



THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR IN SOCIAL MEDIA

*Inauthentic online behavior in the V4 concerning
Russia's war against Ukraine*



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Inauthentic behavior in social media was detected in all V4 countries, although the methods and goals used were different.** In Hungary and the Czech Republic, messages disseminated on Facebook in an inauthentic manner generally tried to sell the Kremlin's messages to the population. In Poland, suspicious commenters tried to pose as anti-Kremlin warriors while attacking the Polish political elite and Poland's allies. In the Slovak media environment, all constantly repeated messages were either content-neutral or pro-West.
- **There are clear signs of coordination.** It is apparent that there is some form of coordination in disseminating these narratives. For instance, there are several profiles that can be suspected of being fake (e.g., fake or no profile picture, posting only political content or having no public FB activity). "Introductions" added to the repeated texts suggest the existence of some form of "guidelines" for users to "personalize" their messages. Moreover, there seems to be no other logical explanation for hundreds of Facebook users to copy the same message under posts of a wide variety of Facebook pages.
- **Multiple user types are involved in the coordinated dissemination of messages on Facebook.** Across the three countries, we found "common" user types spreading messages on Facebook inauthentically. There are likely "professional" trolls who engage in inauthentic activity in social media as a job, using fake profiles. There are enthusiastic activists who engage in this activity to convince others about their truths; and their behavior is presumably coordinated centrally through closed Facebook or Telegram groups. Third, there are "average users" who only engage in inauthentic activity sporadically. They either just see some comments they agree with and spread them or are also a member of coordination groups, although less active ones.
- **Inauthentic activity was strongest in the early days of the war.** The vast majority of the narratives found by our research were repeated the most frequently in the first couple of days of the war, and then most of them became dormant swiftly. The main exceptions were the two Hungarian election-related messages.
- **Inauthentic activity was the highest in the V4.** Inauthentic activity concerning the war in Ukraine was the highest in Hungary, where the election campaign – focusing strongly on Ukraine – gave rise to two of the six narratives observed in the country in the research period.
- **Inauthentic behavior is a threat to the media environment.** The inauthentic dissemination of online messages is a threat because this way, pro-Kremlin messages can reach individuals who would otherwise not meet such claims, and the large number of these texts could create a perception that pro-Kremlin views are in the majority. From the pro-West side, the main threat could be the dissemination of factually incorrect messages, which can provide ammunition to Kremlin-friendly actors to justify dismissing criticism of Russia as lies.

THE WAR OF INFORMATION

The forces of the Russian Federation attacked Ukraine on 24 February 2022, bringing largescale war onto the European continent for the first time in decades. However, while open military conflict was a surprise to most observers, the Kremlin has long waged a different type of war with its eastern neighbor and the West. One crucial element of the pre-war hybrid conflict was the dissemination of [disinformation](#) involving Russian state-run media such as RT or Sputnik International, the local-language [pro-Kremlin portals](#), and a large number of so-called “Russian trolls”: fake or real social media users engaged in inauthentic online behavior. The professional trolls of the Internet Research Agency located in Saint Petersburg played an [important role](#) in the 2016 US presidential election and the Brexit [campaign](#).

While the military conflict is currently confined to the territory of Ukraine, the information war is not. Pro-Kremlin media operating in western nations started justifying Russia’s aggression immediately after Russian troops started their attack. The official Russian casus belli for the attack – like the allegedly [impending](#) Ukrainian offensive in the Donbas, Ukraine committing genocide against separatists, or the [myths](#) of Ukrainian Nazis and nuclear and biological weapons – had been featured frequently before February, with disinformation activity noticeably rising in the month before the attack. Pro-Kremlin outlets throughout the world doubled down on these false claims after the war. Their goal is not to convince the world that Russia is right, merely to confuse the western population and make them question the truth about the war; namely that Russia is solely responsible for it and the [war crimes](#) its soldiers committed since then.

If the western population starts questioning the facts about the Kremlin’s aggression, they would be more likely to dismiss European and US sanctions against Russia, especially in the face of rising inflation throughout the world, and they would be less supportive of arming Ukraine to fight. In turn, the court of public opinion could potentially start pressuring their governments to change course.

However, Russia has hit some roadblocks in its information operations. First, the world’s [public opinion](#) generally remains firmly supportive of Ukraine. Second, the attack united most of the European Union, prompting the bloc to approve newer and newer sanctions packages swiftly, and even previously firmly pro-Kremlin politicians – such as Czech President Miloš Zeman – had to at the very least condemn Russian actions. Third, the EU [suspended](#) the broadcasting activities of RT and Sputnik in the EU, delivering an important but not fatal blow to the Kremlin’s European activities.

Nevertheless, the Kremlin has not given up on sowing information discord and it still has allies, as some EU governments’ stance remains favorable to the Kremlin. Importantly, the EU and its member states have generally taken no measures against local pro-Kremlin portals with no official connection to the Russian administration – although the Czech Republic is a notable exception. Hungary’s government-controlled public broadcaster and pro-government media outlets have [published](#) articles, audiovisual reports that whitewash Russia’s responsibility for the war. A recent [Ipsos](#) poll showed the potential effects of this campaign: among EU and NATO member states, Hungarians were the most likely to say that events in Ukraine are “none of our business” and were the least likely to say that it is worth paying more for fuel and gas due to sanctions against Russia for attacking a sovereign country. The populations of other EU member states also wavered when it came to rising energy prices. Naturally, they are not the only electoral group in the EU that remain warm on Russia. As noted above, local-language pro-Kremlin mouthpieces generally continue operating without restrictions. Finally, professional pro-Kremlin trolls and enthusiastic Russia-friendly activists can [continue](#) spreading the Kremlin’s talking points on social media unhindered.

After researching inauthentic online behavior only in Hungary, Political Capital engaged with partners from the other V4 member states to take measure of the situation from a regional perspective.

What do we mean by inauthentic online behavior?

We describe the phenomenon of inauthentic online behavior as an effort by online profiles handled by real people¹ to confuse, provoke other users, generate debates or alter the fabric of online discussion. These users can mobilize or demobilize electoral groups, support or discredit political forces, alter public opinion, spread disinformation or create fake debates between seemingly legitimate viewpoints.

The dumping-like dissemination of Facebook comments is clearly useful for the political actor who the given narrative favors. If this is happening completely organically, it does not even require resources and the effects of such efforts can be improved by some level of coordination. We can say that if a profile copies the same text into the comment section of various Facebook posts over and over again or if multiple users repeat the exact same message constantly, we can no longer talk about organic behavior, as they are not sharing their own opinions but that of others. The proliferation of repetitive comments deteriorates the quality of Facebook discussions, contributes to tensions between differing stances and strengthens tribal logic. It might bring about heated arguments, discouraging other users to partake in discussions. Amplifying a narrative by constantly repeating it might distort public opinion by making it look like the majority view. Moreover, this behavior could introduce false narratives to users who otherwise could not have been targeted by manipulation efforts.

In this project, we compiled a database of Facebook comments in Hungarian, Czech, Slovak and Polish with the aid of the SentiOne monitoring software. All queries were based on the same words. The comments we compiled were published on Facebook between 21 February and 31 March, covering the first 4.5 weeks of the war. In Hungary's case, this period was prolonged by a week due to the general election of 3 April. After compiling the database, we used AI-based text-mining to find comments that were repeated at least 100 times in the database. The repetitive comments we found were then checked with SentiOne again for appearances before the research period's start.

We had to find the profiles that posted the comments in the database manually due to Facebook's privacy practices, which is often possible but sometimes not. Moreover, some comments were deleted by the time we checked them. Regardless, we can present a fairly accurate picture of the profiles taking part in this activity.

¹ The profiles themselves can be fake or real.

HUNGARY: A SOCIAL MEDIA SPACE ENAMORED OF THE KREMLIN

A very ambiguous stance towards Russia

In Hungary, Russia's war with Ukraine was not only a crucial topic of political debate but the main issue in the 2022 general election campaign. Since the war became a key campaign topic, it did not unite the country's mainstream political elite or the Hungarian population – except for the question of refugees coming to Hungary from its eastern neighbor.

The Hungarian ruling Fidesz party, which scored a landslide victory in the 2022 general election, was initially confused by the Kremlin's decision to launch a war against Ukraine. For weeks before the Russian attack on 24 February, pro-government influencers, media personalities had [scoffed at the possibility of Moscow declaring war on Kyiv](#), stating that “even idiots know” there is not a chance for a Russia-Ukraine war, blaming the US for “sword rattling” over the issue, trying to provoke conflict. On 1 February, PM Viktor Orbán met President Putin in Moscow, which was labelled as a “[peace mission](#)” that “[broke the ice](#),” culminating in the visit of several western leaders to Russia.

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán [condemned](#) Russian aggression against Ukraine on 24 February, while Péter Szijjártó met the Russian Federation's ambassador to Budapest to [relay](#) Hungary's official stance to him. The Hungarian government has approved all EU sanctions against Russia so far (even if sometimes grudgingly), although it [outlined](#) any restrictions on energy imports from Russia as a definite red line, which is, they say, required to protect utility cost cuts for Hungarian households and the country's economy.

Hungarian officials were not always so clear about specific events in the war: PM Orbán was not willing to clearly pin the blame on Russia for the Bucha massacre on his post-election international press conference, and he only did so through his [press secretary](#) after being criticized by PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski.

In terms of domestic rhetoric, the cabinet and Fidesz found a narrative that could not only keep its electorate together, which is [divided](#) on the assessment of Russia's actions, but even expand it: they created a manipulative [narrative](#) comparing the “peace-seeking” ruling party protecting Hungarian lives by staying out of the conflict with the “warmonger opposition” that would make Hungary a party to the war by sending soldiers, weapons into the warzone. At one point, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó claimed that opposition candidate Péter Márki-Zay and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had reached an agreement about Hungarian weapon [deliveries](#) that would start right after they won the election. These governmental communication panels were then disseminated to a broad layer of the Hungarian public through the [government-controlled public broadcaster](#) and the [media empire](#) built by Fidesz over the past 12 years.

The media empire of Fidesz played a considerable role in disseminating pro-Kremlin narratives, many of which questioned Russia's responsibility for attacking its neighbor – although their sites also offer balanced coverage on the war in [other articles](#). On 24 February, the Hungarian public broadcaster published pieces that uncritically repeated or even justified Russia's casus belli, such as [preventing genocide](#) in the Donbass. On 25 February, one guest [claimed](#) on the main state-run news channel M1 that Ukraine stepped over a red line when it announced it wanted to develop nuclear weapons. On 5 March, the channel's chief foreign policy editor (who has since [resigned](#), officially for health reasons) [argued](#) that it would be best for Ukrainian refugees and Transcarpathian Hungarians if the war ended quickly, but weapon transfers to Ukraine are prolonging the conflict. The Hungarian state wire agency MTI [reported](#) on the Russian viewpoint regarding Bucha uncritically multiple times, which was then quoted by a vast number of pro-government media outlets.

Due to the fact that Hungarians receive [favorable coverage](#) on Russia from mainstream media outlets loyal to Fidesz and the government itself, alternative pro-Kremlin sites had not been particularly active in the country before the war, and they mainly followed topics that are (mostly) absent from pro-government outlets; namely, disinformation about [NATO](#). However, since then, the most popular of these outlets became

a more [visible](#) presence in the Hungarian media environment and at least one of the statements disseminated in Facebook comments in Hungary by the hundreds originated from such the site. Therefore, fringe pro-Kremlin portals might play an increasing role in Hungary's disinformation environment.

A heaven for inauthentic behavior

Hungary ended up as the country with the most Facebook comments we believe to be the result of inauthentic online behavior in the V4. We found six narratives that were copied and pasted into the comment sections of Facebook posts hundreds of times. The overall number of comments we found was 5,902 in the research period and the most popular ones occurred over 1,000 times on Hungarian Facebook in the research period. This makes Hungary the V4 country with the most active pro-Kremlin community of Facebook commenters by far. The election campaign significantly boosted the number of repetitive comments on Hungarian Facebook: two narratives combined election-related messages with statements regarding the war.

1. Ukraine "does not exist"

The first narrative we found claimed that Ukraine did not even exist because "it did not register its borders at the UN since 25 December 1991." The statement also claims that nobody can thus be blamed for infringing upon the sovereignty or territorial integrity of Ukraine, and – additionally – since Russia is the legal successor of the USSR, Ukrainian, Belarussian lands belong to it; hence, it can do as it pleases in these places. Naturally, none of this is true: Russia [recognized](#) Ukraine's independence and 90% of Ukrainians who cast a ballot [voted](#) for it in 1991 (with a turnout rate of 84%). The [majority](#) of those living in Crimea and the Donbass wanted independence, too. Russia obliged itself to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity in several official treaties, such as the [Budapest Memorandum](#) of 1994.

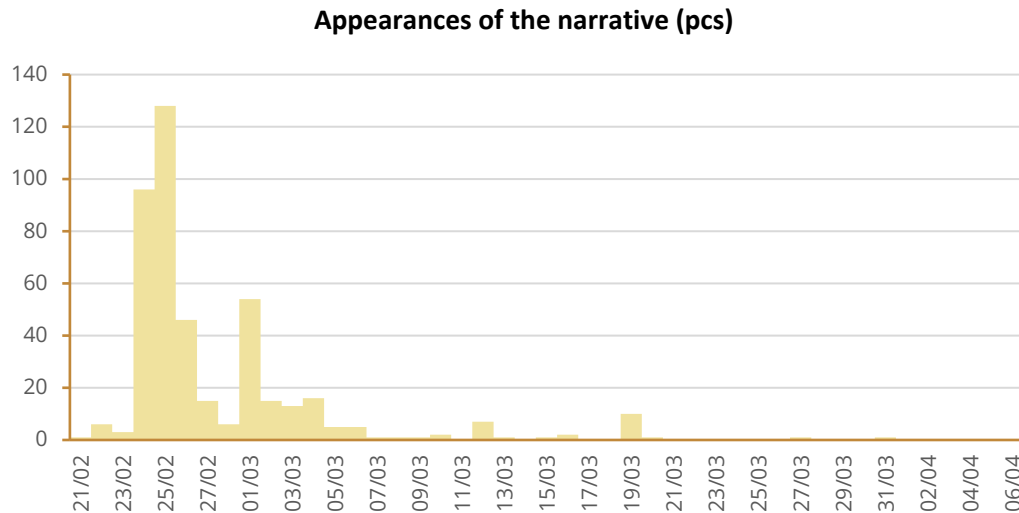
Original text of the narrative:

Az Egyesült Nemzetek Főtitkára azt mondta, Ukrajna 1991 óta nem kért regisztrációt a határon, nehogy az ukrán állam létezzon...
És semmit sem tudtunk róla!!!
04/07/2014
Meglépő nyilatkozatot tett Ban Ki-Moon ENSZ-főtitkár, amelynek közvetítését megtiltották az ukrán médiában és az interneten.
Az ENSZ Biztonsági Tanácsának ülésén vitatták meg a két ország közötti konfliktust.
Onnan a következő következtetést vonták le:
Ukrajna 1991.12.25 óta nem jegyeztette be határait
Ukrajna határait az ENSZ nem jegyezte be szuverén államként.
Ezért feltételezhetjük, hogy Oroszország nem követ el jogsértést Ukrajna felett.
A CIS-szerződés szerint Ukrajna területe a Szovjetunió közigazgatási körzete.
Ezért senkit sem lehet hibáztatni Ukrajna határainak szeparatizmusáért és kényszer módosításáért.
A nemzetközi jog szerint az országnak egyszerűen nincsenek hivatalosan elismert határai.
E probléma megoldása érdekében Ukrajnának be kell fejeznie a szomszédos országokkal a határok lezárását, és a szomszédos országok, köztük Oroszország megállapodását kell megszereznie közös határukon.
Köteles mindent dokumentálni és szerződéseket aláírni az összes szomszédos állammal.

Az Európai Unió elkötelezte magát Ukrajna támogatása mellett ebben a fontos kérdésben, és minden technikai segítséget megad.
De vajon Oroszország aláír-e határszerződést Ukrajnával?
Nem, dehogy!
Mivel Oroszország a Szovjetunió jogutódja (ezt erősítik meg a nemzetközi törvényszékek határozatai a volt Szovjetunió és külföldi országok közötti ingatlanvitákról), azok a földek, amelyeken Ukrajna, Fehéroroszország található és Novorosszia belong Oroszországban vannak, és senkinek sincs joga hozzá!
Oroszország beleegyezése kell ahhoz, hogy ez külön terület legyen.
Alapjában véve Oroszországnak kellett kijelentenie, hogy ez a terület orosz, és hogy minden, ami ott történik, az Oroszország belügye.
Bármilyen beavatkozás Oroszország elleni intézkedésnek minősül.
Ezen az alapon törölhetik a 2014. május 25-i választásokat és a nép azt csinál, amit akar!
A Budapesti Memorandum és más megállapodások szerint Ukrajnának nincsenek határai.
Ukrán állam nem létezik (és nem is volt!)
Csak a háttérhatalom fő hadiszállása! Akkor milyen területen tartózkodik a NATO???
Hivatalosan Orosz területen!

This narrative was already present in Hungary on 21-23 February 2022, but only in very small numbers. However, the number of the text's appearances skyrocketed on the 24th and reached its peak on the 25th

with over 120 instances. After that, the narrative was copied into Facebook discussions over 40 times on only two days (26 February and 1 March). The statement has been virtually non-existent since 20 March. The text was copied into posts published by independent and oppositional, and governmental actors, but the top five targets were the pages of independent outlets ATV, Telex, HVG and 24.hu, and the opposition's PM candidate Péter Márki-Zay.



