MONITORING REPORT

March 13 – March 19, 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.

<u>Country-By-Country Overview:</u>

- Armenia
- Baltics (Russian Language)
- Belarus
- Bulgaria
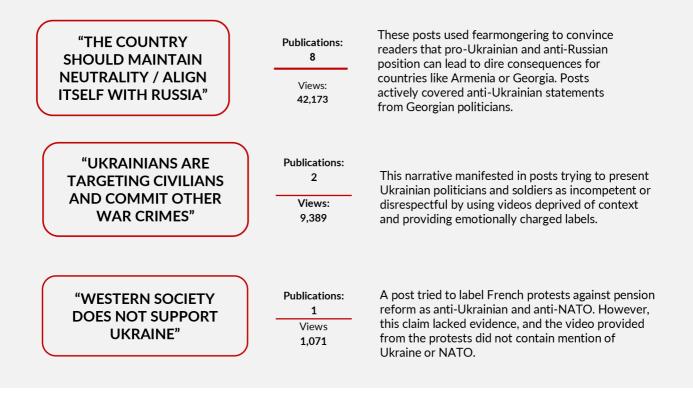- Georgia

- Hungary
- Moldova
- Poland
- Slovakia
- Ukraine

Working Definition of Disinformation:

1. False or misleading information spread deliberately via Hostile State (HS)-backed or HSaligned 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

ARMENIA
Media Initiatives Center

"THE COUNTRY SHOULD MAINTAIN NEUTRALITY / ALIGN ITSELF WITH RUSSIA"	**Publications:** 8 ―――― Views: 42,173	These posts used fearmongering to convince readers that pro-Ukrainian and anti-Russian position can lead to dire consequences for countries like Armenia or Georgia. Posts actively covered anti-Ukrainian statements from Georgian politicians.
"UKRAINIANS ARE TARGETING CIVILIANS AND COMMIT OTHER WAR CRIMES"	**Publications:** 2 ―――― **Views:** 9,389	This narrative manifested in posts trying to present Ukrainian politicians and soldiers as incompetent or disrespectful by using videos deprived of context and providing emotionally charged labels.
"WESTERN SOCIETY DOES NOT SUPPORT UKRAINE"	**Publications:** 1 ―――― Views 1,071	A post tried to label French protests against pension reform as anti-Ukrainian and anti-NATO. However, this claim lacked evidence, and the video provided from the protests did not contain mention of Ukraine or NATO.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- As during the monitoring period of March 6 – March 12, 2023, the dominant narratives containing disinformation focused on fearmongering and threateing the audience with the possibility of the war expanding beyond Ukraine. Disinformation actors utilized the events in Georgia (see below) to convince the Armenian readership that credible sources in neighbouring states are afraid of Ukraine bringing war upon their country.
- Some posts implied that Ukraine is involved in orchestrating protests in Georgia.
- Similar to the previous results, pro-democracy or pro-West Armenians were portrayed as "traitors" ready to sacrifice the interests of their own country for the West.

Trend changes

"Threat of war expanding beyond Ukraine" remained the dominant narrative, but there were significantly less anti-Western publications compared to the previous round of monitoring. Interestingly, Western media figures voicing Russian disinformation did not appear in this week's publications, despite the fact that there were several such posts throughout March 6

– March 12. The absence of many anti-Western publications is unlikely to be a long-term trend.

The dominant topic in disinformation posts were Georgian protests (5 publications; 25,639 views; see more below) that retained the focus since the previous round of monitoring.

In recent weeks, videos emerged with Ukrainian soldiers allegedly dishonouring the Quran (Ukrainian officials denied this). One such video (with a soldier cutting salo on a Quran; 5,725 views) also appeared in the Armenian information space via the Telegram channel „Togarma". Interestingly, the channel focused on criticising Russian disinformation for inefficiency and not using this video enough to discredit Ukraine. Overall, there were two publications discrediting Ukraine (9,389 views combined), the same figure as in the previous week. Discrediting Ukraine seems to be a stable trend in the Armenian disinformation ecosystem.

Context

As mentioned, protests in Georgia were the dominant topic. In all cases these were retellings or citations from statements by Georgian politicians, in some cases coupled with commentary. Particularly popular was the idea that Ukraine is trying to turn Georgia into "second front" against Russia. Interestingly, the core issue of the protests – the foreign agent bill proposed by the Georgian government – was barely discussed. Thus, the posts highlighted only a "clash" between Georgia and Ukraine without any meaningful explanation of the cause of the internal unrest in Georgia. Furthermore, the Georgian opposition was labelled as being "sent from Ukraine" (1 publication, 10,852 views, most popular post of the week). Commentary from the Ukrainian leadership was presented only in one post (608 views). The proximity and similarity of Georgia to Armenia, as well as traumatic fear of war among the Armenian public (caused by conflict with Azerbaijan) arguably make such disinformation tactic effective.

One of the most popular publications (made by ArmenianVendetta channel, 10,507 views; reposted by Mika Badalyan, 5,835 views) focused on Armenian participants of an event with Georgian and Ukrainian civil society; the Armenian participants were labelled as "hating Artsakh" (Artsakh is the Armenian name of Nagorno-Karabakh). It is important to note that in Armenian anti-Western discourse in general, pro-democracy/pro-West actors are regularly blamed in being unpatriotic and giving away/betraying Nagorno-Karabakh (which remains the number one topic in mainstream media) or the memory of the Armenian Genocide. Such claims were evident in all three rounds of monitoring since February 20, 2023.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The 3 most popular publications of the week (31,637 views in total) were arguing that there is a danger of war spreading beyond Ukraine and implying that countries better keep neutrality or take pro-Russian position. 2 of these posts focused on protests in Georgia (see above).

As in previous weeks, Telegram channels ArmenianVendetta and Mika Badalyan (see more on him in the previous reports), as well as news outlet Yerevan.Today, were key actors spreading disinformation. All of these channels are either affiliated to or actively express sympathy for pro-Russian opposition (former President Robert Kocharyan's bloc).

The most active actor was blogger Mika Badalyan; 4 disinformation posts were published either him or by "Azatagrum" channel which also belongs to Badalyan. Badalyan describes himself as the "Leader of national movement Azatagrum [Armenian for 'liberation']". Badalyan maintains an active role in the Armenian disinformation eco-system. Badalyan was also the one actively citing Russian sources (3 publications, 21,738 views). In one of his posts the Russian state-controlled Sputnik Armenia was cited as source; two other were reposts from a pro-Kremlin channel and a typical Z-channel which supports Russian invasion and often spreads disinformation.

Trend prediction

As in the previous two rounds, the "Threat of war expanding beyond Ukraine" narrative will be notable. This is due to the fact that Russian disinformation traditionally used fearmongering to address the public in Armenia (usually it focused on portraying Russia as the only hope Armenia has in face of Azerbaijani/Turkish aggression, therefore, Armenia allegedly has no choice but to be pro-Russian no matter how Russia behaves). Pro-Russian disinformation in the country will most probably continue utilizing this tactic.

Since February 20, 2023, it has also been evident that pro-Russian disinformation on Telegram was spread by the same actors (see above). This trend shows political division in Armenia, where the government responds neutrally to anti-Russian sentiments, while the biggest Parliamentary opposition bloc, led by former President Robert Kocharyan, focuses on pro-Russian discourse, often utilizing the tactics and materials of Russian disinformation.

BALTICS (RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE)
Civic Resilience Initiative

CONDITIONS OF RUSSIANS AND RUSSIAN-SPEAKING MINORITIES	**Publications:** 11 <hr> **Views:** 408,280	The narrative was centred on portraying Latvian Legion Day as a pro-Nazi celebration and as a threat to the Russian-speaking minority. The less prevalent story was framing Lithuania's policy of banning the transportation of fertilizers from Belarus as a Russophobic one.
"NATO/THE WEST IS OR WILL BE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE WAR"	**Publications:** 5 <hr> **Views:** 101,069	The narrative signified a continuation of attempts to justify Russia's war against Ukraine with the claims that the Western countries are directly involved in it against Russia and will further threaten it. NATO's reinforcements are being portrayed as an existential threat to Russia
ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF SANCTIONS	**Publications:** 5 <hr> Views 35,690	The narrative was centred on proving how Russia is unaffected by sanctions, showing how there are still hundreds of Russian and Belarussian companies working in Lithuania

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- This week the "Conditions of Russians and Russian-speaking minorities" narrative's popularity sharply rose. The narrative gathered around 10 times more interactions compared to previous weeks.
- The most popular post of the Telegram channel "Антифашисты Прибалтики" (Antifascist Baltics) should be considered as a statiscal anomaly for the second week in a row, suggesting inauthentic behavior.
- The main attack focusing on Latvian Legion Day shows that Russian disinformation actors systemically target significant historical events and try to delegitimize Lithuania's, Latvia's or Estonia's sovereignty or political status.

Trend changes

Discrediting Latvian Legion Day took up most of the disinformation space in the Baltic region throughout the period of March 12 – March 20, 2023. This led to a decline in other usually popular narratives such as "Threat of war expanding beyond Ukraine" or "Sanctions being ineffective / hurting the West more than Russia". Despite this, the trend shows that Russian disinformation in the Baltic region still mainly focuses on pushing the Russophobia narrative. Narratives discrediting the West remain popular as well.

Context

Latvian Legion Day is celebrated on the 15th of March. It commemorates the World War 2 Latvian Legion and falls on the date when this legion fought the only Latvian-led battle of World War 2 (against the Russian Red Army which sought to occupy Latvia). To the Kremlin, the fact that Latvians eagerly fought against Red Army allegedly lengthened the Nazi German occupation instead of restarting Soviet one undermines the national myth that the "Soviet Union liberated Latvia". Therefore, the Russian media (sometimes repeated by Western media) to this day regularly portrays the event as a pro-Nazi one.

