

MONITORING REPORT

March 20 – March 26, 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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ДЕТЕКТОР медіа



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 report, produced by the Ukraine War Disinformation Working Group (UWD WG) and supported by the Open Information Partnership, covers the monitoring period of March 20 – March 26, 2023. Despite the variety of disinformation themes and actors across 12 countries, the narrative that the war will expand beyond Ukraine was dominant across the entire geography during this period. Despite being detected in all 12 countries monitored, it was most prominent in Armenia, Georgia and Moldova. Messaging such as this intersected with ongoing coverage of the popular protests in Georgia against the “foreign agent” draft bill. These protests have consistently received wide coverage from pro-Russian disinformation actors in different countries, who have focused on drawing parallels between them and the 2014 Euromaidan in Ukraine; both are presented as Western meddling in the internal affairs of sovereign countries, driven by the alleged goals of installing “anti-Russian” governments and ultimately destroying Russia itself.

The protests were a dominant topic in the previous monitoring period of March 12 – March 19, and coverage remains consistent; the protests are presented as an attempt to open “a second front” by the West. Although most popular in Georgia, the topic has gained traction in Armenia, where the subsiding intensity of the protests (explained by the fact that the ruling party “Georgian Dream” dropped the bill under public pressure) was used as a warning that, since the West has “failed” in Georgia, it will shift its attention to Armenia in its attempts to fuel anti-Russian sentiment. In the case of Armenia, fearmongering has been effectively utilized by pro-Russian actors promoting the idea that support of Ukraine is dangerous, as it will lead to the Kremlin refusing to assist Armenia if an armed conflict erupts with Azerbaijan or Turkey.

In Moldova, the “second front” narrative is also prominent, with messages centered on Transnistria and the consistent claims of Russian officials that Ukrainian forces are preparing to stage a provocation there. Despite being recycled in the Moldovan information space for several weeks, these messages retain their popularity by preying on the fear of military hostilities in the country. Although the nuances and specifics of these narratives vary across each country context, the claim that war is going to expand is the most salient and consistent feature of Kremlin disinformation campaigns across the monitored geography throughout the specified period.

A second area of focus for Kremlin disinformation campaigns in this period is religion. Narratives and content covering this topic have surged, particularly in Georgia and Belarus, with disinformation actors condemning the decision of Ukrainian authorities to terminate the lease of the Holy Dormition Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), due to its malign connections with the Russian Orthodox Church, which

continues to be heavily involved in Kremlin influence operations. This step is employed by pro-Russian sources to portray the Kyiv authorities as attacking Christianity while casting Russia as a defender of faith and, by extension, justifying the invasion of Ukraine. The focus on religious topics is likely to continue to be pushed by disinformation actors into the information environments of these countries throughout upcoming Easter celebrations. A notable feature of the cross-country disinformation eco-system is the increasing promotion and amplification of Russian narratives discrediting Ukraine by local far-right groups and parties, particularly in Hungary and Slovakia. In Poland, far-right groups are readily utilising Kremlin messaging on topics such as Ukrainian refugees, or claims that supporting Ukraine is undermining the strength of Poland, ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections. Understanding the connections (be they direct or indirect) between the Kremlin and the spectrum of far-right and extremist groups operating within the UWD WG geography is vital for further developing our understanding of how disinformation travels across borders and how Kremlin influence ripples through audiences that may ostensibly be anti-Russian, such as the Polish far-right.

The Baltic region remains dominated by disinformation messages promoting the “Russophobia” narrative and insisting that the rights of Russians and Russian-speakers are consistently abused. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are the only countries where this narrative repeatedly ranks among the most popular, and the situation is likely to remain unchanged. Ongoing anti-Western narratives (with a particular focus on the idea that the West uses Ukraine as a pawn) and disinformation related to battlefield events remains stable across the Working Group’s geography. Such messaging continues to focus on Bakhmut, where both sides suffer heavy losses – however, Russian actors consistently hyperbolize the existing problems on the Ukrainian side and portray the Russian army as victorious, claiming that the ultimate outcome of the war, Russian victory, cannot be changed.

This monitoring period has also demonstrated a certain increase in messages linked to the economic consequences of sanctions and the claim that while they have no effect on Russia, other states suffer from them substantially.

ARMENIA

Media Initiatives Center

“Non-aligned countries are choosing to side with Russia over the West”

Publications:
2

Views:
11,718

Both publications with this sub-narrative cited Turkish nationalist politician Do ğu Perinçek, who said that Crimea and Eastern Ukrainian districts are part of Russia.

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

Publications:
1

Views:
8,975

Ongoing fearmongering based on the protests in Georgia and claims that Georgia risks becoming a “second front” against Russia. These claims are used as a warning for the Armenian target audience against potential “anti-Russian” positions.

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

Publications:
1

Views:
6,501

The key publication claimed that the news cycle in Armenia is unjustly dominated by the war in Ukraine, while problems in South Caucasus, where the West is allegedly trying to open a “second front” against Russia, fall under the radar.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- Anti-western narratives were the most popular this week (total of 4 publications, 19,783 views). This is due to less focus on the situation in Georgia (see below).
- 19 publications, or 38% of all posts were about just two big news events: the meeting of Presidents Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, and the meeting of Russian FM Sergei Lavrov with Armenian FM Ararat Mirzoyan.
- The main disinformation actors did not change: 4 out of 7 posts containing disinformation were published by Yerevan.Today Rus, a news outlet affiliated with the pro-Russian opposition (the bloc of former President Robert Kocharyan), extensively covered in previous reports.
- Key sub-narratives of this monitoring period demonstrate focus on the idea of the “second front” against Russia, which has enjoyed substantial presence in the Armenian information environment for some time.

Trend changes

As protests in Georgia subside, the attention given by disinformation actors to the topic is also decreasing. This issue has received extensive coverage and, along with the subnarrative that war is allegedly going to expand beyond Ukraine. Despite declining attention to the Georgian protests, the sub-narrative of potential war expansion has continued to be popular: the most popular publication of the week (8,975 views) falls within this category.

The traditional narrative of pro-Russian actors in Armenia – threats that spoiling relations with Russia will allegedly bring war – was also manifested in a [post](#) by Mika Badalyan, one of the most prolific actors in the local disinformation eco-system. While exploiting the situation in Georgia to push the idea of “second front” and Russia supposedly coming to Georgia, disinformation actors also adhere to promoting the idea that should relations with Moscow be spoiled, Armenia risks losing Russian support in the event of a potential military confrontation with Azerbaijan or Turkey.

Context

The topic of nuclear weapons was notable in disinformation posts (2 posts, 3,505 views). This is due to the news on delivery of depleted uranium shells provided by the UK to Ukraine. Both of the posts on this topic were statements by Russian officials. In one post, Russian PM Dmitri Medvedev [warned of](#) the “nuclear apocalypse”, which, according to Medvedev, is coming closer because of foreign weapons provided to Ukraine. In another post, President Vladimir Putin commented on the news about depleted uranium with the phrase that West has decided “to fight until the last Ukrainian” – a sub-narrative that is often present in the anti-Western narratives spread by pro-Russian actors.

The most popular topic of the week was the meeting between Foreign Ministers Sergei Lavrov and Ararat Mirzoyan (10 posts, 108,801 views), particularly the statement by Lavrov where he suggested that guarantees on the rights of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians should follow the models previously established for Russian-speaking residents of Donbass and Serbs in Kosovo. Although none of these posts contained disinformation relevant to this project per se, it is noteworthy that reaction of Armenian politician Edmon Maruqyan on the inappropriateness of such a comparison was particularly popular (3 posts, 67,872 views). As quoted in “Sputnik.Armenia” later shared by a number of pro-Russian Telegram channels including “Infoteka24” with 36,528 subscribers, according to Maruqyan Nagorno-Karabakh “has always been an autonomy”. Maruqyan rebuffed the comparison between NagornoKarabakh and the Donbas, saying that any attempts to regulate the conflict must “include the whole complex of historical and legal reasons [behind it]” and that this particular conflict predates the disintegration of the USSR, unlike other hotspots mentioned by Lavrov.

Key sub-narrative analysis

Anti-Western narratives were the most popular throughout the period of March 20 – March 25. The sub-narrative *Non-aligned countries are choosing to side with Russia over the West* was manifested in the reports about a Turkish politician Doğu Perinçek [recognizing](#) Crimea and Eastern Ukrainian regions as part of Russia (2 posts, 11,718 views). Perinçek is known for his anti-Western position: he supports Turkey leaving NATO and building closer relationships with countries like Iran and Russia. However, Perinçek is an extremely marginal figure in Turkish politics: his party gained only 0.23% of votes in the last Parliamentary elections. The posts repeating his statements did not provide any such context to the reader.

Other anti-Western sub-narratives were *The West will fight until the last Ukrainian* – a direct quote from Vladimir Putin, and *The West seeks to open a second front against Russia*. The idea of “second front” in South Caucasus was reported in one post by a pro-Russian activist Mika Badalyan who, in turn, [shared](#) this post from Russian pro-Kremlin channel WarGonzo. WarGonzo is run by Semyon Pegov, an individual with alleged ties to Russian intelligence and a leading military correspondent in the Russian segment of Telegram. He is very well known to Armenian audiences as he was actively covering Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020, with a strong pro-Armenian bias. Pegov was [awarded](#) the ‘Order of Courage’ by President Putin in November 2022, after being wounded in Donbas.

One post focused on the sub-narrative of Western society not supporting Ukraine (1,189 views). Spread by the Russian-language version of the media outlet Yerevan.Today, this [post](#) claimed that an American activist interrupted a US briefing in order to protest against the use of force in Ukraine. However, the video in the post did not match the caption: in the video, the activist was protesting American “economic warfare” against Cuba and Venezuela.