The profiles spreading the narrative are rather interesting. Several of them have foreign names or only partially Hungarian names (e.g., English first name, Hungarian second name). Many of these profiles seem to have minimal or no public Facebook activity, most information about them is inaccessible and their profile pictures are unrecognizable – they can be suspected of being fake. Multiple fake profiles are among the most prominent disseminators of this message, and they were the engines behind it in the first couple of days. The early comments also suggest that the narrative might have been imported, as it seems like the text was translated into Hungarian with Google Translate: several English words, such as “belong” was left in it.

The dissemination of the message was later taken over by enthusiastic, real profiles of Hungarian pro-Kremlin activists and they even fixed the text linguistically.

2. Where were you when Kyiv did bad things?

The second texts asked people “who are now crying because of Ukraine” where they were when Kyiv committed genocide in the Donbass (e.g., when the Trade Union HQ of Odessa was “set ablaze” when pro-Russian protesters were inside) or restricted the rights of the Hungarian minority in the country. They never mention that neither the [UN](#) nor the [OSCE](#) found evidence of genocide in eastern Ukraine. There were civilian casualties in the region after 2014, but that was due to [both sides’](#) regular breaches of ceasefire agreements. The statement is also false due to the fact that widespread criticism was directed towards Ukraine’s laws targeting minorities, for instance by the [Venice Commission, but this does not mean these laws constituted genocide in any way](#). As for the Trade Union HQ fire, the Council of Europe’s [report](#) highlights that pro-Kremlin and pro-Kyiv protesters were throwing Molotov cocktails at each other, which led to the fire.

Original text of the narrative:

Azoknak:
 - akik most elkezdtek siránkozni Ukrajna miatt...
 - akik most kiteszik az ukrán zászlós profilképüket...
 - akik tüntetést szerveznek az Orosz nagykövetség elé...
 Hol voltatok az elmúlt nyolc évben?
 Nem sajnáltátok Donbass és Luhanszk lakosságát?
 Nem hallottatok a népi társról?
 Nem hallottatok az ukrán nyelv törvényéről?
 Nem tiltakoztatok, amikor a Krímben elzárták (az egyébként orosz területről jövő) vizet?

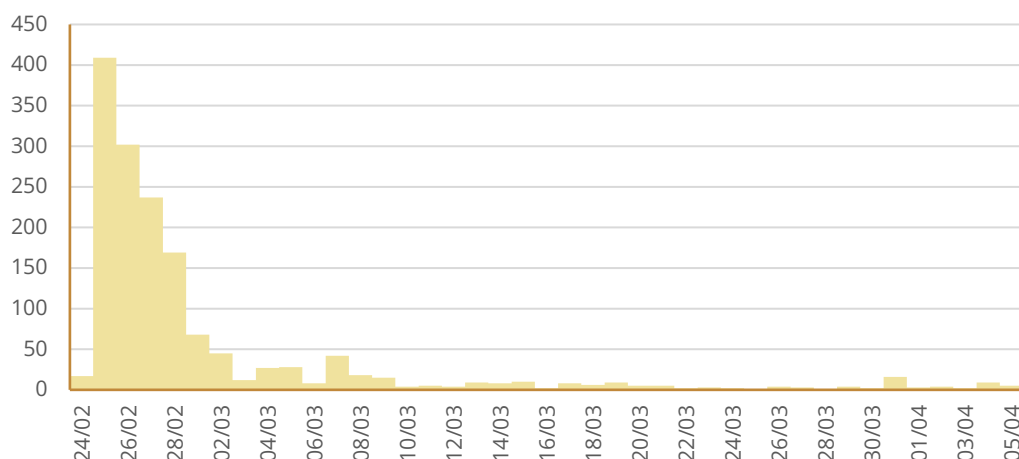
Nem tudjátok hogy az ukránok betiltották az orosz és a magyar nyelv használatát?
 Nem tudjátok, hogy Ukrajna szerint a kárpátaljai magyarok és a keleti részén lakó oroszok nem minősülnek őslakosnak?
 Nem hallottatok az odesszai szakszervezetek székházában bent égett emberekről...?
 Nem hallottatok azokról, akik kiugráltak a székház ablakán és túléltek - ott verték agyon őket?

És azt tudtad, hogy oda voltak készítve a molotov koktélok és az épületre rá lettek szorítva a civilek...? Nem tudtad, hogy soha nem volt emiatt felelőségre vonás? Emlékezetünk szerint a Szakszervezetek Házában a tűz 2014. május 2-án történt, amikor nacionalisták az Euromaidan ellenfeleit űzték be az épületbe. 42 ember halt meg.... - Nem hallottál róla???? Arról tudsz, hogy Donbaszra ráengedték a börtönből kiszabadított bűnözőket?

Hogy a börtönök előtt ott álltak a fegyverrel megrakott teherautók...? Hogy három nap maga volt a pokol? Esetleg az ukrán fasiszták fenyegetéséről hallottál? Hogy Kárpátját kiirtják? Hogy felrobbantják az ukrainai atomerőműveket? Hallottál a Minszki egyezményről? Arról hallottál, hogy az Egyesült Államok irányítása alatt álló - Ukrajnában lévő - biológiai laboratóriumokból 16 Oroszországgal határos?

The narrative started as a Facebook post by a pro-Kremlin Hungarian-language “alternative” website. Within five minutes of its publication, the same text appeared under a Facebook post of an independent media outlet. The dissemination of the message started on 24 February at 8PM sporadically. The number of its appearances reached their peak already on the 25th with over 400 instances. The number of times the text was copied into the comments fell to under 50 on 2 March 2022 and has not been higher ever since. This text was left under Facebook posts by Telex over 100 times but the Fidesz-dominated public broadcaster’s Facebook news page (hirado.hu) also saw it being copied under its posts 76 times.

Appearances of the narrative (pcs)



The profiles spreading this message have few common characteristics, they seem to be real profiles with only a couple of potential fake ones mixed into the group. The real profiles were by far the most active. It is possible that the campaign was coordinated in closed Facebook groups or on other social media surfaces (e.g., Telegram) closed to the public, there is no other probable reason for hundreds of profiles copying the same message into Facebook discussions over and over again. It certainly helped that the text was shared in [two](#) of the [larger](#) public pro-Russian Hungarian-language Facebook groups.

Another fact that could have made the narrative one of the most successful of the six we observed is that the message was posted by a former Fidesz-affiliated MP on her own [Facebook page](#). This is especially absurd considering that this particular MP was the politician who launched an initiative to dedicate a day of commemoration to Hungarian political prisoners deported to the USSR.

3. NATO in Crimea

The third narrative brought up the well-known pro-Kremlin claim that the CIA helped orchestrate a coup against the legitimate leaders in Kyiv in 2014 to let the US open a NATO base in Crimea – so, the text says, everything is actually Washington’s fault. President Putin, meanwhile, bears no responsibility. In fact, Russia, just like the US, will emerge as a winner of the conflict because the sanctions levied on Russia by the EU will only harm Europe. In contrast, the [facts](#) are that the Maidan protests were the result of then-President Viktor Yanukovich refusing to sign the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. Since then, Ukrainians participated in multiple elections that [did suffer from problems](#), but could be considered free and competitive – [unlike](#) those

in Russia. The sanctions are [hurting](#) the Russian economy, even if the regime is adamant the country will emerge better off with them.

Original text of the narrative:

"Látom a szörnyülködő meg sápiózó posztokat, kommenteket az orosz-ukrán konfliktus (mára: háború) kapcsán. Úgy látom elég nagy a káosz a fejekben és mindenki érzelmi oldalról közelíti meg a dolgot. Ezért próbáljuk meg most tisztába tenni a dolgokat egy picit.

Először is a háború nem jó, senkinek, mármint a francokat nem, egy jól behatárolható csoportnak jó, mindenki más szopni fog. Az ukrán-orosz konfliktus nem idén kezdődött. A gyökerei egészen 1991-ig nyúlnak vissza, amikor a Szovjetunió és a Varsói Szerződés széthullásával a kétpólusú világ egyensúlya felbomlott. Nyilván értelmes ember nem sírja vissza a Szovjetuniót, sem a kommunizmust. Az viszont tény, hogy a NATO és Oroszország kötöttek egy írásbeli megállapodást, hogy a NATO nem terjeszkedik keletre az oroszok rovására. Az ezt bizonyító dokumentumokat a Der Spiegel a múlt héten a nagyközönség elé tárta, valahogy nem került bele a fősodratú hírekbe...

Ugorjunk egy pár év(tized)et előre az időben: 2014 februárjában feltehetően a CIA segítségével megpuccsolták az akkori oroszbarát ukrán kormányt, helyére egy USA barát kormány került. Röviddel ezután Ukrajna bejelentette óhaját az EU-hoz és a NATO-hoz való csatlakozására. erről az USA azonnal támogatásáról biztosította, az EU pedig bizonyos feltételekhez kötötte.

Itt most álljunk meg egy pillanatra és nézzünk a térképre: Ha Ukrajna csatlakozik a NATO-hoz, ez a következőket jelenti: - Oroszország elveszti a Fekete-tenger feletti uralmát, mert akié a Krim azé a Fekete-tenger. Egyúttal elveszti a szabad átjárást a Földközi-tengerre a Boszporuszon keresztül. Ezenfelül, Moszkva légicsapás közelbe kerül a NATO erőikkel szemben, arról nem is beszélve, hogy az ukrán ásványkincs nagy részét az oroszok felügyelik. Ez megszűnne és az amcsik kezébe menne át, ahogy ez történt Irakban, Szíriában stb, stb.

Na ezután foglalta el a Putyin a Krímet, és robbantotta ki feltehetően a GRU (a KGB utódja) segítségével a donbaszi és luhanszki szeparatista felkelést. Aminek a végjátékát az oroszok ma indították el. Ez történik most.

Tehát ez a háború nem azzal kezdődött, hogy a gonosz Putyin a reggeli kula+kávé+cigi kombó után gondolt egyet és bevonult Ukrajnába. A jelenlegi helyzet az USA agresszív, erőszakos terjeszkedés politikájának gyümölcse, amit az elmúlt hozzávetőleges 30 évben jól megfigyelhettünk, nyomomonkövethettünk. Az ukrán háború nem akció, hanem reakció, az USA és a NATO sorozatos szerződésszegésére, és a geopolitikai status quo felrúgására.

Légyszí ne kezdjünk már bele az ilyen talmi mantrákba, hogy de Ukrajna az egy szuverén ország, joga van eldönteni, hova akar

csatlakozni. Te is és Én is pontosan tudjuk, hogy ez egy szépen hangzó maszlag, és a világ az nem így működik. Így kellene de soha nem így működött és belátható időn belül nem is fog így működni.

Nincsenek független, szuverén országok, érdekszférák vannak és ha rossz érdekszférába tartozol, akkor bizony beszoptad. Mint említettem, ez nem jól van így és nem így kéne lennie, de így van.

Putyin le fogja dózerolni Ukrajnát, és ez ellen nem csak, hogy senki nem tehet semmit, de nem is akar és mindezt a saját ostobaságuknak és az USA-nak köszönhetik az ukránok. Kirakhatod az ukrán zászlót a profilképedre, meg hashtagelhatsz iprayforukraine-t ez csak annyit jelent, hogy nem vagy tisztában vagy nem érdekel az összes vonatkozása a történetnek. Jóemberkedéstől viszont továbbra sem leszel jó ember.

Adalékok:

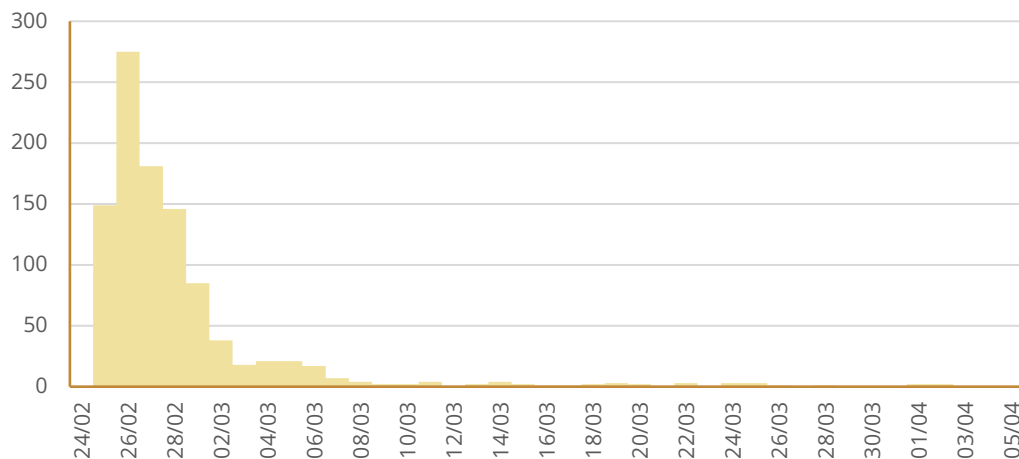
Az ENSZ-nek 8 éve volt arra, hogy békefenntartókat küldjön a régióba és segítsen a konfliktus megoldásában, de ez egyetlen egyszer sem merült fel, vajon miért? Feltehetőleg mert eleinte azt várták, hogy az ukrán hadsereg majd pár hónap alatt leveri a szakadárokat és visszaáll minden a maidani útra. Hát nem sikerült nekik. Aztán meg ugye ott volt a vita és az amerikai nyomás, hogy az EU ne támogassa az északi-áramlatot, amit most így háború kitörésével kénytelenek voltak a németek felfüggeszteni. Amivel kit lőttek tőkön? Saját magukat. Tehát ki jár jól ezzel a háborúval? Az USA. És persze az oroszok is, mert a gáz ára egyből megugrott.

Ukrajnában a nacionalista kormány minden elképzelhető módon vegzálta és vegzálja a kisebbségeket: kezdve a kárpátaljai magyaroktól a románokon át az oroszokig: megtiltja nekik anyanyelvük használatát és az azon való tanítást, tanulást, rendszerek a verőosztagok vegzálásai. De ahogy a délvidéki magyarok esetében, ezekben az esetekben sem érdekli, érdekelte sem az ENSZ-t, sem az EU-t, sem az Amnesty féléket, mert cserébe az ukrán katonai bázisok használatáért szemethúnytak ezen atrocitások feltt, ahogy a kárpátaljai kényszersorozások felett is.

Számunkra e háborúnak két nagy kockázata van: A pöcsfej amcsiknak sikerül belerángatnia a NATO-t és ezáltal minket is, ami az ország megsemmisüléséhez vezet, illetve Ukrajna elfoglalása után, Putyin visszaadja Kárpátalját Magyarországnak. Ez esetben olyan belső feszültséget teremt a NATO-ban és az EU-ban is ami végleg megingatja az amúgy sem rózsás helyzetünket az EU-ban és kizárnak minket mind az EU-ból, mind a NATO-ból és végleg megindul az EU és a NATO erodálása.

This narrative emerged on 25 February 2022 and reached its peak on the 26th, when it was copied under Facebook posts over 250 times. The number of appearances dropped to under 40 by 2 March 2022. It has only had sporadic presence ever since. Independent media outlets were once again the main sites where the comment appeared, but the pro-government Mandiner and hirado.hu, and even the FB site of PM Viktor Orbán saw the text copied under their posts around 20 times each.

Appearances of the narrative (pcs)



This is also a message that was spread mainly by enthusiastic, real pro-Kremlin activists with only a couple of potentially fake ones in the mix. There is a very real chance of some level of coordination here as well because there is no other realistic explanation for disseminating the same text over and over again.

4. The opposition would drag us into the war

The fourth narrative concerned domestic politics. As noted in the Hungarian country chapter's introduction, the government accused the opposition constantly of seeking to drag Hungary into the war in Ukraine and might even send soldiers into the neighboring country to fight Russia. This is exactly what the fourth text claimed in nearly 1,700 instances, noting that people should vote for Fidesz to maintain peace in Hungary. This narrative started when Péter Márki-Zay claimed that he would agree to sending weapons, soldiers into Ukraine if NATO decided to do so – but this was easily manipulated into sounding as if he did not set any prerequisites for this course of action. The claims of pro-government media and Fidesz were [denied](#) quickly by Péter Márki-Zay, but this had little effect on the future of the abovementioned [peace vs war](#) narrative.

