OPEN
INFORMATION
PARTNERSHIP

Ukraine War
Disinfo
Working Group

# MONITORING REPORT

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

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# Country-By-Country Overview:

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

- Hungary
- Moldova
- Poland
- Slovakia
- Ukraine

**Working Definition of Disinformation:**

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

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
*Open Information Partnership*

This monitoring report, produced by the "Ukraine War Disinformation" Working Group of the Open Information Partnership, covers the period of March 25 – April 1, 2023. It provides an overview of the prevailing disinformation narratives identified across select Telegram pages, online news portals, and, in some cases, Facebook groups, that are known to be active creators and purveyors of disinformation content across 12 information environments spanning a geography from Poland to Armenia. Each section highlights the most salient disinformation narratives, emerging trends, and most prolific actors in addition to offering an indication of what trends the data suggests will emerge in the coming weeks. The recurring narrative about the opening of a "second front" against the Russian Federation, supposedly orchestrated by the West (or global elites in some instances), remained a major factor in the disinformation eco-systems of the entire geography covered in this report. Having reached its peak so far during the monitoring period of March 20 – March 25, the narrative maintains a potent presence in the information spaces of Armenia and Georgia, where the ruling Georgian Dream party has intensified its promotion of this narrative in the ongoing attempts to discredit CSOs, independent media and the opposition as warmongering agents of the West. This narrative has persisted in Georgia since the fullscale invasion of Ukraine, but continues to gain increasing traction – thanks in part to the rhetoric of the Georgian Dream government.

Narratives focusing on Ukrainian authorities being "anti-Christian" and suppressing religious freedoms in the country were employed by disinformation actors across the monitored geography. Having manifested during the March 20 – March 25 round of monitoring, this narrative has increased substantially among the monitored channels in 4 countries in particular, having been amplified and promoted by pro-Russian and far-right actors in Belarus, Georgia, Moldova as well as Ukraine itself. The narrative has strong potential to undermine support for Ukraine due to the deliberate omittance of information on the complexity of the religious situation in the country. Furthermore, the pro-Russian and far-right sources portray the Russia-linked Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) as the only legitimate Orthodox church in Ukraine, which is allegedly violently suppressed by the government. The allegations remain focused on Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, one of the most important churches in Ukraine, that has been occupied by UOC MP in protest at the church's transfer to the control of independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Easter celebrations added an extra level of tension this week.

A notable trend that has emerged from the data is the increase in salience of conspiracy theories in Poland on the channels monitored. Having increased during the March 20 – March 25 monitoring period, narratives such as the War in Ukraine being part of a global conspiracy

orchestrated by the West have solidified throughout March 25 – April 1. In a similar manner to other conspiracy theories observed throughout this project, including the aforementioned idea of the West orchestrating the opening a "second front" against Russia, this messaging relies on the idea that global elites are acting nefariously to exert influence and control over countries across the world in an effort to destroy Russia. The use of such narratives in Poland are logical, given the lack of sympathy much overtly pro-Russian content is likely to find among Polish audiences, however the increased focus on such narratives rather than battlefield developments or Ukrainian refugees, for example, represents a noteworthy development should the current trend continue.

 With the slight increase in economy-related disinformation mostly exploiting the ongoing cost of living crisis, a new narrative emerged in Poland: Ukrainian grain supplied to the country is contaminated and dangerous – or, at the very least, that importing it is destroying the livelihoods of farmers. The same narrative was spread in Bulgaria with the idea that importing Ukrainian grain in large quantities demonstrates government support of Kyiv at expense of their own population, again with a focus on farmers. These narratives prey on genuine economic challenges faced by the agriculture industry across the entire monitored geography, highlighted recently in protests largely composed of disgruntled farmers – many of whom have already bought into the Russian narrative that imported Ukrainian grain is the cause of their travails. The selection of ongoing economic challenges and targeting of audiences such as the farmers by Kremlin-affiliated actors represents a significant and ubiqutous threat that requires an agile response.

Among the channels monitored in Ukraine, the most prevalent narratives either focused on the alleged corruption and incompetence of the Ukrainian government or on the supposed (or dramatically exaggerated) battlefield gains of the Russian military – both of which connect to another dominant narrative: Russian victory is inevitable. Disinformation actors in the Ukrainian information environment are clearly focusing on undermining the morale of the Ukrainian people and support for the Zelensky administration, echoing the Kremlin's approach in its use of missiles and artillery against civilian targets and infrastructure.

# ARMENIA
## *Media Initiatives Center*

"The West/NATO provoked the conflict between Russia and Ukraine"

Publications: **2**

Views: **22,766**

These sub-narratives manifested in an article by pro-Kremlin media attacking the EU civilian mission to the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. The article argues that the West is using "Ukrainian methods" to turn Armenians against Russia.

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

Publications: **2**

Views: **9,858**

Claims that the European Union is weak and that the prospect of Ukraine joining it is dangerous since such a step will allegedly make the EU collapse , simultaneously strengthening the cooperation between Russia, China and Iran.

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

Publications: **1**

Views **191,144**

The most popular publication promoted the idea that the West is behind protests in Georgia, in an attempt to sever ties between Tbilisi and Moscow and use Georgia as a "second front" against Russia.

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

- Anti-western rhetoric has intensified throughout the period of March 25 – April 1 2023, with traditional pro-Russian actors portraying the West as self-serving and manipulative – not just in Ukraine, but in other countries as well.
- The aftermath of the Georgian protests continues to be extensively covered by the Telegram channels that claim the West was behind the protests and the government of Georgia was allegedly trying to prevent the opening of a "second front" against Russia at the expense of Georgia.

## Trend changes

While the core narratives remain the same as in previous monitoring periods (heavy emphasis on anti-western rhetoric as an instigator of anti-Russian policies and threats of war expanding beyond Ukraine), throughout March 25 – April 1, 2023 the specific focus shifted towards

claims of the alleged weakness and internal tensions in the West,  particularly the EU. At the same time, the West is portrayed as being strong enough to incite Russophobia/anti-Russian sentiments.  These particular anti-Western messages are accompanied by claims that Ukraine will lose the war.

## Context

 In the monitoring period of March 25 – April 1, 2023, the main topic of discussion in Armenia continued to be the tense situation at the border with Azerbaijan and in Nagorno-Karabakh. These developments dominated both the media space and the disinformation eco-system. As Azerbaijan continues to apply pressure on Armenia, the local information space is dominated by the discussions of a new potential escalation or even war. Pro-Russian sources use this opportunity to undermine support for Ukraine, insisting that Armenia should strive for Russian protection from Azerbaijan, which will be withdrawn if Armenia supports Ukraine. This narrative is not new, yet its importance is growing against the backdrop of increasing tensions regarding Nagorno-Karabakh. Furthermore, a noteworthy topic throughout this period was Russia's reaction to
Armenia's possible ratification of the Rome Statute: Russia threatened Yerevan with "severe consequences" if Armenia ratifies the statute, as this would mean that if Vladimir Putin travels to Armenia, the country could arrest him.

   Struggle for the ratification of the Rome Statute  has a long history in the country, as Armenia signed the documents in 1998 yet didn't ratify the statute as the Constitutional Court announced in 2004 that the document in question violated some of the provisions of the Armenian constitution. The statute was finally ratified by the government of Armenia in 2022 and passed over to the ultimate ratification in parliament. After the negative reaction from Russia, the speaker of the Armenian parliament Akop Arashakyan announced that despite the ratification of the Rome Statute Armenian authorities will not arrest Vladimir Putin if he is in the country.

   The US-led Summit for Democracy that took place at the end of March 2023 was another noteworthy topic, as Armenia participated and joined the final declaration, however, with a reservation regarding the paragraph on the war in Ukraine. It was announced by the Armenian authorities that the reason for such reservation was the fact that the paragraph did not touch upon Azerbaijani aggression towards Armenia.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

 As mentioned, the two main narrative categories were both anti-Western: insisting that the West provokes conflicts with Russia as well as suggesting it is weak and ready to fall apart. The  key disinformation actors of March 25 – April 1, 2023 remained the same as during the previous monitoring periods: Mika Badalyan and  "Armenian Vendetta" channel, both affiliated with the pro-Russian opposition led by former president Robert Kocharyan.  Both Armenian Vendetta and Mika Badalyan shared an article by a pro-Kremlin website, Fond of

Strategic Culture (fondsk.ru), which built a conspiracy theory around the fact that several US diplomats in Armenia had also served in Ukraine. On the one hand, the article criticized the Armenian government for its pro-Western position, whilst on the other it argued that over the years the US has been using "Ukrainian methods" to influence politics in Armenia and turn the country against Russia. Notably, the article claimed that the EU civilian mission to Armenia, the equivalent of which is also active in Ukraine, is not civilian at all, but has military and intelligence-related goals. This is false: the mission is unarmed and civilian. Fond of Strategic Culture is a Russian organization self-positioned as a think-tank, which actively promotes disinformation on a variety of topics, including the war in Ukraine. The organization is led by Vladimir Maksimenko who is a a frequent contributor to websites affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church and to the sources consistently spreading Russian disinformation, such as Ukraina.ru.

Another set of conspiracy claims was published by Mika Badalyan and the AZATAGRUM channel (which also belongs to Badalyan). The blogger quoted Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić who said that the EU will start talks on accepting Ukraine into the bloc because Ukraine won't be able to win the war. Badalyan then commented on this statement saying that this would show that Ukraine cannot defeat Russia even with the help of NATO. Moreover, by accepting Ukraine, the EU will break apart, while Russia will form a new geopolitical bloc with Iran, China and Saudi Arabia. All of this, according to Badalayan, is supposed to be condoned by the US that is eager to ruin other competing centres of power, such as the EU.

