POLICY BRIEF WITHIN
KREMLIN WATCHERS
MOVEMENT PROJECT

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KREMLIN WATCHERS MOVEMENT

Kremlin Watchers Movement is a project which has been running for almost 3 years now within the effort to fight Russian malign influence and disinformation in Europe. Gathered authors, junior analysts are producing content about Russian malign influence and disinformation on social media, informing not only expert society but also the wider population about the latest events in this field.

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Disclaimer: The report was produced within the Kremlin Watchers Movement project. Report has been prepared by Infosecurity.sk. It presents facts and conclusions resulting from the analysis of the information environment. The authors are solely responsible for the content of the document.

CONTENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Russia's continued aggression in Ukraine is supported by Russian influence and information operations in the online space. The Kremlin's use of proxy actors is a key tool, particularly in the dissemination of disinformation, pro-Russian narratives and propaganda. The following text focuses on identifying the key disinformation narratives that were present in the Slovak information space during December 2022 and January 2023. It also focuses on the narrative of "Ukrainian fascism", which can be considered one of the main pillars of propaganda trying to justify Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Report concludes by offering a set of recommendations aimed at countering disinformation in the form of strategic communication.

MAIN DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES

In December 2022, analysts from *Vox Ukraine* monitored 13 Slovak media outlets and found 144 cases of disinformation about Russian aggression in Ukraine. They recorded 21 narratives, with the most numerous being the narratives claiming that Russian aggression is justified, that the West controls Ukraine and uses it for its own purposes, and that Russia is not committing war crimes in Ukraine.

Similar narratives were also present in the Slovak information environment during January 2023. The following false claims appeared most frequently:
- European sanctions are causing high energy prices and must therefore be lifted,
- Russia is not to blame for civilian casualties in Ukraine,
- Moscow wants peace while Kiev wants war,
- the West has been planning war with Russia for a long time.

In addition, the narrative about the allegedly strong presence of fascist ideas in Ukraine has not been absent in recent weeks.

Russia's attack on Ukraine, not sanctions, is to blame for high energy prices

High energy prices, which have been felt by the population across Europe, including Slovaks, have recently become a central disinformation narrative. Pro-Russian actors are trying to convince us that the only reason for such price increases is the EU sanctions imposed on Russia. This is used to justify their demand for the immediate lifting of Western countermeasures.

Milan Uhrík, chairman of the far-right Republika party, commented: *"Let the liberals wage their jihad against the East with their double sweaters and triple invoices. But do not let them destroy Slovak families and businesses with overpriced energy prices because of it. Quite frankly: We would lift the energy sanctions, resume bilateral negotiations and start importing cheaper energy from the East again."*

Uhrík further added that he was concerned about the interests of Slovakia and its people, implying that the supporters of restrictions against Russia think the opposite. Robert Fico, chairman of the SMER-SD party, described the sanctions as *"self-destructive."* To this, Slavěna Vorobelová added the fallacious claim: *"It was not Russia that caused the price increase, but sanctions!!"*

Tomáš Špaček, a member of the Republika party, did not hesitate to stress the pro-Kremlin narrative by publishing a video with fellow party member Milan Mazurek with the description *"SANCTIONS DO NOT WORK, OUR ECONOMY IS COLLAPSING."* In another post, he wrote that *"sanctions against Russia have failed."*

Such rhetoric is highly manipulative and glosses over several crucial facts. First of all, the Slovak apologists of the Kremlin fail to mention that sanctions were imposed on the Russian Federation because of an illegal invasion, and therefore, it is not sanctions but the Russian attack on Ukraine that is one of the main reasons for the high energy prices.

Furthermore, the EU has not imposed any sanctions on gas, the Kremlin is withholding these supplies at its own discretion. Moreover, Moscow has already tampered with gas supplies to Europe before February 2022, which has caused a noticeable increase in prices.

It is also misleading to claim that sanctions against Russia are ineffective. The available data show that the West's countermeasures are weakening the Russian economy and none of Putin's efforts to reverse the situation are sufficiently addressing the country's problems. Russia has also long used energy resources as a political tool to blackmail other states, and it is therefore naive to believe that lifting Western countermeasures would lead to a significant reduction in energy prices.

Russia is attacking civilian targets, Dnipro was no different

The inaccurate statement of the Ukrainian presidential advisor Oleksiy Arestovych about the attack in Dnipro was immediately exploited by the Kremlin propaganda, which was subsequently spread by Slovak pro-Kremlin actors. On 14 January, Russia attacked a residential building with a Kh-22 missile, killing 45 people and injuring dozens more.