Key sub-narrative analysis

This week the most popular narrative concerned the "Conditions of Russians and Russian-speaking minorities" (11 posts, 408,280 views). It was the most dominant narrative by far – this story took up half of the identified posts/articles with disinformation. Moreover, this week the narrative gathered around 10 times more interactions compared to previous rounds of monitoring (February 20 – March 6, 2023 – 61,097 views; March 6 – March 12, 2023 – 28,330 views). As predicted, the most popular story within the narrative revolved around Latvian Legion Day. Most of the posts within the narrative still portrayed this event as a celebration of Nazism and as a direct threat to the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia. Even though the event itself was celebrated peacefully (there weren't any big provocations or riots), it did not stop pro-Russian sources to portray the celebration as a pro-Nazi gathering.

Same as last week, the most popular post came from the Telegram channel "Антифашисты Прибалтики" (Antifascist Baltics). As before, the popularity of this post should be considered an anomaly. If we look at this Telegram channel's statistics, we can see that they have 6,878 subscribers, an average reach per post of 7,355 and a low-medium citation index score of 81.0. Despite all of that, their most popular post this week gathered 313,042 views. This post was about how on March 16th at 4 PM a protest will be held at the Latvian embassy in Moscow "against the annual honoring of the Nazi criminals of the Latvian Legion of the Vafen SS in Riga and Latvia's support for the Nazi Kiev regime." (once again referring to Latvian Legion Day). We can clearly see that this week the "Антифашисты Прибалтики" (Antifascist Baltics) channel heavily targeted the celebration of Latvian Legion Day aimed at discrediting Latvia's history and tried to portray Latvia as a Nazi supporting regime.

This group is ran by anonymous admin who claims that they are "antifa" and that their goal is to "fight Nazism, Russophobia and racism". They tend to share content from other disinformation channels (such as Baltnews or Поздняков 3.01 [Posdnyakov 3.01]) or Aleksey Stefanov, a Latvian correspondent in the Baltic states for Kremlin-owned Rossiya Segodnya, who also featured in the previous report with his ties to another popular disinformation Telegram group in the Baltics – "Шпроты в изгнании | Новости Латвии" [Sprats in exhile|Latvia's News]. However, if we look at this channel's history we can see that it was created on the 5th of November, 2022. Throughout the 4 month period since its creation, they managed to make 2,452 posts (803 per month). That is a lot of content being produced – too much for a small group of individuals to keep up. The statistical anomaly of inflated views and the amount of posts might imply inauthentic behavior or help from outside forces.

However, there were other stories, which were spread within this narrative. For example, Russophobic Latvians were blamed for not wanting to participate against Russians or Belarussians in Tennis. Lithuania was being accused of it's Russophobic policy of banning the transportation of fertilizers from Belarus. Estonia was accused of falsely imprisoning Andrey Andronov, a citizen of the Russian Federation.
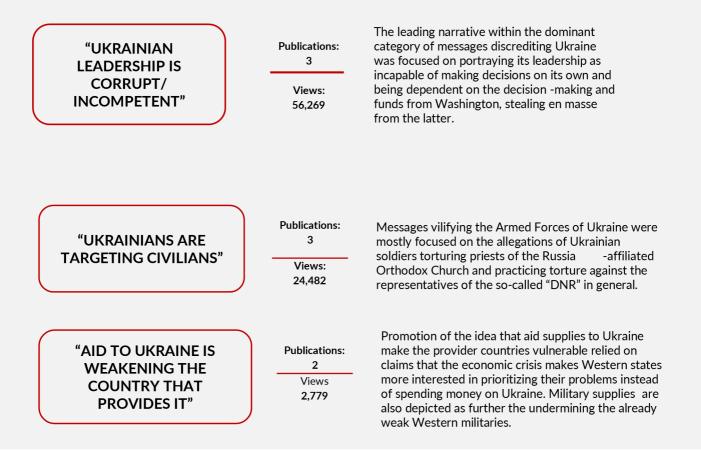
The second most popular narrative fell within the category of "Anti-Western narratives" (5 posts, 101,069 views). Most of the stories within the narrative revolved around how NATO / the West already is (or will be) directly involved in the war. The deployment of NATO reinforcements to the Baltics is being called a provocation to Russia. Americans are being accused of shooting down Russian planes. France is "allegedly" transferring military vehicles to Latvia "preparing for an attack". None of these produced stories have credible sources, which could be fact-checked. We believe they are a product of the administrators of the anonymous Telegram channels.

The third most popular narrative regarded the "Economic consequences of sanctions" (5 posts, 35,690 views). This narrative revolves around portraying the negative consequences of sanctions against Russia and their inevitable ineffectiveness against Russians. It is shown how the EU's sanctions on Russia (so called artificial obstacles and delays) prevent the shipment of Russian chemicals from transit points within the EU to the poor countries in the world that need them. Lithuania's policy of banning the transportation of fertilizers from Belarus is also framed as if the EU is hindering the economic development of countries in the Global South. This strategy tries to portray Russia as the innocent one which is just trying to help other countries, but is being stopped in its good intentions by the West. Furthermore, it is being stated that even despite the EU sanctions on Russia, the country is still striving economically (i.e. rebuilding their rural areas). Ultimately they are trying to prove, that not only do the EU sanctions hinder the progress of other countries, but that they do not even help in limiting the power and prosperity of Russia.

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.

Taking into consideration the important dates for the next week, there aren't any specific politically or culturally important events or celebrations that will happen. This means that we might expect more diversity in the narratives – the communication shouldn't be solely focused on one event. However, the 29th of March marks the anniversary of the Baltic states becoming NATO members. This means that we could see some "preperations" for discrediting NATO.

"UKRAINIAN LEADERSHIP IS CORRUPT/ INCOMPETENT"

Publications: 3

Views: 56,269

The leading narrative within the dominant category of messages discrediting Ukraine was focused on portraying its leadership as incapable of making decisions on its own and being dependent on the decision -making and funds from Washington, stealing en masse from the latter.

"UKRAINIANS ARE TARGETING CIVILIANS"

Publications: 3

Views: 24,482

Messages vilifying the Armed Forces of Ukraine were mostly focused on the allegations of Ukrainian soldiers torturing priests of the Russia -affiliated Orthodox Church and practicing torture against the representatives of the so-called "DNR" in general.

"AID TO UKRAINE IS WEAKENING THE COUNTRY THAT PROVIDES IT"

Publications: 2

Views 2,779

Promotion of the idea that aid supplies to Ukraine make the provider countries vulnerable relied on claims that the economic crisis makes Western states more interested in prioritizing their problems instead of spending money on Ukraine. Military supplies are also depicted as further the undermining the already weak Western militaries.

Contextualising most popular narratives

Throughout the monitoring period of March 12 – March 20, 2023 the most effort on behalf of the disinformation actors was focused on the rhetoric discrediting Ukraine. Allegations of torture against the people of the Donbas region play into the broader claims that Ukraine organized genocide in its eastern regions, which was one of the leading narratives produced by the Russian actors to justify the invasion. Although diminishing in numbers, the narrative is still present in the Russian information space and, given the tendency of Belarusian state sources to recycle Russian messaging, is also present there.

Trend changes

Three sub-narratives that had not been present in the information space since February 20, 2023 have been noticed this week:

1) **Zelensky is destroying the Orthodox Church**. The "Our Country" channel promotes the narrative that Zelensky is allegedly destroying the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.
2) **The Ukrainian government is illegitimate**. Alexander Spakovsky, the author of Belarusian Russian-language channel "Shpakovsky" focused on political news. Commenting on the news from one of the largest pro-government media outlets, "SB. Today", stressed that when a coup took place in Ukraine, several officers of the Ukrainian Special Police Detachment arrived and started working in Belarus.
3) **Foreign mercenaries of the Ukrainian army were looting in Ukraine**. The "Yellow Plums" channel promotes the narrative that foreign mercenaries of the Ukrainian army are looting in Ukraine, stealing crosses and icons from churches.

   Notably, two out of three sub-narratives rely on the claims about alleged violence against church and its representatives in Ukraine. It overlaps with the most popular sub-narrative of the week, where Ukrainian soldiers were accused of torturing not just representatives of the so-called "DNR", but priests as well.

   Growing attention to the religious issues might be explained by the upcoming Orthodox Easter, one of the most important holidays in the religious calendar, revealing the strategic thinking of disinformation actors.

Context

Noticeably, throughout the monitoring period of March 12 – March 20, 2023 the pro-Russian disinformation eco-system in Belarus heavily relied on utilizing foreign speakers. In particular:

Seymour Hersh. International observer Gleb Lavrov, in the "Anti-fake" section of "ONT TV", referring to the investigations of the American Seymour Hersh, accused the United States and Norway of undermining the gas pipeline. He also believes that the West has found a "scapegoat" in Ukraine.

John Dugan. In an interview with "Kontury", former American naval journalist John Dugan, who has sought political asylum in Russia, believes that Washington is manipulating Europe and that the main beneficiary in Ukraine is the United States. "Money is being stolen from the sale of weapons provided to Ukraine, both by the US oligarchs and in Ukraine".

Eva Högl. The "ONT NEWS" channel, citing the Financial Times, quotes the German Commissioner for the Armed Forces, Eva Högl, who said in a report that the slow pace of defence procurement in the country was hampering the necessary modernisation, and that the conflict in Ukraine and Germany's decision to supply arms to Ukraine had "aggravated already serious problems with the equipment of the armed forces".

