus Press Club

"The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent"

**Publications:**  
6

**Views:**  
25,734

The narrative manifested in a form of messages accusing "the Kyiv regime" of favouring different types of criminal activities that supposedly support its corruption as well as in accusations of incompetence potentially leading to the loss of human lives both at the frontline and beyond.

"Ukrainians are Nazis"

**Publications:**  
4

**Views:**  
179,317

The "Belarusian Silovik" channel promotes the narrative that "Nazi worshippers" support the Kyiv regime. The "ZhS Premium" channel generalises the neo-Nazi movement in Ukraine. The "YELLOW PLUMS" channel calls the Ukrainian military neo-Nazis.

"Western society does not support Ukraine"

**Publications:**  
2

**Views:**  
16,607

Pro-government channels claim that "enlightenment" is coming to more people, and that authorities of Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland are discussing a ban on the import of Ukrainian grain as they start to "wake up". Allegedly people no longer want to agree with the West "orchestrating" support for Ukraine.

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

One of the main topics of the week's narratives was the accusation of the Ukrainian leadership of incompetence, which is broadcast and presented through various messages:

- allegedly the Kyiv regime favours the development of various kinds of crime (in particular, telephone fraud)
- the greed of the Ukrainian leadership (the case that Zelensky is ready to do anything for the sake of receiving money)
- it is speculated that Kyiv is incapable of managing infrastructure, as there are messages that Kahovska HPP could be dysfunctional and flood Kyiv (local authorities rejected this claim)
- a reference was made to the appearance of Zelensky (recall that a year earlier there were attacks on the appearance, posture and behaviour of the First Lady of Ukraine Elena Zelenska during a photo shoot for Vogue magazine).

- Another interesting narrative is that after the war, due to high expectations (economic, political, social) in Ukraine, “Maidan” can happen again.

The old narrative that the Ukrainian leadership is destroying the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is still on the agenda of the pro-government media. For example, the "STV. News of Belarus" [reports](#) that there are daily killings of civilians and persecution of Orthodox Christians in Ukraine.

Pro-government media remain dedicated to portraying Belarus as a “peaceful” side in the war; at the same time, they keep accusing Ukraine of “Nazism” – a narrative that has intensified during the last several weeks and manifests in a variety of messages which often combine portrayal of Ukrainian military and government as “Nazi” while contrasting this portrayal with allegedly oppressed regular Ukrainians that Russia tries to protect (see below).

## Trend changes

New interesting narratives emerged during the week.

1. **"Belarus is not violating international agreements"**. The author of the channel "Yuriy Voskresensky" [believes](#) that it is a “sin” for the Ukrainian side to “offend” Belarus because of the cooperation between Belarus and the so-called “Donetsk People’s Republic” (DNR). At the same time, Voskresensky considers “DNR” to be part of Russia since 2014.

2. **"Serving in Ukraine's armed forces is not prestigious"**. "JS Premium" Telegram channel posts Ukrainian advertising for the exam preparation courses and uses it as an excuse to ridicule the situation in the country, [stating](#) that it is better to study and become anyone at all, than to be a Ukrainian soldier destined to die in Bakhmut. Service in the armed forces is portrayed as meaningless, dangerous and derogatory.

3. **"Russian society supports the leadership of the country, Russian elite and/or war"**. Channel "Shpakovsky. Essentially." [reposts](#) a message from the "Logic Markov" channel saying that in Russia people do not believe that Dmitry Peskov's son served as a volunteer in the special military operation's zone with the Wagner PMC. At the same time, the channel says that the story must be true, as users from Ukraine are calling for Peskov's son to be punished.

## Context

On April 18, Alexander Lukashenko met with the head of the so-called “DNR” Denis Pushilin. Pro-government media accompanied the description of the meeting with a quote from Lukashenko from October, 2022: "As for our participation in a special military operation in Ukraine, we are participating there. We do not hide it. But we do not kill anyone. We do not send anywhere of our military. We do not violate our obligations ... Yes, we treat. We treated people if necessary. Yes, we feed people. And not only Russians. We feed most of all those refugees, beggars, poor people, 400-500 people arrive to us from Ukraine every day. Well, how not to feed them, how not to treat them?! This is our participation in this military operation. There is no other and there will not be."

The media complain that Belarus is labelled as a co-aggressor, while Lukashenka, together with the head of the so-called "DNR", "decide how to make life easier for ordinary people".

On April 20, Alexander Lukashenko held a meeting with the Governor of St. Petersburg Alexander Beglov, where they discussed issues of cooperation in the field of agriculture, humanitarian and industrial cooperation between Belarus and Russia.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

**"Western leadership is incompetent".** The BEREZINA channel [promotes](#) Donald Trump and his populist statement that once he wins the presidential election he will immediately settle the war between Russia and Ukraine.

**"The West is trying to divide Slavs/Orthodox Christians".** "Pul Pervogo" channel [quotes](#) Alexander Lukashenko, who said at a meeting with St. Petersburg Governor Alexander Beglov on 20 April: "Nazis, fascists and other destructive forces are seeking to rewrite history and drag our people into the Third World War via Ukraine".

**"Ukraine's leadership does not care about its people".** Political commentator Igor Tur on the "Glavny. Tur" channel [claims](#) that "almost the entire population of Ukraine is starving" and from the point of view of Ukrainians, either Putin or Lukashenko are to blame or Europe should come and help them.

**"Russian troops are advancing/achieving success".** Channel "Ludmila Gladkaya. SB" [praises](#) the Russian "Storm" assault unit for efficiency and supposed military success in Ukraine.

**"Ukraine "referendums" are legitimate".** The author of the channel "Shpakovsky. Essentially" [believes](#) that Minsk considers the "DNR" as one of the regions of the Russian Federation.

**"Military aid unnecessarily prolongs the war/endangers civilians" and "X country is under threat/will be pulled into the war".** The channel "ONT NEWS" [reports](#) that Republican congressmen are calling on Joe Biden to stop sending aid and weapons to Ukraine, noting that the aid could lead to an escalation of the conflict, as well as a clash with Russia.

Moreover:

- "ATN NEWS" channel [reports](#) that NATO is allegedly unhappy with Zelensky's appearance and that Zelensky looks much worse than Stoltenberg, who is almost 20 years older than him. It also [reports](#) that the Kyiv regime favours the development of various types of crime, especially telephone fraud.
- Channel "STV. News of Belarus" [quoting](#) Russian "RIA Novosti" reports with a clickbait headline that Kyiv could be flooded due to failures at the Kakhovskaya HPP, referring to the words of the head of the Kyiv City State Administration Civil Protection Department, Roman Tkachuk, that the water level in Kyiv is one metre higher than usual.
- The channel "STV. News of Belarus" [reports](#) that Ukraine is threatened with a new Maidan after the end of the war. The reasons could be the high expectations of Ukrainians for economic, political and social reforms. Politico implies that if the authorities are unable to meet public expectations, they will

be replaced. However, pro-government channels present this scenario as a given.