Original text of the narrative:

KEDVES MINDENKI,KEDVES MAGYAROK !!!
 HUHUUHU 🙌🙌🙌🙌🙌
 ELÉRKEZETT A VÁLASZTÁS NAPJA,
 AZ EDDIGI VÁLASZTÁSOK KÖZÜL MÉG EKKORA TÉTJE SOHA-
 SOHA NEM VOLT EGY VÁLASZTÁSNAK SEM, NEVEZETESEN
 SZÓ SZERINT A LÉT A TÉT !!!
 HÁBORÚ,VAGY BÉKE MIVEL AZ ÖSSZELLENZÉK
 EGYÉRTÉLMŰEN HANGOZTATTA-KINYILATKOZTA AMIT
 ÉPESZŰ EMBER NEM TENNE SOHA, HA ŐK NYERNÉNEK
 BIZONY BELESODORNÁK - BELEVINNÉK A DRÁGA
 ORSZÁGUNKAT AZ UKRÁN-OROSZ HÁBORÚBA !!!
 A GYERMEKEINK-UNOKÁINK-MINDANNYIUNK JÖVŐJE
 ÉRDEKÉBEN EZT SEMMIKÉPPEN NEM ENGEDHETJÜK
 MEG, MERT EZ TELJES PUSZTULÁST,TELJES MEGSEMMISÜLÉST
 HOZNA DRÁGA HAZÁNKRA-MINDANNYIÓNKRA !!!
 MINDEZEKÉRT IS MENJÜNK EL MINDANNYIAN
 SZAVAZNI,ERRE NE SAJNÁLJUK AZT A FÉL ÓRÁCSKÁT, ÉS
 SZAVAZZUNK A FIDESZ-KDNP ORSZÁGGYŰLÉSI KÉPVISELŐK
 JELŐLTJEIRE !!!
 HAJRÁ-ÉLJENEK-NYERJENEK A FIDESZ-KDNP
 ORSZÁGGYŰLÉSI KÉPVISELŐ JELŐLTJEI,
 HAJRÁ-ÉLJEN A FIDESZ-KDNP CSALÁDBARÁT KORMÁNY !!!
 HUHUUHU 🙌🙌🙌🙌🙌
 GYERMEKEINKÉRT-UNOKÁINKÉRT-MINDANNYIUNKÉRT,
 MEGKÉREK MINDENKIT EZT OLVASSA EL !!! 😊😊😊😊😊 HUHUUHU
 KEDVES MINDENKI, KEDVES MAGYAROK !!! 😊😊😊😊😊 HUHUUHU
 FINISHÉHEZ ÉRT A 2022 ÁPRILIS 3.-AI ORSZÁGGYŰLÉSI
 KÉPVISELŐI VÁLASZTÁSI KAMPÁNY !!!
 MINDEN MAGYAR EMBERT MEGKÉREK MOST IS MINT
 MINDEN VÁLASZTÁSKOR, HOGY JÓL GONDOLJA MEG,ÉS

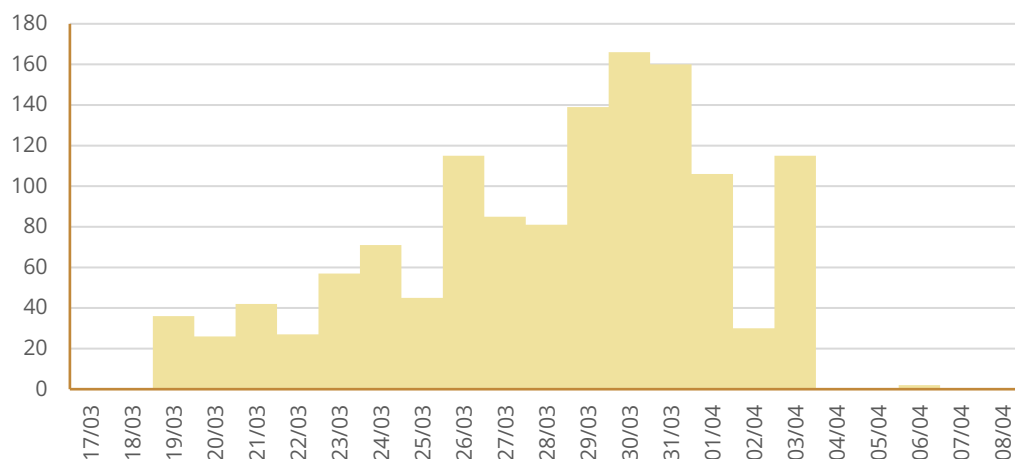
NAGYON-NAGYON OKOSAN-BÖLCSEN-MEGFONTOLTAN
 DÖNTSÖN ARRÓL HOGY MAJD 2022 ÁPRILIS 3.-ÁN MELYIK
 ORSZÁGGYŰLÉSI KÉPVISELŐ JELŐLTRE TESZI AZ X-ET, A
 VOKSÁT A VÁLASZTÁSI FÜLKE MAGÁNYÁBAN !!!
 EZT CSAK OKOSAN-BÖLCSEN-MEGFONTOLTAN TEHETIK-
 TEHETJÜK MINDANNYIAN, MIVEL EZ A DÖNTÉS
 MINDANNYIUNK ÉLETÉT-JÖVŐJÉT- BIZTONSÁGÁT
 HATÁROZZA MEG ÚGY A VÁROSAINKBAN-
 TELEPÜLÉSEINKBEN,MINT AZ EGÉSZ ORSZÁGBAN EGYARÁNT
 !!!
 NINCS OLYAN MAGYAR EMBER AKINEK GYERMEKE-UNOKÁJA
 JÖVŐJÉNEK SORSA-LEHETŐSÉGEI NE A LEGFONTOSABB
 LENNE, EZÉRT ÉN AZT MONDOM MINT AHOGYAN AZT AZ
 OKOS-BÖLCSE-MEGFONTOLT MAGYAR EMBEREK IS
 MONDJÁK-TESZIK NEVEZETESEN HOGY (A JÁRT UTAT A
 JÁRATLANÉRT EL NE HAGYD) !!!
 A GYERMEKEINK-UNOKÁINK-MINDANNYIUNK JELENÉNEK-
 JÖVŐJÉNEK ÉRDEKÉBEN EL NE HAGYJUK AZT A JÁRT UTAT
 AMIT A FIDESZ-KDNP KORMÁNY PÁRTSZÖVETSÉG-
 PÁRTFÜZŐ MÉR ZSINÓRBA 3-CIKLUSON KERESZTÜL
 VÁLTOZÁST-BERUHÁZÁST AMIT NAPRÓL-NAPRA TETT-TESSZ
 MINDANNYIUNKÉRT A FIDESZ-KDNP CSALÁDBARÁT
 KORMÁNY, AMIT-EZT SOHA NEM TEHETÜNK KOCKÁRA,
 SOHA-SOHA NEM KOCKÁZTATHATUNK MEG HOGY EBBE
 BÁRKI-BÁRKIK IS BELERONDÍTSSANAK-BELERONDÍTHASSANAK
 !!! EZ NEM VÉLETLEN HOGY A FIDESZ-KDNP KORMÁNY

ZSINÓRBA A HARMADIK CIKLUSÁT TÖLTHETI AZ EGÉSZ ORSZÁG, DRÁGA HAZÁNK MINDEN EGYES MAGYAR EMBER SZOLGÁLATÁBAN, MINDEZEK MIATT-TÜKRÉBEN VEGYÜK ELŐ A JÓZAN ESZÜNKET, LEGYEN KÉZNÉL A JÓZAN ÍTÉLŐKÉPESSÉGÜNK, ÉS NE ENGEDJÜK MEG HOGY OLYANOK AKARJANAK PÁLYÁZNI-NYERNI A ORSZÁGGYŰLÉSI KÉPVISELŐI SZÉKEKRE, POSZTOKRA AKIK MINDEN NAP BIZONYÍTJÁK-HANGOZTATJÁK HA BÁRMILYEN FORMÁBAN ŐK NYERNÉNEK AKKOR KINYITJÁK A HATÁRAINKAT TERET ENGEDNEK, KAPUT NYITNAK MAJD A MIGRÁNSOK ELŐTT,ÉS SZÍVFÁJDALOM NÉLKÜL BELESODORNÁK AZ EGÉSZ ORSZÁGOT AZ UKRÁN- OROSZ HÁBORÚBA !!! SOHA NE ENGEDJÜNK OLYANOKAT MÉG EGYSZER A VEZETŐI SZÉKEKBE, DE MÉG A KÖRNYÉKÉRE SEM AKIK SZEMBE MENTEK DRÁGA HAZÁNKAL-GYERMEKEINKKEL- UNOKÁINKKAL-MINDANNYIUNKKAL, ÉS AKIK A MINŐSÍTHETETLENÜL VISELKEDNEK A PARLAMENTBEN,AKIK FETRENGENEK A FÖLDÖN,NEKISZALADNAK A BECSUKOTT AJTÓNAK, ÉS MINDIG-MINDIG AZT HANGOZTATJÁK HOGY MINDEZEKÉRT A NEVETSÉGES-MINŐSÍTHETETLEN-ÓVODÁS VISELKEDÉSÜKÉRT IS MINDIG-MINDIG A FIDESZ-KDNP CSALÁD BARÁT KORMÁNY A HIBÁS !!! NA EZT AZTÁN MÁR NEM,EZT SOHA-SOHA NEM ENGEDHETJÜK MEG BÁRMIT-BÁRMIKET IS ÍGÉRGETNÉNEK ALATTOMOS MÓDON, MIVEL MI OKOS-BÖLCSEK-MEGFONTOLT JÓZAN ÉSSZEL GONDOLKODÓ MAGYAROK AZT SOHA-SOHA NEM ENGEDHETJÜK MEG HOGY

ELLEPLEJENEK MINKET-ORSZÁGUNKAT AZOK A MIGRÁNSOK AKIK EGYÉRTÉLMŰEN KONTINENST, ORSZÁGOKAT FOGLALNI JÖTTEK EURÓPÁBA NEM PEDIG SZORGALMASAN-BECSÜLETTEL DOLGOZNI-BEILLESZKEDNI EURÓPÁBA AMIT MINDEN EMBERNEK MÉG A VAKNAK IS LÁTNIA KELL !!! AZT NEM ENGEDHETJÜK MEG SOHA-SOHA HOGY ÚGY JÁRJUNK HOGY A MIGRÁNSOK ELVEGYÉK ORSZÁGUNKAT-HAZÁNKAT,VÁROSAINKAT-TELEPÜLÉSEINKET,HÁZAINKAT,ÉS EGYSZER CSAK AZT VEGYÜK ÉSZRE ,HOGY MENELKÜLHETÜNK SAJÁT ORSZÁGUNKBÓL-VÁROSAINKBÓL-HÁZAINKBÓL A MIGRÁNSOK,ÉS SEGÍTŐIK-STATISZTIKAI MIATT !!! KÖSZÖNJÜK NEKÜNK MAGYAROKNAK ILYENRE EGYÁLTALÁN NINCSEK, NEM LEHET SZÜKSÉGÜNK EZÉRT MI A MONDÁS SZERINT KELL HOGY CSELEKEDJÜNK (A JÁRT UTAT A JÁRATLANÉRT EL NE HAGYD) ÉS SZAVAZZUNK ÚJRA A FIDESZ-KDNP ORSZÁGGYŰLÉSI KÉPVISELŐ JELÖLTJEIRE MERT AZ AZ ÚT AMIT A FIDESZ-KDNP PÁRTSZÖVETSÉG NYÚJT-NYÚJTOTT, BIZTOSÍT-BIZTOSÍTOTT AZ BIZTOS HOGY MINDANNYIÓNK SZÁMÁRA KISZÁMÍTHATÓ-BIZTONSÁGOS JÖVŐT JELENT !!! 😊😊😊 HUHUUH HAJRÁ-ÉLJENEK-NYERJENEK A FIDESZ-KDNP ORSZÁGGYŰLÉSI KÉPVISELŐ JELÖLTJEI !!! 😊😊😊 HUHUUH MEGKÉREK MINDENKIT AKI CSAK TUDJA OSSZA EZT MEG,HOGY MINÉL TÖBB EMBERHEZ ELJUTHASSON !!!HUUUUU 🙌🙌🙌🙌🙌🙌

The dissemination of the message started on 19 March 2022. Between 29 March and 3 April 2022, it was copied under Facebook posts more than 100 times every day (except for 2 April) and then disappeared completely. On 31 March and 1 April, the message was being disseminated constantly from a little after 6AM to almost 9PM.² However, it was spread almost exclusively on the Facebook pages of pro-government sites and Fidesz-KDNP-affiliated politicians, so it seems like the goal of the narrative was not to win over new voters but to mobilize existing ones.

Appearances of the narrative (pcs)



This message was spread almost exclusively by a single Facebook profile. The user actually posted on his own Facebook page that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán sent him a card for his birthday, noting that he “thanked him for it with a plethora of posts, comments.”

² We must mention that pro-opposition messages were also disseminated in a similar, inauthentic manner during the broader election campaign, just not regarding Ukraine. See, for instance: https://politicalcapital.hu/konyvtar.php?article_read=1&article_id=2958

5. The theater company in charge of Ukraine

The fifth narrative claimed that Ukraine is being led by President Volodymyr Zelensky's theatre company, as many of his staff members are fellow comedians or actors, and many of them are US citizens, some of them were even born in the US. The same, it claims, is true for many of the Ukrainian Army's frontline leaders. These people are all deemed to be puppets who do not represent real Ukrainians. These claims were published by several Hungarian [media outlets](#), with one article claiming they quoted it from the Romanian-Hungarian portal "[Informatia Libera](#)."³ The article makes several mistakes. For instance, they claim that Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Andriy Yermak is a comedy producer, simply omitting the fact that he has a degree in international law and experience as a [lawyer](#). They also claim that Ukraine's Healthcare Minister is an American-born woman, while in reality, he is a man born in Osova in the [Rivne region](#). They presumably meant [Ulana Suprun](#), who no longer fills the position of Minister of Healthcare of Ukraine. Moreover, there is absolutely no evidence that the majority of Ukraine's frontline army commanders were US citizens.

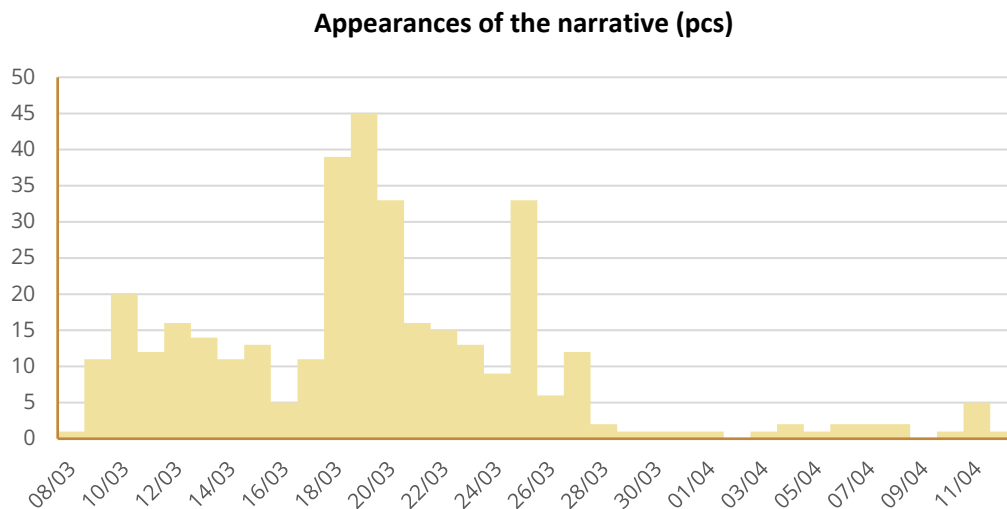
Original text of the narrative:

"Miközben folyik az orosz-ukrán háború, vessünk egy pillantást az ukrán kormány összetételére:
Volodymyr Zelenskij ukrán elnök alapvető döntéshozói belső köre tulajdonképpen a színészkori baráti körén alapul.
Az ukrán kormány-társulat:
Az elnöki palota kabinetfőnöke, Andre Yermak vígjáték-producer;
Az elnöki adminisztráció vezetője, Andre Bodin a szórakoztatóiparban tevékenykedő ügyvéd;
Az elnök fő politikai tanácsadója, Sergey Sheffey vígjáték-író;
Ivan Bakanov, az Ukrán Legfelsőbb Hírszerző Szolgálat elnökhelyettese, egy vígjátékfilmeket készítő cég főnöke;
Szergej Sivoko, az Ukrán Nemzetvédelmi Bizottság vezető tanácsadója szintén humorista, és Zelenskij partnere a színészetben. (A színpadon és a politikában is.)
Ha csak ránézünk az önéletrajzukra, nem derül ki, hogy film- és televíziótársaságról van-e szó, vagy egy ország döntéshozó testületéről.
Miért hagyta Ukrajna teljesen figyelmen kívül a nagyhatalmak geopolitikai kapcsolatait az évek során?
Úgy tűnik, a belbiztonságnak és a nemzetfejlesztésnek semmi köze ezekhez a politikusokhoz – mert igazából teljesen mindegy, hiszen alapvetően nem ukránok.
Mivel Ukrajna elismeri a kettős állampolgárságot, a vezető kormányzati tisztviselők 80%-a amerikai, és a tekintélyes vagyonuk és bizalmasaik 90%-a Londonban vagy Svájcban van.
A 2008-as olimpia idején az Amerika-barát grúz elnököt, Szaakasvilit, akit Putyin támogatott, legyőzték, megbuktatták, és az ukrainai Odessza megye kormányzójává nevezte ki magát.
A legjellemzőbb (elrettető)példa Ukrajna női egészségügyi minisztere. Az Egyesült Államokban született. 2013 előtt amerikai általános orvos volt. 2013-ban Ukrajnába utazott, 2015-ben honosítottak Ukrajnában, 2016-ban pedig máris egészségügyi

miniszterhelyettesé léptették elő. 2019-ben Zelenskij minden ellenzékkal szembeszállt érte, és egészségügyi miniszterré nevezte ki.
Az ukrán parlament által 2014 novemberében kinevezett három miniszter mind külföldi:
a pénzügyminiszter amerikai;
az egészségügyi miniszter grúz;
a gazdasági miniszter litván;
Grúzia korábbi elnöke Odessza kormányzója volt.
Az utolsó elnök, Petro Porosenko állítólag a CIA informátora volt.
Ami az alulról építkező csapatokat illeti, sok frontvonal parancsnoka amerikai, akik az elmúlt években telepedtek Ukrajnához.
A kvantitatív statisztikákat tekintve a mutatók a következők:
1) A vezető tisztviselők 80%-a rendelkezik amerikai állampolgársággal (a kettős állampolgárság legális).
2) A gazdagok vagyonának 90%-a Európában és az Egyesült Államokban található.
3) Zelensky se nem orosz, se nem lengyel, hanem zsidó, emellett van egy kastélya és hatalmas vagyona az Egyesült Államokban.
Van remény a hétköznapi embereknek egy ilyen országban?
Ha jön a háború, vajon az ország és a nemzet szemszögéből gondol majd valaki erre a földre?
Mi tehát a végső célja annak, hogy ennyi amerikai és nyugat-európai, véletlenül sem ukrán ember beszivároghjon Ukrajnába, az ukrainai államapparátusba?
Az ukrán kormány az ukrán állam és az ukrán nép nevében szónoklók NEM UKRÁNOK.
Idegen hatalom, madzagon rángatott bábpolitikusokkal.
Egy ilyen országban élni valóban nehéz több mint 40 millió ukrán embernek!"

