



Larger than life - Who is afraid of the Big Bad Russia?

Grassroots vulnerability to Russian sharp power in Hungary
Country Report

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FOREWORD

The present study takes a novel approach to the understanding of Russian soft and sharp power in Hungary. Our analysis is part of a regional project, led by Political Capital Institute and funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, which explores vulnerability and resistance to hostile everyday Russian influence in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), focusing on horizontal, online “grassroots” communication between citizens. An explicit aim of the study was to leave behind the “elitist,” top-down approach of analyses of hybrid warfare, and instead investigate ordinary conversations taking place each day between citizens. This was accomplished by mapping 1.16 million spontaneous online conversations related to Russia in Hungary, and more than 3 million online messages in the three countries examined (Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic). The regional comparative analysis, country reports and policy recommendations are available on Political Capital’s thematic website titled Russian sharp power in CEE¹.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The fact that 52% of Hungarians’ grassroots communication is anti-Russian, and most of the Hungarian perceptions and public opinion in the Hungarian media space are negative towards Moscow, is in line with Hungarians’ overwhelming and clear support for the EU, NATO or the West, as evinced by representative polls.
- **Thus, the results highlighted a public “resistance,” as well as certain mechanisms which seem to withstand the Hungarian government’s pro-Kremlin foreign policy, its overpowering dominance across the Hungarian media landscape and Russia’s sharp power directed at Hungarians.**
- **Hungarian resilience can be explained by five major institutional and media-related factors:**
 1. The Hungarian discourse, comprised of 1.16 million messages, is produced by a small number of “core users.” Only 42,400 individuals influence the image of Russia in Hungary.²
 2. Most of the discussions about Russia, the Kremlin or Putin play out in independent media or social media platforms not controlled by the government, which affects the (anti-Kremlin) geopolitical orientations of the discussions.
 3. Even in the pro-government media or pro-Russian media included in our research sample, a significant percentage of the posts or comments are anti-Russian. Thus, the pro-government or pro-Russian media are unable to fundamentally alter the grassroots communication related to centralised media campaigns, disinformation and propaganda articles.
 4. While the Hungarian government may paint a positive picture of the bilateral relationship, the main discussion triggers of 1956, the poisoning of Sergei Skripal and the illegal annexation of Crimea are unfavourable to Russia in terms of content, and even the most pro-government or pro-Russian communication cannot put a positive or believable spin on these to exonerate the Kremlin’s political and/or military aggressions. Moreover, these triggers tend to strengthen widespread societal narratives about Russia’s historical aggression against Hungary.
 5. Finally, experiences topple even the best conspiracy theories or disinformation against the West. Hungarians do have first-hand experience with Western democracies: even the most conservative estimate puts the number of Hungarians who have migrated to the West since 2010 (and maintain regular contact with relatives in Hungary) at 200,000.³

1 https://www.politicalcapital.hu/russian_sharp_power_in_cee/index.php

2 The number of unique or individual authors publishing or commenting articles.

3 ‘Kiderült, Hogy Mennyien Vándoroltak Ki Magyarországról - Itt a Hatalmas Meglepetés!’, Portfolio.hu, accessed 13 February 2019, <https://www.portfolio.hu/gazdasag/kiderult-hogy-mennyien-vandoroltak-ki-magyarorszagrol-itt-a-hatalmas-meglepetes.283118.html>.

- As a result, the almost 500 outlets of the Hungarian pro-government media landscape have not been able to produce an airtight media-bubble to date. The top-down elite communication of the Hungarian government on Russia still seems to fail on the grassroots level.
- On the other hand, however, pro-Russian propaganda successfully reaches approximately 1.2-1.5 million people (51% of Fidesz's voter base who clearly favour closer relations with Russia),⁴ and positive perceptions of Russian can tap into the 2.4-3.2 million geopolitically undecided populace, or those "on the fence." Another problem is the lack of a clear symbolic or values-based definition of the West or Western institutions in the Hungarian public discourse, as opposed to Russia's clear-cut and formidable perceptions, capable of Hungarian geopolitical attitudes.

HUNGARIAN-RUSSIAN POLITICAL RELATIONS

After the democratic transition in 1989, the Hungarian-Russian bilateral relationship was characterised by a pragmatic approach on the part of the incumbent Hungarian government, with the objective of remaining on neutral diplomatic terms with the Kremlin. This was due to Hungary's significant dependence on Russian gas, oil and nuclear energy. Hungary's reintegration into the Euro-Atlantic Community remained a priority and a matter of consensus among the political elite until 2010, with the Socialist Party (MSZP) – as the heir of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party –, unlike newer democratic political formations, maintaining a somewhat higher level of political and economic ties to Russia. After the formation of the second Orbán government in 2010, the Hungarian right took a deliberate pro-Kremlin turn in diplomacy, to benefit from lucrative bilateral business opportunities, such as the Paks 2 nuclear power plant project financed with a Russian credit line worth 10 billion Euros and constructed by Rosatom,⁵ and to improve the international standing of the Hungarian "illiberal state" among EU and Western partners, who expressed disdain over PM Orbán's increasingly autocratic governance. While the Hungarian left, namely the Socialist MSZP party (in government between 2002 and 2010), used to maintain exclusive political relations to the Kremlin that were viewed with suspicion by Viktor Orbán in opposition, the ruling Fidesz-KDNP coalition transformed its own diplomatic turn into the nation's official diplomatic position, calling it the "Eastern Opening" foreign policy. It was centred on sectoral cooperation (energy, healthcare, tourism, agriculture) and individual projects with Russia and China.⁶ Although the economic aspects of the "Eastern Opening" have proven a failure,⁷ the policies have resulted in a special bilateral relationship between Russia and Hungary, characterised by special economic deals, yearly bilateral summits between the Hungarian Prime Minister and the Russian President and by Hungary's "double-faced" diplomacy that tries to please both the West and the Kremlin at the same time. As a consequence, the Hungarian government and Fidesz have repeatedly expressed support for Ukraine's territorial sovereignty⁸ and voted for sanctions against Russia, while PM Viktor Orbán repeatedly criticised sanctions policies as economically damaging, and the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade has been blocking Ukraine's Western/NATO integration on all levels as part of a bilateral dispute over minority rights; the latter development is used in the Kremlin's disinformation

4 Magyar Páter, 'A Fideszesek Nagyon Megszerették Putyint És Oroszországot', 444, 14 March 2018, <https://444.hu/2018/03/14/a-fideszesek-nagyon-megszerettek-putyint-es-oroszorszagot>.

5 'Paks2 Nuclear Power Plant - What We Have Achieved since 2014', energiaklub.hu, accessed 11 February 2019, /en/news/paks2-nuclear-power-plant-what-we-have-achieved-since-2014-4058.

6 'A keleti nyitás és a magyar ellenzék', Magyar Idők (blog), accessed 11 February 2019, <https://magyaridok.hu/velemeney/a-keleti-nyitas-es-a-magyar-ellenzek-3624212/>.

7 The reason for the lack of success is that the majority of Hungarian exports are accounted for by manufactured goods produced by multinational companies, whose export orientation cannot be controlled by the Hungarian cabinet.