The *Ereport* website added an article claiming that the missile that landed on the apartment building *"was shot down by Ukrainian air defences."* Similar reactions were also posted by the pages *Spravodajská Alternatíva* (News Alternative) and *Armáda Ruskej Federácie* (Army of the Russian Federation). The latter informed their readers that Arestovych admitted that the damage was caused by the Ukrainian system, while the "mainstream" remained silent.

However, neither of these Facebook pages, which have long promoted pro-Russian rhetoric and whose activity gained momentum after February 2022, mentioned that Arestovych's claims were immediately denied by the Ukrainian military. The military, in its own words, does not currently have the capability to shoot down Kh-22 missiles, which it will only acquire once Patriot systems are delivered.

Arestovych apologised for his mistake. He explained the mistake by fatigue and lack of time to verify the information. However, the misleading information had already taken on a life of its own among the disinformation actors, despite its refutation.

Moreover, the whole debate is irrelevant, especially since it is Russia who is attacking Ukraine, not the other way around. Even in the hypothetical case that the mishap was caused by Ukrainian air defences, it does not change the fact that the blame lies with Moscow, against which Kiev must defend itself.

Yet denying Russia's crimes in Ukraine is not an unfamiliar activity for Slovak disinformation actors. Analysts at *Vox Ukraine* have noted cases where the European Parliament has been accused of falsely accusing Russia of war atrocities or claiming that Ukrainian soldiers are actually responsible for crimes in Ukraine.

Last but not least, it is possible to observe a diversionary tactic used by Slovak pro-Kremlin actors on issues related to Russia's war crimes. A prime example is Milan Uhrík's speech in the European Parliament debate on the need to hold the Russian political and military leadership accountable for the crimes of aggression against Ukraine, during which he said: *"Fine, but when will there be a tribunal to investigate the war crimes of the Americans in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Syria, Libya or the crimes in the Donbas?"* Finally, he also suggested that a possible tribunal to investigate Russia's crimes would be *"just another political tribunal with pre-written decisions."*

Meanwhile, there is overwhelming evidence of Russia deliberately bombing not only military targets, but also civilian infrastructure, with the intention of undermining the morale and resolve of the Ukrainian people.

True peace is not in Russia's interest

In recent weeks, one of the most widespread pro-Kremlin narratives has been the claim that while Russia calls for peace, Ukraine and the West desire war. In particular, disinformation actors have exploited Moscow's offer of a Christmas ceasefire, which Ukraine rejected. Zelensky made it clear that a short pause in the fighting would mainly help the Russian side to regain strength.

The unsuccessful presidential candidate Eduard Chmelár also reacted to the Russian ceasefire declaration, saying: *"The reaction of the Ukrainian president and US President Biden (take your pick) only reaffirmed my belief that these two do not want peace."* He then made a comparison with the situation during the Second World War. Although he wrote that comparisons tend to be *"historically inaccurate and always demagogic"*, he added in the same breath that even Hitler *"with virtually the same arguments (as Zelensky) rejected the Pope's calls for a Christmas truce when he marched on Moscow."* Chmelár's words comparing the victim of aggression (Ukraine) to the aggressor (Nazi Germany) were immediately amplified by Slovak disinformation sites such as *Informácie bez cenzúry* (Information without Censorship), *Slobodný vysielač* or *Ereport*.

Several actors have also tried to stress the religious aspect of this allegedly forthcoming move by Putin. The Facebook pages *Ereport* or *napalete.sk* reported a snippet from a Kremlin statement that *"taking into account His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church, I order the Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation to implement a ceasefire along the entire line of contact."* The spiritual aspect was also stressed by *Extra plus*, according to which the Kremlin gave *"the opportunity to participate in the services on Christmas Eve and also on the day of the Saviour's Birth."* Facebook pages thus directly adopted Moscow's propaganda, which sought to use the ceasefire to build an image as a defender of Christian values.

According to experts at the *Institute for the Study of War* (ISW), the ceasefire demand may have been part of a Russian information operation designed to damage Ukraine's reputation or image. In fact,

Putin articulated the request just a day before the ceasefire was due to begin, and thus could not have expected Ukraine to suddenly comply without sufficient necessary preparation.

ISW also confirms Zelensky's claim that the ceasefire would primarily help the Kremlin and thus the proposal can be seen as hypocritical. After all, the Russian side could use two days to rest, recover and redeploy to resume offensive operations in critical sectors of the front.