Trend prediction

In the upcoming week we are likely to see more posts about threats and dangers coming from Russia towards Armenia. This is due to a harsh reaction from the Kremlin on the possible ratification of the 2002 Rome Statute (the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court) in Armenia. Armenia initiated this process in 2022 to be able to protest the actions of the Azerbaijani political leadership. However, the ratification of this statute could mean that if Vladimir Putin visits Armenia, local authorities will have to arrest him. Russia’s reaction is being extensively covered in media and perceived as threat to national security.

BALTICS (RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE)

Civic Resilience Initiative

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

Publications:
9

Views:
15,918

This narrative was centered on attacking the Baltic region through freedom of speech, claiming that it is non-existent in these countries and that it creates an unsafe political environment for Russians and Russian-speaking minorities

“Ukrainians are Nazis”

Publications:
7

Views:
316,838

The narrative was centered on trying to discredit Ukraine by portraying it as a hostile country, a Nazi - type regime aiming to destroy Russian culture and people.

Economic consequences of
sanctions

Publications:
6

Views
28,802

The stories within the narrative try to prove that Russia can thrive independently of Western economic ties and that the current “anti -Russian” economic policies are creating political instability in the Baltic region, ultimately being against the national interests of its states.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The decline of viewership this week (compared to the monitoring period of March 12 – March 20 2023) shows that significant historical events within the Baltic region play a big part in facilitating the spread of Russian disinformation.
- The “Антифашисты Прибалтики” (Antifascist Baltics) Telegram channel’s most popular post should be considered as a statistical anomaly for the third week in a row, suggesting consistent inauthentic behaviour.
- While the Russophobia narrative continues to be the most popular one, narratives regarding the economic consequences of sanctions have started to become a staple in Russian disinformation efforts. The narrative implies that not only do the sanctions have no effect on Russia’s morale or material progress, but that in fact these anti-Russian policies destabilize the Baltic region even more.

Trend changes

As expected, throughout this monitoring round of March 20 – March 25 2023 there were no significant historical events in the Baltic region for the Kremlin to focus its efforts on. We assess that this is the reason why the salience of each narrative declined this week. The

Russophobia narrative continues to be the most popular one, as it has been since the beginning of the project. Narratives regarding the economic consequences of sanctions continue to be an integral part of disinformation campaigns against the Baltics for the second week in a row. Although they weren't amongst the most popular ones, the Anti-Western narrative still has a relatively important role (4 posts, 13,396 views) in the local information environment. Narratives discrediting Ukraine were on the rise this week compared to the previous stages of monitoring.

Context

Some of the controversy and promotion of the "Russophobia" sub-narratives are centered on the figure of Kirill Fedorov, who gave an interview to the Russian channel Zvezda, which is affiliated with the Russian Ministry of Defense. Fedorov is a blogger who was living in Latvia and was detained on March 17th, 2022, for supporting the Russian military operation in Ukraine. Russia demanded the immediate release of Fedorov, labeling the arrest of the blogger as a gross violation of fundamental human rights. He was released on March 17th, 2023, and fled to Moscow where he actively spreads Russian disinformation narratives which are later recycled in local pro-Russian Telegram channels (see below).

Key sub-narrative analysis

This week the most popular narrative regarded "Conditions of Russians and Russianspeaking minorities" (9 posts, 15,918 views). It mostly revolved around an attempt to discredit the statehood of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, claiming that these countries are under Nazi regimes. This idea was being pushed in showing how freedom of speech is allegedly non-existent in these countries, as one cannot say anything about the war which would not be "in line with the official pro-Ukrainian narrative".

The second most popular narrative regarded the discreditation of Ukraine via accusations of Nazism (7 posts, 316,838 views). For example, there are posts with pictures which show that some (allegedly) Ukrainian soldiers tattooed with Nazi symbols. In other cases the narrative claims that Ukraine is being run by a Nazi-like regime, specifically aiming to destroy Russian culture.

The third most popular narrative regarded the "Economic consequences of sanctions" (6 posts, 28,802 views). The stories within this narrative tried to portray two things – (a) that Russia does not need economic ties with the West in order to succeed and (b) the current international economic situation is supposedly creating political instability within the Baltic region. The first point is promoted with stories about how Russians are encouraged to follow the lead of their politicians in abandoning Western products. For example, the Russian governor of Kaliningrad Anton Alikhanov was quoted as stating that it is no longer useful for Russians to use iPhones and it is better for their national economy to stray away from the Apple brand. That is to say, abandoning Western products is now being considered as an act of civic duty. This politicizing of consumerism allows the Kremlin to add another dimension

to the polarisation of Russia and the West. In other words, Western economic products are being viewed as the antithesis of Russian culture – to own Western products means not only harming Russia’s economic status, but also its political and cultural status as well.

Additionally, there are numerous posts which show that despite international economic sanctions, Russia is still thriving, for example, focussing on newly built roads or buildings in the Kaliningrad region. Russian disinformation tries to create an impression that the citizens are getting frustrated with the current economic crisis, which is a result of the Baltics’ anti-Russian economic policies. While it is not stated outright that Lithuanian, Latvian or Estonian workers are beginning to call for the abandonment of anti-Russian economic policies, their general dissatisfaction is being shown through such a lens. For example, there are posts which mock Lithuania’s and Estonia’s decision to increase their spending on defence, when their internal economic situation is allegedly deteriorating. Looking at both of these points combined, we can see that Russian disinformation tries to show that not only do the sanctions have no effect on Russia’s morale or material progress, but that in fact these anti-Russian policies actually hurt the West.

There was a noteworthy communication campaign from the Telegram group [“Своих не бросаем! | Свободная Балтика!”](#) (“Free Baltics”) to spread Kirill Fedorov’s (see above) interview with the Russian channel Zvezda Live. The communication campaign amounted to 4 posts and 10,157 views. The average post regarding this interview gathered about 3,000 views, while the channel itself has 1,287 subscribers and [an average](#) of 662 views per post. The interview itself gathered 73 thousand views on [YouTube](#) and [was spread](#) on Russian media outlet 1TV. In this interview, Fedorov is talking about how the “Nazi-Ukraine regime” is to blame for this war, how Latvia is supposedly discriminating against Russians and the Russian-speaking minority, how they are being spied on in Latvia. He also discusses his detainment. Zvezda Live is a Russian online media platform, in which journalists talk with pro-Russian colleagues and otherwise spread Russian disinformation. They have 133,000 subscribers on [YouTube](#) and 22,483 subscribers on [Telegram](#).

Similarly to previous weeks, the most popular post came from the Telegram channel [“Антифашисты Прибалтики”](#) (Antifascist Baltics). The popularity of this post should be considered as an anomaly for a third time in a row. The post gathered 298,226 views, while the group itself has 6,983 subscribers and an average post reach of 7,355 views. This time it was a recruitment post for this Telegram group, in order to gather open source intelligence about the war against Ukraine (the post included the word "khokhols", a derogatory term for Ukrainians). Their priority is information about the participation of foreigners in the Northern Military District (in particular, the Baltic states). The popularity of this post, which is specifically targeted at recruiting new group members, makes us suspect that this post (or indeed the whole group) was infiltrated by or pushed by Russian authorities.

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 the most popular one. The narrative regarding

economic sanctions has been amongst the most popular ones for a second week in a row, so we expect the same trend to continue.

Looking at important dates for next week, the 29th of March marks the anniversary of the Baltic states becoming NATO members. Moreover, Lithuania will host a NATO summit in Vilnius on 11th-12th of July, 2023. The meetings will be chaired by the NATO Secretary General. This might set the ground for pro-Kremlin disinformation actors to attack the Baltic region's political competence and to discredit NATO.

BELARUS

Belarus Press Club

“Western leadership is incompetent”

Publications:
4

Views:
397,496

Blogger Dmitriy Puchkov has spoken out that the Polish people do not support the ruling elites' incompetent decisions about Ukraine. President Lukashenko called the British government "crazy" because they are going to supply depleted uranium munitions to Ukraine.

“Ukrainians do not support Zelensky”

Publications:
2

Views:
287,996

Sportsman and blogger of a Ukrainian origin Maxim Shikhaliyev (Tamir Sheikh) said in an interview to STV News Belarus that Zelensky is not supported in Ukraine and that he betrayed the people, which was widely spread by the disinformation actors

“Ukrainians are Nazis”

Publications:
2

Views:
187,787

The channel "belarusian_silovik" claims that the trio of Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania is Nazi, and that they are actively involved in recruiting Russians and Belarusians in Ukraine, Poland or Lithuania for their own intelligence purposes.