8 'Magyarország Kiáll Ukrajna Területi Integritása És Szuverenitása Mellett', fidesz.hu, accessed 11 February 2019, <https://fidesz.hu/hirek/magyarorszag-kiall-ukrajna-teruleti-integritasa-es-szuverenitasa-mellett>.

campaign against Ukraine.⁹ The Orbán government's confrontational, anti-Western campaigns centred on accusing Brussels, the European Parliament or various member states of the implementation of the "plan of George Soros," to "repopulate" Europe with illegal immigrants or to establish "a world government," are in fact supplementing/supporting Russian efforts to disrupt EU unity and discredit Western institutions in general.¹⁰ At the same time, the Hungarian opposition clearly rejects Hungary's unilateral and asymmetric political and economic dependence on the Kremlin, and similarly rejects the Hungarian "illiberal state" that is thought to be modelled after the Russian regime in terms of an oligarchic, corrupt economy, lack of the rule of law,¹¹ the persecution of NGOs,¹² the limited freedom of the press.¹³

THE HUNGARIAN MEDIA LANDSCAPE AND GEOPOLITICAL ATTITUDES

The ruling Fidesz-KDNP alliance has been systematically conquering the Hungarian media space by taking full institutional control of the state channels, supporting oligarchs – financially or through regulatory powers – to buy independent media and either close them down or turn them into government mouthpieces.¹⁴ In this process, 476 private media outlets were openly organised into one entity under the umbrella of the Central European Press and Media Foundation in 2018,¹⁵ which was officially declared by the government to be of "national strategic importance" to avoid any competition authority supervision.¹⁶ As a result, Freedom House's 2019 Freedom in the World report lowered Hungary's status from "Free" to "Partly Free," with "Freedom of Expression and Belief" receiving only 10 points out of 16.¹⁷ The highly centralised pro-government media conglomerate both restricts the opposition's access to free and impartial media – save for a handful of independent national news media outlets on the internet –, and has made (geopolitical) conspiracy theories invented by the government a daily staple of media production and consumption.¹⁸ In this manner, pro-government media follows the government's pro-Russian diplomatic stance blindly, by uncritically praising the state of bilateral relations or disseminating Russian disinformation or conspiracy theories. One example is a piece in the main print daily *Magyar Idők* (now *Magyar Nemzet*) revealing the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity to be a "CIA executed plan of George Soros" to install a "puppet government."¹⁹ The few independent media, for example 24.hu, index.hu, 444.hu and *Népszava*, remain bastions of pro-Western journalism and balanced, fact-based reporting on Hungarian-Russian relations; their reach, however, is limited by internet-penetration, the general population's lack of interest in foreign affairs and by low levels of funding.

9 Lóránt Györi, 'How Hungary Became a Weapon of Russian Disinformation |', Euromaidan Press (blog), 16 November 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2018/11/16/how-hungary-became-a-weapon-of-russian-disinformation/>.

10 'Orbán Viktor Évértékelő Beszéde', Kormányzat, accessed 11 February 2019, <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-evertekelo-beszede-2019>.

11 'Russian Disinformation and Extremism in Hungary', Warsaw Institute (blog), 16 October 2017, <https://warsawinstitute.org/russian-disinformation-extremism-hungary/>.

12 'What Is The Problem With The Hungarian Law On Foreign Funded NGOs?', Magyar Helsinki Bizottság (blog), 10 October 2017, <https://www.helsinki.hu/en/what-is-the-problem-with-the-hungarian-law-on-foreign-funded-ngos/>.

13 'LMP: Csökkenti kell az orosz energiatüggőséget', 24.hu (blog), 21 May 2018, <https://24.hu/fn/gazdasag/2018/05/21/orosz-energiatuggoseg-lmp/>.

14 Partner Organisations to the Council of Europe Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists, 'Democracy at Risk: Threats and Attacks against Media Freedom in Europe' (Council of Europe, 2019), <https://rm.coe.int/annual-report-2018-democracy-in-danger-threats-and-attacks-media-freed/1680926453>.

15 'Infografika: Mától Így Nézi Ki a Kormánypárti Média Tulajdonosi Szerkezete', Adatújságírás (blog), accessed 6 February 2019, <https://adatujsgiras.atlatszo.hu/2018/11/28/infografika-matol-igy-nez-ki-a-kormanyparti-media-tulajdonosi-szerkezete/>.

16 Zrt HVG Kiadó, 'Nemzetstratégiai jelentőségűvé tette a kormány a fideszes médiabirodalmat', hvg.hu, 5 December 2018, https://hvg.hu/kkv/20181205_Nemzetstrategiai_jelentoseguve_tette_a_kormany_a_fideszes_mediabirodalmat.

17 Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2019 - Hungary', 30 January 2019, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/hungary>.

18 'Nyugat-Európában is csak a valóságtól elszakadt politikai elit elégedett a bevándorlással', PestiSrácok (blog), accessed 11 February 2019, <http://pestisracok.hu/nyugat-europaban-is-csak-a-valosagtol-elszakadt-politikai-elit-elegedett-a-bevandorlással/>.

19 'SorosLeaks: Ukrajna volt annak idején a „legsikeresebb” akció', Magyar Idők (blog), accessed 11 February 2019, <https://magyaridok.hu/belfold/sorosleaks-ukrajna-volt-annak-idejen-a-legsikeresebb-akcio-2931667/>.

It is thus no wonder that the Hungarian government's actions against free media and objective reporting have decreased trust in the media and increased anti-Western sentiments at the same time. Although Hungarians tend not to trust public service broadcasters and mostly consume independent traditional and online media, according to the Reuters Digital News Report 2018,²⁰ overall trust in the news (at 29%) is the lowest among the countries examined. Moreover, Hungary is in second place when it comes to believing conspiracy theories, with 60% of the public having encountered disinformation on social media, according to the GLOBSEC Trends 2018 survey.²¹ This ambivalence in media consumption translates into contradictory geopolitical attitudes both on the micro- and macro-levels. While Hungary can still be considered the second most pro-EU member state in CEE with 75% and 56% of respondents supporting membership in the EU or NATO, respectively, and 39% considering Hungary to be a part of the West, Hungarians are becoming increasingly anti-Western on specific geopolitical issues. For example, a recent Political Capital Institute survey found that over one-third of Hungarians believed the "immigration crisis was caused by American interest groups," the "United States is using European Union to impose its will on other nations" and that the 2014 revolution in Ukraine "had been orchestrated by the CIA and George Soros."²²

Altogether, Fidesz's and the pro-government media's pro-Russian or pro-Kremlin communications in the last eight years have significantly impacted Hungarians' geopolitical attitudes by successfully pushing anti-Western or anti-Ukrainian geopolitical narratives and conspiracy theories, and by creating the first-ever pro-Russian voting bloc among the Fidesz electorate, 51% of whom believe Hungary should have closer relations with Russia instead of the United States, according to a 2018 Median poll.²³

THE PRESENCE OF RUSSIAN SOFT AND SHARP POWER, DISINFORMATION IN HUNGARY

Since the Hungarian government cultivates a close and special relationship with the Kremlin, Hungary is not a target, but is rather a tool of Russian disinformation and hybrid warfare, and a liability in the European Union and NATO security network.

The main aim of the Kremlin is to enhance the Hungarian government's anti-Western and anti-Ukraine rhetoric and diplomatic position, to achieve three strategic goals: attack and delegitimise the European institutional system and the consensus on the sanctions regime against Russia; sow discord among CEE member states with regard to Russia and the role of NATO and the United States in the region's security posture; and continue the political destabilisation of Ukraine to conclude the war in Eastern Ukraine on the terms of the Kremlin.

The Kremlin cannot count on religious or cultural proximity to Hungary to extend its influence, so Russian sharp or soft power in Hungary relies mainly on top-down bilateral relations with the government and, by extension, on the overly centralised mainstream media reflecting Hungarian public diplomacy.²⁴ While Russia receives generally favourable publicity from the mainstream pro-government media, it has also established a small pro-Russian network of approx. 100 sites and social media accounts that has been directly linked to the Russian secret services and which has launched coordinated information campaigns against Ukraine

20 'Overview and Key Findings of the 2018 Digital News Report', accessed 11 February 2019, <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2018/overview-key-findings-2018/>.

21 'GLOBSEC TRENDS 2018', globsec.org, 2018, <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/GLOBSEC-Trends-2018.pdf>.

22 'Összeesküvés-Elméletek, Álhírek, Babonák a Magyar Közvéleményben', politicalcapital.hu, accessed 11 February 2019, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article_read=1&article_id=2323.