Disinformation actors either cherry pick the specific claims made by the Western sources or utilize individuals who have a long track of cooperating with or endorsing Russia (John Dugan). In all of these occasions, the presence of Western sources is used to hyperbolize the issue discussed and present it as a universal truth, accepted even in the "hostile West"; foreign sources are used to provide more credibility to disinformation spread.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The narrative "The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent" was promoted by the Telegram channel "ONT NEWS". It announced a programme on the ONT TV channel, where the guest of the release of the programme "Markov. Nothing personal" is the former Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (11 June 2019 - 29 October 2020), and now President Lukashenko's assistant - inspector for the Grodno region, Lieutenant General Yuri Karaev, who said that Zelensky is Petrushka [a hand puppet], he is not independent in making decisions, but is controlled from the outside and is a clown on the stage.

In addition to the above-mentioned claims that Ukrainian authorities are corrupt and that Ukraine targets civilians, other messages from the category of discrediting Ukraine are important. In particular, the allegations of Ukraine mistreating its soldiers/civilians. The "BEREZINA" channel published a video of hazing in the Ukrainian army during the punishment of a conscript.

The Telegram channel "ZhS Premium" trolled Ukraine with the fact that Ukrainians had violated the Moldovan border more than 6,000 times in 2022, allegedly fleeing conscription ("Ukrainians refuse to fight / have low morale").

The channel "STV. News of Belarus" published a link to a report about the volunteers of Donbass, who since 2014 had not agreed with the allegedly "anti-state" and "Nazi" coup. Telegram and YouTube channels "ATN BTRC" claimed that the Ukrainian military was beating and mocking the clergy. Besides, "ATN BTRC" channel published a report on the "ATN: News of Belarus and the World" YouTube channel, which, based on an interview with a soldier of the Donetsk People's Republic who had been released from captivity, promoted the narrative that torture and ill-treatment were taking place in Ukrainian prison camps, as well as the harassment of clergy ("Ukrainians are targeting civilians and committing other war crimes").

The "ZhS Premium" channel claimed that Goebbels' propaganda was operating in Ukraine and promoted the idea that the Ukrainian media were lying.

The author of the "Dzermant" channel believes that the "return to Russia has become a bright event for the youth of Zaporozhye and Kherson regions and has opened up new opportunities", stressing that life under Russian occupation is better than under Ukrainian rule.

Additionally, anti-Western rhetoric has also maintained its significance. It includes the contribution of the "ZhS Premium" channel, which published the news that Poland had allegedly caught fake Belarusian spies. The channel claims that there is now a witch-hunt in Poland to divert public attention to an imaginary enemy against the background of economic problems and a drop in the ruling party's rating (Western countries/institutions ignore the will of their people).

In addition, the "Belarus Lives!" channel, citing polls by The Economist magazine and YouGov (an Internet market research and data analysis company) reported that support for Ukraine among the population of EU countries was declining. The channel published the

opinion that the leaders of the countries "do not give a damn what ordinary citizens think". As an example, the head of EU diplomacy, Josep Borrell, believes that it is necessary to focus on increasing financial and military support for Ukraine (Western politicians care about Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens).

The third group of narratives to discuss in more detail includes two older messages. "Belarusian Silovik" manipulates an article in The Guardian, which says that the UN commission does not believe that there was a genocide of Ukrainians. From this, the channel concludes that the alleged harassment and rape committed by Russian forces, for example in Bucha, are propaganda fakes. At the same time, the UN's Independent International Commission of Inquiry into Violations in Ukraine has stated that the Russian authorities have committed a wide range of violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in various regions of Ukraine, many of which amount to war crimes. It notes that war crimes include attacks on civilians and energy infrastructure, deliberate killings, unlawful detention, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and the unlawful transfer and deportation of children (3d. Reports of Russian war crimes are exaggerated/fake news).

The "YELLOW PLUMS" channel artistically manipulates and promotes the narrative that Belarus and the former USSR republics will defeat NATO. The channel published a video of the Belarusian kickboxer Andrei Kulebin going to fight in Italy to the song "Victory Day". The commentary to the video reads: "Victory Day in a NATO country". The fighter has won.
[The manipulation is that nowhere it is written that Andrey Kulebin won in Italy on 2 May 2015. Probably at that time such an exit and meeting of the audience was more appropriate] (3c. Russian troops are advancing / achieving success).

Trend prediction

Given the steady presence of narratives discrediting Ukraine in the Belarusian information environment, it is likely that they will maintain their presence in the next round of monitoring. Considering the sudden surge of the disinformation messages exploiting religious topics, there is a possibility that they will still be present in the disinformation space next week due to the upcoming holiday of Easter.

As allegations of Ukraine mistreating its soldiers retain their presence – and so do the claims that Ukraine is going to lose the war, contrasted with the supposed might of the Russian military – they are likely to be noticed further.

- 27 out of the 50 monitored posts and publications utilize the anti-Western narrative, which points to the conclusion that the sub-narrative stating that the **Western politicians care about Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens** has highly intensified, mainly under the pretext that the EU is giving way more money for military aid to Ukraine.
- Number of publications utilizing the narrative **discrediting Ukraine** has dropped significantly. However, a number of publications with **Battlefield events** narratives has increased, mainly due to the ongoing hostilities and the stand-off at Bakhmut.

Bulgaria
Center for the Study of Democracy

"WESTERN POLITICIANS CARE ABOUT UKRAINE AT THE EXPENSE OF THEIR OWN CITIZENS"	Publications: 9 ——— Views: 10,542	The sub -narrative intensified in comparison to the monitoring period of March 6 – March 12, mainly utilizing the narrative that the US is ignoring its citizens' needs in order to give military aid to Ukraine. Also, some articles emphasize on the claim that the future government will involve Bulgaria directly into the war, without the citizens' opinion.
"UKRAINE IS LOSING THE WAR"	Publications: 6 ——— Views: 10,334	The sub -narrative was also popular during the previous round of monitoring mainly focusing on the alleged success of the Russian army in Bakhmut and Wugledar (Vuhledar) as well as the Artyomivsk region. Furthermore, the sub -narrative centred on a retired US military veteran who claims that the West has underestimated Russia's power and that no military aid will help change the balance.
"THE WEST IS HYPOCRITICAL TO CRITICIZE RUSSIA'S	Publications: 4 ——— Views 12,223	The sub-narrative intensified , mainly focusing on Putin's ICC arrest warrants. Also, an [interesting claim] was made that war crimes committed by the Ukrainian army are not mentioned by the West, only the ones done by Russia.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

The preparation for the parliamentary elections in Bulgaria in the beginning of April has led to the far-right populist party *Revival* often using disinformation narratives predicting that the future formed government will lead Bulgaria to a full-blown war with Russia. Revival was also a substantial presence in the disinformation eco-system during the previous period of March 6 – March 12 2023.

Trend changes

As the parliamentary elections approach, the sub-narratives such as **Western politicians care about Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens** and **Western countries/institutions ignore the will of their people** are deployed more often from proKremlin telegram channels and media.

With the developments around the battles for Wugledar and Bakhmut, as well as other military actions on the Ukrainian soil, the narratives and sub-narratives surrounding the **Battlefield events** have increased this week.

The sub-narrative claiming that the **West is hypocritical to criticize Russia's actions** intensified in comparison to the period of March 6 – March 12, mainly due to Putin's ICC arrest warrants.

Context

The Telegram groups and media outlets covered in the monitoring actively disseminate the "peacemaking" alternative to the provision of aid to Ukraine, insisting that whoever wishes to support it should personally go the frontlines. The latter claims are mainly supported by the populist nationalist *Revival* party, who also utilize publications to criticize the actions of the US as well, for example republishing a caricature of Biden. It appears that Revival attempts to increase its popularity with voters before the upcoming elections by attacking its opponents for allegedly taking care more of Ukraine than of Bulgaria.

Key sub-narrative analysis

The most popular publication of the week was published in Russian language in the the group **ЗОВ - заЕДНО ОБЩение всеМИР** [ZOV - United Community for Peace], which also prudced the most widely read post of the March 6 – March 12 monitoring period. This time, the publication accumulated 309,000 total views and reshared a video from the popular Russian Telegram group Rybar, providing an "explanation" in Russian about the anti-war rally in Bulgaria. The channel stated that according to the "colleagues" from the Bulgarian channels @Za_PraVda and efir_info that also openly promote pro-Russian messages, some 12,000 protesters took to the streets of nine major cities including the capital of Bulgaria. A few days earlier, anti-government rallies had already taken place in Sofia. Then the demonstrators at the Sofia City Council demanded that the local administration refuse to remove the monument in honor of the Soviet soldiers-liberators from the center of the capital.

The main disinformation piece is that the **estimated number of people protesting published by the pro-Russian sources was overstated**. The monitored publication claims that there were around 12,000 protesters in 9 cities. However, in Sofia and Plovdiv (the capital and one of the most major cities) the protestors were much lower in number - seen in photos here and here.

Furthermore, strong anti-NATO and anti-EU sentiments were shared. During the protest in Plovdiv, the first speaker to address the protestors was Raychin Raychev - an MP Candidate for the elections from the far-right populist *Revival* party. He stated that the ruling coalition are "scoundrels who have a majority and make up their minds". He also said that they were obeying "the US imperialists who created the Ukrainian neo-Nazis".