In the Threats of war expanding beyond Ukraine category the topic of protests in Georgia was again the centre of attention. In a post published by the pro-government Baghramyan 26 channel the deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mikhail Galuzin was quoted saying that the West was behind recent protests in Georgia. The channel did not provide any fact-check of this conspiracy theory. Interestingly, the post gained a big number of views – 191,144 (the usual number of views per post on this channel is 3-4 times lower).

## Trend prediction

As the situation on Armenia's own border remains tense, the information space of the country is not likely to change. Thus, the intensity and manner of coverage of the RussianUkrainian war will likely remain the same with anti-Western narratives dominating the disinformation content, and pro-Russian actors trying to use the tensions to undermine support for Ukraine.

It is important to note that Armenian coverage of the war will likely rely heavily on Russian media: Russian sources have traditionally been important due to familiarity and language accessibility, which affects the Armenian information space.

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The viewership of the most popular narrative "Conditions of Russians and Russianspeaking minorities" has sharply risen this week. The narrative gathered almost twice more views as compared to its peak, or almost 20 times more views compared to the average. The second most popular narrative is focused on the idea that Russia is allegedly unaffaceted by sanctions, which hadn't have substantial traction since the monitoring commeneced and before April 1 – April 7, 2023.

# BALTICS (RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE)
## *Civic Resilience Initiative*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "X country is Russophobic / Russian culture is being attacked" | **Publications:** 11 <br> **Views:** 755,223 | The narrative was centered on showcasing how Lithuania and Latvia are allegedly threatening Russian-speaking minorities and Russian culture due to their internal undemocratic anti-Russian policies |
| "Russia is unaffected by sanctions" | **Publications:** 4 <br> **Views:** 17,622 | The narrative was centered on trying to show that Russia is still thriving economically despite the sanctions and, as such, they are a futile and ineffective tool |
| "NATO/the US/the West is or will be directly involved in the war" | **Publications:** 3 <br> **Views** 5,787 | The stories within the narrative were centered on showing how the alleged militarization in the Baltic region is posing a direct threat to Kaliningrad |

- The Telegram channel "Антифашисты Прибалтики" (Antifascist Baltics), which has been demonstrating statistical anomalies in previous weeks, is largely responsible for inflating the viewership numbers for the narrative, accounting to over 600,000 views in only 2 posts, once again implying inauthentic behaviour.

## Trend changes

Disinformation narratives focused on allegedly Russophobic policies in the Baltics continued to be the most popular category; indeed, as they have been since the project commenced on February 20, 2023. Narratives regarding economic sanctions and antiWestern rhetoric have continuously increased in popularity for the past few weeks. As a result, narratives discrediting Ukraine have dropped in popularity. The "Threat of war expanding beyond Ukraine" and "Battlefield event" narratives have also decreased.

## Context

On the 16th of March, Lithuania's Internal Affairs minister Agnė Bilotaitė proposed a bill which would suspend the acceptance of applications and decisions on Lithuanian citizenship for Russians and Belarusians. This proposal caused a lot of discussion and paved the way for

Russian disinformation sources to claim that Lithuania is trying to politically attack the Russian-speaking minority and deprive its representatives of their rights.

However, on the 4th of April, Lithuania's parliament agreed that there would be no restriction on obtaining Lithuanian citizenship at all. Regarding the ownership of private property, the new law establishes a limitation for Russian citizens and legal entities established and controlled by them to acquire real estate in Lithuania, unless these citizens have a permanent or temporary residence permit in Lithuania or the right to real estate is acquired through inheritance. This does not mean that private property will be taken away from the Russian-speaking minority in Lithuania, as Russian disinformation tries to claim.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

This week the most popular narrative was "Conditions of Russians and Russianspeaking minorities" (11 posts, 755,223 views). It mostly revolved around (a) Lithuania's and Latvia's "anti-Russian policies, statements and decision-making", which supposedly endanger Russian culture. Lithuanians were accused of ridiculing Russians and Belarusians living in the country and attacking the Orthodox church.

The first accusation relies on Lithuania's parliament's proposed bill, which would see Russians and Belarusians facing more restrictions on the purchase of new land. This bill was exaggerated and assessed as a direct threat to Russian-speaking minorities in the country, claiming that their land and property will be taken away.

The "Lithuanian attack on Orthodox believers" refers to Patriarch's Bartholomew's of Constantinople visit to Lithuania. This visit was a pretext for Russian disinformation to attack Lithuania, claiming that it has historically threatened non-Catholic, Orthodox believers. For example, during the visit, the statements from the Speaker of the Lithuanian parliament Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen, in which she claimed that Lithuania was always a religiouslytolerant country, were portrayed as "false and in fact opposite".

In addition, Latvia's decision to ban Russian shows in their national puppet theatre and plans to merge their national TV and Radio companies are being viewed as an attack on Russian culture. The decision to not renew showings of "Ceburashka", a "beloved cultural symbol" in the Latvian puppet theatre is viewed as an attempt to "rewrite history". At the same time, the merger of the national TV and Radio are being assessed as a danger to the Russian-speaking minority, because it is likely to reduce broadcasts in the Russian language.

The second most popular narrative regarded the "Economic consequences of sanctions" (8 posts, 35025 views). Stories within this narrative mainly revolved around (a) showing how Russia is still thriving despite the sanctions and (b) how Estonia is not following up on sanctions against Russia. The first point heavily relies on showcasing the prosperity of Russians' life (especially in the Kaliningrad region) with photos of clean new streets and other areas of the city, while also claiming that a new pharmaceutical company which was opened by Putin will generate thousands of jobs and billions of rubles in profit. While not fake, these reports take Kaliningrad's traditionally strong economic relations with European countries out

of context. Kaliningrad's example canot be extrapolated onto the Russian economy as a whole.

The second point relies on the story that thousands of Estonians have been bypassing sanctions against Russia and have continued economic relations with the Russian Federation. This story, published by one of the most active disinformation actors in the local environment "Sprats in exhile|Latvia News", tries to show that Estonian citizens are polarized on the antiRussian economic policy issue, while also trying to prove that the political situation in Estonia is getting more and more unstable. Additionally, the combination of two stories deliveres an extra effect, showing that sanctions supposedly don't have any real effect on Russia, and Europeans even actively try to bypass them. As a result, they are portrayed as obsolete.

The third most popular narrative was focused on the idea that "NATO / the West will be directly involved in this war". It is backed up by stating that the Baltics continue to militarize and it posts a direct threat to the Kaliningrad region. The conspiracy theory about American biolabs in Ukraine being biological weapon facilities popped up once again in ths context. The InfoDefence LV channel that regularly spreads Russian disinformation has conducted an "investigation" into similar biological labs allegedly existing in the Baltic states to develop biological weapons. The story, however, did not get substantial traction.

Similarly to the monitoring period of March 20 – March 25, 2023, the two most popular posts came from the Telegram channel "Антифашисты Прибалтики" (Antifascist Baltics). Same as last week, the popularity of these posts should be considered as an anomaly. The posts gathered 352,127 and 347,193 views accordingly, while the group itself has 6,983 subscribers and an average post reach of 7355 views. Both of these posts spread the "Russophobia" narrative. The first post regarded Latvia's alleged Russophobia, as they decided to ban showing "cheburashki" in their puppet theatre. This post also incited mudslinging against Latvia's culture minister, uploading a (fake) photo of him where he is posing next to grotesque objects, stating that "this is the face of Latvian culture and national identity".

The second post stated that any person in the "free West" who dares to even hint at Russia's right to protect the Russian people instantly finds themselves behind bars with their property confiscated and a ban on any economic and creative activity. These posts show that the Russian disinformation machine was actively trying to push the narrative that Russian culture is being attacked in the Baltic states, and that the Russian-speaking minority cannot speak up about those issues, for fear of reprisals.

# Trend prediction

Looking at the past few weeks and our previous analysis, it is safe to assume that the Russophobia narratives will continue to be the most popular category with a specific subnarrative depeding on particular events in the Baltic countries. The narrative regarding economic sanctions has been increasing in popularity over the past few weeks, so it should be expected to remain amongst the most popular ones as well.

Looking at important dates for next week, Orthodox Easter is coming up. This might give ground for Russian disinformation to spread stories on how Orthodox believers in the Baltic region are allegedly being attacked.

- In an interview with "STV. News of Belarus", the executive director of the Historical Memory Foundation (Russia), Natalya Selyukina, expressed the opinion that Ukraine is the European centre for the revival of Nazism. She accused the West of being complicit in this revival and blamed European countries for their "active participation" in the genocide of the civilian population in Ukraine, pumping the region full of weapons and volunteers.

