# Slovakia: Annual Report on Disinformation 2021

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# Summary


- Posts related to the topic of Covid-19 were clearly predominant within the analyzed Facebook content. Of the 150 posts examined, political or health topics related to the Covid-19 pandemic appeared in as many as 112 cases.
- Within the analyzed Facebook content, the topic of Covid-19 attracted the most interactions. At the same time, videos in this category received the most views.
- Among international topics, Russia and the USA resonated the most and gained the majority of interactions on Facebook. In the case of audiovisual content, videos mentioning the USA were the most successful followed by videos discussing Russia.
- Topics like Vrbětice, the energy crisis, and Ukraine appeared most frequently within the category of Russa-related content. In the case of the USA, the presidential elections, negotiations between the presidents of the USA and Russia, and the agreement on defense cooperation between the Slovak Republic and the USA resonated the most.
- The analysis of Facebook posts showed that the content posted by MP M. Mazurek and Ľ. Blaha gained the highest number of interactions. However, this finding does not correspond with the real total share of interactions on Facebook for the whole year of 2021 – this indicator points to Blaha as a clear winner.
- Within the category of web content, we analyzed a total of 4,615 articles. The majority of the analyzed articles discussed the topic of Covid-19, with their number (1,783 articles) far exceeding all other topics (approximately 38.63% of all examined articles). The topics related to the USA and Russia came second.
- The majority of the analyzed articles were published by the website called Extraplus (1,620 articles), followed by Hlavný denník (946 articles) and Slovanské noviny (460).
- Analysis of the articles allowed us to identify links to individual political actors (direct citation or sharing of statements, videos, posts). In the total number of mentions, Ľuboš Blaha claimed the first place, followed by Robert Fico and Anna Belousovová.
- The web content differed slightly from the posts most popular on Facebook. For instance, M. Mazurek was not mentioned at all within the analyzed web content, despite the success of his posts on Facebook.
- The analysis of the content published both on the selected websites and Facebook points to a link between individual disinformation narratives. For instance, the Covid-19 topic was linked with other topics in many articles and posts.
- The examined content employed a relatively strong pro-Russian rhetoric, anti-Western narratives, as well as toxic content aimed against the government and its policies (especially in the context of Covid-19 and in connection with the US-SR defense agreement).

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# Introduction

Although disinformation and disinformation campaigns can be hardly considered a new phenomenon, the topic keeps resonating not only in the minds of the general public but also the expert community, which regards the issue as one of the most pressing security threats endangering the proper functioning and stability of democracy and the rule of law. Moreover, disinformation is also problematic due to its potential to manipulate public opinion on serious societal issues. It also poses a threat to the efforts to reinforce confidence in democratic institutions or foreign policy orientation of a particular state and its representatives and population. In the era of social media, disinformation offers a relatively cheap, quick, and easy tool **to polarize society and undermine the institutional, procedural, and value pillars of the state**. Their disseminators are typically various disinformation actors (politicians, disinformation media, social media, etc.) motivated by political, economic, social, or psychological factors. They use various tools and narratives, that are often linked to popular and critical topics with the potential to incite negative emotions, fear, and uncertainty. The aim of such efforts is not to convince the addressee, but to use the free flow of information in democratic societies to destabilize and polarize them and sow chaos.

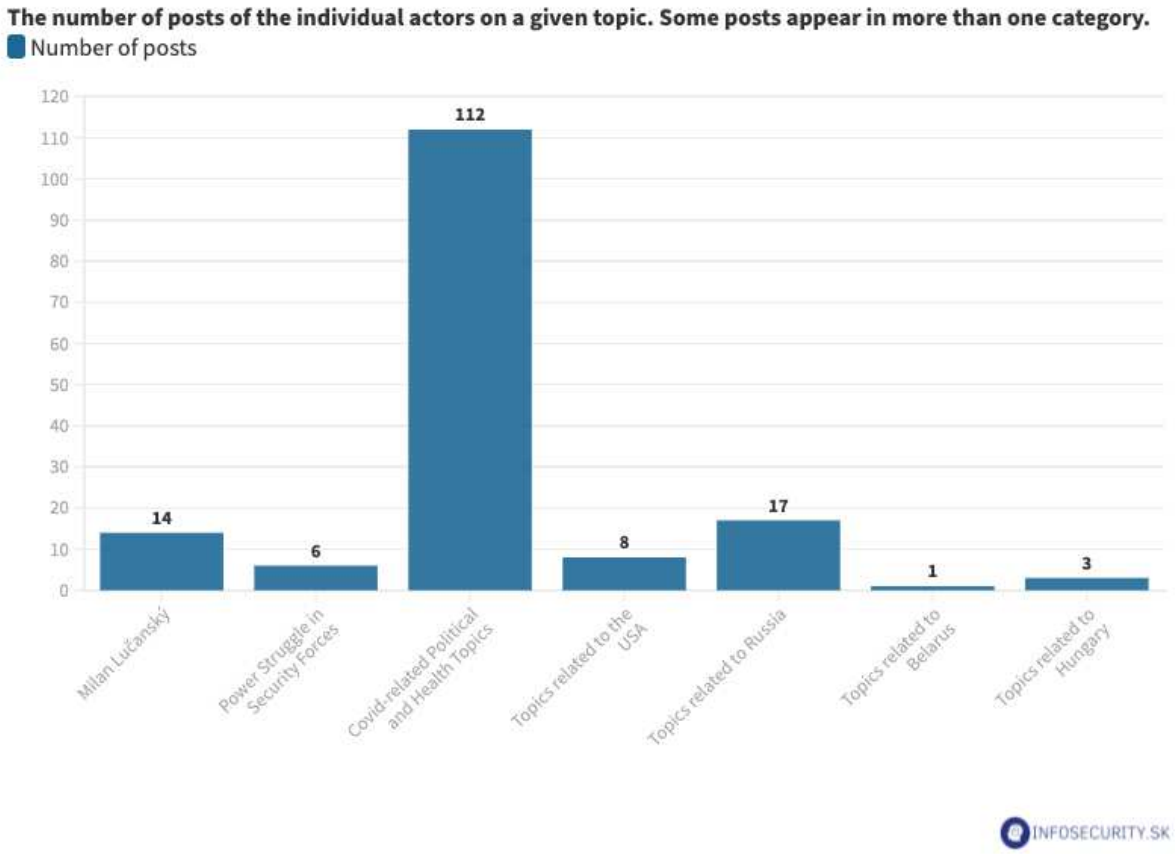
The Covid-19 pandemic created ideal conditions for the spread of disinformation which resulted in the so-called "infodemia". The sharp **increase in frequency and social legitimization of false information** was made possible precisely by the uncertainty of the times we live in. Its effect was amplified by crucial events not only in domestic but also in foreign policy, especially those related to the growing tensions in the international arena. The significance of the pandemic is underlined by the fact that **the impact of the disseminated disinformation was not limited to the online space; on the contrary, it was also felt in the real world**. Protests against and attacks on experts motivated by various factors in 2021 can serve as an example. **This means that there is a need not only for the monitoring of the Slovak information space but also for making use of this monitoring to further predict future developments within this space and to protect its health**. Monitoring is also crucial in the context of precautions employed by the state in the form of strategic communication and other measures.

In our research, we focused on topics that resonated with the public in 2021 and that, to some extent, also steered the political discourse. Based on long-term experience with activities related to the monitoring of the disinformation space and its actors, we have identified narratives that were used by the majority of disseminators of problematic content**. The most resonant narratives worked with false claims about the Covid-19 virus and the pandemic as such. They had both a health and a political dimension.** Besides these, narratives linked to the broader geopolitical context and the activities and influence of the Russian Federation, too, resonated with the Slovak public. Interestingly, pro-Russian narratives are not limited by

any boundaries but rather, as our research shows, they are often related to other topics, which is one of the distinctive features of the Slovak information space.

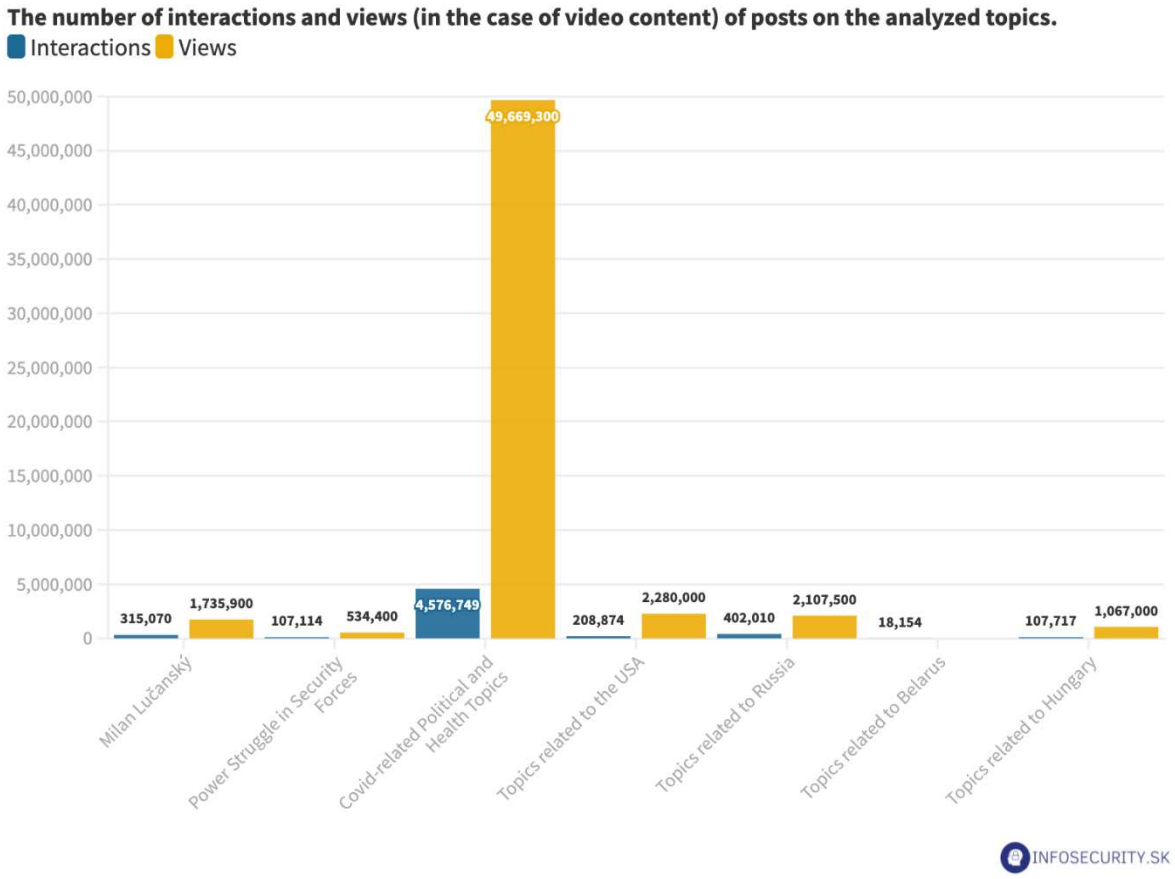
## Facebook Content Analysis

The analysis of the 150 most successful Facebook posts of selected actors has shown that in 2021, the topic of Covid-19 (mainly in the context of current political events) was the most popular on Facebook. Of the 150 analyzed articles, political and health topics related to the Covid-19 pandemic appeared in as many as 112 articles, followed by posts mentioning Russia (17 articles), and content discussing Milan Lučanský (14 articles). Many articles featured several narratives at the same time.




Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8818990/.

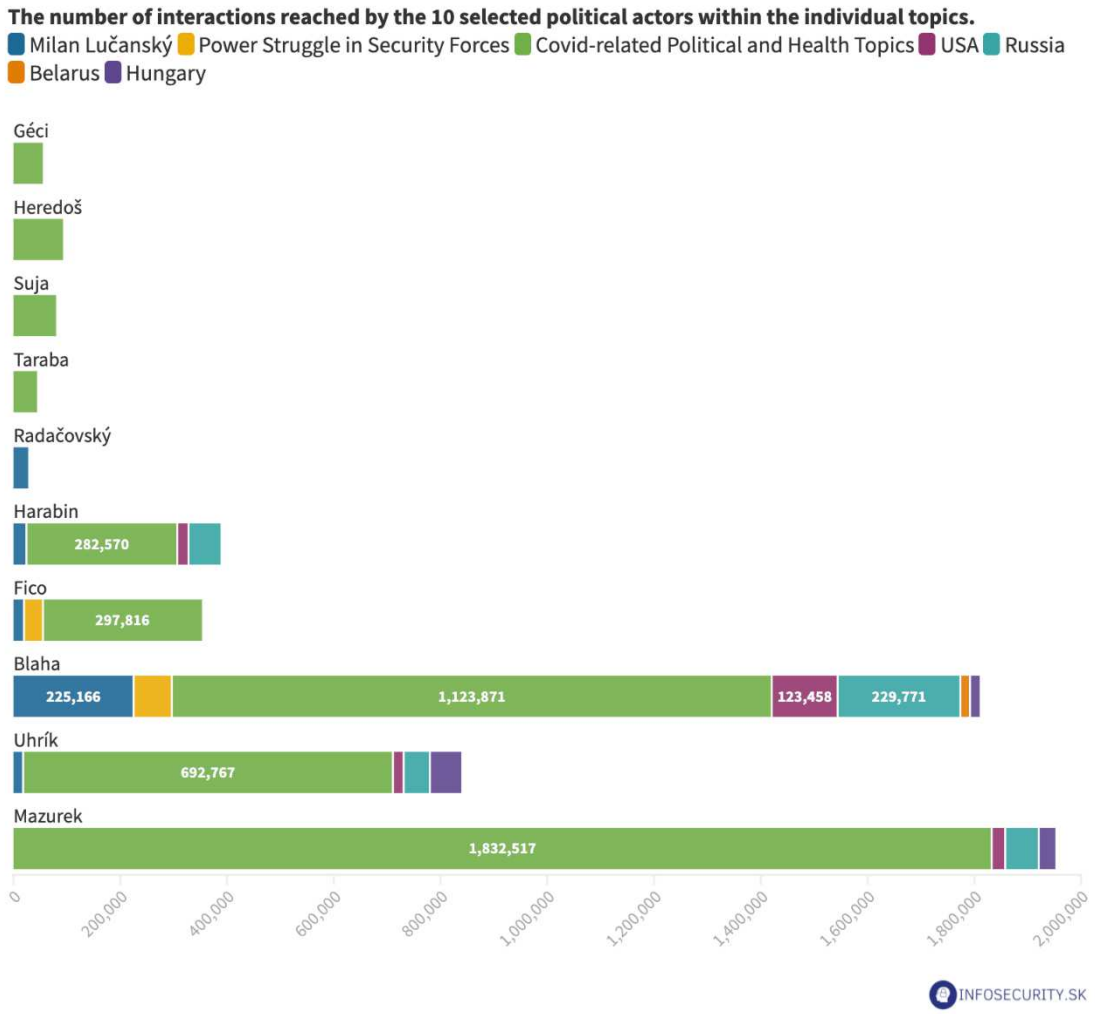
Covid-related political and health topics gained the most interactions in the analysis (see chart below). Interestingly, **in the case of Facebook content – 99 out of 150 most popular posts were videos** (representing 66% of all posts analyzed), while 51 posts were statuses (34% of all posts analyzed). Therefore, videos appeared at the top of the analysis, attracting not only a large number of interactions but also views.




Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8819011/.

An analysis of 150 posts on Facebook subsequently showed that the posts of two of the monitored political actors generated the highest number of interactions. One of them was a member of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Milan Mazurek, currently a member of the Republika movement (with a total of 1,951,708 interactions), and a member of the SMER-SD party, Ľuboš Blaha (with a total of 1,810,180 interactions). The most likely reason why Mazurek, who appeared only seldom in the analyzed web content, gained the most interactions is that the posts he published on Facebook were in almost all cases videos, that were able to attract a significant number of interactions. However, this finding only applies to the contributions analyzed in the study. This conclusion does not correspond to the real total share of interactions and views on Facebook for the whole year of 2021. This indicator points to Ľuboš Blaha, who used a combination of algorithms, a high quantity of published content, and paid campaigns, as the decisive winner.

In the category of views of video content, Milan Mazurek also ranked at the top (with approximately 24,021,000 views). Milan Uhrík (approximately 8,761,400 views) and Ľuboš Blaha (approximately 8,388,600 views) ranked second and third.

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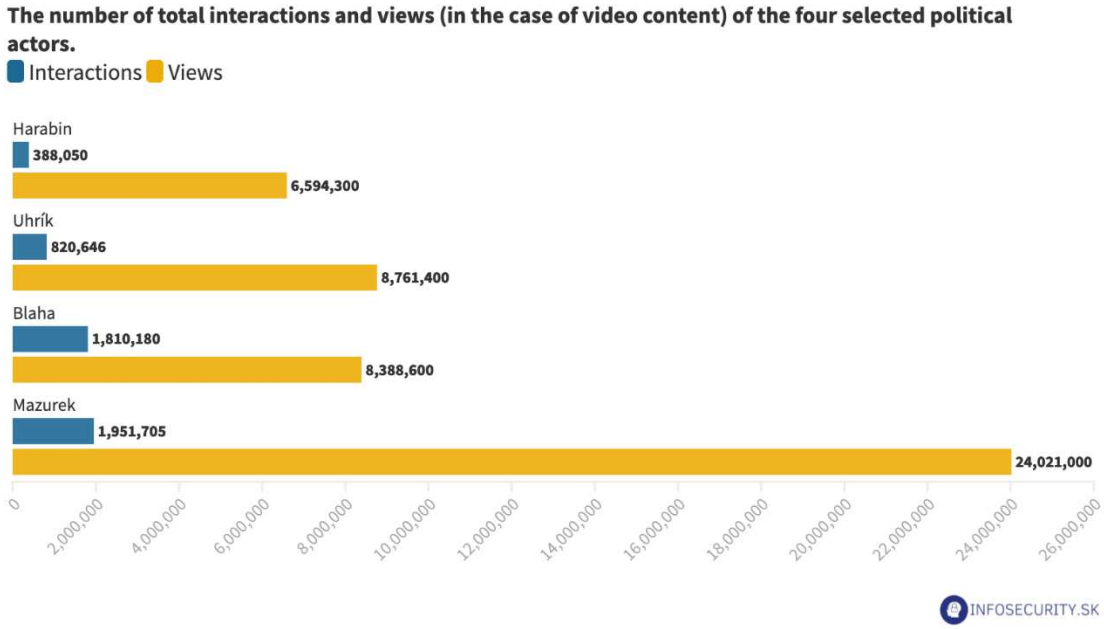
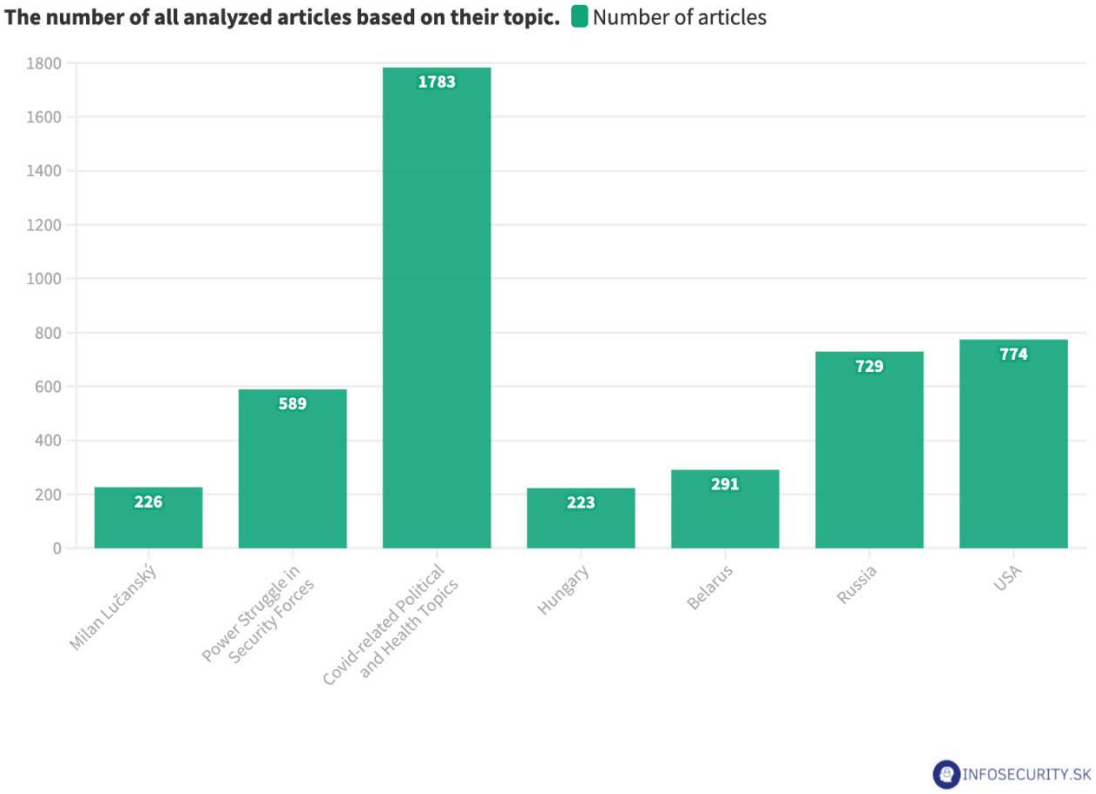


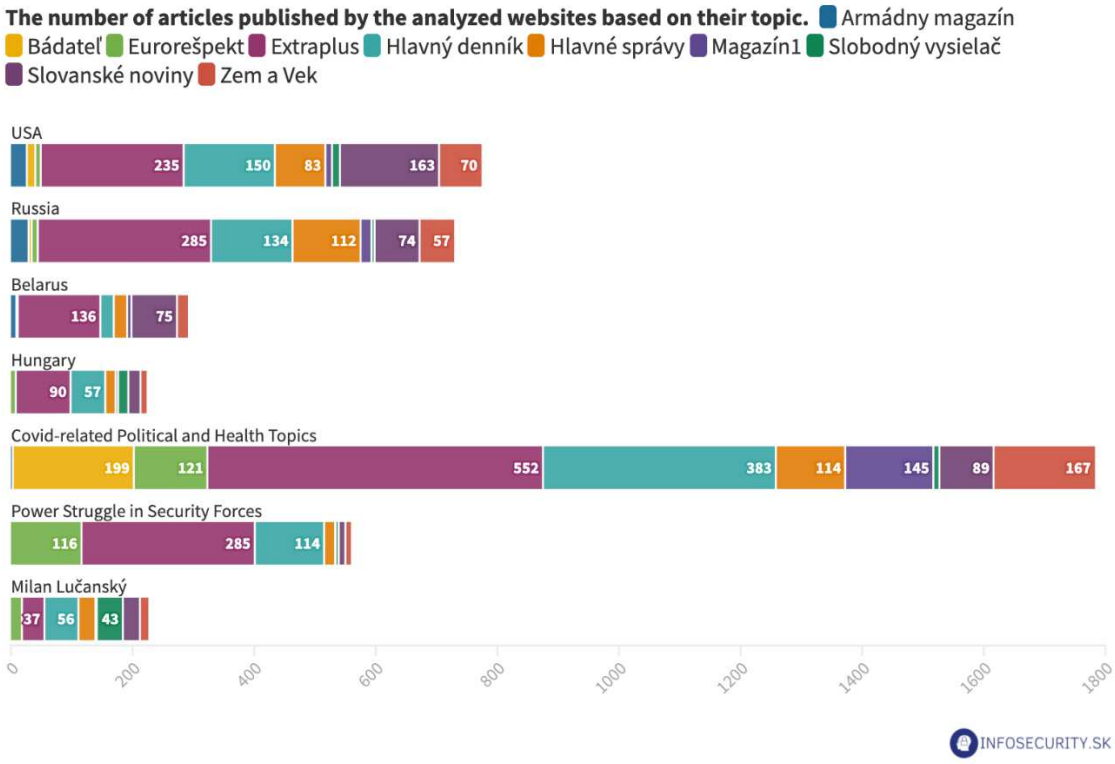

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8819168/.

## Web Content Analysis

We analyzed **a total of 4,615 articles** from selected websites. The majority of these articles discussed the Covid-19 pandemic. These articles were then placed to a joint set with content related to political and health topics. The number of articles related to the Covid-19 topic (1,783 articles) exceeded all other topical areas. The second and third most frequent topics were the USA (774 articles) and Russia (729 articles). The Covid-19 category included articles that touched on either domestic and foreign issues or on both at the same time.

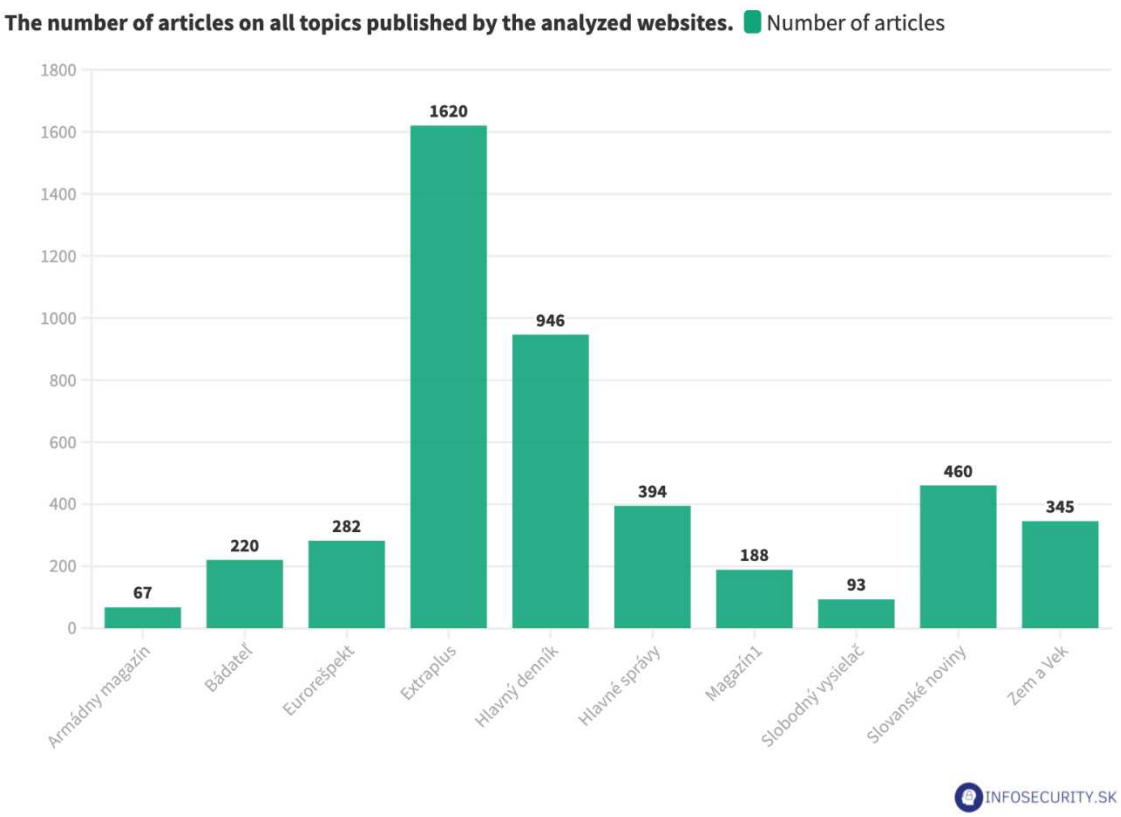



Data from CrowdTangle, publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8819195/.




Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8819212/.

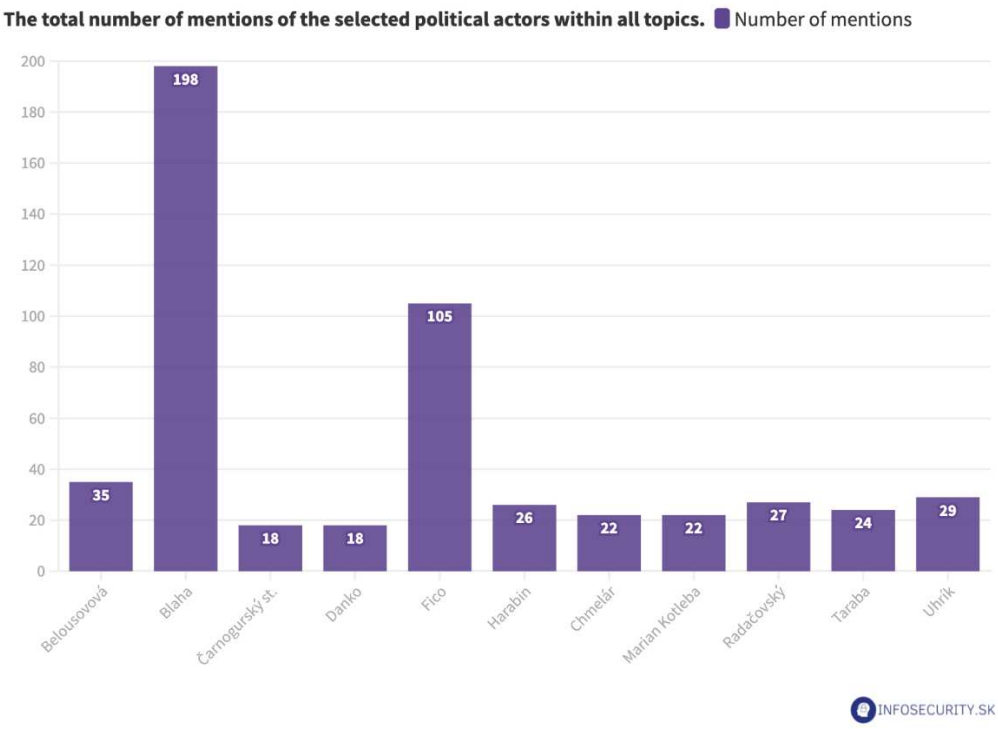
The analyzed articles were published by all ten websites that we had decided to include in our list of researched sites. **The majority of these articles were posted on the Extraplus** website (1,620 articles), followed by Hlavný denník (946 articles) and Slovanské noviny (460). It should be noted that these are only the articles we managed to identify by using the Gerulata analytical tool and a search by keywords.



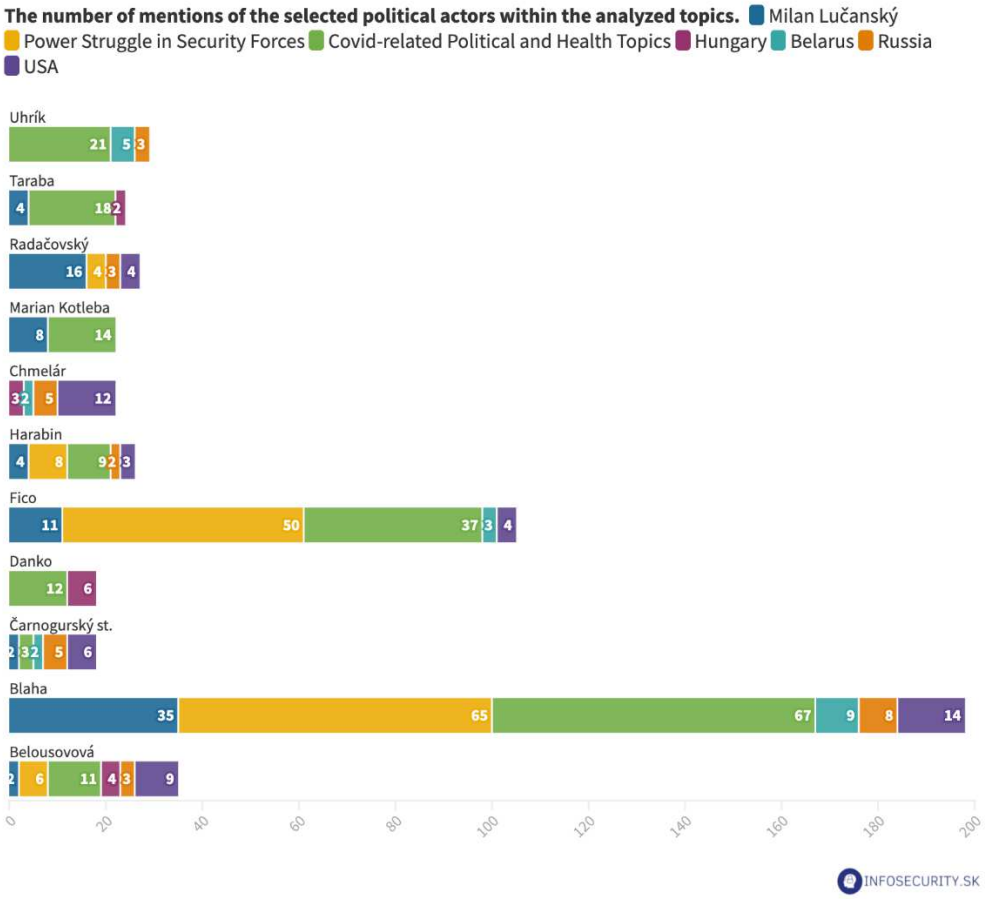

Data from CrowdTangle, publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8819240/.