The Telegram group **ЗОВ - заЕДНО ОБЩение всеМИР** accumulates a significant portion of the total views from the monitored sources and for now posts only in Russian. The group aims to gather "all Bulgarians" (according to its Telegram description) and supposedly to promote peace and enlightenment. Although the admins formally strictly forbid any political discussions and disinformation, the 3,200 members of the group mainly

disseminate anti-NATO and pro-Russian publications, often with media files attached to them. Only once during the three weeks of monitoring the Telegram group has shared information that is not of anti-EU or pro-Russian sentiment.

Trend prediction

- As the elections approach, the sub-narratives such as **Western politicians care about Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens** and **Western countries/institutions ignore the will of their people** will continue to be deployed more often, especially from the Bulgarian news outlets Pogled.info and Newsfront.info. Revival party is likely to be a part of the efforts to promote this rhetoric.
- With military actions unfolding in the eastern part of Ukraine, narratives of **Ukraine losing the war** and **Russia having military success** will intensify even further. The popular Kremlin disinformation techniques of utilizing the opinion of an agent of Russian influence or impersonating/misrepresenting a legitimate and trusted figure or entity in order to create false credibility surrounding a narrative will probably be used again, as was the case of Douglas McGregor, former adviser to the US defence secretary frequently quoted by Russian sources precisely as an "independent expert".

GEORGIA
GRASS

"UKRAINE IS LOSING THE WAR"	Publications: 5 Views: 2,661	The sub-narrative that Ukraine is losing the war and Russia would eventually win has been the core message of the pro -Russian disinformation in Georgia. Its dissemination might have intensified due to Russia's stalled attacks and the rumored Ukrainian counteroffensive. Cherry -picked articles from the Western media have been shared for more convincingness.
"GEORGIA IS UNDER THREAT/WILL BE PULLED INTO THE WAR"	Publications: 3 Views: 2,630	The conspiracy theory that the West is trying to organise a revolution in Georgia to bring forces to power that will open "a second front" against Russia has been the dominant disinformation narrative in Georgia since the start of the war. It is embraced b y the ruling party and pro-Russian groups.
"THE WEST IS USING UKRAINE AS A PAWN"	Publications: 3 Views 2,549	Messages were disseminated claiming that the US is controlling Ukraine and using it to its own interest, disregarding Ukrainian people.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- Disinformation regarding battlefield events has intensified. As Russia has not made any sufficient progress on the battlefield for a while and there is no triumph to showcase, disinformation is trying to make Georgians believe the myth of Russia's invincibility. Sub-narratives that Ukraine is losing the war and Russia is successfully advancing and will eventually win have been the most popular last week.

In the recent weeks, unlike the previous months, anti-Western narratives are getting increasingly popular amongst the spreaders of disinformation compared to other narrative categories. This means that the focus is switching from Ukraine to the West. Also, messages concerning military aid to Ukraine and economic sanctions are still present but to lesser extent and hence, anti-Western messages are more in the spotlight. The main sub-narratives of anti-Western disinformation included claims that

the West is profiting from the war in Ukraine, that the West is using Ukraine as a pawn, that the EU and/or NATO and/or the West are weak and will break apart, etc. The data is still limited to make decisive conclusions, but it can be speculated that proRussian disinformation has diverted its attention to such messages in order to seize the opportunity. In particular, following the fact that the ruling party was forced to drop a draft law that aimed to declare CSOs and media as agents of foreign influence and limit their activities, the pro-governmental messaging is actively disseminating anti-Western messages, claiming the West is increasingly interfering in Georgia's internal affairs and that Georgian government is increasing state sovereignty. Attacks on the Western actors, both institutions and persons, are also becoming mainstream in Georgia. Hence, this is creating a fertile ground for the pro-Russian disinformation advance the messages that the West is also interfering in Ukraine's politics to their own interests which has allegedly led to the war and destruction. All in all, this tactic aims to demonize the West.

- The conspiracy theory that the West via the opposition is trying to organise a revolution in Georgia in order to drag Georgia into the war with Russia and open a second front has been the most dominant narrative not only in the disinformation ecosystem, but also in general information space, for a while already and we believe it is here to stay. Recent demonstrations in Tbilisi against the aforementioned draft law were also linked to this conspiracy. As the ruling party MPs are parroting the "second front" conspiracy in response to almost every criticism, pro-Russian disinformation will follow suit.

After the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party has been forced to drop the controversial draft law they have intensified disinformation, including calling CSOs agents of foreign influence (despite failing to make it a legal norm, GD leaders are trying to label CSOs as such by disinformation), doubling down on the "second front" conspiracy, playing the "interference in internal affairs" and "strengthening sovereignty" cards, coining the term "liberal fascism", etc. Their messaging in this context have in some cases coincided with those of Russian officials and propagandists.

Trend changes

Narratives regarding the second front conspiracy and battlefield events remain unchanged from last week. In regards to the battlefield events, cherry-picking articles from the Western media that discussed the issues about the Ukrainian military has been used as a tactic to persuade the audience that Ukraine is losing the war. This tactic is not brand new but it is not observed constantly – from time to time disinformation sources resort to republishing either news and articles from the Western media that are advantageous to their tasks or quoting only Russian officials in their news.

In addition to the recent demonstrations, another story emerged concerning the message that Georgia will be dragged into the war that has been utilized by disinformation actors. This originated from a controversial interview of Vano Merabishvili, a notorious former interior minister and Prime Minister, who was later convicted and now is associated with the opposition party – United National Movement, given to the Ukrainian media.

The main difference observed compared with the previous weeks of monitoring was that in the period of March 6 – March 12 2023 the main anti-Western narratives claimed that the West was interfering in Georgia's internal affairs and it was relevant in the context of demonstrations in Georgia. Also, this message has stayed in Georgia's information space, it seems like pro-Russian disinformation sources have shifted to arguing that the West is using Ukraine for its own interests. This might be a continuation of the narrative from the previous week to display to the audience that war and destruction is what would await Georgia if the West will continue interfering in Georgian politics.

Context

Pro-Russian disinformation in Georgia is currently operating in the context of a very high degree of polarization between the government and opposition, civil society and media. The government disinformation is trying to demonize its critics by labelling them as the puppets of the West who desire to open a second front in Georgia. These messages are in line with the tasks of the pro-Russian disinformation and, therefore, they prefer to follow the same line, stay relevant, and possibly have higher chance of dissemination of their content. Internal tensions are currently boiling in Georgia and all of this might explain the change of focus of pro-Russian disinformation narratives somewhat away from directly Ukraine-related messages to the messages more focused on the West and domestic affairs.

Key sub-narrative analysis

There were several noteworthy particular disinformation pieces. One of them was interesting because it originated from the currently Russia-based sanctioned propagandist:

- Pro-Russian newspaper Georgia and the World published an interview with Shota Apkhaidze - pro-Kremlin Georgian propagandist currently based in Russia, who is even sanctioned by Ukraine for spreading Kremlin disinformation.
He argued that since 2012 (the year when current ruling party Georgian Dream came into power) the US and Europe are organising demonstrations with the aim of conducting a revolution, for instance he recalled events of June 2019 and claimed that it was organised by the US congressmen and MEPs (for context, in June 2019 Georgia hosted a controversial parliamentary conference of Orthodox countries during which a Russian MP from the Communist party occupied the seat of the Speaker of Georgian Parliament that triggered massive protests that resulted in clashes with the police).
Apkhaidze also claimed that the recent massive protests in the capital Tbilisi against a Russian-type law was an attempt of revolution and this was "well known" for the Russian government. He also argued that behind the recent attempts of revolution were Ukrainian special services that created several organisations in Georgia for this goal. He suggested that if the attempts of revolution succeeds in Georgia, then the forces that would come into power would drag Georgia into the war and open a second front against Russia and that this was not the last attempt and the US and Europe will continue organising such destructive action from time to time.

- One post that aimed to claim that the West has provoked the war in Ukraine argued that in 2016 the war in Ukraine was already planned by the US to occur in 2017 but electing Donald Trump as President spoiled these plans.
- Regarding the morale of Ukraine, notorious propagandist Beka Vardosanidze claimed that due to Zelensky's decision to continue the defence of Bakhmut, Ukraine is conducting forced mobilisation in Odesa and as people are unwilling and hesitant to fight, Ukraine is resorting to forceful measures and taking people to the army against their will.

In this week's monitoring, three actors are worth mentioning:

1) TV Obietivi – it was founded in August 2010. Among the founders was Irma Inashvili, the current general secretary of the pro-Russian political party Alliance of Patriots. In addition to the television frequency, broadcasting is carried out by radio frequency and the Internet. According to the report of the Parliament of Georgia "Strengthening of the State Policy of Georgia against Anti-Western Disinformation and Disinformation in the Country", TV Obieqtivi's presenters, as well as the guests of the programs, present Georgia's pro-Western foreign policy course as damaging to the country. Along with anti-Western disinformation, the TV station actively engaged in spreading various types of fake news and disinformation about the coronavirus. TV Obieqtivi is closely affiliated with the Alliance of Patriots and constantly hosts their leaders in the TV programmes.

2) Beka Vardosanidze – an individual blogger closely linked to and associated with altright violent groups, pro-Russian media Alt-Info and its affiliated pro-Russian political party the Conservative Movement, and pro-Russian businessman Levan Vasadze, etc. He is quite popular in the disinformation eco-system and has his core very loyal audience. His main operating platform is Facebook, but is also active on Telegram. He posts on almost every relevant internal or international topic. He also regularly makes live broadcasts and gathers considerable audience. Apart from politics, he was active in spreading fake news about Coronavirus, as well.