The narrative emerged first on 8 March 2022, after the majority of the first three described in this study went largely dormant. This message became the most prevalent on the 19th, when it was copied under Facebook discussions 45 times. Afterwards, the popularity of the narrative fell almost constantly with one resurgence on 25 March 2022. The main pages targeted by those disseminating it were Telex, Szeretlek Magyarország, the Transcarpathia-focused KárpátHír, HVG and Világgazdaság; the message was only copied under posts by pro-government outlets sporadically.

³ They did not link the article, just the home page of the site.



This narrative was spread mainly by a very enthusiastic fan of conspiracy theories (according to his profile), who frequently shares anti-US and pro-Kremlin disinformation. Among the commenters, there are multiple fake profiles, some of them sharing no public information at all on Facebook, while others are using stock photos as profile pictures. Moreover, we also found evidence of potentially hacked profiles “repurposed” as fake Hungarian Facebook users. While in this case it is clear that fake profiles were helping to disseminate the message, the main engine behind it was the single real user mentioned above, who was responsible for about 20% of the comments containing this text.

6. The lone man fighting Russia in the comments

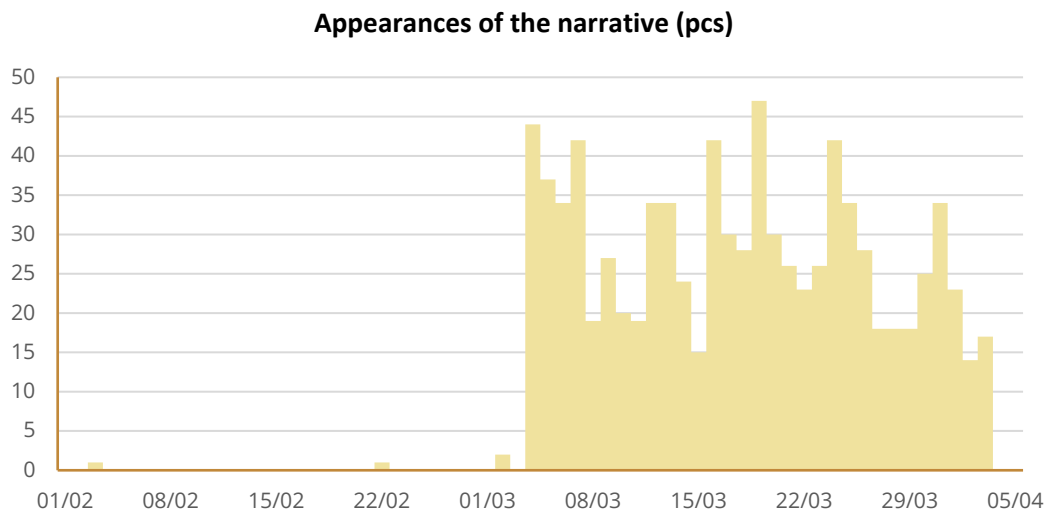
We cannot say that only pro-Kremlin comments were being spread on Hungarian Facebook in the research period. One man copied a link to an article by Ez a Lényeg, a strongly pro-opposition [site](https://ezalenyeg.hu), hundreds of times. The article reported on Péter Márki-Zay’s statement that Hungary’s EU membership is against PM Orbán’s interests and that he became a puppet of President Putin. While PM Viktor Orbán has been criticized frequently for his close relations with Russia, we must note that this article is biased in the sense that it made no efforts to report on PM Orbán’s or the government’s stance regarding the issue of Russia and EU membership.

Original text of the narrative:

ORBÁN = PUTYIN = HÁBORÚ!!! ELLENZÉK = EURÓPA = BÉKE. <https://ezalenyeg.hu/kozugy/mzp-szerint-orban-putyin-babjava-valt-152694>

The user spreading the message used two types of introductions to the link: (a) insults to anyone sharing a pro-Kremlin comment, article or (b) a claim that “ORBÁN = PUTIN = WAR.”

The message first appeared on Facebook in the comments on 3 February (the day after it was published), but it has only been disseminated actively since 4 March 2022. The text was copied 15-45 times each day between 4 March and 3 April and then disappeared completely.



The message was spread by a single profile focusing on two pro-government sites – one of which has blocked him, as all his comments on that page have disappeared. Since this was done by a single person, coordination is rather unlikely in this case, so he might just be an enthusiastic Hungarian pro-opposition activist.

There are signs of coordinated activity

As we already mentioned above, there are clear signs of a coordinated effort to spread pro-Kremlin narratives in Hungary, even if we disregard the clearly pro-government and pro-opposition, domestic politics focused contents (narratives four and six). As it has been mentioned, in a couple of narratives (mainly one and five), suspected fake accounts played a prominent or strong supplementary role in spreading the messages. In cases when dissemination was done mostly by real profiles, there seem to be few other reasons for random users to copy and paste the exact same message under the Facebook posts of various Facebook pages.

Four more factors must be mentioned regarding this claim. First, while most narratives targeted independent media, the comments also regularly showed up on pro-government pages, creating a sort of balance.

Second, some real profiles played a role in the dissemination of multiple messages, some even took part in spreading three of the six identified narratives. Thus, it is likely that there is at least a Facebook or Telegram group where people get “munition” to “convert” Kremlin-critical users.

Third, the comments arrived in a steady stream throughout the most active days, including during working hours and outside of them, which could suggest that some of the profiles might comment on Facebook in a “job-like manner.”

Fourth, and most importantly, oftentimes these copy-pasted texts have a short introduction before them, which is often different from message to message. However, these “introductions” are not completely unique: they are repeated by different users from time to time. This indicates that there might be some sort of “guidelines” made available to people engaged in this activity to “personalize” their message.

Lastly, it must be highlighted that users often copied the messages together with the name of the user who they copied it from. This revealed that some of the messages are not from other Facebook users but from Telegram groups.

SLOVAKIA: WHERE INAUTHENTIC BEHAVIOR IS MOSTLY PRO-WEST

The political elite's reaction to Russia's aggression against Ukraine

Slovakia's response to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and its aftermath is marked by a united stance affirmed by top officials and representatives of the ruling coalition parties, which is founded on five points:

1. A clear condemnation of the aggression committed by the Russian Federation that included support for all resolutions against Russia at the UN, and a strong condemnation of war crimes committed by the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine.
2. Comprehensive and full support for Ukraine in its fight against Russian invasion (moral, diplomatic, political, humanitarian and heavy arms transfers). In early April 2022, Slovak Prime Minister Eduard Heger visited Kyiv together with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, where he met Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky. Heger also visited Bucha, where he witnessed the consequences of crimes and atrocities committed by the Russian Army. Slovakia handed over its S-300 anti-aircraft and anti-missile systems to Ukraine and has been involved in negotiations on handing over its Zuzana howitzers and MiG-29 fighters to Ukraine.
3. Welcoming a large number of refugees from Ukraine and facilitating their life in the country, financial and other support for refugees on the basis of legislation approved for this specific situation.
4. Unequivocal support for strong political and economic sanctions against the Kremlin, a proactive position in seeking expanded coordination among the EU in member states' approach to economic interactions with Russia (for example, in refusing to pay for gas and oil in rubles). Since the beginning of the war, Slovakia expelled 38 Russian diplomats. Along with 39 other countries, Slovakia has filed a lawsuit against Russia at the International Criminal Court in Hague for war crimes committed in Ukraine.
5. The implementation of urgent steps to strengthen the country's defense capabilities through the expansion of defense cooperation with the US, the reception of military equipment and personnel from NATO (Patriot anti-aircraft complexes, troops from the USA, Germany, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Poland).

President Zuzana Čaputová, Prime Minister Eduard Heger and Speaker of the Parliament Boris Kollár outlined the abovementioned positions in their public statements and on other occasions (for example, during their participation in EU and NATO events or during negotiations with foreign partners). Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivan Korčok and Minister of Defense Jaroslav Naď have played an active role in implementing these policies.

In her [statement](#) on Russia's aggression against Ukraine, President Zuzana Čaputová pointed out the bravery of Ukrainians defending their homeland and highlighted the war crimes committed against Ukrainians. The Slovak president underlined that "Ukraine did not start the war and did not provoke it. Its only 'fault' is the desire to become part of a democratic Europe." According to Čaputová, "Vladimir Putin miscalculated himself. He wanted to divide Europe, but he achieved its unification. He wanted to gain respect and strengthen his sphere of influence, but he only got contempt and isolation. He wanted to deny Ukraine the right to exist but contributed to the strengthening of the Ukrainian political nation, which has earned the respect of the whole world for its sacrifice."

In [another](#) statement, Zuzana Čaputová said that Putin "is trying to convince his nation by lying about denazification, a special operation and the rescue of Ukraine." The president spoke in favor of Slovakia helping Ukraine. According to her, "Ukraine has the right to defend itself and we cannot leave them without help. Ukrainians are waging a just struggle for their sovereignty and national self-determination. I am proud that Slovakia is on the right side [of history] by helping Ukraine."

After visiting Kiev, Prime Minister Eduard Heger [justified](#) the need to supply arms to Ukraine as follows: “It is also in Slovakia’s interest. If, God forbid, Ukraine would fail to defeat the Russian troops, we know who is next. We need to help Ukraine to repel Russian troops as soon as possible and we will do everything we can do and can afford.”

The parliamentary opposition – Smer-SD [Direction – Social Democracy], Hlas-SD [Voice] and two right-wing extremist (fascist) formations, the ĽSNS [People’s Party Our Slovakia] and Republika [Republic] – took a different stance on issues related to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. In the months leading up to the war, the opposition took all possible steps to prevent approval of the defense cooperation agreement with the United States. The document was needed inter alia to adjust the conditions of the presence of American service personnel at the airports where American F-16 fighters were to be located after their delivery to Slovakia (the fighters were purchased during the tenure of the previous government formed by Smer-SD).

Opposition leaders Robert Fico (Smer-SD), Peter Pellegrini (Hlas-SD), Marian Kotleba (ĽSNS) and Milan Uhrík (Republika) argued that the Slovak-American defense cooperation agreement was, allegedly, unequal, as it is only favorable to the US. They accused the Slovak government of betraying national interests and undermining state sovereignty, accused the USA of seeking to occupy Slovakia and involve it in the war with Russia. Prosecutor-General Maroš Žilinka clearly sided with the opposition on this issue, calling on the Parliament to refuse the ratification of the document, similarly to former Supreme Court President Štefan Harabin and former Prime Minister and Minister of Justice Ján Čarnogurský. The disinformation-centered and conspiratorial “alternative” media sphere has become an integral part of an informal political alliance against the approval of the agreement. However, its efforts were unsuccessful: in February 2022, the Parliament ratified the document and President Zuzana Čaputová signed it immediately.

Prior to Russia’s invasion, opposition leaders claimed that Russia was not interested in war with Ukraine, it was only trying to defend its legitimate interests in a peaceful way, for which it is being unjustly blamed by the West. Those highlighting Russia’s aggressive intentions and the need to strengthen Slovakia’s defenses along with NATO partners were labelled as “warmongers.”

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine seemingly surprised pro-Russian activists (similarly to Hungary), including opposition leaders, as it contradicted their previous pro-Russian narratives on the Kremlin’s “peaceful policies.” After a few days of confusion, pro-Russian actors re-activated themselves. Although they were under pressure thanks to reports about the brutality of the Russian aggression, they did criticize the invasion (with the exception of Štefan Harabin, who openly supported it); however, they continued their anti-Ukrainian rhetoric. The main goal of their renewed activities was to prevent Slovakia from helping Ukraine by supplying it with weapons (S-300 system, Zuzana howitzers, MiG-29 fighters).

Another opposition’s intention was to provoke an unfavorable attitude among the population towards Ukrainian refugees through misleading arguments based on social chauvinism.

Three narratives repeated, two of them are critical of the Kremlin

Among the three analyzed narratives, two are critical of the Kremlin, and one is content-neutral with the possibility of being used for and against the Kremlin’s interests. In total, these three comments were copy-pasted 910 times.

1. Russia is not the best place to live

The purpose of the first narrative is to highlight the living conditions of the population of a developed liberal democracy compared to those in an authoritarian society. Russia is mentioned here as an example of an authoritarian society (in a historical context, the USSR here is implicitly present in the text, although the name of the Soviet state is not directly mentioned). The narrative describes the poor socio-economic situation in Russia, including the low standards of living and bad general health of the population. According to the

narrative's author, Russia cannot be a model for Slovakia, contrary to USA, where the Slovak diaspora is the largest – not coincidentally.

Original text of the narrative:

Rusko : minimalna mzda 170e, najvyssia miera potratov, alkoholizmu, korupcie a samovrazd, krajina s najvyssim poctom HIV pozitivnych, krajina, ktora nam v 68 roku poslala do ulic tanky.
A este pikoska, v roku 2009 bolo 1 euro cca 35 rublov, dnes je to 87!!

Mozete mi prosim napisat, co mnohych slovakov na Rusku tak vzrusuje? Vratane Fica. Pretoze nepoznam slovaka, ktory by tam tuzil nielen pracovat ale aj zit.
Dakujem

According to this narrative, South and North Korea are good example for the differences between American and Russian ways of life. Another example of the different lives of people in free and not free societies, understandable to Slovak citizens, was the situation in Austria and Slovakia, two neighboring countries, during the existence of the Iron Curtain.

Although the argumentation used in the first narrative is marked by heightened emotions and contemporary Russia is de facto identified with the former Soviet Union, it can be said that the arguments in favor of people having better lives in a free society are correct, generally based on verifiable data and do not contain elements of deliberate manipulation.

"User 1" posted the following comment on 1 February 2022, starting the proliferation of this message:

"Russia: the minimum wage is 170 euro, the highest rates of abortion, alcoholism, corruption and suicide, the country with the highest number of HIV-positive people, the country that has sent tanks to our streets in 1968. Can you, please, write me what excites so many Slovaks in Russia? Including Fico. Thank you".

The comment reacted to the post on the [Nový Čas daily's FB page](#) (the most widely read online daily in Slovakia), in which the newspaper quoted the short comments [Fico attacked the president: sharp words in relation to Ukraine! He also hit on government politicians](#). He also [criticized](#) government politicians, arguing that they allegedly "ignored elementary facts" and that "the problem is certainly not the threat of Russia, but the blatant rise of prices and the incompetence of the Slovak government." 868 comments responded to the mentioned FB post. The slight majority of them opposed the government and the president (only a small part of the comments was pro-Russian); while a minor part of the comments was critical towards Fico's narrative. User 1's comment belonged to this second group. 49 users reacted positively to this comment.

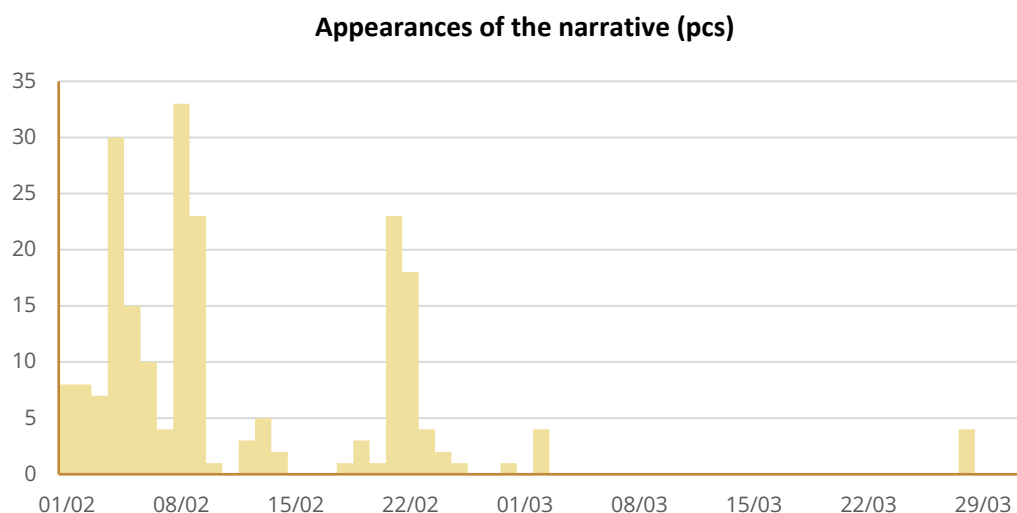
A discussion started by User 1



Less than two minutes later after the user's first comment, he published the exact same comment under the post of the FB page of the news channel TA3, which stated that *Ukraine will strengthen the army by 100,000 soldiers. It's not about the war, it's about the future, Zelensky said*⁷. The third and fourth appearance of comment was identical to the first. In the fifth comment (6 hours after the first) the text was expanded: *"Russia [means]: the minimum wage 170 euro, the highest rates of abortion, alcoholism, corruption and suicide, the country with the highest number of HIV-positive people, the country that has sent tanks to our streets in 1968. One thing to add: in 2009, 1 euro was for about 35 rubles, today it is for 87!! Can you, please, write me what excites so many Slovaks in Russia? Including Fico? Because I don't know any Slovak who would want not only to work there but also to live there. Thank you."*

In the following days, the user published a few different versions of the comment, longer and shorter. The longest version is shown in Figure 1.