23 Magyari Péter, 'A Fideszesek Nagyon Megszerették Putyint És Oroszországot', 444, 14 March 2018, <https://444.hu/2018/03/14/a-fideszesek-nagyon-megszerettek-putyint-es-oroszorszagot>.

24 Péter Krekó et al., 'The Weaponization of Culture: Kremlin's Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Europe', <http://www.politicalcapital.hu>, 4 2016, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_reactionary_values_CEE_20160727.pdf.

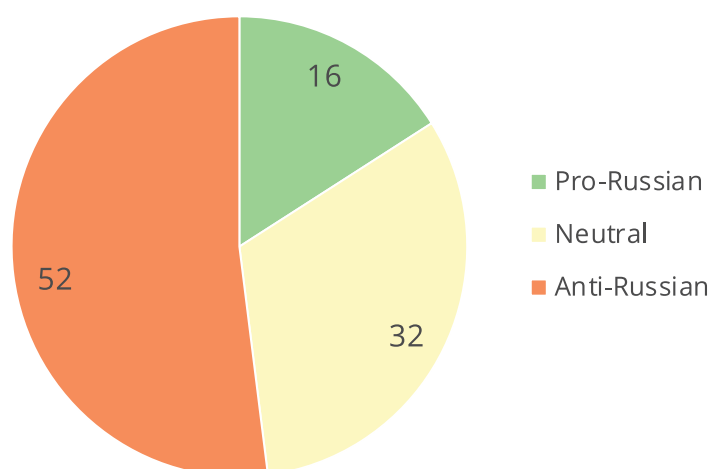
after the Crimean war begun in 2014.²⁵ Today, this network echoes the Hungarian government’s communications; during the 2018 parliamentary elections, it stood fully behind Fidesz’s campaign. These pro-Russian narratives are centred on the government’s anti-immigration messages, targeting independent NGOs, the Western elite and the Hungarian opposition, while also infusing official messages of the government with the most hard-core conspiracy theories about a “freemason world government,” the EU being founded by Nazis, a third world war launched by NATO etc. Although the Hungarian pro-Russian network is embedded into the Hungarian far-right subculture, it is ideologically still flexible. So, the non-parliamentary Hungarian Workers’ Party and various far-right actors actually find a common platform as far as their pro-Russian foreign policy orientation is concerned.

All in all, the Hungarian government’s pro-Russian foreign policy, coupled with powerful mainstream media tools and a significant portion of society being uncertain about where to belong geopolitically between the East and the West, makes Russian sharp power a force to be reckoned with.²⁶

PERCEPTIONS OF RUSSIA AMONG HUNGARIANS – PERCEPTIONS AND NARRATIVES

Among the three countries under review, Hungary proved to be the second most anti-Russian or anti-Kremlin²⁷ after the Czech Republic, based on the sentiment analysis of 1.16 million social media conversations. 52% of the voices or messages were reflecting anti-Russian feelings, with 32% expressing neutral positions and 16% voicing positive opinions, as seen in the chart below.

Chart 1. Sentiment ratios of 1.16M public conversations in Hungary



The anti-Russian nature of the majority of Hungarian opinions is in line with representative polling results.²⁸ The fact, however,²⁹ that Hungary ranked only second in terms of anti-Russian sentiment among the two successor states of the former Czechoslovakia (which maintained close historical, cultural and ideological ties to Russia and the Soviet Union) demonstrates the impact of the increasingly pro-Russian foreign policy

25 'Az Orosz Választási Dezinformáció Elleni Stratégiák Kommunikációs Lehetőségei Magyarországon', politicalcapital.hu, 2017, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/konyvtar.php?article_read=1&article_id=2217.

26 'GLOBSEC TRENDS 2018'.

27 The analysis used the keywords “Russia,” “Russian,” “Kremlin,” “Putin” etc. (in Hungarian) to map opinions and sentiments related to Russia; the words Russia and Kremlin are thus used interchangeably in this paper to refer to the same Russia-related focus of the analysis.

28 The current research measured non-representative grassroots public opinions based on grassroots public communication, as opposed to representative measurement of public attitudes in polling.

29 'GLOBSEC TRENDS 2018'.

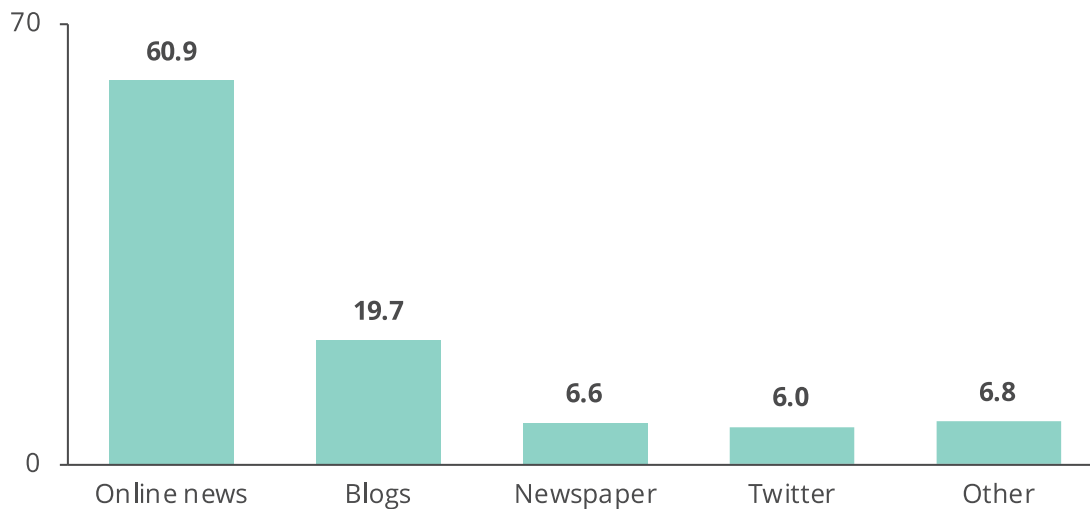
of the Hungarian government. Accordingly, Hungarian grassroots public discourse was driven by domestic politics and bilateral relations, such as by the two Putin-Orbán summits, one on 2 February,³⁰ the other one on 27 August, 2018 – as seen on the communication peaks of the chart below.³¹

Chart 2. Distribution of 1.16M Hungarian public conversations encompassing the term “Russia” between 20 November 2016 and 19 November 2018



At the same time, Hungarian grassroots communication was shaped mainly by new media and online news media, as demonstrated by the figures of the distribution of sources.³² This explains the high ratio of negative or neutral sentiments towards the Kremlin, since Hungarians tend not to trust traditional or pro-government media, and primarily consume independent new media and news media.

Chart 3. Main sources of communication surveyed in Hungary



A closer look at the perceptions reveals that positive sentiments are driven mainly by the “known bad” (12%) and the “strong protector” (10%) perceptions of Russia, as shown in the figure below.

The leading positive perception compares the West to the East, and concludes that Russia is the “safer bet” among international players based on shared Christian culture or positive experiences in the socialist era. This reasoning is also affirmed by GLOBSEC Trends 2018 data, which show that 35% of Hungarians have

³⁰ ‘Putyin Szlovákián át közelít’, 2 February 2017, https://index.hu/belfold/2017/02/02/putyin_budapest/.

³¹ ‘Putyin Budapesten járt, megnézte a dzsúdó-vb-t és tárgyalt Orbánnal Paksról’, 28 August 2017, https://index.hu/belfold/2017/08/28/putyin_a_dzsudo-vebere_ugrik_be_de_Orbánhoz_is_benez/.

³² Main sources did not include Facebook due to limitations of data access, so analysis of Facebook data was performed in a separate chapter, below.