The West did not plan a war with Russia

Closely linked to the narrative that Russia wants peace and the West wants war with Ukraine is the justification of aggression. Kremlin apologists try to convince the general public that Moscow is merely defending itself against the West, which *"has long been plotting against Russia."*

The rhetoric that Russia is primarily at war with the West and not with Ukraine is used, for example, by Tomáš Špaček. He wrote: *"NATO NEVER WANTED PEACE IN UKRAINE. An American political commentator argues on his show that Russia did not want the conflict in Ukraine, but NATO and the US provoked the war."* In another post, Špaček shared the remarks of the grandson of former French President Charles de Gaulle, who said that *"the US and NATO are to blame for the war in Ukraine."* Subsequently, he also posted Croatian President Zoran Milanovic's statement that *"Washington and NATO are waging a proxy war against Russia with Ukraine's help."*

But the truth is that there is no evidence that NATO or Ukraine planned to attack Russia. On the contrary, the Kremlin has decided to attack a neighbouring country which was not posing any immediate security threat to Moscow. Although it is difficult for imperialist Russia to understand, Ukraine is an independent sovereign state which decides its foreign policy course and which has chosen to resist an aggressor. Helping the victim of aggression is permissible under international law, but would not be necessary if the Kremlin respected the internationally recognised borders of states.

Multiple Slovak media outlets also spread a misinterpretation that former French President Francois Hollande and former German Chancellor Angela Merkel allegedly admitted that the Minsk agreements were just a *"fake game of the transatlantic West"*, which was used to *"deceive Moscow"* in order to buy time for Kiev to arm itself. But in fact, both leaders said that given the difficult situation, there was little hope that peace could be sustained. Neither said that NATO had been preparing for war with Russia all along.

The fear and insecurity mongering through the narrative that the West is trying to get into a direct conflict with Russia has gone so far that disinformation actors have exploited the well-known military *"exercises to perform tasks after the declaration of martial law and the order to mobilise the armed forces of the Slovak Republic."* By manipulatively informing about this routine matter, they gave the impression to a significant part of the population that mass mobilisation in Slovakia may soon take place. As a result, men began to make declarations to the state that they would not fight with weapons. For example, Milan Uhrík, Jozef Viktorín of the Republika party or Katarína Boková of the Slovenské hnutie obrody (Slovak Resurgence Movement party) misled the public about the alleged mass mobilisation.

In reality, however, these are mobilisation exercises, which are [organised](#) twice a year and relate to the *"verification of the defence capabilities of the Slovak Republic."* Only professional soldiers from selected districts participate in the exercises.

The narrative that Ukraine is ruled by fascists or Nazis has not been absent in the Slovak information space in recent weeks as well. *Infovojna*, for example, [wrote](#) about the *"neo-Nazi regime in Kiev."* Artur Bekmatov, the chairman of the Socialisti.sk party, in turn [spoke](#) of the *"banderisation of Ukraine"* or the *"long-term and systematic rehabilitation of the Nazi collaborators in Ukraine."*

The website *Slobodný vysielač* [shared](#) the claim of Ľuboš Blaha, a member of SMER-SD, who wrote: *"Fascism is rampant in Ukraine. As it was in the Second World War. Even today, Bandera is being glorified, even today minorities are being oppressed there."* Given that, since the beginning of the aggression, Moscow has been justifying its attack with the alleged need to deal with the presence of fascists and Nazis in Ukraine, through this sort of rhetoric, Slovak disinformation actors are siding with the aggressor.

SHAPING THE NARRATIVE OF "UKRAINIAN FASCISM"

The narrative of "Ukrainian fascism" was sporadically present in Slovak public discourse even before the Maidan, but its dissemination has intensified since the turn of 2013-2014, when the intensive and systematic activity of pro-Kremlin actors in the Slovak information space emerged.

Practically to this day, the narrative that Ukraine is ruled by fascists and that the whole society is becoming fascist is one of the fundamental framings through which pro-Kremlin propaganda channels present events in Ukraine. Events such as the Maidan, the violence in Odessa, the adoption of laws concerning the OUN and the UPA, the marches on the anniversary of Stepan Bandera's birth, and the war in the Donbas have been used by pro-Kremlin actors to present Ukraine as a fascist country.

The narrative has been at its peak since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Even before that, the narrative served to legitimize the war in the Donbas and was one of the main tenets of pro-Kremlin propaganda. The start of the invasion has only reaffirmed this and further emphasized the potency of this narrative. Putin, after all, set out to "de-Nazify" Ukraine, in his own words.

This narrative, often coupled with accusations of pogroms, genocide, and violence against the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine, served to deliberately and manipulatively create hatred and an image of the enemy. At the same time, it was a powerful tool to reinforce negative emotions towards Ukrainians.

Since the beginning of the war, the narrative has taken many forms, accusing the Ukrainian political representation of fascist practices, pointing to the fighting involvement of the Azov battalion, some of whose members have a history of involvement with the far right, etc.