A total number of 211 repetitive comments in the first narrative were recorded in the period under review. The largest numbers were recorded on 4 February, 8 February and 21 February 2022. Only a few comments appeared after 24 February 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine.



The analysis of users that published comments shows that this narrative was not spreading organically or in a standard way, as it is shown in chart 1, where the comments are shown chronologically.

The timeline of users' activity

Name	Profile Real/Fake	Total comments	First comment	----->	-----> Last comment
User 1	Non-determinable	109			
User 2	Real	1			
User 3	Non-determinable	14			
User 4	Non-determinable	6			
User 5	Non-determinable	1			
User 6	Real	13			
User 7	Non-determinable	5			
User 8	Non-determinable	7			
User 9	Real	1			
User 10	Real	3			
		160			

The user with highest number of comments does not have a publicly accessible profile, he does not have a profile photo and, apart from repetitive comments, he does not participate in any discussions (even if others respond to him, he is always quiet). His other online activities are not visible. He published comments at times typical for the average user, he is not a bot. It is unclear whether he is a real person or a fake profile. He did not contribute to the dissemination of the other two narratives.

This narrative might have been disseminated in a coordinated manner since, as seen in figure two, the active periods of various users basically never overlapped, making it highly suspicious.

2. Russia's military aggressions

The evident intention of the second analyzed narrative is to point out the aggressive nature of the foreign policy of contemporary Russia – just like in the Czech Republic. The narrative contains a list of countries that became the targets/victims of "Russian aggression" in the 20th and 21st centuries. This narrative, however, includes factual inaccuracies and obvious errors. First, the list of victims of "Russian aggression" (i.e., the military activities of pre-communist and post-communist Russia and the Soviet Union during its existence) includes both independent states and republics of the former Soviet Union or the subjects of the current

Russian Federation without differentiation between their statuses (in case of the later ones, we can consider them the armed suppressions of internal unrest or separatist tendencies). Second, the list includes states that were not the targets of military aggression by the Soviet Union (in case of some of them, the USSR was engaged on the side of an ideological ally but without direct military intervention). These factual errors and inaccuracies reduce the effectiveness of this narrative, as they may provide Russia's local advocates with an argument about the deliberately misleading approach of those who are critical of Russia.

Original text of the narrative:

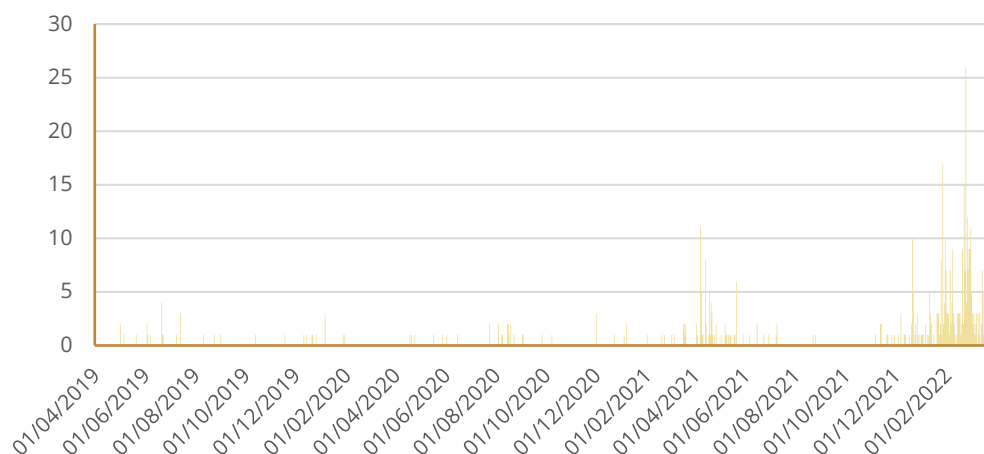
Chronologický zoznam krajín, ktoré
čelili ruskej agresii
Japonsko 1904
Ukrajina 1918
Azerbajdžan 1918
Poľsko 1920
Mongolsko 1924
Čína 1929
Ukrajina 1937
Azerbajdžan 1937
Japonsko 1938
Poľsko 1939
Fínsko 1939
Japonsko 1945
Čína 1946
Severná Kórea 1950
Čína 1950

Východné Nemecko 1953
Maďarsko 1956
Laos 1960
Vietnam 1961
Alžírsko 1962
Egypt (Spojená arabská republika)
1962
Jemen 1962
Sýria 1967
Československo 1968
Čína 1969
Kambodža 1970
Bangladéš 1972
Angola 1975
Etiópia 1977
Libanon 1982
Afganistan 1979

Azerbajdžan 1988
Gruzínsko 1991
Tadžikistan 1992
Moldavsko 1992
Gruzínsko 1992
Tadžikistan 1992
Azerbajdžan 1992
Inguško 1992
Čečensko 1994
Azerbajdžan 1994
Dagestan 1994 a 1999
Gruzínsko 2008
Ukrajina 2014

The narrative first appeared on Facebook on 2 May 2019. We found this text copied under Facebook posts 510 times in almost two years. This was mostly disseminated by real users, suggesting that the dissemination did not take place under close coordination.

Appearances of the narrative (pcs)



The first occurrence of such a list of countries is from September 2015: it can be found in an [article](#) entitled *What countries were attacked by the Soviet and Russian armies?*, published on the mainstream online platform *Aktuality.sk*. The author's name was not mentioned under the article. Since then, this list has been used by various social media users. In our case, there are 510 comments on FB from over 100 real users, most of them used this comment once, twice or three times. The highest incidence of repetitive comments including this text was measured after 24 February 2022.

Indeed, the opposite side uses various lists as a counter-argument to show US involvement in wars and conflicts. There are also users who supplement the original list of targets of Russian aggression with a list of American operations, explaining that none of them was an offensive war; the US was engaged to support democratic forces.

3. Slovak Penal Code

The third analyzed narrative is neutral. It is identical with section 417 of the Slovak Penal Code dealing with the crime of disrupting peace and committing the act of war propaganda. As critics and advocates of Russia accuse each other of committing the said crime, the narrative can be used by both camps. While critics of the Kremlin can blame Slovak pro-Russian opposition politicians of supporting an aggressive war against Ukraine and approving the war crimes, arguing that it is therefore justified to consider the possibility of their criminal prosecution, the advocates of Russia, on the other hand, can accuse supporters of Ukraine that through supporting the idea to deliver arms to Ukraine they prevent achieving peace, behaving as the “warmongers.”

Original text of the narrative:

§ 417 Trestného zákona: „Kto v úmysle narušiť mier akýmkoľvek spôsobom podnecuje k vojne, vojnu propaguje alebo inak podporuje vojnovú propagandu, potrestá sa odňatím slobody na jeden rok až desať rokov. Odňatím slobody na desať rokov až dvadsaťpäť rokov alebo trestom odňatia slobody na doživotie sa potrestá

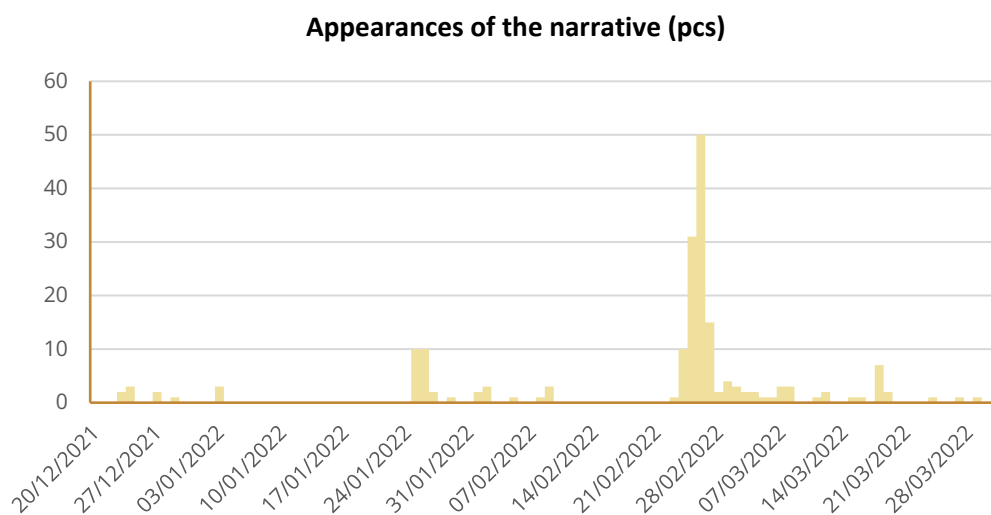
páchateľ, ak spácha čin uvedený v odseku 1 a) v spojení s cudzou mocou alebo cudzím činiteľom, b) ako člen nebezpečného zoskupenia, alebo c) za krízovej situácie.“

At first, this narrative was used by a radical pro-Russian activist against supporters of the country’s pro-Western foreign policy line, critical of the Kremlin’s policies. However, the situation changed after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

It was the notorious pro-Russian left-wing activist Eduard Chmelár, who [published](#) a post on his FB page on 23 December 2021 entitled *In Brussels and Washington, they are scoffing at us*, in which he argued that “Western politicians, including the Slovak president, the prime minister, the minister of defense and the minister of foreign affairs are frightening the public by claiming that Russian troops are on the border with Ukraine and are preparing for war.” To emphasize the certainty that no threat of war exists, he wrote: “Russian President Vladimir Putin calmly answered questions to reporters for four hours. He patiently and factually refuted all the rumors and repeated many times that Russia does not want or is not going to war.” In his post, Chmelár warned the abovementioned politicians and some journalists, threatening to prosecute them in accordance with the Slovak Criminal Code (see quotation of Section 417 on “Endangering Peace”).

Linking the criminal offence of “endangering peace” and the policies of the Slovak government or the attitudes of citizens was the essence of the third narrative found in Facebook comments.

Three users copied Chmelár’s post on the day of its publication. Two days later, only an excerpt from Chmelár’s text began to spread – a reference to the Criminal Code. Prior to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (24 February 2022), this link was used by at least 16 users in 40 comments, always as an argument against actors who warned about the threat posed by Russia. In addition, these users referred to the criminal offense of “high treason” related to politicians who approved a defense cooperation agreement with the United States in early February 2022.



Interestingly, the situation involving comments containing the narrative on the crime of “endangering peace” changed after 24 February 2022. Since then, this narrative mostly appeared to criticize those who approved the ongoing war – it was present in more than 100 comments from approximately 40 users.

We see that each side of the sharp dispute tries to justify its accusation of the opposite side through this crime. Here are two examples:

The anti-American attitude claims that “Our foreign policy is a servant of the American Embassy in Bratislava. This whole neoliberal fascist scum and cesspool of society commit treason against the citizens of the Slovak Republic and on the Slovak Republic” (reference to section 417 of the Criminal Code).

The anti-Russian stance says that “However, if someone systematically supports Russia’s military campaign in Ukraine and spreads Russian propaganda, even calls for Putin to come to impose order in Slovakia, he/she must also be reminded of the criminal law – section 417 – threat to peace” (link to the cited section of the Criminal Code followed).

Slovaks are polarized on foreign policy, too

The analysis of three selected narratives with repetitive comments on the Slovak Facebook confirmed the strong polarization of FB users in Slovakia on foreign and security policy issues, reflecting the developments on the domestic political scene. FB users from conflicting camps try to outnumber their opponents using all ways of communication offered by the social network. Russia’s aggression against Ukraine gave in this dispute additional arguments in favor of their stances to supporters of the pro-Western line. However, even if pro-West opinions are in the majority among these repeated comments, there is a relatively broad layer of Slovak society (up to quarter of the population) that continues supporting Russia.

INAUTHENTIC ACCOUNTS AND PAN-SLAVISM'S FLAG-BEARERS UNITE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Czech Response to the Invasion

When the Russian invasion of Ukraine started on February 24, 2022, the Czech political elite came up with a united response and firmly [condemned](#) the Russian invasion as an aggressive act against a sovereign country. This response included the current liberal-conservative ruling coalition led by Prime Minister Petr Fiala, in power since December 2021, and former prime minister and incumbent leader of the largest opposition party ANO, Andrej Babiš. President Miloš Zeman, who was known for his pro-Russian stances in the past, also [joined](#) this chorus. Czechia granted military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine soon after. The Czech Republic supported the strongest possible economic sanctions against Russia and Prime Minister Fiala went on an official visit to Kyiv to show support to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Moreover, the Czech Public Prosecution warned that publicly expressed agreement with Russia's aggression, as well as support or praise towards Russian officials, can be [prosecuted](#), possibly leading to a penalty of up to three years in prison.

Commentators in the mainstream media mirrored the official political representation's supportive stance towards Ukraine. The invasion also led to unprecedented steps to tackle websites spreading disinformation about the invasion and promoting the Kremlin's policies. Based on a recommendation from the government and consultations with Czech intelligence services, the Czech Internet Association (CZ.NIC), the operator of the .cz domain, decided to block websites that spread disinformation about the invasion. The [decision](#) was founded on the argument that these websites pose a serious national security threat and on the exceptionality and urgency of the situation, in which spreading disinformation serves the Russian aggressor by manipulating and confusing Czech citizens to approve the aggression towards Ukraine or question political leaders' motive to oppose it. At the beginning of March, more websites were [blocked](#) by domestic mobile operators in reaction to an appeal from the government and the National Cyber Operations Centre, and these [remain](#) blocked.

Due to the war on Ukraine, the negative [perception](#) of Russia among the Czech population became record-breaking and ¾ of the population see Russia as the definite culprit of the war. The high solidarity of Czechs with Ukraine continues even two months after the start of the war and 64% of the population approve welcoming and supporting Ukrainian refugees, although 70% also worry about their social security. The war on Ukraine also produced the highest level of agreement with Czech membership in NATO since 1994 (78%) and consensus that EU members should build their defensive forces together.

Inauthentic Pro-Kremlin Behavior on Facebook

The Russian war on Ukraine opened the possibility of Russian information operations in the Czech information space that could attempt to erode the general solidarity with Ukraine and amplify any disagreement with the official Czech response to the war. There would be ground for such activities: the Czech branch of the Russian state-run Sputnik was an active Russian propaganda [outlet](#) posing as a standard news portal and [surrounded](#) by a network of approximately 40 conspiracy websites which tend to reproduce its content and narratives. Social media, including both authentic and inauthentic accounts, can act as its amplifiers.

Therefore, using the SentiOne tool, we went through comment sections of Facebook pages of Czech mainstream media, major politicians and alternative media, including pro-Kremlin outlets, and identified four repetitive comments suggesting possible inauthentic coordinated activities. Three of these comments involved attempts to spread Moscow's interpretation of the war or even official Russian communication and one repetitive message actually attempted to counter narratives that justify Russian aggression or present the West as the real aggressor. In total, we found 1,370 comments spread across the four narratives.

Our analysis uncovered attempts of inauthentic accounts to spread official Russian communication about the war or pro-Russian narratives presenting the West as the aggressor and blaming Ukraine for an ultranationalist regime and genocide. The inauthentic accounts were joined by users leaning toward nationalism, pan-Slavism and the national-conservative end of the political spectrum. At the same time, a counter-narrative was formed and shared mostly by authentic accounts of users closer to the political mainstream with the possibility of loose coordination.

1. The Opposition's Narrative

The first repetitive comment was a repost of a Facebook post by Petr Štěpánek, a member of the right-wing, strongly Eurosceptic political party Tricolor (Trikolóra), which belongs to the non-parliamentary national-conservative political opposition. In his [post](#), Štěpánek recounts his interpretation of what led to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. He claims ultranationalist forces took over Ukraine after Euromaidan and started to oppress the Russian population of eastern Ukraine through armed harassment until "Russians on both sides of the border ran out of patience." Although Štěpánek's original post was liked by only 149 profiles,⁴ it was reposted 496 times as a comment. It first appeared on 22 February 2022 in a Facebook comment. The number of appearances of the narrative peaked on the day of the start of the invasion (24 February), but it disappeared almost completely by the 28th.

The original post of Petr Štěpánek



Petr Štěpánek - Trikolóra

22. února · 🌐

Malé osvěžení paměti aneb Ukrajinská protože

Protože Evropská unie nutila Ukrajině nepřijatelnou asociační dohodu, ukrajinský prezident Janukovyč ji odmítl podepsat.

Protože prezident Janukovyč asociační dohodu s EU odmítl podepsat, nastal Majdan.

Protože nastal Majdan, vlády nad Ukrajinou se s podporou EU a USA zmocnily ultranacionalistické síly.

Protože se vlády nad Ukrajinou zmocnily ultranacionalistické síly, okamžitě přišly s návrhem na zrušení ruštiny jako úředního jazyka.

Protože ultranacionalistické síly přišly s návrhem na zrušení ruštiny jako úředního jazyka, začaly se východní ukrajinské regiony bouřit.

(Poznámka: Na východě Ukrajiny nežije proruské obyvatelstvo, jak nám už osm let bulíkuje Česká televize, nýbrž miliony Rusů. A protože na východě Ukrajiny žijí Rusové, cítí s nimi Rusko sounáležitost.)

Protože se východní ukrajinské regiony začaly bouřit, poslala na ně ukrajinská vláda armádu.