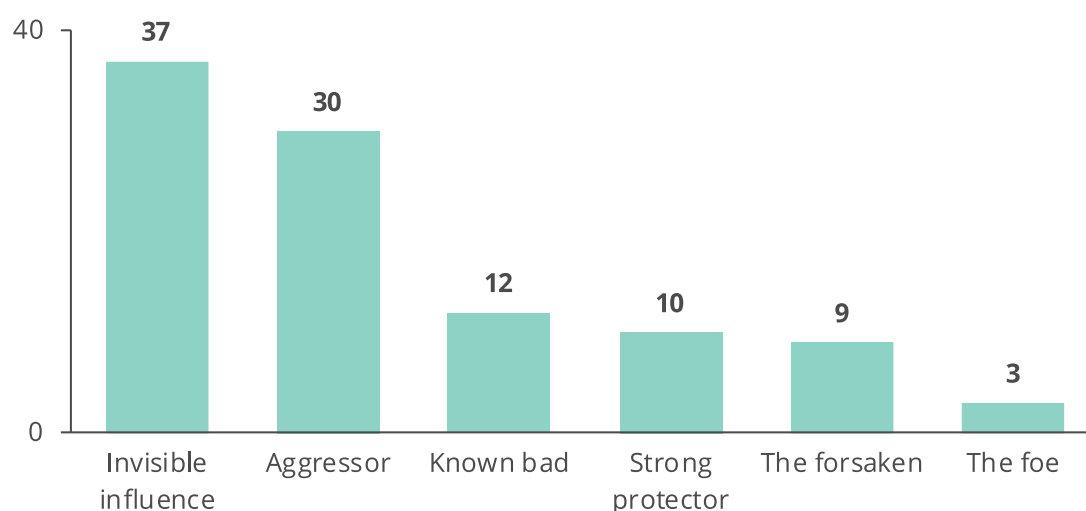
nostalgia towards the socialist past (i.e. before the 1989 democratic transition).³³ Moreover, this perception plays into the “buffer zone” mentality, with people thinking that Hungary, owing to its Central-European geography, has been historically bullied or taken advantage of by big powers. Hungary should thus avoid becoming part of a military alliance or should take Russia’s side to avoid future conflicts:

“The problem is with NATO membership – we are at the front line and a potential target for bombing. In this case it’s better to go with Russia.”

This kind of reasoning could be quite successful among approx. 30-40% of Hungarian society who place themselves and Hungary “somewhere between” the West and the East or Russia geopolitically, according to IRI³⁴ and GLOBSEC polls.³⁵ The “strong protector” perception of the Kremlin, supported by 10% of opinions, can be directly linked to the Hungarian government’s pro-Russian and anti-Western rhetoric and its anti-immigration propaganda, fuelled by conspiracy theories and lies. Thus, Putin appears to be a “true friend and supporter” of Hungarians, and Russia is portrayed as the “last fortress of Christianity” against mass migration, straight out of the Kremlin’s playbook:

“Putin is the only friend of Hungary. He stands up for us. The West only causes problems for us and exploits us.”

Chart 4. Positive and negative perceptions of Russia among Hungarians (in %)



Another argument is based on the Red Army “liberating” Hungary from Fascist rule, which was a main line of propaganda of the Kádár regime before 1989, used to justify the Soviet occupation of Hungary. This viewpoint remains popular among older generations of Hungarians to this day.

Negative Hungarian sentiments are much more nuanced and are determined by Russia being seen as an invisible influencer (37%), a military aggressor (30%) or a forsaken, backward country (9%). The Kremlin’s overall negative image is less supported by Russia being perceived as a “forsaken” or backward country (expressed by 9% of opinions), characterised by narratives about Russia’s low standards of living, poor infrastructure or social inequalities, and a weak rule of law. While these kinds of comparisons between nations, based on the degree of wealth, are quite frequent, Hungarians usually do not have direct experiences with Russia or Russians, due to the lack of a Russian diaspora living in the country and the lack of cultural and

33 ‘GLOBSEC TRENDS 2018’.

34 IRI, ‘Hungary Poll Reveals Pessimism Over Economy and the Country’s Future’, iri.org, 2 March 2017, <https://www.iri.org/resource/hungary-poll-reveals-pessimism-over-economy-and-country%E2%80%99s-future>.

35 ‘GLOBSEC TRENDS 2018’.

historical ties. Rather, Russia's negative image is much more determined her being perceived as "an aggressor" which is the second most frequent perception (expressed by 30%). This impression is based both on negative historical narratives – such as the revolutions of 1848/49 and 1956 being crushed by Tsarist Russia and by Soviet Russia, respectively – and current military interventions by the Kremlin. A typical Hungarian comment would read:

„The whole world is terrified of Russian spies (...) whoever they don't like, dies.”

Most importantly, this perception positions Russia as a lasting and real geopolitical threat and a force to reckon with in Europe or CEE. The aggressor perception could be further enhanced or caused by the most widespread perception (37% of opinions) of the Kremlin as being an invisible or master manipulator. This viewpoint draws solely on current geopolitical events surrounding Russia that include narratives about Putin controlling the Hungarian government to spread Russian propaganda in the Hungarian media or to interfere into Ukrainian affairs. Typical Hungarian narratives would read:

“Instead of blaming Soros for everything, let's see a list of the Hungarian government's members financed by Agent Putin. All Fidesz members would be on that list...”

“In Hungary, the government spreads Russian propaganda from taxpayer money.”

Interestingly, the manipulateness of the Putin regime is also reflected by non-political narratives, for example, about the systemic doping of Russian athletes assisted by the Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RU-SADA). The low ratio (3%) of the “foe” perception among Hungarians highlights a very important distortion in Hungarians' overall geopolitical orientation. Russia does not appear to be a “foe,” because it is interpreted as a geopolitical adversary of the Euro-Atlantic community or NATO – alliances which Hungary is a part of:

“Moscow would destroy us if we were not members of NATO. Just look at Ukraine...Russia occupied it really quickly. It is scary that some Hungarians would prefer the same situation here,” expresses one of the opinions.

Thus, discussions or debates about the West, NATO or the Euro-Atlantic community and their advantages for Hungary are almost non-existent in Hungarians' grassroots communications about Russia. This means not only that Cold War-era geopolitical thinking is no longer valid, but it reveals the severe shortfalls of Western strategic communication. While Russia or the Kremlin is well-defined in the public discourse and provides a strong negative or positive image to identify with or against it, the West or Western political actors do not present themselves efficiently to significant parts of the public as a strong ally, or a cultural or military symbol to rely on against aggressors such as Russia.

PERCEPTION OF CHINA IN RUSSIA-RELATED CONVERSATIONS

China barely appears in discourses related to Russia in Hungary. However, analysis of grassroots communications reveals that the few mentions describe China as a world power that is very similar to Russia in terms of having a repressive political system, gathering secret data on people all over the world and lacking a genuine capitalist economic system. Hungarians are aware that the Hungarian government is on good diplomatic and economic terms with Beijing due to its Eastern-oriented foreign policy and the construction of the Budapest-Belgrade railway (financed by China as part of the One Belt One Road Initiative). At the same time, Hungarians noticed China's sharp power and they consider the country to be a part of a Russia-China-Turkey “axis” with the same illiberal geopolitical goals. Thus, negative views about Russia tend to reinforce negative perceptions of China along the same economic, military or human rights issues, which hints at the same grassroots societal resistance factors against any authoritarian influence in CEE.

ANALYSIS OF HUNGARIAN FACEBOOK PAGES AND NARRATIVES

The analysis of Hungarian Facebook pages is based on the top 20 most significant mainstream, pro-government and independent, and the top 20 most important pro-Russian fringe Facebook pages or media as seen in the tables below.