Channel "ATN BTRC" announced a new film about the tragedy in Khatyn (a village in Belarus, not to be confused with the Katyn Massacre by NKVD in Poland). The emphasis in the film, among other things, is on portraying the 118th battalion that carried out the operation as a "Ukrainian police battalion" while in reality it was led by Germans and did not consist solely of Ukrainians.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The ontnews channel has announced a [programme](#) featuring an interview with Dmitry Puchkov, a Russian blogger on the EU sanctions list in connection with "Russia's actions to destabilise the situation in Ukraine". Puchkov expressed a number of narratives in the programme, including: "Ukrainians are Nazis"; "There are no independent leaders in Europe, they are monkeys following commands from the US."; "Western people, unlike their political elites, do not want to go to war with Russia."
- During an event to mark the 80th anniversary of the Khatyn tragedy, President Lukashenko called the British elites - "crazy", as they are about to supply depleted uranium munitions to Ukraine. He also noted that the West has brought Russia, Belarus and China together: "You are just uniting us."
- Ukrainian athlete and blogger Maxim Shikhaliyev (Tamir Sheikh) in an [interview](#) with the Belarusian pro-state channel "STV. News of Belarus" said that Zelensky is also considered a nit in Ukraine (Lukashenko called Zelensky a nit in one of his interviews). The speaker said that "Lukashenko is right that Zelensky has betrayed the Ukrainian people and is leading the genocide of the Ukrainian people." Shikhaliyev has been consistently promoting pro-Russian narratives in his social media.
- The channel "belarusian silovik" claims that special services operate in Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania to recruit Belarusian and Russian citizens not only in Russia and Belarus, but also abroad, particularly in Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania. The intelligence services of these three countries are said to be particularly active in their recruitment attempts on social media. The channel calls the countries in question "the new (old) Nazi trio" and the message may be considered an attempt to discourage Russians and Belarusians from leaving their country and going abroad.
- The "ATN BTRC" channel announced a new film dedicated to the event, which has become a symbol of the genocide of the Belarusian people - the tragedy in Khatyn. The film is said to focus on the criminal cases of Ukrainians from the 118th battalion, which is portrayed as a "Ukrainian police battalion". Such portrayal, however, is misleading since the 118th battalion, although mostly comprised of the local recruits in Ukraine, was led by the Nazi German commanders. The unit was formed not just of Ukrainians but included other nationalities present within the USSR. Finally, it was not comprised solely of volunteers but was included prisoners of the Red Army.

Trend changes

This week continues the story related to the fact that the Directorate of the KyivPechersk Lavra Reserve in early March announced the termination of the lease with the

Holy Dormition Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). Belarusian and Russian channels are promoting the narrative that Zelensky is destroying the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

Additionally, there are publications gaining traction with the following narratives:

1. "Belarus must be ready for active defence due to future Western invasion attempts". [Posted](#) by "Dzermant" channel with 6,509 views and additionally [shared](#) by pro-Russian political analyst Shpakouski, the message depicts Belarus as having a strategically important geographical location that makes it a "natural defence" for the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Such a position is said to demand readiness to defend both Belarus and Russia from the West.
2. "Belarusian mercenaries of the armed forces of Ukraine - traitors to the motherland" Belarusians - participating on the side of the armed forces of Ukraine - are labelled as traitors and neo-Nazis. The story in question is that of a former special forces officer who takes part in the hostilities in Ukraine, acting as an instructor. The formation he serves with is called neo-Nazi and the "belarusian_silovik" channel quotes the alleged parents of the officer in question, who say they are ashamed that their son is a "traitor". The publication gained [traction](#) with 148,267 views.

Context

In February 2024 parliamentary elections will be held, including elections to all Councils, and then the election of delegates to the Belarusian People's Assembly (a new legislative body). Security preparations have already begun to ensure tight control over the process. President Lukashenko has started to mention the upcoming elections in interviews.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The situation with the possible supply of depleted uranium ammunition to Ukraine was mentioned by many channels, the topic can be considered the second most important topic related to the war in Ukraine. It is portrayed as Western blackmail and readiness to cross the "red line" to which the pro-Russian Telegram channels respond with vague threats of unprecedented reaction from Russia should those weapons be used against its soldiers in Ukraine. The first topic, however, is the deployment of Russian nuclear weapons on the territory of the Republic of Belarus. This is portrayed as an investment in national security and as a natural step given the close ties between both regimes. Pro-Russian actors actively apply double standards here, portraying the presence of the Russian military on Belarusian territory as a positive step while consistently criticizing other sovereign states, particularly NATO members, for choosing to allow NATO military bases to be stationed on their territory.

Channel "Pul Pervogo" [quotes](#) Alexander Lukashenko about possible deliveries of depleted uranium munitions to Ukraine: "as soon as these munitions explode on the positions of Russian troops, you will see: the answer will be a terrible lesson for the whole planet", promoting the narrative that "The world is at risk of nuclear war/disaster".

The channels "Belarusian Silovik" and "Our Land" [promote](#) the issue of the placement of US biological laboratories around the world. It is pointed out that the allies of the USA on the issue of biological laboratories are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Georgia and Kazakhstan. It is pointed out that the US Department of Defense announced the plans of the Pentagon's Defense Threat Reduction Agency to "conduct repairs at a number of biological laboratories in the post-Soviet space". It is noted that virus incubators are marked along the perimeter of Russia's borders and that 30 American secret biological laboratories were working in Ukraine in the interests of the Pentagon. The channels accuse the United States of inhumane experiments on human cells carried out by the Pentagon and CIA scientists in Ukraine. It is also claimed that a new, more deadly "coronavirus" has been invented by the United States.

The "ONT News" channel [refers to](#) the lesser known British politician David Kurten who said that the prolongation of the conflict in Ukraine "damages our national interests and the interests of ordinary people in Russia, Ukraine and the West", promoting the narrative that "1. Western countries/institutions ignore the will of their people." It should be noted that Mr Kurten is a member of The Heritage political party that does not enjoy any visible public support in the UK as demonstrated by the results of 2021/2022 elections where no member of this political force was elected for any public office, even at the local level. The pro-Russian Telegram channel, however, fails to mention any of the details that would clarify the fringe status of The Heritage and Mr Kurten. Instead, the right-wing, Eurosceptic, mostly anti-vaccination party is frequently quoted by Russian sources akin to RIA as a legitimate force for its comments fitting the key narratives of the Russian disinformation.

The channel "Our Land" [points](#) to the alleged hypocrisy of the West, and to the fact that the West is escalating the situation in Ukraine. Thus, the channel cites the words of the White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre: "The United States considers the truce in Ukraine unacceptable at the moment," saying that the US leadership used to say that they were for peace and for "no war."

The channel also points out that the reason for issuing a warrant for Putin's arrest is purely a desire to make money. The channel refers to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Karim A. A. Khan, who is asking for additional money for the investigation.

Trend prediction

It is expected that in the near future, Kremlin-affiliated disinformation actors will argue that the deployment of Russian nuclear weapons on the territory of the Republic of Belarus is "an adequate and restrained response of the Union State to the aggressive policy of the West". The Union State in question marks a supranational union of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus that dates back to 1997 and is aimed at bringing Russia and

Belarus closer via the integration that is prioritized in economy and defence sectors. Despite the long-standing agreement, integration increased significantly during the last several years, particularly after the 2020 protests in Belarus and growing dependence of Lukashenko regime on the Kremlin.

Bulgaria

Center for the Study of Democracy

<p>“NATO/the US/the West is or will be directly involved in the war”</p>	<p>Publications: 7</p> <hr/> <p>Views: 10,210</p>	<p>The sub -narrative intensified , mainly utilizing the narrative that the US is imposing t he war in Ukraine upon EU member states. Also, some articles argue that the West kidnaps Ukraine's children and sponsors the country with billions of dollars in arms, whilst there are unfortunate mothers helplessly searching for their children.</p>
<p>“The West is using Ukraine as a pawn”</p>	<p>Publications: 4</p> <hr/> <p>Views: 6,183</p>	<p>The pro-Kremlin media outlets mainly focused on the war in Ukraine as a supposed platform for the EU to satisfy its military-industrial complex.</p>
<p>“Ukraine is losing the war”</p>	<p>Publications: 4</p> <hr/> <p>Views: 4,342</p>	<p>The sub -narrative persisted in portraying the Ukrainian authorities as being in despair, because Bakhmut is allegedly falling and “nobody can stop Russia now”.</p>

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- 17 out of the 50 monitored posts and publications utilize the anti-Western narratives and the sub-narrative **NATO/the US/the West is or will be directly involved in the war** has increased in prominence, mainly under the pretext that the US is allegedly dictating a potential Ukrainian counter-offensive, utilizing NATO troops.

- The number of publications utilizing narratives that focus on **Discrediting Ukraine** has grown significantly, a particular reason being Putin's visit to Mariupol, compared by Ukrainians to "[spitting in the face of the Ukrainian people](#)".
- Publications with **Battlefield events** narratives are still popular, mainly due to the ongoing Russian offensives in different regions of Ukraine.

The preparation for parliamentary elections in Bulgaria in the beginning of April 2023 has led to the far-right populist party *Revival* consistently using disinformation narratives arguing that the US is starting to lose its strong position in Bulgaria and that it will be forced to retreat from the country. Thus, for this very reason, the US authorities will supposedly do [everything to destroy Bulgaria](#) as we know it.

Trend changes

- As the elections approach, sub-narratives regarding the pro-Russian stance of president R. Radev are becoming more popular. A Telegram post emphasized Radev's statement that no artillery shells produced in Bulgaria for other countries [should go to Ukraine](#).
- With the developments around the battles for Artyomivsk and Bakhmut, as well as other military actions on Ukrainian soil, the narratives and sub-narratives surrounding the **Battlefield events** are still popular this week.
- The sub-narrative that **Ukrainians are Nazis** intensified in comparison to the monitoring period March 12 – March 20, 2023 – in particular, there was a [video](#) showing an allegedly Ukrainian fighter posing next to a Nazi symbol.

Context

Telegram groups and media outlets in Bulgaria again focused on the dissemination of content on the "peaceful" alternative, that Bulgaria should not send military aid to Ukraine. Such claims are mainly supported by President Radev, [saying](#) that "Bulgaria will support European diplomatic efforts to restore peace but as long as the interim government rules, Bulgaria will not supply Ukraine with fighter jets, anti-aircraft missile systems, tanks and armored personnel carriers". Furthermore, the populist nationalist *Revival* party shared a post on their Telegram channel criticizing US actions, [stating](#) that US foreign policy is currently a major threat to domestic and civil peace in Bulgaria.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The most popular publication of the week was, curiously, in the German language and was published in the group **ЗОВ - заЕДНО ОБЩение всеМИР** [ZOV – United Community for Peace], which is among the usual leaders of disseminating disinformation on Telegram in Bulgaria. The [post](#) reshared a publication from Euronews in German, explaining that after the foreign ministers of the international community agreed on Monday to jointly supply ammunition to Kyiv, Bulgaria has now declared its intention to withdraw from the program - accumulating 15,500 total views. President Radev stated that Bulgaria does not support or participate in the joint procurement of ammunition for Ukraine. While not disinformation per se, Radev's claims lay ground for the pro-Russian actors to claim that Bulgaria should pursue "peace" instead of war and that aiding Ukraine is dangerous. The claims made by Radev, who wields growing influence over national politics, could potentially impact Bulgaria's [geopolitical positioning](#) on the West-East axis.