3) Georgia and the World – a newspaper published by the "Historical Heritage" organization, whose board member is Alexander Chachia. In July 2008, the then President of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev, awarded him with the order "for his great contribution in the field of friendship and cooperation with the Russian Federation". The newspaper has a strongly pro-Russian editorial policy. The editorial office supports the false neutrality initiative of the pro-Russian political party Alliance of Patriots, spreads disinformation about Georgia's Western partners, NATO and the European Union as a campaign and tries to justify Russia's foreign policy. Georgia and the World has repeatedly been noticed in the spread of fake news and disinformation on major internal and international developments. Apart from publishing weekly newspaper, it also operates a website and shares its content on Facebook.

Trend prediction

Current trend suggests that the "second front" conspiracy will still be the dominant narrative as it is actively employed by ruling party and the pro-Russian sources. In fact, many other narratives lead to this conspiracy. For instance, the sub-narrative that the West is interfering in Georgia's internal affairs usually suggests that the West has the aim to drag Georgia into the war with Russia. Disinformation on Ukrainian refugees is also usually interconnected to the "second front" conspiracy.
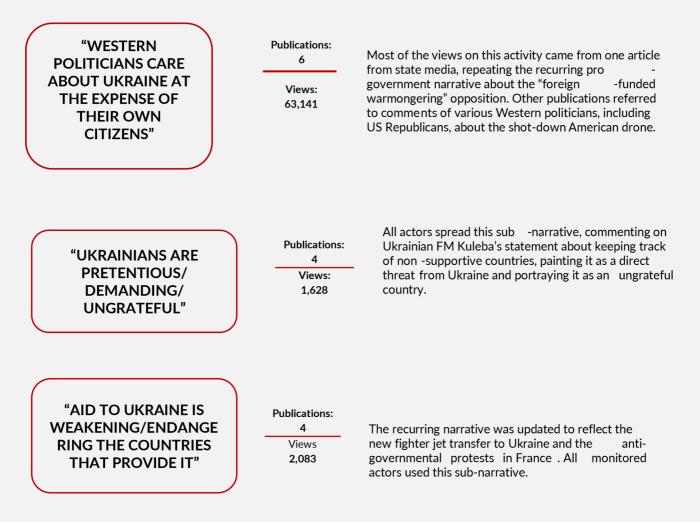
Due to the current messaging of the ruling party, anti-Western narratives both of local context and international and Ukrainian context are expected to pop up.

Disinformation on the battlefields events, particularly claiming that Ukraine is losing and Russia is successfully advancing has been constantly observed and there is no sign of change. Disinformation on Ukrainian refugees is usually related to local developments and is depended on any new events.

Other narratives are present but sporadic and currently there is no patterns to predict them, especially given their low quantity might mean that they might not be included in each week's monitoring sample.

Hungary
Political Capital Institute

"WESTERN POLITICIANS CARE ABOUT UKRAINE AT THE EXPENSE OF THEIR OWN CITIZENS"

Publications: 6

Views: 63,141

Most of the views on this activity came from one article from state media, repeating the recurring pro-government narrative about the "foreign-funded warmongering" opposition. Other publications referred to comments of various Western politicians, including US Republicans, about the shot-down American drone.

"UKRAINIANS ARE PRETENTIOUS/ DEMANDING/ UNGRATEFUL"

Publications: 4

Views: 1,628

All actors spread this sub-narrative, commenting on Ukrainian FM Kuleba's statement about keeping track of non-supportive countries, painting it as a direct threat from Ukraine and portraying it as an ungrateful country.

"AID TO UKRAINE IS WEAKENING/ENDANGERING THE COUNTRIES THAT PROVIDE IT"

Publications: 4

Views 2,083

The recurring narrative was updated to reflect the new fighter jet transfer to Ukraine and the anti-governmental protests in France. All monitored actors used this sub-narrative.

Contextualising most popular narratives

- Anti-Western and anti-Ukranian narratives dominated the examined period, but the sub-narratives within these categories were quite diverse. The lack of strong pro-gvoernment presence in the relevant messages is interesting, but our estimation is that such an occurrence is temporary.
- News about the shot-down US drone, the protests about the pension reforms in France, and the transfer of Polish and Slovak fighter jets to Ukraine divided the attention of the sources.

Interestingly, the speeches around Hungary's 15 March national holiday did not reflect actual political messages. Thus, the expected surge in the pro-Kremlin and progovernment peace narratives did not take place and such messaging remained scarce.

Neither did the events of the battle for Bakhmut dominate the media space this week, so compared to what was expected, only a few publications featured disinformation about the state of the fight. This could be explained by a switch to more foreign-focused narratives partially driven by domestic political processes.

For example, news about French President Macron's controversial pension reform was recently popular in the Hungarian media. FM Szijjártó slammed the move and tried to discredit the criticism of the Hungarian rule-of-law situation by painting Western politicians as hypocritical. The most numerous sub-narratives focused on this issue. These anti-West narratives are generally popular among Hungarian audiences, especially among progovernment and far-right voters.

Trend changes

The most interesting phenomenon during this monitoring period was the lack of focus in the disinformation messaging and the absence of a clearly dominant narrative. There was not a central event or message that disinformation actors focused on. Pro-government sources were less prominent this week, and the vast majority of publications were found on far-right sights including the pro-government influencer Zsolt Bede, the Szent Korona Radio, and the kuruc.info supporting the political force "Our Homeland". Szent Korona Radio is a news platform closely related to the Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement, one of the key rightwing extremist organisations in Hungary, with a clear pro-Kremlin stance in general and regarding the war in Ukraine in particular. The prominence of far-right sources explains the relatively large presence of narratives discrediting Ukraine and the West.

The popularity of messages undermining aid to Ukraine remained due to the news that Poland and Slovakia would send the Soviet-made fighter jets to Ukraine. This narrative continued painting the picture of a demanding and warmongering Ukraine and a provocateur West that will escalate the conflict to a world war with increasing support for Ukraine. This is the usual narrative as a reaction to new international decisions.

Context

Hungary's most important disinformation channels are the government-organised media (traditional and social), fringe media, far-right media, and pro-Kremlin disinformation hubs. These are the main distributors of disinformation narratives in the country. The governing party Fidesz and the government-organised media are the leading actors in spreading these narratives. Far-right, fringe social media and pro-Kremlin sites have much less influence on the public. Far-right actors spread their narratives through different channels. They have a strong online presence, e.g., on Facebook, Telegram, organisations' websites and different portals connected to them.

One powerful example to illustrate the power of the governmental disinformation machine is that, according to a recent opinion poll, 63% of Hungarian respondents believe the government's narrative that the EU sanctions are causing the record-high inflation rate in Hungary.

During the period of March 12 – March 20 2023, the far-right media outlet Kuruc.info reached the widest audience of mostly far-right voters, who already share the anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian worldview. Thus these outlets can build on recurring narratives when interpreting world events. Zsolt Bede, the pro-government far-right influencer was the most active with 10 posts containing disinformation.

Key sub-narrative analysis

Western leadership is incompetent: The far-right Kuruc.info media outlet published the most popular post about the news that the Bundeswehr chief of staff was replaced by a different general due to him repeatedly being proven wrong on various claims about the war. The article implies that he is a heroic rebel against the "maniac" Western consensus of supporting Ukraine, and that's why he was fired. However, other articles clearly show that the reason he was against said military aid was due to his flawed conception of Ukrainian and Russian capabilities, which ended up being proven wrong.

Western politicians care about Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens: The article on the state media outlet hirado.hu is a lengthy collection of Hungarian opposition politicians supporting Ukraine, including the support for military aid to Ukraine and economic sanctions on Russia. The author claims that these politicians are only saying this because they are beholden to foreign interests (so-called "Dollar Left" referring to their alleged foreign funding). There are two main disinformation narratives in the article: these politicians ignore the people's will and prioritise Ukraine over Hungary, and any increased support to Ukraine will mean Hungary entering the war. These have been the key narratives of the ruling party since March 2022, thus this sub-narrative or the form of this publication is nothing new.

Aid to Ukraine is weakening/endangering the countries that provide it: The author Zsolt Bede, a pro-government far-right influencer, criticises the French government over the new pensions reform in support of the protestors, pointing out the hypocrisy of having money to support Ukraine but not having money to pay for pensions. In reality, France has spent around 2 billion euros on Ukraine (some of that just being the value of the equipment they have sent, not government spending). Still, it pays 300 billion euros yearly on pensions, which is significantly increasing yearly. The two are not comparable.
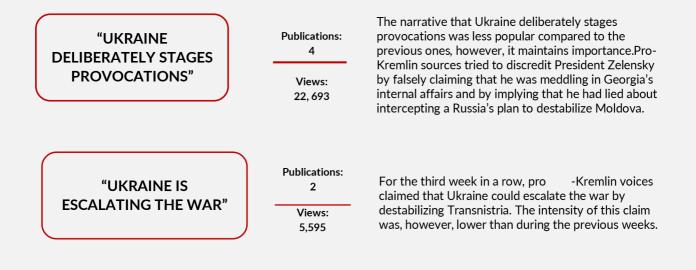
Trend prediction

The trend change mentioned above is temporary as pro-government media will likely get back on track with narratives about the promotion of "peace" on Russian terms and economic

effects of sanctions supposedly hurting Western countries more than Russia. These outlets generally repeat the same narratives every week.

Dependent on the news regarding the battle for Bakhmut, publications about victorious Russian forces, withdrawing Ukrainian forces and the inability of Western support to turn the war around could gain prominence.