- The channel "Zhivet Belarus" [publishes](#) a fake cover of the magazine "The New European" with a caricature of Zelensky saying that "he is ready to suck if someone gives me money". It promotes the narrative that Ukraine is asking for money and is ready to do anything for it.
- The "Zemlya Nasha" channel [quotes](#) Nicaraguan President Ortega as saying that the Russian Federation is fighting for peace: "Not against the nation, but against the fascists, the Nazis, who have made a coup in Ukraine. Hitler's sons are ruling there".
- The "Dermant" channel [tries](#) to divide Ukrainians into Nazis and those who "want to remain Ukrainian and admit defeat".
- The "YELLOW PLUMS" channel [calls](#) the Ukrainian military neo-Nazis.
- Lyudmila Gladkaya on her channel "Ludmila Gladkaya. SB" [claims](#) that "enlightenment is coming to more and more people in the world, people no longer want to agree with everything the West does".
- "Zemlya Nasha" [reports](#) that the authorities of Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland are discussing a ban on the import of Ukrainian grain.

## Trend prediction

The case of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church will not go away, because it is universal and allows disinformation to cover different issues the way pro-Kremlin actors sees fit: religion, genocide, fascism, collaborationism, opposition, sanctions, and so on.

Despite Ukraine's accusations and constant attacks on its ambassador to Belarus, Lukashenka and his media are probably reluctant to break off diplomatic relations with Ukraine. As before, Belarusians will be presented with a picture as if there were two separate strata of society in Ukraine, on the one hand the 'Nazi elite', totally corrupt, deceitful and incompetent, on the other hand – the ordinary people, poor and suffering, who do not support the ruling elite, and Russia is supposedly protecting this part of Ukrainian society and helping them to get rid of the junta that has seized power.

The pro-government disinformation will increasingly emphasise the peace initiatives of Belarus, the solution of humanitarian problems, promote possible options for economic cooperation with Western countries, and narratives that the West loses a lot by refusing to cooperate with Belarus. Pro-government channels will increasingly try to clean up the image of Belarus as a co-aggressor country.



# Bulgaria

## Centre for the Study of Democracy

“Russian troops are advancing / achieving success”

Publications:  
5

Views:  
411,468

The sub-narrative was popular throughout the whole monitoring period. It portrayed the Kyiv regime in a hopeless state due to Russia's military success: Articles mention that Russia has destroyed 100% of HIMARS and MLRS missiles launched in Ukraine, Wagner PMC's assault troops are winning in Bakhmut and that Ukrainian supposed saboteur groups in the Kupyansk region were killed.

“Ukrainians are Nazis”

Publications:  
4

Views:  
3,982

Pro-Kremlin media outlets and Telegram channels focused on emotional messages, sharing again materials of supposedly Ukrainian soldiers posing next to Nazi symbols. Furthermore, they shared few posts of Easter eggs supposedly from Ukraine decorated in swastikas.

“The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent”

Publications:  
3

Views:  
1,413

The sub-narrative intensified in comparison to the previous round of monitoring mainly utilizing disinformation about Zelensky supposedly betraying the country's interest and [stealing 400 mil. USD](#) from aid funds to Ukraine.

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

- 24 out of the 50 monitored posts and publications utilized the **anti-Western narratives** and the **Narratives discrediting Ukraine** (12 each). The sub-narrative **Ukraine is losing the war** was even more popular than during April 8 – April 14, 2023, with articles claiming Ukraine no longer has any real mobilization resources and that Russia continues to strengthen its military potential.
- The number of publications utilizing **Anti-Western** narratives is still significant. Telegram groups shared posts stating that [circumstantial evidence](#) of Israeli kamikaze drone deliveries to Ukraine has emerged, probably via a proxy country and that Ukraine is [being denied](#) support from countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, which are increasingly turning towards Moscow or choosing neutrality for political and economic reasons. While not completely false, these claims portray support for Ukraine as minor and unstable, and promote the idea that the international community is not willing to support Ukraine simply because a select few Western governments have said so.
- 3 weeks after the elections, there was only [one](#) Telegram post from political figures containing disinformation narratives. The post was again from the pro-Russian political party *Revival's* Telegram account and again shared the party's viewpoints stated by the leader Kostadin Kostadinov. He insisted that the government has to



immediately stop the import of Ukrainian grain, sunflower and other agricultural products in Bulgaria in order to protect farmers from low prices. Furthermore, there was a Telegram post in the form of an [opinion piece](#) from the not so popular pro-Russian Telegram group *BulgariaAz* arguing that there is no real alternative to Revival's political agenda.

## Trend changes

- **Conspiracy theory narratives** were used most frequently during this monitoring period. Only Telegram channels disseminated such disinformation, including that the war criminals of the “Kyiv regime” began to spread tuberculosis through counterfeit money and that Ukrainians are extracting Adrenochrome from abducted children under the age of 9.
- In addition, a [new](#) sub-narrative emerged under the same category, claiming that the planet is crisscrossed with a network of underground intercontinental tunnels that run beneath the land, seas and oceans and connect remote points on different continents, in order to help the “Collective West”
- The sub-narrative that **Ukrainians are Nazis** is again one of the most disseminated ones – for example, one Telegram [post](#) published by “The Smart Village” channel claimed that Russia is fighting something similar to Nazi Germany during WW2.

## Context

Throughout the period of April 15 – April 23, in addition to the abovementioned narratives Telegram groups and media outlets disseminated publications utilizing the **X country is escalating the war** narrative. In Bulgaria, the aforementioned is amplified by disinformation about a supposed Israeli spy, according to which Bulgaria is secretly preparing for war in Ukraine. The source of the disinformation is a 20 minute [video](#) from the pro-Russian writer and agent of influence Dobri Bozhilov. No factual support to the claims made is provided in the video.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

As in all of the weeks covered in the monitoring, the most popular publication of the week was again a Telegram post in Russian from the group **ЗОВ - заЕДНО ОБЩение всеМИР [ZOV – United Community for Peace]**. The [post](#) accumulated 657,453 total views (44% of all the views from the 50 monitored posts) and showed a video of Oleksiy Danilov, head of the Ukrainian Security Service, stating that Ukraine is carefully preparing every soldier for the coming offensive. However, the post claims that Danilov evacuated his sons to the US, which is used to discredit him and the whole state of the AFU.

The popular post further supports the Narrative category **Battlefield events**, as well as the sub-narratives **Ukraine is losing the war/Russian troops are achieving success**.

**Ukrainians are Nazis:** For Putin, Ukraine – a country where the Nazi ideology is banned, a grandson of a Holocaust survivor has been elected to the Presidency, and millions died fighting Nazism in WW2 - is the most 'Nazi' of them all. The latter has been a cornerstone of the Kremlin's disinformation toolset since the Euromaidan protests in 2013-2014, when the Kremlin sought to discredit pro-European protests in Kyiv and, subsequently, the broader pro-Western shift in Ukraine's foreign policy as a 'Nazi coup.' This week the leitmotif was photos of Easter eggs with Nazi symbols, disseminated through various Telegram channels ([here](#) and [here](#)). A [selfie](#) of Ukraine's armed forces with the flag of the Third Reich was again reposted, this time with the supposed names of the people in the photo that has been actively shared by the pro-Russian sources during April 8 – April 15 as well.

**The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent:** The idea that Zelensky uses the war for personal embezzlement is heavily promoted by the pro-Russian actors who promote the idea of Ukraine being an extremely corrupt country. However, in 2022, Ukraine was 116/180 countries in the Global corruption perception [index](#), whereas Russia was 137/180, thus making Russia demonstrably more corrupt than Ukraine. Furthermore, there is no actual evidence that Western aid is stolen by Zelensky or his government, which is claimed by [Telegram groups](#) and [media outlets](#) such as the notorious Russian "news agency" *News Front*.

## Trend prediction

With military actions unfolding in the eastern part of Ukraine, narratives depicting **Ukraine losing the war** and **Russia having military success** will again continue to be highly popular.