To achieve enhanced narrative legitimacy, pro-Kremlin propagandists exploited historical excursions, often referring to representatives of Ukrainian radical nationalism and their actions (both real and fictional) from the 1930s to the 1950s. The underlying premise of these historical references was that

Ukrainians collaborated with the German Nazis in The Second World War and murdered civilians (including in post-war Czechoslovakia).

Communist propaganda also worked with this message, which is why today's propaganda also targets these stereotypical images of Ukrainians which are present in the collective memory of a certain segment of the Slovak population.

Such references were meant to give historical legitimacy to the narrative and to point out that Ukrainians had collaborated with the Nazis in the 20th century, and today they are following up on and rehabilitating these collaborators from the ranks of the OUN and the UPA. The driving force behind this alleged Ukrainian action is supposed to be hatred towards Russia.

The aim of this narrative is thus to make the victim of aggression its culprit and to justify Russian crimes. Specifically, in Slovakia, to reduce public support and solidarity with the Ukrainians, which could also have an impact on political decisions.

In the Slovak information space, the narrative of Ukrainians as fascists serves one more purpose, and that is to discredit both Slovak and Western politicians who support Ukraine in its defence against the aggressor.

Propagandists have tried to give the impression that Slovak and Western politicians are helping "Ukrainian fascists" by supplying arms, while claiming to be against fascism on the domestic scene. This is linked to the conspiracy theory according to which the war was provoked by the West, by supporting "Ukrainian fascists" and aiming to attack Russia indirectly by using them.

Again, the goal of this strategy was to discredit Slovak and Western politicians, while at the same time highlighting and promoting politicians who refuse to send arms to "Ukrainian fascists" and who call for the so-called "peace". Behind this appeal, however, lurks a policy of appeasement, which would not automatically result in a long-term peace, but would sanctify the possibility of militarily gaining territories from other countries, which would suit Russia.

The narrative of fascism's influence in Ukraine is false. The far right has no influence on the governance of the state, such parties have not succeeded in presidential or parliamentary elections, and they have no representatives in the government, parliament or the presidency.

No reports from independent institutions confirm Russia's claims of genocide of the Russian-speaking population in the Donbas; on the contrary, Russia's actions in Ukraine are much more akin to genocide.

A march of a few thousand people on the anniversary of Bandera's birthday is not a representative sample of Ukrainian society, just as one battalion is not a representative sample of the Ukrainian army.

There is, of course, a far-right scene in Ukraine, as in all European countries, but the Kremlin is inflating its influence in order to have an excuse to carry out real war crimes on Ukrainian territory.

TOP COMMUNICATORS OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND "UKRAINIAN FASCISM"

The Slovak information space is dominated by political actors in terms of generating interactions on social networks. Facebook remains the primary communication channel on the Internet. However, it is necessary to underline the growing importance of Telegram, which today serves as a gateway for pro-Russian content in the Slovak online space. At the same time, it is possible to clearly distinguish and define clusters of different actors, the dividing line being primarily represented by topics related to Russian geopolitics. Based on these, it is relatively easy to identify actors according to the sentiment of the communication they produce.
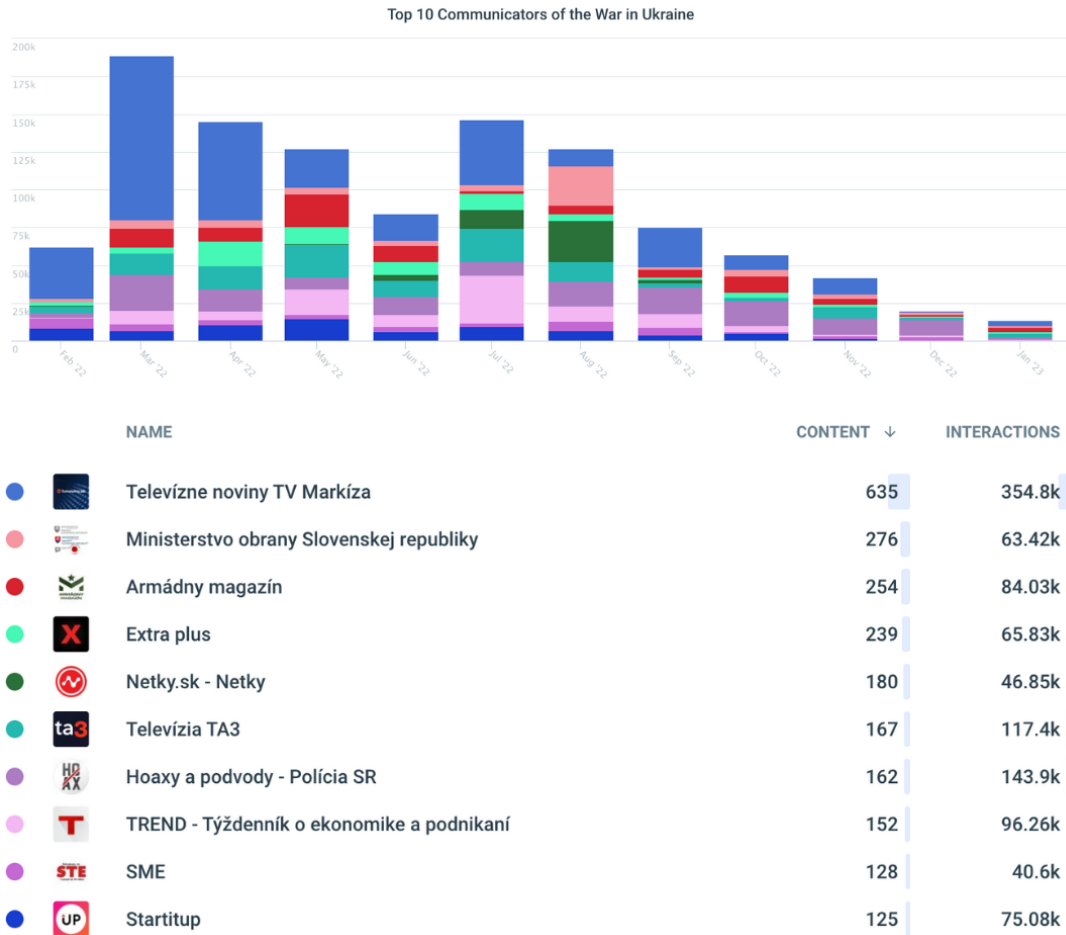
It should be added that a large number of today's most successful political communicators have gained their popularity and prominence precisely by spreading disinformation and hate speech. The rhetoric and tools they began to use during the COVID-19 pandemic are now automatically applied to the subject of the war in Ukraine. This is mainly due to the high viral and polarising potential of the topic.