# BELARUS
*Belarus Press Club*

| Narrative | Metrics | Details |
|---|---|---|
| "Ukrainians are Nazis" | Publications: **4** <br><br> Views: **21,513** | In an interview with the channel "STV. News of Belarus"  an opinion was expressed  that Ukraine is the European centre for the revival of Nazism. <br> The  channel "STV. News of Belarus"  also broadcast the words of Felix Yashkov, who believes that Ukraine has been lured to the "other side" [Nazism]. <br> The channel "Lyudmila Gladkaya. SB" portrays the Belarusian s  fighting in Ukraine as neo - Nazis. |
| "Ukraine's informational space is controlled by the state authorities / Ukrainian media is lying" | Publications: **3** <br><br> Views: **229,186** | The "Belarusian Silovik" channel claimed that Ukrainian  Telegram channels spread fakes  as ordered by the Ukrainian authorities. <br> The "YELLOW PLUMS" channel promotes the narrative that history is being changed  and "rewritten"  in Ukraine. |
| "The West/NATO provoked the conflict between Ukraine and Russia" | Publications: **3** <br><br> Views **135,249** | The "Pul Pervogo" channel quotes Lukashenko who accuses the West of violating agreements with Russia. <br> The "ZhS Premium" channel claims that Western   support for Belarusian "terrorist organisations" will force Belarus to use nuclear weapons to prevent the invasion. |

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The channel also broadcast the words of a member of the Council of the Republic of Belarus, Head of Operational Customs Felix Yashkov, who believes that Belarus stands against Nazism and that Ukraine has been lured to the "other" – evil – side of history by the West.

- Channel "Shpakovsky. Essential" published a photo of a seriously wounded civilian whose legs were blown off by an explosion. The channel accuses the Ukrainian Armed Forces and Olaf Scholz of allegedly using German anti-tank mines when shelling

residents of Donetsk. This claim fits the sub-narrative that "Ukraine targets civilians", and is intertwined with the aforementioned accusations that the West has enabled the genocide, perpetrated by the neo-Nazi Ukrainian government.

- The "Belarusian Silovik" channel claimed that Ukrainian telegram channels began to spread news of the explosion in Minsk on the territory of the MAZ plant. The channel called news of the explosion "fake" while proceeding to admit that indeed an incident happened on the territory of the plant, thus accusing Ukrainian sources of spreading disinformation.

  The "YELLOW PLUMS" channel promotes the narrative that historical facts are being changed in Ukraine and that a new history is being taught in schools. Ukraine is portrayed as a country where history is being actively "rewritten" for the sake of the regime – one of the long-standing accusations consistently promoted by the Russian authorities and echoed by the Belarusian regime.

- The "Pul Pervogo" channel quotes Lukashenko whose speech included many antiUkrainian narratives and accusations, including those of neo-Nazism, and accuses the West of violating agreements with Russia, effectively promoting the narrative that Russia was provoked into the war with Ukraine by the West.
  The channel "ZhS Premium" calls refugees from Belarus "Nazis" and "criminals", and claims that the West, by supporting "terrorist organisations" formed by these refugees, will eventually force Belarus to use nuclear weapons to prevent an invasion of military groups organised abroad.

## Trend changes

A trend that occurred during the monitoring period of March 20 – March 25 has spilled over to the next round of monitoring, with Belarusian pro-Russian sources continuing to vilify Belrusians who fight on Ukrainian side in the war with Russia. They are consistently labelled as traitors, terrorists and neo-Nazis.

Accusations of Nazism in Ukraine also remain consistent, and so does the trend to vilify Ukraine as an anti-Christian country (focused on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine between the Russia-affiliated Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine).

Coverage of the deployment of Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus remain widespread and typically portray this step as an investment in Belrusian national security against the West, however, the overall number of relevant publications on this theme decreased compared to the previous week.

## Context

Key narratives of March 25 – April 1, 2023 are mostly formed on the basis of Alexander Lukashenko's message to the people of Belarus and the National Assembly.

Official report, issued [here](#). In total, more than 2,500 people took part in the Assembly. Among the invitees were parliamentarians and delegations from the regions and the city of Minsk, senior officials of the country, members of the government, heads of state bodies, state media, representatives of the diplomatic corps and international organisations, heads of religious institutions, parliamentarians of past convocations, representatives of business, and representatives of state civil society.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

The three **most viewed** posts with anti-Ukrainian narratives were from the channel "Belarusian Silovik".

The most-viewed post of the week in the sample (350 thousand views) was a [quote](#) from a Russian nurse, Kristina Kim, who allegedly carried to safety 12 wounded soldiers in Hostomel, Ukraine, in the early stage of the Russian invasion and was honored by the Russian President Vladimir Putin. The nurse claims that the hospital in Hostomel "was the main target of [Ukrainian] shelling". In this way, the channel promotes the narrative that " Ukrainians are targeting civilians and commit other war crimes".

Second ranks a post (187 thousand views) which [claims](#) that Ukrainian Telegram channels, followed by a number of Russian ones, began to spread fake news about an explosion in Minsk on the territory of the MAZ plant. An incident did occur at the plant resulting in a fire that the local emergency services dealt with. The actual nature of the incident remains unknown with the Belarusian authorities insistsing it was just a case of spontaneous combustion.

Another post (2 thousand views) was a [claim](#) that the Kyiv authorities were sending thousands of their citizens to the slaughter in Bakhmut, arguing with the words of Zelensky, who stated that if Ukraine loses Artemovsk [Russian name for Bakhmut], Kyiv will quickly come under pressure from the international community, and internally it will be forced to compromise with Russia. Zelensky made this claim in the interview to Associated Press on March 29, arguing that the Russian leadership will increase the pressure on Ukraine at even the smallest indication of weakness, and potential loss of Bakhmut would undermine Western support due to voices that insist Ukraine is bound to lose becoming stronger.

Five claims observed throughout the period of March 25 – April 1, 2023 deserve extra attention:

1. **The deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus nullifies the militarization of the West**. During the programme "Sunday Evening with Vladimir Solovyov" the author of the channel "Shpakovsky. Essentially" [claimed](#) that the deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus would "nullify" the militarisation of the West, particularly Poland, who will now become helpless in the face of nuclear weapons deployed in Belarus.

2. **Ukraine is to blame for deploying nuclear weapons in Belarus**. The "ZmeyMarinych" channel [believes](#) that Ukraine is responsible for the deployment of nuclear weapons

in Belarus because it threatened to withdraw from the Budapest Memorandum. This step is interpreted as hostile and undermining the regional nuclear security, which has driven Belarus to accept the deployment of Russian weapons as a security measure.

3. **The West is supplying Ukraine with radioactive weapons**. As Britain trains Ukrainian soldiers to handle depleted uranium shells, the "ATN_NEWS" channel claims the West is supplying Ukraine with radioactive weapons. At the same time, doubts are being raised about whether the weapons are safe for the Ukrainians themselves.

4. **Poland makes claims on the territory of other states**. In the opinion of the "ATN_NEWS" channel's presenter, Maria Petrashko, Poland's alleged claims on the territory of other states and Kyiv's invitation to explore and develop hydrocarbon deposits in Ukraine could lead to the loss of energy and even territorial independence of Ukraine.

5. **European politicians do not want negotiations**. In an interview with the "STV. News of Belarus", the executive director of the Foundation of Historical Memory (Russia), Natalya Selyukina, noted that European politicians are not in the mood for negotiations because among them there is no "opponent who is ready to listen to us, who is ready to take some steps to overcome contradictions".

Here are some interesting details of the narratives mentioned above.

**Lukashenka**. The "Pul Pervogo" channel quoted Lukashenka as saying that he remembers how all peace proposals were rejected by the Ukrainian leadership [in 2014]. The channel also quoted Lukashenka as saying that Poland has plans to invade the territory of Belarus in order to destroy the country, and that fugitive Belrusians will be used for this purpose as fighters.

The ATN NEWS channel published a quote in which Lukashenka accused Zelensky of not doing everything to prevent the war.

The "Minskaya Pravda|MLYN.by" channel quotes Lukashenka as saying that Russia is using its defence complex to the full and that the Ukrainians will not win because it is impossible to defeat a nuclear power.

**Legalisation of Software Piracy**. The author of the channel "Yury Voskresensky" reposts a message from the ONT NEWS channel, which refers to Dmitry Medvedev's statement on legalising software piracy. The author supports this decision by referring to the fact that the West has "stolen our assets". Among other things, it is proposed to support projects that distribute scientific articles from Western scientific journals and specialist literature free of charge.

**The West and Ukraine are evil**. The channel "ONT NEWS" claims that the West is hypocritical, that it in fact calls for crimes, whilst trying to convince the whole world that this is the way to bring democracy.

The ATN_NEWS channel trolls Macron by saying that the majority of football fans are against Macron, while Macron's popularity has dropped to a minimum. Macron is only supported by ethnic Ukrainians who are happy about the arms deliveries to Ukraine.

The channel "Azarenok. STV" tries to show that organisations in Poland collect money for the needs of Ukraine and steal it.

The channel "Lyudmila Gladkaya. SB" portrays the Belarusian mercenaries fighting in Ukraine as neo-Nazis.

Metropolitan Pavel, the governor of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, threatened Zelensky with heavenly punishment for the expulsion of the Lavra's servants, calling Zelensky directly responsible for what was happening around the Lavra.

**The Future of War**. The "BEREZINA" channel promotes the narrative that there is a growing number of Western experts who predict a gloomy scenario for Kyiv, where it is bound to lose the war.

The author of the channel "Shpakovsky. Basically." believes that one of the scenarios for the development of the military campaign in Ukraine in 2023 is the expansion of the war zone to Moldova and the unleashing of the Transnistrian conflict [by Ukraine].

The "Our Country" channel promotes the narrative that the West is losing interest in Ukraine. The channel quotes the words of Slovak President Susanna Chaputova, who said that support for Ukraine in that country is drying up, both materially and morally.

The author of the "Dzermant" channel claims that Ukrainians as a people should be together with us [Belarus and Russia].