The often-utilized Kremlin disinformation technique to use the opinion of a foreign or local agent of Russian influence or impersonate a legitimate figure in order to create false credibility will again be used. For example, throughout April 15 – April 23 a statement from American "investigative journalist" and political writer with pro-Russian views [Seymour Hersh](#) also echoed the [narrative](#) that Zelensky is a criminal who has stolen 400 million USD from aid funds.

# Georgia

## Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS)

"Ukraine is losing the war"

**Publications:**  
5

**Views:**  
4,800

The sub-narrative that Ukraine is losing the war and Russia will eventually win remains the core message. Some of the messages originated from American actors with pro-Russian views, presented as international support for the claim that Ukraine will lose.

"Western military/financial aid is being misused/stolen"

**Publications:**  
2

**Views:**  
3,196

Military aid to Ukraine was a target of disinformation that applied various messages on the alleged misuse of the aid due to the corruption of Ukraine's political elite and Zelensky himself.

"The West will fight until the last Ukrainian"

**Publications:**  
2

**Views:**  
1,270

The claim that the US will fight its proxy war against Russia "until the last Ukrainian" has been spotted in the Georgian information field before, but for the first time it was popular enough to be ranked among top-3.

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The disinformation message that Ukraine is losing the war is consistently among the top messages. It has been seemingly prioritized by pro-Russian sources in Georgia. Throughout the period of April 15 – April 23, disinformation sources concentrated on Ukraine being lured into Russia's trap in Bakhmut which was set up to get more Ukrainian troops there in order to kill them easily. It has also been stated that Russia destroyed most of Ukraine's aviation - fighter jets, helicopters and drones. Ukraine was said to have no chance of victory against Russia as a whole generation of Ukrainian men is dying and Russia remains too strong for Ukraine to be able to challenge it – all leading to the conclusion that Russia will decisively defeat the Ukrainian military and supporting Ukraine is futile.
- Disinformation regarding aid to Ukraine focused on messages stating that the US providing Ukraine with military aid leads to the escalation of war or that there is no sight of the end of the war. Therefore, providing aid to "historically one of the most corrupt countries" is a bad idea and it will bankrupt the US. Claims were also made that some of the US-donated military equipment is useless.
- The sub-narrative that the West will fight until the last Ukrainian was based on a conspiracy theory that a group of neo-conservatives inside the US government, including Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs of the United States Victoria Nuland and Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin, control the US foreign policy. Allegedly, Nuland and Lloyd are ready to sacrifice as many Ukrainians as necessary as the war is "not going well" for the US.

## Trend changes

The sub-narrative that Ukraine is losing the war remains the core disinformation message in every week of the monitoring.

Sub-narratives that Western military/financial aid is being misused/stolen and that the West will fight until the last Ukrainian emerged in top-3 for the first time in Georgia.

The difficult military situation in Bakhmut consistently contributes to the messages of Russian disinformation portraying the Russian military as victorious. Religious issues in Ukraine, particularly regarding UOC MP and dispute around the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra still generate disinformation messages.

A new development on which several disinformation pieces were based was a decision of several European states to ban Ukrainian grain imports.

## Context

Throughout the period of April 15 – April 23, 2023, disinformation messages were diverse, and apart from the sub-narrative that Ukraine is losing the war no other sub-narrative was distinctively popular.

Messages regarding Western military aid suggest that either the West should no longer provide aid to Ukraine or that it is ineffective, which means that they are also linked to the core message of Russian disinformation in Georgia that Ukraine will lose the war. The sub-narrative that the West will fight until the last Ukrainian is also connected to the goal of persuading the audience that Russia will win because it is based on the assumption that Ukraine is losing but the West is ready to sacrifice all Ukrainians in order to prolong the war.

The sub-narrative that the Ukrainian government is fighting against Orthodox Christianity has decreased in popularity, but it is still present. It is hard to say whether it has just become less relevant as religious issues have not been in focus recently, or whether disinformation sources believed that the campaign was not achieving its results and attention should be directed elsewhere.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

There were several noteworthy pieces of disinformation this week:

- The disinformation Telegram channel World Politics [posted](#) a video claiming that Ukrainians raid Orthodox churches, while in reality the video shows celebration in Greek church.
- Pro-Russian newspaper Georgia and the World [claimed](#) that the most profitable option for Europe to deal with Ukraine is the disappearance of Ukraine. According to the newspaper, Ukraine is completely foreign for the EU and there are only problems at all levels, so Ukraine will never be able to join the EU.

The author of the article argues that the total European blockade of Ukrainian food products is actually a clear signal for Ukraine: no one is waiting for it in the European Union. The newspaper further claimed that the EU is a pyramid in which everything is regulated in favour of those who are at the top, i.e. in favour of Western European countries, not for the Baltics or Romania and Bulgaria. The author created a conspiracy

theory - according to him, thanks to the EU 42% of Latvian dairy industry has been destroyed in five years and the EU would have done the same to Ukraine. The author concluded that giving a small number of Leopard tanks and "and other deadly decorations" to Ukraine might mean that the EU is striving towards the goal to make Ukraine disappear.

- Propagandist blogger Beka Vardosanidze [spread](#) disinformation based on the claims of American pro-Russian actor Douglas McGregor, who claimed that he had information from sources in Washington, according to which Russians destroyed 402 airplanes, 256 helicopters and thousands of drones as the Russian air defence system is extremely effective and deadly. Also, according to him, this war will not go well for the West and President Biden and his advisers know it well, but Nuland, Austin and others will push until the last Ukrainian – and because Biden is not really a leader, he will be forced to follow through. Also, the post inaccurately stated that Bakhmut is the last remnant of Ukraine's defence line in Donbas and if they lose it then there is open terrain leading to Kyiv, ignoring Kramatorsk and Slovyansk. The post ended with a statement that Ukraine's defeat was inevitable.
- Disinformation Telegram channel PolitNews [claimed](#) that as proof that the West sees Ukraine only as a resource to be used in the confrontation with Russia, the European Union plans to impose restrictions on the import of certain types of agricultural products from Ukraine, and is also preparing a compensation of 100 million euros to help the farmers of the neighbouring European countries of Ukraine.

## Trend prediction

The sub-narrative that Ukraine is losing the war is highly likely to remain popular as it has been since the monitoring commenced.

The “second front” conspiracy has remained in Georgia’s information space, most recently in the context of the US sanctioning four Georgian judges, but its presence is decreasing and is likely to further decrease.

The number of messages that the Ukrainian government is fighting against Orthodox Christianity has gone down, however, given the potency of this topic to undermine support for Ukraine it remains to be seen whether the local pro-Russian actors have ultimately abandoned this issue or whether they will return to promoting it.

# Hungary

## Political Capital

"Russia wants peace, but the West and Ukraine want to keep fighting"

**Publications:**  
9

**Views:**  
31,696

This narrative puts the responsibility of achieving peace on the West and absolves Russia of blame. It assumes that Russia wants peace, and it is the West and Ukraine preventing that from happening.

"Ukraine is losing the war"

**Publications:**  
6

**Views:**  
8,237

This narrative assumes that Ukrainian defeat is inevitable, that Russia is consistently achieving success on the battlefield, and that it is therefore pointless to try to influence the outcome of the war by supporting Ukraine.

"X country should not help Ukraine due to their past historical conflicts"

**Publications:**  
3

**Views:**  
7,545

This narrative alleges the mistreatment and repression of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine, and utilizes anger towards Ukraine for governing Transcarpathia in the first place, which is why Ukraine is supposedly undeserving of support from Hungary.