The Telegram group **ЗОВ - заЕДНО ОБЩение всеМИР** accounts for a huge proportion of the total views from all monitored sources. The group aims to gather "all Bulgarians" (according to its Telegram description) and to promote peace and enlightenment. Although the admins ostensibly strictly forbid any political views and disinformation, the 3,200 members of the group mainly disseminate anti-NATO and pro-Russian messages, often with media attached to them.

Trend prediction

As the elections approach, sub-narratives such as **The West is using Ukraine as a pawn** and **Military aid unnecessarily prolongs the war/endangers civilians** will continue to be deployed more often, especially with President Radev's [statement](#) of 24 March.

With military action unfolding in the eastern part of Ukraine, narratives depicting **Ukraine losing the war** and **Russia having military success** will intensify even further. The popular Kremlin disinformation technique to utilize the opinion of a foreign agent of Russian influence or impersonate a legitimate and trusted figure or entity, in order to create false credibility surrounding a narrative will be used – this week again [Douglas McGregor](#), former adviser to the US defence secretary was quoted in numerous posts similarly to the period of March 12 – March 20.

GEORGIA

Grass Factcheck

“Western military aid is ineffective/will not influence the outcome of the war”

Publications:
3

Views:
2,408

The issue of providing artillery shells to Ukraine (which requires them due to the high ammunition expenditures) has been utilised to promote the idea that Ukraine is doomed to lose the war and resistance to Russia is futile.

“Ukrainian government is fighting against Christian church”

Publications:
3

Views:
1,688

Due to the ongoing issue regarding Kyiv Pechersk Lavra in Ukraine and its transfer from the Russia-linked Church to the independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church, disinformation was actively targeting Zelensky and his government as fighters against Christianity.

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

Publications:
3

Views:
1,363

The ruling Georgian Dream party and government leaders (alongside with their affiliated disseminators of disinformation) keep pedalling the narrative that CSOs, the media, the political opposition, the West, etc., seek to open a “second front” in Georgia and drag Georgia into a war with Russia.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- As supply and resources are getting scarce in the war, and especially in the context of the looming Ukrainian counteroffensive, pro-Russian sources started to highlight and exaggerate the issue. By cherry-picking the comments and articles from the Western outlets, pro-Russian sources tried to persuade the audience that the Western military aid to Ukraine is not enough and Ukraine will not be able to win.
- In March 2023 a decision was made by the Ukrainian government for the ownership of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, one of the biggest Orthodox Christian churches in Ukraine, to be transferred to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) the autocephaly of which was granted in 2018. Unlike the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) that has long-standing ties with Russian Orthodox Church and has been on numerous occasions accused of perpetrating Russian hybrid influence in the country, the OCU is independent from Russian influence. The OCU has been vilified as “heretical” by the Russian church, officials and disinformation sources. The decision for UOC MP to vacate the church has been widely exploited by the Russian and pro-Russian disinformation not just in Ukraine, but also in Georgia, a country where

Russian affiliated church officials have substantial influence. The crisis around Kyiv Pechersk Lavra has been used by the pro-Russian sources in Georgia to picture the Ukrainian government as “anti-Christian”.

With Russia trying to position itself as a defender of Christian faith in Georgia, where vast majority of the population is Christian and religion is a sensitive issue, this message is particularly dangerous. In particular, pro-Russian sources tried to depict Zelensky and Ukraine’s government as fighters against Christianity in order to diminish popular support towards Ukraine in Georgia. Additionally, the highly influential Georgian Orthodox Church has petitioned the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (World Patriarch) with a letter of support for UOC MP regarding the crisis around the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra. This action has further fuelled the religionrelevant anti-Ukrainian disinformation in Georgia.

- The ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party has put even more effort into the promotion of the “second front” narrative, according to which the West, by using its “proxies” such as CSOs and activists, plans to open a second frontline against Russia in Georgia. This messaging is likely in an attempt to divert attention from GD’s failure to pass the controversial “foreign agents bill”, after which the ruling party continued labelling CSOs, media, and political opposition as agents of foreign influence in Georgia who allegedly seek to destabilise the country.

Trend changes

Throughout the period of March 12 – March 20 2023, the most popular sub-narrative in terms of number of publications has been the message that Ukraine is losing the war. However, while remaining popular, throughout the period of March 20 – March 25 this narrative no longer topped the ranking, as even more attention was paid to messages that claimed that Western military aid is not enough for Ukraine and its supply supposedly will not change the outcome of the war. Both of these sub-narratives eventually argue that Ukraine will lose the war and Russia will be victorious. The slight change in messaging is a result of pro-Russian sources picking up on the discussion of the issue of lack of artillery shells for Ukraine - their high usage rate and low production rate.

The above mentioned “second front” conspiracy that states Georgia is at risk of being pulled into the war by local pro-Western actors (CSOs, media and the opposition) at the instructions of the West remained among the top three of the most popular sub-narratives similarly to the previous monitoring period. As mentioned before, this particular message has been spread more aggressively throughout March 20 to March 25 due to the efforts of the ruling Georgian Dream party.

Previously, the sub-narrative that the West is using Ukraine as a pawn has been the key message to discredit both the West and Ukraine and this time it has changed with a subnarrative that the Ukrainian government is fighting against the Christian church. This is

due to the Ukrainian government ordering the Ukrainian Orthodox Church subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate to leave the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra. As Russia has for long tried to label itself as a defender of Christianity and persuade the Georgian population that Russia should be Georgia's ally due to this shared religion, this direction of disinformation is unsurprising. It also aims to justify Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine by creating the illusion of Russia defending Christianity in Ukraine.

Context

The discussion in the Western media regarding the issue of supplying Ukraine with enough artillery shells is behind a minor change in battlefield-related disinformation claiming that Western support is not sufficient and it will not save Ukraine.

Much of the disinformation in the Georgian information space is currently driven by GD that persists in attempts to discredit the opposition, independent media and CSOs even after the controversial "foreign agents" bill was withdrawn. Still painted as a threat to the Georgian society and accused of doing the bidding of the aggressive West, the Georgian opposition is blamed for attempts to drag the country into war with Russia.

The driver behind the popularity of the sub-narrative that Ukraine "is fighting against Christianity" is the decision of the Ukrainian government to order UOC MP to leave the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra. The Georgian population is considered to be highly religious and the Georgian Orthodox Church wields significant influence; as a result, religious matters are a very sensitive topics for Georgians.

One of the important actors in the Georgian disinformation eco-system is a "People's Power" movement. "People's Power" is represented in the parliament by 9 MPs that form parliamentary majority along with the "Georgian Dream". "People's Power" positions itself as a group that "speaks the truth" unlike other political forces – the "truth" is mostly antiWestern disinformation and attacks on Georgia's European and US partners. However, despite this seeming distance from other parties, "People's Power" is exceptionally close to the Georgian Dream. In fact, all of the "People's Power" MPs originate from the parliamentary list of Georgian Dream. This particular group has been the author and main lobbyist of the controversial "foreign agents bill" that sparked protests in Georgia.

Despite formal separation, Georgian Dream and "People's Power" are represented together in the parliamentary majority and they do not hide their unity. GD leaders have actively supported their narratives and have claimed that the only difference between them is the form of communication of the sensitive information.

Key sub-narrative analysis

There were several noteworthy particular disinformation pieces:

- Chairman of the ruling Georgian Dream party and the leader of the parliamentary majority, Mr. Irakli Kobakhidze, [claimed](#) that NGOs in coordination with political

opposition and media, all of which according to him are agents of foreign influence, have tried on several occasions to overthrow the government with the overarching goal to open a second front in Georgia against Russia.

- A political scientist, Tamar Chiburdanidze, from the Georgian Dream (GD)-affiliated civil/political movement that calls itself "People's Power" [claimed](#) that events are unfolding at a fast pace in the world and the political centre may soon shift from Europe to the Eastern countries, and Georgia might be at the focal point of the new center of power in the world. She claimed that the West is frightened by this prospect and therefore seeks to open a second front in Georgia – not just to undermine Russia's influence, but also to ensure that Georgia will not be among the strengthening SouthEastern countries whose "rise to power" is allegedly a key concern for the Western governments.
- Pro-Russian newspaper GeWorld [hailed](#) the visit of Xi Jinping to Russia and the Sino-Russian alliance, suggesting that it is an indication of the shift of political power from the West to the East. According to the article, the West is weak but does not want to accept reality and is going to fight until the last Ukrainian.
- Pro-Russian Telegram channel "World Politics" [spread](#) a fake quote claiming that "White house spokesman John Kirby" said that "since Ukraine is a free, independent, and completely sovereign nation, the US will not allow President Zelenskyy to accept any peace plans proposed by the Chinese delegation in Moscow this week".

Trend prediction

It is unclear whether the sub-narrative that Western military aid is ineffective/will not influence the outcome of the war will continue to be popular or even present because it was picked up by pro-Russian sources due to the discussion in the Western media. However, it is likely that the other sub-narratives related to the aid to Ukraine and battlefield events will take its place.