Since 2014, anti-system actors, especially the far left and right, and pro-Kremlin actors, have managed to establish their own information subsystems, which can be identified as the originators of every major communication crisis in the last two years. Besides proxy media and various sites or groups, this ecosystem has recently been shaped mainly by political actors. They shape or at least further amplify topics and specific narratives in the online information space.

The specific feature is the high personalisation and sentimental colouring of the communication, which is also confirmed by the graphs below.[1] At the same time, it turns out that both topics (Ukraine in general and the metanarrative of Ukrainian fascism) are naturally gradually losing their popularity. However, it is evident that narratives associated with Ukrainian fascism still form a significant part of public discourse and communication about Ukraine on social media.

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[1] The data presented in the graphs were obtained through the Gerulata Juno monitoring tool. The content and data mining was conducted in two versions. The first graph shows content related to Ukraine. A query with the keyword "Ukraine" was used to find the data. The second graph focuses on the metanarrative of Ukrainian fascism. The search was based on the query "Ukraine AND (fascism OR Nazism OR fascists OR Nazis OR fascist OR Nazi)". Both searches focused on content (page posts) on Facebook. The monitoring period started on February 23, 2022 and ended on January 23, 2023; the data in the graph are displayed in monthly intervals. The searches were based on automatic Slovak language recognition with the intention of the monitoring tool capturing the desired content based on keywords and their grammatical variations.