# Trend prediction

Against the backdrop of Ukraine's potential counter-offensive, Belrusian progovernment channels will increasingly call for a peaceful settlement at any cost – meaning that Ukraine should agree to the Russian demands. At the same time, the threat of the use of tactical nuclear weapons will not disappear from the information field. The channels will continue justifying the deployment of Russian nuclear weapons on the territory of the Republic of Belarus.

# Contextualizing most popular narratives

# Bulgaria
*Center for the Study of Democracy*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "Western politicians care about Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens" | Publications: 5 <br><br> Views: 6,605 | The sub-narrative intensified in comparison to the previous round of monitoring, mainly utilizing the idea that Western Europe leaders are imposing policies supporting Ukraine despite their citizens' discontent. Some articles mention local protests in Bulgaria , claiming that the farmers are on strike because of the cheap grain coming from Ukraine. |
| "Ukrainians are Nazis" | Publications: 4 <br><br> Views: 2,512 | Pro-Kremlin media outlets and Telegram channels shared an interview with a Ukrainian personallegedly rescued by the Russians, claiming that Russia is much nicer than Ukraine, because there are no Nazis. |
| Russian troops are advancing / achieving success | Publications: 4 <br><br> Views 10,833 | Similar sub-narratives were also popular during last week's monitoring, portraying Ukrainian authorities as desperate, because PMC *"Wagner"* supposedly occupied the entire plant in Bakhmut, or stating that the situation at the frontlines is devastating for Ukraine. |

- 30 out of the 50 monitored posts and publications utilized the **anti-Western narratives** and **narratives discrediting Ukraine,** making them the dominant disinformation categories throughout March 25 – April 1, 2023 (15 publications per category). The sub-narrative **Western politicians care about Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens** is also popular, framed predominantly thought the claims that the western elite are "warmongers", approving military aid to Ukraine and sanctions against Russia.

- The number of publications **Discrediting Ukraine** in one way or another is still growing significantly. Throughout March 25 – April 1, 2023 such narratives focussed on Zelensky always "complaining" of military aid shortage, despite the weapons allegedly not even ending up on the frontline as the corrupt Ukrainian elite supposedly sells all weapons and ammunitions at the black market for personal gain.

# Trend changes

- With the developments around the battles for Mariinka in Ukraine as well as Putin sending nuclear capable "Iskander-M" missles to Belarus and other military actions on Ukrainian soil, the narratives and sub-narratives surrounding **Battlefield events** are still present this week.
- The sub-narrative that **Ukrainians are Nazis** intensified even more in comparison to last week's monitoring, with articles claiming that the West and Ukraine are preparing a war in Transnistria and that a temple of the Ukrainian Orthodox was set ablaze in the Ternopil region gaining traction.

# Context

Telegram groups and media outlets monitored actively disseminated publications utilizing the ***Western politicians care about Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens*** narrative. In Bulgaria, the aforementioned disinformation is amplified due to the protests by Bulgarian farmers all over the country. Farmers insist that Regulation (EU) 2022/870 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2022 on duty-free imports of agricultural products from Ukraine should not be extended for Bulgaria.

However, farmers are protesting for many other reasons such as against the construction of wind turbines near the region of Vetrino, for the lack of registration procedures to create identification code for the production of cultivated truffles and against the drastic increase in water price. Portraying these protests solely as "antiUkrainian" is a manipulation.

# Key sub-narrative analysis

As usual, the most popular publication of the week was a Telegram post in Russian from the group **ЗОВ - заЕДНО ОБЩение всеМИР [ZOV – United Community for Peace].** The post accumulated 153,865 total views and showed a video from Poland in which a "Ukrainian beggar" dressed in the Ukrainian flag asks for money at the entrance to a store. The video aims to portrait Ukrainian refugees as spoiled and a burden on the Polish society. The Telegram group **ЗОВ - заЕДНО ОБЩение всеМИР** accumulates a huge 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 to promote peace, and enlightment. Although the admins strictly forbid any political views and disinformation, the 3,200 members of the group mainly disseminate anti-NATO and pro-Russian publications, often with media attached to them.

# Trend prediction

- With military actions unfolding in the eastern part of Ukraine, narratives depicting **Ukraine losing the war** and **Russia having military success** will intensify even further.

The popular Kremlin disinformation technique to utilize the opinion of a foreign agent of Russian influence or impersonate a legitimate and trusted figure or entity, in order to create false credibility surrounding a narrative will again be used – similarly to a statement from Mick Wallace, an MEP from The Left in the European Parliament - GUE/NGL was used, strongly criticising the UK's decision to supply Ukraine with uranium munitions.

- With the unfolding military action there is a chance that narratives connected to **Ukrainian refugees** will intensify further.
- Further discreditation of Ukraine and claims that it is prioritized by the foreign governments at the expense of their own citizens is also likely, considering the ongoing farmers' protests.

# Georgia
*GRASS*

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| "Ukrainian government is fighting against Christian church" | Publications: 11 <br><br> Views: 8,651 | Since the Ukrainian government ordered the Russia-linked Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate to leave Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, pro-Russian disinformation is trying to portray Ukrainian government as an enemy of Christianity, utilizing the sensitivity of religious issues in Georgia. |
| "Ukraine is losing the war" | Publications: 5 <br><br> Views: 8,000 | In one form or another, the message that Ukraine is losing the war has been consistently spread to persuade the public that the fate of the war is in Russia's favour. |
| "Western society does not support Ukraine" | Publications: 3 <br><br> Views 3,342 | Several pieces of disinformation tried to manifest that support for Ukraine in Western societies is fading. This message has not been popular before. |

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The disinformation campaign claiming that the Ukrainian government is fighting against Christianity has intensified. It is focussed on messages that Ukraine is forcing Orthodox priests out of churches, including Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, and portrays the actions of the Ukrainian government as hostile to Christianity, failing to explain the complex nature of religious disputes in Ukraine and the links between Russian

Orthodox Church and Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate that has been occupying Kyiv Pechersk Lavra. This narrative is amongst the most harmful disinformation messages as it has potential to decrease public support towards Ukraine in Georgia by playing on the religious beliefs of the vast majority of Georgians.

- The message that Ukraine is losing the war is popular almost every week. Throughout March 25 – April 1, 2023 several publications shared the same message, arguing that Ukraine is losing by cherry-picking articles from Western media regarding Ukraine's military issues, claiming that Western military aid is ineffective, claiming that the Russian army is advancing and capturing more territory and insisting that the Ukrainian army is not willing to defend Bakhmut any longer as their morale deteriorates.

- The third most popular message this week claimed that Western society does not support Ukraine. One message was based on the far right Austrian MPs leaving the session during Zelensky's video address in the Austrian parliament on March 31 portraying it as a widespread disdain towards Ukraine in the country. Another fake story suggested that Western leaders are no longer talking to Zelensky because of negative attitudes towards Ukraine in the Western societies.

The event that is influencing the disinformation eco-system in Georgia the most is the ongoing dispute between Ukraine Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine over the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra.

## Trend changes

As predicted based on the results of March 20 – March 25, 2023 monitoring, the dispute concerning the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra remains unresolved, and therefore the disinformation campaign has intensified. 22% of the sample were messages trying to persuade the Georgian public, which is highly religious and sensitive to issues related to Orthodox Christianity, that Zelensky and Ukrainian government are fighting against Christianity and the Orthodox Church. These messages are consistently disseminated in order to discredit Ukraine and decrease high public support in Georgia.

As it was predicted in the last issue, the message that Ukraine is losing the war has remained active, although some details have changed. In particular, during March 20 – March 25 this narrative stated that Western military aid would not be enough to save Ukraine. This week no single angle has been overwhelmingly popular – instead several varying messages reiterated the idea that Ukraine is losing the war due to different factors: military issues, deteriorating morale in the Ukrainian army, ineffectiveness of Western military aid, advances of the the Russian army in Bakhmut etc.

Despite not being mentioned in the top three sub-narratives this week, the "second front" conspiracy has not disappeared from the information space and in terms of dissemination it was on par with the third most popular sub-narrative this week. Georgian Dream is

increasingly using this conspiracy theory (see GRASS Disinfo Brief for more examples), and its presence remains high.

## Context

The reason why pro-Russian sources are pedalling messages that the Ukrainian government is fighting Orthodox Christianity lies in the social realities of Georgia. Most Georgians are Orthodox Christians, they are very sensitive towards religious affairs, and the Georgian Orthodox Church is a highly influential and trusted institution (alongside the army) in Georgia based on polling (more than 80%).

Public support towards Ukraine and negative attitudes towards Russia and its war are also very high amongst the Georgian public. Therefore, pro-Russian disinformation is trying to use the religiousness of Georgians to decrease public support towards Ukraine by pressing on the disinformation campaign that depicts Ukrainian government as an enemy of Christianity. The dispute around Kyiv Pechersk Lavra remains a focal point of this campaign for the second monitoring period in a row.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

The most active disinformation campaign concerned the dispute in Kyiv Pechersk Lavra and an attempt to portray Ukrainian government as enemies of Christianity:

- Pro-Russian Telegram channel "World Politics" distorted the facts in its publication, claiming that Kyiv Pechersk Lavra will be closed and all the clergy was ordered to leave the church. Lavra will remain open, and the priests have an opportunity to remain in it as a part of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine instead of the UOC MP.
- The same channel claimed that in Ukraine priests and their followers were forced out of the church with tear gas, which is fake.
- Pro-Russian newspaper GeWorld, regularly contributing to disinformation ecosystem, published the address from the UOC MP representative, Vicar of KyivPechersk Lavra Metropolitan Pavel, to President Zelensky, attributing personal responsibility for the "suffering" of the UOC MP due to the loss of Lavra to the Ukrainian President.
- Telegram channel "PolitNews" spread a fake claim that in Ukraine Orthodox priests and their followers were forced out of the Orthodox church and to celebrate this victory, an evil, un-Christian performance was organised there. The channel concluded that this act once again demonstrates the dire spiritual situation in Ukraine where the government is at war with Christianity.