Table 1. Top 20 disinformation media in Hungary³⁶

Name	Profile	Number of likes
Tudnodkell	Conspiracy, pro-Russian	380,403
Patrióta Európa Mozgalom	Eurosceptic, conspiracy	183,777
Magyar Munkáspárt	Far-left, pro-Russian	135,804
Leleplező Friss Hírek - Világlátó Hírmagazin ex. Titkolt Hírek	Conspiracy, pro-Russian	74,557
Enigma	Conspiracy	66,216
Valóság amit tudnod kell	Conspiracy	58,189
Új Világtudat	Conspiracy	50,282
Vilaghelyzete.com AWAKENING THE WORLD. . EVERY HEART MAKES A DIFFERENCE	Conspiracy, pro-Russian	33,262
KárpátHír	Pro-Russian news media	30,719
Orosz Hírek	Pro-Russian news media	22,961
Orientalista.hu	Conspiracy, Middle East-focused	15,486
Felháborító Hírek	Conspiracy	13,805
HUN-News	Far-right, conspiracy	10,845
Aranykor hajnalán	Conspiracy	7954
Ellenforradalom	Far-right, conspiracy	4671
Közel - Kelet jelene	Conspiracy, Middle East-focused	2051
Kiállunk Oroszország mellett - Support Vladimir Putin from Hungary	Conspiracy, pro-Russian	1185
balrad.ru	National-Bolshevik	351
Kiállunk Novorosszija mellett - Support Donbass from Hungary	Pro-Russian, separatist	
310	pro-Russian	535
Alfahír	Far-right	n/a*

* Currently offline.

36 As of 1 April 2019.

Table 2. Top 20 mainstream media in Hungary

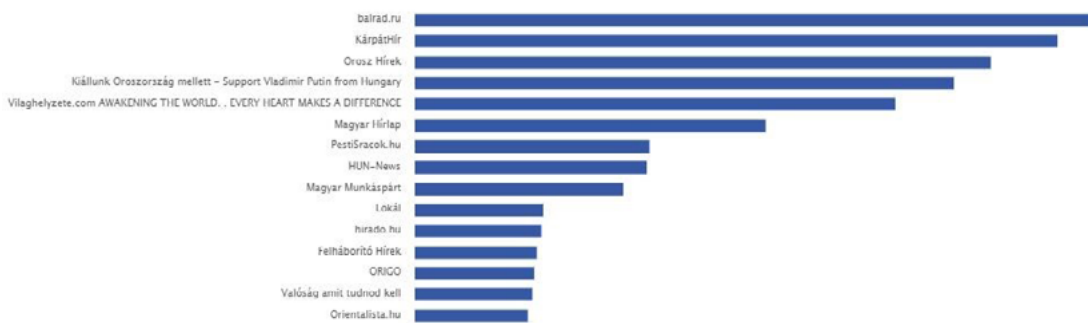
Name	Profile	Number of likes
Blikk	Print tabloid daily	769,788
24.hu	Online independent news	683,411
Index.hu	Online independent news	520,872
HVG	Independent weekly	533,710
444	Online independent news	315,097
RTL Klub official	Independent commercial television	178,113
Népszava Online	Leftist print daily	32,738
ORIGO	Pro-government online news	442,602
Borsonline	Pro-government print tabloid daily	196,588
TV2	Pro-government television	327,431
888.hu	Pro-government online news	253,806
Hír TV*	Pro-government television	256,793
hirado.hu	Main state-owned channel	187,387
PestiSracok.hu	Pro-government online news	91,764
ECHO TV	Pro-government television	89,340
Mandiner	Pro-government online magazine	43,369
Magyar Hírlap	Pro-government print daily	35,600
Kossuth Rádió	Main state-owned radio channel	27,551
Lokál	Pro-government free print daily	20,310
Figyelő	Pro-government weekly	15,156

* Hír TV merged with Echo TV after completion of the research and data collection.

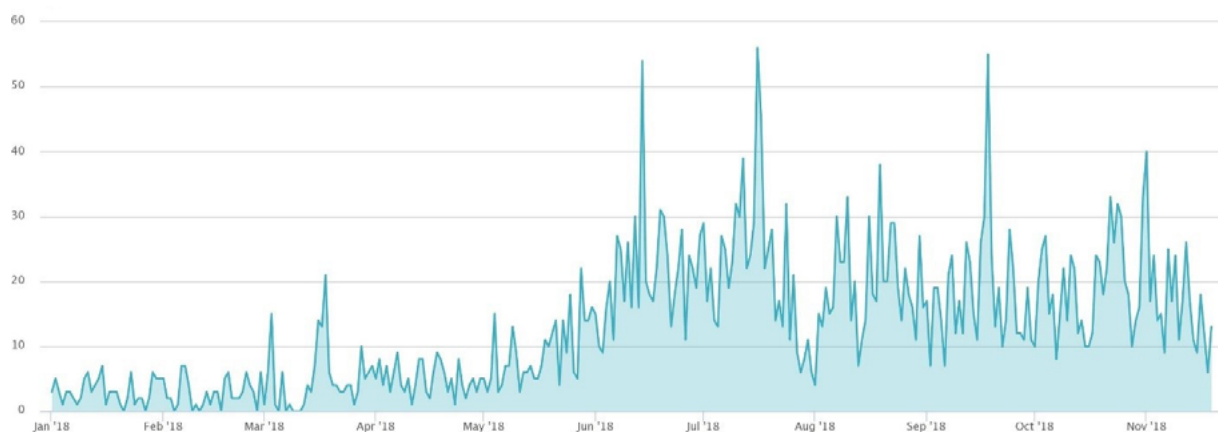
Facebook's role in the Hungarian media space cannot be underestimated, since it is not only the number one social media page in the country,³⁷ but is also one of the last remaining bastions or platforms of the freedom of the press.³⁸ The list of the most active 15 Facebook accounts disseminating Russia-related articles or posts in 2018, as listed in the chart below, proves that pro-government media, such as the print *Magyar Idők* (transformed into *Magyar Nemzet* in the meantime), the leading online news outlet origo.hu or the main state-channel hirado.hu, are as active in shaping the discourse about Russia as the pro-Russian fringe media, due to the Hungarian government's pro-Russian foreign policy and international stance. In fact, the relationship between the two is even stronger, given that the pro-Russian fringe media, such as the National Bolshevik balrad.ru, the Kremlin-mouthpiece Orosz Hírek or the far-right, conspiratorial HUN-news, echo the Hungarian government's position on almost all policy matters, be they about George Soros, Euroscepticism or fruitful relations between Budapest and Moscow.

37 'Top Websites in Hungary - SimilarWeb Website Ranking', accessed 6 February 2019, <https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/hungary>.

38 'Infografika'.

Chart 5. Top Facebook sources disseminating Russia-related articles between 1 January and 19 November 2018³⁹

The blue chart displaying all Russia-related posts in 2018 reveals five communication peaks, all related to significant geopolitical events. It is important to note, however, that the general discourse about Russia or the Kremlin is influenced primarily by pro-government or pro-Russian accounts and their articles, because their communications, especially those of the pro-Russian network, is quite focused on Russia-related topics, while independent media has far fewer venues and covers a broader range of issues altogether in Hungary.

Chart 6. Number of Russia-related posts on the 40 Hungarian pages between 1 January and 19 November 2018⁴⁰

Although the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia event, beginning on 14 June, was apolitical in nature and could not be connected to any international diplomacy, it was nonetheless a perfect opportunity to showcase a positive and efficient image of the Russian regime, capable of organising such a prestigious sporting event. All the other peaks reflected important geopolitical events, such as the Russian presidential election on 18 March; the Helsinki Summit between the Russian and the U.S. presidents beginning on 16 July;⁴¹ PM Orbán visiting President Putin in Moscow on 18 September;⁴² and Russia introducing economic sanctions against Ukraine on 1 November.⁴³

39 Top Facebook accounts disseminating articles containing the keyword “Russia” (or “Oroszország” in Hungarian) among the 40 Facebook pages under review.