Top 10 Communicators of the War in Ukraine

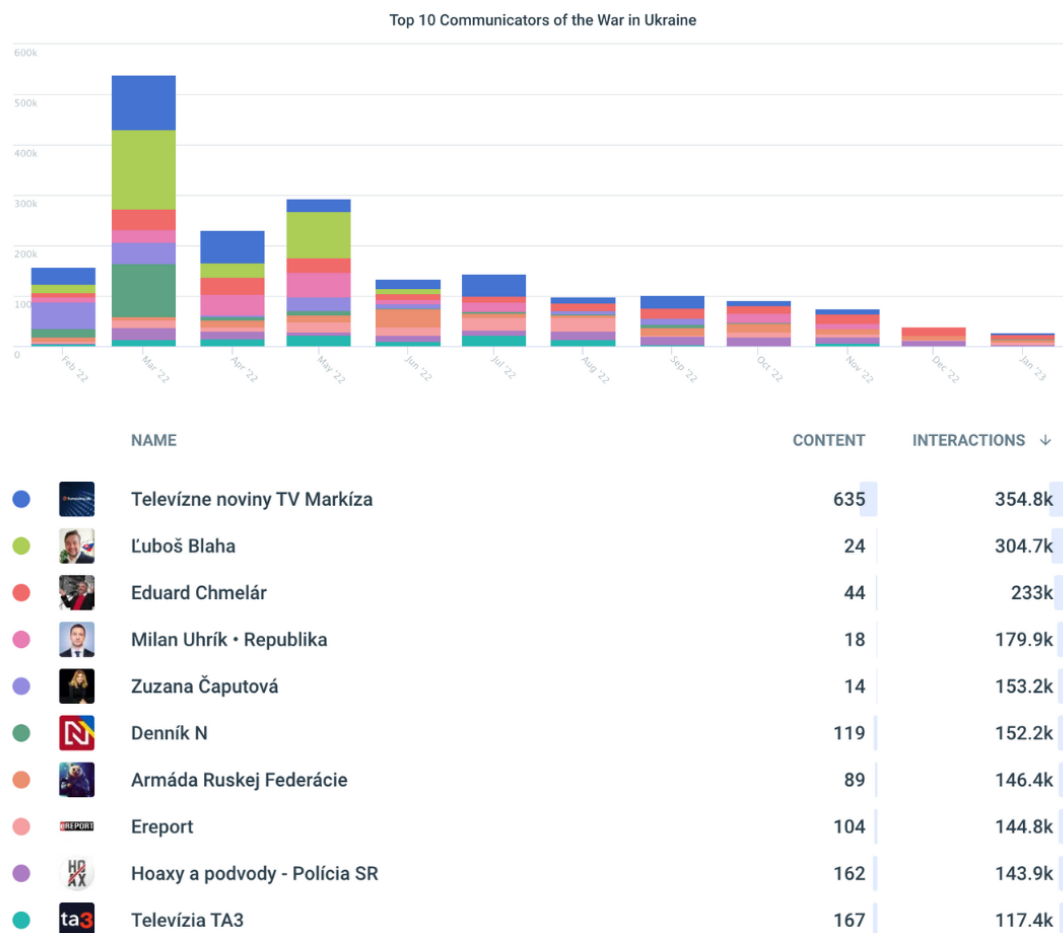|	NAME	CONTENT ↓	INTERACTIONS
●	Televízne noviny TV Markíza	635	354.8k
●	Ministerstvo obrany Slovenskej republiky	276	63.42k
●	Armádny magazín	254	84.03k
●	Extra plus	239	65.83k
●	Netky.sk - Netky	180	46.85k
●	Televízia TA3	167	117.4k
●	Hoaxy a podvody - Polícia SR	162	143.9k
●	TREND - Týždenník o ekonomike a podnikaní	152	96.26k
●	SME	128	40.6k
●	Startitup	125	75.08k

Graph 1: Top 10 communication actors of the war in Ukraine by communication activity. Data from the monitoring period between 23 February 2022 and 23 January 2023. Source: Gerulata Juno.

The actors' communication can be evaluated according to two criteria: activity (number of posts) and effectiveness (amount of interactions generated). The graph monitors Ukraine-related content in general. The assumption is that the vast majority of the captured content, also with respect to the period under review, deals specifically with the war in Ukraine. In terms of activity, the list is dominated by actors that can be described as mainstream media, or are state institutions – primarily the Ministry of Defence and the dedicated page of the Slovak Police (*Hoaxes and Frauds - Slovak Police*) for the fight against disinformation. However, there are also alternative media that have long been characterised by the dissemination of disinformation and pro-Kremlin narratives – namely *Armádny magazín* and *Extra plus*.