The analysis of selected articles also allowed us to identify references to individual political actors, either by a direct quoting of the actor, or by sharing his statements, videos, or status. **In the total number of mentions, Ľuboš Blaha (198 mentions) ranked at the top of the list**, followed by Robert Fico (105 mentions) and Anna Belousovová (35 mentions), who also received the most mentions among selected non-parliamentary actors.

Interestingly, the web content did not follow the same pattern as in the case of social media posts (see Facebook analysis section). For instance, Milan Mazurek, a member of the Republika movement, was mentioned only seldom in the analyzed web content. We identified 6 mentions related to the topic of Covid-19, among which the lawsuit filed by the ID specialist Petr Sabaka against Milan Mazurek and Milan Uhrík for spreading lies about his work resonated the most. A graph showing the exact number of mentions of political actors in selected topics can be found below.




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8819283/.




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8819305/.

## Milan Lučanský

On December 6, 2020, Milan Lučanský, a former head of the Presidium of the Police Force, was, based on the charges by the National Criminal Agency (NAKA), placed in collusive custody. His arrest was a part of the Judas operation which resulted in charges against eight people who held senior positions in the Police Force, the Financial Administration, the Criminal Financial Administration Office (KÚFS), or the Slovak Information Service (SIS). According to the statement of the Specialized Criminal Court, which decided on their detention, the investigators uncovered a so-called "corruption tree" kept alive most likely by members of the police department, prosecutors, judges, and employees of various government agencies. Most of the charges in the Judas case, including Lučanský's, concerned corruption. Lučanský was charged based on the statements of former KÚFS director Ľudovít Makó, a former official at the police department Norbert Paksi, František Böhm, and former director of the National Financial Police Unit Bernard Slobodník.

On December 29, 2020, Milan Lučanský was to hang himself on a tracksuit, succumbing to his injuries the next day. The investigation into his death has not yet reached any decisive conclusion and remains open. However, the case has already been discussed and examined by an independent monitoring commission composed of politicians and experts, which has not found any evidence that would put the suicide version into question.

The disinformation actors responded to the news of Milan Lučanský's tragic death immediately after its announcement. Websites with problematic content along with some opposition politicians have promoted a series of conspiracies and disinformation narratives questioning whether his death was truly a suicide. Moreover, several of these actors had talked about political assassination even before Lučanský was pronounced dead.

At the time of writing the annual report, the official version of the reason for Lučanský's death was suicide, therefore we considered the disseminated narratives that contradicted or conspiratorially questioned it to be unsubstantional and speculative.

The topic of the death of the former chief of police, thanks to disinformation actors, has kept re-appearing in public discourse throughout the year. The topic was discussed either in the context of the nature of his death as such to question the government, state institutions, and their decisions or in connection with the competition and strife within the law enforcement institutions. Lučanský's suicide has become an important tool for inciting the feeling that government officials are abusing their power in the fight against their opponents, and the government has often been accused of fabricating political processes. At the same time, the topic was misused to attack the liberal media and journalists, who allegedly created an atmosphere of fear by reporting on the arrests of senior officials.

Throughout the year, a lot of false claims spread in the information environment, which raised doubts about Lučanský's suicide. According to these claims, the former chief of police was

supposedly abused and mentally tortured. Photographs of medical documentation allegedly talking about Lučanský and pictures of a beaten man circulated through the Internet aiming to refute the suicide version. Similarly, several conspiracies appeared claiming that he had been dead a few days before and his suicide was staged.

Some opposition politicians and websites publishing problematic content have turned Lučanský into a hero and a martyr. He was described as a victim of political persecution or a victim of political reprisals. Disinformation actors even used the #AllforMilan hashtag and likened Lučanský's death to the murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová in 2018. Their death had incited mass demonstrations that led to the fall of Robert Fico's government and triggered a series of investigations into affairs and cases involving high state officials.

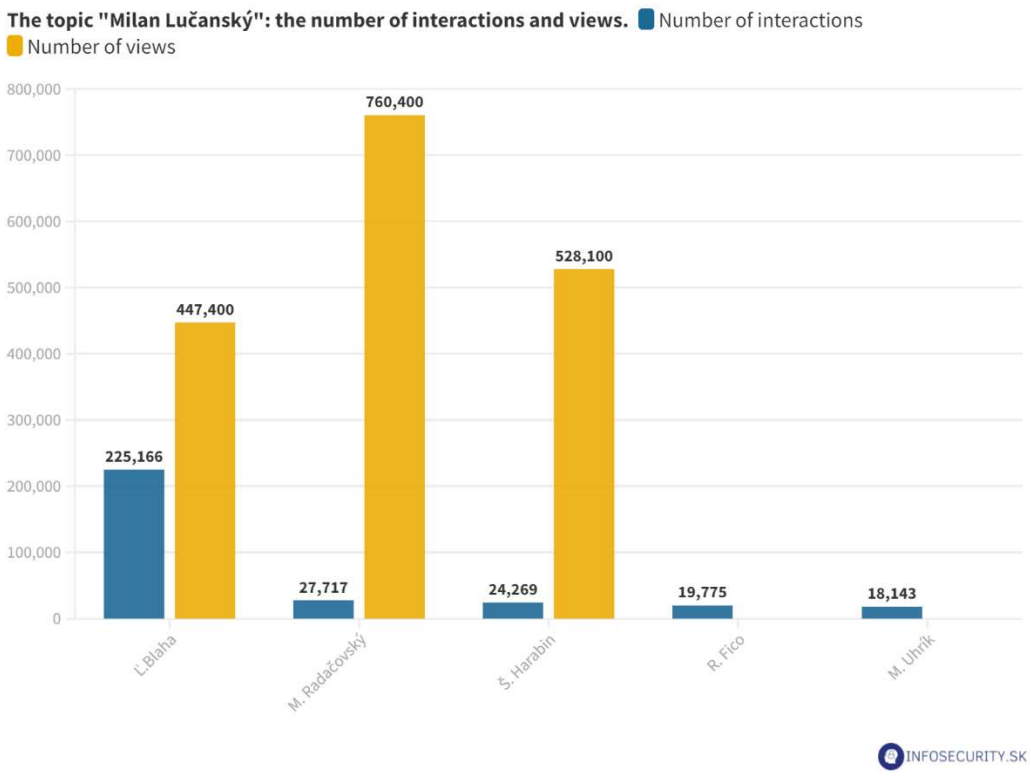
From the beginning, the government was accused of being responsible for Lučanský's death. Members of the government, according to disinformation actors, exploited their power over the prosecutor's office and launched political purges. Similarly, government officials allegedly tried to take control over the law enforcement branches, and Lučanský knew too much, stood in the way of the government's power interests, and thus had to be silenced. Liberal media have been accused of helping the government and trying to sweep the evidence under the rug. At the same time, the credibility of the independent special commission was questioned by claims that it does not, in fact, investigate anything and only serves as an instrument of the people at power.

Such rhetoric intended to call into question the legitimacy of the arrests of senior state officials and to provoke distrust in state institutions. The disinformation actors have succeeded in spreading the narrative of the universal data system, through which the government is said to send its opponents into custody. This way, government officials supposedly try to liquidate the opposition, and so innocent people end up in prison based only on the statements of untrustworthy denunciates and mobsters.

## Facebook: Political Actors

Among the 150 most successful posts of selected political actors in 2021, we identified 14 related to the death of the former chief of police Milan Lučanský which marks 9.33% of all contributions analyzed. Based on the findings of our analysis, **this topic achieved a total of 315,070 interactions.** Of these, the four posts, which were published in the form of a video, managed to attract **a total of 1,735,900 views**.

**Based on the analysis of 150 selected posts discussing this topic, Ľuboš Blaha (with 10 posts) ranked at the top of the list**. His posts achieved a total of 183,554 interactions and his video content attracted approximately 447,400 views. Other actors commenting on this topic included Miroslav Radačovský, Štefan Harabin, Robert Fico, and Milan Uhrík, who all published one post.




Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822500/.

**The most successful post about Lučanský's death was the one shared by Ľuboš Blaha**, an opposition MP for the SMER-SD party. It was posted on January 4, 2021, and **reached 27,684 interactions**. In the post, Blaha put the blame on the Minister of Justice, Maria Kolíková, who allegedly refused to take political responsibility for the tragic event. At the same time, Blaha called Lučanský the first victim of political persecution since the 1950s. The government allegedly decided to embark on "political purges" and Lučanský was put into collusive detention because of the "power misuse at the prosecutor's office".

Blaha also questioned that a fair investigation into the incident was possible. For example, the statute read: *"Kolíková is only a long arm of Kiska in the department of justice, and we are going to pretend that we can trust her? She is the nominee of Remišová who made Milan Lučenský into a target – and is she supposed to be the impartial guarantor of the independent investigation? Is she kidding us?"* and *"Of course, we will try to get as much information as possible from the special commission, but I'm sorry – if this is supposed to be justice for Milan Lučanský, forget it. We have to take every opportunity, but let's face it – what we see is the evidence being swept under the rug."*

The status can be seen as an attempt to score some political points, as five days after Lučanský's death, thus at the time of Blaha's post, no official conclusions were yet announced by the investigators or the special commission. Efforts to question the independence of the

investigation into the incident and attempts to portray Lučanský's detention as illegal are also evident in this post.

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

Very similar rhetoric was used in many other Blaha's posts, as well as in content posted by Harabin, Fico, and Uhrík. The underlying narrative in these posts claimed that the government was trying to cover up the tracks and intimidate anyone who tried to investigate the case. There was reportedly cogent evidence that the government was trying to put innocent people in jail to silence them. The charges in these cases were allegedly all fabricated and there was suspicion that the denunciates who testify against high-ranking state officials are just stooges used to destroy the opposition. Fico went as far as likening the government and its actions to a "semi-fascist regime".

MEP Uhrík called for an investigation into Lučanský's death with an international committee involved and argued that: *"It is important for the public to have a guarantee that people who do not blindly comply with the government will not be in a sudden car accident, fall on their own dumbbells during exercise or die mysteriously in prison cells."*

Several posts of political actors also claimed that Lučanský was tortured in custody and mentally abused. For example, Blaha said that it was very likely that Lučanský had been brutally beaten in prison, which caused his death. Štefan Harabin expressed a similar opinion. In the video, which had more than 528,000 views, he argued that it could have been a political assassination, forced suicide, or that the competent authorities had helped Lučanský in committing suicide. What these posts do is that they fabricate theories without any evidence to support them.

In their posts, Blaha, Harabin, and Fico spoke of Lučanský only as a hero who was imprisoned by the Slovak mafia. In 6 of the analyzed posts (42.86% of all posts on the topic) there was a strong appeal to emotions, the aim of which was to incite compassion in people and possibly question the actions of the law enforcement authorities. For example, Blaha reported in an emotional tone on Lučanský's wife's visit to the hospital bed, during which she was guarded by police officers. In his words, *"Yes, it was certainly necessary – to send a commando armed to teeth with machine guns to guard an unconscious, dying man. Because he was the biggest threat to Slovakia – if he happened to wake up, maybe he would tell his dear wife how much he loved her. This is why Mikulec's hyenas had to be there? This is why they acted, until the last moment, in such a humiliating and cruel way towards the hero who chased the mafia out of Slovakia?"*

A comparison of Kuciak and Lučanský's deaths appeared in four of the 14 posts about the death of the former chief of police. For instance, Blaha wrote: *"There is a dramatic difference between the All for Jan and All for Milan movements – I agree with the liberal media. But unlike them, I say that the All for Milan movement is more authentic and just. The former was a journalist who was not very well known until his death, while the latter was an important man who sent the biggest mobster and murderer in Slovak history, Mikuláš Černák, behind bars. The former was a nice young man, the latter was more than that – he was a hero ... There is also a second significant difference between the All for Jan and All for Milan movements. In the first case, the state had nothing to do with the death of the journalist. The case of Milan Lučanský is different."*

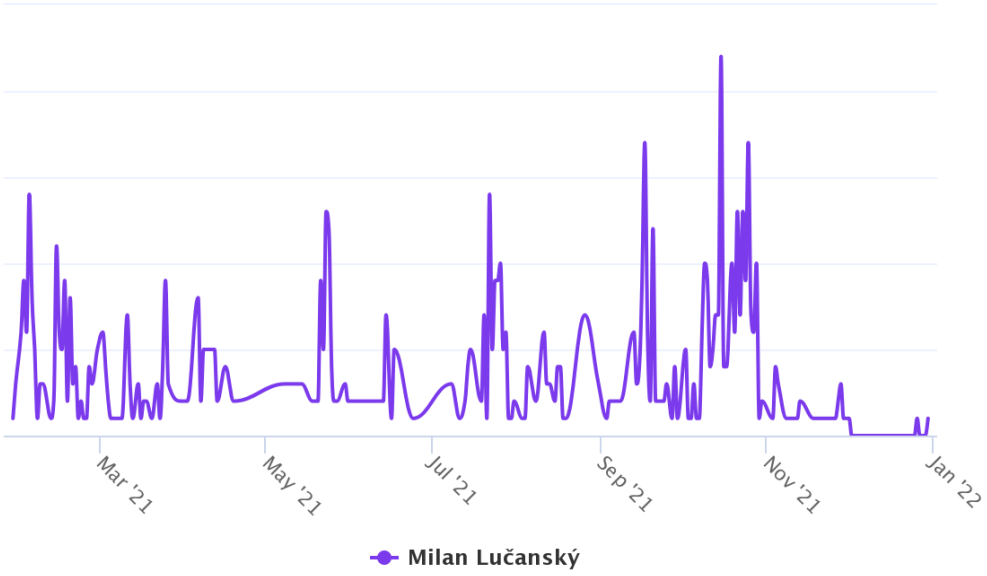
**The most successful video on the topic of Lučanský's death** was posted on the profile of MEP Miroslav Radačovský on January 15, 2021**. The video reached 27,717 interactions and had more than 760,000 views**. Radačovský, who is also a lawyer for the Lučanský family, shared a document with journalists stating that the former chief of police was to be transferred to a prison in Banská Bystrica on 9 December 2020. On the same day, Lučanský suffered an injury, after which he underwent eye surgery at a military hospital in Ružomberok. Based on the shared document, Radačovský asked how Lučanský could have been in two places at the same time. The MEP also questioned the prospect that the outcome of the future investigation could be objective and fair.

According to Anna Ragasová, a spokeswoman for the Prison and Judicial Guard Corps, this document, which was sent to the lawyer and Lučanský's wife, is easy to explain. The document says that the guards at the hospital in Ružomberok were replaced by guards from the institute in Banská Bystrica. However, Lučanský was never physically in this prison.

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

The analyzed posts concerning Lučanský's death focused on two basic narratives: his death itself (whether it was really suicide and questioning of the independence of the prosecutor's office) and the alleged start of political purges in Slovakia. In 8 posts (57.14% of all posts on the topic) there were allegations claiming that the prosecutor's office is being manipulated, mentions about political purges, and accusations of the government supposedly trying to get rid of its opponents by arresting high state officials. 6 posts (42.86% of all posts on the topic) questioned whether Lučanský's death was suicide. At the same time, 5 of these posts (35.71% of all posts in the topic) debated whether Lučanský had been tortured mentally or physically. In 3 posts (21.43% of all posts on the topic), political actors also questioned the independence of the investigation and expressed concerns that the incident would never be fairly inspected.

## Websites

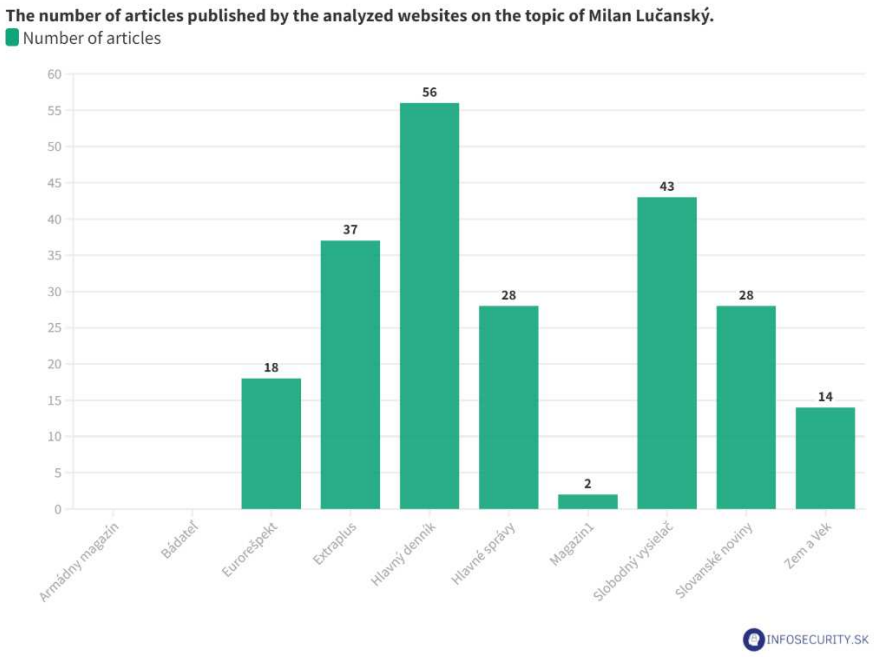



The graph shows the prevalence of the topic during 2021 in relation to other published content. Data were obtained using the Gerulata Juno analytical tool.

The amount of content related to the topic of Milan Lučanský and his death published by the examined websites in 2021 peaked during several key periods throughout the year. The major peak can be seen in the first three months of the year when the topic was still fresh and important to many political actors who commented on it. February, 13 marks the second peak, as on this day František Böhm, a former SIS employee, who testified as a witness in several cases, including the one concerning Milan Lučanský, committed suicide.

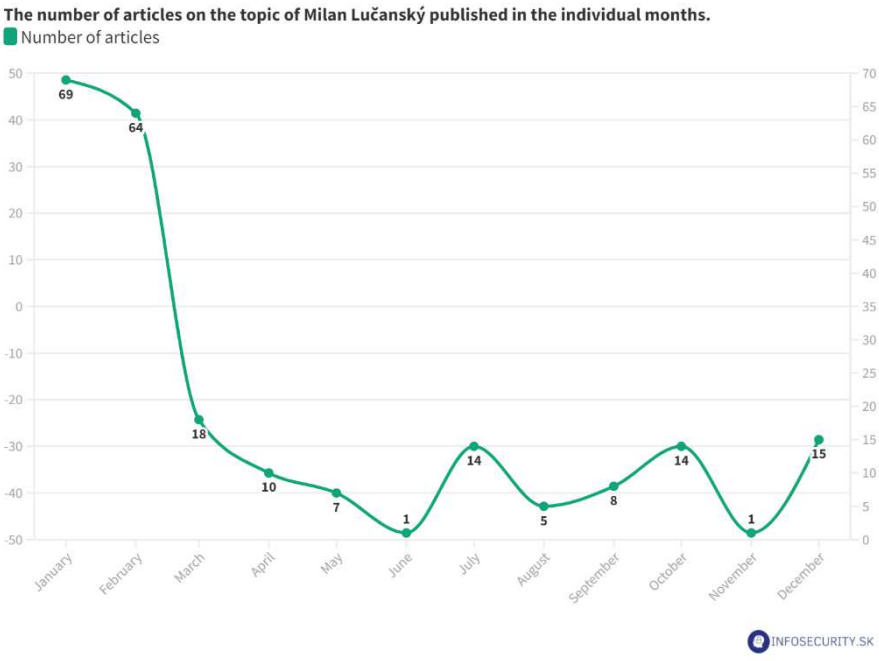
websites published a larger amount of content focused on this topic, was the end of July, after a protest in front of the National Council of the Slovak Republic took place. Finally, the last peak was in early October after the release of NAKA investigators.

Based on a set of keywords, we identified **226 articles** on the analyzed websites that were related to the topic of Milan Lučanský's death. **The highest number of articles on the topic was published by Hlavní denník** (56 articles), followed by the websites Slobodný vysielač (43 articles) and Extraplus (37 articles).



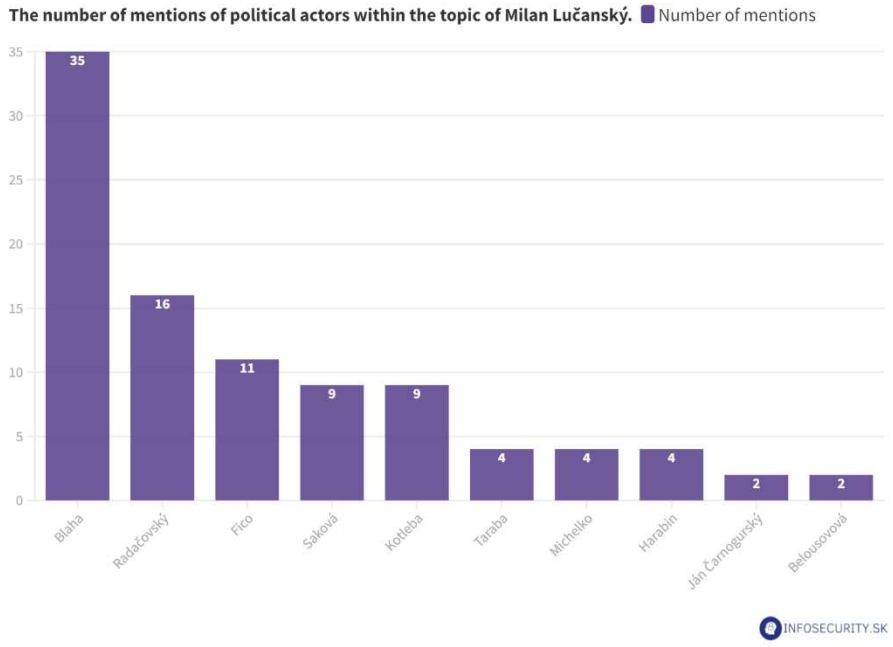

The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822524/.

Content related to Milan Lučanský and his death **peaked mainly in the first two months of the year** and then appeared sporadically throughout the year. The re-appearance of the topic can be explained, for example, by the linking of the topic with the tension and competition within law enforcement and security services. The actors, for instance, exploited the death of Milan Lučanský to portray him as "a victim of political persecution" in the context of widespread criticism of the government by the opposition and non-parliamentary entities.




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822534/.

Quoting and taking-over of statements, posts, and other content by political actors was quite common during the examined period. In the case of Milan Lučanský, **references to political figures most often concerned Ľuboš Blaha** (35 mentions), followed by statements and posts by Miroslav Radačovský (16 mentions), and Robert Fico (11 mentions).



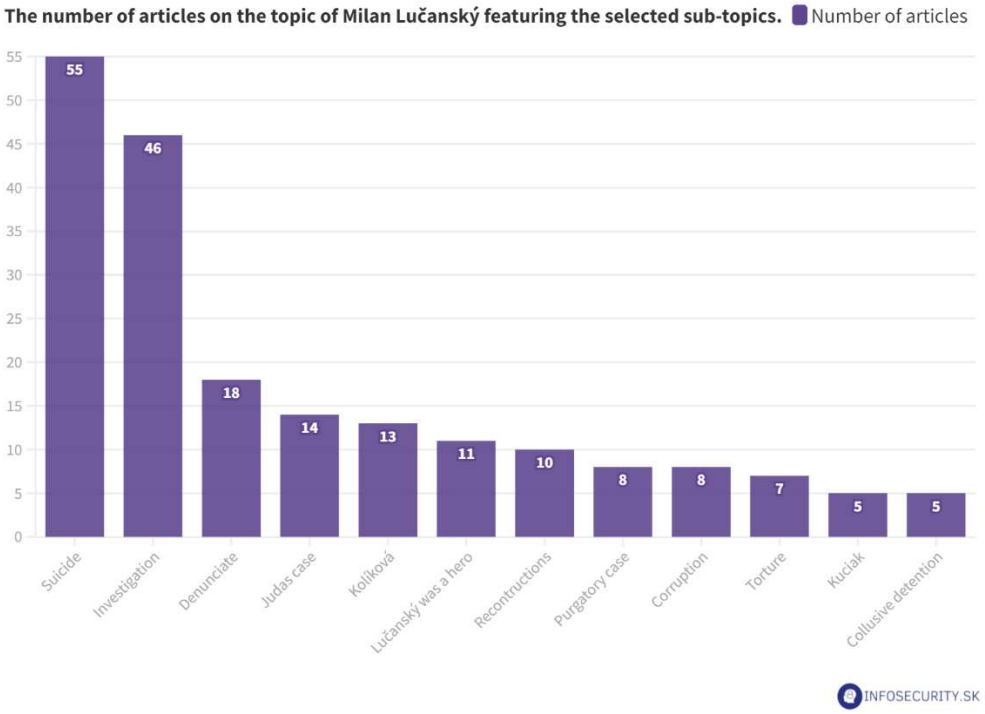

The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822571/.

Similar narratives appeared in the web content as in the examined Facebook posts. **Most of the articles questioned whether Lučanský's death was truly a suicide.** This narrative appeared in the case of 55 analyzed articles. Seven of these articles mentioned the alleged torture of Lučanský in custody. One of the most widespread narratives claimed that government and coalition politicians were involved in the incident. In line with this narrative, for example, the status of Ľuboš Blahu was taken over by Extraplus which in one of its articles argued that: *"They [Matovič's government] send people to prison based on fabricated charges. And then suddenly the denunciates are found dead after "committing suicide". However, I am far more concerned about what is happening in Slovakia: if the government was run by the mafia, it would not have looked different."* In September, Extraplus shared a similar statement, again by Blaha, which claimed that NAKA investigators have teamed up with mobsters to scare Smer nominees: *"Matovič has for years screamed that we all are mafia, and in the end, it turned out that he is the mafia."*

The topic was also exploited to question the legitimacy of the government and its members. Several websites contrasted the mafia government with Lučanský who was portrayed as the **hero fighting the mafia off** Slovakia. In this context, the phrases "Lučanský – the hero" (in the case of 11 articles) or "victim of political persecution" (occurred in the case of two articles)

were also used. Similarly, parallels between the murder of journalist Ján Kuciak and the suicide of Milan Lučanský appeared in five articles.

The second most common narrative was the (un)fairness of **the investigation into the death of Milan Lučanský** and the special commission set up for this purpose. This topic appeared in 46 researched articles. Other articles focused mostly on the topics of cases related to Milan Lučanský (especially Judas and Purgatory).




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8734736/.

## Power Struggle in Security Forces

One of the topics resonating in the Slovak information space in 2021 was the conflict within the state security forces - primarily in the police, the prosecutor's office, and the Slovak Information Service (SIS).

On one side of the conflict was the team of NAKA investigators, the Special Prosecutor's Office (ÚŠP), and the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic. On the other side of the conflict was the so-called anti-team, which included the Office of the Inspection Service, the General Prosecutor's Office, part of the Regional Prosecutor's Office in Bratislava, and SIS.

As early as in May 2021, SIS intervened in the investigation of serious cases of corruption on high levels of government. At its headquarters, Prime Minister Heger convened a secret meeting between SIS Director Michal Aláč and top state officials. The subject of the meeting

was intelligence on the influencing of and manipulating with witnesses in corruption cases by NAKA investigators. In response to this information, a police investigation team led by Diana Santus was set up as part of the police inspection to clarify the suspicions arising from the information from the SIS.

For several months, we have witnessed a battle between these two actors which brought along mutual accusations and arrests. In addition to the security forces themselves, politicians, activists, and other public figures have, too, become involved in the conflict taking one side or the other.

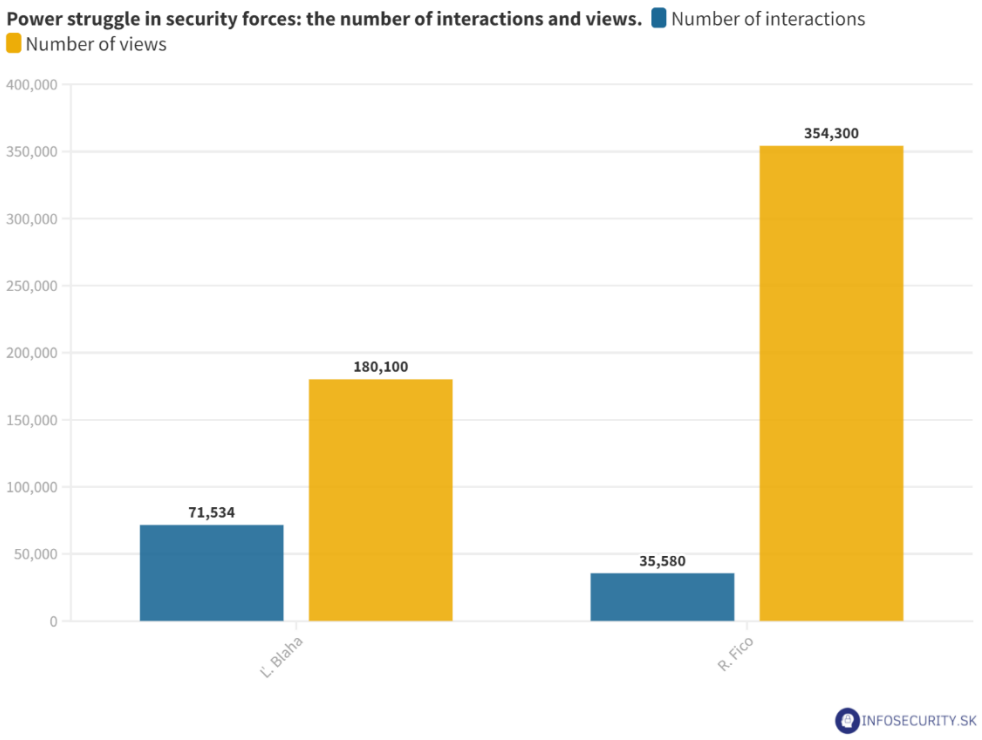
The considerable degree of complexity of the situation and a large number of unanswered questions made this topic an ideal tool for manipulating public opinion. Many of the actors who took this opportunity did not hesitate to gamble with the fragile confidence of Slovaks in the security forces.

In their posts, anti-team actors have often questioned the credibility of witnesses, NAKA investigators, and the Special Prosecutor's Office. To increase interest and incite an emotional response, some of the actors linked the power struggle in the security forces with other topics, such as the death of former police president Milan Lučanský. Attorney General Maroš Žilinka became the “hero” in these narratives. With his decisions and especially with the use of paragraph 363, he terminated the investigation of several key figures in corruption cases investigated by NAKA.

On the opposite side of the barricade, thus from the actors supporting the so-called team, narratives calling for trust in the police, the NAKA, the Special Prosecutor's Office were promoted. At the same time, these actors criticized the practices of Attorney General Maroš Žilinka, especially his use of paragraph 363 and his treatment of some journalists. This was reflected, for example, in preventing the journalists from the Pravda, SME, Denník N, and Aktuality from coming to a press conference. Attorney General made an excuse for this decision blaming it on the capacity of the room where the conference took place.

## Facebook and Political Actors

On Facebook, the two opposition politicians, Robert Fico and Ľuboš Blaha dealt with the conflict in the security forces with the greatest success. In their rhetoric, both tried to create the impression that the current government is trying to put pressure on the SMER-SD party and exploits the law enforcement agencies (OČTK) to do so. Within this topic, 6 posts were identified that met the selection criteria for the analysis, of which 3 were videos and 3 statuses. MPs Blaha and Fico have **attracted more than 107,000 interactions and 534,000 views** for their posts on the subject.




Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822595/.

The most successful post in this thematic category reached 18,088 interactions and was shared by MP Blaha. In this post, the Deputy Chairman of SMER responded to the statements of Attorney General Maroš Žilinka. At a press conference on September 2, 2021, he criticized President Zuzana Čaputová and the media for questioning the use of section 363. In his post, Ľuboš Blaha tried to create an image of an organized criminal group led by Igor Matovič and special prosecutor Daniel Lipšic, who is allegedly responsible for coordinated manipulation with witnesses in corruption cases related to the period of rule of the SMER party.

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

At the same time, Blaha claimed that the government was assisted in this effort by liberal media and journalists. As in most of his statements on this topic, he criticized criminal

prosecutions based on the statements of cooperating defendants, the so-called “denunciates”. However, both Blaha and Fico's criticism of the use of the denunciate institute is largely problematic because this investigative process already existed during their rule, and testimonies of members of criminal groups are an irreplaceable source of information about the structure and functioning of these groups. In addition, allegations in corruption cases are not based solely on the testimonies of denunciates, they are also confronted with the evidence and testimonies of other witnesses. In his status, Blaha also referred to the death of Milan Lučanský, who was, too, investigated based on testimony about his alleged corruption.

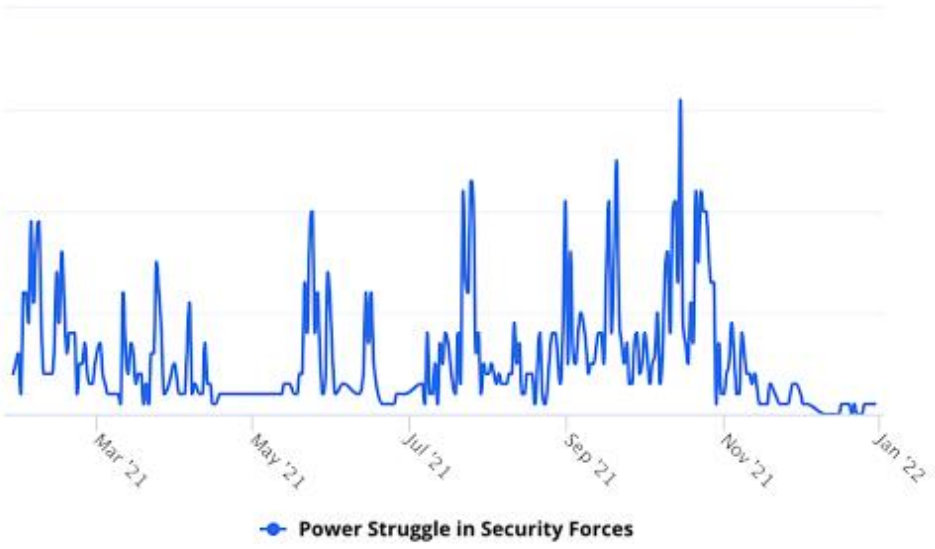
In a similar post from September 14, Ľuboš Blaha again attacked President Čaputová and raised suspicions of her indirect involvement in the alleged system of paid whistle-blowers. He claimed that Milan Lučanský had also become a victim of this system. In the post, Ľuboš Blaha misleadingly claimed that Peter Kubina, the legal representative of NAKA investigators detained by the police inspection, was an adviser to President Zuzana Čaputová. However, Peter Kubina ended his activity as a presidential adviser on May 25, 2021, precisely to avoid any suspicion of a conflict of interest in his legal activities.

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

Both Fico and Blaha used the phrase "Čurilla's Mafia" or "Lipšic's Mafia" in the analyzed posts on Facebook. The SMER members took this label over from the leader of the coalition party Sme rodina, Boris Kollár, who used this label on NAKA investigators after they were detained by a police inspection on suspicion of manipulating witnesses. However, the same investigators detained in March the former SIS director and nominee of Sme rodina, Vladimír Pčolinský.

In the case of both of these actors, the topic was manipulated in an attempt to attack the emotions of their audience, especially by linking it with the topic of the death of Milan Lučanský. As part of this, some of the information was misinterpreted by the actors, or false arguments and misleading claims were used.

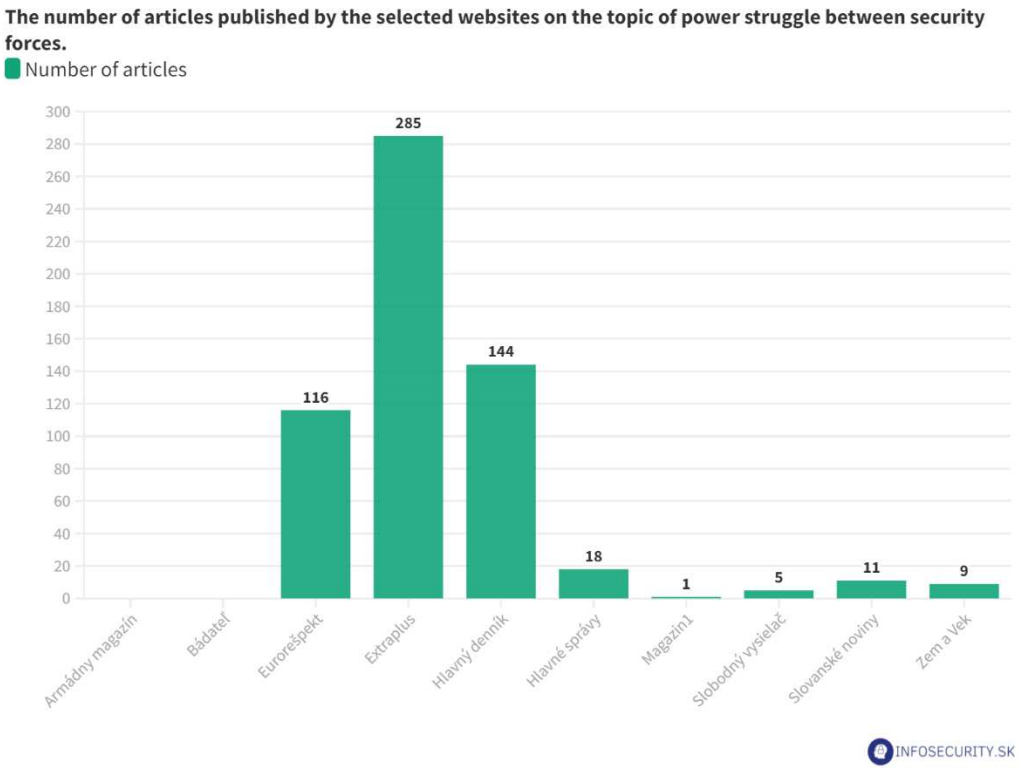
## Websites




The graph shows the prevalence of the topic during 2021 compared to other published content. Data were obtained using the Gerulata Juno analytical tool.

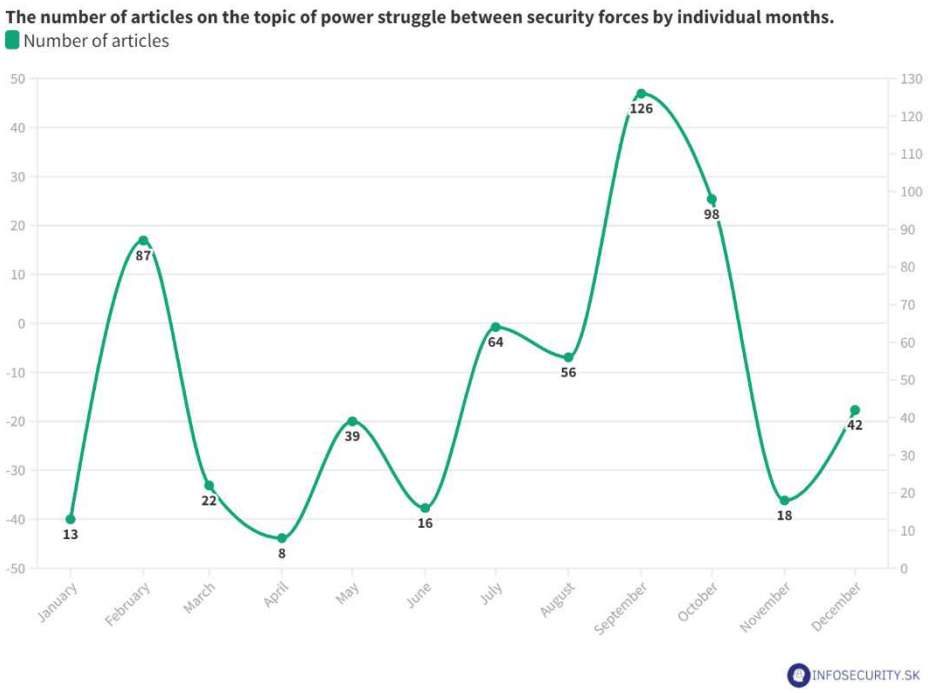
As with the topic of Milan Lučanský's death, in the case of the power struggle within the security forces, articles devoted to the use of the institute of denunciates, well-known cases, and the suicide of František Böhm appeared at the beginning of the year. At the end of May, the key topic was the SIS report on the manipulation of witnesses and manipulation of criminal proceedings by using the so-called universal witnesses.

Based on a set of keywords, we identified **589 articles** on the selected websites that were related to the topic of power struggle in the security forces of the Slovak Republic. **Most of the articles on the topic were published by Extraplus** (285 articles), followed by Hlavný denník (144 articles), and Eurorešpekt (116 articles).



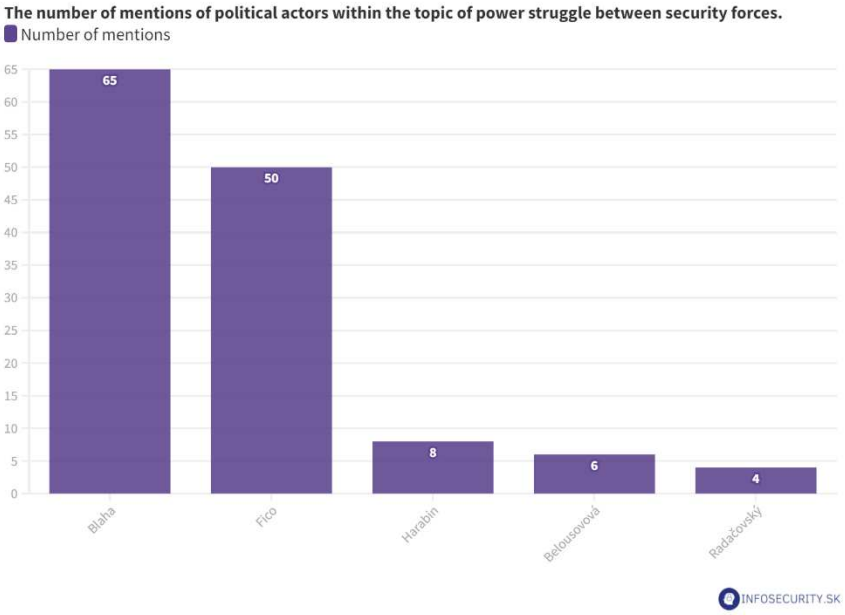

The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822608/.

The topic of the power struggle in the security forces **appeared in the analyzed web content mainly during September and October 2021**, when several NAKA members were detained in the "Purge" case investigated by the police inspection, and also during **February 2021**, when the media analyzed by us wrote mainly on the topic of security screening of then special prosecutor candidate Daniel Lipšic. The third key moment came about during July 2021, after the testimony of denunciate Ľudovít Makó, according to which former special prosecutor Dušan Kováčik helped him get rid of suspicion of preparing the murder of NAKA investigator Ján Čurilla.




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822621/.

Mentions about **Ľuboš Blaha (65 articles) appeared most often in the analyzed articles**, followed by Robert Fico (50 articles), and Štefan Harabin (8 articles). In addition, mentions of other actors appeared within the examined web content, namely Maroš Žilinka (13 mentions), Daniel Lipšic (9 mentions), Peter Pellegrini (8 mentions).

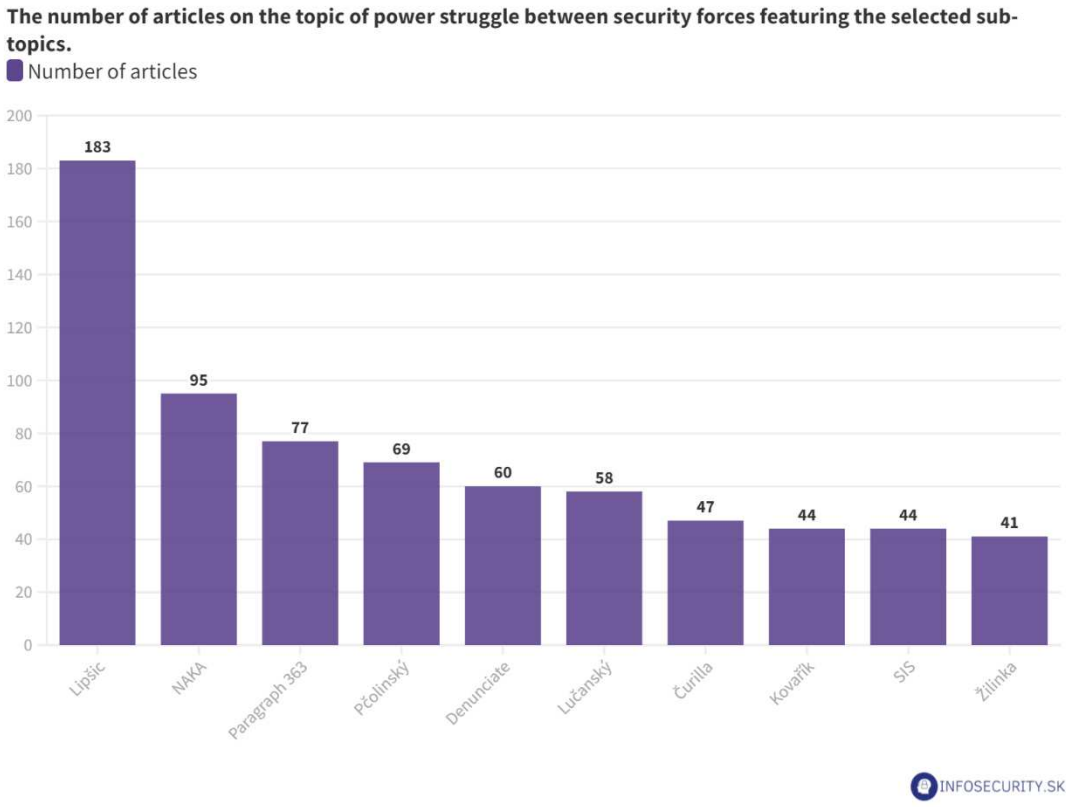



The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822632/.

Despite the absence of direct statements, several actors were often the subject of these articles. In the case of Daniel Lipšic, there were up to 183 articles, mainly related to his role at the **special prosecutor's office**. Ľuboš Blaha referred to the office as Lipšic's special prosecutor's office, "*which acts as the liquidation platoon of the government*" working on the instructions of Igor Matovič. His statement was taken over by Extraplus.

Peter Pčolinský was the subject of 69 articles and 58 articles on the topic of power struggle in the security forces discussed Milan Lučanský.

95 of the analyzed articles focused on allegations made against NAKA investigators and on the release of detainees, while 77 articles dealt with the use of **paragraph 363** by Attorney General Maroš Žilinka. This was in most cases viewed positively, as a legitimate use of the powers of the Prosecutor General's Office that the coalition is trying to undermine. In this context, Eurorešpekt talked about hysterical dictatorship and unprofessional police management. According to Ľuboš Blaha, the discussion on the possible narrowing of section 363 after the release of Peter Pčolinský was a purposeful manipulation because the government did not agree with the decision of the General Prosecutor's Office. The statement was shared by Extraplus.




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822640/.

## Covid-Related Political and Health Topics

Since its outbreak in Slovakia, the Covid-19 pandemic has almost immediately become not only a medical but also a political issue. The original intention of the research was to separate the two lines. However, during the analysis, it turned out that the monitored information space is dominated by content that does not distinguish between the two levels; on the contrary, it unites them into homogeneous rhetoric characterized by the use of different combinations of the same narratives. Due to the continuation of the pandemic, both medical and political issues have claimed a large segment of the disinformation space. In the qualitative part of the research, we thus point to the differentiation of health and political disinformation narratives, but fully acknowledge their interconnectedness. In the quantitative part, both dimensions have been put in one joint dataset.

Narratives questioning the severity of Covid-19 have been after the start of nationwide vaccination accompanied by vaccine skepticism. Throughout the year, anti-vaccination rhetoric was associated with resistance to government measures to stop the spread of the disease. The topic resonated especially after the purchase of Russian Sputnik V vaccines and has been continuously present in the steps and rhetoric of opposition and non-parliamentary political entities that supported and incited the protest movement against government measures.

The disinformation actors focused on questioning the safety of Covid-19 vaccines, as well as raising doubts about the real goals of vaccination. Mentions of the vaccines were often accompanied by the adjectives "experimental" or "not tested". Disinformation actors also called vaccination "a social experiment" and compared it to laboratory experiments on animals. According to websites with problematic content and various individual actors, pharmaceutical companies are the ones behind the vaccination campaign as they want to make profits regardless of the impact of these vaccines on human health.

Unsubstantiated reports or out-of-context information were often spread on social media about Covid-19 vaccines. Among the most common claims was that the benefits of vaccination do not outweigh the risks, that vaccines pose a greater risk than the virus alone, and that vaccination does not offer any protection against Covid. The severity of coronavirus was constantly questioned and belittled, while side effects or the risk of death after vaccination were exaggerated. Disinformation actors also exploited the deaths of several celebrities who were claimed to have died as a result of the vaccination while giving no evidence to support their claims. Examples include the death of moderator Jul Viršík, singer Miroslav Žbirka, and hockey player Boris Sádecký.

Besides vaccines, the disinformation actors have questioned the legitimacy of anti-pandemic measures. They claimed that wearing masks is said to limit the supply of oxygen to the brain, that the sole purpose of border restrictions is to bully the population, and the government is

trying to infringe on people's lives because they cannot move freely. Each measure was generally considered by disinformation actors to be a violation of fundamental human rights and freedoms. They justified this by saying that any restrictions were incompatible with freedom and the fundamental principles of a democratic society.

Frequently used words and phrases related to vaccination and anti-pandemic measures included apartheid vaccination, vaccination terror, coronafascism, segregation and discrimination, and the categorization of citizens into superhumans and subhumans. The government was described as totalitarian, Nazi, or fascist, and government officials, scientists, and doctors were compared to German Nazi officials. At the same time, disinformation actors spoke of the loss of fundamental human rights and freedoms, crimes against humanity, state-organized terror, government tyranny, dehumanization, oppression, and humiliation of unvaccinated citizens.

False claims have been spread that the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic was going to deprive the unvaccinated of the right to vote and that the government, together with the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, started building a concentration camp for the unvaccinated. The disinformation about the concentration camp was started by the announcement of the MOVIR project of the Technical University of Košice (TUKE), which aims to create a monitoring system to protect at-risk groups from the spread of viral diseases.

Using polarizing rhetoric, the disinformation actors have succeeded in increasing tensions in society, resulting in a series of protests at state borders, in front of doctors' homes, and in front of state institutions.

In the autumn, mask-free shopping, which disrupted the normal functioning of stores and against which the police had to intervene in several cases, earned great media attention. These acts of resistance were directed against vaccination and government measures to stop the spread of the disease. At the same time, in the autumn of 2021, people were called upon to launch a general strike, the main reason for which was the government's efforts to introduce compulsory vaccination. Some opposition politicians and websites publishing problematic content invited citizens to take part in the protests throughout the year. The political topics described below related to the Covid-19 pandemic formed a significant part of the content disseminated by disinformation actors.

## Sputnik V Purchase

The fact that Sputnik V lacked a registration of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) at the time when the then Minister of Health Marek Krajčí announced his intention to make the purchase (February 3, 2021) played an important role. Krajčí stated that the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic may issue a permit for the use of an unregistered vaccine. In mid-February, then Prime Minister Igor Matovič indicated that he was willing to provide Russian vaccines even without EMA permission.

On March 1, Matovič announced the arrival of the first delivery of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine at Košice Airport (the EMA registration process did not begin until March 4). At the same time, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivan Korčok unaware of the situation informed at a press conference on the issue of foreign policy consequences of the purchase. He subsequently said that the Russian Sputnik V vaccine was an instrument of hybrid warfare. He argued that the fact that the manufacturer did not apply for EMA registration until March 4 proves that it was a political tool in the hands of the Kremlin. He also described as inappropriate the presence of the Prime Minister at the arrival of the first supply of vaccines, as other vaccines had not been received and welcomed in this way.

In addition, the vaccine has quickly become one of the main subjects of the disinformation narratives in the first half of 2021. Various actors took over the narratives from Russian pro-Kremlin sources and official institutions, and at the same time used the topic as a tool to oppose the then government.

It should be noted that the topic was so resonant due to the long-lasting campaign of many pro-Kremlin actors who have been since September 2020 spreading disinformation and conspiracy narratives about Covid-19 and vaccines.

These were mostly medical disinformation (for example, that the human adenoviruses used by Sputnik V are "more natural" than those "monkeys ones" used by the AstraZeneca vaccine), but also pro-Russian propaganda narratives (for example, that the Kremlin revealed "*the Western plans for a large campaign against Sputnik V*," that the Russian vaccine was "*registered as the first in the world*," that Russia thus won the race to develop the vaccine, and that the situation confirms the "*historical truth that rescue always comes from Russia*" and so on).

At the same time, these narratives served to discredit EMA and the European Union, whose vaccine supplies were deliberately downplayed, and, conversely, the purchase of vaccines from Russia was portrayed as an act of friendly help. The purchase also received a response in the Russian media, where Matovič's words of gratitude were taken over, and the purchase of Russian vaccines in the Slovak Republic as an EU member state was overtly emphasized. Maria Zacharova from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also commented on Ivan Korčok's claims about the Russian vaccine as a tool in hybrid warfare and deemed them inappropriate and insensitive in the context of the current global pandemic situation.

## Anti-Government Protests

Along with the spread of the pandemic, an extensive disinformation campaign took place in the Slovak information space against government measures, political and medical authorities,

as well as against the EU. In 2021, the topic of vaccinations and vaccines resonated the most within the disinformation narratives, and the spread of these narratives resulted in the formation of a widespread anti-vaccination movement. Its first protest took place at state border crossings beginning on July 5, 2021, when the government's decision to tighten border controls and close some border crossings due to the spread of Covid-19 came into force.

The first clashes erupted at the borders of the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic – Horné Sŕnie and Vrbovce. The biggest protest took place between the villages of Vrbovce (SR) and Velká nad Veličkou (CZ). Another key protest was held on July 9, 2021 and the crossings Petržalka (SR) - Rajka (HU) and Svrčinovec (SR) - Mosty u Jablunkova (CZ). Some political actors began to express support for the movement, both on social media and by participating in protests.

Several protests took place during the second week of July in front of the homes of doctors who publicly support vaccinations (ID specialist Pavol Jarčuška, Vladimír Krčméry, and pediatrician Elena Prokopová). The biggest protest was held on July 14 in front of the house of the chief hygienist Ján Mikas.

Later, several more protests were held in front of the buildings of several state institutions: on July 10 in front of the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic; July 23 in front of the building of the National Council of the Slovak Republic; July 29-30 in front of the National Council of the Slovak Republic and the Presidential Palace; August 5-7 in front of the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Presidential Palace. The events of these summer months culminated in the protests on the Day of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic on September 1 in Bratislava and Košice in front of the building of the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic. Subsequently, protests took place in the capital on November 17, the Day of the Struggle for Freedom and Democracy.

Disinformation actors and media with problematic content regularly reported on alleged violations of the constitution and laws restricting citizens' rights, which they said would lead to catastrophic consequences: segregation, discrimination of the unvaccinated, apartheid (category 1 vaccinated, category 2 non-vaccinated), or even genocide. By spreading these alarming reports, conspiracies, and misleading information, these actors amplified the fear and distrust of citizens. There was also an effort to unite opposition political forces against the government as a common enemy. At the same time, the ability of these political entities to act in unison and “join” forces to combat the system personified by the government and the parliamentary coalition could be seen.

## Referendum on Early Parliamentary Elections and Electoral Law

A widespread disinformation narrative that emerged in early August 2021 was the supposed attempt by Interior Minister Roman Mikulec to amend the electoral law so that unvaccinated people would not have the right to vote. It was alleged that the government was trying to manipulate the elections, which was to meant the end of democracy in Slovakia. By spreading this narrative, disinformation actors hoped to promote and boost participation in anti-government protests on September 1.

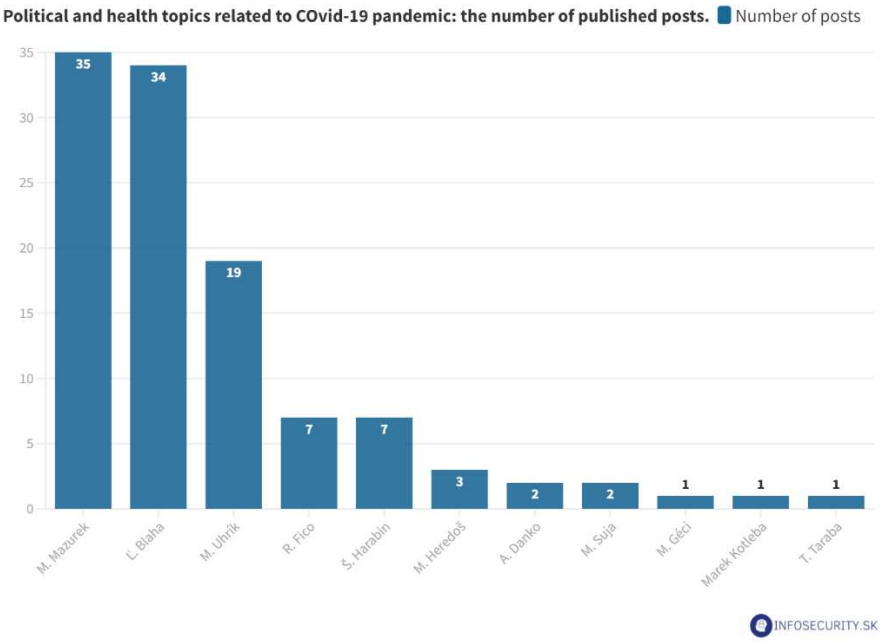
Another resonating topic was the effort of opposition entities to hold early parliamentary elections based on a petition action they initiated. The question of amending the Constitution of the Slovak Republic so that the legislative period of the National Council of the Slovak Republic could last shorter if a valid referendum was held on the matter thus entered the public discussion. More than 600,000 people have supported the petition for a referendum on early elections. The referendum question was: "*Do you agree that the VIII. term of the National Council of the Slovak Republic should be shortened so that the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic could take place within 180 days from the date of the announcement of the results of this referendum?"*

President Zuzana Čaputová turned to the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic in this matter. On July 7, 2021, the court decided that the issue of the proposed referendum on shortening the term of the National Council of the Slovak Republic was not in accordance with the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. Despite the official position of the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic, narratives emerged in the Slovak information space that the president had deliberately thwarted the referendum. According to Petr Pellegrini from Hlas party, it was a "*sad day for Slovak democracy*". The former Prime Minister Igor Matovič spoke about the president's malicious actions, which he considered "*mean, insidious, and a spit in the eyes of 600,000 people*."

## Political Actors on Facebook

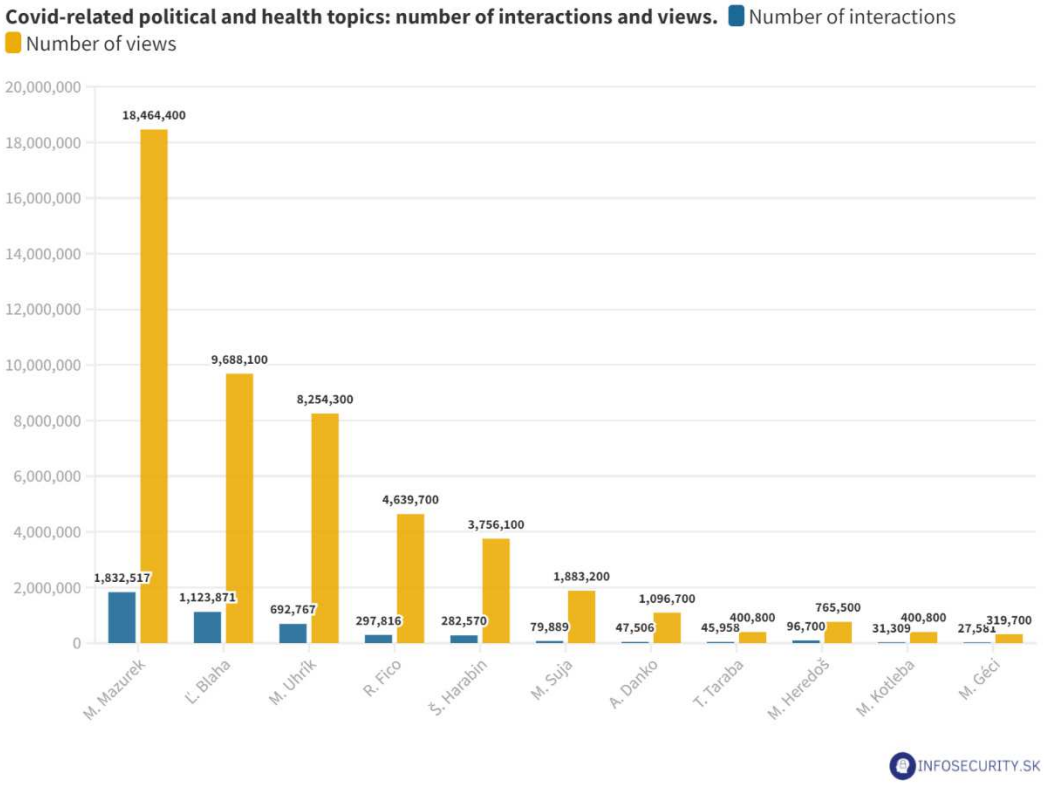
After analyzing 150 Facebook posts of selected political actors based on a set of keywords, we found that political and health issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic appeared in the largest number of posts and attracted the most interactions.

**112 Facebook posts** discussed these topics. They appeared mainly in posts by MP M. Mazurek (35), Ľ. Blaha (34), and M. Uhrík (19). Other posts were shared by R. Fico (7), Š. Harabin (7), M. Heredoš (3), A. Danko (2), M. Suja (2), and 1 post was published by opposition politicians M. Géci, Marek Kotleba, and T. Taraba.




Data from CrowdTangle, publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822652/.

The total number of interactions of the posts in which we identified political and health references related to the Covid-19 pandemic, was 4,576,749. Video content in this category received approximately 49,669,300 views.




Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822661/.

These were mostly posts on the following topics: state of emergency, compulsory vaccination, general strike, vaccination passes (so-called covid passports), testing, measures introduced or being prepared by the government during the period under review. At the same time, there was an overlap between political and health issues. For example, many government measures to prevent the spread of the virus have been downplayed or linked to health disinformation by selected political actors and have been used as arguments proving the government's incompetence and alleged human rights abuses.

**The post with the highest number of interactions** on the Covid-19 topic was published on February 25, 2021, on the page of the opposition MP Milan Mazurek, currently active in the Republika political movement. It was a video of a speech by MP Mazurek in the plenary of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, in which he addressed the topic of the state of emergency, measures, and the forthcoming referendum on early parliamentary elections. The video **received 82,499 interactions and approximately 1.26 million views**.

In the post, Mazurek opposed the introduction of a **state of emergency but also spoke against Covid-19 testing, movement restrictions, and other measures**. He argued that the introduction and extension of the state of emergency in Slovakia, together with other measures, will serve the government and allow it to deny basic human rights and freedoms to people. At the same time, it was an effort to support the business of MOMs (mobile collection points), which were performing antigen testing. Mazurek called the introduction of measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 an attempt to ruin the entire state by constantly prolonging the state of emergency.

