

## Ignoring the Green Deal to Their Own Peril

---

Michaela Ružičková  
Infosecurity.sk

*September 2022*

In Slovakia, disinformation scene could take advantage of the lack of interest of political leaders.

Infosecurity.sk, in cooperation with the International Republican Institute's Beacon Project, monitored posts concerning the European Green Deal present in the Slovak-language Facebook space between 20 April-20 September 2022 using the CrowdTangle tool. This monitoring is a part of a [larger IRI initiative](#) implemented simultaneously in five EU countries.

### Key takeaways

---

- Few actors communicated Green Deal-related topics during the research period, receiving only minimal interactions on Facebook posts. However, the posts were more likely to engage positive or neutral sentiment.
- Relevant actors, such as EU institutions, published most of the posts. The number of posts on the topic published by Slovak political actors was limited.
- Due to the low number of posts on the topic, whether their content represents the general opinion in Slovak society cannot be concluded.

The results of the analysis show a consistently low interest in communicating Green Deal-related topics in the Slovak information environment. Only a few actors have addressed these issues, receiving negligible numbers of interactions on their posts. However, of the total number of posts, the overwhelming majority had a positive or neutral framing, with only a few posts containing narratives against the EU, the Green Deal, or climate action in general.

The original intention of the research was to monitor the top 100 most-interacted-with posts mentioning the Green Deal each month; however, the dataset from Slovak Facebook contained only a minimum of relevant content. The number of relevant posts on the topic continuously decreased during the monitoring period after a peak in the second month. The highest number of results related to the Green Deal was recorded in the 20 May-20 June interval with 25 posts, a number that then declined: 20 June-20 July: 14 posts; 20 July-20 August: nine posts; and 20 August-20 September: six posts. In total, we analyzed 62 Facebook posts over the course of the monitoring.

The Green Deal and related measures were communicated on Facebook mainly by relevant sources such as European institutions and their offices in Slovakia (the representation of the European Commission in Slovakia, the office of the European Parliament) or Slovak state institutions (the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, the Office for the Preservation of National Heritage under the Ministry of Culture). Several mainstream media also covered the topic. These were primarily news portals such as teraz.sk, EURACTIV, or Európske Noviny, as well as technology- or energy-oriented media such as Techbox, TREND, or energie-portal, which presented EU measures primarily from the perspective of energy and technology.

We also observed several potentially harmful sources in our monitoring. The first of these is the media outlet Extraplus, which has been listed as a pro-Russian source by Gerulata Technologies, a Slovak technology company that develops digital tools for monitoring and evaluating harmful online content. In early September, Extraplus reported on protests in the Czech Republic against EU and NATO policies, the Green Deal, and the Czech government's negative stance toward Russia. The article cited people from anti-EU parties and the overall content negatively portrayed the Czech government and the EU. The second problematic source was the Ereport portal, which has been classified by Konšpirátori.sk, the respected Slovak initiative that labels disinformation websites, as in the so-called gray zone of media (the gray zone means sites that do not currently pose a significant risk but are worthy of more attention). Among other things, Ereport has shown signs of spreading anti-Western narratives as well as political bias. However, the post itself was informative. It focused on the attitude of Prime Minister Eduard Heger toward the role of nuclear energy in the energy mix of the Slovak Republic. The post received the second highest number of interactions in our dataset.

Another problematic source in our monitoring was the Facebook profile of the alternative media outlet Creative Society - Tvorivá spoločnosť - Tvorivá spoločnosť. Creative Society presents itself as an international project aimed at maintaining peace in the world and developing moral and spiritual values, but it is known for its pro-Russian and anti-Western orientation and its spreading of conspiracy narratives. The group's Facebook page presented the Green Deal as a plan to help financial elites, wealthy investors, and private companies to profit from green energy while fueling energy instability and insecurity.

A similar narrative appeared in a post from the profile of the regional branch of the far-right People's Party Our Slovakia (Kotlebovci - Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko - okresy Žilina a Bytča). The page shared a post at the end of June claiming that the Green Deal could lead to economic decline, saying "The mindless adoption of any further restrictions, without regard to the current negative developments, may in fact bury the economic giants for good." The post also included the claim that the results of the EU's green measures will, in practice, be borne by ordinary citizens, who will struggle with the consequences of the energy crisis.

Among the politicians who appeared in our dataset were Romana Tabak, a member of parliament who drew attention to the need for soil protection; Ivan Štefanec, a member of the European Parliament (MEP); and Rudolf Huliak, a non-parliamentary politician and chairman of the nationalist-oriented party National Coalition (Narodná koalícia). On 14 July, Huliak shared a problematic post containing conspiracies and false narratives about the Green Deal, claiming that both the UN's 2030 Agenda and the EU's Green Deal are dangerous for Europe's future because they bring a perverse ideology of climate fascism. The post received 514 interactions.

The highest number of interactions (894) was received by online media Európske Noviny and its post of 8 July, in which the media outlet featured an interview with Štefanec. Štefanec stressed that nuclear and gas should be the main energy sources to meet the objectives of the Green Deal.

All the posts in our dataset were manually coded based on topic and context, using a predefined category structure corresponding to eight predetermined tags. We assigned most posts to the tag "economy" (27), followed by "information" (23), "political" (9), "environment" (2), and "infrastructure" (1). We did not use the tags "military," "social," and "health," as no posts fell under those categories. Most of the content was primarily related to the energy crisis and the economic struggles related to the war in Ukraine.