Top 10 Communicators of the War in Ukraine

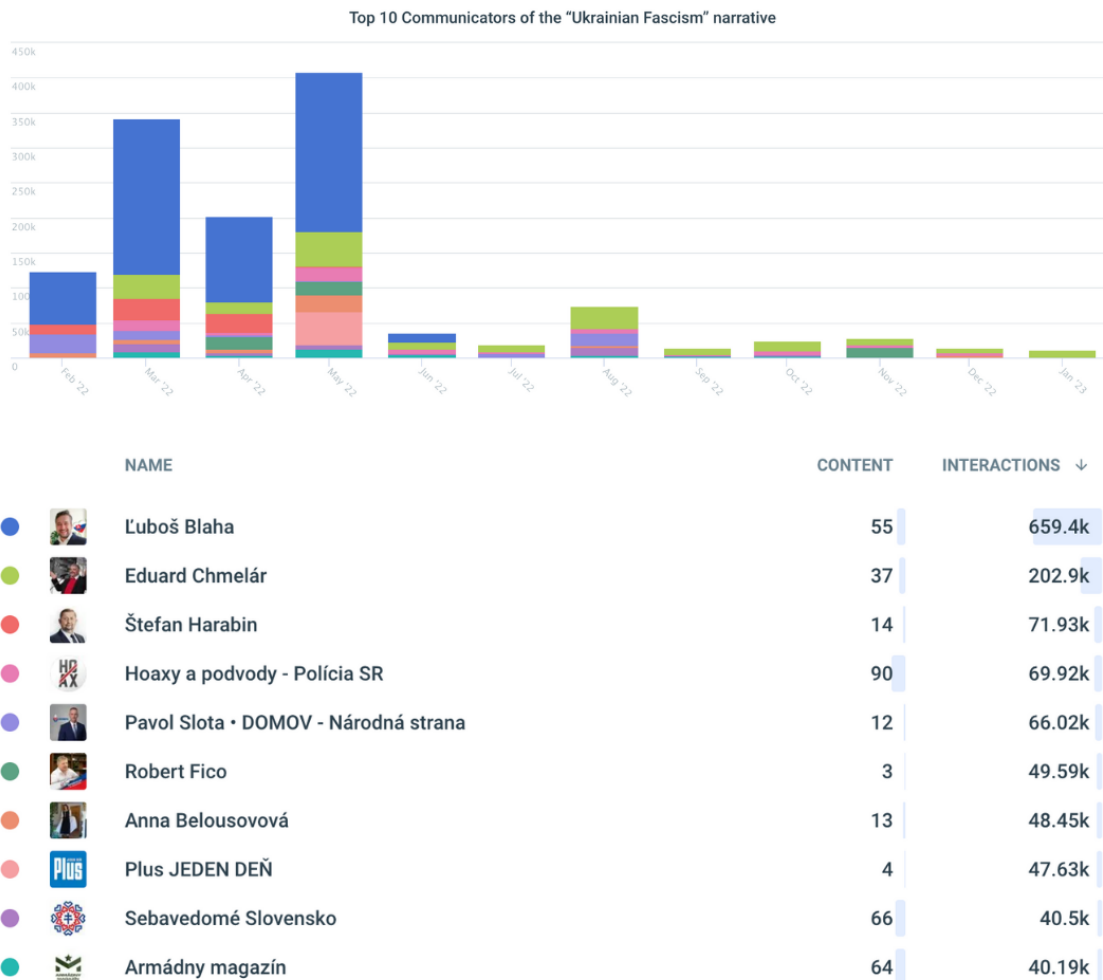|	NAME	CONTENT	INTERACTIONS ↓
🔵	Televízne noviny TV Markíza	635	354.8k
🟢	Ľuboš Blaha	24	304.7k
🔴	Eduard Chmelár	44	233k
🩷	Milan Uhrík · Republika	18	179.9k
🟣	Zuzana Čaputová	14	153.2k
🟢	Denník N	119	152.2k
🟠	Armáda Ruskej Federácie	89	146.4k
🩷	Ereport	104	144.8k
🟣	Hoaxy a podvody - Polícia SR	162	143.9k
🟢	Televízia TA3	167	117.4k

Graph 2: Top 10 communication actors of the war in Ukraine according to the effectiveness of communication. Data from the monitoring period between 23 February 2022 and 23 January 2023. Source: Gerulata Juno.

However, if we examine the effectiveness of communication (Graph 2), we observe that the spectrum of actors is changing. The data obtained confirm that the generating of interactions is dominated mainly by political actors. Apart from President Zuzana Čaputová, politicians characterised by their long-standing pro-Russian communication appear on the list. Despite the relatively low number of posts, actors such as Ľuboš Blaha[2], Eduard Chmelár and Milan Uhrík achieve high interaction figures. The aforementioned disinformation ecosystem is completed by the sites *Armáda Ruskej Federácie* (Army of the Russian Federation) and *Ereport*. On the positive side, the mainstream media also actively and effectively reported on the topic of Ukraine during the year, in particular the page of *TV Markíza* (privately-owned television channel), which produced the most posts and the most interactions.

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[2] Ľuboš Blaha is the most successful communicator in terms of the ratio between the number of posts and the number of generated interactions. This is despite the fact that in June 2022, his Facebook page was blocked due to repeated violations of the rules regarding hate speech, bullying and harassment, incitement to violence and spreading misinformation about COVID-19. He moved his activities to the social media network Telegram.

Top 10 Communicators of the "Ukrainian Fascism" narrative

NAME	CONTENT	INTERACTIONS ↓
Ľuboš Blaha	55	659.4k
Eduard Chmelár	37	202.9k
Štefan Harabin	14	71.93k
Hoaxy a podvody - Polícia SR	90	69.92k
Pavol Slota · DOMOV - Národná strana	12	66.02k
Robert Fico	3	49.59k
Anna Belousovová	13	48.45k
Plus JEDEN DEŇ	4	47.63k
Sebavedomé Slovensko	66	40.5k
Armádny magazín	64	40.19k

Graph 3: Top 10 communication actors of the "Ukrainian fascism" narrative. Data from the monitoring period between 23 February 2022 and 23 January 2023. Source: Gerulata Juno.