Protože ukrajinská vláda poslala na východní ukrajinské regiony armádu, akcelerovaly tam separatistické tendence.

Protože akcelerovaly separatistické tendence, ukrajinská vláda namísto nabídky rozumné autonomie dál harašila zbraněmi a přitápěla pod kotlem.

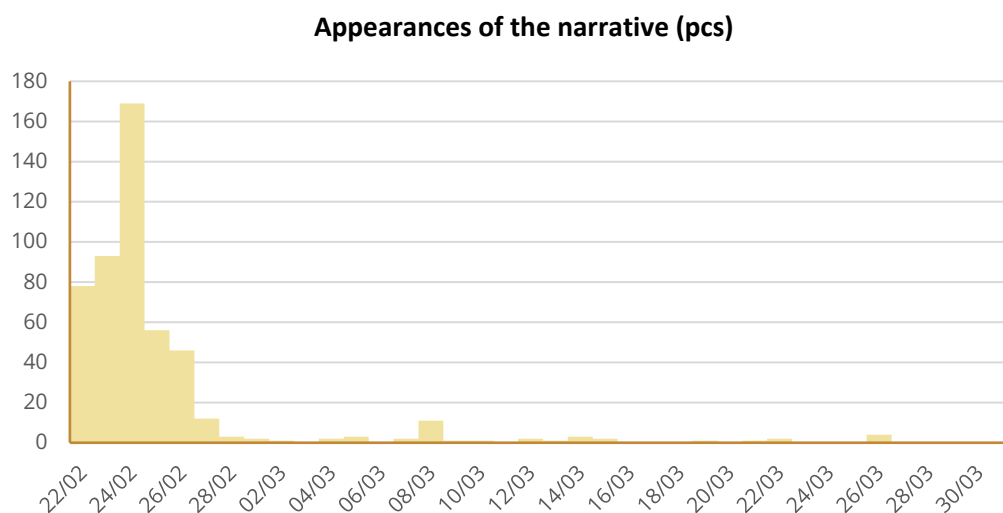
Protože ukrajinská vláda dál harašila zbraněmi a přitápěla pod kotlem, došla po osmi letech Rusům na obou stranách hranice trpělivost.

A jsme tam, kde jsme.



The text was copied most frequently (75 comments) under the posts of ČT24, a 24-hour news channel owned and operated by Czech Television - the public broadcaster. The comment also appeared 21 times on the page of the Prime Minister Petr Fiala and on other mainstream media pages, such as the most popular Czech news portal iDnes.cz or the popular commercial television channel CNN Prima News.

⁴ By 27 April 2022.



Among the 312 commenters who reposted this narrative, we identified at least 24 potentially inauthentic accounts with no personal information and/or purely political content on their walls. The commenters mostly depicted themselves as patriots, which corresponds to Tricolour's target audience, and pan-Slavists. These accounts also tend to reshare conspiracy theories about the global world order or COVID-19, and are usually strongly critical towards the incumbent Czech government. The most active commenters posted their comments in batches within the span of a few minutes, which can be a sign of intentional and systematic behavior.

2. The Reality of Donbas

The second repetitive comment recounted the "reality of the Donbas," which is supposedly facing a genocide of ethnic Russians committed by Ukrainian soldiers killing and plundering under a repressive fascist regime. It was first posted by a now untraceable user claiming they are from Donbas and have personally witnessed this reality. The message is similar to the second text described in the Hungarian country chapter.

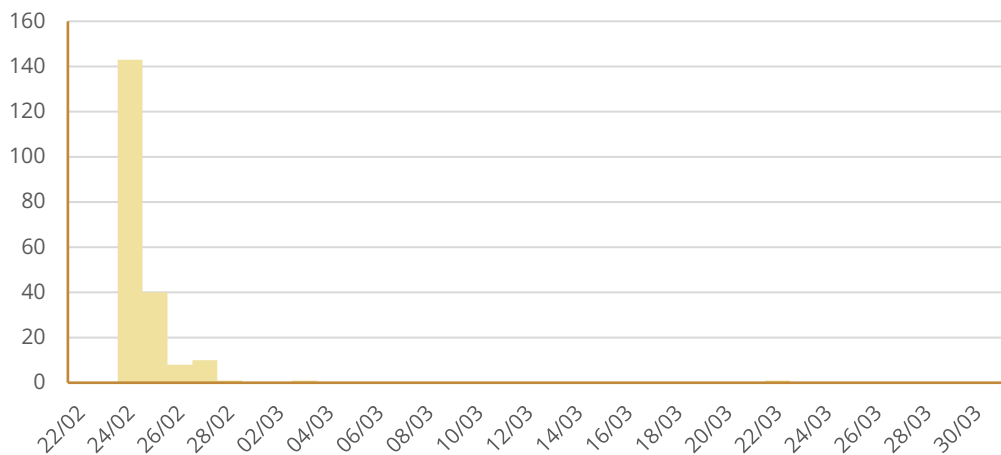
Original text of the narrative:

No....omlouvám se, ale část komentářů jsou jenom výroky lidí kteří neviděli realitu Donbasu Je to genocida ruský mluvící PŮVODNÍCH obyvatelů Donbasu.... Ukrajina chce jenom ruskou teritorii ale obyvatelé ne!!! Víte jak oni jim říkají? Nedoladí a vše, co mluví ruský - pistole k hlavě.... Co vy víte o "šedivé zóně"? A jak tam žijí lidé pod vládou ukr. vojáku???? Rabování, násilí a jsou chráněni ukr. vládou máji to dovolené... můžou vzít vaše auto, vlézt do bytu a vzít co budou chtít... Není to k smích... pomalu

každí den na poště fronty ukr. vojáku, který posílají domu narabování věci.... vrchol byl jeden voják který balil kování vrata!!!! A Evropa vidí jenom Putina a "atresii" rusu.... cítím bolest a beznaději, že popírají se lidský práva a všechny kolem rvou - Sláva Ukrajině.... sama lež.... a mám držet hubu.... nikdo nemluví o kvetoucím fašismu na Ukrajině... a že Bandera je národní hrdina "civilizování" svět zavírá na to oči..... jenom aby to bylo proti Rusku.... Ted' mluve o tom kdo to opravdu začal!!!

The narrative blew up on 24 February with 143 comments, followed by a steep decline. It disappeared by 1 March. The total number of 204 comments appeared mainly on mainstream media pages, mainly ČT24 and two popular commercial television channels, CNN Prima News and TV Nova.

Appearances of the narrative (pcs)



The top three commenters spreading the message seemed to be authentic accounts of users with anti-establishment stances. Among the 118 commenters we identified, we have counted at least 5 possibly inauthentic accounts promoting strongly patriotic stances and resharing conspiracy theories from Czech media known for spreading disinformation (e.g., AC24 News) about the war, other global conflicts, and COVID-19. Some systematic effort is suggested by the fact that the comments usually appeared within batches of 9-10 within sixty minutes.

3. Official Russian Communication

The third repetitive comment that started appearing on 25 February provided a daily update on the “Situation in Ukraine during the Russian peacekeeping operation.” Besides [labelling](#) the invasion as a special peacekeeping operation, the comment repeated Russian narratives about a Nazi regime in Kyiv and the genocide of ethnic Russians in the Donbas, or Ukrainian soldiers killing civilians. The text reiterated official Russian communication and openly referenced the YouTube channel of the Russian Ministry of Defense as its source, which originally brought these daily updates to its audience.

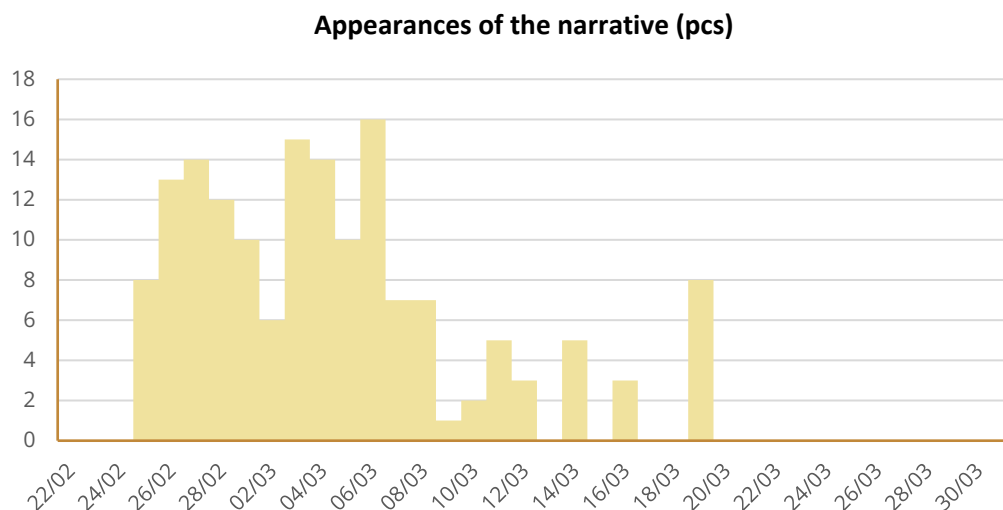
Original text of the narrative:

Situace na Ukrajině při mírové operaci Ruska 26.2.2022 (21:57)
Představitel DNR Eduard Basurin vydal ke konci dnešního dne oficiální prohlášení o tom, že ozbrojené síly Doněcké národní republiky osvobodily 12 obydlených oblastí, udělaly tak obrovskou průrvu v nepřátelské obraně a začínají se blížit k městu Mariupol. Připomínám, že včera bylo z opačného směru vzato město Melitopol které bylo osvobozeno ruskou námořní pěchotou. Tedy je tato oblast v dvojitém sevření. Dnešním dnem také vydal oficiální prohlášení i hlavní představitel Krymu Sergej Aksjonov o tom, že ruská armáda vyhodila do povětří přehradu postavenou "kyjevskou klikou narkomanů a Banderovců" jak je tečně pojmenoval prezident Putin a která celých 8 let blokovala dodávky vody na Krym. Což je velmi vážný element ohledně ukončení vodní blokády Krymu ze strany Kyjeva a jednou z etap mírové mise ruské armády na Ukrajině. Čečenský prezident Ramzan Kadyrov na svém kanále Instagram a Telegram kanále opublikoval několik videí kde je vidět jak bojovníci čečenského SPECNAZu kteří bez boje zajali velký oddíl ukrajinských Banderovců, strhávají ukrajinskou vlajku a na její místo věší ruskou státní vlajku. Kadyrov také ve videích ukázal techniku a

zbraně NATO které čečenský SPECNAZ Banderovcům ukořistil. Opět připomínám, že ruské armádě nekladou ozbrojené síly Ukrajiny vůbec žádný odpor a skutečné boje se vedou pouze s ukrajinskými nacisty a Banderovci. Ramzan Kadyrov upozornil, že všechny fejky o tom jak je na Ukrajině hromadně zabíjen čečenský SPECNAZ jsou směšné a z palce vycucané. Podle oficiálního prohlášení Kadyrova nebyl zraněn ani jediný člen čečenského SPECNAZu a už vůbec ne zabitý. Uvedl že čečenské oddíly budou nadále bojovat po boku ruské armády do té doby, dokud nebude osvobozena celá Ukrajina a zachráněn celý národ od Kyjevského režimu. Upozorňuji že prezident Ramzan Kadyrov je jednou z nejsilnějších osobností v současném Rusku a mimo toho, což chci podotknout, také ochránce pravých duchovních Islámských cenností a tufijský lídr světa. Kdy toto žezlo mu bylo předáno již před desíti lety. Je tedy velice významnou osobou nejen pro celé Rusko ale také i pro CELÝ islámský svět, který ho bezvýhradně respektuje. Proto jeho večerní prohlášení je nutno brát velice vážně a je důležité především i pro stabilizaci situace na Ukrajině. No a také je především důležité pro vítězství sil Dobra nad silami Tmy.

The narrative was mostly active between 26 February and 6 March. 83% of these comments were posted by a single account. This user boasts about himself being a “Czechoslovak” nationalist, promotes the narrative concerning the alleged Nazification of Ukraine and even the Czech Republic, and reshares Czech conspiracy

websites' (e.g., Aeronet or Protiproud) content. The user started posting actively on his wall only at the end of March 2022 and his content often celebrates Slavic or specifically Russian culture or praises and defends Russian foreign policy and involvement in conflicts abroad, such as in Syria. The intentional character of his activity was also demonstrated by the consistent timing of his comments in the evening hours, although this also suggests that commenting is likely not his "job," as the user is likely to have a day job that stops him from commenting during his working hours.



This comment targeted the voters of the national-conservative political opposition in the Czech Republic. It appeared 159 times in total. The comments can be found mainly on the pages of opposition leaders such as Kateřina Konečná from the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), Tomio Okamura from the right-far right Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) known for his Eurosceptic, anti-NATO and fervently anti-immigration stances, and Zuzana Majerová Zahradníková from the abovementioned Tricolour. Therefore, these comments tried to promote the Russian interpretation of the invasion to an audience already susceptible to anti-Western narratives.

4. Russia's Historic Aggression: The Counter-Narrative

The fourth repetitive comment was anti-Russian and provided a list of Russian military aggressions throughout history, symbolically [starting](#) with "war against Ukraine and its efforts for independence" in 1917-1921. A very similar comment appeared in the Slovak Facebook environment, too. This comment has been circulating on the Czech Facebook since April 2019 under any posts mentioning Russia with a peak in April 2021, parallelly to the [escalation](#) of tensions in Ukraine and the rising concentration of Russian troops on the borders, and, naturally, in February 2022, totaling 509 comments.⁵

Original text of the narrative:

RUSKÉ AGRESE ZA POSLEDNÍCH 120 LET 1904 Rusko napadlo některé ostrovy, patříci Japonsku 1917-1921 válka Ruska proti Ukrajině a jejím snahám o nezávislost 1918 invaze do Azerbajdžánu 1918 invaze do Finska 1918 obsazení Běloruska 1918 obsazení části Moldavska 1918-1920 válka Ruska proti Lotyšsku 1918-1920 válka Ruska proti Estonsku 1918-1919 válka Ruska proti Litvě 1918-1920 válka Ruska v Osetii 1919-1921 invaze Ruska do Polska (Rusko-polská válka) 1920 invaze Ruska do Azerbajdžánu 1921 invaze Ruska do Gruzie 1921 invaze do Mongolska 1921 ruské potlačení arménského povstání 1921-1922 ruské potlačení povstání v Karélii 1924 další ruský vojenský zásah proti gruzínským nacionalistům 1929 první ruskán vojenská intervence v Číně 1937 druhá ruská vojenská intervence v Číně 1937 invaze do Azerbajdžánu 1938 znovu napadení Japonska 1939 ruská invaze do Polska 1939-1940 ruské přepadení Finska

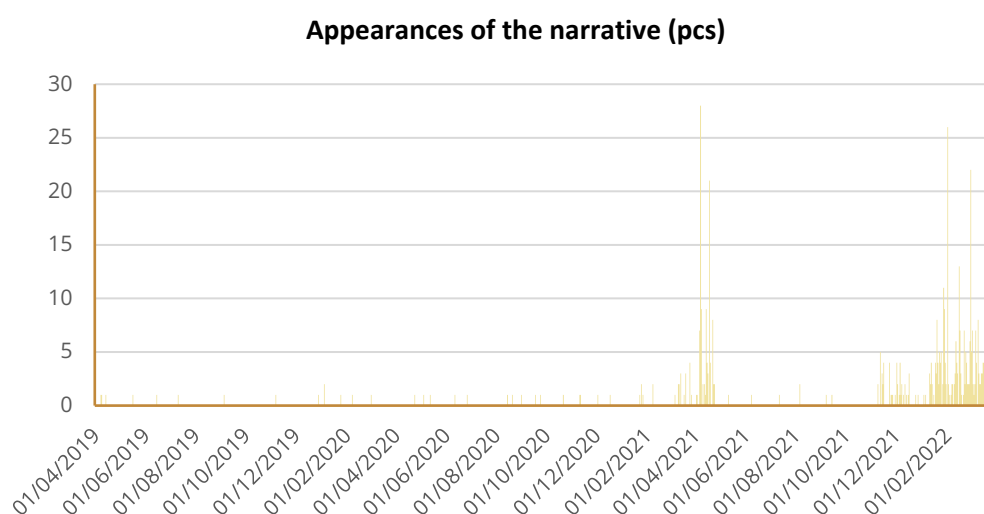
(tzv. Zimní válka) 1940 vpád do Rumunska 1940 ruská anexe Estonska 1940 ruská anexe Lotyšska 1940 ruská anexe Litvy 1941 invaze do Iránu 1941-1944 pokračování ruské války proti Finsku 1941-1945 využití důsledků 2. světové války, jako záminky k obsazení východní Evropy, střední Evropy a Balkánu 1944 anexe Tuvy 1944 vpád do Albánie 1944 válečné operace na čínské hranici 1944-1956 ruská vojenská intervence v Pobaltí 1950 aktivní účast na válce v Korei 1950-1953 ruská vojenská účast v Korejské válce 1953 krvavé potlačení povstání v NDR 1955-1975 ruská vojenská účast ve vietnamské válce 1956 krvavá ruská vojenská intervence v Maďarsku 1960 aktivní účast na válce v Laosu 1961 aktivní účast na válce ve Vietnamu 1962 vojenský podíl na operacích v Alžírsku 1962 ruští vojáci v Jemenu 1968 krvavá ruská invaze do Československa 1969 Rusko znovu napadlo Čínu 1969-1970 přímá ruská vojenská podpora

⁵ There may have been earlier appearances as well, but SentiOne can only provide data only from the past three years.

egyptských islamistů proti Izraeli 1970 aktivní účast na válce v Kambodži 1971 ruská vojenská účast v indo-pákistánském konfliktu 1972 aktivní účast na válce v Bangladéši 1974-1990 ruská vojenská účast ve válce v Eritrei 1975-2002 intenzivní ruská vojenská podpora zruďných režimů v občanské válce v Angole 1977-1978 ruská vojenská účast ve válce mezi Etiopií a Somálskem 1979-1989 ruská masivní invaze do Afghánistánu a následná válka 1988 invaze do Azerbajdžánu 1990 opět invaze do Pobaltí 1991 invaze do Gruzie 1992 nová invaze do Gruzie 1992 bombardování Inguška 1992 ruská vojenská intervence v Moldavsku (dodnes jsou v Podněstří ruská vojska) 1992 nová ruská vojenská intervence ve východní Osetii 1992 invaze do

Azerbajdžánu 1992-1997 ruská vojenská intervence v Tádžikistánu 1993 ruská vojenská účast v gruzínské občanské válce 1994 opět Azerbajdžán 1994 opět vojenský zásah v Dagestánu 1994-1996 první válka v Čečensku 1998 znovu Gruzie 1999 znovu Dagestán 1999-2009 druhá válka v Čečensku 2008 válka v jižní Osetii, kde Rusko napadlo Gruzii 2009 další ruské vojenské intervence na severním Kavkaze 2014 anexe Krymu, invaze na východní Ukrajinu 2016 bombardování Sýrie a obsazení několika klíčových míst (dodnes) 2022 celoplošné napadení Ukrajiny

The comment appeared most frequently (115) under the posts of Sputnik CZ, the Czech branch of the Russian state-run outlet. Otherwise, it appeared under the posts of mainstream media, such as ČT24, the television documentary channel PRIMA ZOOM or the popular online news outlets Aktuálně.cz, Novinky.cz and the most visited Czech news portal iDnes.cz.