None of the pro-Russian sources explain the details of religious dispute in Ukraine. Instead, they are actively involved in manipulation, portraying UOC MP as the only Orthodox Christian force in the country, and the only legitimate church. Meanwhile, Orthodox Church of Ukraine also belongs to Orthodox Christianity, and claims that the Ukrainian government chases Orthodox priests out of churches are false.

The aforementioned Telegram channel [World Politics](#) is administered by Arsen Popkhadze who is head of regional office of the pro-Russian political party – Conservative Movement . This political party and its media group Alt-Info are the vanguard of pro-Russian disinformation in Georgia, their representatives regularly visit Russia and hold meetings with Russian propagandists and  officials. They advocate for closer alliance with Russia.

## Trend prediction

The US has just sanctioned 4 Georgian judges alleged to be part of a "clan" that controls the judicial system. Therefore, disinformation against the US is likely to increase and the sub-narrative of the West interfering in Georgia's internal affair might be popular again.  The message that Ukraine is losing the war and Russia is set to emerge victorious is highly likely to yet again remain one of the key messages of pro-Russian disinformation in Georgia as it has remained in the top three every week but changed sub-topics.

The "second front" conspiracy will definitely stay in Georgian information space, its popularity is generally dependent on how often Georgian Dream leaders and its disinformation machine share it.

The disinformation campaign to portray Zelensky and Ukrainian government as enemies of Christianity and Orthodox Church has picked up steam and is likely to stay popular, whether it has reached its peak and will be decreasing or will further escalate is yet to be seen. It is generally dependent on the situation on the ground in Ukraine, particularly whether the dispute regarding the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra is settled or tensions rise even higher.

## Contextualising most popular narratives

- Narratives discrediting Ukraine were the most widespread throughout the period of March 25 – April 1, 2023. These can be broadly arranged into three categories: Ukraine's crackdown on pro-Kremlin clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate, Ukraine's treatment of Hungarian and Russian minorities, and Ukraine being allegedly ungrateful and demanding towards the West. Both far-right and government-organised media used these narratives.

# Hungary
*Political Capital*

| "The West will fight until the last Ukrainian" | Publications: 4 — Views: 466,209 | Claims are based on previous pro-Kremlin narratives about the immediate need for peace negotiations and insist that while Russian strives for peace, the West is willing to prolong the conflict in Ukraine. Its presence in the information space resulted from a statement by Lukashenko, painting the West as a warmongering party. Pro-government and far-right sources spread it. |
|---|---|---|
| "Ukraine mistreats its soldiers/civilians" | Publications: 5 — Views: 5,213 | This sub-narrative is a continuation of last week's pro-Kremlin claims alleging that Zelensky is prosecuting Christians. This narrative was spread by all three groups of actors: pro-government, far-right, and pro-Kremlin. |
| "The West/NATO provoked the conflict between Russia and Ukraine" | Publications: 3 — Views 121,049 | This is a recurring pro-Kremlin narrative that the West is responsible for the war in Ukraine. Far-right actors spread this narrative through different messages, mostly quoting pro-Kremlin sources. |

- Anti-Western narratives were popular, too. These boiled down to the claims that it is the US provoking the conflict, Western leadership is incompetent in various ways, and Western countries are warmongers that prevent peace. Once again, both far-right and government-organised media used these narratives.
- Narratives regarding battlefield events, alleging that Russia is winning and Ukraine is losing, were observed, too. For the fourth week in a row, Bakhmut has completely fallen to Russia. Once again, both far-right and government-organised media used these narratives.

The Hungarian National Assembly – specifically the government majority – accepted a so-called "peace resolution". In this resolution, ruling-party MPs repeat the Hungarian government's position about the war in Ukraine: They condemn Russia's aggression against Ukraine, but they state that 1) the West should avoid escalation and not send weapons; 2) sanctions are useless and they cause inflation; 3) the only solution is immediate peace negotiations.

# Trend changes

Interestingly, the total number of disinformation messages decreased this week compared to previous weeks, but this is not likely to become a long-term trend. Disinformation narratives continued to mostly reflect emerging news stories and repeat previous claims about the war.

Lukashenko's statement that while Russia is ready for peace, the West isn't, was the most substantial manifestation of a narrative that the West is ready to fight until the last Ukrainian. This is part of the widespread claims that the West is a warmongering party in the conflict, not interested in peace, while a ceasefire and immediate peace negotiations are the only viable solution to the war and Ukraine should agree to those, even if it means accepting Russia's demands.

# Context

Narratives about Ukraine suppressing its Hungarian minority have been a popular and successful tool to stoke anti-Ukrainian sentiment in Hungary. This week, however, the narrative changed to accuse Zelensky of not just being anti-Hungarian, but also antiChristian. The crackdown on pro-Putin elements of the Church is being communicated to Hungarian readers of both government-organised media and far-right media as a widespread attack on the religious freedom of Christians. It remains to be seen how effective this will be because while Hungary's ruling party proudly and explicitly calls itself Christian, the proportion of actively religious people is fairly low compared to, for example, Ukraine or Poland.

Although mostly featured as a secondary sub-narrative, the economic aspect of the war played a prominent role, too. Hungary is experiencing particularly high inflation compared to some other EU countries, even though it is able to import cheap Russian oil and gas. As a part of its communication strategy, the government has decided to blame domestic economic troubles solely on the sanctions on Russia. The two key parts of their narrative are that Russia is unaffected by sanctions and that the sanctions are the primary cause of inflation in Europe. Thus, the government avoids taking the blame for the deliberate economic choices they have made in the past and can blame an external actor (Brussels/the West/those that want sanctions) for the hardships experienced by Hungarian families.

The use of the word peace has become crucial in Russian disinformation narratives. The Hungarian government is trying to score domestic political victories using the proKremlin narrative of peace. The government majority even passed a "peace resolution" in the National Assembly, which, among other things, condemns weapon shipments to Ukraine. The opposition voted against the declaration, which allowed the government and the government-organised media to start a defamation campaign against the opposition by labelling them as warmongering and anti-peace. This latter falls into the narrative that the Hungarian opposition is controlled by the West.

In many cases, a piece of disinformation by a Russian official or a pro-Kremlin sympathiser is repeated uncritically and without any context in Hungarian media. In these

cases, it is not the Hungarian media or politicians inventing these narratives, but by spreading them as legitimate statements of facts, they are engaging in disinformation nonetheless. This is a regular strategy of the government-organised, and pro-Kremlin media outlets in Hungary.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

***The West is ready to fight till the last Ukrainian*** (4 cases, 466,209 views). There are multiple articles and posts echoing this narrative. This sub-narrative was centred around a statement from the Belarusian dictator Lukashenko urging Western leaders to negotiate for peace, but accusing them of an unwillingness to do so, while Russia would be ready for peace. However, within the same statement, Lukashenko also said that Russian troops should stay in Ukrainian territory, that the West needs to stop arming Ukraine, and that Ukraine should refrain from launching a spring offensive. Russian disinformation has deliberately co-opted the word "peace" to openly argue for Russia's complete subjugation of Ukraine. Russia is not open to negotiating peace in good faith - they want a peace involving annexation and demilitarisation of Ukraine. A similar framing was used in the "peace resolution" of the Hungarian parliament, where weapon shipments are understood as the cause of the continuation of the war, not Russia refusing to negotiate and withdraw troops.

***Ukraine mistreats its soldiers/civilians*** (5 cases, 5,213 views). Multiple articles this week focused on Ukraine's efforts to crack down on leaders of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), not to be confused with the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). Ukrainian security services have been targeting leaders of the former due to their alleged and now confirmed ties to Russia and their role in spreading Russian propaganda and undermining the war effort. Even though the OCU is left alone and protected by the government, and that the vast majority of both priests and Orthodox Christian citizens belong to it, and not the Putinist UOC-MP, far-right and government-organised Hungarian media is claiming Zelensky is prosecuting Christians, and is engaged in a witch-hunt against believers. One of the articles claimed that the UN called this an unjust persecution, but the referenced UN report is mostly about Russian human rights abuses and just says that it hopes Ukraine is respecting the rule of law and giving the priests due process and fair trials.

***The West/NATO provoked the conflict between Russia and Ukraine*** (3 cases, 121,049 views). The three cases in which this narrative is used are all slightly different. Kuruc.info quotes Lukashenko claiming that the West has brought total war to Ukraine by sending it weapons while ignoring that the West is sending weapons because Russia is waging war against Ukraine. Referenced by Hungarian pro-government far-right journalist Zsolt Bede, Italian politician Barbara Spinelli says that American arrogance and broken promises towards Russia in the past decades caused this war, once again ignoring the central fact of Russia choosing on its own to conduct this invasion and deciding not to withdraw its troops. An article on the far-right Szent Korona Radio, which is closely affiliated with the far-right organisation

SixtyFour Counties Youth Movement, quotes [Viktor Medvedchuk, a disgraced Ukrainian politician](#) [now in exile in Moscow, who writes](#) that the conflict started in 2014 when the US "comducted a coup [against the] the legitimate government of Ukraine". In reality, there were mass protests against Ukraine's corrupt leadership, which Medvedchuk was a part of.