Additionally, as the end of March closes and there is no visible sign of governmental success regarding EU funds, we can expect intensifying anti-EU messaging in the coming weeks. The problem has persisted for some time, as on the one hand, the Hungarian government regularly states that it's willing to meet the EU's requirements to receive EU funds blocked by the Council. On the other hand, however, it's unwilling to implement the necessary legal amendments because these would dismantle important components of the autocratic system. Instead, it's tried to circumvent the requirements by passing legislation which tackles the rule-of-law deficiencies only ostensibly. Hence, no progress can be seen in the process, and it seems unlikely that the funds for Hungary would be unfrozen any time soon. Accordingly, the government regularly postpones its prognoses when it expects EU funds to arrive in Hungary.

Moldova
WatchDog.MD Community

"UKRAINE DELIBERATELY STAGES PROVOCATIONS"

Publications:
4

Views:
22, 693

The narrative that Ukraine deliberately stages provocations was less popular compared to the previous ones, however, it maintains importance. Pro-Kremlin sources tried to discredit President Zelensky by falsely claiming that he was meddling in Georgia's internal affairs and by implying that he had lied about intercepting a Russia's plan to destabilize Moldova.

"UKRAINE IS ESCALATING THE WAR"

Publications:
2

Views:
5,595

For the third week in a row, pro-Kremlin voices claimed that Ukraine could escalate the war by destabilizing Transnistria. The intensity of this claim was, however, lower than during the previous weeks.

Contextualizing most popular narratives

Of particular note throughout the monitoring period of March 12 – March 20, 2023 was a group of sources most likely affiliated with Russian special services - such as "Gagauzian People's Republic" or "Moldavskii Piston". The first was created relatively recently (about a year ago) and quickly accumulated subscribers after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The second channel is older, and is possibly run by FSB agents stationed in Transnistria (at the very least, it doesn't seem to be written by someone from Chisinau, as it has poor knowledge of the Moldovan context). Another group is formed by the sources affiliated with pro-Russian politicians Igor Dodon and Ilan Shor. These are the Telegram channels Index, Bogdan Țîrdea, Moldovan Politics and Gabriel Calin. Țîrdea is the main propagandist of the Party of Socialists, has a clear anti-European stance, has participated in various pro-Kremlin conferences in Russia even after the start of the full-scale war. Gabriel Calin is a media mercenary who does disinformation and propaganda for money.

Most of the posts have manipulated the statements of politicians or other speakers from Georgia, Italy, etc. The disinformation actors seem to have acted out of inertia with respect to the general Kremlin propaganda guidelines.

Trend changes

The manipulations around the so-called terrorist attack on Transnistrian leaders and the OSCE delegation, plotted by Ukrainian secret services, have significantly reduced over the past week.

In general, no new 'events' have taken place over the week to generate massive disinformation about Russian aggression in Ukraine specifically targeting the Moldovan public. In the previous weeks, however, these have dominated the disinformation agenda - accusations of alleged military aggression against Transnistria or accusations by the illegal authorities in Transnistria that the SBU was preparing a terrorist attack in Tiraspol. In contrast, we see a kind of inertia in the last week.

Context

Since no major disinformation "events" took place, pro-Russian disinformation relied on exploring its permanent themes and narratives. Thus, it strengthened its impact and explored the rather high vulnerability of the Moldovan population to the influence of the Kremlin's narratives.

Key sub-narrative analysis

- Last week, the most popular sub-narrative discrediting Ukraine was that this country was deliberately staging provocations. Some pro-Kremlin media channels claimed that President Zelensky wanted to destabilize Georgia and Moldova. This narrative seeks to sow distrust in Ukraine and its leaders and to portray it as an aggressor state that wants to escalate the war. At the same time, this idea seeks to distract the attention from the elephant in the room – Russia – who has started the unjustified war in Ukraine.

  Moreover, the idea that other countries would like to draw Moldova into the war is hardly new. Very often the pro-Russian media and the Kremlin authorities try to create an image of a Moldova that has no autonomy and is a puppet in the hands of the West that wants to draw it into the war.

  The other sub-narratives in this narrative were rather diverse: *Ukrainians would support Prigozhin's candidacy in the 2024 Ukrainian presidential election, Italian so-called anti-fascist group supports Putin, Bulgarian farmers oppose Ukrainian wheat import, etc.*

- In addition to the ongoing campaign to discredit Ukraine, pro-Kremlin disinformation continued to sow uncertainty and panic about the situation in Moldova. This perception is fueled by falsehoods, speculation and manipulation that Moldova is at risk of being drawn into the war by either Ukraine or the West. The former head of

state Igor Dodon, for example, said that the US wants to ''Ukrainize'' Moldova. His claim was echoed by multiple channels.

At the same time, such statements are neither new nor shocking in the Moldovan media. They already form a background noise and serve as fertile ground for other new manipulations.

Trend prediction

We assume that Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow will probably be intensely discussed in the coming period. Attempts will be made to create the impression that Putin is not isolated and that he wants peace. In contrast, the West and Ukraine might be presented as not being interested in peace and negotiations.

During the period under review, the electoral campaign for the election of the leader of the autonomous region of Gagauzia in the south of Moldova began. This election campaign will abound in anti-Western positions and will probably boost the anti-Ukraine discourse. This will happen because the population in the Gagauz autonomy is probably the most affected by the Kremlin's and, respectively, pro-Russian pdisinformation.

We expect the rise of disinformation discourse in the public sphere, especially from the speakers involved in the Gagauz election campaign - local candidates and the parties supporting them - the Socialists and the Shor Party.

POLAND
Fakenews.pl

"UKRAINIAN REFUGEES ABUSE THE AID"

Publications:
3

Views:
17,956

Allegations of Ukrainians profeeteering from the aid provided by the host governments, particularly in Germany and Switzerland, portray the Ukrainian refugees as rich and exploiting the sympathy of others. These claims are tightly linked with accusations of Ukrainians being ungrateful and abusing their position, in particular by increasingly harming Polish citizens and bullying their children in schools.

"THE WAR IN UKRAINE IS A PART OF GLOBAL CONSPIRACY"

Publications:
3

Views:
61,633

The conspiracy in question promotes the idea that the war is used by the global elites as a distraction and a test ground to proceed with the secret monetary agenda, trying to ban cash and create virtual money to enslave people.

"UKRAINIANS ARE NAZIS"

Publications:
3

Views
9,864

The traditional accusations of Nazism in Ukraine throughout this week mostly relied on the quotes from Russian and pro-Russian politicians, including Basshar Assad, and their justification of the war as necessary to counter Nazism in Ukraine

Contextualizing most popular narratives

One of the most crucial developments throughout the period of March 12 – March 20, 2023 is the surge of conspiracy theories and fake news. While there is no specific conspiracy that would heavily dominated the information environment, the messaging about alleged US biolabs in Ukraine resurfaced. It was combined with a theory which insisted that the war in Ukraine has been orchestrated in order to divert the attention of the public globally from the plans to ban cash and enslave the population worldwide via the use of digital funds, easily controlled by the elites.

Ukrainian refugees remain a major target of disinformation attacks, being portrayed as ungrateful and demanding, and no only in Poland but allegedly in other Western countries as well, in particular in Germany. At the same time the refugees are portrayed as a threat to their host countries, and also as a social group that is prioritized by the local governments instead of their own citizens.

Additionally, political campaigns before Autumn's parliamentary elections are on the go. It starts to influence the Polish information sphere, but since there are still few months left, soon the influence will largely increase.

Trend changes

The narratives regarding Ukrainian refugees are still as popular as in the previous monitoring periods. Anti-Ukrainian rhetoric in these instances is diversified, but messages are overall linked together, and while the sub-narrative that Ukrainians abuse the provided aid was dominant throughout the priod of March 12 – March 20, it is closely followed by accusations that Ukrainians are an increasing threat to their host communities as the harm Polish citizens and bully their children in schools.

It is essential that anti-refugee rhetoric relies on allegations against Ukrainian refugees not only in Poland, but in other countries as well, such as Germany, where Germans are supposedly so fed up with Ukrainians that they sweep the floor with Ukrainian flags, and Switzerland, where rich Ukrainians are allegedly forced to sell their expensive cars instead of receiving free humanitarian aid from the government.

It is also worthwhile to mention that anti-western narratives are on the rise compared to the period of March 12 – March 20 2023 due to the several factors explored below.

Context

Among the factual events that influenced Polish information space and partially led to the increase of anti-Western messages as well as to the surge of conspiracy theories are:
- President's Biden previous visits to Kyiv and Warsaw in February 2023 that continue to make waves;
- MQ-9 drone downing – the ongoing escalation between Russia and the US over the American drone downed over the Black Sea
- Talks between Polish government and Kyiv authorities about the donation of MIG29 fighter-jets, as in the middle of March Polish Prime Minister stated the jets may be transferred to Ukraine in the coming weeks.

These events have influenced the domestic agenda and resulted in a surge of messages from the local disinformation actors, mostly accusing the West of profiting from the war and even having planned it as early as in 2021.

Key sub-narrative analysis

1. Ukrainian refugees are spoiled/abuse the aid/are a threat to Polish security:

These sub-narratives are consistently among the top disinformation messages spread in Poland and aimed at fueling hatred towards Ukrainian refugees. They are a key form of the narratives discrediting Ukraine in the local information environment, coupled with traditional accusations of Nazism – a separate recurring sub-narrative pushed in Poland.

Such claims are coupled with accusations that the Polish authorities take better care of the Ukrainian refugees than of their own citizens, and they also let Poland down by glorifying Ukrainian historical figures controversial in Poland.