The top three users disseminating the message were suspicious accounts lacking transparency, with little to no personal information and almost purely political content on their walls, but they accounted only for nearly 10% of all the comments.⁶ Seemingly authentic accounts comprised the majority of the disseminators of this text. These users were supporters of Ukraine in the conflict, supporters of Western institutions and the current liberal-conservative governing coalition, as well as mainstream media. The comment appeared mostly as a response to other comments demonstrating pro-Russian stances, downplaying Russian aggression or presenting the West, the USA, and/or the Czech Republic as the real aggressors. The inconsistent timing of the comments and the quite even involvement of a higher number of commenters (114) can suggest a loosely coordinated effort. The commenters are likely to be a part of closed social media groups (on Facebook, Telegram, etc.) where they receive “guidelines” on what messages they should be spreading.

Conclusion: Inauthentic Behavior Patterns Similar to Hungary

Our analysis has demonstrated that comment sections on Czech Facebook pages, primarily those of the mainstream television and online news servers, have been used for spreading manipulative and targeted narratives. Inauthentic accounts have attempted to promote official Russian communication about the unprovoked war on Ukraine or pro-Russian narratives that present the West as the aggressor and blame Ukraine to be an ultranationalist regime oppressing ethnic Russians and carrying out genocide. In some cases,

⁶ Many of these comments were lost after Sputnik was blocked in the EU and, thus, in Czechia.

this was a natural continuation of the long-term dissemination of manipulative and conspiratorial content from problematic Czech outlets. The inauthentic accounts were joined by users leaning toward nationalism, pan-Slavism and the national-conservative end of the political spectrum. At the same time, we discovered a counter-narrative being formed, which was shared mostly by authentic accounts of users closer to the political mainstream.

POLAND'S FACEBOOK PARTISANS STUCK IN THE PAST

Turning around EU opinion

Whereas in the pre-war period the Polish government was heavily criticized by the EU for its deteriorating rule of law record and democratic backsliding, Warsaw is now praised for its readiness to support Ukraine in the country's efforts to repel Russia. This sentiment, however, diverges from popular (and, sometimes, unpopular) opinions expressed on Facebook, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine eliciting discussion based on a number of popular narratives: 1) the allegedly close ties of the Polish ruling party to the Kremlin, 2) a [spillover](#) war in Poland and possible military action against Poland triggered by the US' involvement in the war, 3) the inefficient policies of the government to manage the influx of Ukrainian refugees or to prevent the war.

Domestic political issues seem to have largely been put on the backburner as the government and the opposition have a united position regarding the national security of Poland, although parties continue to accuse each other of betraying the country's interests. This symbolic unity (while silently ignoring previous quarrels) is evidenced, among others, by the swift adoption of the 'Homeland Defense Act' aiming to speed up and increase defense spending. Donald Tusk, the leader of Civic Platform, the largest opposition party, has also [pledged](#) to support the ruling party in its efforts to strengthen the security of Poland. Despite this show of unity, the opposition remains [committed](#) to correct PiS' failed policies and to put an end to toxic alliances with the Hungarian governing party Fidesz as well as other European right-wing parties and leaders looking favorably at the Kremlin. Against this background, a general perception of 'treason' permeates the political scene of Poland: while Tusk [accused](#) the governing Law and Justice (PiS) party of 'treason' for its alliances with other European far-right parties with close ties to the Kremlin, the government regularly mirrors this criticism citing the opposition's fondness of 'Brussels'. Furthermore, before the war in Ukraine, the opposition had been highly critical of PiS efforts to increase control over the media and the security apparatus, [calling](#) it the 'Putinization' of Poland. Unsurprisingly, this view gained ground after the war broke out, perpetuated predominantly by more liberal media outlets.

PiS, the ruling conservative party, has been committed to supporting Ukraine and condemning Russia's actions. Whereas PiS and the Hungarian ruling Fidesz party have been considered to be close partners in an anti-EU coalition, pledging to support each other in their respective rule of law disputes with the European Commission, the war transformed this relationship. PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczyński condemned Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán's refusal to provide meaningful support for Ukraine, and for his failure to strongly denounce Russian atrocities in Bucha, as well as his [criticism](#) towards Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Yet, the long-standing strategic partnership forged over the years between the two party leaders led to their unequivocal association with one another; as a consequence, some Facebook pages have seen a hike in sentiments that PiS is the agent of the Kremlin. Nevertheless, the anti-immigrant, anti-liberal and anti-EU overall image of Jaroslaw Kaczynski (called the 'de facto ruler of Poland') has somewhat changed in the past month, and he is increasingly [viewed](#) as a tacit supporter of European values and a strong proponent of solidarity with Ukraine. Nonetheless, the old, deep-rooted political essence of Kaczynski, long perceived as an autocratic, pugnacious leader, is used for criticism against him and PiS on social media.

The security context of Poland is transforming during the ongoing invasion of Ukraine. Prior to the war, Poland's cooperation with the US and NATO was considered to be ineffective. The actions of Polish authorities to ensure pre-war security and prevent the war (although their reach is admittedly limited beyond the country's borders) were presented as insufficient, but the same government has since been [portrayed](#) as a "strategic partner of NATO in the region." Some media outlets continue to focus on past controversial foreign and security policy actions of the government, thus undermining trust in PiS, while hinting at the possibility of the war in Ukraine — and not only its indirect effects — spilling over to Poland.

Well before the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022, the Polish government had started to brace for the worst-case scenario resulting from the standoff between Russia and Ukraine. Not only did public administration and security services were put on high alert anticipating potential cyberattacks, but local municipalities [started](#) to prepare accommodation for up to 1 million refugees. The Polish government, however, underestimated the sheer magnitude of the refugee flow (both transit and settlement), as Poland thus far provided shelter for almost 3 million Ukrainians, according to [UN data](#). This sparked another wave of indignation and dissatisfaction among anti-government actors active on Facebook, with local governors accused of not doing enough to deal with an influx of refugees from Ukraine, instead [appropriating](#) the efforts and achievements of NGOs and volunteers who manage the refugee flow more efficiently.

No direct pro-Kremlin inauthentic behavior

In Poland, we only found two comments being repeated for a total of 1,358 appearances. However, there is a significant discrepancy between the two: one of them was copied and pasted under Facebook posts over 1,000 times mostly by a single user.

1. The lone wolf fighting PiS, Germany and Russia at the same time

The profile of the lone Facebook user (hereinafter 'User X') who repeated the same specific comment over and over again is quite basic: it has no profile picture, its feed is filled with mostly political reposts from news agencies and other media outlets. The pattern of User X's actions is uncomplicated: it focuses on one event with latent criticism of incumbent leaders and the government, posting the same text afterwards as a comment below the post or as a reply to comments of other Facebook users. As a skillful/desperate attention-seeker, User X replies directly to others by tagging them and as a result, the tagged user has to at least take a look at what User X has to say (though he is not always successful in getting a response). As a follow-up method, the profile continues to send comments below the responses to his provocations. He rarely uses his own thoughts, instead relying on copying texts from other sources. The tendency is that User X responds more often to those who do not support him than to those who agree with his narrative. He seems to be more eager to persuade Facebook users that are distrustful and skeptical of his views, but with dubious success: his conversation partners often do not seem to be convinced by his arguments. The proverbial phrase 'attack is the best form of defense' is also common in the case of users such as User X: when caught red-handed — that is, accused of lying — called a "psycho" or a "Russian agent", the profile will typically use hostile language typed with capital letters or claim that he is in favor of whatever the opinion of the addressee is and then revert back to his favored original topic anyway. Even if he is caught telling an incomprehensible narrative, he does not pause and continues to post further lengthy comments. As a result, hardly anyone interacts with his essay-like comments.

Original text of the narrative:

"Wierzę w Putina, może bardziej, niż wielu innych. Doceniam jego mądrość i jego przewidywalność. Przewidywalność jest częścią myśli europejskiej - powiedział Władysław Bartoszewski w rozmowie z niemieckim dziennikiem "Thueringer Allgemeine". "Zawsze to lepiej niż odbierać medale od Putina, przedstawiać absurdalne założenia Białej Księgi Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego, wchodzić na krzesła, wywoływać Shoguna - S. Kozieja lub spotykać się Patruszewem! Przypomnę przemówienie Władimira Putina w Moskwie w 60 rocznicę wybuchu II wojny światowej, kiedy to Putin dziękował niemieckiemu ruchowi oporu, nie wspominając nawet jednym słowem o Polakach walczących na wszystkich frontach wojny (także ramię w ramię z Rosjanami) i zorganizowanych politycznie, militarnie w pierwszym i największym w Europie państwie podziemnym. Kwaśniewski siedział w entym rządzie i mówił, że wszystko było Ok. I zapowiadali mu, że tak go potraktują. Przed tymi uroczystościami ITAR-TASS poinformowała, że MSZ Federacji Rosyjskiej uważa za nieuczciwe podejmowane w Polsce i innych krajach próby

wypaczania wyników konferencji jałtańskiej: - "Właśnie w Jaltie - utrzymuje rosyjskie MSZ - mocarstwa sojusznice potwierdziły pragnienie, by Polska była silna, wolna, niezawisła i demokratyczna". W wyniku uregulowań jałtańsko-poczdamskich Polska zyskała istotne powiększenie terytorium na północy i zachodzie. Jej bezpieczeństwo zagwarantowały nie tylko Stany Zjednoczone i Wielka Brytania, ale i ZSRR." A Wolski wtedy honory w Moskwie odbierał i medale od Putina przyjmował, prawdziwa i uroczysta feta dla swojego i bohatera, wywiady w Russia TV udzielał, miał siły schorowany człowiek honoru! W Polsce na proces Wujka zawsze był słaby, zaświadczenia lekarskie przedstawiał! Postępowi? Kto pozwolił na to, żeby Putin na Westerplatte w rocznicę wybuchu drugiej wojny światowej mówił, że traktat wersalski był wielką krzywdą dla Niemiec? A kto mówi o rajdzie czołgami przez Polskę, kto ćwiczy atak nuklearny na Warszawę, kto mówi, że zetrze Polskę z powierzchni ziemi, kto napadł na Donbas? Kto? Kto urabia własne społeczeństwo w nienawiści do Polaków dudniąc we własnych mediach idiotyzmy, że Polska chce dokonać rozbioru

Ukrainy i chce prewencyjnie zaatakować Rosję? Robią to nasi przyjaciele w Moskwie popierani przez zwykłych Rosjan na ulicach. Kto jest dumny z Paktu Ribentropp- Mołotow, dodając, że Polska zasłużyła sobie na II Wojnę Światową, że ją rozpoczęła. O skandalicznym śledztwie smoleńskim i wynikach ekshumacji nie będę wspominał! "Wisienką na torcie" są trwające od 15 lat występy kolejnych ważnych Moskali, opowiadających, co już w Polskę wycelowano, a co na dniach się wyceluje, jakie rakiety umieszczono już w Królewcu i ile nowych dywizji rozpoczęło już manewry. Wszystko oczywiście w imię umiłowania pokoju. Do

dziś na zajętych ziemiach w okręgu Królewca stacjonuje więcej wojska niż ma Polska, jest to oczywiste zagrożenie dla naszej wolności. Za co mamy być wdzięczni za najwyższe ceny gazu i ropy? Czy za ciągłe pogrożki i zastraszanie? I koniecznie musimy kupować od Rosjan gaz, żeby mogli się lepiej zbroić, tworzyć kolejne dywizje pancerne, ćwiczyć, grozić nam i robić jeszcze więcej wielotysięcznych wojskowych manewrów przy naszych granicach.

User X prefers to leave his comments on pages of widely-read news agencies (most have the label 'Solidarity with Ukraine'), as well as satirical and entertaining online magazines, or on the profiles of top officials like President Duda or PM Morawiecki. Similarly, some anti-PiS pages are among common places for him to 'hunt'. In general, the profile appears to have developed a set of preferred Facebook pages where he usually finds some support for his comments. Most of the profile's efforts are concentrated on three pages: WP Wiadomosci, SokzBuraka and TVN24, which received most of his attention, while the profile leaves only one or two comments on a host of other, less favored pages.

The master of incomprehensive comments

One prominent feature of such comments is their clumsiness and general irrelevance: neither are they related to the topics the targeted post addresses nor are they coherent or logical replies to comments left by other users. The content of these comments does not correspond with the news piece or post and is hardly related to concrete events discussed, instead focusing on the perceived underlying reasons for PiS' ineffectiveness and sometimes the incompetence of the opposition.

The commented text changes over time. In contrast to 2019-2021, this year's comments from User X contain another message, arguing that through its weakness and political incompetence, the PiS contributed to making Russia and Putin stronger. The narrative focuses on the criticism of PiS, President Duda, PM Morawiecki, with the 'Kaczynski-is-worse-than-Putin' idea prevailing in it. The text contains other added elements that are aimed at undermining Poland's international relations and security: 1) with its egoistic pursuit of only its own interests, Germany is not an ally for Poland, 2) NATO cooperation does not provide enough security and threatens with dragging Poland into the war in Ukraine.

Sowing uncertainty is key

The main aim of such comments is to spread a general sense of uncertainty and insecurity. In the first days of the war, User X's main mission was to sow uncertainty as the security context was beleaguered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As the events unfolded and the world was waiting for a response from the EU, the profile's texts sought to strike another nerve: popular dissatisfaction with inflexible policies in some EU countries (mainly Germany) and their unwillingness to stop Putin. Usually, such comments merit no responses, only rarely does a comment appear that refuses to accept such a text as a logical argument. User X has long criticized the government's security policy, a strategy that paid off during the war as the profile did not need to change narratives, maintaining an air of credibility with numerous Facebook users agreeing with his arguments at a time when Poland's security was perceived as vulnerable. User X was thus able to repeat the same tried and tested messages about insufficient defense spending or the government's inadequate management of the country's armed forces. The profile often succeeded in triggering the desired reaction, with other commenters responding with sentiments such as "Our country is destroyed," "Polish traitors," something about a "Putin-Kaczynski pact," and claims that there is "no NATO support for Poland if Poland is attacked".

It is unclear to what extent User X acts autonomously. Other social media users regularly call him "a strange mixture of a PiS and a Kremlin bot," but there is no evidence to support this claim and it is not possible to verify these statements. The user spares no effort to reiterate that he/she is anti-PiS, pro-European and anti-Russian, citing comments where the profile expresses anger over Germany's reluctance to introduce tougher

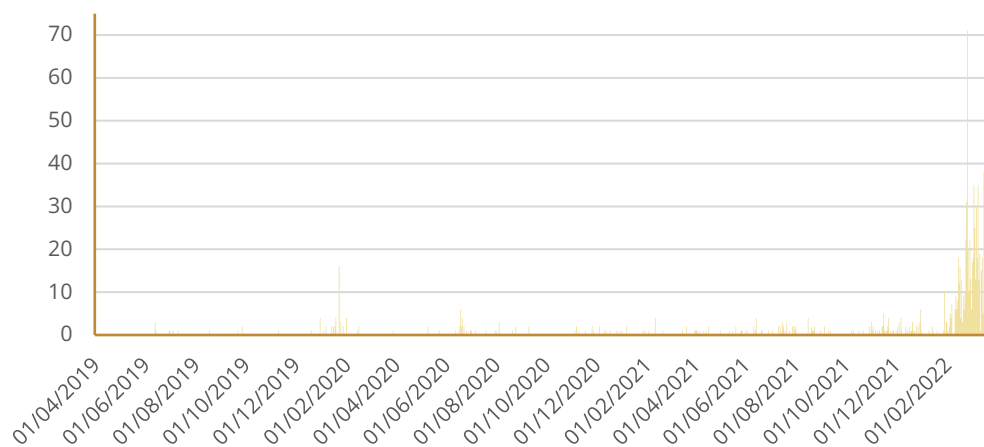
Russia-sanctions and how Kaczynski played an integral role in emboldening Russia and destroying Poland. At the same time, the user is always ready to provoke a conversation about the shared memory of World War II and reminding social media users of the bloody battles between Soviet Ukrainians and Poles.