The post also stated that "*Third world countries managed to save many more lives than we do, thanks to offering to the people who have a bad health condition or a severe form of this disease* ***treatment with high doses of vitamins and ivermectin****, which is also used in Slovakia*". He thus mitigates the health risks associated with Covid-19 and offers drugs with potentially dangerous consequences for human health.

At the end of the post, Mazurek stated: "*We will continue to fight! We will soon offer Slovakia an alternative and I believe that the signatures for the referendum will be collected as soon as possible so that the nation can express itself*!" This statement referred to the planned referendum on early parliamentary elections which in the end did not take place due to a ruling of the Constitutional Court.

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

The post, which received the **second-highest number of interactions (72,645),** also came from Milan Mazurek. The video was published on November 20, 2021, and had **750,800 views** at the time of data collection. It focused on the topic of compulsory vaccination and other anti-pandemic measures. According to Mazurek, the Slovak Republic took the example of Austria, which announced harsh measures and mandatory vaccinations for its citizens. In the video, he argued the government plans to divide citizens into two categories – those with rights (vaccinated) and those without rights (non-vaccinated).

Mazurek used **false arguments and misleading dramatization** in the post, claiming that a temporary lockdown would lead to a "complete closure" for all and bring the aforementioned division of the population into two categories. According to him, the real goal of the government's measures was to be "*the introduction of totalitarianism, the restriction of human rights, and a new normality*", which was to mean "*living in a huge totalitarian gulag*". The opposition MP questioned the authority of government experts, as well as the measures themselves and especially the vaccination. He claimed that it was completely irrelevant how many times people could be vaccinated and what percentage of vaccination the state would have. The post, therefore, carried elements of political and health issues related to Covid-19.

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

**The video published by Štefan Harabin on November 28, 2021, was also successful. The video reached 70,351 interactions and had more than 910,100 views**. In our ranking of the 150 most successful posts, it took third place. The video captured an interview with Russian academic Alexander Redko, in which he talks about vaccines against Covid-19.

**The almost 4.5-minute video promoted a lot of misleading and false information**. In the interview, Redko claimed that the vaccine was not effective against the mutated virus because the original virus no longer existed. He also said that a safe vaccine against Covid-19 did not exist because the research had not yet been completed and preliminary results indicated that the vaccination had no anti-epidemic effect. He described the vaccination against Covid-19 as a large business project that is based on lies. According to Redko, up to 25% of Covid-19 vaccines are only placebo. The remaining doses are said to have no positive effect or even increase the risk of a serious form of the disease. Finally, he added that he knew a number of people who had become seriously ill or died after being vaccinated against Covid-19.

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

The alleged **danger and ineffectiveness** of vaccines were among the most common narratives in the analyzed posts. In this context, Slovak political actors mostly disseminated false information and information taken out of context, which resulted in uncertainty and fear.

A select group of political actors kept calling the Covid-19 vaccines experimental, which was meant to raise doubts about their safety. Milan Mazurek has repeatedly claimed in several posts that vaccine manufacturers are not responsible for any side effects after vaccination. According to the MP, everyone knows someone who had serious side effects after the vaccination or even died as a result of the vaccine.

In an effort to discredit the Covid-19 vaccines, political actors have also attacked vaccine-producing pharmaceutical companies. According to MP Blaha, "*greedy pharmaceutical corporations*" use us as guinea pigs. In fact, companies are not concerned about people's health, but only about earnings. Government officials are reportedly being paid by pharmaceutical companies to promote the vaccines. On the topic of vaccinating children, Blaha said: "*The government has turned us into a laboratory for American pharmaceutical firms and risks the lives of our children! They want to experiment on our Slovak children.*" By exploiting this topic concerning children, Blaha appeals to emotions and the basic human instincts like the protection of the weakest.

In addition to questioning the safety of vaccines, the politicians analyzed resorted to allegations that vaccination against Covid-19 was ineffective. For example, non-parliamentary

politician Andrej Danko said: "*Vaccination will not solve Covid, (...) there is no such thing as collective immunity."* Blaha expressed a similar opinion in his post in which he wrote that it is not possible to achieve collective immunity to viruses because they mutate. According to Fico and Blaha, vaccination against Covid-19 does not help even in countries where almost the entire population is vaccinated, as the number of infected is growing there as well. At the same time, however, they completely neglected the severity of the disease or the situation in hospitals.

One of the most frequent claims was that **the new wave of the disease was caused by vaccinated people**. Blaha wrote: "*Without vaccination, the pandemic could have been over by now*". In this case, he spreads disinformation based on the claim that the virus only mutates in vaccinated people, and it is because of them that more contagious variants arise.

Efforts have also been made to substantiate misleading claims about the dangers of vaccines with expert studies. For example, Blaha informed about a study from the scientific journal Vaccines. Based on this study, he said that the Covid-19 vaccine might kill more people than it could save. He also said that "*dramatically more people may die from vaccination*", "*it is clear that only a fraction of serious side effects have been reported*" or that "*experimental Covid vaccines can have long-term consequences, even after a longer period of time (…) the number of deaths can be much higher*."

However, the study cited by Blaha was withdrawn due to serious concerns about the misinterpretation of the data, which led to incorrect and distorted conclusions. The research was withdrawn on July 2, 2021, Blaha published his contribution on July 9, 2021. Given that the reader is clearly informed about the withdrawal of the study, we believe that Blaha was aware of the incorrectness of the research and still published the post.

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

**Another successful post was published** by Milan Mazurek on November 12, 2021. The video had **58,646 interactions and approximately 665,600 views**. It captured the emotional speech of MP Mazurek in the National Council of the Slovak Republic on anti-pandemic measures.

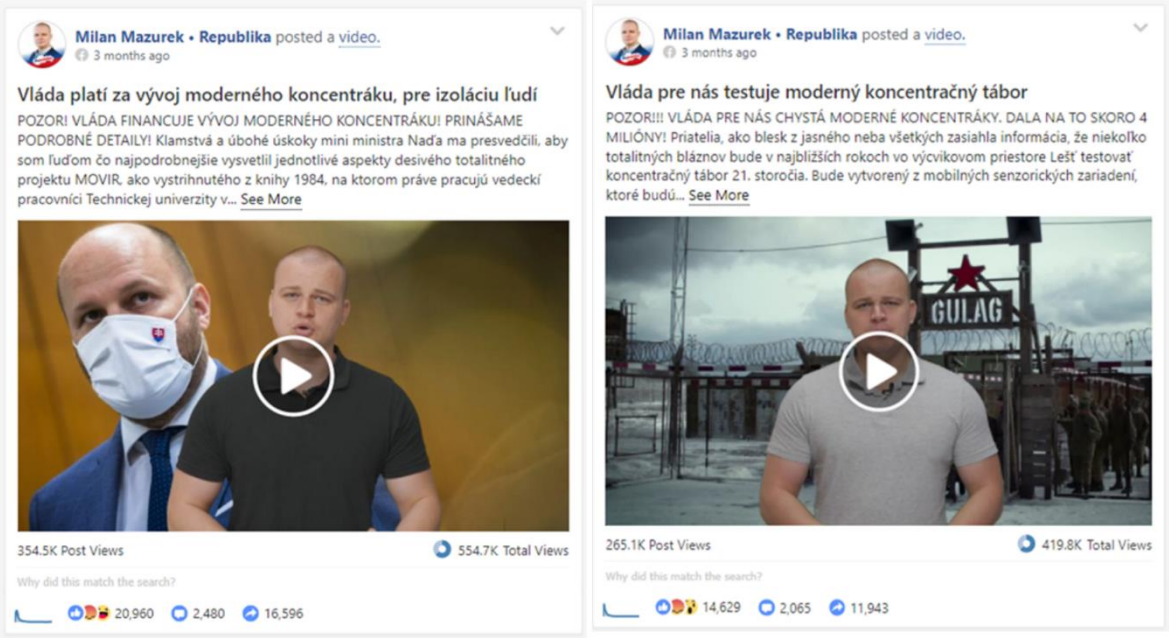
During his monologue, he accused the Minister of Justice, Maria Kolíková, as well as the entire government, of introducing fascism and totalitarianism. The video said that government officials were restricting the movement of free and healthy citizens by adopting unconstitutional restrictions and deliberately trying to violate their fundamental rights and freedoms.

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

Posts related to Covid-19 often featured **the comparison of anti-pandemic measures to fascism, totalitarianism, Nazism, and apartheid**. According to these narratives, the government allegedly introduces a system of fascist totalitarianism, covid totalitarianism, coronatotality, or coronafascism in Slovakia. Human rights and fundamental freedoms are said to be constantly violated, government officials are putting in place repressive measures, and depriving citizens of basic human dignity. According to these narratives, these measures will result in unconstitutional segregation, discrimination, and the division of citizens into superhumans and subhumans. At the same time, government officials incite hatred against unvaccinated citizens, treat them as a "bioterrorist threat" and have unleashed "pandemic terror" throughout Slovakia.

The disinformation that **the government is preparing a concentration camp** has also become viral. This disinformation emerged after the announcement of the intention to build a Mobile Monitoring System (MOVIR) to protect at-risk groups from the spread of viral diseases. MP

Mazurek misleadingly portrayed the project as an electronic prison, thanks to which it will be possible to monitor unvaccinated people. Of the 150 most successful posts we have analyzed, MOVIR has been mentioned in 3 videos posted on Mazurek's profile. These had a total of 105,213 interactions and more than 1,465,400 views.



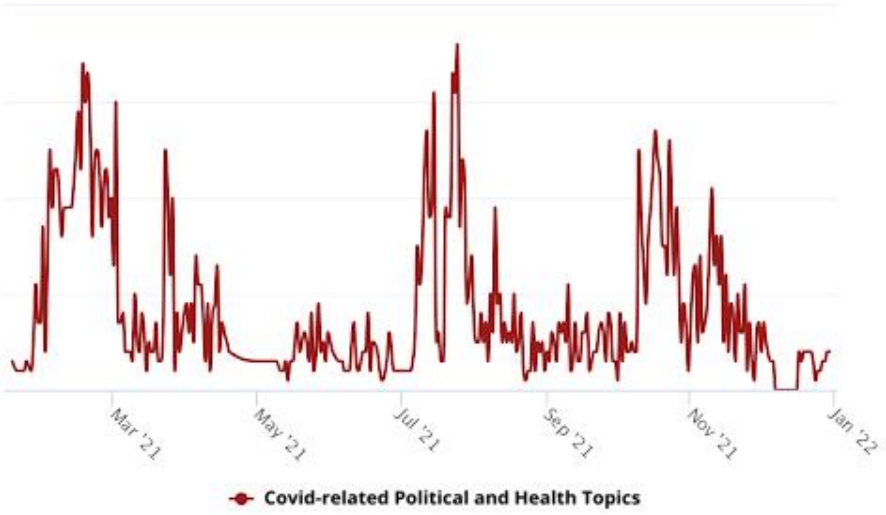

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

In addition to comparing the government to a Nazi, fascist or totalitarian regime, government officials were compared to Nazi officials. For example, Minister of Health Vladimír Lengvarský was compared to Mengele, Prime Minister Eduard Heger to Himmler and Minister of Justice Mária Kolíková to "the prison guard of Mauthausen". It is a toxic and offensive label meant to portray government officials in a negative way and arouse the distrust of citizens in their actions. At the same time, a clear intersection of health and policy issues related to Covid-19 can be observed in these examples.

Last but not least, **opposition to wearing masks and respirators** persisted during 2021. The most common claim was that people could not breathe through them. The second part of the interview with Russian academic Redko, which Harabin posted on his Facebook, was also one of the most popular videos. The post, which had 36,011 interactions and approximately 489,700 views, promoted disinformation about masks. In the video, Redko claimed that by wearing masks, people increased the risk of a serious Covid-19 disease or even death. Upper airway covering and isolation are said to prevent the body from being exposed to the surrounding virus, depriving people of their immunity. As a result, their bodies are unable to fight Covid-19 effectively.

To summarize, as many as **54 of the 112 Facebook posts on the Covid-19 topic discussed vaccination (approximately 48.21% of all posts on the topic),** either in the context of compulsory vaccination, side effects, or alleged discrimination against the unvaccinated (13 of these posts were devoted to the latter, thus approximately 11.61% of all posts on the topic). In 28 posts (25% of all posts on the topic), the side effects of vaccines were highlighted and exaggerated, or there were claims that vaccination does not help or does not help enough. The 24 posts were related to the topic of government measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 (approximately 21.43% of all posts on the topic). In 18 posts (approximately 16.07% of all posts on the topic), it was mentioned that vaccination is being promoted because of p pharmaceutical firms that want to make the most of the profits. Finally, the topic of anti-government protests appeared in 11 posts (approximately 9.82% of all posts on the topic) and 10 posts focused on the general strike (approximately 8.93% of all posts on the topic).

## Websites

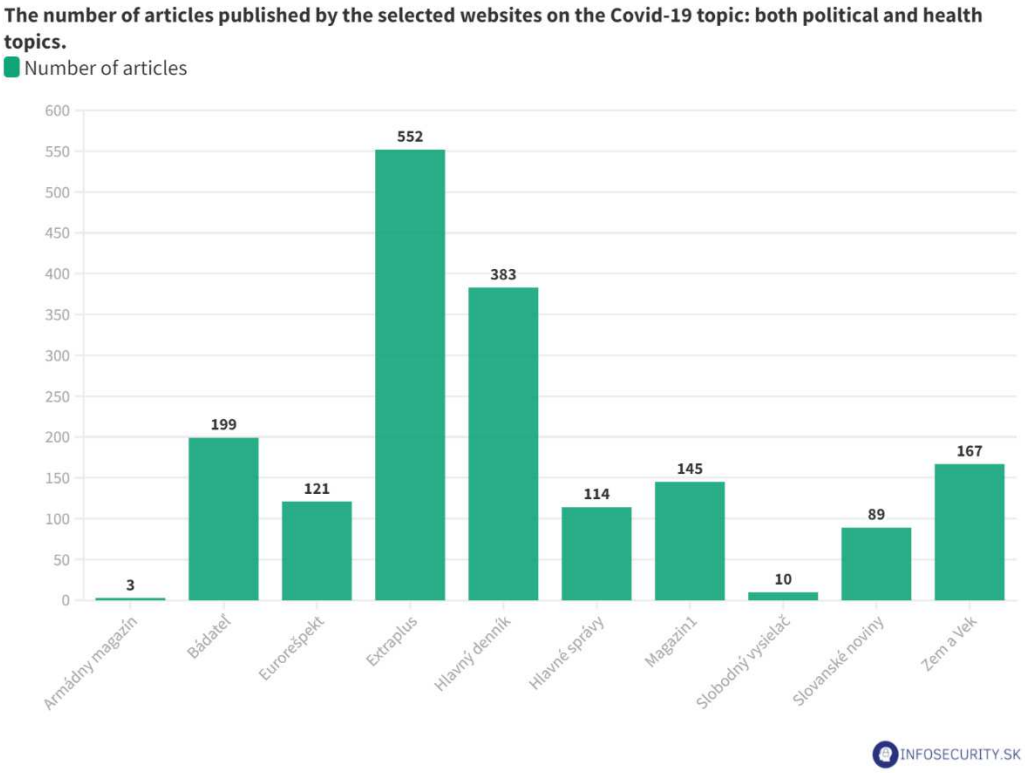



The graph shows the prevalence of the topic during 2021 in comparison to other published content. Data were obtained using the Gerulata Juno analytical tool.

Among the selected topics, political and health topics related to the Covid-19 pandemic appeared most often not only on Facebook but also in the analyzed web content. They appeared almost continuously throughout the year, as the websites constantly published information on government measures, for example.

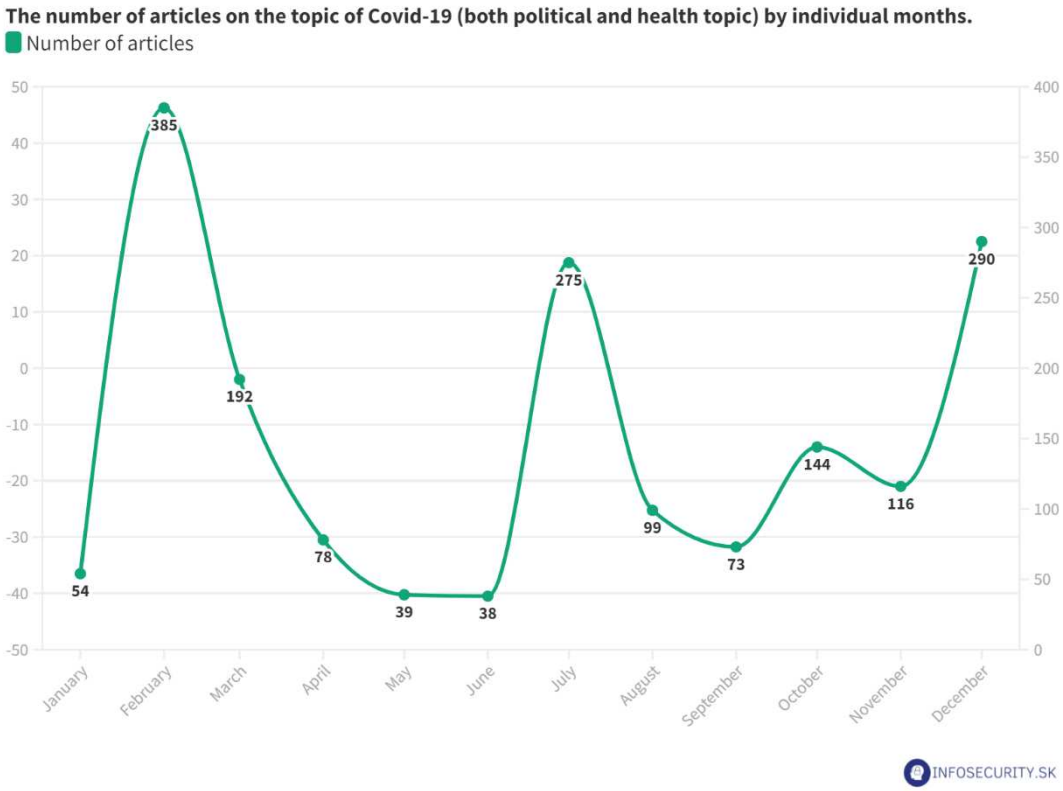
As for all published content of selected media during 2021, three peaks can be identified when the largest amount of content was published. It was the beginning of the year, when topics such as nationwide testing, covid automat, but also vaccines resonated – primarily the purchase of Russian Sputnik V vaccines and the following coalition crisis. Subsequently, during the summer months, selected sites published mainly articles on anti-government protests and resistance to measures (especially against vaccination certificates). In October 2021, most of the articles analyzed focused on vaccination, specific vaccines, or the so-called "cap" protest in Rimavská Sobota, organized by members of the SMER-SD party.

We covered **1,783 articles** within the Covid-19 topic. Thus, this was the topic where we identified the largest amount of web content. **The highest number of articles came from Extraplus** (552 articles), Hlavný denník (383 articles), and Bádateľ (199 articles).



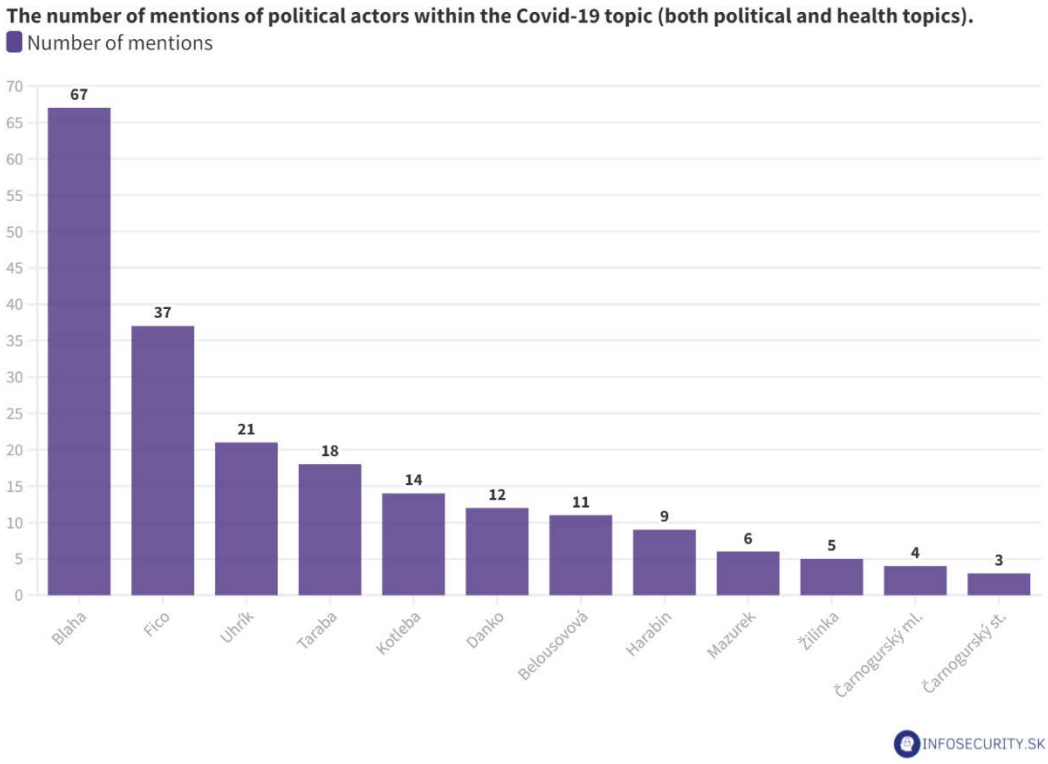

The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822683/.

**Within the data set of the web content on the Covid-19 topic we analyzed, we recorded the largest number of articles during February 2021, then during July, and finally in December 2021,** which more or less copies the overall trend described above. In February, the most relevant content was devoted to the planned purchase of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine. In December, most articles dealt with compulsory vaccination as well as with the vaccination of children.




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822699/.

The Covid-19 topic was accompanied by the highest number of mentions of political actors among the analyzed topics. **Ľuboš Blaha (67 mentions) received the most mentions**, followed by Robert Fico (37 mentions), and Milan Uhrík (21 mentions).




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822713/.

Due to the high number of articles on Covid-19, 2021 has seen a spread of many narratives. Similar to the analysis of Facebook content, the probe into the content published by websites showed that the highest number of articles focused on the topic of vaccination and vaccines. These articles covered topics such as compulsory vaccination, vaccination of children, and vaccination of the elderly. The second most widespread topic was the Covid-19 vaccines in general, their side effects, deaths after vaccination, or specific vaccines.

The 89 articles analyzed were devoted to misleading claims about the **side effects of Covid-19 vaccines**. There were baseless allegations that vaccines cause blindness, inflammation of the heart muscle and other heart diseases, AIDS, autoimmune diseases, and cancer. Bádateľ addressed this topic daily and claimed that the real threat is the vaccines, not the virus, and deaths after vaccination are falsely presented as Covid-19 deaths because vaccines are said to "*use mRNA to activate the production of toxic spike proteins in the human body*."

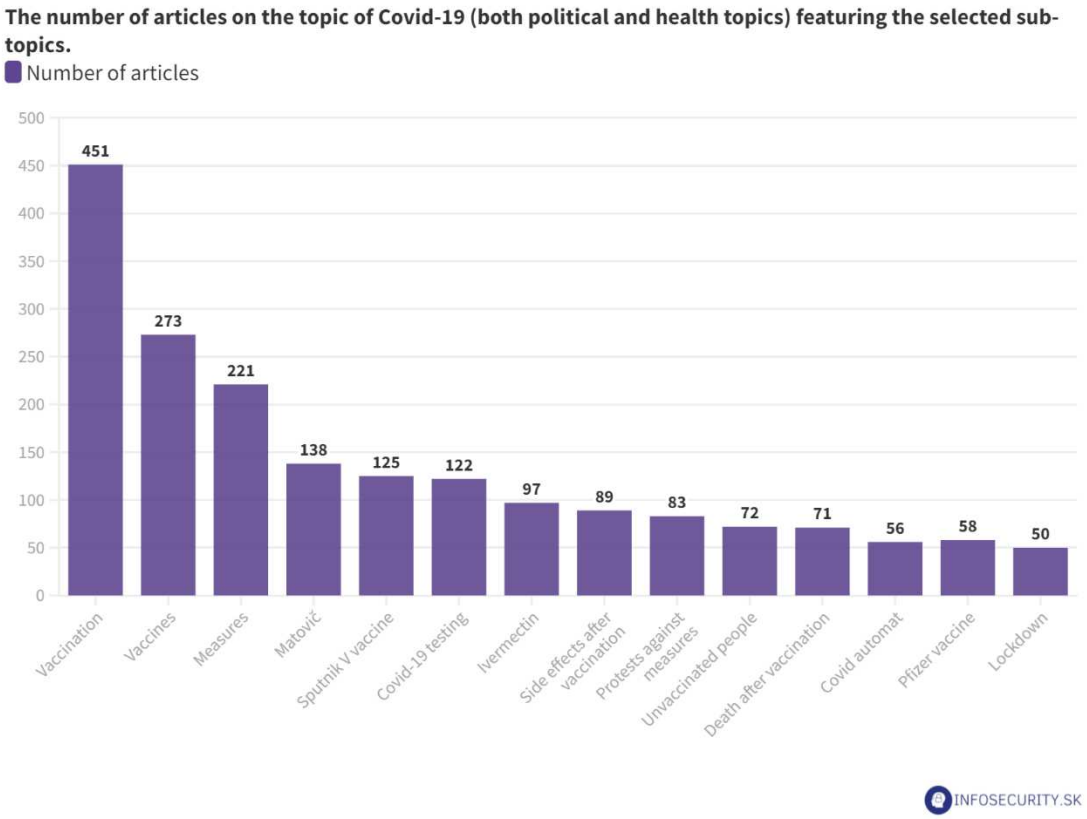
The articles also touched on a**lternative treatments for Covid-19 or the promotion of unverified drugs**. It was mainly about highlighting the alleged preventive and therapeutic effect of vitamin D, in which case the examined articles (in 23 cases) referred mainly to the doctor Juraj Mesík. However, the articles also focused on promoting various other vitamins or the drug ivermectin. We mentioned ivermectin in the analysis of 97 articles. However, ivermectin was not recommended by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) or the US Food

and Drug Administration (FDA) for coronavirus treatment, as available data at the time did not show a clear positive effect in the treatment of patients.

During the period under review, there were also conspiratorial narratives associated with the alleged **efforts of global elites to monitor the population through vaccination certificates** (covid passports). The topic of covid passports was included in the analysis of 82 articles and was presented as a tool used by the EU to restrict personal freedom. In addition, the monitored sites also shared reports of microchip implants being injected under the skin during vaccination. They should carry vaccination information that would be read by a regular smartphone. According to Magazine1, Marian Kotleba spoke about these implants at the beginning of the pandemic, but he was criticized for spreading alarming messages. The article read: "*A year ago, they would have ridiculed you for it and called it a fantasy. Today, however, they talk openly about a small microchip the size of rice, which they can apply under your skin, so you carry your covid passport everywhere with you*."

Another important topic was the **government's measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19**. These have been presented many times as a government's effort to discriminate against unvaccinated citizens. The means of discrimination should be, for example, compulsory testing at work, vaccination, covid automat, and police checks. Terms such as totalitarianism (10 articles), apartheid (6 articles), segregation (13 articles), fascism (14 articles), and genocide (8 articles) accompanied many narratives promoted by the examined articles.

Along with the measures, there were reports **of anti-government protests**, which were addressed in 83 analyzed articles. We have included in this category articles devoted to protests against the pandemic measures and vaccination in other countries (for example, Austria, the Netherlands, Italy), but also in Slovakia. 4 articles in this category were devoted to protests in front of the homes of Slovak doctors and experts, who were called pharma lobbyists. Only one of the analyzed articles dealt with protests at the borders, but 24 articles wrote about the border regime and conditions for commuters. Other articles were devoted to the protest in front of the Presidential Palace, which was held as a response to the verdict of the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic on the unconstitutionality of the referendum on early parliamentary elections, as well as the protest in front of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. In the context of a protest in front of the parliament, Hlavný denník published a statement by Ľuboš Blaha: "*So much anger, disrespect, and hatred towards ordinary people have not been seen since 1945.*" The topic of the referendum on early elections appeared in 26 analyzed articles. In this context, the popular narrative was that president Zuzana Čaputová thwarted the referendum by turning to the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic, and thus betrayed the citizens.




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822721/.

## USA

The United States, which is a strategic security partner of the Slovak Republic, was the target of many disinformation actors during 2021. At the beginning of the year, the information space was preoccupied with events related to the election of a new American president. Incumbent President Donald J. Trump refused to accept the election results and disseminating misleading and false information about the rigged elections has driven some of his sympathizers to take action. Thus, several hundred of them decided on January 6 to attack the Capitol Building – the seat of the US Congress.

Trump's public statements resulted in the so-called impeachment, that is, a constitutional action against the President of the United States. At the same time, his accounts on social media Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram were blocked. The reason was the spread of conspiracy theories that fueled hateful and violent tendencies in society.

Disinformation actors in our information space have often taken over conspiracy narratives directly from American sources or Trump himself. Thus, the conspiracies of the QAnon movement began to spread in Slovakia, especially the theory of the so-called deep state which claims that the USA is ruled by a secret cabal of elites who have conspired to bring down

Trump. The aim of these disinformation narratives was often to portray Donald Trump as a brave defender of “traditional values” and an enemy of globalist elites.

On the other hand, newly elected President Joe Biden has been portrayed as a weak and untrustworthy statesman. Disinformation actors often questioned his health and drew attention to his advanced age. There were also derogatory posts about his alleged senility or dementia.

Biden's attitude towards Russia and China was also criticized. Disinformation actors addressed mainly the escalating tensions on the Ukrainian-Russian border. They attributed the deterioration in international relations to NATO's aggressive expansion to the East. The US was supposed to threaten Russia in order to pursue its own interests. The aggressive coercive diplomacy of the Russian Federation was portrayed as self-defense by disinformation actors.

In the context of US-Russian relations, meetings and phone calls between Biden and Putin resonated in the Slovak information space. At the end of the year, the bilateral agreement on cooperation in the field of defense between the governments of the USA and Slovakia (DCA) became a key topic. Disinformation actors began to use the treaty to spread the fear that US military bases would be established in Slovakia and weapons of mass destruction would be stationed here. Supporters of the DCA, especially the Secretary of Defense and Foreign Affairs, were even referred to as American agents.

Disinformation actors also widely discussed the purchase of new Black Hawk helicopters, the transfer of military equipment through Slovak territory, anti-pandemic measures, and the construction of the Nord Stream II pipeline.

## Political Actors on Facebook

Ľuboš Blaha, Milan Mazurek, Milan Uhrík, Štefan Harabin, and Eduard Chmelár were the ones who mainly dealt with topics related to the USA on Facebook. Of the 150 analyzed articles, this topic was featured in 8, of which 4 were published by Ľuboš Blaha. Together, US-related topics were able to gain **nearly 209,000 interactions and 2.28 million views**.

The most successful post on this topic was a video by Ľuboš Blaha from November 26, which attracted **42,060 interactions and more than 353,000 views**. In the video, MP Blaha tried to arouse suspicion that the American neoliberal elites are behind the creation of Covid-19. According to Blaha, the reason for this suspicion is the fact that Anthony Fauci, President Biden's medical adviser, admitted that during his tenure as director of the National Health Institute, the US government contributed to virus research in the Wuhan laboratory.

In the video, Blaha also mentions that the pandemic was one of the main reasons for the electoral defeat of Donald Trump. By claiming this, he sought to create the impression that the neoliberal elites had planned a world pandemic in order to remove Trump from his seat

and replace him with Joe Biden. Blaha also emphasized that Biden's election campaign was also funded by Pfizer and George Soros. In his argument, he quoted Republican far-right politician Josh Mandel, known for spreading disinformation about “stolen elections.” Mandel accused George Soros of being behind the pandemic along with the deep-state and insisted that it was a planned action.

However, there are several logical errors in Blaha's argument. The basic thesis that a world pandemic was created to achieve electoral success is, to say the least, questionable. The effects of the pandemic on society are still largely unknown to us. It is highly unlikely that anyone would be able to predict in advance the impact of a global pandemic on the outcome of the US presidential election.