The "second front conspiracy" is likely to stay active as it has been observed since the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine. However, whether it will rise or decrease in popularity depends on Georgian Dream – the main disseminator of the message. GD has been quite reliant on the narrative to discredit its critics, but events unfold in Georgia rapidly and the internal information space might be consumed by other topics (for instance, the most talked about topic in Georgia nowadays is the discussion regarding the alleged cases of sexual abuse committed by the most notorious pro-government propagandist).

The narrative that the Ukrainian government is fighting against Christianity is likely to remain and even increase in popularity if the issues linked to Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and the alleged "oppression" of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate remain unresolved and the situation gets more tense. Russian sources have for years been parroting that Georgia should ally with Russia as the two countries follow the same religion and therefore, they will not miss the chance to advocate for it and at the same time, try to diminish popular support towards Ukraine and justify Russia's brutal war. However, the Georgian

public is very supportive towards Ukraine and heavily critical of Russia and its war and therefore, if this sub-narrative does not get popular, which has a certain likelihood, it might be dropped or more relevant sub-narratives linked to the most recent developments might get prioritised.

HUNGARY

Political Capital

“Military aid unnecessarily prolongs the war/endangers civilians”

Publications:
6

Views:
174,189

Per this narrative, Russia allegedly wants peace, and Western warmongers prolong the suffering and conflict by continuously sending weapons to Ukraine. The Hungarian government and far-right sources spread this message, as it is a core element of the government’s rhetoric on the war in Ukraine.

“Ukrainians are targeting civilians and committing other war crimes”

Publications:
4

Views:
147,804

Pro-government and far-right sources reported with a bias about the UNHCR’s report on war crimes in Ukraine, misrepresenting the contents of the report and whitewashing Russian crimes.

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

Publications:
4

Views:
122,070

Recurring narrative about NATO supposedly provoking the conflict in Ukraine and causing WWII by inviting Sweden and Finland. It was spread by far-right sources.

Contextualising most popular narratives

- Anti-Western narratives, especially military aid-related ones, were the most popular this week following international events. These tried to discredit international efforts to aid Ukraine both from a pro-government and a far-right perspective.

- NATO-related narratives were also popular, as the NATO accession of Finland is to be ratified by both Turkey and Hungary in the following weeks. This sparked accusations by far-right politicians that it would escalate tensions with Russia, causing WWIII.
- Narratives discrediting Ukraine were also popular, following a UN report describing potential war crimes by Russian and Ukrainian forces after the invasion. These narratives try to paint Ukraine as a similarly cruel actor as Russia by cherry-picking details from the report to support their anti-Ukrainian messages.

Trend changes

Negative messages about Western military aid and Ukraine continued to dominate the media space. Although the exact sub-narratives were different from the period of March 12 – March 20, the underlying narratives remained the same. This week's popular subnarratives reacted to the news related to the UN report about war crimes in Ukraine and events about NATO. Additionally, Western support, especially the news that Western tanks were arriving in Ukraine, was frequently attacked as provocations and warmongering efforts.

Context

Anti-Ukrainian narratives about the alleged war crimes and the forced mobilisation of minorities (with a focus on Hungarians in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine) are trying to convince the average reader of a moral equivalence between Russia and Ukraine. These messages resonate well with the audience, as anti-Ukrainian sentiments are strong amongst pro-government and far-right voters after years of a negative campaign portraying the Government of Ukraine as being abusive towards the national minorities in the country.

Messages targeting NATO are generally only popular among far-right voters, as NATO membership is viewed positively in Hungary. Thus, messages regarding Sweden's and Finland's NATO accession are only popular in a small sub-section of society. This might change in the future after NATO hold talks with Ukraine despite the Hungarian government's previous opposition to this, which might turn the attention of pro-government sources towards anti-NATO messages.

Key sub-narrative analysis

Military aid unnecessarily prolongs the war/endangers civilians. This narrative is based on the notion that Russia allegedly wants peace, and Western warmongers prolong the suffering and conflict by continuously sending weapons to Ukraine. In reality, as Russia could end the war at any time by withdrawing its troops, it's a patently false claim that Russia and pro-Russian actors want peace. The sources spreading this Russian disinformation narrative this week cited the Hungarian prime minister, the Hungarian defence minister, the Hungarian minister of the prime minister's office, and the press secretary of the Russian president. One of the most important sites spreading this narrative was the government-organised media outlet

PestiSrácok. This outlet is part of the governmental disinformation machine (which has lost multiple lawsuits for false accusations starting from 2013) that is currently owned by pro-government businessman Miklós Vaszily.

Ukrainians are targeting civilians and committing other war crimes. One of the main stories using this narrative concerns a UN report about the abuse against prisoners of war on both sides, including executions, which constitute war crimes and absolutely need to be condemned. However, the articles analysed this week omitted crucial context, which no doubt led the reader to draw false conclusions that are favourable to Russia. In the actual report, it is revealed that Russian camps for Ukrainian POWs couldn't be visited by the monitoring missions, while Ukrainians could, leading to a significant discrepancy in available reports and, therefore, a discrepancy in confirmed cases of abuse. The report further condemns Russia's mass deportation of children and names Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine as the underlying cause of the entire situation. The articles analysed this week did not mention any of these, only claiming that Ukraine abuses POWs at least as much as, if not more than, Russia, drawing a false equivalence. This sub-narrative was used by both far-right sources (Kuruc.info, Zsolt Bede, Szent Korona Rádió) and government-organised media (PestiSrácok).

The West/NATO provoked the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. This is the classic narrative which claims that US foreign policy provoked Russia so much that they had to invade Ukraine, making the US responsible for the Russian invasion. The most striking example of using this sub-narrative was by Előd Novák, vice president of the far-right party Mi Hazánk and a member of parliament, who used it to argue against Finland and Sweden joining NATO. He said that Ukraine being neutral meant its territorial integrity and sovereignty were protected, but the West trying to force Ukraine to join its sphere led to Russia having to invade it; similarly, if neutral Sweden and Finland join NATO, Russia might invade them, causing World War 3. This is the opposite of what happened: Ukraine was neutral, which allowed Russia to invade it. Now, Ukraine seeks membership in the Transatlantic community to defend itself more effectively (and the Ukrainian people overwhelmingly support this). As a reaction to the invasion of Ukraine, the governments and societies of Finland and Sweden decided to join NATO to be adequately protected.

Trend prediction

We expect a similar distribution of disinformation narratives as presented in this report. The next round of monitoring will likely feature more NATO-related narratives, as the Hungarian National Assembly ratified Finland's NATO accession on 27 March 2023, but the ratification of Sweden's accession is further delayed. Far-right politicians are opposing this, so their anti-NATO and anti-West messages are likely to be spread by far-right outlets.

MOLDOVA

Watchdog

“Ukraine deliberately stages provocations”

Publications:
4

Views:
117,675

The main story that fuelled this narrative was a Ukrainian official's claim that Moldova has a plan to reintegrate Transnistria in 7 years. Telegram channels suggested that this was Ukraine advocating for non-peaceful resolution of the Transnistrian conflict.

“Sanctions hurt the West more than Russia”

Publications:
3

Views:
13,758

Images from protests in München against high inflation have been circulated as proof that ordinary citizens from the West are suffering more because of the anti-Russian sanctions. This is a regular occurrence whenever such protests happen anywhere in the West.

“Europe is threatened by an energy crisis”

Publications:
3

Views:
8,217

The sub-narrative drew on a Romanian article about a potential increase in fuel prices, but also reiterated the idea that Moldova's energy crisis has been caused by the government's pro-Western, pro-Ukrainian stance.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The most popular overarching narrative category was the one discrediting Ukraine. Besides the alleged provocations, Ukrainian refugees were also targeted as either a danger to the host country or being ungrateful and spoiled.
- The tried and tested format remains the same: most of the direct, aggressive disinformation happens via Telegram channels, while more traditional media outlets simply provide unbalanced news, which are then used as fodder to Telegram commentaries.
- The domestic debates about the price and source of gas provide a good opportunity to keep the energy crisis narrative afloat, even as the heating season nears its end and the topic's relevance "naturally" diminishes to a certain extent.

Trend changes

[The comment](#) of Secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council, Alexei Danilov, about Moldova's alleged 7-year plan to solve the Transnistrian conflict has been interpreted as proof that Ukraine is pressuring Moldova to "unfreeze" the conflict.

Publications on this topic fuel two sub-narratives: that Ukraine wants to escalate the conflict (the goal) and that it stages provocations (the means).

Publications from Romania have been increasingly used to fuel disinformation narratives in Moldova. This refers both to real news items presented tendentiously, such as the potential [fuel price hike](#) because oil companies export more to Ukraine, and to anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian [statements](#) of far-right Romanian politicians. This kind of disinformation is particularly dangerous because it can reach audiences that might be traditionally pro-Romanian instead of pro-Russian.

Context

The context did not change in any significant way. Apart from the online media and channels, disinformation narratives continue to be actively spread by politicians, especially by the Shor Party, which is the main organizer behind the anti-governmental protests in recent months. It is no coincidence that its deputy leader and MP Marina Tauber launched a new story that reinforces precisely the most popular sub-narratives of the week. She said that Romanian soldiers are being supplied with Moldovan uniforms and that the government in Chisinau ordered 3,000 coffins in anticipation of an armed conflict. The synchronization between the statements of such politicians and the sub-narratives circulated online by the monitored media is hardly a coincidence and may be a sign of a coordinated campaign based mostly on fear-mongering and threats that the war will spill over to Moldova.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The narrative about Ukraine pushing for escalation or staging provocations, especially in the light of how the remarks of Alexei Danilov were used, has another dimension: it presents the Moldovan authorities as incompetent or weak, unable to take independent decisions or to resist pressures from Kyiv or Washington. This is better illustrated in [the criticism](#) of the Moldovan authorities' contradictions regarding the trenches dug by Ukraine near Transnistria. Some officials said the trenches were for defensive purposes, others said they were meant to stop smuggling and illegal immigration. Pro-Russian Telegram users preyed upon this indecisiveness and favoured the position of the separatist authorities from Transnistria, who accused Ukraine of preparing an attack.