Support for User X's comments depends on security perception

Regarding the profile's activity, the number of comments spiked shortly before the war broke out. In contrast with the profile's activity in 2019-2021, the war period was more fruitful for it, with far more interactions reached than before, even though the majority of his comments did not find any support at all. In general, the most responsive users are to be found on the following pages: gazeta.pl, WP, fakt 24 etc, goniec, and superexpress. We observed a discrepancy in support for the profile's comments during the nearly two months since Russia invaded Ukraine, with User X's comments during the first week of the war garnering the most likes, with a decreasing tendency since then. During the period between 2 and 13 March 2022, there were only occasional supportive comments or likes on his texts, with positive interactions rare under his comments, while accusations of the profile being a Russian bot and a liar that uses a copy-paste method became more frequent. During the period between 13 and 20 March, support under his comments increased again, although only moderately. It appears that the profile's texts found more support at times when the perception of Poland's security was more fragile: in the first days of the war, during the influx of refugees, strikes on the military base close to Poland, Biden's visit to Poland and when the idea to send peacekeepers to Ukraine first emerged.

In all likelihood, this particular user is a solitary actor. Among over 1000 repetitive comments, only a couple of them are reshared by other random users with no identifiable connections to him (see the figure below).

Appearances of the narrative (pcs)



If the user's goal was that the text is reshared by others or at least supported by them, it came to partial fruition with a limited number of random-looking reposts⁷ that refer to his post as "something found on the web" without referencing the original poster.⁸ Other users appear to be more attracted to posts depicting the current political situation with identifiable roots in the past. Most users on the pages frequented by the user are against the ruling party, this presumably being one of the reasons why they 'like' a particular post. Yet, some users who reshared User X's comments seemed fake, carrying the typical characteristics of fake

⁷ An interesting observation is that another bot commented on the user's comment on Superexpress, where she accused him of only being able to copy and paste texts, which happens to be her own tactic, too. We know this because she is the user spreading the second narrative. The profile is User Y from the second repetitive Polish comment.

⁸ This pattern of quoting another text was also present in the Hungarian database, although Hungarian users were more likely to name who they quoted (although this might often have been accidental).

accounts. Such reposts by these dubious accounts appeared only during the war, but this can be attributed to the fact that User X posted more frequently since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

2. A woman's campaign to spread the ideas of Roman Giertych

A profile (hereinafter referred to as 'User Y' — with a profile picture sporting a Ukrainian flag — spreading the second narrative looks ordinary, though the limited amount of personal information she shares and her friend list does increase the chance that this is a fake account. Her feed is rife with reposts of political shows about Ukraine and Poland-Russia relations (with self-proclaimed revelations and "secret" documents shared frequently).

Original text of the narrative:

Czy szykowano zdradę stanu? Coraz więcej informacji zaczyna wypływać wskazujących na to, że Putin od dawna planował atak na Ukrainę i ustanowienie strefy buforowej pomiędzy NATO, a Rosją, w której to strefie miała być Polska. Być może Polska połączona z częścią Ukrainy. Częścią tego planu było wsparcie jakie udzielał partiom i osobom, które mogły mu w tym planie pomóc. Wiemy o poparciu, które przesądziło o zwycięstwie Trumpa i wiemy o pisanej cyrylicą, jak mówił Donald Tusk, operacji poparcia PiS, jaką była afera podsłuchowa. Podobnie pewnie było z Orbaniem. Wiemy również o wsparciu finansowym Putina dla innych sojuszników PiS skupionych w międzynarodówce proputinowskiej, która spotkała się miesiąc temu w Madrycie. Dzisiaj John Bolton - b. Doradca ds. Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego mianowany przez Trumpa ujawnił, że Putin czekał z inwazją, gdyż było ustalone, że Trump zlikwiduje NATO jak wygra reelekcję. Przypomnę, że Trump jawnie wspierał Orbana i PiS. Plan Putina się nie powiódł, gdyż wygrał Biden, który zorganizował opór świata zachodniego. Przywództwo USA było tak silne, że zdołało przekonać Andrzeja Dudę do zmiany sojuszu i od zawetowania przejścia TVN-u, co skłóciłoby nas głównym sojusznikiem. To wypadnięcie Dudy oraz nastroje proukraińskie spowodowane heroicznym oporem Ukraińców spowodowały, że plany PiS-u skorzystania na wojnie Putina z Ukrainą stały się niemożliwe do realizacji. O tym jednak, że były one realizowane świadczy próba przejścia TVN-u i to już w czasie, gdy Biden poinformował nasz rząd o planach Putina inwazji na Ukrainę. O tym świadczy też spotkanie w Madrycie 29 stycznia tego roku, gdy już rząd wiedział, że wojna zaraz wybuchnie (a Morawiecki sprzedawał działki inwestycyjne, których cena spada przy każdym konflikcie). Spotkanie w Madrycie było próbą ustanowienia międzynarodowej kooperacji partii i rządów, które chciały skorzystać na przemodelowaniu stosunków europejskich związanym z wojną. Na to, że to przemodelowanie stosunków było planowane wskazuje też fakt, że PiS w ogóle nie przejmował się gigantycznymi karami

nakładanymi przez TSUE. Gdyby wojna potoczyła się zgodnie z planem Putina nasza część Europy byłaby buforowa, czyli miałaby taką rolę Białorusi z zeszłej dekady. PiS miałby wówczas wolną rękę do rozprawy z sądami i do wprowadzenia pełnego autorytaryzmu. Tę wolną rękę dawałoby mu balansowanie pomiędzy UE, a Rosją. Rosją, która otaczałaby nas już wówczas z trzech stron. Podejrzewam o sobiście, że Putin te żarty, którymi testował Sikorskiego (o podziale Ukrainy i oddaniu nam Lwowa) tym razem na poważnie przedstawiał PiS-owi jako propozycje. To że Kaczyński ma bezpośredni kontakt z Putinem (nie tylko przez Orbana) to wiem na pewno, bo sam mi to przed laty mówił. Te kontakty z pewnością były uruchomione. Pewnie na to też liczył Orban, że uzyska kawałek Ukrainy (nawet jako twór pozornie niezależny) i na fali patriotycznego wzmożenia znowu wygra wybory. Te wszystkie plany popsuli Amerykanie dogadując się z Dudą, a później popsuli Ukraińcy nie oddając Kijowa. Operacja wojenna była zaplanowana na kilka dni. Gdyby się ona Rosjanom udała, to żadnych poważnych sankcji by nie było i wszyscy siedliby do stołu z Putinem. PiS mógł wówczas liczyć na to, że za pozostanie w strefie amerykańskiej dostałby wolną rękę do rozprawy z opozycją, albo na to że przejmując kontrolę nad zachodnią Ukrainą i broniąc jej przed Putinem uzyskaliby wzmożenie patriotyczne, które dałoby im władzę w Polsce na lata. Wszystko to się nie udało. Szykowana zdrada stanu nie weszła w fazę realizacji. I teraz ci, którzy kilka tygodni temu spiskowali z Putinem przebrali się za największych twardzieli (choć sankcje ekonomiczne Polska w ogóle nie wprowadziła). Paradują jako najwięksi obrońcy Ukrainy, mimo że jeszcze przed chwilą rozwalali Europę i NATO. Polska na szczęście została częścią Zachodu. Mamy więc szansę, że normalne wybory się odbędą i że praworządność powróci. Musimy tę szansę w pełni wykorzystać. - cóż bracia kremłowscy - wasi mocodawcy mają coraz pełniejsze portki

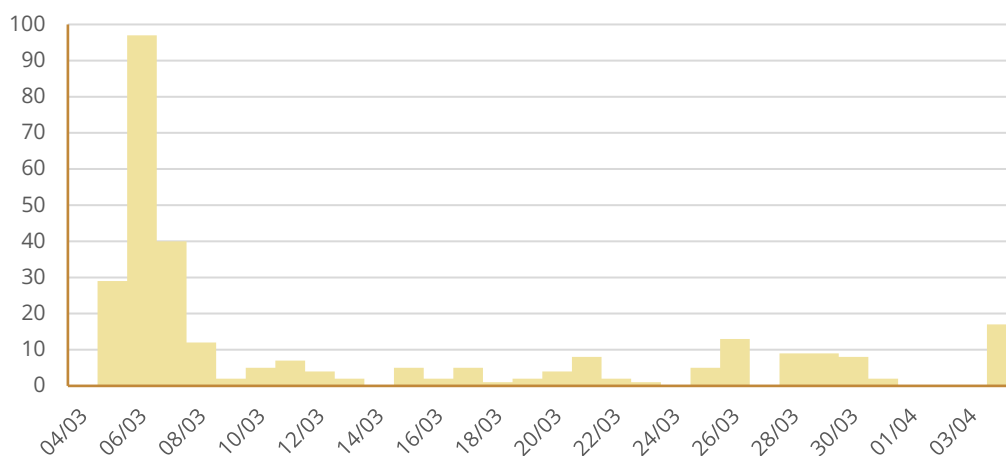
User Y is not spreading a repetitive message by the classic copy-paste method but she is quite active nevertheless, and her style is easy to recognize. In general, the most noticeable feature is the profile's directness and aggression. She becomes aggressive when someone accuses her of being a liar, a bot, or just generally unwise. Reciprocating this strategy, she often opts to call her critics "Russian trolls." The profile's often used strategy is to answer another user's comment, tagging that particular individual directly to provoke a response. Another way to trigger a conversation and at the same time find support is by first responding to a person (agreeing or disagreeing with them) and then providing a copied text in a separate comment altogether. Before the copied text, she tends to use a short provocative sentence for enhanced impact. The profile also admits in one of the comments that she shares the same text everywhere. Sometimes she starts small talk, and sometimes shares a screenshot to start a conversation (these images rarely elicit a response). Interestingly, the profile does not seem to be interested in maintaining conversation: even if the text attracts attention, the user tends not to continue chatting.

Not only is she aggressive in her manner of writing, her tone is typically condescending (“read it and you’ll get it”). To give more credibility to the text, she cites Roman Giertych — a lawyer for Donald Tusk — or shares screenshots that support her argument. This tactic might give an impression that she is indeed a real person and not just a bot. References to Roman Giertych are quite random, however, and there is hardly any visible connection between the posts and the choice to cite Giertych. Projected credibility is so important for User Y that she once tried to use the usual text but claiming it was from someone else whom she trusts. When someone expresses criticism towards the user’s narrative regarding the ongoing war in Ukraine, the profile’s first reaction is usually condescending while emphasizing that PiS is doing everything so that the war is felt by the Polish.

The original text was [posted](#) by Roman Giertych on 5 March 2022. The first evidence regarding the time when the text was copied and spread by other users shows that comments reappeared only 10 minutes after the publication of the original post. The text was shared by 14,000 users. Importantly, some users, including User Y started to copy-paste the text in the comments section under other posts shared by different Facebook pages. The text has appeared in comments since 5 March and attracted the largest of comments per day on 6 March 2022 (See Picture below).

The key arguments of the text are that 1) Morawiecki and Kaczynski neglected cooperation with the US and made Poland vulnerable to Russia; 2) the government failed to do enough to prevent the war; 3) Polish authorities ignored US warnings about the war; 4) Poland has no influence in the EU; and 5) the PiS did not break ties with Fidesz because of Hungary’s reluctance to take Ukraine’s side in the war. Although the author is Roman Giertych, the users that spread his post tend not to mention that this text is written by Giertych.

Appearances of the narrative (pcs)



The media campaign spreading the ideas of Roman Giertych rotates around small groups of users, specifically 1) bots, 2) fakes, 3) usual top supporters and 4) random users. There is a clear division between the bot-like users based on the type of pages where they are most active. For example, one specific user shares the text on the pages of top officials like President Duda or commentators such as Piotr Szumlewicz, while User Y started with top officials from the opposition, like Donald Tusk and then proceeded to copy the text under posts by news agencies. Her usual introductory remarks before the copied text are mostly directed against PiS and hints that the party might have ties to the Kremlin.

Even though User Y is usually early to post the same text under every available post, there are several users that seem to play the same game, reposting the same text under a variety of posts. There are certain characteristics that these profiles share: they all appear as pro-Ukrainian, pro-European, anti-PiS, and anti-Russian (*one or several criteria apply). In general, User Y is careful to keep the narrative about the need to support Ukraine and Poland coherent. Still, there are cases where other users sharing the same text are not consistent with this sentiment. One of them, for instance, is clearly against assistance to Ukraine.

One of the obvious commonalities is that all profiles examined criticize the ruling party and the opposition alike — it is clear that these users are neither satisfied with the ruling party (PiS: Kaczynski, Morawiecki, Duda) nor with the opposition (in particular, Tusk). A case in point is a profile that labels PiS as the ruling party of Putin, while at the same time claiming that Tusk struck a deal with the Kremlin to divide Ukraine. Other users like a fake profile posing as a Roman Giertych supporter compares Russia to Poland. His common strategy is based on simple and short catchy posts that attract attention which are then followed by a lengthy comment, but this method (the profile replying to its own posts) does not attract much attention from other users.

Being aggressive on Facebook (similarly the main disseminator of the second narrative) is a key feature of other users as well, who routinely address others who doubt their narrative and accuse them of being on Russia's payroll. One user from this group often promotes the idea that PiS did not do enough to prevent the war.

The second user types are obvious fakes. There are some easily identifiable fake accounts that participate in this campaign. Yet another group are 'top supporters' of particular Facebook pages who spread the same narrative. While a 'top supporter' status gives such comments more credibility, it is not completely clear whether the users have just fallen for this narrative or spread it consciously. In the month since the second narrative was launched, bots and fake accounts succeeded in involving at least 40 real accounts in spreading the text on other pages, although some of them share this text with a reference only to Roman Giertych, the original poster. Since the majority of users active on the above pages share similar political views (anti-PiS, pro-European, anti-Russian, pro-Ukrainian), this is likely the target audience of this large-scale campaign.

CONCLUSIONS

Our research makes it clear that inauthentic online behavior is present throughout the Visegrád Group's member states, although the methods and goals of their campaigns differ. Czechia and, especially, Hungary are targeted mainly by pro-Kremlin comments, which target various mainstream media outlets and the Facebook pages of mainstream politicians. The situation in Slovakia differs because in this case, the majority of repeated comments support the West. The reason for this might be the fact that pro-Kremlin forces do not invest in such activities in the country as a result of the perceived strength of pro-Kremlin sentiments in the population and the materialization of this in online discussions, which invalidates the necessity of such efforts. While combatting pro-Kremlin online disinformation narratives through repetitive comments can be a valid goal, disseminating factually questionable texts is only helping the cause of the Kremlin. Poland is an entirely different case again: in this country, spreading openly pro-Kremlin sentiments would yield no results because of the strongly Russia-critical views of the population. Instead, inauthentic online behavior in Poland focuses on sowing discord, lowering the population's sense of security and increasing tensions between various political sides. One common characteristic between the campaigns is that generally they were most active during the early days of the war.

We can differentiate similar groups of users engaging in inauthentic online behavior in the four countries.

1. The “professionals”: There are likely fake profiles engaged in spreading messages that directly or indirectly serve the interests of international actors (and mainly those of the Kremlin). In some cases, they are the true engines behind the dissemination of a text, while on other occasions, they only supplement the activities of real profiles. Their activity is likely a part of centrally coordinated campaigns – both paid and voluntary ones.
2. The “enthusiastic activists”: These users are often engaged in spreading narratives via Facebook comments because they truly want to convince other users of the truth of their viewpoints. They are very likely to be a part of closed social media groups (on Facebook, Telegram, etc.) where they receive “guidelines” on what messages they should be spreading – there are few other potential explanations on why dozens, if not hundreds of users would start copy-pasting the exact same words and often even paying attention to “deliver” these messages to a balanced mix of Facebook pages. Their work is likely to be somewhat tightly coordinated.
3. The “average user”: These are everyday Facebook users simply see something they agree with, which they then share a few times to convince others of the validity of that view. They might or might not be a part of the abovementioned social media groups serving the purpose of coordination.

It is clear that the activities of these profiles are often coordinate to some extent. First, as noted above, it is highly likely that fake profiles are also involved in this behavior. Second, at the height of the dissemination of a message, the comments arrive in a steady stream without any break in the activities during typical working hours, often in a batch of 5-10 comments within an hour. Third, in at least one case we saw that the activity of various commenters did not overlap with each other at all. Fourth, in multiple cases we observed the existence of personalized introductions to the copied texts, suggesting the existence of “guidelines” for people to spread the messages in question. Finally, there seems to be no other realistic reason for hundreds of profiles starting to spread the exact same text on Facebook.

It is certain that Facebook is not doing a lot to stop inauthentic behavior on its platforms, although it can be a significant contribution to the dissemination of disinformation – at least not in the V4 countries. It is much more likely that Facebook pages themselves ban certain users who they believe to be “trolls.” And besides contributing to the spread of disinformation, these repetitive comments do not contribute to a healthy public discourse about the war in Ukraine, regardless of which side they support.

Overall, future research will have to be dedicated to how these repetitive commenting campaigns are run and what the motivations of those engaging in them are to be able to formulate policy recommendations to halt this phenomenon.