Also, a scenario in which Communist China would allow millions of its people to be exposed to a dangerous virus just to meet the wishes of “American neoliberal elites” is highly unlikely. The fact that President Biden ordered an investigation into whether the virus escaped from a Chinese laboratory also does not fit into Blaha's theory.

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

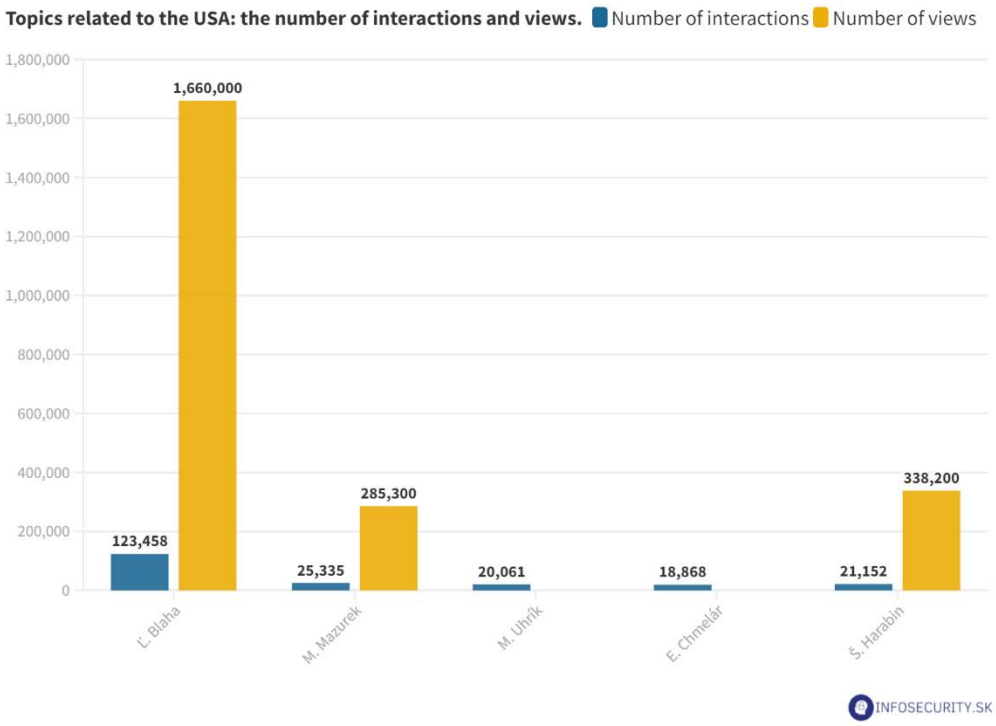
Another popular US-related post was Štefan Harabin's video posted on April 8, which reached **21,152 interactions and 338,200 views**. In the video, Štefan Harabin responded to the escalating tensions on the Ukrainian-Russian border, for which he says the US under the leadership of Joe Biden is responsible. Harabin argued that the United States was on the brink

of economic collapse and therefore needed to provoke a war in Europe that would be economically advantageous for them. However, he said that such a plan was not feasible during Donald Trump's rule, and thus Trump's allegations of fake presidential elections are said to be true.

Štefan Harabin, like many others, accepted Trump's narrative about stolen elections, but he slightly modified it so that he could approach the Slovak audience and play on their feelings. When electoral fraud becomes a tool to start a war in Europe, the message can provoke a strong response. Harabin's post deliberately played on the audience's feelings and misinterpreted the situation in Ukraine. In the video, Harabin claimed that Ukraine was on the brink of war. However, he did not mention that there has been an armed conflict in Ukraine since 2014 and that the aggressive steps taken by the Russian Federation are behind it.

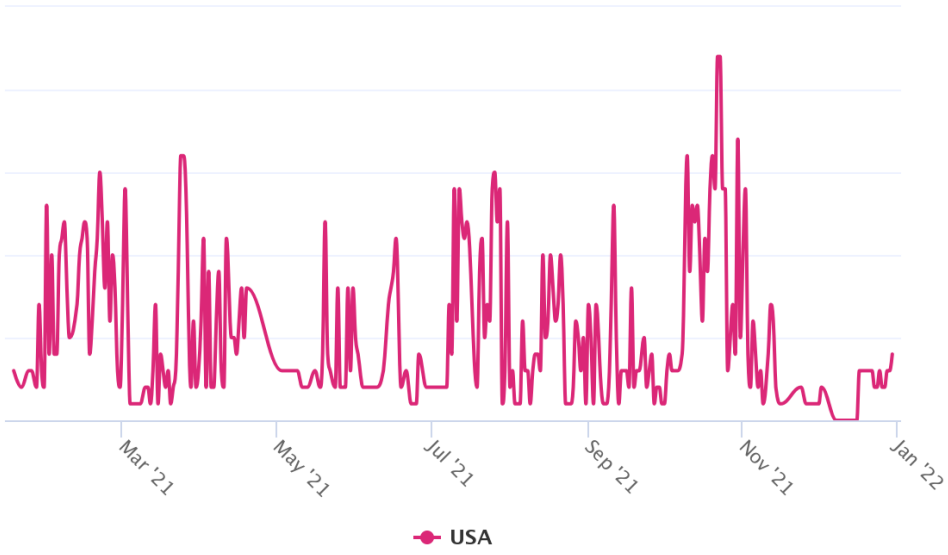
Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

The disinformation narratives about the United States examined shared several common features. An important aspect was building distrust and fear of the United States. This was due to the civil unrest surrounding the US presidential election. In this regard, it was possible to identify in the posts the attempt to discredit the current President Biden, as well as the elections themselves. On the other hand, Slovak disinformation actors praised former President Trump. Another important part of this narrative was building the image of the United States as an aggressor who because of its greed seeks to provoke conflict in Europe. The analyzed actors took over some disinformation narratives directly from American sources and adapted them to an attractive form for the Slovak audience.




Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822800/.

## Websites

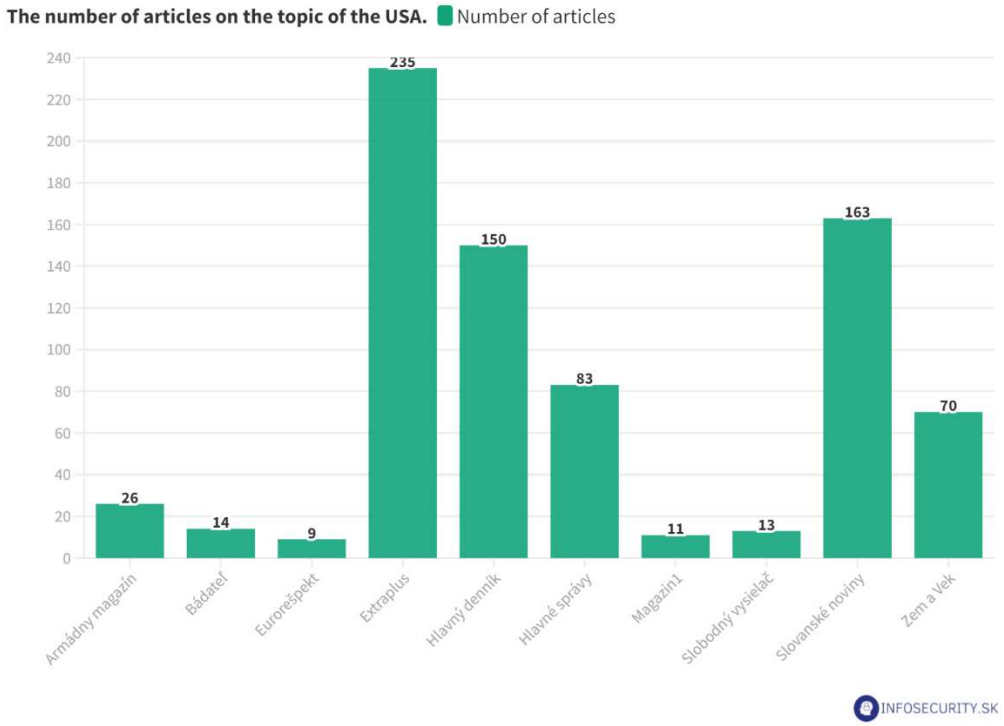



The graph shows the prevalence of the topic during 2021 compared to other published content. Data were obtained using the Gerulata Juno analytical tool.

A survey of content related to the topic of the USA published during 2021 by 10 selected websites shows that articles on this topic were published constantly throughout the year. The peaks during which they attracted the most reactions from the audience were mainly at the beginning of the year and in November.

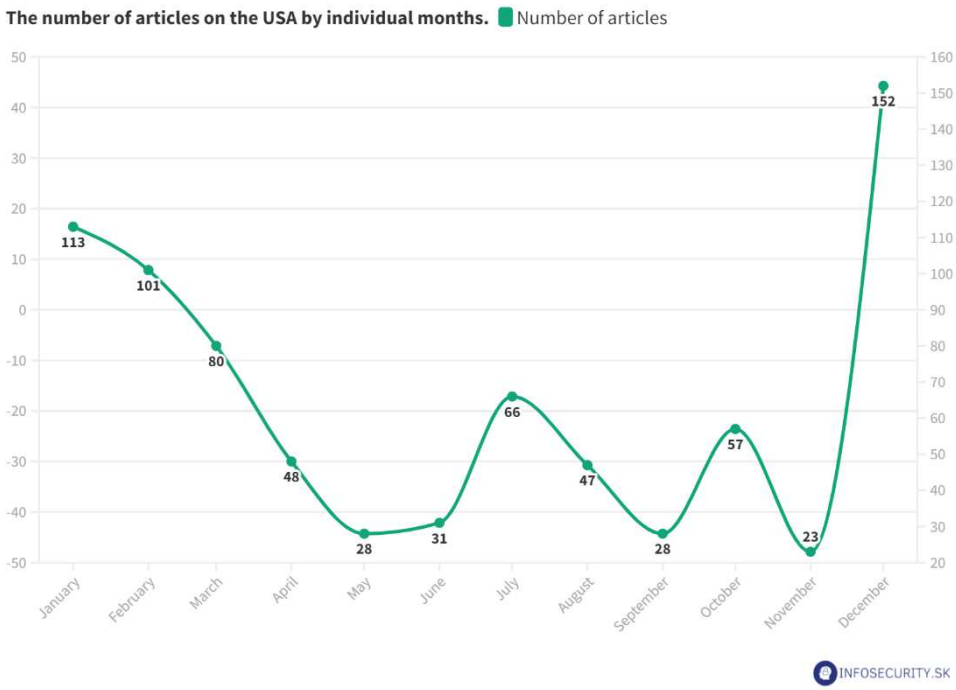
These peaks are probably related to events such as the attack on the Capitol (January 6), the inauguration of President Joe Biden (January 20), or the unveiling of a new strategy to fight Covid-19 at the end of the year.

Based on a set of keywords, we identified **774 articles** related to the United States published on the websites we analyzed. **The highest number of articles on the topic was published by Extraplus** (235 articles), followed by Slovanské noviny (163 articles) and Hlavný denník (150 articles).



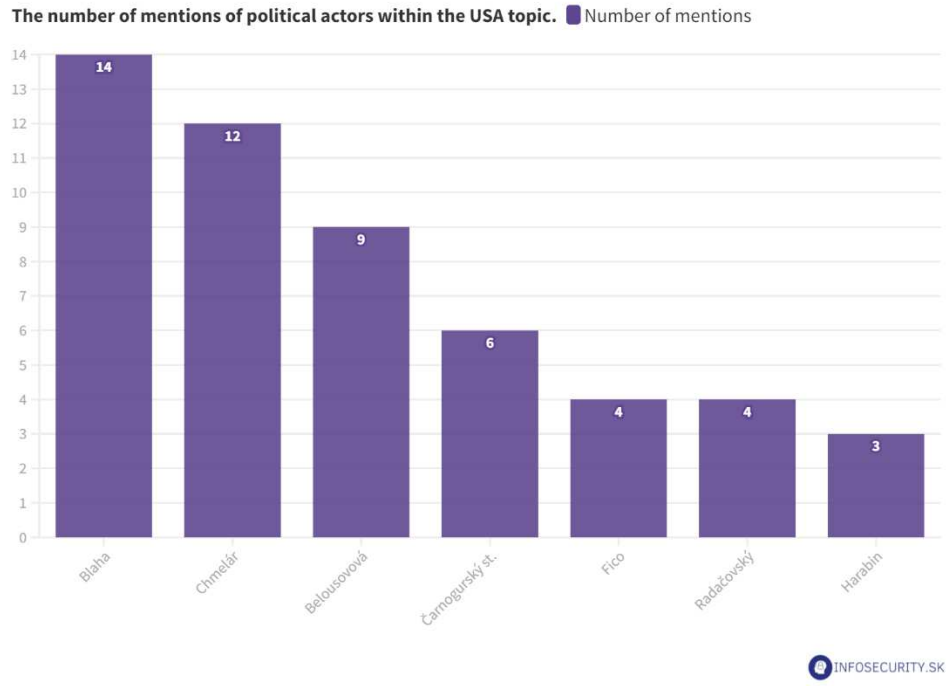

The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822820/.

Topics related to the USA appeared in the articles published on the analyzed websites continuously throughout the year**. A lot of this content was published at the beginning of the year**, mainly after the US election, the attack on the Capitol, the impeachment, and the inauguration of the new President Joe Biden. The second critical period was December 2021, when we identified the highest number of articles on the topic of the USA. This is mainly related to the events in Ukraine, the ongoing negotiations between the Russian and American presidents, as well as the draft agreement on defense cooperation between the Slovak Republic and the USA (DCA).




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822832/.

There were also mentions of some political actors in articles related to the US topic. **Ľuboš Blaha received the most mentions** (14 mentions), followed by non-parliamentary actors Eduard Chmelár (12 mentions) and Anna Belousovová (9 mentions).




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822846/.

We have identified several key narratives in US-related articles. In the first two months of the year, the topic of the US election and the attack on the Capitol dominated. In the analyzed articles, disinformation narratives about rigged elections also appeared. These narratives predicted the end of democratic elections around the world, because "if the falsification of elections passed into the so-called 'Symbol of democracy', then boundaries will be torn down in all states and elections will be manipulated quite openly."

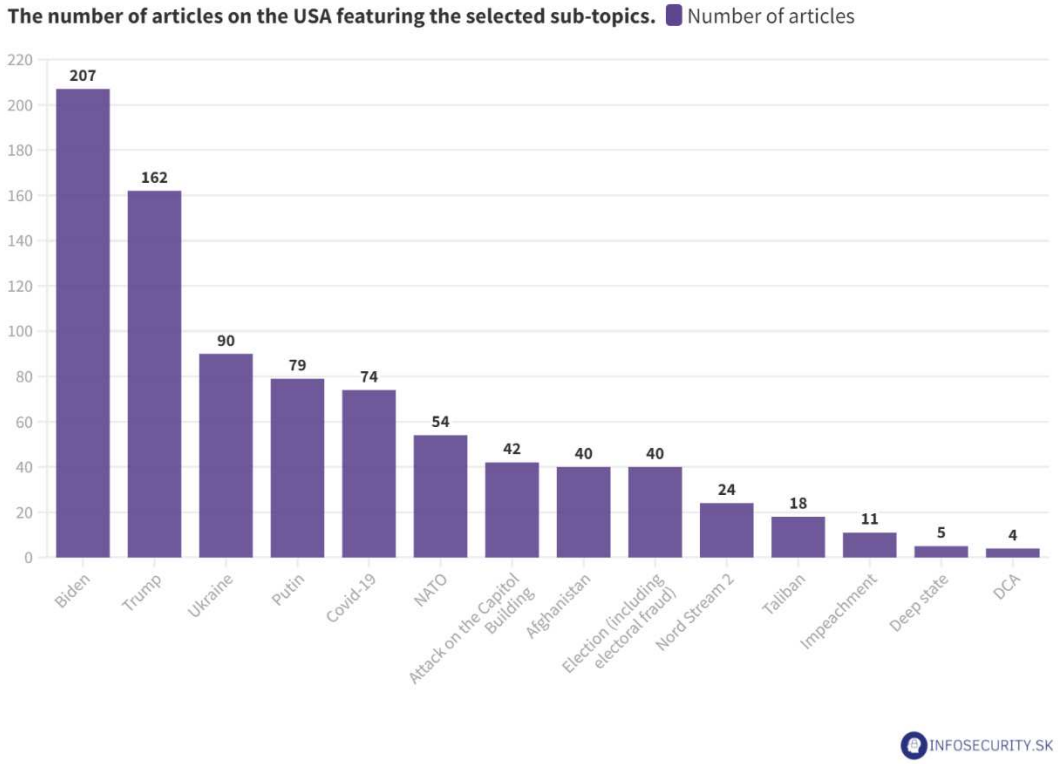
In addition, narratives were also spread in an effort to discredit the new president Joe Biden, whom the analyzed articles described as senile or incompetent. Allegations were made that his health does not allow him to fully perform all the duties of the presidency. According to this narrative, Biden will not be able to hold office for the entire parliamentary term. His steps are manipulated by Vice President Kamala Harris, who is reportedly planning on replacing Biden. The US president was also described as an anti-Russian warmonger, whose actions would worsen "relations between the United States and Russia, China, Iran, and other states, as Washington will continue its aggressive, coercive policy." Finally, narratives claiming that Biden pursues a very unsound migration policy and that he plans to make the support of the LGBTQ community's rights a cornerstone of American diplomacy, too, emerged.

A popular topic in the analysis of web content was also the relations of the USA under the leadership of President Biden with the Russian Federation. One of the key topics in this context was Biden's speech at ABC News, where he answered yes to the question of whether Putin is a killer. Extraplus took over the statement of Ľuboš Blaha, who claimed that Russian-American relations are at a freezing point, because "*Biden went completely crazy and called Russian President Putin a 'killer', which is two millimeters from the declaration of war*". He also linked the topic with the opposition to American bases in Slovakia. This reappeared at the end of the year in connection with the forthcoming agreement on defense cooperation between the Slovak Republic and the USA (DCA). According to Blaha, the Slovak Republic "*will be turned into a colony and a military base of the United States by this proposal*."

Narratives focused on US influence in Europe, too, often re-appeared during the period under review. Hlavný denník portrayed the United States as an actor seeking to create an unruly Third World and a colony that would serve the interests of Americans. Europe is also said to be a US accessory or colony because it has imposed sanctions on Russia for trying to poison opposition leader Alexei Navalny who was portrayed in a negative light as "a paid agent, a 'West Hop,' a clown and a populist who make the EU and the US a hero."

On the other hand, the analyzed articles glorified the government officials, primarily Russian President Vladimir Putin. Its view was largely associated with the preference of the so-called "traditional values", based on which the analyzed media portrayed Russia as the opposite of Western "gender obscuration" and crimes against humanity, which are to be represented by "*forcing the teaching of transgenderism to children*". In this regard, some websites, for example, took over Putin's statement that a woman is a woman and a man is a man.

At the end of the year, the situation in Ukraine was also discussed to a great extent, including negotiations between NATO and Russia. According to an article published on the Armádny magazín website, these negotiations were only a farce for the media. However, the decision to hold multilateral talks "*demonstrates NATO's readiness to discuss Russia's draft documents, including the most important one - NATO's non-enlargement*". The Extraplus portal took over the statement of Milan Uhrík, who spread misleading claims that "*if the Slovak government accepts this agreement, Slovakia will de facto hand over its territory to the US military. We will be their vassals and become the target of many of their enemies in the world. We will become part of their conflict-inciting foreign policy*." At the same time, narratives spread that the DCA would bring the deployment of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles in Slovakia.




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822863/.

## Russia

Even in 2021, the Slovak disinformation media, as well as political actors, addressed issues related to Russia and its politics. Russia (or Russia's defense) is one of the long-standing topics of these actors, focusing on the propaganda in line with the position of the Russian state media and government officials.

Russia's relations with the West and Slovakia have long been among the main thematic areas of disinformation actors. Disinformation media are flexible and always report on current topics, while some of them are given more space than others.

Resonating events related to Russia in 2021 included the investigation of the explosion in Vrbětice in the Czech Republic and the subsequent expulsion of Russian diplomats, the energy crisis, and rising energy prices. The accumulation of Russian troops at the Ukrainian borders in April and the second half of 2021 was also an important part of the discourse of examined actors.

From the beginning of 2021, and especially after its arrival to Slovakia on March 1, the topic of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine was also very visible in the Slovak information space. We covered this topic in the category of domestic political topics related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

## The Vrbětice Case and the Expulsion of Russian Spies

On Saturday, April 17, the then Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš and Interior Minister Jan Hamáček held a press conference at which the Czech police and secret services informed the public about suspicion of the involvement of Russian GRU members in the 2014 ammunition depots explosion in Vrbětice which left two people dead.

According to both politicians, the evidence of Russian involvement in the event was so compelling that the Czech government took diplomatic retaliation and expelled 18 Russian intelligence officers with diplomatic cover from the Czech Republic. Slovakia has expressed solidarity with the Czech Republic by expelling three intelligence officers with diplomatic cover.

The people responsible for the explosion are Anatoly Chepiga and Alexander Mishkin, well known as suspects in the attempted poisoning of double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Great Britain in 2018. The information from the Skripal case (which took place four years after the explosions) was for Czech investigators key in identifying the perpetrators.

The Vrbětice case quickly became a major topic of Slovak disinformation websites, which immediately began to question the official version and spread conspiracy theories about the affair. Often, they reproduced narratives in line with the official interpretation promoted by the Russian Federation.

They insisted on publishing evidence (from a top-secret investigation and from the work of the secret services), conspiring that the whole case should serve as a pretext for excluding the Russian state-owned company Rosatom from the tender for the completion of the Dukovany nuclear power plant.

They also spread conspiracy theories claiming that the whole case was just a fabrication made up by the Western secret services to legitimize the (non-existent) transfer of NATO and US troops to the Russian border and that the Czech Republic is just a middleman in this great geopolitical game. The Russian embassy in Slovakia also helped to spread this narrative.

As evidence that the case was fabricated by the West, disinformation actors also used a speech by President Zeman, who questioned the official version that Russian citizens could be behind the explosions.

## Russia's Role in the Energy Crisis

Another resonating topic where Russia played a decisive role was the rising energy prices caused by their deficit on the market. There were several reasons behind this situation. One of them was the growing demand of an economy recovering after two years of pandemics, less energy from wind farms, the prolonged winter of early 2021, and problems with a key supplier, Russia.

The Russian state-owned company Gazprom, which supplies gas to Europe, has fulfilled its long-term contracts but has stopped supplying gas to the so-called spot markets where commodities are traded at market prices, thus reducing the volume of gas in Europe.

The fact that this is not a business but a political problem is evidenced by the statement by Russian President Vladimir Putin, according to which the situation on the energy market may calm down after the approval of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline which would allow Putin to bypass Ukraine and ship gas through routes outside of its territory.

The certification of Nord Stream 2 was stopped by the German regulator due to the fact that the pipeline did not meet European legal standards.

Disinformation media and actors reproduced the narratives put forward by Kremlin propaganda. They claimed that the lack of gas and rising energy prices were due to Europe, the European Union, and its transition to green energy and the adoption of the European Green Deal.

Russia was supposed to be innocent in this case, allegedly only fulfilling its role of a reliable energy supplier and a constructive partner in resolving the situation.

The West was accused of politicizing energy supplies and purposefully blocking Nord Stream 2, which was supposed to harm Russia. In fact, the West allegedly only harmed himself, because Nord Stream 2 should also be in its interest.

## Situation in Ukraine

The situation in Ukraine in 2021 was one of the re-appearing topics of disinformation actors. They took the stance of advocates of Russian policy towards its neighbor. Defending the annexation of Crimea, relativizing Russia's participation in the war in Donbas, and accusing the West of trying to use Ukraine for aggression against Russia were among the frequent narrative featured in reporting on Ukraine.

In April 2021, and later in the autumn of 2021, Russia began to amass troops in offensive positions near the border with Ukraine, against which it has been waging war since 2014. In the autumn, about 120,000 soldiers with military equipment gathered near the Ukrainian border.

According to its own words, Russia was trying to obtain security guarantees from the West, which would include, among other things, a promise not to expand NATO to Ukraine. If these conditions are not met, Russia would be unable to rule out any scenario or war.

Russia portrayed itself as a victim who allegedly only resisted Western aggression. In this dispute, Ukraine is the tool the West exploits to incite aggression against Russia. Major disinformation actors in Slovakia also reproduced this argument.

Such relativization of Ukrainian independence legitimizes in public discourse Russia's demands on the West and its aggressive policies towards Ukraine.

According to disinformation and pro-Kremlin actors, Russia has the right to carry out whatever military maneuvers on its territory. They presented Ukrainian warnings as an unfounded hysteria to justify Western aggression against Russia.

With this “Russian scare”, Ukraine is trying to distract attention from its own domestic economic problems, which deepened after Euromaidan in 2014 and its shift towards the West, which only abuses it politically and economically against Russia.

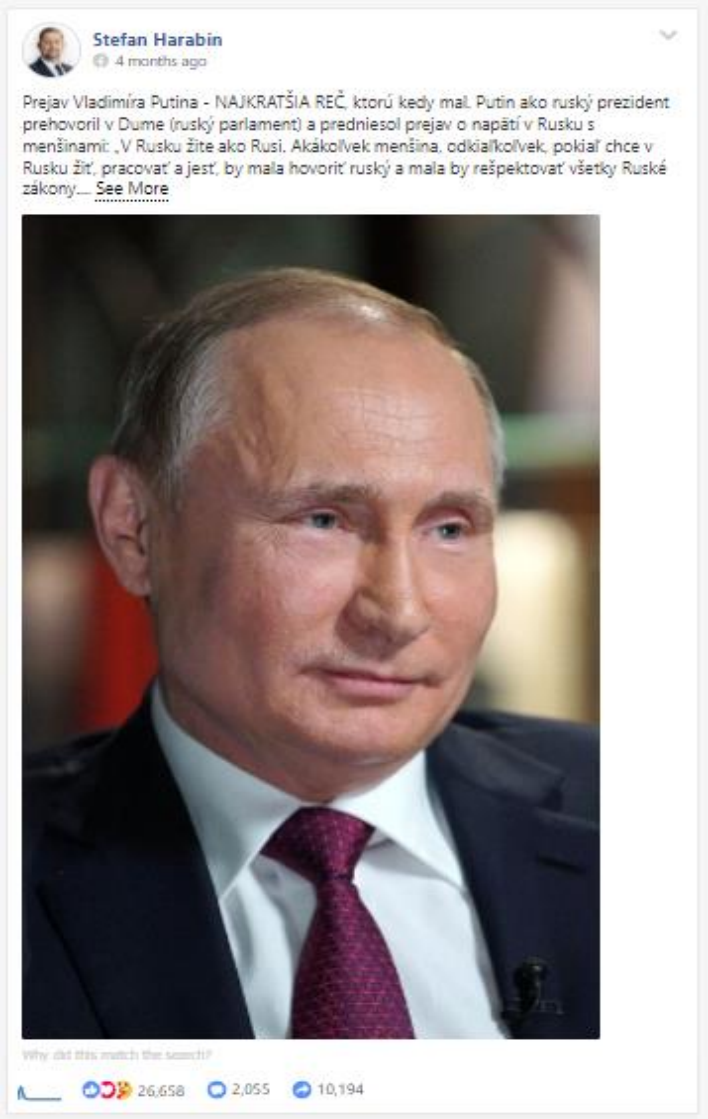
Putin was portrayed as an experienced strategist who, unlike the West, wants peace, tries to resolve the situation diplomatically, but is determined to defend the security of Russia, which the West allegedly threatens.

## Political Actors on Facebook

Among the 150 most successful posts of Slovak politicians, **17 posts discussed Russia**. SMER deputy Ľuboš Blaha addressed Russia and its relations with the West the most, in 11 posts, followed by Milan Uhrík, Milan Mazurek (both from the Republika movement) and non-parliamentary politician Štefan Harabin with two posts mentioning Russia.

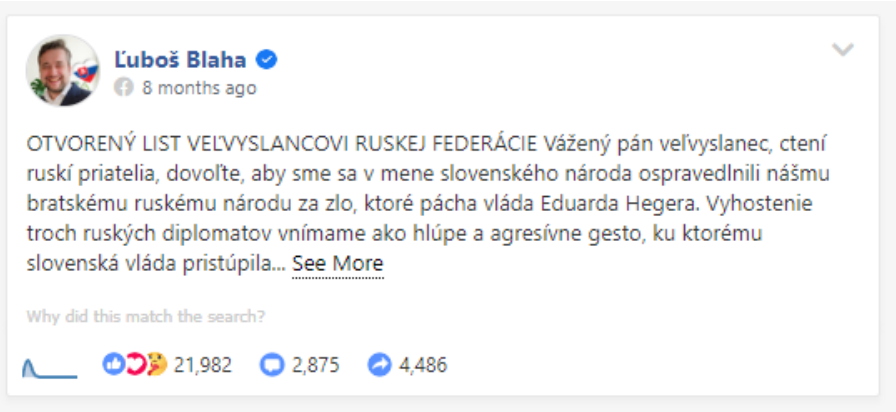
The analyzed **posts on Russia reached a total of 402,010 interactions**. Of these, MP Blaha achieved 229,771 interactions with 11 posts, Mazurek 62,919, Štefan Harabin 60,059, and Milan Uhrík 49,261. Out of 17 posts, we identified 7 videos that had a total of **2,107,500 views**. Two videos were posted by Mazurek (a total of 765,400 views), Uhrík (507,100), Blaha (496,000) and one by Harabin (339,000).

Russia was one of the most resonating among international issues. **The most successful post on Russia (in terms of the number of interactions) was by Štefan Harabin** on September 15, which reached **38,907 interactions**. In the post, Harabin discussed Vladimir Putin's alleged speech, in which the Russian president was to talk about protecting Russian culture from migrants, especially Muslims. Analyst Daniel Milo said that Putin's speech was fabricated and a hoax that spread through chain mails as early as 2013. The post ranked 18th among the 150 most successful posts in 2021.




Data from CrowdTangle, publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

Ľuboš Blah's most successful post was his Open Letter to the Ambassador of the Russian Federation, in which he apologized on behalf of the Slovak nation for expelling Russian spies with diplomatic cover after revealing suspicions of participation of Russian secret service agents in the explosion of the ammunition depots in Vrbětice, Czech Republic. The post received 29,343 interactions.




Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

The monitored political actors addressed several topics in their posts on Russia. They focused mostly on the Vrbětice case (6 posts), the Russian aggression in Ukraine (4 posts), and the role of Russia in the liberation of Slovakia in World War II (4 posts). In one post, politicians also addressed Alexei Navalny, as well as the Sputnik V vaccine, minorities in Russia, the Panama papers case, and the energy crisis (the last two posts are only marginally relevant). In the case of two analyzed posts, we identified two topics at the same time.

**The Vrbětice Case**

A number of the most successful posts on Russia discussed the Vrbětice case. In the posts examined, the politicians questioned the official version of the Czech secret services, which was presented by the Czech government and in which the main suspects were Russian secret agents Alexander Mishkin and Anatoly Chepiga. Milan Mazurek called the official version a "fairy tale".

In three instances, politicians used conspiracy theory in their posts on Vrbětice. Blaha called the whole case a "long-running propaganda campaign" that was to serve as a pretext for the war with Russia. According to Blaha, the actors behind this case were the Western intelligence services. Blaha also insisted that the expulsion of three spies with diplomatic cover from Slovakia in response to Vrbětice was a conspiracy orchestrated by the United States. According to him, the expulsion took place "on the instructions of the American embassy". However, Blaha did not support this claim with any evidence.

Blaha used the case of Vrbětice mainly to criticize the West and the Slovak government led by Eduard Heger. He presented the expulsion of spies (Blaha spoke of diplomats) as an unsound decision that bears the traits of treason.

The Czech president Miloš Zeman, who questioned the version about Russia's participation in the Vrbětice explosions, played into cards of the Slovak disinformation actors a week after the new evidence in the case was announced. On April 27, Blaha posted a video on Facebook in which he talked about Zeman in superlatives, with admiration, and as of a great statesman. He puts Zeman in contrast to Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová, who allegedly acts on the instructions of the American embassy.