## Contextualising most popular narratives

- Narratives discrediting Ukraine were once again the most popular category. These included claims of Ukraine not wanting peace, being an autocratic regime led by Nazis, Ukrainians being demanding and ungrateful regarding military aid, and accusations of Ukraine oppressing its Hungarian minority. These narratives all served to paint Ukraine as undeserving of Western support.
- Narratives regarding battlefield events were quite common, always alleging that Ukraine is losing the war, that Russia is progressing, and that Ukraine has no chance to ever win. Some of these claims were backed by made-up statistics, again for the purpose of framing military aid as a useless endeavour in the face of inevitable Russian victory.
- There were plenty of Anti-Western narratives, such as the West using Ukraine as a pawn against Russia, ignoring the will of their own people, and undermining the wellbeing of their own people. Opposite claims were also present, stating, that the West is ready to abandon Ukraine.
- All of the above was either said or quoted by Hungarian government-organised media, including the state-owned media, or by the far-right media.

## Trend changes

Continuing from the last three weeks, [Zelensky's supposed persecution of Christians is still being reported](#), but with some surprising changes. For the first time, the one source that was the most sensationalist in terms of rhetoric finally explained that there are in fact two rival churches, and only the pro-Moscow one is being cracked down upon. Nevertheless, the article still claims that this is a brutal, illegal crackdown on religious freedom, which is not the case.

Unsurprisingly, for the eighth week in a row, it is claimed that [Ukrainians are about to retreat from Bakhmut due to significant recent Russian gains](#). Context is again omitted, especially context about the same exact paper reporting very similar headlines every week for 2 months now.

Overall, there are no significant changes and the recurring narratives were spread as usual, similar to previous weeks. Perhaps the biggest change is the increase in articles alleging an inevitable Russian victory and the supposed hopelessness of Ukraine succeeding in recapturing its lost territories. Such narratives implicitly or explicitly argue that sending weapons to Ukraine is pointless, and only delays the inevitable. The best example was Robert Kennedy's statement on Fox news, where he was dramatically talking about what a catastrophe the future evacuation of US embassy staff will be in the event that Russia fully occupies Ukraine.

## Context

The Justice Minister of Hungary claimed this week that to ensure its energy supply, [Hungary has no choice but to do business with Russia](#), and crucially, that "we don't want to trade dependence on Russia for dependence on the USA". The Hungarian government is still doubling down on its current energy policy despite the fact that other EU countries have reduced dependency during these past 14 months while still experiencing lower inflation. At the start of the war, it was a legitimate and valid argument that even though reducing dependency is morally right, doing it too quickly and without taking into account its potential effects might lead to extremely high inflation. It is harder to claim this after 14 months, with little effort to diversify our energy sources, and nevertheless having the highest inflation in Europe.

Recently, [there has been a billboard campaign](#), funded by the US Embassy to Hungary, to try to increase solidarity with Ukraine in Hungary. The billboard draws parallel between Soviet troops crushing the 1956 revolution in Hungary and Russian troops invading Ukraine today. The narrative used here was probably conceived of as a way to persuade Hungarians by getting them to recognize the historical parallels, ensuring sympathy, and making them realise that Russian withdrawal of troops is desirable, just like in 1956. Instead, Hungarian government-organised media has attacked these billboards, calling them divisive, [hypocritical](#) and unwanted foreign influence.



## Key sub-narrative analysis

***Russia wants peace, but the West and Ukraine want to keep fighting (9 cases, 31,696 views).*** Any separate narratives actually are quite similar, in that they operate on the assumption that Russia wants peace, and peace will immediately be achieved (and such a peace is desirable) if the West decides to stop escalating or sending weapons.

Another narrative is related to this broad category, and it sometimes (but not always) fits here - ***Both sides are equally at fault for the war. (3 cases, 10,898).*** These sub-narratives, which comprised more than one third of all disinformation messages found this week, were spread by a very wide range of actors including the Slovakian opposition party leader [Robert Fico](#), Hungarian government-organised media, including the state-owned media, Brazilian [President Lula](#), the [Hungarian defence ministry](#), [RFK Jr](#), and the [justice minister of Hungary](#), as well as minor far-right sources. The former sub-narratives put the onus of achieving an end to the war on the West, rather than on Russia. In cases where it is Hungarian officials and government-organised media expressing this, it is always framed as a battle between the pro-peace and pro-war side. In this framing, the government is pro-peace, and NATO, Brussels, the West, the USA, and the liberal and leftist opposition are pro-war. There is an article by a journalist at a government-organised news source [which details the pro-peace and the pro-war sides, their arguments, actors, and beliefs, from the perspective of the government](#).

***Ukraine is losing the war (6 cases, 8,237 views).*** This narrative alleges that Ukraine is losing the war and Russia is winning. These cases all ignore the Ukrainian army recapturing territory last fall, and do not reflect on their previous rhetoric regarding the war, specifically how some of their previous claims were proven false. Here is the [usual weekly article about Bakhmut](#), specifically that Russia is on the cusp of completely capturing it and Ukraine is on the cusp of surrender. Robert Kennedy Jr, who's running to be the presidential nominee for the Democrats (although far-right journalist Zsolt Bede thinks he already is the Democratic nominee) went on Tucker Carlson's show on Fox News to spread this sub-narrative of Ukraine losing. [He used distorted numbers, claiming that Russia is killing Ukrainian soldiers at a 1 to 7, if not 1 to 8 ratio, and that 300 thousand Ukrainian soldiers have died](#) (there was no pushback from the host of the show). It is hard to assess the number of casualties due to the fog of war, but according to analysts, the casualties are somewhat similar in size in both countries. Furthermore, he claims there is nothing we can do to stop Russia - ignoring the fact that Ukraine has stopped Russia using Western equipment. The Hungarian far right reported his statements as finally "admitting the truth". This implies conspiratorial thinking, claiming that these false numbers of tremendous Ukrainian casualties are the hidden truth, and the "elites" don't want to admit them, but someone finally did.

***X country should not help Ukraine due to their past historical conflicts (3 cases, 7,545 views).*** While this narrative has been present every week and is extremely important in Hungarian government communications, this is the first time it enters the top 3 sub-narratives. For context, Ukraine has a sizeable Hungarian minority, which is allegedly oppressed by the Ukrainian government. There is some truth to the allegations: the controversial Language Law of Ukraine restricts the ability of the Hungarian minority to operate its own schools and teach in Hungarian past elementary school, and some far-right Ukrainian activists and movements sometimes march through Hungarian towns to intimidate the inhabitants. The official position of Orbán's government is that Ukraine should reinstate full human rights for its minority groups in exchange for support from Hungary. The narrative is disinformation to the extent that it is [quite exaggerated in most Hungarian media](#) (some



even claim there is genocide against Hungarians by the Ukrainian Nazi regime) and that [it is spread specifically to undermine support for helping Ukraine](#), rather than having a genuine concern for minority rights. It also could be considered a distraction from other factors, such as Hungary leveraging support for Ukraine in exchange for EU funds, or the fact that Hungary is buying Russian gas and oil. It needs to be further explored to what extent this narrative is driving anti-Ukrainian sentiment in Hungary, because based on this project so far, the pro-peace framing seems to be much more salient.

## Trend prediction

News regarding the future Ukrainian counteroffensive will probably feature more and more frequently in the next weeks, as more information is revealed from both sides. The narratives regarding it will probably emphasise Russia's military advantages, and double down on claims that Ukrainian defeat is inevitable.