The story of the Moldovan citizen sentenced in Transnistria for throwing a Molotov cocktail at a military commissariat also [fits](#) within this narrative. The case has been presented in a very partisan manner, reflecting only the position of the separatist authorities that the man acted upon the orders of the Moldovan secret services. If we put this in the context of the wider narrative, the implication is that Moldova does not act of its own will, but is being forced by Ukraine and/or the West to do such things – a typical Russian narrative portraying the West, and specifically the US, as a puppeteer, controlling the country in question.

One of the Telegram channels more specialized in spreading slightly more elaborate narratives is [Genii Karpat](#). It is most likely administered by a person from Moldova who writes analyses about Romania for Russian services, hence the name "Genius of the Carpathians" and the handle "romania_ru". While the channel had built up some credibility in its early years, it is now very openly partisan and interprets or comments on news from Moldova and Romania from a clear [a pro-Russian perspective](#), portraying Russia as a mostly democratic country and undermining Moldova's European integration.

Trend prediction

Considering all the effort put into the topic of Transnistria and the alleged Ukrainian plans for escalation and provocations, these sub-narratives will most likely remain very present in the public sphere. The expected spring offensives in Ukraine and the probable intensification of fighting and bloodshed could increase the Moldovan audiences' sensitivity to military risks and the potential of bloodshed in Moldova.

The regional electoral campaign in Gagauzia will generate a proliferation of Russian disinformation sub-narratives, but this might remain a regional rather than national trend. In Gagauzia, the majority of regional politicians are pro-Russian and the region in general being a heavily Russified one, so, in some respects, repeating Russian disinformation might be just a box to tick rather than a means to gain a competitive advantage. Nevertheless, soundbites and short videos from electoral meetings with pro-Russian and anti-Western messages will likely be widely distributed by the monitored Telegram channels and online outlets as proof of popular support for these ideas.

POLAND

Fakenews.pl

“X country is escalating the war”

Publications:

4

Views:

11,579

New narrative: The British government has announced it will provide Ukraine with armor-piercing rounds containing depleted uranium. Russian disinformation actively criticizes this decision pointing at negative environmental effects of such munitions and threatens the West with escalation of the conflict. The agenda about “nuclear” shells is being spread to justify the prospective response – tactical nuclear “countermeasures”.

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

Publications:

3

Views:

54,498

Old narrative stating that Poland may be pulled into war by the government. Narrative triggered by the words of Polish ambassador in France, Jan Rościszewski, who said that “If Ukraine loses, Poland will have to go into war”. He meant that after Ukraine falls, Baltic states and Poland will be in direct danger. Russian disinformation is using this out-of-context sentence to prove that Poland is planning to start a war. Especially active actor in spreading the narrative: pro-Russian so-called “Polish Anti-War Movement”.

“The war in Ukraine is a part of global conspiracy”

Publications:

3

Views:

53,107

Old narrative: the war in Ukraine is pictured as a part of transnational banking conspiracy and the main source of income for the West profiting from war-related industry. Current banking crisis enforces the narrative even more.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- New, hot topic is the UK’s prospective donation of depleted uranium munitions to Ukraine. The British MoD confirmed it would provide Ukraine with armor-piercing rounds containing depleted uranium. President Putin falsely claimed the material had a “nuclear component”. Russian disinformation started to spread this false narrative and threaten the audience with Russia’s nuclear countermeasures. This narrative may potentially succeed due to the general public’s lack of understanding of the difference between various types of uranium-based weapons.

Worth noting that conspiracy theories remain a very popular and successful way of spreading false narratives since the beginning of the monitoring period.

As in the previous rounds of monitoring, the upcoming fall elections remain an important factor influencing current narratives. Of particular note here is the activity of the far-right and

pro-Russian Confederation party, which spreads the vast majority of harmful narratives as evidenced by the previous reports that showcased party's consistent involvement in promoting disinformation and conspiracy theories.

Trend changes

The definite rise in popularity of the sub-narrative "X country is escalating the war" is evident. It is related to the new story - aforementioned transfer of depleted uranium munitions to Ukraine by the UK. Since the beginning of the monitoring project, this is a topic that, although not directly related to Poland, has been exceptionally publicized on the Polishlanguage Internet by several different Russia-linked channels.

Also, the same sub-narrative "X country is under threat/will be pulled into war" backed by the out-of-context words of Polish ambassador Jan Rościszewski is still actively present on monitored channels.

Context

A factor particularly conducive to the development of the aforementioned subnarratives is the progressive impoverishment of Polish society as a consequence of the recession caused by the war in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic. The drastic rise of inflation rates as well as the increase in the price of energy, fuel and food products has caused the first significant decline in consumption in a long time.

The public is not assured of a stable economic future and is particularly susceptible to any narrative pointing to a waste of budget funds or spreading fear of another crisis - a possible war on Polish territory. Such narratives resonate more each week.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The sub-narrative "X country is under threat/will be pulled into war" is heavily fuelled by the activity of the Polish Anti-War Movement (below referred to as "the Movement"). It spreads the slogan "This is not our war" and directly uses Russian disinformation narratives to discourage Poles from supporting Ukraine and to demonize Ukrainian refugees. Active for less than two months, the Movement has attracted considerable media attention. Its activists are also leading the "Stop Americanization of Poland" project. In its official policy, the Movement explains that Poland cannot take part in a war started by the US. According to the Movement, the trigger for war was supposed to be the alleged expansion of NATO to the east, and the US financing of the "coup" - Euromaidan of 2014. Such rhetoric comes directly from Russian sources.

Examples:

1. The most popular narrative of the week is about Polish government allegedly being sponsored by the US to fuel the war in Ukraine, endangering the lives of Polish citizens, based on the [interview](#) with Sebastian Pitoń, one of the leaders of the Movement.
2. A good example a narrative based on the aforementioned words of the Polish ambassador in France, Jan Rościszewski is the following: according to the [source](#), NATO is already out of troops and its time for Poland to prepare and send at least 300,000 conscripts to die on the frontline. Source is linked to the Movement.
3. Another example of the narrative is yet one more [source](#) linked to the Movement, the Telegram channel Olej w Głowie. Here the exact same narrative about Poland risking being pulled into war is spread based on the statement of Jan Rościszewski .

The main actors in the Movement are Dr Leszek Sykulski (a political scientist specializing in geopolitics, founder of pro-Russian Polish Geopolitical Society and a well-known pro-Russian propagandist) and Sebastian Pitoń (founder of so-called "Highlander's veto", popular conspiracy theorist and antivax activist, currently spreading pro-Russian narratives). Both are also involved in the initiative "Stop Americanization of Poland".

Trend prediction

With parliamentary elections approaching, we classify the Movement as a rapidly developing and particularly active threat to Poland's information security that requires additional attention. At the moment, the Movement has built an audience of around 50,000 followers on Facebook (profiles of Góralskie Veto, Polski Ruch Antywojenny, Leszek Sykulski, Sebastian Pitoń) and is being widely promoted on other far-right and conspiracy channels. It is highly probable that the Movement will keep on growing, influencing even more people.

In the coming weeks, narratives aimed at naming the US and its allies as the culprits behind the escalation of the conflict will invariably be popular. Pro-Russian rhetoric based on fears of war and a possible deepening of the crisis will intensify to terrorize voters and induce them to vote for anti-Ukrainian parties in the upcoming parliamentary elections. In addition, there is no doubt anti-refugee narratives will also be present, as they have consistently proved useful in deepening social divisions.

Slovakia

Infosecurity

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

Publications:
4

Views:
47,598

The most popular sub-narrative claimed that more countries will soon be a part of the ongoing war in Ukraine. The posts were about Poland, Slovakia and NATO joining the war in the future.

“West/the US/NATO is aggressive”

Publications:
3

Views:
49,532

Slovak disinformation actors have long been spreading the narrative about an aggressive West, the USA or NATO. This week it was the second most popular sub-narrative. It is based on accusations of waging wars or wanting/planning to wage wars. The three posts were based on three different stories and spread by two different actors.

“The politicians of X country are supporting the war”

Publications:
2

Views:
7,626

Two posts spread the narrative about certain politicians supporting the war in Ukraine. One of the posts was about Slovakia, the other one was about the West in general fuelling the war.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- 4 posts this week spread the sub-narrative about X country planning to join the war in Ukraine (Poland, Slovakia). From the category of narratives about the war expanding beyond Ukraine’s borders, Slovak disinformation actors mostly talk about the risk of World War 3 erupting, therefore we find it quite unusual that it now focused on a specific country.
- Many of this week’s posts, despite being spread by pro-Russian actors, did not constitute disinformation per se. There are two reasons: firstly, many of the actors simply shared Russia’s reaction to the Slovak government’s decision to send Mig-29 jets to Ukraine. Russia called it a hostile act and claimed that Slovakia violated its international obligations about re-export of weapons produced by Russia. However, this agreement signed between Slovakia and Russia is not public, therefore we are not able to check if this is true. The second reason is that a newly published poll brought results which suited the disinformation actor’s narratives. The poll showed that many Slovaks blame the West for the war and do not support military aid to Ukraine. The poll was also shared by mainstream media and was financed by the EU. The messages in question then do not manipulate the facts, but by focusing on these specific facts

they contribute to the pre-existing conviction that supporting Ukraine is against Slovakia's interests.