40 Disclaimer: due to Facebook’s data-access restrictions, we could only analyse the posts of a limited number of pages in 2018.

41 Patrick Wintour Diplomatic editor, ‘Helsinki Summit: What Did Trump and Putin Agree?’, The Guardian, 17 July 2018, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/17/helsinki-summit-what-did-trump-and-putin-agree>.

42 Henry Foy, ‘Orbán Thanks Putin for Help in Overcoming EU Sanctions Impact’, Financial Times, 18 September 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/0fdf08cc-bb37-11e8-94b2-17176fbf93f5>.

43 Andrew Roth, ‘Russia Announces Sanctions against Senior Ukraine Figures’, The Guardian, 1 November 2018, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/01/russia-announces-sanctions-against-senior-ukraine-figures>.

Each of the peaks fed into four basic perceptions expressed by Hungarians: Russia being a “strong protector and ally”; or being the “foe”; “the known bad”; or the “aggressor.”⁴⁴ Views or perceptions on Russia proved to be much more “balanced” or not overtly negative on Facebook due to the high number of pro-Russian articles and Facebook sources cultivating a rather positive and powerful image of the Kremlin and Russia.

With regard to the Russian presidential election in March, Hungarian pro-government and fringe Facebook pages politically legitimised Putin’s victory by claiming that there had been no election fraud or irregularities during the election, asserting that Russian autocracy is supported by the majority of Russians.^{45,46} Fringe accounts also emphasised perceptions of Russia as an “ally and protector” of minority Russians, and an “aggressor,” by quoting one of Putin’s speeches on “Russian unity,” the historical unification of Russia and Crimea, on the campaign trail.⁴⁷ Another article showcased the Russian presidential election taking place in Crimea as another proof of the democratic political system present on the peninsula after the “independence referendum” took place back in 2014.⁴⁸

The Helsinki Summit of July between President Trump and President Putin was hailed by both fringe and mainstream pro-government media as a “historical event” that put an end to bad relations between the two superpowers, and as the first step in restoring diplomatic “trust.”⁴⁹ These articles not only cast the Kremlin in a positive light, but also displayed the stark differences between the communications by NATO member states about the need to counter “hybrid threats,” a not so subtle reference to the Kremlin’s actions, during the preceding Brussels Summit as opposed to the conciliatory tone of the Helsinki Summit.⁵⁰ This line of the Kremlin’s narrative presented Russia as a “known bad” or “foe,” which continues to be a rational international actor and can be dealt with through negotiations despite its unilateral military interventions in Ukraine or in Syria. Moreover, pro-government media put an astonishingly conspiratorial spin on the event by blaming the “American presence in Ukraine” for the war and the Western “coup” in Kyiv,⁵¹ which “forced” Putin to “defend” his military base in Sevastopol.⁵²

Articles about the September 2018 bilateral meeting between PM Orbán and President Putin clearly promoted the Kremlin as an “ally” of Hungary that has proven to be a “reliable” and “balanced” economic and trading partner of Hungary.⁵³ Pro-government articles also displayed the Kremlin’s defiance, claiming that Russia “could not be broken by Western sanctions” and Putin’s position is as strong as ever.⁵⁴

44 The unit of analysis was defined by Bakamo Social as individual “conversations” corresponding to individual articles or messages published by media sources or individual users.

45 ‘Putyin Negyedszerre Is Elnök Lett’, Facebook, accessed 6 February 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/OrigoHirek/posts/1794010263983224>.

46 ‘Exit Poll: 74 Százalékkal Nyert Vlagyimir Putyin’, Facebook, accessed 6 February 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/oroszhirek.hu/posts/1836788796374063>.

47 Hírek Orosz, ‘Vlagyimir Putyin nyerte az orosz elnökválasztást’, Orosz Hírek (blog), 18 March 2018, <http://oroszhirek.hu/2018/03/18/vlagyimir-putyin-nyerte-az-orosz-elnokvalasztast-elo/>.

48 ‘A Krím Félzigeten Az Újraegyesülés Évfordulóján Szavaznak Először Az Orosz Elnökválasztáson’, Facebook, accessed 6 February 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/oroszhirek.hu/posts/1836037506449192>.

49 ‘Trump: Véget Ért Az Egyesült Államok És Oroszország Rossz Viszonya’, Kiállunk Oroszország mellett - Support Vladimir Putin from Hungary, accessed 6 February 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/kiallunkoroszorszagmellet/posts/2230966066919008>.

50 David Wemer, ‘Here’s What NATO Achieved at Its Brussels Summit’, Atlantic Council, accessed 6 February 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/here-s-what-nato-achieved-at-its-brussels-summit>.

51 ‘Van értelme az Oroszország és a Nyugat közötti szembenállásnak?’, PestiSrácok (blog), accessed 6 February 2019, <http://pestisracok.hu/van-ertelme-az-oroszorszag-es-a-nyugat-kozotti-szembenallasnak/>.

52 ‘Elemző: Nem lesz második hidegháború’, PestiSrácok (blog), accessed 6 February 2019, <http://pestisracok.hu/elemzo-nem-lesz-masodik-hideghaboru/>.

53 ‘Kiegyensúlyozott És Stabil a Magyar-Orosz Kapcsolat’, hirado.hu, accessed 6 February 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/hirado.hu/posts/2131943220171411>.

54 ‘Kiegyensúlyozott és stabil a magyar-orosz kapcsolat’, Figyelő, 18 September 2018, <https://figyelo.hu/kiegyensulyozott-es-stabil-a-magyar-orosz-kapcsolat>.

Finally, the issue of new Russian sanctions entering into force in November 2018 once again brought perceptions of Russia as an “aggressor” to the forefront. Articles blamed the West for the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, and the United States for terminating the INF treaty,⁵⁵ which put Russia on the receiving end of hostile international actions.⁵⁶ Previous pieces quoted Putin’s assessment of Russia’s defence capabilities during the 15th Annual Meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club in Sochi, during which he said Russia could retaliate against any military aggression with a nuclear strike, to include any challenges to Russian control of Crimea.⁵⁷

CRIMEA

Although Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine were mainstays of the international political agenda, Hungarian interest in these topics remained very low throughout 2018: only 340 articles were published about them, and most appeared on pro-Russian sites.⁵⁸ Still, Crimea has been a relatively controversial topic in Hungarian politics and discourse. While the ruling Fidesz-KDNP alliance, along with opposition parties, has consistently supported Ukraine’s territorial sovereignty,⁵⁹ anti-Ukrainian conspiracy theories about the Maidan revolution being instigated by the CIA and George Soros have popped up in mainstream pro-government media from time to time.⁶⁰ Thus, anti-Ukrainian contents of the pro-Russian sites were also able to draw on some mainstream disinformation as well. Most of the articles in our period dealt with the shooting in the Kerch technical college in October 2018, which left 19 dead.⁶¹ While some of the articles first pinned the blame for the incident on “Ukrainian nationalists,”⁶² the majority of news items about Crimea presented on fringe accounts downplayed the incident. They either tried to prove that Ukraine continues to violate minority rights, which was the original *casus belli* for the annexation,⁶³ or that Crimea has become a better place to live in after it became a part of the Russian Federation.⁶⁴

1956

1956 was most mentioned on its anniversary day of the 23rd of October, which is also a national holiday in Hungary (the number of total mentions was 753).⁶⁵ The political discourse of the commemoration was dominated by mainstream media paying tribute to the fallen heroes of the revolution, with a slight change in the

55 ‘Moszkva Ellenzankciókat Vezetett Be Kijevvel Szemben’, *hirado.hu*, accessed 6 February 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/hirado.hu/posts/2193585750673824>.

56 ‘Szemet Szemért - Ha Amerika Kilép a Fegyverzetkorlátozási Szerződésből, Akkor Oroszország Visszakövetelheti Alaszkát’, *Új Világtudat*, accessed 6 February 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/ujvilagtudat/posts/878515815605543>.