Narratives about Ukraine's alleged mistreatment of minorities, the supposed economic impact of sanctions, and the characterization of the West and the domestic opposition as warmongering (as opposed to the Hungarian government being pro-peace) will continue to be featured prominently in the next weeks.

It was recently revealed that the Ukrainian POW beheaded by Russian soldiers was actually an ethnic Hungarian. It will be very interesting to see how pro-Kremlin Hungarian media reports this, seeing as a common narrative of theirs is that Ukraine should not fight because Hungarians are suffering and dying in the war. This revelation shows that Ukraine in fact must fight to prevent more Hungarians meeting the same fate. It's also possible the pro-Russian sources will revise their previous statements denying and relativizing Russian war crimes, with confirmation that a Hungarian person is a victim. Finally, it is possible they will simply not report this at all.

# MOLDOVA

WatchDog.MD

“Western society does not support Ukraine”

**Publications:**  
4

**Views:**  
21,382

The monitored sources circulated the story about certain Eastern and Central European countries banning the import of Ukrainian grain, calling for the Moldovan government to do the same in order to preserve the local economy and follow the suit of the governments that don't want to support Ukraine at their own expense.

“Ukrainian refugees are a threat to host countries”

**Publications:**  
4

**Views:**  
42,635

The sub-narrative relied on two stories – one about a Ukrainian citizen who tried to bribe a border guard and another one about two Ukrainians who smuggled money into Moldova. While not disinformation per se, emphasizing the nationality of these people contributes to a negative view of Ukrainian refugees.

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

**Publications:**  
4

**Views:**  
20,559

A mix of various messages accusing the Moldovan government of various ‘Russophobic’ acts such as banning two Russian movies on TV, withdrawing Moldova from the Mir international TV channel and trying to repeat ‘the Ukrainian scenario’ against the Moldovan Orthodox Church.

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The idea that Western society does not support Ukraine was reinforced via adjacent sub-narratives: Western politicians care about Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens and Western countries/institutions ignore the will of their own people. The Ukrainian grain imports and surrounding problems are the main pillar supporting these messages. Pro-Russian disinformation attempts to push the idea that some countries are getting tired of supporting Ukraine at the cost of their own benefit, and Moldova should follow their lead.
- Overall, it has been another week in which the disinformation eco-system was formed by a plethora of messages, with no narrative category clearly dominating the landscape.
- After weeks of denouncing the Ukrainian ‘persecution’ of the Orthodox community subordinated to Moscow, one publication finally ‘imported’ the issue to Moldova and accused President Sandu of discriminating the Metropolitan Church of Moldova. It is argued that the Moldovan government will try to repeat the actions of Ukrainian authorities and unleash persecution on the local Orthodox Church.

## Trend changes

The sub-narratives revolving around the risk of escalation, Moldova being dragged into the war or Ukraine staging deliberate provocations have subsided to a certain extent, but still had some of the most popular posts of the week. Relevant messages typically also fall under the “Russophobia” category and promote the idea that “Russophobic” actions of the Moldovan government may be seen as a provocation against Russia which will ‘have to’ react, escalating the conflict and bringing it to Moldova.

An increasing amount of attention is paid to the international issues and agenda for the second week in a row, since April 8, 2023. For the period of April 15 – April 23, the dominant narrative fitting this framework is the claim that the West does not support Ukraine or does so at the expense of its own citizens.

The topic of Ukrainian refugees is most likely integrated in the local disinformation system due to the sensitivity of the issue and will resurface every once in a while. Such stories are usually triggered by reports similar to that of the Border Police about attempted bribe from Ukrainian citizens to cross the border.

## Context

The local context in Moldova remains mostly the same as in previous weeks. The exploitation of the Ukrainian grain issue and its impact on the markets of other countries may be an attempt to fire up Moldovan farmers and get them to protest as well, given their previous record.

Moldovan society remains vulnerable to fearmongering due to the issue of Transnistria and the potential expansion of the conflict beyond Ukraine. As the Easter celebrations have passed and the crisis around Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra in Ukraine is no longer as sharp as it used to be, religion-linked disinformation has subsided, although it still has potency in Moldovan society.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

The farmers’ protests and politicians’ action against imports of Ukrainian grain in countries like Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria have been exploited for the promotion of both anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian sub-narratives. [One post](#) by an anonymous Telegram channel “Genius of Carpathians” criticizes Romania for not caring about its farmers, but goes further to claim that Bucharest was actually forced by the European Union to continue to take in Ukrainian grain under the threat of sanctions. This fits in the wider narrative about the alleged loss of sovereignty in the EU, Brussels elites being estranged from European populations and involved in geopolitical games without care for the cost. It also reiterates the idea that helping Ukraine is [too costly](#) and damaging. [Another post](#) by “Moldavsky Piston” Telegram channel argues that Moldovan authorities should follow suit and also ban Ukrainian agricultural products to protect local farmers.

A similar connection of an issue from abroad to a local one was the post criticizing President Sandu of supporting the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia (subordinated to the Romanian Patriarchate) as opposed to the church subordinated to Russia, thus deepening the issue of [religious ‘schism’ in Moldova](#). It draws on previous coverage of church tensions in Ukraine to warn that something similar might happen in Moldova, but it also exploits years

of conservative accusations against President Sandu that she doesn't go to church, doesn't allot money for church repairs, isn't pious enough etc. Finally, it concludes by quoting the old saying that 'the light comes from the East', to suggest that darkness then comes from the West.

The [most popular publication](#) among those monitored was a post about the transportation of weapons to Ukraine via Moldova made by "Gagauzian Republic" channel and having 47,800 views. It cuts a fragment from a Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty story, where a Ukrainian border guard says that the newly rehabilitated railway section Basarabeasca (MD) – Berezino (UKR) will be used for military cargo. This is presented as proof that the Moldovan authorities lied about the purpose of this railway's renovation and that this violates Moldova's statute of neutrality, with a grim warning about 'potential consequences' from Russia. There are multiple implications here: that the Moldovan people are cheated and dragged into the war without their knowledge, the Moldovan authorities are disrespecting the constitution and provoking Russia, the West and Ukraine are using Moldova without caring about potential consequences for it and so on.

## Trend prediction

May 1 and 9 will likely be a good occasion for resurfacing of Soviet nostalgia narratives. Pro-Russian sources are likely to disseminate accusations of Western ingratitude for the Soviet sacrifice against the Nazis and "rewriting history". The usual Commemoration Day vs Victory Day debates are likely to fill the information space and conflicts regarding the use of St. George's ribbon, a symbol that has become associated with Russian hybrid influence and military aggression since 2014, are probable.

"Poland will be pulled into the war"

**Publications:**  
4

**Views:**  
57,323

A new top sub-narrative emerged in the Polish information space. Pro-Russian disinformation channels intensified the claims that Poland's support for Ukraine will pull Poland into the war and such support is, therefore, against Polish national interests.

Ukraine sells low quality/contaminated/too much products to the West

**Publications:**  
4

**Views:**  
44,705

Various far-right and pro-Russian sources tackle the topic of Ukrainian grain, meat and honey being sent to Europe under low tax/no tax agreements to support Ukraine. Sources claim that these products are contaminated/low quality or there is too much of them and the Polish market is being destroyed.

Conspiracy theories & fake news

**Publications:**  
7

**Views:**  
29,771

A plethora of messages claiming that the War in Ukraine is staged, a conspiracy and was planned for years by the West. While being linked by conspiratorial thinking targeting Ukraine and the West, these narratives are not interconnected, which is why they are ranked as a third most popular category.