## Trend prediction

The explosion that killed pro-Kremlin Russian military blogger Vladlen Tatarsky in St Petersburg and Russian authorities blaming Ukraine will reinforce anti-Ukrainian narratives, and this will likely be popular among far-right and pro-Kremlin actors.

Narratives claiming that Western weapon transfers and interference in the war could cause WWIII, used by Prime Minister Orbán in a recent statement, will likely gain influence and be distributed by government-organised, far-right and pro-Kremlin media outlets. We find it unlikely that Finland joining NATO would be a key focus, as it wasn't a popular target for disinformation previously.

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The threat of military escalation in Transnistria was the most intensely promoted sub-narrative. Such fearmongering tactics are also employed to pressure the government into inaction regarding support of Ukraine.
- The regular, yearly call-up of reservists for exercises and training is scheduled to last four months this year, longer than average, and has been the subject of falsehoods and speculations even before it started. It is mostly portrayed as proof that Moldova is preparing to attack Transnistria.

# MOLDOVA
## *WatchDog.MD Community*

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| **"X country is under threat/will be pulled into the war"** | Publications: **5** <hr> Views: **23,180** | This sub -narrative was fuelled by the story of a Russian citizen who tried  to cro ss into Transnistria after fighting  against  Ukraine. Ongoing reservists' mobilization in Moldova and support statements from NATO Deputy Secreta  ry General  Mircea Geoan ă were also used to stress the risk of escalation in Moldova. |
| **"Ukrainians are Nazis"** | 4 <hr> Views: **20,258** | The comeback of this sub  -narratives has benefited from a pro  -Romanian unionist rally in Chi      șinău, where participants display  the flag of the Azov battalion. A secondary story was Romanian far  -right senator Diana Șoșoacă accusing Ukraine of putting her name on a "kill list" and called them Nazis. |

- Narratives discrediting Ukraine remain overall the most popular category, even if specific topics within it are very diverse. Anti-Western narratives were also widely present in the information field throughout March 25 – April 1, 2023.

## Trend changes

The risk of escalation in Transnistria remained  a dominant issue in the Moldovan disinformation eco-system and took the form of the "Moldova will be pulled into war" subnarrative.  Whether it involves accusing Ukraine  of deliberately staging provocations to pull Moldova into war, the West dragging Moldova into hostilities or, as this week, Moldova preparing to attack Transnistria, the threat of military confrontations is a permanent, pervasive topic. The exact angle and specific sub-narrative is mostly adapted to the specific events and developments in Moldova and Ukraine throughout each monitoring period.

Economy-related sub-narratives, such as the  focus on sanctions and the energy crisis during the previous monitoring round of March 20 – March 25, 2023  have received less attention this time around. They remain a constant topic, but more as a tick-the-box, background sub-narratives, while most of the effort and attention is redirected elsewhere.  Some topics resurfaced that were more actively disseminated in the earlier periods of monitoring. One can be described as a "this day in history"-type publication which, in this particular case, selected a series of events that happened throughout history on March 27. The selected events, such as a decree by the Russian Empress  Catherine II to include rightbank Ukraine into the Russian

Empire, underscored the idea that the region (Moldova and Ukraine) belongs to the Russian World (Russki Mir). This way the war in Ukraine is indirectly legitimized as Russia is portrayed for taking action in its own backyard.

Two other ideas that contradict each other but aim to shape public opinion about the war is that 1) a Ukrainian victory would negatively impact Moldova and is undesirable; and 2) that the war in Ukraine does not really affect Moldova and authorities in Chișinău should not concern themselves with it.

It is not uncommon for Russian disinformation actors to simultaniuosly promote contradictory messages. In this case the first story, published by "Genii Carpat" anonymous channel, claims that if Ukraine wins Moldova will become a trafficking hub for weapons and drugs and even a route for human-trafficking from Ukraine. No explanation or additional details are provided. The second story was published by "Gagauzia News" and reposted by "Moldavski Piston" channel, quoting Moldovan MP Vasyl Bolya who said that there is no need to prolong the state of emergency in the country and offered to exclude this point of discussion from parliament's agenda since the situation with Ukrainian refugees "has been brilliantly resolved by the local administration" and "there is no war in the country". The parliamentray majority did not support his initiative.

## Context

The issue of the effect of sanctions in the West does not really stir up emotions in Moldova the same way as a story about the tensions around Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra in Ukraine. The energy crisis is also losing its emotional potency as the need for heating during winter comes to an end.

The resurgence of the "Ukrainians are Nazis" sub-narrative draws on decades of political debate in Moldova, where pro-Russian forces have been always accusing proRomanian unionists of being fascists. Unionists do indeed harbour some far-right elements and their association with the Azov battalion was low-hanging fruit for Russian propaganda. However, when an openly far-right Romanian politician like Diana Șoșoacă calls the Ukrainians Nazis, pro-Russian Telegram channels have no issue sharing her statements.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

The sub-narrative about Moldova getting pulled into the war had several variants. First, there was the factual story of a Russian citizen, who had fought in Ukraine, trying to get into Transnistria. While a true event, this story is spinned to give credibility to the imminent escalation narrative. Not openly pro-Russian or anti-Ukrainian, it is simply used to sow panic, to make the threat more real, after which pro-Russian politicians can blame the pro-Western government for attempts to drag Moldova into war by using the same narrative as in Ukraine: Russia had to act because it was provoked.

For example, a [fragment from President Sandu's speech](#) in Parliament was presented as proof that she is fully subordinated to Washington and Brussels, has no sovereignty and is "ready to fight Putin, Russia and cheap Russian gas, until the last farmer". This commentary comes from one of the most famous Moldovan "journalists" for hire who previously worked for the (now fugitive) oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc, but has since joined the pro-Russian camp and has become one of the most vitriolic voices against the government.

## Trend prediction

 Last week's prediction that sub-narratives concerning the potential escalation in Transnistria and Moldova being pulled into the war held true and this will likely remain true in upcoming weeks as well. This topic not only has potentially strong emotional resonance in Moldova, but, as explained above, has strong narrative versatility. It can be tied into multiple anti-Western, anti-Ukrainian or battlefield event narratives, which allows it to persist from week to week, adapting to topical developments.
 Given that Ukrainian grain has stimulated a fall in grain prices that led Bulgarian and Polish farmers onto the streets, this type of news will fuel again sub-narratives about how sanctions hurt the West or that the West does not care about its own people, or that it should not provide aid to Ukraine anymore, etc. It is also worth monitoring whether and how the trial of Donald Trump will be reflected, as it might tie into some anti-Western narratives.

# POLAND
*Fakenews.pl*

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| New Sub-Narrative: "Ukrainian grain undermines Western economies" | Publications: **5** <br> Views: **185,696** | Various far-right and pro-Russian sources tackle the topic of Ukrainian grain being sent to Europe under low tax/no tax agreements to support Ukraine. Sources claim that the grain is contaminated/low quality or there is too much of it, leading to local market instability in Poland. |
| "NATO/the US/the West is or will be directly involved in the war" | Publications: **3** <br> Views: **11,640** | General narratives from various sources aimed at frightening the general public: claiming that NATO is planning to engage Russian troops in Ukraine directly, that the US pushes its allies in Europe into war or military aid to Ukraine will result in Russia's "countermeasures" hurting Poland. |
| The war in Ukraine is a part of global conspiracy | Publications: **3** <br> Views **10,058** | Various narratives claiming that war in Ukraine is a conspiracy and was planned for years by the West (and/or Jews). The aim of the sub-narrative is to blame the West for war in Ukraine and to picture Russia as the victim of a transnational, evil conspiracy which provoked the violent conflict. The same sources tend to claim that whole war is staged, ignoring the fact that these two narratives contradict each other. |

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

- A notable development of the March 25 – April 1, 2023 monitoring period is the emergence of a new narrative in the Polish information space: claims that Ukraine sends contaminated grain, as well as huge amounts of grain, to the West. All of the Kremlin-linked and most of the far-right sources were promoting this new subnarrative, which potentially can point to coordinated behavior and signals the importance of this rhetoric for the local disinformation actors.

- The number of conspiracy-related narratives and standalone instances of fake news is slowly rising. Highly present in the Poland's information environment during the

monitoring period of March 20 – March 25, conspiracy theories demonstrated their efficiency as a disinformation tactic due to their rapid spread and high traction. The initial success might have prompted disinformation actors to continue investing in conspiracy theories as a strategy to undermine support for Ukraine.

Due to upcoming elections in Autumn, the far-right Confederation party begain campaigning, focusing on economy-related topics which may result in general rise of pro-Russian economy-themed narratives. Representatives of this party have been regularly noticed to spread disinformation, and it is highly likely they will continue to do so for their own political gain before the election.

## Trend changes

For the third consecutive week "The war in Ukraine is a part of global conspiracy" sub-narrative constitutes an important part of the disinformation eco-system in Poland. Russian disinformation is not pushing and boosting the narrative as aggressively as other topics, but makes sure that it is constantly present, creating the impression that "people are talking about it". Although not overly widespread, it  still of great importance as a way of a constant, almost subconscious-level influence on the general audience.
A new sub-narrative -  "Ukraine sends contaminated/too much grain to the West" – emerged , and its importance is considerable as it relies on the general public's economy and crisis-related fears.