57 ‘Putyin: Csak Indokolt Esetben, Válaszcapásként Atombombázunk’, *PestiSracok.hu*, accessed 6 February 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/pestisracok.hu/posts/1919614394793572>.

58 The keyword “Crimea” (or “Krim” in Hungarian) was applied to the period 1 January 2018 – 19 November 2018.

59 ‘Https’.

60 ‘SorosLeaks’.

61 ‘Legalább 10 Halott Egy Robbanásban a Krim Félzigeten – Terrortámadás Lehetett’, *Orosz Hírek*, accessed 11 March 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/oroszhirek.hu/posts/2123862067666733>. <https://www.facebook.com/oroszhirek.hu/posts/2123862067666733>.”, plainCitation”: “Legalább 10 Halott Egy Robbanásban a Krim Félzigeten – Terrortámadás Lehetett’, *Orosz Hírek*, accessed 11 March 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/oroszhirek.hu/posts/2123862067666733>.”, noteIndex”: 64}, citationItems”: [{“id”: “k33FgHaR/rtnTJeqZ”, “uris”: [“http://zotero.org/users/local/Hm141vVw/items/XHNGNG4EG”], “uri”: [“http://zotero.org/users/local/Hm141vVw/items/XHNGNG4EG”], “itemData”: {“id”: 583, “type”: “webpage”, “title”: “Legalább 10 halott egy robbanásban a Krim félszigeten – terrortámadás lehetett”, “container-title”: “Orosz Hírek”, “URL”: “https://www.facebook.com/oroszhirek.hu/posts/2123862067666733”, “accessed”: {“date-parts”: [“2019”, 3, 11”]}}, “schema”: “h”}], “github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json”}]

62 ‘Friss! Ukrán Nacionalisták Robbanthattak. Többen Meghaltak’, *HUN-News*, accessed 11 March 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/hungaryannews/posts/1909235859153219>.

63 ‘Zaharova: A Totális Elukránosítás Ellentétes Az Ukrán Jogi Normákkal - Orosz Hírek’, *Orosz Hírek*, accessed 11 March 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/oroszhirek.hu/posts/2115479631838310>.

64 ‘Elképesztő Luxushotelt Építettek Az Oroszok Az Ukrajnától Visszafoglalt Krimben. Videó!’, *HUN-News*, accessed 11 March 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/hungaryannews/posts/1906488772761261>.

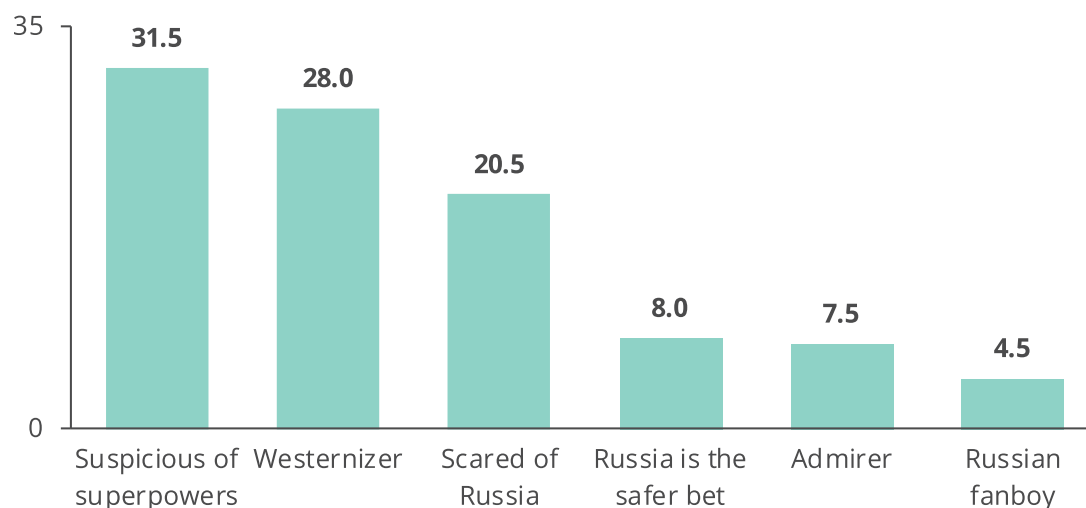
65 The keyword “1956” was applied to the period 1 January 2018 – 19 November 2018.

tone of the pro-government outlets.⁶⁶ PM Viktor Orbán used the occasion to fan the flames of Euroscepticism by warning of a “European empire,” facilitated by the EU, to support its alleged “pro-immigration” political platform.⁶⁷ The EU was thereby portrayed as the current force trying to subdue Hungarian sovereignty, just as the Soviet Union once did. Pro-Russian and far-right fringe sites mostly echoed the official narrative or stayed silent, since Russia’s past role in the revolution is hard to reinterpret in a positive way. Only a few sites pushed a narrative about 1956 being the product of a CIA operation that was meant to “keep the Soviets busy,” while the West tried to regain military control of the Suez Canal from Egypt.⁶⁸

HUNGARIAN PUBLIC SEGMENTS ON RUSSIA

Based on the discussion analysis, we segmented six types of public or consumer groups that are vulnerable or resilient to Russia’s or the Kremlin’s sharp power. These groups reflect people’s basic needs or drivers attached to the consumption of information/disinformation concerning Russia, so each group may incorporate several aforementioned perceptions at the same time.⁶⁹ The typology consists of three negative groups, two positive groups and one quasi neutral group; however, the absolute majority of Hungarians have negative or critical attitudes towards the Kremlin or Russia, as seen in the table below.

Chart 7. Distribution of Hungarian public segments on Russia (in %)



Only a fraction (4.5%) of Hungarians belong to the “Russian fan boy” segment, comprised of young men who hold the masculine image of Russian society, Putin’s aggressiveness and militantism in high regard. This group is most likely associated with the Hungarian far-right subculture that usually promotes paramilitary activities, legitimizes Russian or Hungarian separatism and revisionism. A representative poll by Political Capital also confirms that only around 11% of Hungarians support political violence as a justified means to achieve important goals.⁷⁰ “Admirers of Russia” (7.5%), and those who think “Russia is the safer bet” among international players, present two sides of the same coin in Hungary: the first group has a favourable view

66 Labs Endless Flux, ‘Varga Mihály: nekünk megadatott, amiért 1956 hősei harcoltak’, PestiSrácok (blog), accessed 11 March 2019, <http://pestisracok.hu/varga-mihaly-nekunk-megadatott-amiert-1956-hosei-harcoltak/>.

67 ‘Megemlékezés Az 1956-OS Forradalom És Szabadságharc 62. Évfordulójáról’, kormány.hu, accessed 11 March 2019, <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/fotok/megemlekezés-az-1956-os-forradalom-es-szabadságharc-62-evfordulojarol>.

68 ‘A sötét titok: EZÉRT nem segített az USA 1956-ban? Ha ennek csak a fele igaz, borzalmas átverés részei voltunk...’, Világ Figyelő (blog), 17 November 2018, <https://vilagfigyelo.com/a-sotet-titok-ezert-nem-segitett-az-usa-1956-ban-ha-ennek-csak-a-fele-igaz-borzalmas-atveres-reszei-voltunk/>.

69 While perceptions summarized different types of narratives, public segments describe specific information consumption patterns or group behaviours related to Russia and perceptions about her.