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The narrative "Poland will be pulled into the war" was ranked No. 1 in the weekly monitoring report for the first time. Russian disinformation sources are trying to sow fear of an impending war in Polish audiences and discourage them from supporting Ukraine.
- The narrative about low quality of Ukrainian products is losing momentum, as the problem is being addressed by the government more effectively than before. Yet, it still stays in the top 3 narratives for the 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive week. However, pro-Russian and far-right actors still attempt to promote it, particularly via adding new Ukrainian products to the list of supposedly harmful ones.
- Conspiracy theories have been increasingly present in the Polish disinformation eco-system.

## Trend changes

The narrative "Poland will be pulled into war" became very popular, following Polish efforts and lobbying in the EU to provide Ukraine with modern tanks and fighter jets. Many of the outlets pushing the narrative rely on the Polish Anti-War Movement, a group that presents itself as a peace-seeking initiative opposing the "warmongering" current government and its "meddling" in the war. They insist that "this is not our war" and the protests organized by the movement, albeit low in attendance, are extensively covered by Russian media such as TASS.

The sub-narrative focused on the import of Ukrainian grain is still trending, but as predicted last week, this has decreased both in number of publications and views. As the narrative was initially popular, similar theories started to emerge, targeting the imports of chicken meat from Ukraine several weeks ago. The newest addition to this disinformation trend is targeting imports of Ukrainian honey. It may be speculated that by introducing new directions of this disinformation trend that portrays imports as a deadly blow to the Polish economy the local pro-Russian actors try to keep the narrative afloat.

Anti-refugee narratives, although still present, lost momentum, mostly due to the same sources aggressively pushing “Poland will be pulled into war” sub-narrative instead.

## Context

Sources pushing the sub-narrative about Poland being pulled into war are based on many, events and news that are not always connected (see details below). The narrative is gaining momentum after Poland’s efforts to provide Ukraine with fighter jets, successful lobbying to send Leopard tanks to Ukraine and news about Ukrainian soldiers trained in Poland on Polish Leopard tanks. The direct push for the narrative was signing the Project “Interreg NEXT Poland-Ukraine 2021-2027” (<https://www.gov.pl/web/uw-podlaski/interreg-next-polska-ukraina-2021-2027>)

According to our investigation (<https://fakenews.pl/polityka/geneza-terminu-zboze-techniczne/>) the term “technical grain” that is actively used by the far-right and pro-Russian actors was not present in the information space before the whole “grain scandal”. According to Polish law, the grain was either “for human consumption” or “for livestock feed”. Outlets using the new term are unable to explain what “technical grain” really means. It may be the Kremlin-inspired term used for enforcing the narrative that Ukrainian grain is a threat. Other context of grain/meat/honey sub-narratives did not change.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

This week’s top narrative was triggered not only by Polish pro-Ukrainian lobbying in the EU and NATO and training Ukrainian soldiers in Poland to use Leopard tanks, but also by the aforementioned “Interreg NEXT Poland-Ukraine 2021-2027” project, which for the first time excludes Belarus.

The project aims at supporting the reconstruction of Ukraine after the end of Russian aggression; developing administrative and community cooperation at various levels and improving operations and protection of the Polish-Ukrainian border. The managing institution of the program is the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy of the Republic of Poland. Meanwhile, the role of the national institution is played by the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. Such close cooperation after all the military support provided fuel for disinformation actors to amplify the “Poland will be pulled into war” sub-narrative, which is actively promoted by the “Polish Anti-War Movement”.

## Examples:

1. The leader of the Movement, Leszek Sykulski, is explaining that the actions of the Polish government will supposedly pull Poland into war with Russia: <https://wolnemedi.net/projekt-szpiegostwa-bezobjawowego-pis-u/>  
Disseminated by one of the most active disinformation outlets in Poland “Wolne media”, this publication received 44,705 views.
2. Pro-Russian disinformation channel “Niezalezhny Dziennik Politychny” claims Poland plans to economically own Ukraine thanks to the “Interreg NEXT” project. It pictures Poland’s intentions as malign and trying to use Ukraine for its own profit: [https://t.me/ndp\\_pl/23309](https://t.me/ndp_pl/23309).  
The post received 5,466 views.
3. The same source has been spreading fake news about Poland helping the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence to recruit volunteers for Polish Battalions, which will supposedly lead to direct engagement of Polish troops in war: [https://t.me/ndp\\_pl/23378](https://t.me/ndp_pl/23378).  
The publication received 4,521 views.

Despite the decline in popularity, pro-Russian sources still attempt to promote the messages about the harmful impact of importing Ukrainian products. In particular, the abovementioned outlet Wolne media [published](#) an article admiring how Hungary fights the negative economic consequences of Ukrainian low tax imports and urges Poland to follow Budapest’s suit. The post received approximately 44,000 views. Other posts included [the attack](#) on Ukrainian honey imports by Lega Artis and [claims](#) that chicken meat imported from Ukraine is literally “poisonous”.

Anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian conspiracy theories don’t have a single framework, however, the rapid rise of conspiratorial rhetoric deserves extra attention. In particular, the far-right channel “Wiadomosci Czasow Ostatecznych” [claims](#) that the Ukrainian refugees were sent to the Western countries on purpose, in order to destabilize them and aggravate the financial and economic crisis. This publication gathered 4,628 views; the message that Russia supposedly has secret and extremely powerful weapons it will deploy against the West and Ukraine has received 4,717 views after being published by “Siostry Jansowidzki” Telegram channel. The message relies on the UK publication “Express”, which uncritically quotes Russian state news agencies and anonymous Russian sources that claim such a weapon has been developed.

## Trend prediction

It is predicted that the so-called Polish Anti-War Movement will continue its efforts to use fake news and fear-mongering to influence Poles before this Fall’s Parliamentary elections. Citizens of Poland, facing dire economic consequences of various ongoing crises, may become even more vulnerable to such malign influence and fake news undermining their sense of security.

# Slovakia

## Infosecurity

"Ukrainian grain imports are harmful"

**Publications:**  
**4**

**Views:**  
**73,762**

The most prevalent sub-narrative this week claimed that numerous countries banned the import of Ukrainian grain because it is endangering people and their health. The publications analysed were spread by InfoVojna and Ľuboš Blaha.

"The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent"

**Publications:**  
**2**

**Views:**  
**18,411**

Disinformation actors continue spreading the sub-narrative that the Ukrainian leadership, namely President Zelensky, is corrupt. Both of the publications spreading this sub-narrative shared the quotes of pro-Russian American "expert" Seymour Hersh who claims that Zelensky embezzled \$400 million.

"Western media is lying"

**Publications:**  
**2**

**Views:**  
**14,618**

The sub-narrative about the western media lying is still prevalent in the Slovak disinformation space. The actors claim that the media constantly lies about the war in Ukraine, but the "truth" is gradually coming to the surface.

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

- Narratives discrediting Ukraine are still the most prevalent category. For the period of April 15 – April 23, 2023 1/5 of the 50 publications were spreading these sub-narratives.
- The sub-narrative about Ukrainian grain endangering people's health is new in Slovak disinformation space and it is a reaction to the news about numerous countries banning its import.
- The second most prevalent category of narratives is anti-Western. Apart from the sub-narrative about media lying, the actors continue claiming that the West is responsible for the war in Ukraine.