With the preparations for the upcoming elections, there is distinct possibility that the far-right actors will continue promoting such rhetoric in attempt to capitalize political influence.

2. Biolabs and global conspiracy sub-narratives:

The surge in dissemination of conspiracy theories is a concerning trend. Recycling the traditional Kremlin-produced accusations of the "American biolabs in Ukraine" and claiming that the war has been planned by the globalists as a technique to distract public attention may be expected to maintain their presence in the information environment – or be supplemented with other conspiracies. As a form of disinformation, conspiracy theories require special attention in case of Poland due to the fact that the audience of disinformation actors is prone to them. Such vulnerability is not new; it has been capitalized on by the far-right political forces in the country, namely, the far-right coalition Konfederacja that has promoted COVID-19 related conspiracies and made the audience more tolerant to conspiracies as a whole.

Trend prediction

Anti-western narratives and anti-refugee narratives will keep on dominating the information sphere. Due to incoming parliamentary elections Polish far-right parties are trying to win more conservative votes by attacking the liberal West and minorities in Poland. Russian disinformation comes in handy, creating popular topics, disseminated by the far-right and their supporters. Additionally, considering that Poland has welcomed a large number of Ukrainian refugees, exploiting anti-immigration issues is also likely to continue on behalf of the far-right forces and pro-Russian actors.

Also, their audience is particularly vulnerable to conspiracy theories and fake news. The closer to the elections, the stronger influence of such narratives will be.

Slovakia

Infosecurity

"THE POLITICIANS OF THE COUNTRY ARE DRAGGING IT TO THE WAR BY SUPPORTING UKRAINE"

Publications: 5

Views: 243,227

Due to an ongoing preelection campaign in Slovakia and the current government's support of Ukraine, some members of the opposition are establishing rhetoric based on "we are peace, they are war". In their posts, they accuse the government of dragging Slovakia into the war and painting targets on our backs. This sub -narrative was shared through publications shared directly by the opposition politicians or shared by outlets, but including the politicians' quotes.

"MILITARY AID EQUALS JOINING THE WAR"

Publications: 2

Views: 53,182

The sub -narrative, mostly spread by an opposition politician Ľuboš Blaha, claims that the decision of Slovakia to send MIG -29 fighter jets to Ukraine practically means joining the war. This sub -narrative was spread also last week when the decision was not made yet but the it was being discussed.

"MILITARY AID IS FLAWED "

Publications: 2

Views 211,400

A new sub-narrative emerged based on misinterpreting the words of Slovak Prime minister, who explained that the fighter jets are not being used in Slovakia, because there is no personnel to work with them. However,
 disinformation actors are taking this statement out of context and claim that the jets were called "broken".

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The most prevalent topic of the Slovak disinformation scene was the Slovak government's decision to send Mig-29 warplanes to Ukraine. Therefore, many actors spread different narratives commenting on the same topic. However, the category of narratives about the military aid in general was only second most prevalent.
- The most popular category of narratives were again anti-western, even though multiple of these sub-narratives were spread in publications commenting on the decision to send Mig-29 fighter jets to Ukraine.
- Our expectation that the topic of the ICC's arrest warrant would be popular was incorrect. Two publications spread the sub-narrative that it is meaningless, but others mostly reacted to the aforementioned sending of military aid.

After quite a long discussion, Slovak government decided to send Mig-29 warplanes to Ukraine which makes it a second member of NATO to take this step, after Poland. The military aid previously sent to Ukraine never included warplanes, which means that the

disinformation and pro-Russian actors are considering this as crossing the line and making Slovakia a justifiable military target for Russia. Should Russia decide to hypothetically to attack Slovakia in response to this decision, these actors would probably blame Slovak government instead of Russia, which is why this narrative may be considered highly dangerous.

Trend changes

This week's most popular sub-narrative (The politicians of X country are dragging it to the war by supporting Ukraine) has been spread before, therefore it is not new in the Slovak disinformation space. Previously, it has been spread by accusations of the Slovak government and president of being warmongers and supporting war instead of peace. This week however, it was reinforced by the government's decision to send Mig-29 warplanes to Ukraine.

In addition, it reinforced other sub-narratives, mostly those about the military aid sent to Ukraine. We identified quite a wide range of sub-narratives, including claims about sending military aid being against international law, the aid prolonging the war, being a crime, meaning joining the war or being broken.

Context

After the resignation of Slovak government in December 2022, there will be new elections in September 2023. The preelection campaign practically started immediately after the government's resignation. Some Slovak opposition politicians have long been spreading disinformation and pro-Russian messaging (it is also important to note that some of them were not spreading pro-Russian disinformation as heavily before the Russian invasion) to gain more popularity and supporters. We can also see the progress of some politicians becoming more popular while spreading these problematic narratives – for example Tomáš Špaček from the far-right political party Republika (Republic).

Some opposition politicians are establishing rhetoric very similar to that of Fidesz before the Hungarian parliamentary election in 2022. The rhetoric is based on "we are peace, they are war" in order to make the voters believe that in the election they are choosing between peace and war. We can therefore see many sub-narratives connected to this rhetoric.

Key sub-narrative analysis

This rhetoric was included in the most popular publication which also spread this week's most popular sub-narrative (The politicians of X country are dragging it to the war by supporting Ukraine). The sub-narrative is nothing new in Slovak disinformation space. Slovak government and president have been long accused of provoking Russia by sending military aid to Ukraine and by that also supporting the war. However, this week, numerous

publications spreading this sub-narrative were commenting on the government's decision to send Mig-29 warplanes to Ukraine.

This week's most popular publication was published by Hlavné Správy, which is one of the most popular disinformation outlet in Slovakia. The publication shared quotes of former prime minister and leader of opposition party Smer-SD (currently one of the most popular parties in Slovakia according to polls) Robert Fico who had been spreading pro-Russian disinformation after the invasion (previously mainly sub-narratives against sanctions). The article was about Fico publicly asking a former member of the party, who is now leader of another party (called Hlas-SD) Peter Pellegrini to establish a cooperation after the election and form a "peaceful" coalition. Fico wants to change Slovakia's approach to war in Ukraine – mainly stop military aid to Ukraine. This post therefore included the aforementioned rhetoric.

More information from previous reports about the outlet which published the article – *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. However, the outlet is continually spreading pro-Russian disinformation. 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 prorussian 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

We will probably see more publications spreading the opposition's rhetoric based on "we are peace, they are war" due to the upcoming election. We could also see this rhetoric being shared by disinformation outlets in order to support the opposition's campaign.

We expect no changes in the ongoing trends – anti-western narratives being the most popular category and Hlavné Správy publishing the most popular publication of the week due to its vast audience

Ukraine
Detector Media

"UKRAINE IS LOSING THE WAR"	**Publications:** 10 **Views:** 7, 999, 535	Most of the posts related to the tense situation in Bakhmut, as well as to the counteroffensive allegedly lost by Ukraine in the Zaporizhzhia region
"THE UKRAINIAN LEADERSHIP IS CORRUPT AND/OR INCOMPETENT"	**Publications:** 7 **Views:** 1,942,832	The sub-narrative focused on the alleged corruption of the Ukrainian authorities. Targeting mobilization and portraying Ukrainians as massively trying to avoid mobilization was a highlight of the monitoring period.
"UKRAINE'S LEADERSHIP DOES NOT CARE ABOUT ITS PEOPLE"	**Publications:** 6 Views 5, 068,676	This sub-narrative was found in posts that claimed the Ukrainian authorities do not care about the military personnel. Particular examples include claims that the authorities are ready to hold the cities "at any cost", regardless of the losses

Contextualizing most popular narratives

- Russian disinformation intensified its messages concerning the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. More precisely, the focus was on the alleged oppression of the Russialinked Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate by the Ukrainian authorities in Ukraine. Pro-Russian Telegram channels accused Ukrainian authorities of mocking the representatives of the said church. In particular, four posts from the sample were concerned with this topic.
- This week there were also messages about the alleged restrictions of the freedom of speech imposed by the Ukrainian authorities. Messages in question claimed that said the Ukrainian authorities control the mass media and all the information that appears in such media, thus aiming to undermine trust towards reliable sources of information.
- Military developments and battlefield events also remained in focus with particular attention to Bakhmut that has proven to be a stable focal point of disinformation given the military significance of the town and the prolonged battle for it. Most of the relevant posts stated that the situation at the front is worsening and that the Ukrainian authorities are ultimately incompetent, making wrong decisions regarding the conduct of the war on several fronts.

Trend changes

The disinformation eco-system in Ukraine remains focused on military developments in Bakhmut, which is likely to be a relatively long-term focal point for messages attempting to discredit Ukrainian military and authorities. This week has also marked the increase of attention towards Georgian protests, which remain a target of an ongoing discrediting campaign that compares it to the "color revolution" and Euromaidan in 2014, insisting that the revolution will only bring negative outcomes for the people of Georgia similarly to how it allegedly developed in Ukraine.

Context

Most of the narratives this week foxused on military developments. This is understandable because the situation in the Bakhmut region is currently difficult and unclear. In addition, there were posts undermining mobilization in Ukraine. For example, they included claims that men pay a lot of money to avoid it or want to go abroad because they don't want to die. Such messages appeared against the background of news that men were detained at the border, in Transcarpathia, who tried to leave illegally. It is important to note that certain problems with mobilization do exist, however, Russian disinformation persists in attempts to portray Ukraine as generally unwilling to fight and being forced into battle by its authorities.