Among the prevailing narratives, several trends emerged within our data. For example, there was a narrative arguing that Russian aggression in Ukraine has caused an increased demand for green energy in addition to the energy crisis, and thus may also serve as a push factor toward a faster green transformation through the Green Deal. Some of the posts also included a narrative that the Green Deal, as part of European climate policies, can play a key role in the fight against global climate change. The inclusion of nuclear and natural gas energy as temporarily sustainable resources was also an important topic, perceived rather positively as a tool for achieving the Green Deal's objectives.

On the other hand, we also identified narratives portraying the Green Deal in a negative light. One of these was the claim that the Green Deal serves wealthy people/the financial elite and profit-seeking companies because consumers' electricity bills fund the revenues of green energy producers. The second negative narrative was the portrayal of the Green Deal as an instrument of the so-called Brussels dictatorship, which allegedly promotes "climate fascism." Measures taken by the EU under the guise of climate protection are supposed to be a manifestation of Brussels' totalitarianism, according to this narrative. At the same time, the narrative claims that the MEPs themselves produce large amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> and are therefore behaving hypocritically like the entire EU.

## Summary and Expectations

---

There is a relatively low awareness of the Green Deal on Facebook in Slovakia, as well as low interest in communicating about the topic from the media or politicians. Over the research period, considering the importance of the topic, we have detected a low number of relevant posts. On the positive side, most of the relevant posts came from official institutions or credible media. Less beneficial, however, is the lack of interest among political leaders, either at the national or regional level. Also, among MEPs, only one (Ivan Štefanec) has posted on the Green Deal, which we find surprising. At the same time, the identified posts reached only a marginal part of the audience and received minimal numbers of interactions.

We can attribute the poor communication of the topic within Slovak-language Facebook to several aspects. On the one hand, in our opinion, it may be the result of the recent events in Europe, which is considerably weakened after the pandemic and now has to deal with the consequences of the war in Ukraine, where most of the political and media attention has been directed.

We also assume that Slovaks associate environmental and climate protection issues with the energy sector in particular, where the promotion of green solutions represents a "bogeyman" in the form of more expensive and less available energy.

According to an opinion poll conducted by FOCUS in October 2021, around 70% of Slovaks are concerned about climate change and around 20% of respondents even consider it to be one of the most important problems of our time. The Eurobarometer poll conducted around the same period showed that up to 35% of Slovaks consider climate change and environmental issues to be the biggest global challenge for the EU. According to the FOCUS poll, only 8% of those surveyed thought that climate protection problems did not need to be addressed. On the other hand, more than half of the respondents (55%) were skeptical about the chances of the Slovak Republic becoming carbon neutral by 2050.

Key here is the role of political leaders, who should take an active approach to communicating on the issue and persuading skeptical citizens through leadership and responsible solutions. These should also be presented in a clear manner and the possible negative impacts on the well-being of citizens should be declared transparently. Finally, it can be added that both of the above-mentioned opinion polls were conducted before the outbreak of war in Ukraine in February 2022; since then support for climate action could have been reduced or attention could have been shifted to issues that Slovaks are likely to consider more urgent. This makes it all the more important to communicate climate issues in the media and in the political arena, which represent two main platforms for agenda setting.

We also consider the situation to be the result of the persistent lack of interest of political subjects in the topics of climate and the environment, as well as the result of the well-developed disinformation scene, which successfully manages to push anti-Western or eurosceptic attitudes in the Slovak information space. These are often associated with the topic of climate action, which is considered to be one of the instruments of oppression by the European institutions. Several political parties and their members even share the narratives brought by actors of the disinformation scene, which makes the Slovak population more vulnerable to false information.

Given the current state of the Slovak information environment and discourse on climate and EU climate action, we do not foresee any major improvement or more successful communication of the objectives and instruments of the Green Deal in the coming months.

In our estimation, the topic will continue to be rather marginal, possibly used to the advantage of Russia as an energy supplier and to the detriment of the EU in the broader anti-Western vision of the world.

## Recommendations

---

- The high number of posts published by official EU institutions and their branches in Slovakia, in proportion to the posts of problematic sources, on the topic of the Green Deal points to a wide space that is not yet largely overwhelmed by disinformation or conspiracy narratives. It therefore represents a suitable platform for further communication by relevant actors who would be able to reach a significant part of the Slovak audience. The institutions should prepare tools that may be used in several scenarios, meaning preventing and reacting to potential disinformation or conspiracy narratives.
- In our view, considerable space is open for domestic political representatives, who currently present environmental and climate issues only minimally. We assume that the Green Deal is a less-preferred agenda topic also because of concerns about higher levels of euroscepticism among the Slovak electorate. However, the reluctance to communicate the topic significantly narrows the societal debate and continues to reduce trust in the EU. Among the relevant actors there are also media, news agencies, or other non-state organizations such as think tanks, which are also responsible for communicating such crucial issues.
- We consider the use of debunking and fact-checking tools to be a productive strategy for raising interest in the topics. In our opinion, both official institutions and the relevant media could create a new platform for debunking myths about climate change and European green policies, assign the topics to debunking centers dedicated to such activity, and promote the findings of existing platforms that are already doing so.
- In our view, it is also suitable to raise awareness of the Green Deal through the tools offered by the education system, i.e. to include teaching about EU measures, including climate legislation, in the curriculum. This could also strengthen overall awareness of the EU and promote active European citizenship. In addition, the power of lifelong learning tools should not be underestimated.

*This article has been prepared with support from IRI's Beacon Project. The opinions expressed are solely those of the author and do not reflect those of IRI.*