## Trend changes

The most prevalent category of sub-narratives spread throughout the period of April 15 – April 23 is narratives discrediting Ukraine. Previously, the disinformation actors claimed that Ukraine is not democratic or the least democratic state in Europe, weak or corrupt. This week, the most prevalent sub-narrative claimed that the Ukrainian grain is [harmful](#) to the people's health and that Ukraine may want to poison the people who consume it. This was not the only sub-narrative discrediting Ukraine spread this week. The other one claimed that Ukrainian president Zelensky is [corrupt](#) because allegedly he embezzled \$400 million. Other



actors also claimed that Ukrainians [are](#) Nazis, and that Ukraine will not [become](#) a member of NATO.

The second most prevalent category of sub-narratives are still anti-western, which is typical for the Slovak information space. They claimed that the Western mainstream media is lying and spreading propaganda, that the Western leadership is [incompetent](#) and that the West is [responsible](#) for the war in Ukraine. All in all, more than 20% of the publications were spreading narratives either against Ukraine or against the West.

## Context

The Slovak government decided to ban the import of grain and other farm products from Ukraine. However, Slovakia was not the only country to do so. It has joined Hungary and Poland which had made this decision earlier. Slovak government has also stated that it will keep its borders open to help Ukraine export its production.

The move was criticised by Kyiv and the European Commission which stated that these actions “are not acceptable. In such challenging times, it is crucial to coordinate and align all decisions within the EU.” By this move Slovakia has also ignored the EU’s warnings about possible illegality of such decision due to the block’s trade policy. The issue has also been discussed by other EU member countries such as Czech Republic, Romania and Bulgaria.

However, it should be kept in mind that there are upcoming parliamentary elections in Slovakia (September 2023) and a part of the opposition and disinformation actors have been spreading the false narrative that the Slovak government does not care about its own people. The upcoming elections could therefore be one of the factors motivating the government to take such decision to boost its own popularity rather than waiting for the EU’s coordinated action.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

This week, the most prevalent sub-narrative claimed that the Ukrainian grain is harmful to the people’s health. Disinformation actors state that it not only contains pesticides, but also genetically modified enzymes against fungi and pests; some of the actors imply that the Ukrainian authorities are aware of the potential harmful effects of the grain and have exported it deliberately, trying to poison the consumers abroad.

It is true that previously Slovakia has banned a batch of Ukrainian grain due to the presence of higher-than-allowed levels of pesticides and repeated tests of the flour finally showed that there were no high levels of pesticides found. This was however not a reason to ban the import of Ukrainian grain. In reality the reason for these governmental measures was to protect Slovak farmers due to the Ukrainian grain’s low prices. Disinformation actors are using the higher levels of pesticides in one batch to represent all of the Ukrainian production as dangerous.

The sub-narrative was spread by two actors: InfoVojna and Ľuboš Blaha. InfoVojna is a Slovak disinformation outlet spreading pro-Russian messages on a regular basis. According to the Ministry of Defence’s information from 2020, it was the second most popular disinformation website in Slovakia. The portal also uncritically provides space for Slovak far-right politicians. It often also spreads dangerous conspiracy theories.

Ľuboš Blaha is an opposition pro-Russian politician, who is a member of a political party (Smer-SD) currently leading the pre-election polls. He uses Telegram as a primary platform, which he has been using since Facebook blocked his Facebook page due to spreading harmful disinformation, bullying and hate speech. He has also been an admirer of communism, Putin, Russia, the USSR, and China.

Blaha published a [post](#) in which he asked whether Ukraine wants to poison us. Then he continued by saying that *“Brussels has been allowing Slovakia and the whole of Central Europe to be infested with dangerous Ukrainian wheat for over half a year, and Slovak government has done nothing. This is literally a crime against humanity.*

*Hungary and Poland could no longer watch how Ukrainian wheat threatens the health of their citizens - they quite logically banned imports from Ukraine.”*

InfoVojna, spreading the same sub-narrative, [claimed](#) that *“Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have stopped the import of Ukrainian grain after it was shown that it not only contains pesticides, but also grain from American GMO production with genetically modified enzymes against fungi and pests.”*

The most popular publication this week was [published](#) by a disinformation outlook Hlavné správy which shared quotes of Ľuboš Blaha, who claims that everyone who supports Ukraine, NATO, military aid, supports war. It is rhetoric which has been used by him and his political party Smer-SD. Its members are trying to persuade the voters in the upcoming elections that they are choosing between war and peace. They claim that they represent peace, however, in reality they spread pro-Russian disinformation.

More information from previous reports about Hlavné Správy – *It is known for mixing disinformation content with factual articles based on information from credible sources, it is therefore much harder for the readers to distinguish whether an article is sharing disinformation or not. The outlet was also recognized as dangerous by National Security Office in Slovakia, which after the beginning of the Russian invasion had an authority to block outlets spreading dangerous pro-Russian propaganda and Hlavné správy was one of them. However, National Security Office lost this authority after a few months. Two of the authors of Hlavné Správy are also known for their direct connections to Russia.*

## Trend prediction

The newly emerged sub-narrative about Ukrainian grain being harmful will probably continue being prevalent. It also might be accompanied by similar attacks on the other products imported from Ukraine.

As anti-Western narratives are an integral part of the Slovak disinformation ecosystem and utilize every opportunity to foment hostility towards the West, reaction to Biden’s announcement that he will be running for president in 2024 may be expected.

# Ukraine

## Detector Media

Russian troops are  
advancing / achieving  
success

**Publications:**  
5

**Views:**  
5,152,043

The main message of the posts is that Ukrainian troops are being defeated in Bakhmut. Pro-Russian actors claim that the defence of Bakhmut is pointless and that the losses of Ukrainian soldiers are enormous. Also, Russians are supposedly attacking and destroying high-rise buildings in Bakhmut, where Ukrainian snipers are stationed. The Russian military has allegedly caused Ukraine such heavy casualties in Bakhmut that a counteroffensive is impossible under the current circumstances.

"The Ukrainian leadership  
is corrupt and/or  
incompetent"

**Publications:**  
5

**Views:**  
1,611,856

The sub-narrative focused on promoting the idea that Ukrainian leaders were stealing Western aid from USAID and that a state-owned timber company was allegedly involved in financial fraud with members of the ruling "Servant of the People" party. In addition, pro-Russian actors used posts by well-known foreigners with pro-Russian views to discredit Ukraine. Among them is the lead singer of the band Limp Bizkit and the American radio host Garland Nixon.

"Ukraine is losing the war"

**Publications:**  
4

**Views:**  
2,274,673

The main focus of the sub-narrative is the supposed inevitable failure of the upcoming Ukrainian counteroffensive due to the enormous losses in Bakhmut, the poor coordination of Ukrainian troops, and the lack of air superiority. Pro-Russian sources claim that Ukraine is in a harsh military situation. Most of the posts belonging to this sub-narrative also belong to sub-narrative 3c. Russian troops are advancing / achieving success.

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The most popular category of narratives was narratives discrediting Ukraine that appeared in 27 posts. This category included the first and the second most popular sub-narratives: "The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent" in 5 posts, and "Western society does not support Ukraine" in 4 posts.
- The main focus was on the claim that the Ukrainian government is mired in corruption. The publications accused Ukrainian leaders of theft of Western aid, particularly from USAID, as well as of domestic corruption scandals, particularly with the state forestry company "Forests of Ukraine." In addition, it was emphasized that corruption was causing Western partners to stop supporting Ukraine.
- In particular, pro-Russian sources mentioned a letter from American members of Congress, as well as anti-Ukrainian posts on social media created by the vocalist of the band Limp Bizkit and radio host Garland Nixon.