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

**Russian Aggression in Ukraine**

In 2021, political actors on Facebook also commented on the escalation of the situation in Ukraine, which has been defending itself against Russian military aggression since 2014. The escalation was first reported in April 2021 and the second in autumn and December 2021. Despite the fact that Russia was planning to wage war against Ukraine and gathering its troops at their joint borders with threats to intensify the conflict, political actors accused the West of escalating tensions in Ukraine present and portrayed Russia as a victim of Western aggression in which Ukraine is used only as a tool against Russia.

They thus take over the rhetoric of Russian political leaders and propagandist state media. The pattern is very simple: the West – an evil aggressor, Russia – a self-defending victim. This argument appears in all posts on the situation in Ukraine. The politicians do not see Ukraine as an entity that decides independently, but only as a tool that the West uses for provocation and military aggression against Russia.

The inciter of the alleged Western aggression against Russia is the USA, which, according to Štefan Harabin, pushes the EU into a war with Russia and uses Ukraine in the process. Harabin uses the typical conspiracy rhetoric "*Biden and Clinton-Sorosovska clique drive Europe into war through Čaputová*." He said without evidence that NATO troops were approaching Russia's borders. Armored trains are to travel through Slovakia to the east. In the past, several hoaxes have spread, which presented the national transfer of military equipment within Slovakia untruthfully as a transfer beyond the eastern border of Slovakia.

Harabin criticized Ukraine for deploying defensive weapons on its border, which, according to him, means escalating the conflict. However, when Russia gathers troops and offensive weapons on the border with Ukraine, according to Harabin, it can do whatever it wants on its territory and does not endanger anyone. Harabin claims that Russia has not attacked anyone militarily. We just wanted to issue a reminder that more than 14,000 people have lost their lives as a result of the war provoked by Russia in eastern Ukraine.

Milan Uhrík also used the argument that Russia is on its territory and therefore can do whatever it wants. He also defended Russian imperial policy and accused the West of escalating tensions. According to Uhrík, the goal of the alleged Western aggression against Russia is clear: "Western liberals want to conquer Russia. However, we do not read about the fact that the West does not collect more than 100,000 soldiers with assault weapons on the Russian border and that it is Russia that has been since 2014 illegally occupying Ukrainian territory.

Data from CrowdTangle, publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

**The "Russophobic" and Pan-Slavic Rhetoric**

All the politicians surveyed, whose posts about Russia got into the 150 most successful posts, used at least one common tactic. They called any reference to the negative consequences of Putin's policy a manifestation of Russophobia, hatred of Russia, anti-Russian rampage, or anti-Russian hysteria. We identified this strategy in only 12 of the 17 posts examined. The aim of this strategy is to relativize criticism of Putin by disqualifying the critics as a person who a priori hates Russia and the Russians, and hence his motives.

We can ask a simple rhetorical question: If the one who criticizes President Putin is a Russophobe, then the one who criticizes President Čaputova is a Slovakophobe. Blaha, Uhrík, Mazurek, and Harabin happen to be among the most vocal critics speaking against the current Slovak president and government?

When Western politicians drew attention in April 2021 to the accumulation of Russian troops on the border with Ukraine, Milan Mazurek called it an "anti-Russian rampage" by which the West was trying to escalate the situation. Mazurek's colleague from the Republika movement, Milan Uhrík, also spoke of "disgusting anti-Russian rampage". According to Štefan Harabin, informing about the accumulation of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border is a "Russophobic campaign".

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

Ľuboš Blaha used this tactic in eight of his 11 posts on Russia. He portrayed the expulsion of three Russian spies with diplomatic cover as a consequence of “Russophobia” and “hatred of the Russian nation”.

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

In four articles, we identified references to pan-Slavic rhetoric. Three of them were published by Blaha and one by Mazurek. Blaha described the Russians as a "brotherly nation" and our "Slavic brothers". According to Blaha, the sooner Slovakia gets rid of this government, the sooner it gets rid of hatred and Russophobia and restores friendly relations with our fraternal Slavic nations."

Panslavism also appeared in Milan Mazurek's video, in which he condemned the alleged "anti-Russian rampage" by the West, because "he considers the Slavs to be our brothers and not our enemies."

Although the above-mentioned politicians referred to the Slavs, they explicitly speak only of the Russians and good relations with the Russians, even in the context of the conflict between the Russians and the Ukrainians, who are also Slavs, but they do not deserve the same respect as the Russians. On the contrary, Russian politicians are trying to legitimize Russia's aggression against Ukraine and look for the causes of the crisis in the West.

The affection for Russia and the Putin regime, which politicians call Pan-Slavism, is also reflected in Ľuboš Blaha's post on the liberation of Czechoslovakia from fascism in World War II. He deals with this topic in four posts and shows respect and gratitude for the liberation exclusively to the Russian nation. He, however, does not mention other nations that took part in the liberation of Czechoslovakia from fascism.

Blaha speaks of the Russian liberation, for example, in the aforementioned open letter to the Russian ambassador to Slovakia: "*Let me assure you, dear Russian friends, that Slovaks will never forget how you liberated us from the German Nazi occupants during WWII. The Russian nation is a heroic nation, and we will forever be grateful for our freedom and for the peace you have brought us*."

Blaha uses a simple manipulative opposition in his statement: "*Slovaks know that the American is an occupier and the Russian is a liberator*."

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

**Manipulation Techniques**

All the analyzed actors used expressive language in their posts, inciting negative emotions towards their opponents. For example, Ľuboš Blaha commented on Igor Matovič's government in the following post, saying that: "*what Matovič is doing here is secretly waging a war against his own nation*" and likened his rule to "a tyranny". Blaha, who is a staunch

opponent of vaccination, claimed in a post from February 2021, after the government decided not to buy Sputnik, that: "*If they believe vaccines can save hundreds of thousands of lives, then what they do is collective suicide – once the government believes that vaccines can save hundreds of thousands of lives, the by this decision it consciously and deliberately sentences hundreds of thousands to death*."

The actors often accompanied the manipulative argumentation techniques with expressive language, which they used to convince people to listen to their opinion. In addition to *ad hominem* attacks on opponents (accusations of Russophobia), such techniques included the use of false analogies (comparisons), whataboutism, and misinterpretation of facts.

MP Blaha used a basic misinterpretation of facts, saying that at a time when "*Slovakia could not get the vaccines from the Western Allies, it was the Russian Federation that offered help*". However, Russia offered its vaccines not in a selfless act towards a country in need, as Blaha portrays it. The arrival of Sputnik V vaccines to Slovakia was a business transaction in which the then Prime Minister Igor Matovič decided on his own accord to buy two million of these vaccines from Russia.

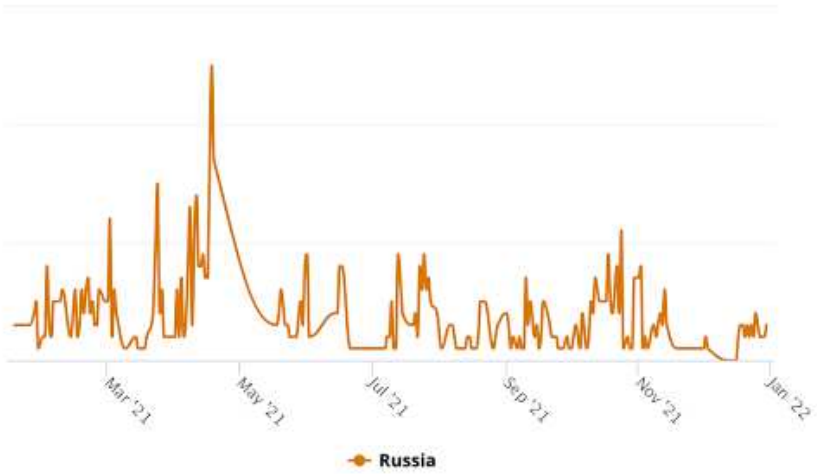
Milan Uhrík employed whataboutism in reporting on the tense situation in Ukraine, which he presented as a result of US policy, completely overlooking the fact that Russia has been waging war against Ukraine since 2014. Instead of admitting that Russia occupies parts of Ukrainian territory, Uhrík criticized the United States for the invasion of Iraq, which was then authorized by then-American leaders such as Collin Powell and George.

Ľuboš Blaha drew a false analogy when he labeled the information about the possible participation of Russian spies in the Vrbětice explosions as Russophobia and linked this alleged Russophobia to the public sentiment in Germany in the 1930s. He also made a reference to the Nazi regime when he compared the Slovak police to the Gestapo because the police supervised the following of anti-pandemic measures during the pandemic.

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

Blaha used the analogy with the communist dictatorship once again when he likened the criticism of his statements in media to political processes in 1950s Czechoslovakia. The analogy, in this case, was accompanied by the strategy called victimization, as Blaha made himself a victim of "dictatorship". With such false analogies, Blaha tried to undermine confidence in the current Slovak government.

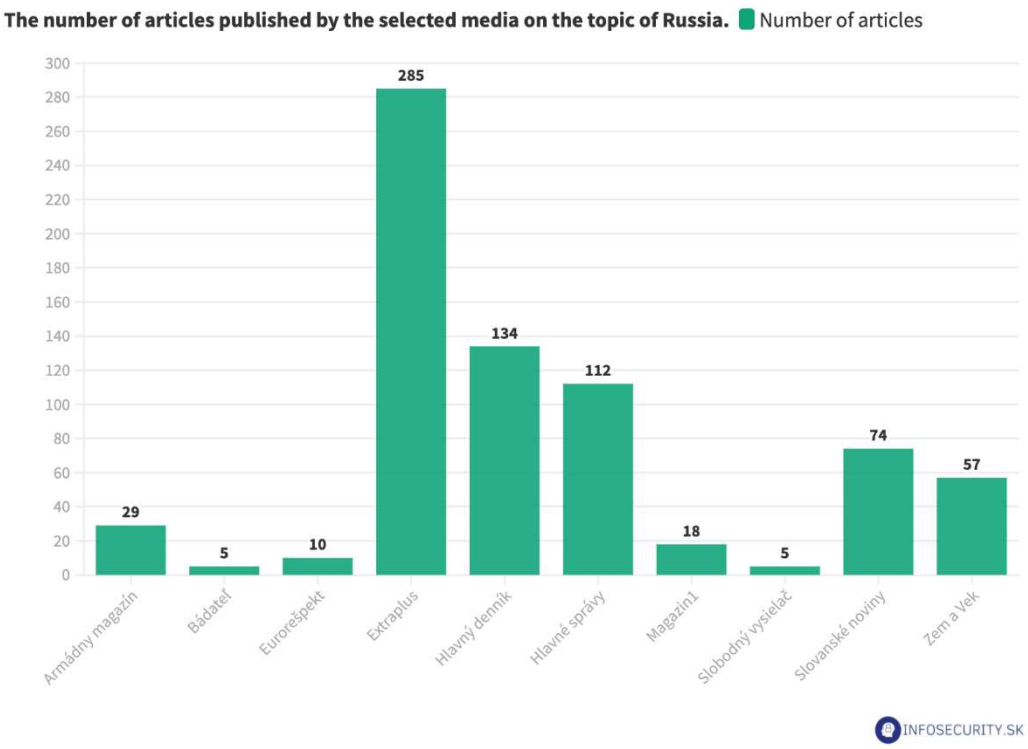
## Websites




The graph shows the prevalence of the topic during 2021 compared to other published content. Data were obtained using the Gerulata Juno analytical tool.

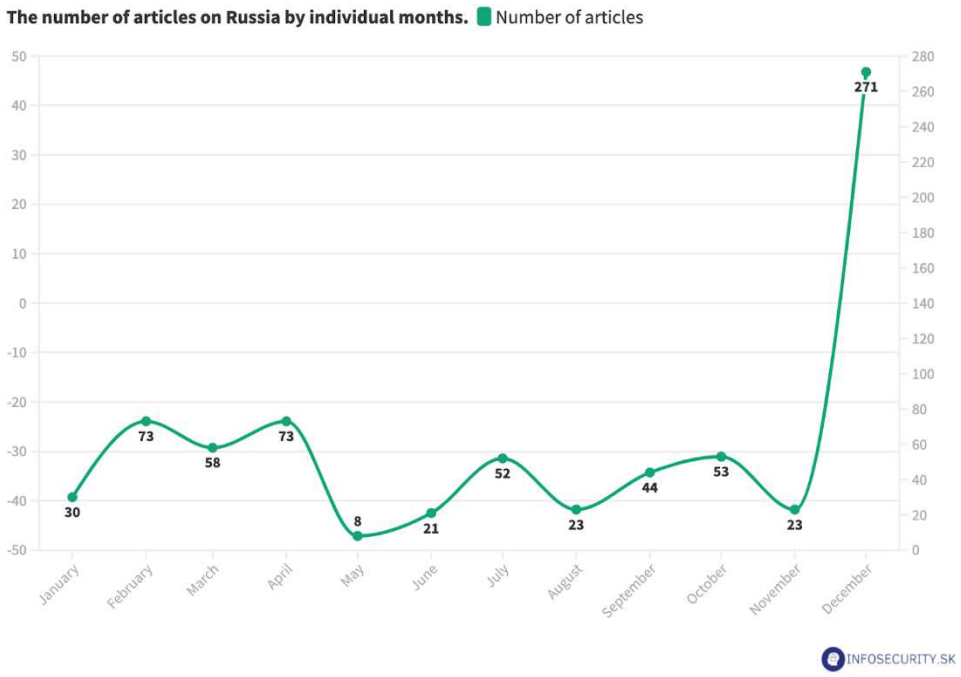
The visualization of Russia-related content published by the analyszed websites showed virtually the same rate of articles throughout the year, with the highest peak appearing on April 18. This is probably related to information about the explosion of the ammunition depot in Vrbětice, Czech Republic, a topic that resonated significantly on the examined websites. These websites also drew attention to subsequent events related to Russia's reaction, the expulsion of Russian diplomats from the Czech Republic, and the Slovak diplomacy's support for this step. Throughout the year, various other topics related to Russia emerged, such as the situation in Ukraine, Belarus, the conflict with NATO, and the like.

Based on a set of keywords, we identified **728 articles** on Russia. **The majority of articles on this topic were published by Extraplus** (285), followed by Hlavný denník (134) and Hlavné správy (112).



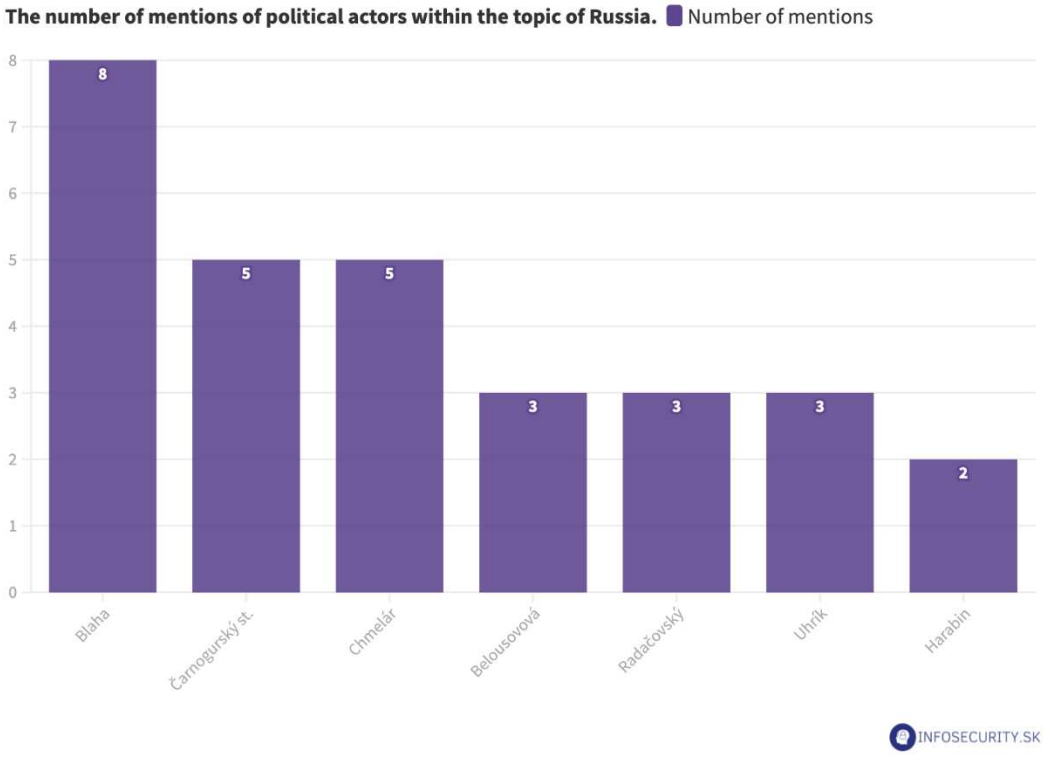

The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822893/.

Topics related to Russia appeared throughout the year with approximately the same monthly average number of articles. In the period from **January to April**, the narratives concerning the purchase of the Sputnik V vaccine by the Government of the Slovak Republic dominated. These were also related to the issue of problematic vaccine registration, not only at the EU level, but also in Russia, and to the conflict between former Prime Minister I. Matovič and ŠÚKL. In the second half of the year, disinformation narratives focused mainly on the energy crisis. The biggest deviation that appeared during the monitored period was in **December, which in the number of articles exceeded the other months by five times**. The reason was both the escalation of the conflict with Ukraine and the heated public debate on the adoption of the DCA. The tensions in Ukraine had also an impact on the debate on DCA and amplified the emotional response of many people in Slovakia.




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822794/.

**Ľuboš Blaha received the most mentions within the content related to Russia** (8 mentions), followed by Ján Čarnogurský senior, and Eduard Chmelár, who both received 5 mentions.



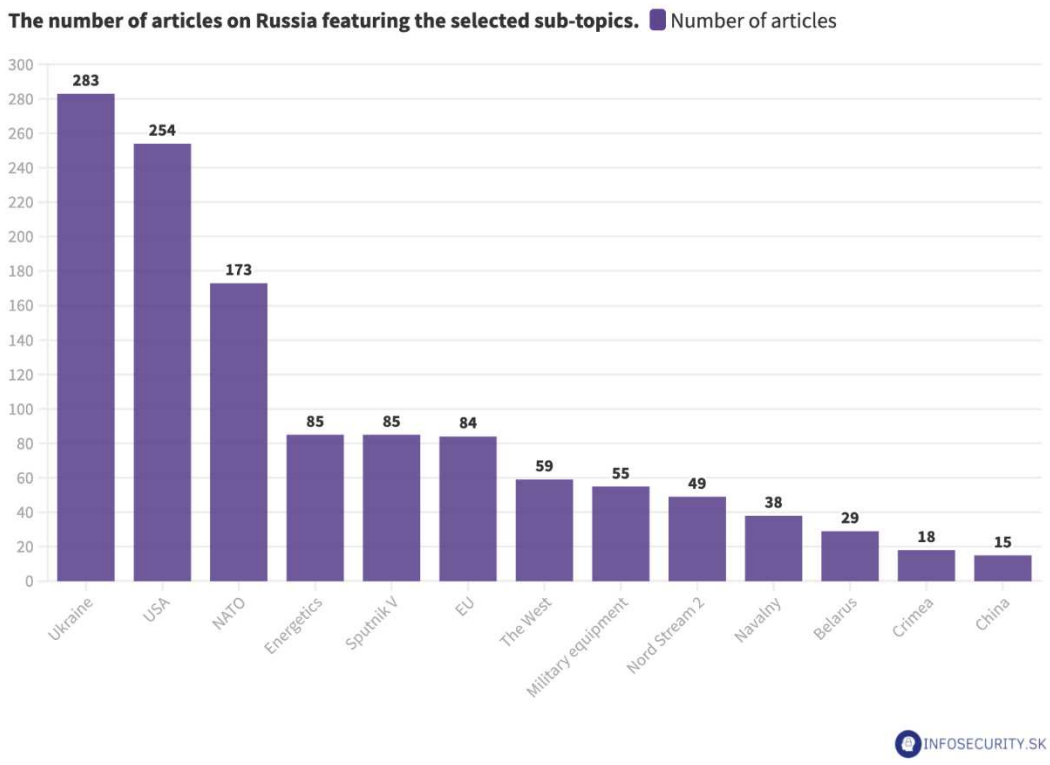

The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822789/.

In the case of topics related to Russia, we identified several dominant narratives that worked mainly with the geopolitical competition between Russia and the West or Russia and the United States. At the beginning of the year, the purchase of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine resonated the most. In this context, Russia was portrayed as a strategic partner of Slovakia, and the issue of vaccine registration by the European Medicines Agency proved to be a problematic and polarizing topic. Arguments pointing to Sputnik V's lack of documentation were often ignored and the distrust towards the vaccine was described as an example of Russophobia and irrational thinking. A narrative was pushed throughout the year, pointing to the quality and preparedness of Russia's military and technical equipment that were contrasted with the US. This narrative often mentioned the drone Ochotnik and hypersonic guided missiles Zirkon that appeared in several analyzed articles and were to be used after Ukraine's possible accession to NATO so that "*NATO will be more willing to talk*".

Other key topics included the explosion in Vrbětice and the energy crisis. In the former case, disinformation actors tried to defend Russia by calling the accusations fabricated and false. A similar line of argumentation was also used after the expulsion of Russian diplomats. Alternatively, the Russian attack was considered as Moscow's legitimate defense of its national interest, not an act of aggression.

This was also the case of narratives concerning the issue of energy, which resonated throughout the year, mainly due to the Nord Stream 2 project and the gas supply outages. A frequent narrative worked with the shift of responsibility from Russia (and Gazprom) to Western actors, in this case, the EU and its green policy in particular. The Kremlin also appeared alongside mentions of Belarus in the analyzed articles, joint military exercises (West 2021), the possibility of deploying nuclear weapons, progress towards a common federal state, and especially the migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border and the conflict with Ukraine were a central subject of a number of the analyzed articles.

As mentioned above, a key issue that has emerged throughout the period under review was the positioning of the US, NATO, and the EU in the role of an aggressor and contrasting them to the allegedly innocent Russia. This optics was applied in the case of several narratives, however, Kremlin's victimization became clearest in the case of the conflict with Ukraine and the end-of-year amassing of Russian troops near its border. Russian aggression was again ignored, and the blame was put on representatives of Western organizations and institutions. At the same time, allegations were made that the US controlled Ukraine, was planning a military invasion, and would not hesitate to use chemical weapons. Similarly, Western institutions were portrayed as lacking unity, facing their own misery and decline.




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822750/.

## Belarus

The rigged presidential elections of August 2020, after which Lukashenko remained president of Belarus and the subsequent mass protests were reflected also in the Slovak disinformation media. Although the protests subsided in 2021, Lukashenko's repressions against civil society, the media, and political opponents continued. Most political opponents have been imprisoned or expelled.

Slovak political actors and disinformation websites covered and interpreted these events in 2021 in line with the arguments of Lukashenko and Putin. The main position on the situation in Belarus was that the West is trying to adversely affect internal developments in Belarus, Lukashenko is defending Belarusian independence, and Russia is helping him to do so.

### Plane Hijacking and Arrest of a Journalist

One of the most resonating events reflected by the Slovak disinformation actors was the hijacking of a plane bound from Athens to Vilnius, the detention of opposition journalist Raman Pratasevich and his girlfriend Sofia Sapegova, and the following sanctions by the EU and the US.

In late May, the Lukashenko regime forced a commercial plane from Athens to Vilnius to land in Minsk. The Belarusians used the false pretext that there was a bomb on the plane.

In fact, there was no bomb on board. The real reason why the Belarusian jets forced the plane to land in Minsk was the attempt to detain journalist Raman Pratasevich and his girlfriend.

The European Union, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States have strongly condemned the hijacking and imposed new, harsh sanctions on Lukashenko's regime. Lukashenko's propaganda presented them as unfounded and as part of Western pressure to change the regime in Belarus.

The Belarusian and Russian media also began to spread various disinformation about Pratasevich himself, for instance, that he was a neo-Nazi. The evidence for this claim was supposed to be his photographs allegedly proving that he had fought in the war in Ukraine alongside the Azov Battalion. In reality, however, Pratasevich watched what happened at the front as a journalist, and his identity in the photos was not confirmed.

However, this claim was also taken over by Slovak disinformation websites, that tried to justify Lukashenko's actions. Their explanation was that he only strives to protect his country's sovereignty and prevent Western aggression. In this context, they also demonized the following Western sanctions.

## Lukashenko's Migration Crisis

Another resonating event was the artificially created migration crisis on the Belarusian border with Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. The worst situation was on the border with Poland.

Lukashenko brought in migrants from the Middle East to Belarus by plane, then Belarusian security forces escorted them to the border, motivating them to try to cross illegally to Poland, Lithuania, or Latvia. These countries built a wired fence at the border and refused to allow migrants into their territory.

Migrants were trapped between a fence at the borders of EU member states and members of the Belarusian security forces who did not want to let migrants back to Belarus. The Belarusians have thus artificially created a humanitarian crisis. Lukashenko has probably tried to push the EU to ease the sanctions on his regime.

Although the evidence clearly indicated that Lukashenko was deliberately sending migrants to the EU border, Slovak disinformation websites rejected this and blamed Poland and the EU for the migration crisis.

They used the argument of a double standard, according to which the EU allegedly tried to get migrants from the Middle East to Europe in 2015-2016, but when they came through Belarus, they rejected them for political reasons.

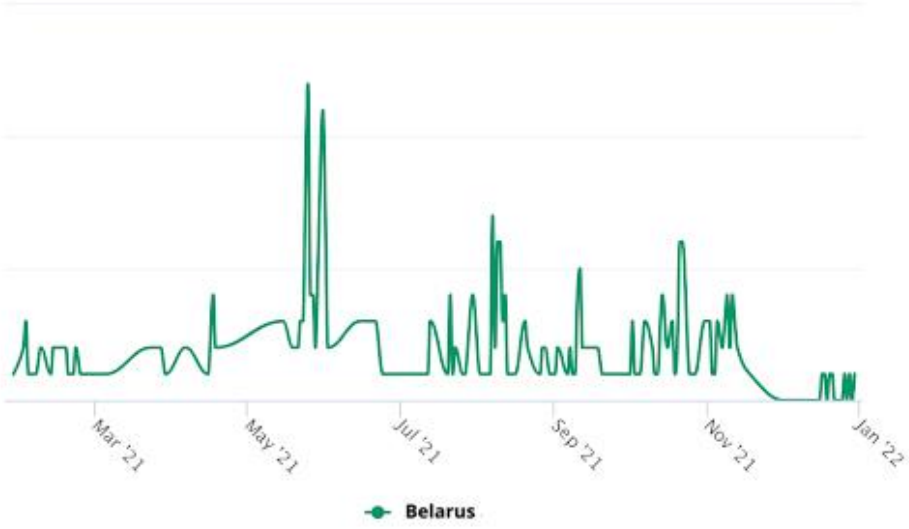
Although they acknowledged that Lukashenko used migrants as a political tool, they portrayed it as a legitimate defense against Western policy toward Belarus.

## Political Actors on Facebook

Belarus was mentioned in only one of the 150 most successful. Specifically, in a post by Ľuboš Blaha from May 9, 2021. The post received **18,154 interactions**. In the post, Blaha speculates and promotes a conspiracy theory claiming that the money that the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent to support the Belarusian opposition ended up in hands of terrorists who were to plan the assassination of Alexander Lukashenko.

Blaha presents the information about the assassination as a fact, although it has not been confirmed or verified and remains only a speculation. Moreover, it was Russia and Belarus who came with this information. In his post, Blaha is trying to discredit the Belarusian opposition (he presents them as people with ties to terrorists but gives no evidence) and the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led by Ivan Korčok.

## Websites

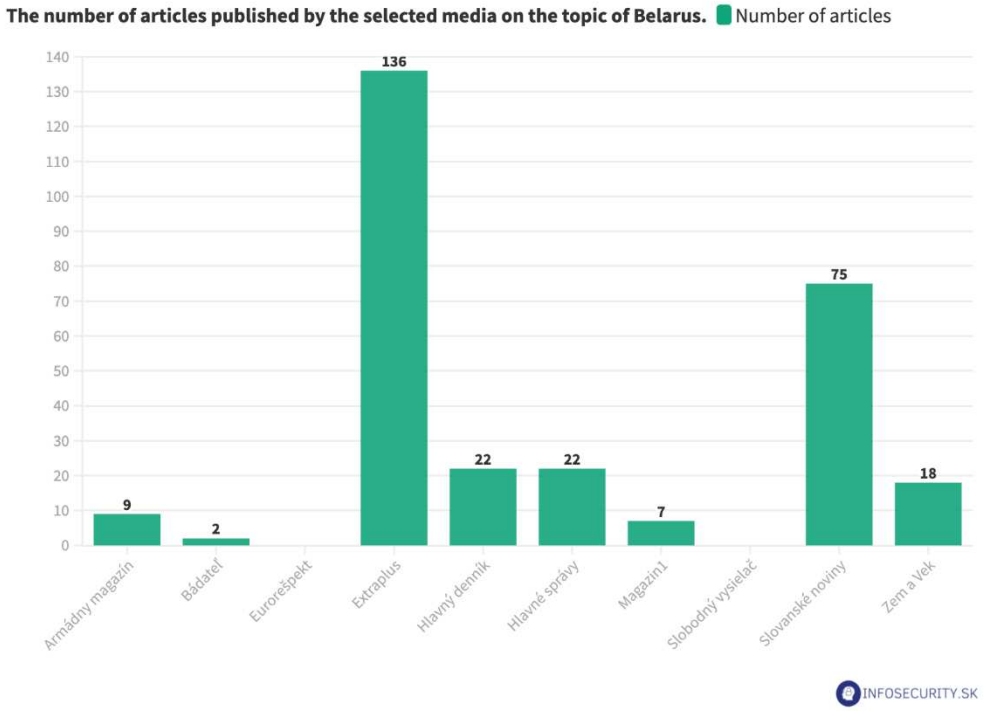



The graph shows the prevalence of the topic during 2021 in relation to other published content. Data were obtained using the Gerulata Juno analytical tool.

On the topic of Belarus, selected websites published a considerable amount of content, especially in the second part of the year, but a major peak was recorded at the end of May. This is probably related to the arrest of the journalist R. Pratašević on May 23, 2021, and the events that followed.

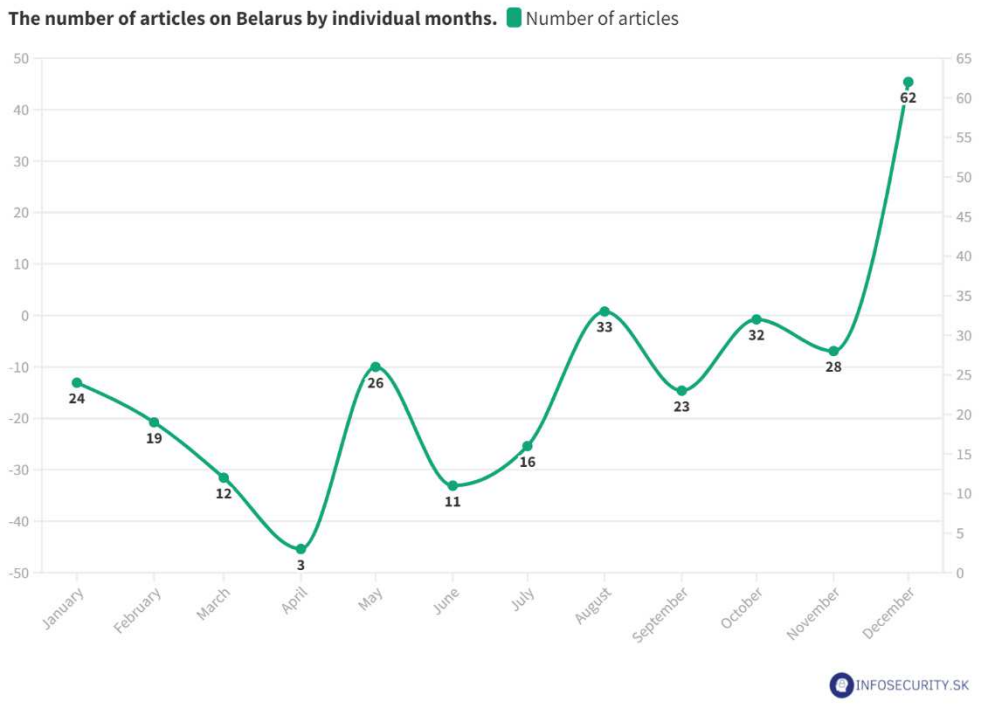
Another peak appeared in early August, probably due to the situation on the Belarusian border. The EU's response to the use of migrants as a coercive tool by the Lukashenko regime to ease the sanctions imposed on Belarus, as well as the decision to close the country's western and southern borders, may have also been a factor behind this peak.