- Another topic which resonated was the meeting of Putin and Xi Jinping. Numerous actors therefore shared the sub-narratives about a weak West vs. a strong Russia and China, and a decadent West, that is allegedly undermining global security.

Trend changes

Although the sub-narratives about military aid to Ukraine (in reaction to Slovakia's decision to send Mig-29 fighter jets to Ukraine) are much less prevalent, they are still present, mostly in the rhetoric of some of the opposition politicians who use this topic in their preelection campaigns. The sub-narratives were spread by two posts this week, one of them shared by Ľuboš Blaha and the other one by Eduard Chmelár. Both of them are pro-Russian opposition politicians who are known for heavily spreading disinformation and hate against the president Čaputová and the government members.

Context

Many of this week's narratives are attacking the West, which falls within the framework of traditional disinformation messages in Slovakia. Some of the opposition politicians use these sub-narratives to boost their campaigns and gain more supporters. They accompany their disinformation about the West with accusations of the government of being pro-Western, pro-war, puppets of the West or working in the interest of the West/the USA instead of Slovakia (therefore being traitors). This rhetoric aims to lower the popularity of the government parties ahead of the upcoming election in September 2023.

Key sub-narrative analysis

This week's most popular sub-narrative was about "X country being under threat/ being pulled into the war". This was in connection to different countries. The first post was about a Polish clairvoyant Krzysztof Jackowski who says Poland will join the war in Ukraine. The post was published by Hlavný denník, a disinformation outlet spreading pro-Russian messages on a regular basis. The outlet also has connections to Národná koalícia (National coalition), a small opposition party.

The other one was about the Polish ambassador in France causing chaos by saying that if Ukraine fails to defend its independence, NATO will have to enter the conflict in Ukraine. The post then claims that NATO will only use Russia's actions to justify its entering the war. This story was shared by two different posts (one on Facebook, one on Telegram) by a disinformation outlet InfoVojna (InfoWar) known for spreading pro-Russian disinformation and giving space to narratives spread by Slovak far-right politicians. InfoVojna is also one of

the outlets blocked by National Security Office in Slovakia after the start of the war because of spreading dangerous disinformation.

The last post spreading this sub-narrative was about Slovakia. A quite new disinformation actor Tomáš Špaček, who is an assistant of a member of the far-right party Republika (Republic), said that the media are preparing us for the war and that the escalation will lead to Slovakia sending its soldiers to Ukraine.

The most popular publication this week was once again published by Hlavné správy. The article was about Putin's meeting with Xi Jinping and it claimed that the West is decadent and that China and Russia are stronger and will establish a new world order. Hlavné Správy is one of the most popular disinformation outlets in Slovakia spreading 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 disinformation and Hlavné Správy was one of them (similarly as before mentioned Hlavný denník). 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 topic of Slovakia sending Mig-29 fighter jets to Ukraine will very probably be replaced by different topics. However, the narratives about military aid to Ukraine overall can be still present because it is a popular topic of Slovak disinformation actors.

The category of anti-Western narratives will most probably remain the most prevalent one because it has long been the most popular target of Slovak disinformation actors and it is more so after the beginning of the war.

Ukraine

Detector Media

“The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent”

Publications:
9

Views:
3,003,645

The main message of the posts is the incompetence of Volodymyr Zelensky. The emphasis is on the fact that he allegedly does not want peace, but fully controls the information and military spheres, and the Russians continue to successfully attack. Thus, according to the actors spreading disinformation, Zelensky is focused solely on winning at all costs and his own interests (the upcoming elections). Pro-Russian actors emphasize corruption in the Ukrainian government.

“Russian troops are advancing / achieving success”

Publications:
6

Views:
6,140,601

The main message of the relevant posts is that the Russians continue to attack all fronts. The pro-Russian sources admit that the Russian army has suffered “some tactical defeats”. Still, they are portrayed as insignificant and not affecting the overall advance of Russian troops and the inevitable victory of the Russians. The main focus is on military operations in the Donetsk region (Bakhmut, Avdiivka).

“Ukrainians are targeting civilians and commit other war crimes”

Publications:
5

Views:
3,089,698

The main message of the posts is that the Ukrainian army is allegedly attacking civilians and infrastructure in the occupied territories (Donetsk region, Crimea) and Russia, thus committing war crimes. The main focus is on drone attacks in Crimea.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- A [post](#) claiming that the Ukrainian army is launching a questionable counteroffensive in the direction of Bakhmut.
- Posts in which it was said that the number of people who support Russia are allegedly increasing in Ukraine received a lot of coverage. For example, such a [post](#) gained 128,246 hits. That is, in this way, the authors of the messages want to show that Ukrainians in non-occupied territories support Ukraine less and less and support Russia more and more. However, no evidence is provided.
- Many posts this week were targeting Volodymyr Zelensky. Compared to the monitoring period of March 12 – March 20, there were more of them. All of them included the sub-narrative that the Ukrainian leadership is incompetent.

In Ukraine, the rules for journalists working in the war zone have changed. It is because of this that different disinformation messages can arise - for example, about restricting freedom of speech.

Trend changes

This week's top narrative has changed. Previously, the most popular sub-narrative was that Ukraine is losing the war. In terms of popularity throughout the period of March 20 – March 25 it was replaced by the claims of the incompetence of the Ukrainian authorities. Messages about the situation at the front in Bakhmut and Avdiivka and disinformation related to the battlefield events continues to be spread consistently. This is due to the fact that fierce battles are really going on in these areas, and the armies on both sides are suffering heavy losses. Yet the pro-Russian messages are designed to aggravate the situation and create the appearance that the situation is desperate for Ukraine. Such messages have been observed through all four weeks of monitoring, but both cities still remain under the control of Ukraine.

Context

This week, most of the posts were about the alleged incompetence of the Ukrainian government regarding the events on the frontlines. This is probably related to the difficult situation that has arisen in Bakhmut and Avdiivka. Popular sub-narratives may arise due to a lack of information about the situation from official sources. That is, there are problems in the Ukrainian army, but disinformation hyperbolizes them. Moreover, certain communication gaps caused by operational security concerns provoke pro-Russian forces to create various manipulative messages to fill those gaps. They are designed to destabilize the situation in Ukrainian society and undermine trust in the current government and its decisions. Such information could also have been provoked by news about restrictions for journalists traveling to the combat zone.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The most popular post overall doesn't belong to the abovementioned categories and is listed under the group of narratives targeting aid to Ukraine. It is a [post](#) in the Telegram channel "Resident," which, according to the Ukrainian Security Service, is controlled by Russian intelligence. The post has reached an audience of 2,013,344. The post claims that Taiwan has provided Ukraine with one thousand drones, alleging that this country is involved in escalating the war – and risking the dissatisfaction of China, which might get involved on the Russian side.

The most popular category of narratives was “NARRATIVES DISCREDITING UKRAINE” with relevant rhetoric appearing in as many as 20 posts. This category of narratives included two of the most popular sub-narratives: “The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent”, and “Ukrainians are targeting civilians and committing other war crimes”.

The primary focus that emerged is the reluctance of Volodymyr Zelensky to stop the war and his obsession exclusively with victory in the war, no matter the price. Although, according to propagandists, Russia is succeeding at the frontline, bringing its inevitable victory closer, and the corruption in the Ukrainian government and military inhibits Zelensky from comprehending the actual situation. Discrediting Ukraine is also realized through accusations of committing war crimes against civilians in the occupied territories and Russia, including artillery shelling and drone attacks.

The most popular sub-narrative this week was the narrative that the Ukrainian government is corrupt and incompetent, with a primary focus on President Volodymyr Zelensky and an aim to discredit him. For example, a [post](#) on Anatoliy Shariy's channel suggested that Zelensky spoke on the phone with Xi Jinping and portrayed him as incompetent and naive. This sub-narrative was also supported by a [post](#) on the Telegram channel "Woman with a scythe" which claimed that Zelensky was incompetent for sending all reserves to the Bakhmut direction while Avdiivka was in turmoil. However, it is impossible to verify this information as military information about the number and location of troops is classified. Another [post](#) on the Telegram channel of Tetiana Montyan questioned the legitimacy of mobilization in Ukraine, trying to discredit the Ukrainian government.

All of these messages are being spread through Telegram channels that regularly broadcast messages that are in line with official Russian sources. Some of these channels are controlled by the Russian intelligence.

Trend prediction

In the near future, messages about the anniversary of the tragedy in Bucha may appear in the information space. Additionally, in light of the analysis prepared by Ukrainian journalists on the course of mobilization in Ukraine, disinformation messages may also arise. Moreover, it is likely that messages about Ukraine losing the war will appear again. They will likely relate not only to the situation in Bakhmut but also in Avdiivka. Interestingly, earlier messages about Avdiivka, despite the poor situation there, almost did not appear in the information field. They appeared only in the last two weeks. Since May 9 is only a month away, Russia may again launch an information attack, just like last year, which began about a month before May 9. There may also be threats of an escalation of the war against the backdrop of Victory Day.

It is possible that such messages will be disseminated in Telegram channels controlled by Russian intelligence. Additionally, messages may appear in the Telegram channel of pro-Russian blogger Anatoliy Shariy, who claims to be Ukrainian but constantly denigrates the Ukrainian nation and Ukraine itself.