Heavy fighting continues on the Bakhmut front in Ukraine, so the attention of Russian actors is partially focused on this. Ukraine is also preparing for a counteroffensive and the liberation of its territories, which the local disinformation eco-system is actively reacting to.

## Trend changes

Sub-narratives linked to the military developments dominated the information field for the period of April 15 – April 23, with focus on the message that Russian troops are advancing. As pro-Russian and Russian sources aggressively promote the idea that Ukrainian military suffers great losses and is not capable neither of defending Bakhmut nor of launching another operation, it can be perceived as reaction to the looming counteroffensive.

That is, it is a tactic to spread messages that imply that any counteroffensive will fail because Russia will advance and fight in full force. These messages are combined with posts that hint that the Ukrainian government is incompetent, is controlled by the West, etc. For example, such messages appeared amid news about the visit of NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg to Kyiv. The event was portrayed as Stoltenberg arriving to control Zelensky on the eve of the counteroffensive.

## Context

Russian disinformation is dynamic, and the developments that took place in the information space throughout April 15 – April 23 once more evidence this characteristic. For instance, pro-Russian sources swiftly react to the current events taking place in Ukraine, such as Stoltenberg's visit. Visits by foreign figures to Ukraine are particularly significant and are usually exploited by the pro-Russian sources en masse to promote anti-Western rhetoric and discredit Ukrainian leadership as being controlled by the West.

Additionally, there were many references this week to the beginning of the Ukrainian counteroffensive. It is likely that these messages will continue to appear in the information space within the next round of monitoring, as the topic gains momentum and the upcoming counteroffensive has a potential to be a highly important military development.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

The most popular sub-narratives throughout the period of April 15 – April 23 were “Russian troops are advancing / achieving success”, “The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent” and “Ukraine is losing the war”, closely followed by the sub-narrative “Western society does not support Ukraine”. The most popular messages within the framework of these sub-narratives were that Ukraine is losing Bakhmut, corruption of Ukrainian leaders, the failure of the upcoming Ukrainian counteroffensive and the accusation in corruption by Western artists and politicians against Ukraine.

As for the claims about Bakhmut, they were mostly promoting the idea that the city should not be held by Ukrainians, as it would supposedly only lead to huge losses among the Ukrainian military. Pro-Russian sources wrote that the Russian army had practically captured the western part of the city, where no civilians were left at all. In addition, there were allegations that the Russians would destroy high-rise apartment buildings with Ukrainian snipers using drones, dealing another heavy blow to the “catastrophic” situation the

Ukrainian military is supposedly in. While Bakhmut is indeed a focal point of heavy fighting and Ukrainian army suffers substantial casualties, the city is not fully controlled by Russian forces, which is the message that disinformation actors have been promoting for weeks while covering up Russian losses that equal or surpass that of Ukrainian side. Messages focused on the military developments have been spread by Telegram channels that were labeled by SBU as being administered from Russia, such as [Resident channel](#). These channels have a large established following – in case of Resident, 892,692 subscribers. However, smaller anonymous channels posing as Ukrainian have also contributed to discouraging the counteroffensive, for example, [Open Ukraine](#) channel with 188,037 subscribers.

Messages of the corruption of the Ukrainian leadership and military command contain accusations of embezzlement of financial aid provided by Western partners. In particular, pro-Russian sources claim that theft of USAID funds has taken place. The main targets are Volodymyr Zelensky, his entourage and military leadership, and the state logging company "Forests of Ukraine," which allegedly embezzled budget funds together with representatives of the "Servant of the People" party—these messages aimed to discredit the Ukrainian authorities in the eyes of Western partners.

As for the messages about accusations of Ukraine by Western politicians and artists, the pro-Russian actors rebroadcast their messages calling to stop helping Ukraine. In particular, they cited a letter from American Republican members of Congress where they accused Ukraine of embezzling financial and military aid – see this [publication](#) by another Russian channel masquerading as a Ukrainian source, Sheptun, for reference.

## Trend prediction

In the upcoming weeks the local disinformation eco-system is likely to be focused on the attempts to undermine the potential Ukrainian counteroffensive. The most probable way to achieve this goal is to combine the messages of the supposed Russian advances with highlighting and hyperbolizing the problems within Ukrainian army. These claims are likely to be accompanied by the increasingly aggressive accusations of Ukrainian leadership as being incompetent to promote the idea that Ukraine has neither capacity nor skill to successfully carry out a counteroffensive operation that should be avoided altogether supposedly for the sake of protecting the lives of Ukrainian soldiers.

There may also be messages related to Victory Day over Nazism in World War II. Pro-Russian sources can be expected to push the traditional claims that Ukraine is a Nazi and Russophobic state that attempts to “rewrite history” and has supposedly betrayed the common past and victory over Nazism.

## 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
@todorangellov	Bulgaria
@dianadeleva	Bulgaria
@ocelqvane	Bulgaria
@ronyrony	Bulgaria
@ivaivatta	Bulgaria
@pogled	Bulgaria
@NewsFrontBulgaria	Bulgaria
@trudnews	Bulgaria
@snabgorg	Bulgaria
@informiran	Bulgaria
<a href="https://kuruc.info/">https://kuruc.info/</a>	Hungary
<a href="https://www.origo.hu/">https://www.origo.hu/</a>	Hungary
<a href="https://pestisracok.hu/">https://pestisracok.hu/</a>	Hungary
@magyarjelen	Hungary
<a href="https://hirado.hu/">https://hirado.hu/</a>	Hungary
@kurucinfo	Hungary
@torockai	Hungary
@szentkoronaradio_official	Hungary
@nzona3	Hungary
@bodiabel	Hungary
@bedezsolt	Hungary
<a href="https://www.facebook.com/oroszhirek.hu/">https://www.facebook.com/oroszhirek.hu/</a>	Hungary
<a href="https://www.facebook.com/pestisracok.hu/">https://www.facebook.com/pestisracok.hu/</a>	Hungary

<a href="https://www.facebook.com/szamokadatok/">https://www.facebook.com/szamokadatok/</a>	Hungary
<a href="https://www.facebook.com/kkemenymag1">https://www.facebook.com/kkemenymag1</a>	Hungary
<a href="https://www.facebook.com/bayerzs">https://www.facebook.com/bayerzs</a>	Hungary
<a href="https://www.facebook.com/elemi.hu/">https://www.facebook.com/elemi.hu/</a>	Hungary
<a href="https://www.facebook.com/magyarnemzet.hu/">https://www.facebook.com/magyarnemzet.hu/</a>	Hungary
<a href="https://www.facebook.com/stefideri">https://www.facebook.com/stefideri</a>	Hungary
<a href="https://www.facebook.com/bohardanielriporter">https://www.facebook.com/bohardanielriporter</a>	Hungary
<a href="https://aif.md/">https://aif.md/</a>	Moldova
@Noi.md   Новости Молдовы	Moldova
@Accent_TV	Moldova
<a href="https://unimedia.info/">https://unimedia.info/</a>	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
<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/1874167932813420">https://www.facebook.com/groups/1874167932813420</a>	Moldova
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<a href="https://www.facebook.com/latebuimistru">https://www.facebook.com/latebuimistru</a>	Moldova
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@monikacichocka	Poland
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@nwk24pl	Poland
@Olej_W_Glowie	Poland
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