However, the situation in the Slovak information space is considerably more politicized if we focus on one of the main metanarratives of Russian propaganda. As described above, the metanarrative of "Ukrainian fascism" serves as one of the fictitious arguments or reasons for supporting Russian aggression in Ukraine. The beginnings of its development can be traced back at least to 2013; since 24 February 2022, it has grown even stronger in its intensity. At the same time, the data obtained confirm the strong sentimental colouring of communication, especially in the case of anti-system politicians who spread this narrative.

The list is again dominated by Ľuboš Blaha together with Eduard Chmelár, joined by former three-time Prime Minister Robert Fico. At the same time, politicians from the periphery of the political spectrum are appearing who, although they have recently lost their political potential, continue to use disinformation and similarly problematic content to stay in the minds of the Slovak population. Once again we see the activity of the site *Armádny Magazín*, which is followed in its activities in the broader list of actors by similarly Kremlin-leaning pages such as *BRAT za BRATA* (Brother for Brother) or *Armáda Ruskej Federácie* (Army of the Russian Federation). The list goes on to include other politicians, primarily with party affiliations to far-right and far-left political entities (e.g. Artur Bekmatov, Marek Kurta, Tomáš Špaček and Slavěna Vorobelová).

PREVENTING DISINFORMATION: SEIZING THE NARRATIVE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The fight against disinformation should not only be waged in a reactionary way. The full-scale Russian aggression beginning on 24 February 2022 has disrupted the dynamics of the security environment. Communicating a similarly critical topic to the public can be considered one of the **key national interests** in democratic states. Particularly in relation to the present information and influence operations from third parties, especially Russia, which seeks to influence public opinion.

The situation is different compared to the previous communication crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic. The enemy and the threat it poses is evident. It is important to note that Russia has a paradoxical advantage over Western states. The disinformation and propaganda it spreads is **strategic communication turned on its head**. At the same time, it is carried out at the level of a "whole of government" approach, which is absent in some Western states (including members of the V4).

The Kremlin knows the purpose of its communication, who it is communicating with and what audience it is targeting. The machinery consists of multiple actors who know their roles, and at the same time, do not have to approach the matter in a highly systematic fashion. They don't rely on logic, they seek to engineer information chaos.

The answer should be a continuous and transparent explanation of the situation. This is, above all, **filling an information vacuum** that could otherwise be exploited by disinformation actors. The communication of democratic values or Western alliances has a strong place in this, but the key to success is to combine it with the **communication of practical solutions and policies**. All these efforts must also be adaptable.

Trust and relationship with the public is a fundamental cornerstone. That is why strategic communication must remain honest and factual. **Dialogue with the audience** (the public), reflecting changes in the nature of communication, is key to success. Public participation is essential, so communication should also follow an audience-oriented approach.

Naturally, the content of the communication itself plays an important role as well. In addition to an attractive and impactful format, it is also necessary to focus on **identifying the priority topics** that the state will nurture. Capacities and attention spans are low. There is a need to be effective on those topics where it makes sense and will deliver results.

At the same time, strategic communication must be based on data. It cannot be random. In other words, **results-based management** must be in place here too. This approach requires active, strategic engagement of communication at several levels: setting the principle and communicating measurable objectives, sharing successful cases as well as lessons learned, and creating systems and processes to identify, track and report on metrics.

Inspiration could also come from best practices in Great Britain or Canada. A model that relies on a **digital and open standard** ("digital and open by default") means designing communication strategies

that rely on the internet as the main communication channel. At the same time, it relies on transparency and continual public access to information.

It should be added, however, that strategic communication should not only take place in the online space, but also within the traditional media, through political representatives and by state institutions. Nevertheless, efforts at cooperation also need to reflect the **competitiveness and polarisation of the information space**.

Obviously, the greatest potential for communication cooperation lies in actors who share a pro-Western orientation. **Joint campaigns** based on a combination of shared values and day-to-day communication are mutually beneficial. They reinforce not only the message itself, but also the position of its bearers.

However, messages should not only be spread by politicians, but also by civil servants and experts. **The guarantee of impartial and professional communication** has a positive impact on social discourse, especially by strengthening public confidence in the message itself.

It should not be forgotten that the entire content of communication does not rest solely on the shoulders of strategic communicators. Sharing the messages and outputs of friendly actors is not only a networking tool, but also an effective capacity management measure.

This is also related to the challenge posed by anti-Western actors. In addressing it, a shared awareness of their activities but also the **timing of the response** itself is key. It is not rare for state institutions to miss an opportunity to communicate with the public effectively due to a rigid process of action approval. Internal settings of institutions should therefore reflect the challenges and culture of communication in the 21st century.

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