Key sub-narrative analysis

Similarly to the monitoring period of March 6 – March 12, the sub-narrative that Ukraine is losing the war remains essential. For example, the Telegram channel "Resident" was among those pushing the message that the Ukrainian soldiers may be fully encircled in Bakhmut and the city will be lost. The post stated that due to difficulties with logistics to Bakhmut, Ukraine cannot get weapons and cannot wage war normally. Allegedly, this is stated by the military themselves, but the authorities are silent about both logistical needs and heavy losses. The authors of such messages aim to convince their readers that everything is bad in Ukraine, thus strengthening the position of the Russian army. They said that the Ukrainian army will lose because it can no longer stand against the Russian army. Problems on the battlefield in Bakhmut do exist and are reported by both the military and the government. However, these problems are taken out of proportion by the Russian sources that extrapolate the situation on the likely outcome of the war in general.

A sub-narrative that the Ukrainian authorities are incompetent was also widely shared during this monitoring period. In particular, such posts targeted Ukrainian courts. For example, the EQUILIBRIUM channel questioned the success of judicial reform in Ukraine and claimed that the Ukrainian authorities only launder money and do not really seek to reform the judicial system. While Ukrainian judicial system still requires further reforms, portraying it as a façade

institution contributes to the portrayl of Ukraine as an ultimately "failed state", which has been one of the leading Kremlin narratives about Ukraine for years.

There were also posts questioning the actions of the Ukrainian authorities regarding the situation at the front and portraying them as incompetent. For example, there was a post on the "Legitimny" channel about an alleged attempt by the Ukrainian army to launch a counteroffensive in the Zaporizhzhia region, claiming that this decision was wrong and in the end the Ukrainian army lost its armor, etc. With the help of such messages, the authors want to create the appearance that most of the decisions of the Ukrainian authorities are wrong and cannot be trusted.

Most popular post/Key actor

The most popular publication of this week (2,106,666) was a post from the Telegram channel "Legitimny" that the Office of the President continues to massively transfer all combatcapable units to Donbas to turn the tide of events in the Bakhmut "meat grinder". This post falls under the most popular sub-narrative of the week claiming that Ukraine is losing the war and attempting to undermine popular resistance in Ukraine. The message also portrays the developments near Bakhmut as something that depends personally on Zelensky's will and choice, and so he is pictured as a leader with disregard to the lives of Ukrainian soldiers.

Another popular post (1,772,081) alleged the persecution of the Orthodox Church by the Ukrainian authorities. For example, at the service in the Nizhny Lavra in Kyiv, parishioners supposedly have to listen to the sermon right on the street. They said that this is because the Ukrainian authorities are trying to expel priests from the Lavra. The authors of the post attempt to create the perception that people in Ukraine support the Moscow Patriarchate and do not support the Ukrainian government.

These posts were spread, by the Telegram channels that regularly broadcast proRussian rhetoric. For example, the "Legitimny" and "Resident" channels, which the Security Service of Ukraine considers hostile, because they are part of the network of channels controlled by Russian intelligence. In fact, these channels constitute a threat since they broadcast proRussian messages to a large audience. For example, their audience grew more than 2.5 times from February 24, 2022 to June 9 2022. Additionally, this week many posts about the allegedly terrible situation at the front were found in the posts of the pro-Russian blogger Anatoly Sharyi, who was accused by the Security Service of Ukraine of treason.

Trend prediction

The future messages are likely to also be focused on military developments and will depend on what will happen in Bakhmut and Avdiivka.

Disinformation actors may also react to a change in the leadership of the Ministry of Science and Education of Ukraine, since Ukrainian education system and any changes in it are of relative importance to the Russian disinformation.

Messages related to Putin's visit to Mariupol may also appear. In addition, before the anniversary of the tragedy in Bucha in the beginning of April, pro-Russian Telegram channels may also revive messages that "the Bucha massacre" was staged by Ukraine in order to blame Russia.

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 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 proRussian media

that duplicate the website content. For countries analysing media outlets, Telegram channels and Facebook pages, 5 media outlets, 15 Telegram channels and Facebook pages will be analysed.

Data sampling

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

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

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

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

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

List of sources per country

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

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

@The_Smart_Village	Bulgaria
@druschbaFM_Bulgaria	Bulgaria
@InfodefBULGARIA	Bulgaria
@bulgariaz	Bulgaria
@svobodik	Bulgaria
@otizvora	Bulgaria
@istinabg1	Bulgaria
@vazrazhdanebg	Bulgaria
@simeonoffkss	Bulgaria
@todorangelov	Bulgaria
@dianadeleva	Bulgaria
@ocelqvane	Bulgaria
@ronyrony	Bulgaria
@ivaivatta	Bulgaria
@pogled	Bulgaria

@NewsFrontBulgaria	Bulgaria
@trudnews	Bulgaria
@snabgorg	Bulgaria
@informiran	Bulgaria
https://kuruc.info/	Hungary
https://www.origo.hu/	Hungary
https://pestisracok.hu/	Hungary
@magyarjelen	Hungary
https://hirado.hu/	Hungary

@kurucinfo	Hungary
@toroczkai	Hungary
@szentkoronaradio_official	Hungary
@nzona3	Hungary
@bodiabel	Hungary
@bedezsolt	Hungary
https://www.facebook.com/oroszhirek.hu/	Hungary

https://www.facebook.com/pestisracok.hu/	Hungary
https://www.facebook.com/szamokadatok/	Hungary
https://www.facebook.com/kkemenymag1	Hungary
https://www.facebook.com/bayerzs	Hungary
https://www.facebook.com/elemi.hu/	Hungary
https://www.facebook.com/magyarnemzet.hu/	Hungary
https://www.facebook.com/stefideri	Hungary
https://www.facebook.com/bohardanielriporter	Hungary

https://aif.md/	Moldova
@Noi.md | Новости Молдовы	Moldova
@Accent_TV	Moldova
https://unimedia.info/	Moldova
@KP.MD: "КП" в Молдове	Moldova
@tirdea	Moldova
@Ungureanu112	Moldova
@Republic_Of_GaGauZia	Moldova
@moldavskii_piston	Moldova
@indexMD	Moldova
@gabrielcalin	Moldova

@romania_ru	Moldova
@dragosgalbur	Moldova
@MoldovaPolitics	Moldova
@turnulmaya	Moldova
@ivanovnamd	Moldova
https://www.facebook.com/groups/1874167932811342 0	Moldova
https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100086182 868245	Moldova
https://www.facebook.com/latebuimistru	Moldova
https://www.facebook.com/ionchicu.md	Moldova
http://3droga.pl/	Poland
@narodowcy	Poland
http://pch24.pl/	Poland
http://ruchnarodowy.net/	Poland
http://wolnemedia.net/	Poland

@project_veritas	Poland
@anna_news	Poland
@WiadomosciCzasowOstatecznych	Poland
@siostryjasnowidzki	Poland
@polska_grupa_informacyjna	Poland
@ndp_pl	Poland
@infokju	Poland
@monikacichocka	Poland
@legaartiswsparcie	Poland
@OSTATNISPRAWIEDLIWI	Poland
@nwk24pl	Poland
@Olej_W_Glowie	Poland

@ruchoporupolska	Poland
@wolna_polska	Poland
@kanalstraznikow	Poland
https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/	Slovakia
https://bajecnezeny.sk/	Slovakia
https://www.hlavnydennik.sk/	Slovakia
https://spisiakoviny.eu/	Slovakia
http://www.ereport.sk/	Slovakia
@casusbellilive	Slovakia
@DKdenneSpravy	Slovakia
@zemavek	Slovakia
@InfoVojnaOfficial	Slovakia
@kulturblog	Slovakia
@ZvodkaOnline	Slovakia
@vimanadark	Slovakia
https://www.facebook.com/ChmelarEduard	Slovakia
https://www.facebook.com/heredos/	Slovakia
https://www.facebook.com/Spacek.republika	Slovakia
https://www.facebook.com/draxlerjuraj	Slovakia
https://www.facebook.com/Zdrojj	Slovakia
https://www.facebook.com/hricalubos1	Slovakia
https://www.facebook.com/Infovojna	Slovakia

@LubosBlahaSmer	Slovakia
@montyan2	Ukraine
@rezident_ua	Ukraine
@legitimniy	Ukraine

@readovkanews	Ukraine
@ASupersharij	Ukraine
@ZE_kartel	Ukraine
@mriya24	Ukraine
@spletnicca	Ukraine
@ukraina_ru	Ukraine
@stranaua	Ukraine
@dark_k	Ukraine
@skosoi	Ukraine
@sheptoon	Ukraine
@JokerDPR	Ukraine
@EQUILIBRIUM2019	Ukraine
@OpenUkraine	Ukraine
@mediakiller	Ukraine
@OlgaSharij	Ukraine
@Novoeizdanie	Ukraine
@Vestnik_Konservatora	Ukraine
@yuryvoskresensky	Belarus
@pul_1	Belarus
@sewerfsefsd	Belarus
@belarusian_silovik	Belarus
@sputnikby	Belarus

@mlynby	Belarus
@ontnews	Belarus
@ATN_BTRC	Belarus
@Nashazemla	Belarus

@shpakouski	Belarus
@Azarenok_TV	Belarus
@dzermant	Belarus
@vashy_slivy	Belarus

@glav_tur	Belarus
@berezina_bel	Belarus
@ZhivetZheBelarus	Belarus
@lgbelarussegodnya	Belarus
@minskctvby	Belarus
@BISRby	Belarus
@zmeymarini4	Belarus
http://geworld.ge/ge/	Georgia
@SputnikGeorgia	Georgia
https://ge.news-front.info/	Georgia
http://www.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