List of Narrative and Sub-Narrative Headings:

1. ANTI-WESTERN NARRATIVES

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

2. NARRATIVES DISCREDITING UKRAINE

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

3. BATTLEFIELD EVENTS

- 3a. Ukraine is losing the war
- 3b. Russia is not fighting at full capacity
- 3c. Russian troops are advancing / achieving success
- 3d. Reports of Russian war crimes are exaggerated/fake news
- 3e. Russia is not to blame for the global food crisis
- 3f. Recognizing Russia as a terrorist state will not help Ukraine
- 3g. Belarus is not participating in the war in Ukraine
- 3h. Mobilization in Russia has been successful
- 3i. Ukraine "referendums" are legitimate
- 3j. Russia's losses in the war are small
- 3k. Russia is only targeting military infrastructure

4. UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

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

5. ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF SANCTIONS

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

6. CONDITIONS OF RUSSIANS AND RUSSIAN-SPEAKING MINORITIES

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

7. THREAT OF WAR EXPANDING BEYOND UKRAINE

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

8. AID TO UKRAINE

- 8a. Western military/financial aid is being misused/stolen
- 8b. Ukraine will use Western weapons to kill Russians/attack Russian territory
- 8c. Military aid unnecessarily prolongs the war/endangers civilians
- 8d. Aid to Ukraine is weakening/endangering the countries that provide it

8e. Western military aid is ineffective/will not influence the outcome of the war 8f.
Ukraine is taking aid away from other countries in need

9. CONSPIRACY THEORIES

- 9a. There are Western biological weapons labs in Ukraine
- 9b. The war in Ukraine is part of a global conspiracy
- 9c. The war in Ukraine is staged/a hoax
- 9d. Western governments are using the war in Ukraine to limit the freedoms of their citizens
- 9e. Western leaders/institutions are Satanist
- 9f. Zelensky is a drug addict
- 9g. Ukrainians engage in organ trafficking
- 9h. Russia has a new secret weapon
- 9i. Ukraine will be divided up among other countries

Methodology

The Ukraine War Disinformation Working Group is partnered with LetsData for data collection and methodological development. LetsData is an AI solution anticipating communication risks and opportunities in the face of ill-intended information campaigns. As a trusted technological partner within the UWGD, LetsData provides sophisticated data collection, processing, and analysis capabilities for further in-depth exploration.

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

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

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

channels, with 5 Telegram channels being the channels of pro-Russian media that duplicate the website content. For countries analysing media outlets, Telegram channels and Facebook pages, 5 media outlets, 15 Telegram channels and Facebook pages will be analysed.

Data sampling

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

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

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

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

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

List of sources per country

Source	Country
@VardanGukasyan	Armenia
@bagramyan26	Armenia
@reartsakh	Armenia
@ArmenianVendetta	Armenia
@military_arm	Armenia
@mikayelbad	Armenia

@xaytarak_official	Armenia
@sisumasis	Armenia
@infoteka24	Armenia
@togarma301	Armenia
@Artsakh_Daily	Armenia
@armmirotvorec	Armenia
@RadarARM	Armenia
@infocomm	Armenia
@civilnetv	Armenia
@newsamarm	Armenia
@rusyerevantoday	Armenia
@togarma301	Armenia
@armeniasputnik	Armenia
@LurerH1	Armenia

@pppaskov	Bulgaria
@The_Smart_Village	Bulgaria
@druschbaFM_Bulgaria	Bulgaria
@InfodefBULGARIA	Bulgaria
@bulgariaz	Bulgaria
@svobodik	Bulgaria
@otizvora	Bulgaria
@istinabg1	Bulgaria

@vazrazhdanebg	Bulgaria
@simeonoffkss	Bulgaria
@todorangelov	Bulgaria
@dianadeleva	Bulgaria
@ocelqvane	Bulgaria
@ronyrony	Bulgaria
@ivaivatta	Bulgaria
@pogled	Bulgaria
@NewsFrontBulgaria	Bulgaria
@trudnews	Bulgaria
@snabgorg	Bulgaria
@informiran	Bulgaria
https://kuruc.info/	Hungary
https://www.origo.hu/	Hungary
https://pestisracok.hu/	Hungary
@magyarjelen	Hungary
https://hirado.hu/	Hungary
@kurucinfo	Hungary
@toroczkai	Hungary
@szentkoronaradio_official	Hungary
@nzona3	Hungary

@bodiabel	Hungary
@bedezsolt	Hungary
https://www.facebook.com/orozshirek.hu/	Hungary
https://www.facebook.com/pestisracok.hu/	Hungary

https://www.facebook.com/szamokadatok/	Hungary
https://www.facebook.com/kkemenymag1	Hungary
https://www.facebook.com/bayerzs	Hungary
https://www.facebook.com/elemi.hu/	Hungary
https://www.facebook.com/magyarnemzet.hu/	Hungary
https://www.facebook.com/stefideri	Hungary
https://www.facebook.com/bohardanielriporter	Hungary
https://aif.md/	Moldova
@Noi.md Новости Молдовы	Moldova
@Accent_TV	Moldova
https://unimedia.info/	Moldova
@KP.MD: "КП" в Молдове	Moldova
@tirdea	Moldova
@Ungureanu112	Moldova
@Republic_Of_GaGauZia	Moldova
@moldavskii_piston	Moldova
@indexMD	Moldova
@gabrielcalin	Moldova
@romania_ru	Moldova

@dragosgalbur	Moldova
@MoldovaPolitics	Moldova
@turnulmaya	Moldova
@ivanovnamd	Moldova
https://www.facebook.com/groups/1874167932813420	Moldova
https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100086182868245	Moldova
https://www.facebook.com/latebuimistru	Moldova
https://www.facebook.com/ionchicu.md	Moldova
http://3droga.pl/	Poland
@narodowcy	Poland
http://pch24.pl/	Poland
http://ruchnarodowy.net/	Poland
http://wolnemedi.net/	Poland
@project_veritas	Poland

@anna_news	Poland
@WiadomosciCzasowOstatecznych	Poland
@siostryjasnowidzki	Poland
@polska_grupa_informacyjna	Poland
@ndp_pl	Poland
@infokju	Poland
@monikacichocka	Poland
@legaartiswsparcie	Poland

@OSTATNISPRAWIEDLIWI	Poland
@nwk24pl	Poland
@Olej_W_Glowie	Poland
@ruchoporupolska	Poland
@wolna_polska	Poland
@kanalstraznikow	Poland
https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/	Slovakia
https://bajecnezeny.sk/	Slovakia
https://www.hlavnydennik.sk/	Slovakia
https://spisiakoviny.eu/	Slovakia
http://www.ereport.sk/	Slovakia
@casusbellilive	Slovakia
@DKdenneSpravy	Slovakia
@zemavek	Slovakia
@InfoVojnaOfficial	Slovakia
@kulturblog	Slovakia
@ZvodkaOnline	Slovakia
@vimanadark	Slovakia
https://www.facebook.com/ChmelarEduard	Slovakia
https://www.facebook.com/heredos/	Slovakia
https://www.facebook.com/Spacek.republika	Slovakia
https://www.facebook.com/draxlerjuraj	Slovakia
https://www.facebook.com/Zdroji	Slovakia

https://www.facebook.com/hricalubos1	Slovakia
https://www.facebook.com/Infovojna	Slovakia
@LubosBlahaSmer	Slovakia

@montyan2	Ukraine
@rezident_ua	Ukraine
@legitimniy	Ukraine
@readovkanews	Ukraine
@ASupersharij	Ukraine
@ZE_kartel	Ukraine
@mriya24	Ukraine
@spletnicca	Ukraine
@ukraina_ru	Ukraine
@stranaua	Ukraine
@dark_k	Ukraine
@skosoi	Ukraine
@sheptoon	Ukraine
@JokerDPR	Ukraine
@EQUILIBRIUM2019	Ukraine
@OpenUkraine	Ukraine
@mediakiller	Ukraine
@OlgaSharij	Ukraine
@Novoeizdanie	Ukraine

@Vestnik_Konservatora	Ukraine
@yuryvoskresensky	Belarus
@pul_1	Belarus
@sewerfsefsd	Belarus
@belarusian_silovik	Belarus
@sputnikby	Belarus
@mlynby	Belarus
@ontnews	Belarus
@ATN_BTRC	Belarus
@Nashazemla	Belarus
@shpakouski	Belarus
@Azarenok_TV	Belarus
@dzermant	Belarus
@vashy_slivy	Belarus

@glav_tur	Belarus
@berezina_bel	Belarus
@ZhivetZheBelarus	Belarus
@lgbelarussegodnya	Belarus
@minskctvby	Belarus
@BISRby	Belarus
@zmeymarini4	Belarus
http://geworld.ge/ge/	Georgia
@SputnikGeorgia	Georgia

https://ge.news-front.info/	Georgia
http://www.obieqtivi.info/	Georgia
https://sezonitv.ge/	Georgia
@worldpolitkal	Georgia
@beqanews	Georgia
@crossroadwar	Georgia
@realoba	Georgia
@power_of_light_Q	Georgia
@PolitNewsN1	Georgia
https://www.facebook.com/groups/2534318576632286	Georgia
https://www.facebook.com/qartuliideaa/	Georgia
https://www.facebook.com/PatriotuliGverdi/	Georgia
https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100083209576803	Georgia
https://www.facebook.com/groups/399500355414390	Georgia
https://www.facebook.com/groups/534652040223283/	Georgia
@SputnikAbkhazia	Georgia
@sputnikossetia	Georgia
@rubaltic	Baltics
http://respublika.lt	Baltics
http://grani.lv	Baltics
http://dv.ee	Baltics
http://obzor.lt	Baltics
@balt4post	Baltics
@antifalivland	Baltics
@news_lv	Baltics

@estlatlitv	Baltics
@baltictea	Baltics
@volna lt	Baltics
@topbalt	Baltics
@baltologija	Baltics
@zhemchuzhina_new	Baltics
@zkbalt	Baltics
@volna lv	Baltics
@baltiknews	Baltics
@free_baltic	Baltics
@latvijasbalzams	Baltics
@russkaya_litva	Baltics