## Context

Rising prices of fuel and food are driving most of the discussed sub-narratives, which results in a growing emphasis on the economy. Russian disinformation tries to blame all these problems in Poland on the war in Ukraine and present the West as responsible for starting the war and consequently causing all the economic problems Poland suffers from. Due to the ongoing cot of living crisis across much of the monitored geography, economy-related sub-narratives resonate much better with the audience.
This narrative mostly reliews on vulnerabilities such as the fear of an uncertain future, a lack of the deeper understanding around disinformation and the low medialiteracy capabilities of the general audience. The Confederation party responsible for spreading a large part of the aforementioned fear and economy-related disinformation is winning more and more support, according to the latest polls even rising to 11% total and 27% in 18-39 age group, positioning it as a prospective 3$^{rd}$ power in the Parliament.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

The most popular and interesting sub-narrative of March 25 – April 1, 2023 is the new "Ukraine sends contaminated/too much grain to the West" narrative. The most popular post of the week also belongs to this category, published by a conservative outlet "Polonia Christiana"and having approximately 42,800 views.

The sub-narrative is bult on two pillars: posts claiming that the grain is contaminated and potentially harmful to the consumers and posts stating that Ukrainian grain ruins Polish farmers and economy and forces the government to subsidize the farmers meaning "Polish taxpayers need to pay for Ukrainian grain".

**Examples:**

1.      First part of the sub-narrative, stating that all taxpayers will have to carry the burden of the subsidies (2 billion PLN) which are needed to save the farmers destroyed by Ukrainian grain: wolnemedia.net/beda-doplaty-dla-rolnikow-ktore-nie-rozwiazujaproblemu/

Also, this part encourages a special taxation of Ukrainian grain to "protect the market": https://pch24.pl/nalozenie-cla-ochronnego-na-zboza-kukurydze-i-rzepak-z-ukrainytego-domaga-sie-solidarna-polska-co-na-to-pis/

2.      Second part of the narrative is "Poland does not want Ukrainian grain", it claims that Ukrainian grain needs to be sent further to Africa and Middle East (as being low-quality), but now stays in Poland disrupting the market: wolnemedia.net/ukrainskie-zboze-manie-pozostawac-w-polsce/

3.      The third part of the sub-narrative is "The grain is contaminated and harmful to humans". People are pictured violently protesting trying to stop the inflow of Ukrainian grain and save lives: https://t.me/infokju/47023

The main actors responsible for promoting the sub-narrative are Confederacy-linked conservative sources and individuals. In addition to the above mentioned Christian ultra-conservative Polonia Christiana, a far-right "independent" WolneMedia.net portal was also a heavy contributor to the spread of this narrative.

## Trend prediction

Although the grain topic most likely won't last very long, similar economy-related narratives are predicted to gain momentum due to inflation. More than ever people are concerned about their economic future, which has resulted in significant drop in consumption rates in Poland.

Far-right and pro-Kremlin sources and individuals will use this sentiment to boost various narratives that may increase their popularity with voters. Previously, narratives targeting Ukrainian refugees have arguably been exploited for this purpose, and it is likely that economy-related disinformation will also become more intensive. Considering the upcoming elections and the subsequent increase in media coverage of politics, these narratives are likely to resonate more than it would in normal conditions.

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

- All of the most widespread sub-narratives belong to the category of narratives aiming to undermine the supply of military aid to Ukraine. The relevant rhetoric has been present in the Slovak information field, but the intensity spiked throughout the period of March 25 – April 1, 2023.

# Slovakia
## *Infosecurity*

„Military aid is against the constitution and/or a crime"

Publications:
**8**

Views:
**118,031**

The most prevalent sub -narrative this week claimed that the Slovak government's decision to send MiG - 29 fighter jets to Ukraine was allegedly against the constitution. The sub -narrative is mostly spread by certain opposition politicians, whose quotes are shared by numerous disinformation outlets.

"The politicians of X country are dragging it to the war by supporting Ukraine/sending military aid"

Publications:
**4**

Views:
**8,2324**

The previous sub -narrative was often accompanied by another one, claiming that the decision [on jets] means dragging Slovakia into the war. Most of the posts were published by a pro -Russian opposition politician Ľuboš Blaha, who is a member of the party Smer-SD, which is currently a leader in pre -election polls.

"Military aid unnecessarily prolongs the war/endangers civilians"

Publications:
**3**

Views
**56,249**

The third most popular sub -narrative claimed that military aid unnecessarily prolongs the war . Two of the posts claimed that the US isescalating the war by sending more and more weapons to Ukraine and if the US did not do so, there could have already been peace in Ukraine.

- A significant number of the posts spreading the most popular sub-narratives were published by members of Smer-SD and Republika party that have spread proRussian disinformation before.

## Trend changes

The most popular category of narratives spread in the Slovak disinformation space has mostly been anti-Western, which we have observed during the previous weeks. However, during the period of March 25 – April 1, 2023 the messages regarding military aid to Ukraine have dominated the information field. Some opposition politicians and other disinformation actors spread the sub-narrative that the Slovak government had no right to decide to send MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine. Some also claim that it was a crime and suggest that the minister of defence should be in prison for making this decision.

Despite the fact that the decision to send jets was made almost a month ago and disinformation attacking it has been somewhat present before, only now has it become essential. On one hand, this is rather surprising because it is now more prevalent than immediately after the decision was made, which contradicts the usual flow of news and

information. However, the phenomenon may also indicate that the Slovak disinformation space is not particularly nimble, and it takes some time for the actors to synchronize and communicate the same topic and the same narratives.

# Context

 Numerous actors spread the sub-narrative that the Slovak government's decision to send MiG-29 jets to Ukraine was against the constitution. The reason is that the government resigned in December 2022 and now according to the constitution "has no right to decide on fundamental issues of foreign policy".

 The question whether the government can make a decision or not has been a legitimate subject of discussion between the government and the president before the decision was made. It is also why the government asked numerous law experts to give them their opinions. The conclusion was that the government, even though has resigned, has the right to make this decision and it is not against the constitution. However, it is still a complicated issue which is why a part of the opposition started heavily spreading the narrative that it was unconstitutional. While analysing this narrative, we must also keep in mind that there are upcoming parliamentary elections scheduled for September 2023.

 The legitimacy of this decision was a topic covered by mainstream media before the decision was made on March 17th. After the lawyers' conclusion that it is not against the constitution, it stopped being a topic in mainstream media. However, as mentioned above, disinformation actors have only recently picked up this narrative.

# Key sub-narrative analysis

 Half of the posts spreading the most popular sub-narrative about sending jets to Ukraine being a crime shared quotes of Ľuboš Blaha, an opposition politician known for spreading pro-Russian propaganda and dangerous disinformation. He is a member of SmerSD party, which is currently leading in pre-election polls. These narratives can therefore be undoubtedly considered a part of their pre-election campaign.

 Ľuboš Blaha spreads this sub-narrative in his posts on Telegram which is currently his main communication channel after Facebook blocked his profile because of spreading dangerous disinformation, bullying and hate speech. In some cases this sub-narrative is the main topic of the post, in other cases it is accompanying other topics. In one of his posts he also claimed that the minister of defence Jaroslav Naď should end up in prison for this decision.

 This sub-narrative is not spread only by members of Smer-SD party. It has been shared also by other opposition actors. One of them is Špaček, a member of a far-right party Republika which was formed by members of another far-right party Kotlebovci-ĽSNS. Both of these parties have previously spread disinformation about Covid-19, NATO, the EU and other topics. Another actor spreading this sub-narrative is a former candidate for president Štefan Harabin. He is also a former President of the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic and

former Minister of Justice. He has long been spreading disinformation about the aforementioned topics.

The most popular publication this week, however, did not contain this sub-narrative. The publication was, instead, an article about the prime ministers of Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia sending a letter to Ursula von der Leyen concerning the problems caused by cheap Ukrainian grain in these countries.

This information was accompanied by a quote of a far-right politician Taraba who says that Ukraine is causing a food crisis in third world countries. Taraba is a leader of a far-right party Život-NS and is currently a member of the Slovak parliament. He is also known for spreading disinformation and hate speech. The article was published by Hlavné Správy, one of the most popular disinformation outlets in Slovakia spreading pro-Russian messages.

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

## Trend prediction

The narratives about military aid to Ukraine will probably continue being prevalent because of it being a part of opposition's campaign. Therefore, we expect this topic to be covered mostly by opposition politicians.

We also expect the presence of the topic about Finland joining NATO, possibly about the NATO expansion, which could result in higher prevalence of anti-Western narratives.

# Ukraine
## *Detector Media*

"The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent"

Publications:
**13**

Views:
**4, 838, 411**

The main messages are allegations of corruption in the government at the highest and local levels, as well as large-scale losses of the Ukrainian military, which will lead to a massive mobilization campaign. It is also emphasized that Zelensky will hold Bakhmut at all costs, as the city's loss will affect his public image.

"Russian troops are advancing / achieving success"

Publications:
**9**

Views:
**7,233,669**

The main message of the posts is that the Russians continue to attack Bakhmut and Avdiivka and conduct missile and drone strikes on Ukrainian military targets. Disinformation sources claim that "Wagner" group has practically taken Bakhmut and continues to advance.

"Ukraine is losing the war "

Publications:
**8**

Views
**6, 141,540**

The main message of the relevant posts is that Ukraine is allegedly losing control of Bakhmut and Avdiivka while Wagner's group and Russian troops are actively advancing in these areas. In addition, the sources claim that Ukraine will not start a counteroffensive because it has weak air defence.