**By using a set of keywords, we identified a total of 291 articles. The majority of them was published by Extraplus** (136), with Slovanské noviny (75) in second place in the number of articles.



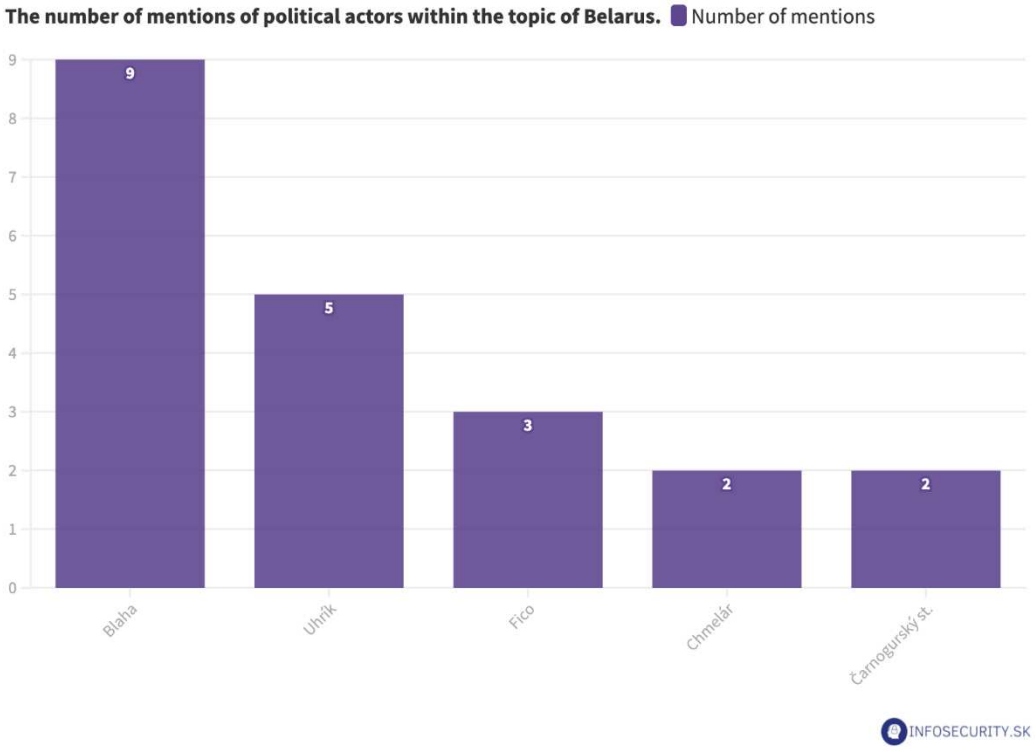

The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822735/.

The topic of Belarus **resonated mainly in May and August**. The articles in May discussed the capture of Roman Pratašević, in August the issue of sanctions and the meeting of the US President with Svietlana Cichanovska dominated as a topic. The situation was similar in October, which was defined by the topic of **the migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border**. The topic was carried over to the first half of December, later the issue of Russian-Belarusian relations began to dominate, especially in the context of the conflict with Ukraine.




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822667/.

**Within the Slovak information space, Ľuboš Blaha (9) posted the most content on the topic of Belarus**, followed by Milan Uhrík (5), and Robert Fico (3).




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822657/.

In the context of Belarus, we have seen three major narratives. The first worked with the topics related to the post-election protests and the Belarusian opposition. These appeared throughout the year, especially in relation to Western institutions and sanctions imposed on the Belarusian regime. Some narratives defended the legitimacy of the election and compared protests to the coup or Maidan. The dominant narrative was the accusation that the protests were organized and funded from abroad. In this context, statements by Russian state officials who followed similar rhetoric were taken over by Slovak disinformation actors. An example of this rhetoric can be in a post by Milan Uhrík, who claimed that the protests were "funded and planned by the West." To a large extent, Slovak disinformation actors uncritically repeated the rhetoric of the representatives of the Belarusian regime, who saw foreign funding and interest in destabilizing the country as key factors behind the protests. The topic of the Belarusian opposition and protests also served as a tool for attacks on Slovak politicians with a Euro-Atlantic orientation. Support for opposition activities was described as following orders of the US embassy. These actors also attacked Sviatlana Cichanovska who was often called a foreign agent.

The expression of support for the Belarusian opposition was criticized with the help of the narrative about the protesting "Belarusian fascists". Narratives associated with fascism, Nazism, or the extreme right have often re-appeared especially in the case of the arrest of journalist Roman Pratašević. The fact that he was detained only due to the label of a foreign agent and a terrorist was ignored and the analyzed content tried to legitimize this act of the Belarusian regime. They also spread speculation about his internship in the USA, participation in the Ukrainian Maidan, or recruitment to the Azov battalion. There were also reports that NEXTA members were to plan protests in Russia.

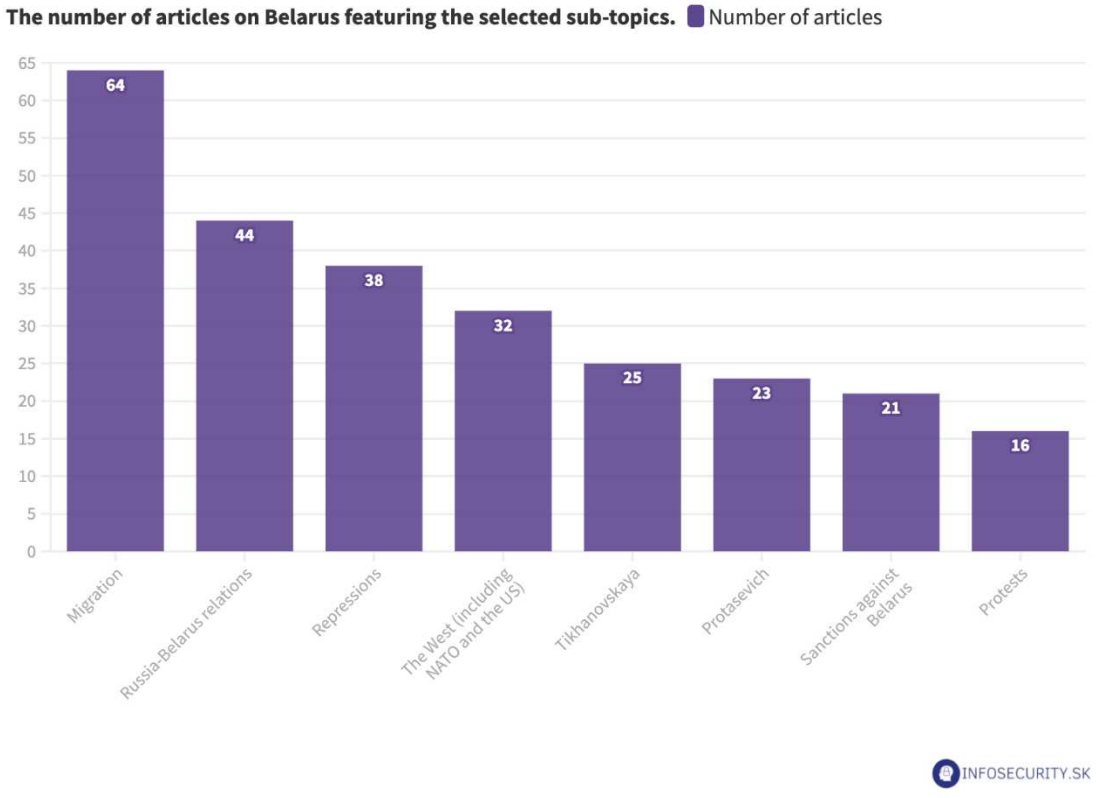
Throughout the year, several narratives were promoted, which portrayed the current events as the conflict between Belarus and the West (esp. the EU and NATO). As in the case of Russia, on the subject of Belarus, we identified several attempts at using victimization of the Belarusian regime, which was to be unfairly sanctioned due to its repression against the opposition. Disinformation actors came up with labels like "sanction marasmus," which was supposed to represent the Western unfounded witch hunt on Belarus. The claims were supported by the marginalization of Lukashenko's dictatorial regime.

In this context, the migration crisis caused by Belarus by its political instrumentalization of migrants on the borders with the Baltic States and with Poland was also crucial. In this way, Lukashenko was to enable the EU to "*welcome what it promotes at home and abroad as extremely desirable, and enriching: the masses of Afro-Islamic immigrants*". The story of a Polish soldier who was to flee to Belarus due to the fact that he was no longer able to serve the Polish army was also widespread. In addition, he allegedly pointed to the "*inhuman behavior of the Polish authorities towards refugees*". In addition to criticism of the

construction of border walls or fences (especially against Poland and Latvia), there was also praise for Russian-Belarusian cooperation.

It is the improvement of Russian-Belarusian relations that can be considered the baseline underlying the content on the geopolitical conflict between the West and the East. The deepening of their mutual relations took place on several levels (it was reflected in several sub-topics). These were mainly supplies of weapons and military equipment, joint exercises (West 2021), and the like. Russian-Belarusian activities have often been presented as a joint effort to combat Western pressure. An example is the deployment of Russian bombers to Belarusian airspace during the "*unprecedented amassing of [Polish] army at their shared border*."

The conclusion of an agreement on deepening the integration process between Russia and Belarus, and thus a step towards the creation of a common federal state was also crucial. A similar narrative was applied in the case of the Russian conflict with Ukraine, in which the prospect of the possible cooperation of two "fraternal nations" was often discussed, including the deployment of nuclear weapons and other military equipment. Here, too, we could see a shift of responsibility for escalating tensions. Lukashenko issued several statements promising that in the event of an open conflict or "*a war on Donbas or somewhere near the border with Russia*," Belarus will not stand by but act.




The data were obtained by using the Gerulata Juno tool. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822636/.

## Hungary

In the course of 2021, Slovak disinformation actors often took over information about what was happening in Hungary many posts and articles were linked to the decline of democracy in the country. The rhetoric and actions of the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in his fight against liberalism, the EU, or migration were interpreted by Slovak actors as right and as a good example, the Slovak Republic should follow. The purchase of the Sputnik vaccine was one of the most resonating topics. It should be added that not all topics related to Hungary were the main subject of the analyzed articles and posts, for example, in the case of Sputnik V, Hungary was only a side topic.

### The Protection of Traditional Values and the Relations with the EU

For example, arguments defending the Child Protection Act have been taken over by Slovak disinformation actors. The law, effective since July 8, 2021, was originally aimed at more strict punishments for child abuse, but later, amendments banning the "promotion of homosexuality" to children under the age of 18 were added. The regulation further prohibits the "display or promotion" of products that "express homosexuality" or "deviation from gender identity at birth".

According to the European Parliament (EP), this legislation is an attempt to suppress the rights of sexual minorities under the guise of combating pedophilia, it restricts children's freedom of expression and rights. The reason for this EP position is that it prohibits the inclusion of LGBT content in school educational materials and television programs for children under 18 years. Following the EU's reaction, Viktor Orbán announced that a referendum would be held on the controversial law.

The Slovak disinfectant media and Orbán's followers approved of his statements and steps related to the law and portrayed him as a politician who strives to preserve "traditional values" and leads the fight against the so-called "Gender ideology" under the guise of Christian, or rather illiberal democracy. Similarly, several actors glorified Orbán and the Fidesz party for their opposition to the West, liberal elites, and the EU. This is also shown by the results of the research of the Slovak-Hungarian information space by the Infosecurity.sk, which pointed to the considerable support for the narrative that Hungary and the Hungarian government are protecting traditional values (from liberal elites, liberal EU, migration, etc.).

### Slovak-Hungarian Relations

Disinformation actors in the Slovak information space in 2021 also took over disinformation narratives concerning mutual relations between Slovakia and Hungary. In April, the then Slovak Prime Minister Igor Matovič's visit to Budapest resonated as a topic for some time. It was linked to the purchase of Sputnik V vaccines. The Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs,

Péter Szijjártó, stated that he was willing to mediate the communication between Slovak and Russian political representatives in talks about the purchase of vaccines. The situation eventually led to a coalition crisis in Slovakia. Slovak disinformation actors reacted to the situation with a mostly stance, as they advocated the purchase of Russian vaccines and promoted the opening of a dialogue with Russia

Another topic that resonated in 2021, was the discussion of the amendment to the Act on Citizenship (the issue of dual citizenship) between the member of OĽaNO party György Gyimes and the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Péter Szijjártó without informing of Slovak diplomacy actors. Gyimes's visit to Komárno on March 3, 2021, led to a diplomatic conflict between Hungary and Slovakia. Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok summoned the Hungarian ambassador to Slovakia and asked him for an explanation. Gyimesi allegedly has a close relationship with the Hungarian New Unity Movement, which leans towards nationalism and wants to unite all Hungarians.

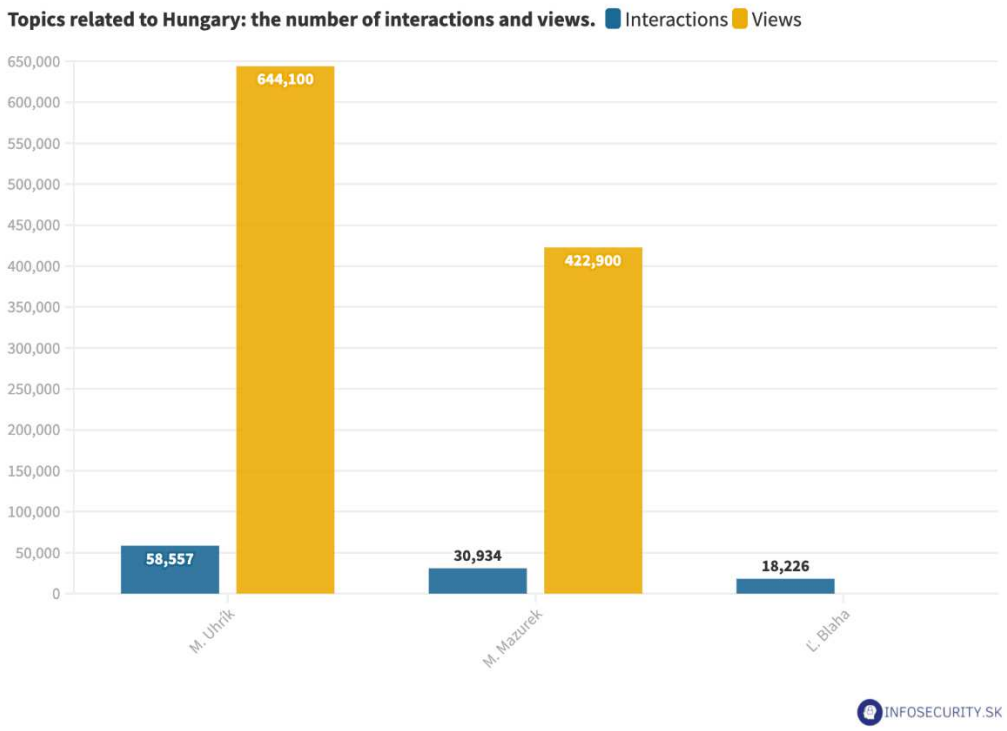
Tensions arose in relations between Slovakia and Hungary again after the visit of the Speaker of the Hungarian Parliament László Kövér in Šamorín on August 2, 2021. At the unveiling of the monument commemorating Hungarians who emigrated after the Second World War on the occasion of the 76th anniversary of the issuance of Beneš's decrees, he spoke of historical wrongs against the Hungarians, for which he demanded an apology from Slovakia.

The conflict over the Citizenship Act, as well as Kövér's speech in Šamorín, reflect the widespread sentiment prevalent in the Slovak-Hungarian information space claiming that the territory of the Slovak Republic should change in favor of Hungary. The narrative to historical events and Hungary's dissatisfaction with the changes in its territory after the Second World War.

The final resonating narrative concerned Viktor Orbán's effort to establish a fund that would allow the purchase of arable land in Central Europe, including Slovakia. The Hungarian side gave up on the intention after diplomatic pressure from the Slovak Republic. However, there are still questions about the purchase of the real estate in the Slovak Republic, as well as the Hungarian government's programs in the field of education and business support in Slovakia, and generous support for subsidy schemes.

## Political Actors on Facebook

After analyzing the content published by selected political representatives and people with a political background on Facebook, we can state that the topics described above related to Hungary were not very important for the actors. Within the 150 contributions that received the most interactions during 2021, the topic of Hungary appeared only three times. **Topics related to Hungary received a total of 107,717 interactions and the video content received approximately 1,067,000 views.**



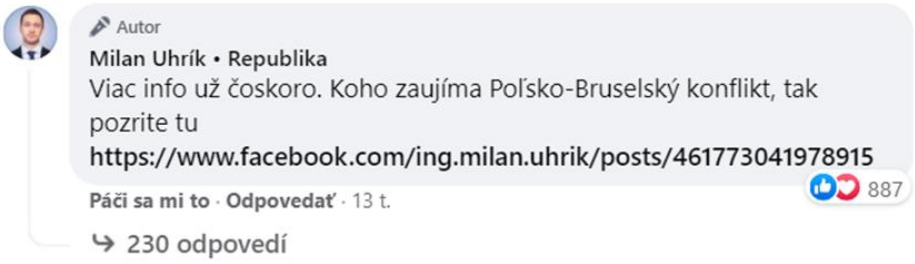

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822537/.

The most successful post on this topic ranked 8th (top) in the list. It was a video by MEP Milan Uhrík, which captures his speech in the plenary of the European Parliament (EP). At the time of data collection, the video had **58,557 interactions and approximately 644,100 views**.

The post was published on October 19, 2021, and featured a short excerpt of Milan Uhrík's message to the President of the European Commission (EC) Ursula von der Leyen. In his speech, Uhrík focused primarily on Poland, but mentioned Hungary too, as he spoke of the conservative states of Central Europe on which is the EU is forcing its liberal values. The post read: "*Do not provoke Central Europe. Don't try to impose an ideology and a way of life we don't want!*" The EP debate concerned a decision by the Polish Constitutional Court establishing that Polish national law may take precedence over EU law.

Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook.

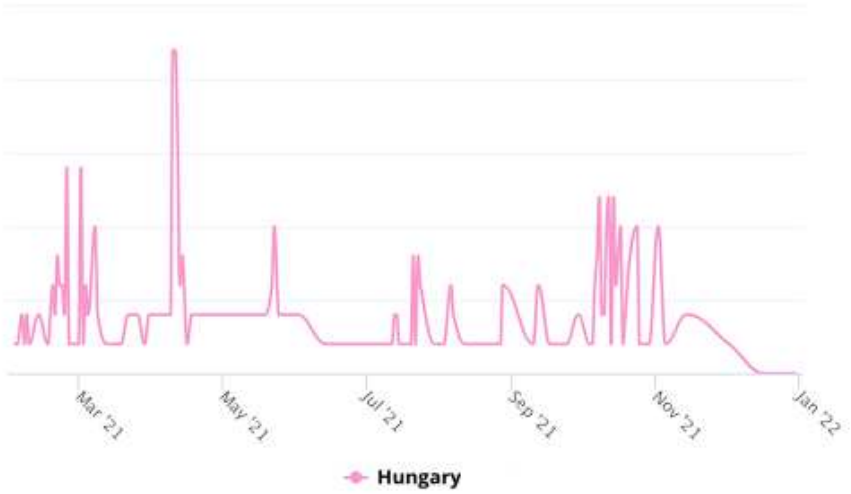
Uhrík's posts promote the narrative of traditional values and the alleged incompatibility of the values of conservative states with the liberal EU. In the comments section, the MEP also added a link to another of his videos with a commentary on the "Polish-Brussels conflict". In the description of the second video, he stated: "Slovakia must join conservative Poland and protect itself from the liberal fools of Brussels. I don't miss Muslim ghettos here" He said in the video that Hungary, as a conservative ally, naturally sided with Poland in the conflict with the EU, which is allegedly pushing its liberal agenda through mandatory recognition of European court rulings. He cited as an example the quotas on the admission of immigrants within the EU Member States and legislation on same-sex marriages. According to Uhrík, this is "*the most dangerous and insidious practice that we must stand up to.*"




Commentary by Milan Uhrík under the posts on EP where he shares a link to another of his videos on traditional values.

The MEP called the superiority of European legislation over the laws of the Slovak Republic a treacherous article in the Slovak Constitution. Slovakia should thus "*support the Hungarians and Poles in the fight to preserve the traditional and conservative Central Europe*". According to Uhrík, Hungarians and Poles are trying to break free from the tyranny of Brussels and European laws, while the EU is dictating to the member states what the rule of law should look like. At the end of the video, he calls on Slovakia to stand together with Poles and Hungarians to protect Central Europe and our way of life.

## Websites



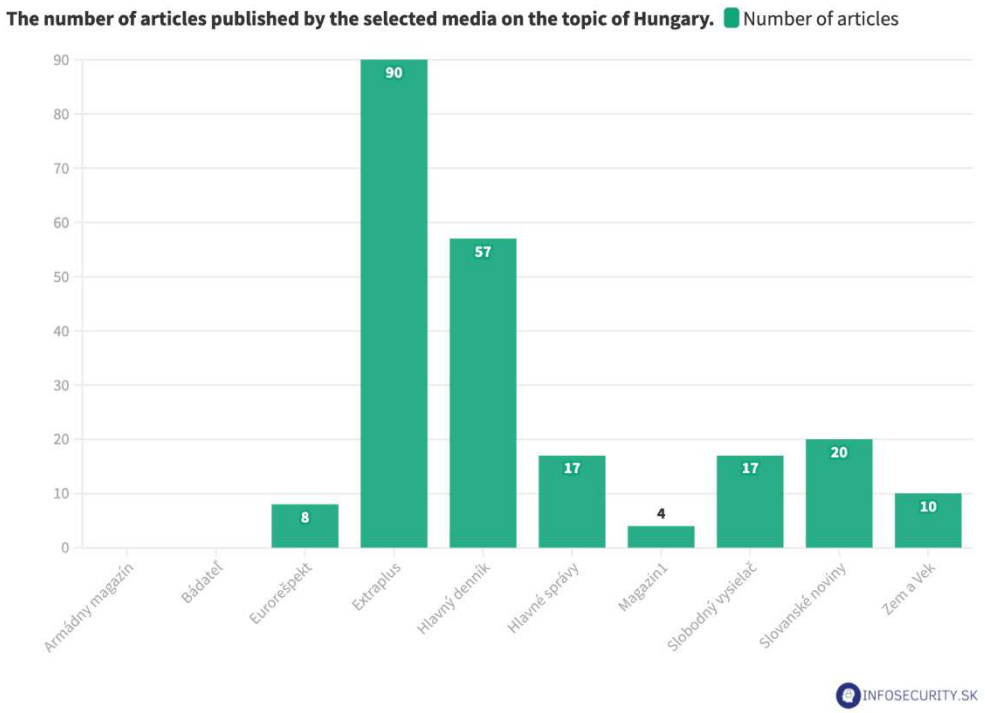

The graph shows the prevalence of the topic during 2021 in relation to other published content. Data were obtained using the Gerulata Juno analytical tool.

Among other foreign topics, those related to Hungary have received less attention. Here too, however, we have seen some key peaks. The major one was in February 2021, when Hungary was the first EU member state to announce the purchase of Russian Sputnik V vaccines.

Another key moment was the visit of Igor Matovič and OĽaNO MP György Gyimesi to Budapest, where they met with the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Péter Szijjártó and the Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orbán. The meeting, which was held to discuss the testing of the Sputnik V vaccine, took place on April 9 and caused a backlash from Slovak diplomacy. Shortly after, the topic also appeared in the content of the analyzed websites.

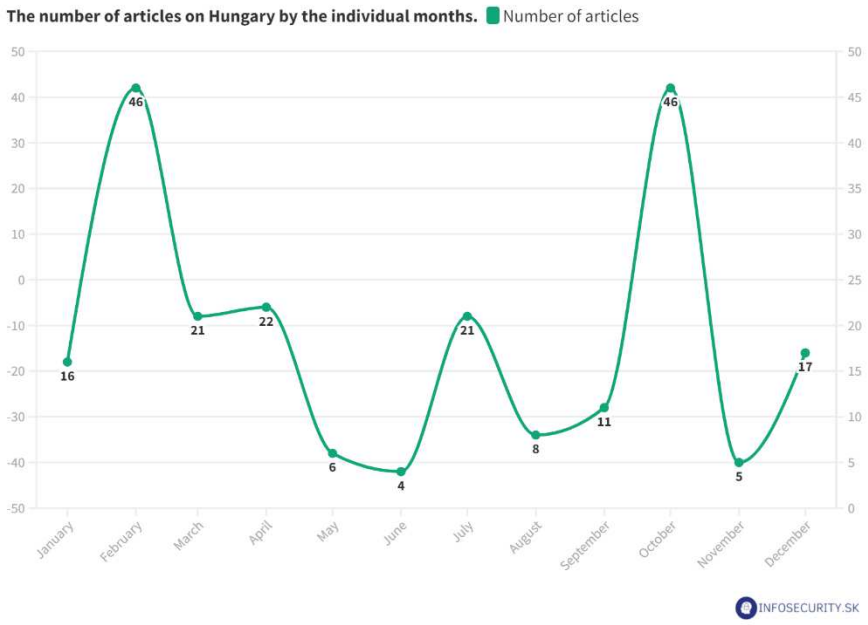
The final peak was in October 2021 when an increased amount of content appeared focused on the purchase of land and real estate by Hungary in Slovakia.

Within the topic of Hungary, we **identified 223 articles** that matched the set keywords. **Most of them were published on Extraplus** (90), followed by Hlavný denník (57).



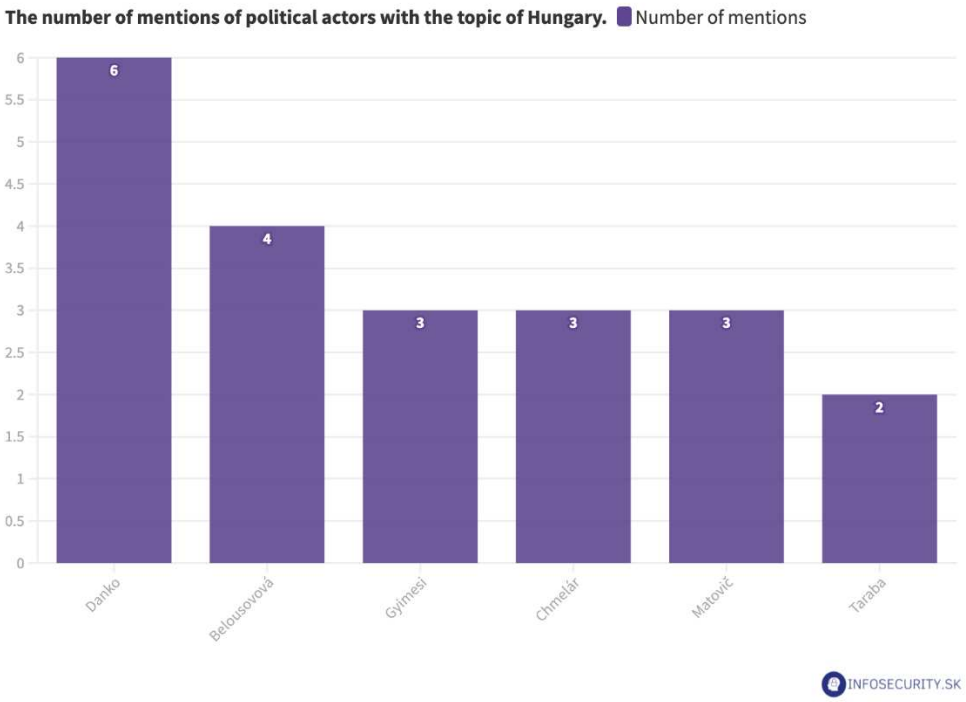

Data were obtained using the Gerulata Juno analytical tool. To zoom in, click here https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822528/.

The topic of Hungary was continuously present in the Slovakia information space but resonated especially in February and October 2021. In February 2021, Hungary was mentioned mainly in connection with the Slovak purchase of Sputnik V.




Data were obtained using the Gerulata Juno analytical tool. To zoom in, click here https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822516/.

**Mentions of Andrej Danko (6) dominated Hungarian topics**. It is mainly the result of his statements on both of the most resonant topics. In the case of the purchase of Sputnik V, he even tried to act as its mediator in the talks with the Russian side. He was followed in the number of mentions by Anna Belousovová (4) and György Gyimesi (3).



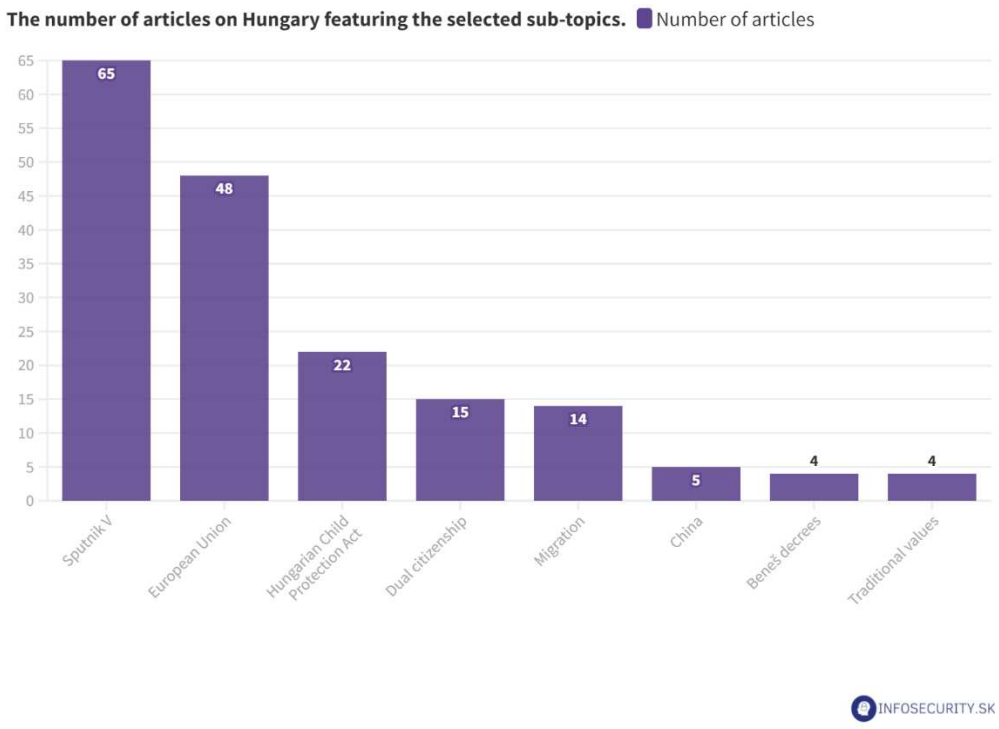

Data were obtained using the Gerulata Juno analytical tool. To zoom in, click here https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822495/.

Within the content related to Hungary, the **topic of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine** appeared in the majority of (65 analyzed articles) of the analyzed content. Articles commented mainly on the fact that Hungary was the first in the EU to approve the use of Sputnik V. At the same time, the articles promoted the narrative that the Russian vaccine should not be considered from a geopolitical point of view, but in the light of vaccination goals. After the Slovak Republic registered the Sputnik V vaccine, these actors emphasized that we followed the example of Hungary.

An important topic in this category was also the conflict between Hungary and the EU. The topic of the EU appeared in 48 articles. These were mainly related to the theme of traditional values, the fight against migration in an effort to preserve the traditional family, and the fight against oppression and totalitarianism, which the EU is allegedly introducing in its member states. The EU was also portrayed negatively for its disapproval of the Hungarian Child Protection Act, originally aimed at protecting against pedophilia. The law was described by the European Commission as homophobic and discriminatory against the LGBT community, as it was also intended to ban "homosexual propaganda." The EC's reaction was presented as coercion and blackmailing of Hungary.