70 Péter Krekó et al., ‘Beyond Populism – Tribalism in Poland and Hungary’, politicalcapital.hu, 2018, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/news.php?article_read=1&article_id=2277.

of the geopolitical status quo, feels nostalgia about the Soviet era and prefers Russian high culture; while the second one has a pragmatic approach to the Kremlin based on economic cooperation and geographic proximity. These segments can easily support the Hungarian government's foreign policy position, which is economic and pragmatic on the surface, with increasing official cooperation regarding religious affairs, high culture and the shared "Eurasian" historical origins of the two countries.⁷¹

The "Westerniser" and "Genuinely Scared" segments present the real attitudinal or group resistance to Russian political or sharp power influence in Hungarian society, amounting to 48.5% of the public as measured by the research. Westernisers oppose Russia and the Hungarian government's (asymmetric) relationship with the Kremlin, based on democratic European values shared with other member states and Hungary's hard fought place within the Euro-Atlantic community, providing shelter from Russia after forty year of occupation. Both the Westernisers and the Genuinely Scared groups view Russia as a security risk, which has proven in the past time and again – for example in 1956 and 1968, and Georgia, Crimea and Syria – that it is an unpredictable, expansive power.

Still, Hungarian society's vulnerability to Russian sharp power is once again proven by the sizeable (31.5%) "Suspicious" group, whose critical or conspiratorial opinions on big powers reflect how Hungary has historically suffered from being a part of the Central-Eastern European "conflict zone" between the East and the West. Along with the Russian fanboys and Russia's admirers, representative polling affirmed the existence of such geopolitically vulnerable public or consumer groups in Hungary. According to Pew research,⁷² 38% of Hungarians saw Russia in a favourable light in 2018, and only 28% viewed Russia as a major threat to Hungary in 2017, ranking Hungary as the second most pro-Russian populace among the European countries measured.⁷³

DRIVERS OF PRO-RUSSIAN ATTITUDES IN HUNGARY

The Hungarian government's geopolitical orientation and related communication speaks to the deepest level of geopolitical drivers rooted in individual and social psychology. According to our research, different perceptions of Russia can be explained or interpreted through a profound identity crisis of the Central European people, centred on geopolitical disorientation: whether these countries should or do already belong to the East or the West in a diplomatic, cultural or military sense. Although these are age old dilemmas and questions, qualitative data revealed that relations to Russia or the West are determined by a continuing geopolitical identity crisis and the lack of knowledge concerning "our fixed place in the world." All of which translates into people contemplating their individual/national survival or geopolitical "insecurity" and their countries' perceived dependence on "big powers" or "inferiority," when it comes to personal geopolitical orientations. The existence of such an identity crisis is clearly supported by GLOBSEC Trends 2018 and IRI data, according to those at least 30% of Hungarians place themselves and Hungary between the East and the West⁷⁴ and between Western Europe and Russia in terms of culture, the welfare state, standard of living and values.⁷⁵

The Hungarian government's campaigns focusing on the "immigration crisis" has, since 2015, directly raised the issue of individual or national survival related to "insecurity." Faced with a significant wave of refugees in 2015, the government did not only erect a fence along the Serbian and Hungarian border to provide a physical line of defence against refugees and migrants, it also emphasised that these people constitute a

71 Herczeg Márk, 'Kásler Miklós Magyar-Orosz Kulturális Együttműködési Egyezményt Írt Alá Moszkvában', 444, 9 September 2018, <https://444.hu/2018/09/09/kasler-miklos-magyar-orosz-kulturalis-egyuttmukodesi-egyezményt-irt-ala-moszkvaban>.

72 Clark Letterman, 'Global Views of Putin, Russia Largely Negative | Pew Research Center', PewGlobal.Org (blog), 6 2018, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2018/12/06/image-of-putin-russia-suffers-internationally/>.

73 Margaret Vice, 'Russia and Putin Viewed Negatively Worldwide', PewGlobal.Org (blog), 16 2017, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/08/16/publics-worldwide-unfavorable-toward-putin-russia/>.

74 'GLOBSEC TRENDS 2018'.

75 IRI, 'Hungary Poll Reveals Pessimism Over Economy and the Country's Future'.

clear and present danger to Hungarians' livelihood, employment and Christian identity.⁷⁶ To make matters worse, the ruling Fidesz-KDNP had made the "fight" against "illegal immigration" a centrepiece of its 2018 parliamentary campaign, claiming the opposition, independent NGOs or the political opposition are executing a conspiracy of George Soros's to "repopulate" Europe with illegal immigrants and destroy Christianity.⁷⁷

As the second step of the anti-immigration campaign, the government placed Hungary above the West and compensated Hungarians' "inferiority" attitudes by claiming that the West or big Western powers like France or Germany are in decline and are unable to withstand the pressure of illegal immigration and terrorism due to their liberal immigration policies. PM Orbán accused the European Commission and the European Parliament of being controlled by pro-immigration politicians determined to destroy Europe or European Christianity. Hungary is thus left to separate itself from the rest of Europe to defend its sovereignty and ethnic homogeneity, which makes the country and CEE – based on "Christian civilisation" – superior to Western "mixed" culture incorporating both Islam and Christianity.⁷⁸

Consequently, the Hungarian drivers of insecurity and inferiority fuelled and articulated by the government and pro-government media push the Hungarian public directly into the arms of the Kremlin's propaganda, which claims that Russia is a strong nation founded on the ideas of nation, family and Christianity against a liberal, weak, infertile West. In this case, Hungarian and Russian alleged geopolitical "superiority" tap into the geopolitical insecurity of Hungarians in order to compensate the Western (technical, material and standard of living) excellence with morality-based arguments and "special" cultural values.⁷⁹

Examinations of the main media influencers in the Hungarian media space reveal the institutional elements of public resilience to Russian sharp power. The overwhelmingly anti-Russian nature of the perceptions and the public segments can be attributed to mostly independent media outlets such as index.hu, 444.hu or 168ora.hu, whose articles and audiences shape the public discourse and image of Russia in Hungary.

Table 3. The list of top media sources of grassroots communication in Hungary⁸⁰

Name of platform	Number of posts	Engagement	Engagement per post
index.hu	2.2K	525.4K	236.1
444.hu	1.1K	363.4K	334
hvg.hu	1.8K	218.4K	123.2
24.hu	2K	122.2K	59.7
origo.hu	2.5K	56.7K	22.7
168ora.hu	629	47.7K	75.8
hirtv.hu	1.4K	32K	22.4
pestisracok.hu	2.1K	2.3K	1.1

76 Vivian S. Walker and Lorant Gyori, 'Migrants, Moral Panic, and Intolerance in Hungarian Politics', warontherocks.com, accessed 13 February 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/07/migrants-moral-panic-and-intolerance-in-hungarian-politics/>.

77 Zrt HVG Kiadó, 'Szijjártó: Hangfelvétel van arról, hogy a Soros-hálózat kormányokat akar egymásnak ugrasztani', hvg.hu, 18 March 2018, https://hvg.hu/itthon/20180318_Szijjarto_Hangfelvetel_van_arrol_hogy_a_Soroshalozat_kormanyokat_akar_egymasnak_ugrasztani.

78 'Orbán: "A migráció a legnagyobb sorskérdés Európában"', 888.hu, accessed 13 February 2019, <https://888.hu/article-Orban-a-migracio-a-legnagyobb-sorskerdes-europaban>.

79 Attia Juhász and Patrik Szicherle, 'A Migrációs Álhírek, Dezinformációk És Összeesküvés-Elméletek Politikai Hatásai - Tanulmány', accessed 13 February 2019, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article_read=1&article_id=2178.

80 Posts include both administrators' content as well as articles and readers' comments. The engagement of an article/post is the sum of activity performed by others on that article/post.

Name of platform	Number of posts	Engagement	Engagement per post
balrad.com	522	1.1K	2.2
karpahir.com	1.4K	1.1K	0.8

Among the most successful media sources, we can find top pro-government ones, such as pestisracok.hu, and members of the Hungarian-Russian network, such as balrad.com, karpahir.com; however, a significant percentage of their posts or comments are also negative in tone. When it comes to social media (Twitter) and discussion forums, conversations, they are also dominated by independent media and/or negative sentiments on Russia.