## Contextualizing most popular narratives

- The most popular category of narratives was "Narratives discrediting Ukraine" that appeared in 28 posts. This category included the most popular sub-narrative of the March 25 – April 1 period: "The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent". Messages aiming to discredit Ukraine have consistently been present, with a particular emphasis on allegations of corruption.
- This emphasis remained true, as during March 25 – April 1 the primary focus of disinformation actors was the alleged corruption of Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukrainian leadership and local governments in Donetsk and Luhansk regions (Ukrainecontrolled).

In addition, pro-Russian sources claimed that the Armed Forces of Ukraine are corrupt as well. Corruption in the Ukrainian government and military is supposedly leading to increased human losses, which requires increased conscription efforts. According to the pro-Russian sources, all men, without exception, will be mobilized in Ukraine in 2024.

- In addition, there is an intensification of the message about the alleged repression of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) centered on the dispute around Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, that is supposed to be transferred to the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). In particular, some disinformation sources stated that Zelensky's intention is to eliminate the UOC MP leaders physically.

## Trend changes

The dispute around Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and claims that Ukraine oppresses UOC MP increased in popularity.

Additionally, many messages concerned the difficult situation on the front lines, particularly in Bakhmut and Avdiivka, which is a stable trend in the local information environment. Pro-Russian sorces attempt to demoralize the Ukrainian audience, and Bakhmut has been a key focal point for their efforts.

The most popular sub-narrative this week, as in previous weeks, was that the Ukrainian leadership is incompetent and corrupt. Consequently, many messages aimed to discredit the current Ukrainian government and President Volodymyr Zelensky personally. Such messages have a potential to be dangerous  because they demoralize society, spread panic, and encourage military personnel not to trust their leadership. Similar tactics have been used by Russia as early as during the 2014 initial invasion of Ukraine and can be considered a trademark.

## Context

This week's monitoring shows that Russian disinformation, despite consistent attention to the most vulnerable issues in the Ukrainian society, is very dynamic and quickly responds to changes in the information field. This is illustrated by the situation with protests at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra.

Pro-Russian sources quickly used the news about the protests to portray the Ukrainian government as discriminatory and oppressing freedom of religion in the country. Additionally, in the light of news about the difficult situation in Bakhmut and Avdiivka, there are posts about the "catastrophic decrease"  in the population in Ukraine, particularly among men. Allegedly, people are dying en masse.

## Key sub-narrative analysis

The most popular sub-narrative was "The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent". The most popular messages were the corruption of Ukrainian leaders, messages about increased mobilization to the Ukrainian army caused by such corruption and incompetence, and messages about the repression of UOC MP.

The messages that focused on the corruption of Ukrainian leaders include traditional accusations of stealing Western financial aid. The main targets here are Volodymyr Zelensky, his entourage, in particular advisor to the head of the Presidential Office Mykhailo Podoliak, and the state's military leadership. A more unusual message was the accusation of local authorities in the government-controlled areas of Donbas being involved in corruption.

As for the messages about the mobilization of men to the Ukrainian army, they referred to the allegedly huge human losses caused by Russian troops in Ukraine. Therefore, the Ukrainian authorities are forced to launch a broader mobilization campaign. Pro-Russian channels claimed that in 2024 all men would be mobilized into the army. These messages are closely related to the topic of corruption, as they include the issue of Ukrainian men buying documents and medical certificates that allow them to avoid the army. Ukraine is thus portrayed as a country paralyzed by corruption on all levels.

Messages related to the UOC MP accused Zelensky and Ukrainian leaders of seizing the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra by force and having plans to eliminate the church's top leadership physically. Such claims further instigate and fuel this issue, that has become highly emotional and sensitive for audiences.

The most popular post published by the channel "Resident", with ±2,2 million views, says that due to the enormous losses at the front, the Ukrainian people have no future and will soon disappear, as many young people have died. The post belongs to two subnarratives, "Ukraine's leadership does not care about its people", and "Ukraine mistreats its soldiers/civilians".

These messages were spread mainly by the Telegram channels that systematically and regularly apply such messages of Russian disinformation. Some of them are disguised as Ukrainian, but back in 2022, the SBU compiled a list of telegram channels funded and coordinated by Russia's special services. In particular, "Шептун 🇺🇦 Украина Война" , "EQUILIBRIUM", #МОНТЯН!, "Картель", "Женщина с косой", "Легитимный", "Резидент".

## Trend prediction

Most likely, next week the messages may be related to the visit of the Ukrainian President to Warsaw. Russian sources may spread messages about the results of the visit to Poland, as it has already done regarding Zelensky's visits to Britain or the United States. Also messages may appear about Finland's accession to NATO. Speculation may arise regarding Ukraine's accession to this organization.

Additionally, this week there may be messages about the death of a "military correspondent" Tatarsky. Ukrainians and Ukrainian special services were already blamed by Russia for his murder.

Furthermore, messages may continue to arise about the tense situation in Bakhmut and Avdiivka. Such messages may be spread by pro-Russian sources that regularly promote disinformation on such issue, for example, pro-Russian Ukrainian journalist and politician Anatolii Shariy.

**List of Narrative and Sub-Narrative Headings:**

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

## 2. NARRATIVES DISCREDITING UKRAINE

2a. Ukrainians are Nazis

2b. Ukrainians are targeting civilians and commit other war crimes

2c. Ukraine was planning to attack Russia first

2d. Ukrainians refuse to fight / have low morale

2e. The Ukrainian leadership is corrupt and/or incompetent

2f. Ukraine is blackmailing Western governments

2g. There are tensions among Ukraine's leadership

2h. Ukrainians are pretentious/demanding/ungrateful

2i. Ukrainian civil society wants to make concessions to Russia

2j. Ukraine's leadership does not care about its people

2k. Ukrainians do not support Zelensky

2l. Ukraine mistreats its soldiers/civilians

2m. Ukraine's informational space is controlled by the state authorities / Ukrainian media is lying Ukraine is autocratic

2n. Ukraine does not want peace

2o. Ukraine deliberately stages provocations

2p. Ukraine should not/will not become a NATO/EU member

2q. Ukraine is not a sovereign state

2r. Ukrainian volunteers are corrupt

2s. Life under Russian occupation is better than under Ukrainian rule / 1ak. Russia is liberating Ukraine

2t. X country should not help Ukraine due to their past historical conflicts

Ukrainian victory is impossible

2u. Western society does not support Ukraine


## 3. BATTLEFIELD EVENTS

3a. Ukraine is losing the war

3b. Russia is not fighting at full capacity

3c. Russian troops are advancing / achieving success

3d. Reports of Russian war crimes are exaggerated/fake news

3e. Russia is not to blame for the global food crisis

3f. Recognizing Russia as a terrorist state will not help Ukraine

3g. Belarus is not participating in the war in Ukraine

3h. Mobilization in Russia has been successful

3i. Ukraine "referendums" are legitimate

3j. Russia's losses in the war are small

3k. Russia is only targeting military infrastructure


## 4. UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

4a. Ukrainian refugees are a threat to host countries' security

4b. Ukrainian refugees are spoiled/ungrateful

4c. Ukrainian refugees are prioritized over the host country citizens/inhabitants 4d. Ukrainian refugees abuse the aid being provided


## 5. ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF SANCTIONS

5a. Sanctions hurt the West more than Russia

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


### 6. CONDITIONS OF RUSSIANS AND RUSSIAN-SPEAKING MINORITIES
6a. Ukrainians discriminate against/terrorize Russian speakers
6b. X country is Russophobic / Russian culture is being attacked
6c. The West and its proxies are inciting Russophobia


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


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


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


## Methodology

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

LetsData is an AI solution anticipating communication risks and opportunities in the face of illintended information campaigns. As a trusted technological partner within the

UWDG, LetsData provides sophisticated data collection, processing, and analysis capabilities for further in-depth exploration.

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

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

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

**Data sampling**

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

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

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

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

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

**List of sources per country**

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

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| @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 |

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| @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 |

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| @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 |

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| https://www.facebook.com/magyarnemzet.hu/ | Hungary |
| https://www.facebook.com/stefideri | Hungary |
| https://www.facebook.com/bohardanielriporter | Hungary |
| https://aif.md/ | Moldova |
| @Noi.md | Новости Молдовы | Moldova |
| @Accent_TV | Moldova |
| https://unimedia.info/ | Moldova |
| @KP.MD: "КП" в Молдове | Moldova |
| @tirdea | Moldova |
| @Ungureanu112 | Moldova |
| @Republic_Of_GaGauZia | Moldova |
| @moldavskii_piston | Moldova |
| @indexMD | Moldova |
| @gabrielcalin | Moldova |
| @romania_ru | Moldova |
| @dragosgalbur | Moldova |
| @MoldovaPolitics | Moldova |
| @turnulmaya | Moldova |
| @ivanovnamd | Moldova |
| https://www.facebook.com/groups/1874167932813420 | Moldova |
| https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100086182868245 | Moldova |
| https://www.facebook.com/latebuimistru | Moldova |
| https://www.facebook.com/ionchicu.md | Moldova |

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| http://3droga.pl/ | Poland |
| @narodowcy | Poland |

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| 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 |

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| 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 |

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| 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 |

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| @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 |

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| @Nashazemla | Belarus |
| @shpakouski | Belarus |

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| @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 |

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| 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 |