Among others, there were also articles focused on the preference for V4 format, or rather relations with Hungary and Poland instead of the EU, especially due to the abovementioned conflict over the rule of law. For example, Extraplus published an article with Robert Fico's statement that Poland and Hungary "*maintained their own position on the key issues at stake here: defending the right of veto and saving Europe from the rigid Eurofederation and defending their countries from the mass migration of people from cultures too different from ours, which would result in ghettos and new communities in the midst of the original populations of Eastern Europe"*.

An important topic within the analyzed web content was also **the issue of dual citizenship** and the discussion on the amendment to the law by György Gyimes and the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Péter Szijjártó without the knowledge of Slovak diplomacy. The topic was viewed rather negatively within the web content examined. Ľuboš Blaha described the move as "*Gyimesi's radical nonsense about the law on dual citizenship*". According to Hlavný denník, it was a "short-sighted Hungarianism". The article then added a statement of former deputy and minister Zsolt Simon, saying: "*They submitted the law on dual citizenship and its amendment to parliament. So, as a matter of priority, Gyimesi should sit down with his colleagues and look for a solution. But he does not negotiate with anyone, either within the coalition or the party*." The negative portrayal of this topic did not have to be motivated only by the fact that this is a sensitive issue linked to Slovak sovereignty, but also by the fact that Gyimes is a member of the OĽaNo party. The topic was thus portrayed through the prism of the Duray nationalists of the new generation in this party (note: Miklós Duray was a member of the National Council of the Slovak Republic for the SMK). In addition, Hungarian politicians allegedly took advantage of the incompetence of Slovak Foreign Minister Ivan Korčok, who was supposedly preoccupied with the problems in Belarus and the expulsion of Russian diplomats.




Data from CrowdTangle, a publicly available tool owned and run by Facebook. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8822463/.

## Conclusion

Research on the Slovak disinformation scene in 2021 has shown a clear **trend in the use of Covid-19-related topics to gain an audience**, whether it is political actors publishing on Facebook or websites focusing on a wide range of topics. In addition to being featured in the highest number of posts and articles, this topic also received the most interactions and video views among the analyzed content. In the case of web content, the reach of the articles could not be documented, but an analysis of 150 Facebook posts clearly demonstrates this trend.

In addition, the study points to a significant **overlap between topics**, with many articles and Facebook posts addressing the Covid-19 as the main subject with several other topics accompanying it. An example of the overlap was the purchase of Russian Sputnik V vaccines by Hungary and the visit of I. Matovič with G. Gyimesi in Budapest. We typically included articles and posts on this topic to the category "Hungary", but this content also bore mentions of topics from two other categories, "Covid-19" and "Russia", as Hungary preferred the Russian vaccine over other vaccines and pointed to the need to communicate purchases with the Russian side.

The analysis of foreign topics showed a relatively little coverage of topics related to Belarus. Moreover, Belarus was in many cases presented in a neutral or even negative light. On the contrary, we have identified a clear **pro-Russian and anti-Western aspect** in the US and Russian-related content. In many cases, Russia has been presented as a victim of aggressive

NATO and US, as a partner for dialogue, or even as a savior (for example, the Sputnik V supplies, which were promoted in the spirit of “rescue comes from Russia”). In addition to pro-Russian rhetoric, we have seen some anti-Western elements. This was particularly evident in the US-related content, where there was a reference to President Biden's allegedly provocative foreign policy, military failures in various regions of the world (primarily linked to the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan), and the decline of democracy in the US (which manifested itself in the storming of Capitol Building). At the same time, disinformation actors often emphasized NATO's allegedly aggressive steps, its extension to the Baltics, and threat to Russia. In addition, there have been many attacks on the EU for allegedly pushing Western vaccines against Covid-19, suppressing traditional values, and sanctioning Russia and Belarus. At the end of the year, the anti-Western rhetoric was very evident in the opposition to the forthcoming defense agreement between the USA and the Slovak Republic.

Undermining the pro-Western orientation of the Slovak Republic, efforts to increase pro-Russian sentiment, and the spread of disinformation narratives related to Covid-19 is nothing completely new compared to previous years. What was new, however, was the spillover of disinformation and toxic rhetoric from the online environment to the reality that has manifested itself in the form of massive anti-government protests, acts of resistance to pandemic measures, and attacks on scientists and experts. Large-scale mobilization for the anti-government protests took place mainly through Facebook profiles and the websites of opposition and non-parliamentary political actors, but also through the analyzed websites. Research in this context has shown a large amount of toxic content directed against the government, its individual members, but also other political figures (for example, against the president, who allegedly deliberately thwarted the referendum on early elections). These phenomena significantly **contribute to undermining of the pillars of a democracy and rule of law, proper functioning of state institutions, the pro-Western orientation of the state, and results in decline of citizens' confidence in their own state**.

## Research Design

The research of the disinformation trends in 2021 was based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The choice of topics and platforms for the analysis was motivated by long-term experience with monitoring problematic content in the Slovak information space. We regularly monitor the information environment, publish articles and fact-checks that allow us to monitor key topics and narratives, as well as the actors who disseminate them.

The research consisted of several stages. In the first stage, based on our monitoring of the disinformation environment, a selection of topics took place which resonated throughout 2021 for more than one month. The result of the selection process were 3 topics from the domestic environment and 4 topics from abroad. Most of the topics consisted of several events and sub-topics. The intersection of individual topics was also frequent, in the case of 2021, it was mainly an intersection with narratives related to the Covid-19 pandemic. We have classified the individual topics as follows:

**Domestic Topics:**

1. Death of former Police President Milan Lučanský
2. Power struggle in the security forces;
3. Political and health issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

**International Topics:**

1. USA;
2. Russia;
3. Belarus;
4. Hungary.

At this stage of the research, we also selected the monitored media and platforms and created lists of analyzed actors. We divided the research into two main parts:

1. **Analysis of content published by actors with a political background on Facebook**

We based our findings on the Reuters Institute report, which clearly shows that Facebook is the preferred social media platform in Slovakia.

The choice of political actors was conditioned by several criteria. We have created a long list of actors, which covered people who in the current election period have a parliamentary mandate in the National Council of the Slovak Republic or are members of the government (166 people), have a mandate in the European Parliament (14 people), are former politicians or political candidates outside the parliament (17 people). After applying the given criteria, we created a list of 197 political figures. We subsequently excluded people from the list

without a public official website or profile on Facebook (27 people), thus reducing the list of actors to 170 people.

To obtain data that would be relevant to the research, we narrowed down the list of political figures by applying additional criteria. We selected the actors we suspected might be distributing problematic domestic and foreign policy content; had an active official and publicly available Facebook profile or page at the time; and the minimum number of followers on this site had to be above 5,000. Applying these criteria, **we created a list of political actors which consisted of 28 people**. The list is available in Annex 1.

The content published by the selected political actors during the period under review (January 1 to December 31, 2021) was analyzed by using the **Crowd Tangle** tool. Content filtering was based on the time period set, the keywords entered, and the use of the "total interactions" metric. The final analysis and conclusions of the research are derived from a detailed examination of the **150 most successful posts** according to the methodology.

2. **Analysis of content published on media websites publishing disinformation and misleading content**

Content analysis of the selected websites was performed using **the Gerulata Juno** analysis tool. The selection of monitored pages was subject to selection based on several criteria. It was primarily a category of Slovak websites relevant to our research, and previous experience with their content – the website has in the past published unreliable, misleading information, conspiracy theories, or disinformation narratives. Another criterion for the selection was the pro-Russian orientation. We also compared our selection with a publicly available online database of problematic websites konspiratori.sk.

Based on these selection criteria, we compiled a list of 41 problematic websites. Then, we created a list of monitored sites in the analytical tool Gerulata Juno. Due to the unavailability of some of them (specifically, data from 20 websites were not available), we ended up with a list of 21 websites.

Then, we obtained data on the content published by the selected websites in 2021 through a set of keywords for individual topics and settings of the monitored period. We subjected the given content to further filtering, based on a selection of 10 sites with the widest audience. We chose the public database similarweb.com for this step. For the research, we used data on website traffic for the last three months of 2021 (October 1 to December 31, 2021; data for a longer period of time were not available), based on which we filtered the websites and created a list of the **10 most visited websites**. The list is available in Annex 2.

The next stage of the research included a detailed analysis of the data obtained, evaluation of the success of selected actors, and visualization. In the analysis of Facebook content, we focused on the most successful posts within each topic, we looked at the statistics of the

interactions of the most active political actors in specific topics. Within web content, we have addressed in each topic the prevailing narratives identified in the content published by the top 10 most visited websites. We also looked at the statistics on the number of published articles (websites are arranged in alphabetical order, as each topic contains the number of articles on all 10 sites) and statistics on mentions of political actors (actors are arranged by a number of mentions, as it may have varied for each topic).

Finally, it should be noted that the research captured as much content as the limitations of the analytical tools used or the settings of the researched websites allowed. Even though we were not able to capture all the web content, the available sample reflects the state of the Slovak information space during 2021.

## Annex 1 – List of Political Actors (data obtained on January 28, 2022)

**Parliamentary Political Actors:**

1. Martin Beluský, page, number of followers: 6,672
2. Ľuboš Blaha, page, number of followers: 167,847
3. Robert Fico, page, number of followers: 161,186
4. György Gyimesi, page, number of followers: 7,680
5. Eduard Kočiš, page, number of followers: 5,164
6. Boris Kollár, page, number of followers: 145,698
7. Marek Kotleba, page, number of followers: 10,273
8. Marian Kotleba, page, number of followers: 47,116
9. Filip Kuffa, page, number of followers: 13,584
10. Igor Matovič, profile, number of followers: 280,852
11. Milan Mazurek, page, number of followers: 161,888
12. Andrej Medvecký, page, number of followers: 5,651
13. Miroslav Suja, page, number of followers: 36,689
14. Tomáš Taraba, page, number of followers: 47,361

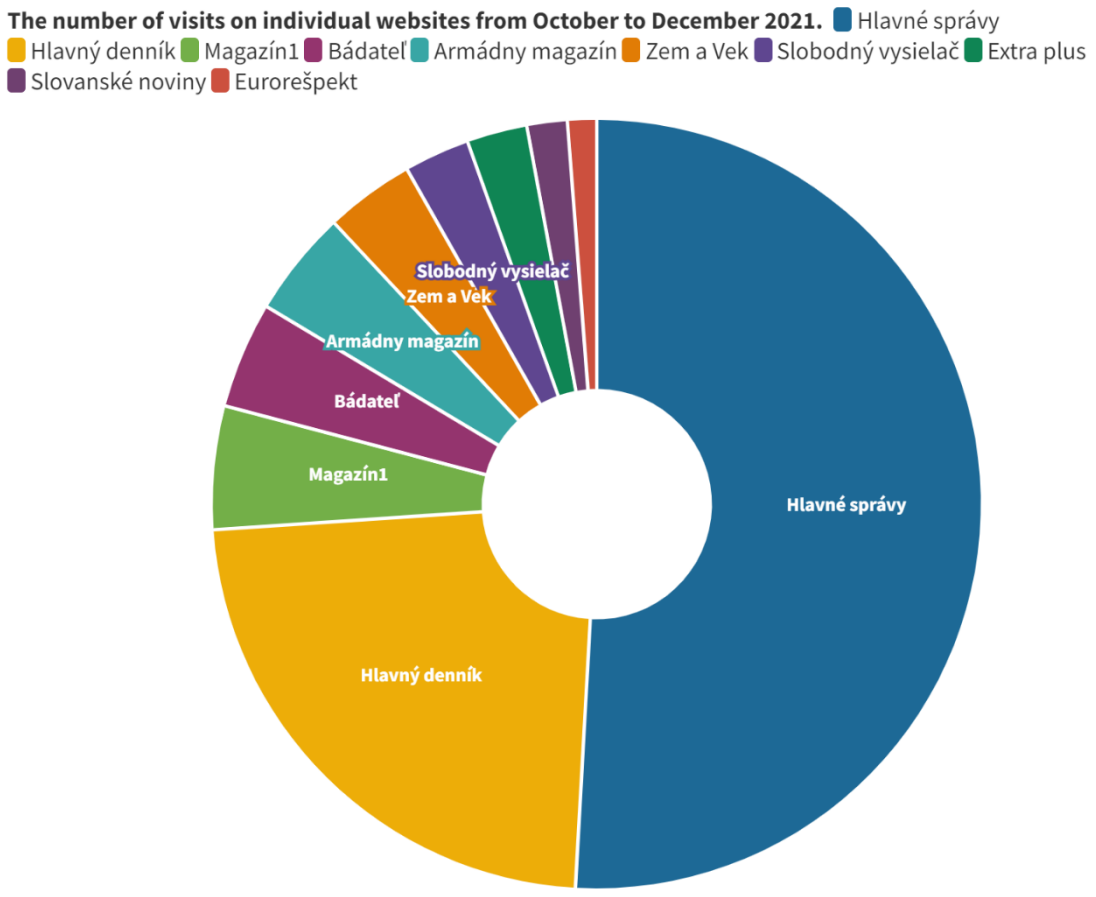
**Non-Parliamentary Political Actors:**

1. Anna Belousovová, profile, number of followers: 14,562
2. Katarína Boková, page, number of followers: 24,244
3. Ján Čarnogurský, profile, number of followers: 11,438
4. Andrej Danko, page, number of followers: 86,612
5. Marek Géci, profile, number of followers: 44,096
6. Štefan Harabin, page, number of followers: 135,488
7. Miroslav Heredoš, page, number of followers: 18,133
8. Eduard Chmelár, profile, number of followers: 59,130
9. Erik Kaliňák, page, number of followers: 77,931
10. Igor Melicher, page, number of followers: 10,048

11. Miroslav Radačovský, page, number of followers: 36,996
12. Róbert Švec, page, number of followers: 11,829
13. Milan Uhrík, page, number of followers: 125,691
14. Slavěna Vorobelová, page, number of followers: 12,834

## Annex 2 – List of the Analyzed Websites (data obtained on January 28, 2022)

1. Hlavné správy, https://www.hlavnespravy.sk, number of visists: 11 710 000
2. Hlavný denník, https://www.hlavnydennik.sk, number of visists: 5 304 000
3. Magazín1, https://magazin1.sk/, number of visists: 1 191 000
4. Bádateľ, https://www.badatel.net, number of visists: 1 028 000
5. Armádny magazín, https://admin.armadnymagazin.sk/, number of visists: 1 027 000
6. Zem a Vek, https://zemavek.sk, number of visists: 861 974
7. Slobodný vysielač, https://slobodnyvysielac.sk, number of visists: 634 372
8. Extra plus, https://www.extraplus.sk, number of visists: 584 227
9. Slovanské noviny, https://www.slovanskenoviny.sk/, number of visists: 389 738
10. Eurorešpekt, https://www.eurorespekt.sk, number of visists: 281 482




Data obtained from Similarweb. To zoom in, click here: https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/8823011/.

# Annex 3 – List of Keywords for the Analysis of Facebook Content (by using Crowd Tangle)

**Milan Lučanský**

Lučanský, Lučanského, Lučanskému, Lučanskom, Lučanským, NAKA, Národná kriminálna agentúra, Národnej kriminálnej agentúry, Národnej kriminálnej agentúre, Národnú kriminálnu agentúru, Národnou kriminálnou agentúrou, kauza Judáš, kauze Judáš, kauzy Judáš, kauzu Judáš, kauzou Judáš, Judáš, AllforMilan, zasamovraždil, zasamovraždenie, zasamovaždenia, zasamovraždy, politická obeť, politickej obete, politickej obeti, politickú obeť, politickou obeťou, politické obete, represie, represia, represii, represiu, represiou, represií, represiám, represiách, represiami, (samo)vražda, (samo)vraždy, (samo)vražde, (samo)vraždu, (samo)vraždou

**Covid-19 Political and Health Topics**

Covid-19, Covidu-19, Covide-19, Covidom-19, covid, covidu, covide, covidom, covidový, covidového, covidovému, covidovom, covidová, covidovej, covidovú, covidovou, covidové, covidové, covidovými, covidových, covidovým, kovid, kovidu, kovidom, kovidoví, kovidovými, kovidových, kovidovým, koronavírus, koronavírusu, koronavírusom, očkovanie, očkovania, očkovaniu, očkovaním, očkovaniami, očkovaní, očkovaniam, očkovaniach, vakcína, vakcíny, vakcíne, vakcínu, vakcínou, vakcín, vakcínam, vakcínach, vakcínami, vakcinácia, vakcinácie, vakcinácii, vakcináciu, vakcináciou, rúško, rúška, rúšku, rúškom, respirátor, respirátora, respirátoru, respirátorom, Sputnik V, Sputniku V, Sputnikom V, EMA, Matovič, Matoviča, Matovičovi, Matovičom, protest, protestu, protesty, protestov, protestom, protestami, protivládne protesty, protivládnych protestov, protivládnym protestom, protivládnymi protestami, generálny štrajk, generálneho štrajku, generálnmu štrajku, generálnom strajku, generálnym štrajkom, hraničný priechod, hraničného priechodu, hraničným priechodom, hraničné priechody, hraničných priechodov, hraničným priechodom, hraničnými priechodmi, hranice, hraníc, hraniciam, hranicami, opatrenia, opatrení, opatreniam, opatreniami, obmedzenia, obmedzení, obmedzeniam, obmedzeniach, obmedzeniami, lockdown, lockdownu, lockdowne, lockdownom, núdzový stav, núdzového stavu, núdzovému stavu, núdzovom stave, núdzovým stavom, testovanie, testovania, testovaniu, testovaní, testovaním, očkovanie, očkovania, očkovaniu, očkovaním, vakcína, vakcíny, vakcíne, vakcínu, vakcínou, covid pass, petícia, petície, petícii, petíciu, petíciou, referendum, referenda, referendu, referendom, voľby, volieb, voľbám, voľbách, voľbami, predčasné voľby, predčasných volieb, predčasným voľbám, predčasnými voľbami, volebný zákon, volebného zákona, volebnému zákonu, volebným zákonom, Ústavný súd, Ústavného súdu, Ústavnému súdu, Ústavným súdom, Čaputová, Čaputovej, Čaputovú, Čaputovou, segregácia, segregácie, segregácii, segregáciu, segregáciou, diskriminácia, diskriminácie, odstup, odstupu, odstupom, diskriminácii, diskrimináciu, diskrimináciou, diskriminačný, diskriminačná, diskriminačné,

diskriminačnej, diskriminačnú, diskriminačnou, diskriminačným, diskriminačných, diskriminačnými, diskriminačnom, diskriminačnému, očkovací fašizmus, očkovacieho fašizmu, očkovaciemu fašizmu, očkovacom fašizme, očkovacím fašizmom, koronafašizmus, koronafašizmu, koronafašizme, koronafašizmom, fašizmus, fašizmu, fašizme, fašizmom, fašistický, fašistická, fašistické, fašistickí, fašistickej, fašistickú, fašistickou, fašistickým, fašistických, fašistickými, fašistického, fašistickom, fašistickým, totalita, totality, totalite, totalitu, totalitou, totalitný, totalitná, totalitné, totalitní, totalitnej, totalitnú, totalitnou, totalitného, totalitnému, totalitnom, totalitným, totalitných, totalitnými, apartheid, apartheidu, apartheide, apartheidom, farmafirma, farmafirmy, farmafirme, farmafirmu, farmafirmou, farmafirmy, farmafirmám, farmafirmách, farmafirmami, teror, teroru, terore, terorom, terorizovať, terorizovanie, terorizuje, podčlovek, podčloveka, podčloveku, podčlovekom, podľudia, podľudí, podľuďom, podľuďoch, podľuďmi, nadčlovek, nadčloveka, nadčloveku, nadčlovekom, nadľudia, nadľudí, nadľuďom, nadľuďoch, nadľuďmi, kategorizácia, kategorizácie, kategorizácii, kategorizáciu, kategorizáciou, dehumanizácia, dehumanizácie, dehumanizáciu, dehumanizácii, dehumanizáciou, dehumanizovaný, dehumanizovaní, dehumanizovaného, dehumanizovanému, dehumanizovanom, dehumanizovaným, dehumanizovaných, dehumanizovanými, gestapo, gestapa, gestapu, gestape, gestapom, nacizmus, nacizmu, nacizme, nacizmom, nacistická, nacistickej, nacistickú, nacistickej, nacistickou, nacistické, nacistických, nacistickým, nacistickými, nacistickým, nacistického, nacistickému, nacistickom, Mengele, Mengeleho, Mengelemu, Mengeleho, Mengelem

**Power Struggle in Security Forces**

SIS, Slovenská informačná služba, Slovenskej informačnej služby, Slovenskej informačnej službe, Slovenskú informačnú službu, Slovenskou informačnou službou, NAKA, Národná kriminálna agentúra, Národnej kriminálnej agentúry, Národnej kriminálnej agentúre, Národnú kriminálnu agentúru, Národnou kriminálnou agentúrou, generálny prokurátor, generálneho prokurátora, generálnemu prokurátorovi, generálnym prokurátorom, generálna prokuratúra, generálnej prokuratúry, generálnej prokuratúr, generálnu prokuratúru, generálnou prokuratúrou, Žilinka, Žilinku, Žilinkovi, Žilinkom, Pčolinský, Pčolinského, Pčolinskému, Pčolinskom, Pčolinským, Kovařík, Kovaříka, Kovaříkovi, Kovaříkom, prezidentka, prezidentky, prezidentke, prezidentku, prezidentkou, Čaputová, Čaputovej, Čaputovú, Čaputovou, Čurilla, Čurillu, Čurillovi, Čurillom, špeciálny prokurátor, špeciálneho prokurátora, špeciálnemu prokurátorovi, špeciálneho prokurátora, špeciálnom prokurátorovi, špeciálnym prokurátorom, špeciálna prokuratúra, špeciálnej prokuratúry, špeciálnej prokuratúre, špeciálnu prokuratúru, špeciálnou prokuratúrou, Lipšic, Lipšica, Lipšicovi, Lipšicom, inšpekcia, inšpekcie, inšpekcii, inšpekciu, inšpekciou, Čurillovská mafia, Čurillovskej mafie, Čurillovskej mafii, Čurillovskú mafiu, Čurillovskou mafiou

**USA**

USA, Spojené štáty americké, Spojených štátov amerických, Spojeným štátom americkým, Spojenými štátmi americkými, Kapitol, Kapitolu, Kapitolom, Kapitole, Trump, Trumpa, Trumpovi, Trumpom, Donald Trump, Donalda Trumpa, Donaldovi Trumpovi, Donaldom Trumpom, Biden, Bidena, Bidenovi, Bidenom, Joe Biden, Joe Bidena, Joe Bidenovi, Joe Bidenom, Putin, Putina, Putinovi, Putinom, útok na Kapitol, útoku na Kapitol, útokom na Kapitol, voľby 2020, volieb 2020, voľbám 2020, voľbami 2020, americké voľby, amerických volieb, americkým voľbám, americkými voľbami, americké prezidentské voľby, amerických prezidentských volieb, americkým prezidentským voľbám, amerických prezidentských voľbách, americkými prezidentskými voľbami, americký, amerického, americkému, amerického, americkým, americká, americkej, americkú, americkou, americké, americkí, americkými, Pelosiová, Pelosiovej, Pelosiovú, Pelosiovou, ukradnuté voľby, ukradnutých volieb, ukradnutým voľbám, ukradnutých voľbách, ukradnutými voľbami, volebný podvod, volebného podvodu, volebnému podvodu, volebnom podvode, volebným podvodom

**Russia**

Vrbětice, Vrbětíc, Vrběticiam, Vrběticiach, Vrběticami, Česko, Česka, Česku, Českom, Česká republika, Českú republiku, Českej republike, Českou republikou, Babiš, Babiša, Babišovi, Babišom, Zeman, Zemana, Zemanovi, Zemanom, GRU, Boširov, Boširova, Boširovovi, Boširovom, Petrov, Petrova, Petrovovi, Petrovom, Gazprom, Gazpromu, Gazprome, Gazpromom, Nord Stream 2, Rusko, Ruska, Rusku, Ruskom, ruský, ruského, ruskému, ruskom, ruským, ruská, ruskej, ruskú, ruskou, ruské, ruského, ruskému, ruským, ruskí, ruských, ruským, ruskými, Ruská federácia, Ruskej federácie, Ruskej federácii, Ruskou federáciou, Rusi, Rusov, Rusom, Rusoch, Rusmi, Putin, Putina, Putinovi, Putinom, Putinov, Putinovho, Putinovmu, Putinovým, Putinove, Putinových, Putinovým, Putinovho, Putinovým, Putinova, Putinovej, Putinovu, Putinovou, Lavrov, Lavrova, Lavrovovi, Lavrovom, Lavorovov, Lavrovovho, Lavrovovmu, Lavrovovým, Lavrovova, Lavrovovej, Lavrovovu, Lavrovovou, Lavrovove, Lavrovových, Lavrovovým, Lavrovovými, Kremeľ, Kremľa, Kremľu, Kremľom, Ukrajina, Ukrajiny, Ukrajine, Ukrajinu, Ukrajinou, ukrajinský, ukrajinského, ukrajinskému, ukrajinskom, ukrajinským, ukrajinské, ukrajinských, ukrajinským, ukrajinskými, ukrajinská, ukrajinskej, ukrajinskú, ukrajinskou, ukrajinskí, ukrajinských, ukrajinským, ukrajinskými, Ukrajinci, Ukrajincov, Ukrajincom, Ukrajincoch, Ukrajincami, Zelensky, Zelenského, Zelenskému, Zelenskom, Zelenským, Krym, Krymu, Krymom, krymský, krymského, krymskému, krymským, krymská, krymskej, krymskú, krymskou, krymské, krymských, krymským, krymskými, krymskí, Tatári, Tatárov, Tatárom, Tatármi, anexia, anexie, anexii, anexiu, anexiou, Donbas, Donbasu, Donbasom, vojna, vojny, vojne, vojnou, vojská, vojsk, vojskám, vojskami, separatisti, separatistov, separatistom, separatistami, NATO, USA, Amerika, Ameriky, Amerike, Ameriku, Amerikou, americký, amerického, americkému, americkým, americká, americkej, americkú, americkou, americké, amerických, americkým, americkými, americkí, Američania,

Američanov, Američanom, Američanmi, „Európska únia, Európskej únie, Európskej únii, Európsku úniu, Európskou úniou, EÚ, Únia, Únie, Únii, Úniu, Úniou

**Belarus**

Bielorusko, Bieloruska, Bielorusku, Bieloruskom, Bielorusi, Bielorusov, Bielorusom, Bielorusoch, Bielorusmi, bieloruský, bieloruského, bieloruskému, bieloruským, bieloruská, bieloruskej, bieloruskú, bieloruskou, bieloruské, bieloruských, bieloruským, bieloruskými, bieloruskí, Lukašenko, Lukašenka, Lukašenkovi, Lukašenkom, Lukašenkov, Lukašenkovho, Lukašenkovmu, Lukašenkovým, Lukašenkova, Lukašenkovej, Lukašenkovu, Lukašenkovou, Lukašenkovo, Lukašenkovi, voľby, volieb, voľbám, voľbami, bieloruské voľby, bieloruských volieb, bieloruským voľbám, bieloruskými voľbami, protest, protestu, protestom, protesty, protestov, protestom, protestami, Cichanovská, Cichanovskej, Cichanovskú, Cichanovskou, Pratasevič, Prataseviča, Pratasevičovi, Pratasevičom, migračná kríza, migračnej krízy, migračnú krízu, migračnej kríze, migračnou krízou, migračná vlna, migračnej vlny, migračnej vlne, migračnú vlnu, migračnou vlnou, utečenecká kríza, utečeneckej krízy, utečeneckej kríze, utečeneckú krízu, utečeneckou krízou, utečenecká vlna, utečeneckej vlny, utečeneckej vlne, utečenckú vlnu, utečeneckou vlnou, migrácia, migrácie, migrácii, migráciu, migráciou, migranti, migrantov, migrantom, migrantoch, migrantami, migračný, migračného, migračnému, migračným, migračná, migračnej, migračnú, migračnou, migračné, migračných, migračným, migračnými, utečenci, utečencov, utečencom, utečencoch, utečencami, sankcie, sankcií, sankciám, sankciách, sankciami, Poľsko, Poľska, Poľsku, Poľskom, poľský, poľského, poľskému, poľským, poľská, poľskej, poľskú, poľskou, poľské poľskí, Litva, Litvy, Litve, Litvu, Litvou, litovský, litovského, litovskému, litovským, litovská, litovskej, litovskú, litovskou, litovské, litovských, litovským, litovskými, litovskí, litovských, Litovci, Litovcov, Litovcom, Litovcoch, Litovcami, Lotyšsko, Lotyšska, Lotyšsku, Lotyšskom, lotyšský, lotyšského, lotyšskému, lotyšským, lotyšská, lotyšskej, lotyšskou, lotyšské, lotyšských, lotyšskými, lotyšskí, hranica, hranice, hranici, hranicou, hraníc, hraniciam, hraniciach, hranicami, Európska únia, Európskej únie, Európskej únii, Európsku úniu, Európskou úniou, EÚ, Únia, Únie, Únii, Úniu, Úniou

**Hungary**

Maďarsko, Maďarska, Maďarsku, Maďarskom, maďarský, maďarského, maďarskému, maďarskom, maďarským, maďarská, maďarskej, maďarskú, maďarskou, maďarské, maďarských, maďarskými, maďarskí, Orbán, Orbána, Orbánovi, Orbánom, tradičné hodnoty, tradičných hodnôt, tradičným hodnotám, tradičných hodnotách, tradičnými hodnotami, Szijjártó, Szijjártóa, Szijjártóovi, Szijjártóom, Sputnik V, Sputniku V, Sputnikom V, Gyimesi, Gyimesiho, Gyimesim, občianstvo, občianstva, občianstvu, občianstve, občianstvom, dvojité občianstvo, dvojitého občianstva, dvojitému občianstvu, dvojitom občianstve, dvojitým občianstvom, LGBT, gender, gender ideológia, gender ideológie, gender ideológii, gender

ideológiu, gender ideológiou, Kövér, Kövéra, Kövérovi, Kövérom, Trianon, Trianonu, Trianonom

## Annex 4 – List of Keywords for the Analyzed Web Content (by using Gerulata Juno)

**Milan Lučanský**

(NAKA | "Národná kriminálna agentúra" | Judáš | AllforMilan | zasamovražda | "(samo)vražda" | "politická obeť" | Lučanský)

**Covid-19 Political and Health Topics**

covid* + (korona* | očkovanie | vakcína | "Sputnik V" | protest* | "generálny štrajk" | "hraničný priechod" | opatrenia | lockdown | "núdzový stav" | testovanie | referendum | "predčasné voľby" | segregácia | diskriminácia | "očkovací fašizmus" | koronafašizmus | apartheid)

**Power Struggle in Security Forces**

(Čurilla | "Čurillovská mafia" | Pčolinský | Kovařík | Lipšic | SIS | "Slovenská informačná služba" | NAKA | "Národná kriminálna agentúra" | "generálny prokurátor" | "generálna prokuratúra" | Žilinka | "špeciálny prokurátor" | "špeciálna prokuratúra" | inšpekcia)

**USA**

(USA | "Spojené štáty americké" | Kapitol | "útok na Kapitol" | Biden | Putin | "voľby 2020" | "americké voľby" | "ukradnuté voľby" | "volebný podvod" | Pelosiová | Trump)

**Russia**

Rusk* + (Vrbětice | Česko | "Česká republika" | GRU | Boširov | Petrov | Gazprom | "Nord Stream 2" | Putin | Lavrov | Kremeľ | Ukrajin* | Krym* | anexia | Donbas | separatisti)

**Belarus**

(Bielorusko | Bielorusi | bieloruský | Lukašenko | "bieloruské voľby" | Cichanovská | Pratasevič | migračná* | utečenecká* | migrácia | migranti | utečenci | sankcie | Poľsko | poľský | Litva | litovský | Lotyšsko | lotyšský | hranica)

**Hungary**

Maďarsk* + (Orbán | Szijjártó | "Sputnik V" | Gyimesi | občianstvo | "dvojité občianstvo" | Kövér | Trianon)

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