



SUMMARY REPORT

Monday 28th April 2020

This report has been produced with the information provided by participating organisations within the OIP COVID-19 Working Group (CWG). Each organisation provides monitoring and analysis of evolving and emerging disinformation and misinformation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional insight and research has been provided by OIP partners, including Zinc Network and Bellingcat.

The following countries and languages are covered in this report:

Countries	Languages
Armenia	Armenia
Bulgaria	Bulgarian
Czechia	Czech
Estonia	Estonian, English, Russian
Georgia	Georgian
Hungary	Hungarian
Latvia	Latvian, English Russian
Lithuania	Lithuanian, English, Russian
Moldova	Romanian
North Macedonia	Macedonian, Russian
Poland	Polish
Romania	Romanian
Russia	Russian
Serbia	Serbian
Slovakia	Slovak
Ukraine	Ukrainian, Russian



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OVERVIEW

Key new or shifting narratives.

1. **(Armenia)** Claims that nicotine prevents the spread of coronavirus in organisms; [claims](#) by an activist and former doctor that the virus was created in 1965; the use of [images](#) of people falling in China to claim that the pandemic is fake and not real in Armenia; a Yerevan City Council member's [suggestion](#) that the pandemic is a myth; the [circulation](#) of the claim that Italy will remain closed to tourists until the end of the year; [claims](#) by a doctor and government critic (amplified by other outlets) that according to a source, a morgue had offered to pay a fee to relatives of a deceased individual if they mentioned coronavirus as a cause of death.
2. **(Bulgaria)** Claims that Bill Gates is using the virus to [depopulate](#) the world; that using [masks](#) makes people more ill; that the US is [facing](#) a food shortage; that the [situation](#) is worse in Bulgaria than previously reported; that Italy will definitely be [closed](#) until the end of the year; that North Macedonia's membership of NATO is [damaging](#) the fight against COVID-19; that the virus will lead to the [collapse](#) of the world order.
3. **(Czechia)** In recent days, conspiracy narratives have been more dominant in this space than other forms of disinformation. They include the suggestion that the virus was exported to China, Italy and Germany by the U.S.A., and that the pandemic was [orchestrated](#) by the 'Deep State' in the U.S.A.
4. **(Estonia)** Further emphasis upon the Baltics' reliance on EU funds, including for the proposed Rail Baltica project; [claims](#) that "small" EU countries are being banned from requesting Russian aid; fall-off in the amount of 5G conspiracy theories circulating.
5. **(Georgia)** New narratives emerging include claims that COVID-19's impact is [exaggerated](#), that COVID-19 is a [global fraud](#), and that Georgia's [foreign policy](#)



will be revised because of it. Continuing narratives include those referring to [5G](#), [obligatory microchipping](#), and the [Bill Gates](#) conspiracy.

6. **(Hungary)** Narratives include government [claims](#) that George Soros is proposing responses to COVID-19 for financial gain; continued [attacks](#) against Bill Gates by fringe pro-Kremlin sites; Donald Trump [using](#) COVID-19 to get rid of liberal elites in the USA. All of the above narratives have featured over the past weekend. The latter (Plan Q) appears to be *prima facie* aligned with QANON.
7. **(Latvia)** Further [emphasis](#) upon the Baltics' reliance on EU funds; [claims](#) that "small" EU countries are being banned from requesting Russian aid; [claims](#) that unemployed Latvians will be intentionally abandoned to provide cheap labour to Western members; the [condemnation](#) of "Russophobic" policy during the pandemic; EU implementers being [seen](#) as unnecessary for the "new world" post-COVID; [claims](#) that NATO failed to assist Spain with their outbreak.
8. **(Lithuania)** Anti-NATO and anti-U.S. narratives persist. Claims that have been circulated include the following: that the EU [is failing](#) to fight COVID-19 (with Western countries being concerned to "contain" the Russian Federation); that [Russia, not NATO](#), is the one who came to the aid of Italy.
9. **(Moldova)** [Suggestions](#) from the Russian Foreign Minister that the pandemic will lead to conflict amongst world powers, for which Russia is preparing; continuing [claims](#) (from MP Iurie Rosca) that the virus is spread through 5G; [claims](#) that U.S. military are installing 5G in the Neamt mountains in Romania; [amplification](#) of Russian/Chinese aid to Moldova.
10. **(North Macedonia)** Narratives concerning Russian superiority persist; the narrative of EU failure continues (the EU's donation of blankets to the country continues to be criticised, as noted in last Friday's report); the suggestion that a COVID-19 vaccine may include [nano-chips](#), used to track people has been circulated. Various claims have also been made about Bill Gates, including that he wants to create a [new human race](#) and that none of his children are [vaccinated](#).
11. **(Poland)** False [claims](#) (since taken down) that two children died in Guinea after being vaccinated; [claims](#) that the authorities can torture people who refuse vaccination; claims that 5G and COVID-19 were [made](#) by "them" or the world order to reduce population control; claims that there is a 5G [nanochip](#) in the COVID-19 vaccine; the idea that the London Olympics was a masonic ceremony [held](#) to introduce COVID-19; claims that the first volunteer for a vaccine in Oxford [died](#) (she is still alive).



12. **(Romania)** New narratives include the [closure](#) of disinformation websites as an expression of authoritarianism; certain Western countries [blocking](#) EU-member states from accessing much-needed (and generous) Russian aid; [Bill Gates](#) having a paramount financial interest in financing the COVID-19 vaccine and making it mandatory.
13. **(Russia)** Claims that Italian media are presenting Russian aid as close to a [military invasion](#), that US biological testing sites are [close](#) to Russia's borders, and that [greed](#) has exacerbated the crisis.
14. **(Serbia)** There was coverage of the EU report into Chinese disinformation across the Serbian media. The most engaged-with coverage was in B92, which led its report with [China's denial that it was spreading disinformation](#). Other coverage of disinformation came from Srbija Danas, which reported Maria Zakharova's [denial](#) that Russia had sought to poison two Czech officials. Zakharova accused the Czech media of inventing fake news.
15. **(Slovakia)** The circulation of conspiracy narratives has been dominant. Theories circulated include those claiming that COVID-19 was [made in a lab](#) in the U.S.A, and that [Bill Gates](#) produced the virus.
16. **(Ukraine)** Anti-lockdown protests are being [overstated](#), whilst [undermining](#) the Maidan revolutions; Western value systems are [viewed](#) as clearly obsolete in a time of crisis; [suggestions](#) that biolabs run by the U.S. military are behind the outbreak; Ukrainian statehood and sovereignty undermined.

DISINFORMATION

1. Immigration

None



2. Failure of the EU

EU specific 'failures' have reduced in quantity since last week, though there continue to be claims that the EU cannot cope with the crisis and that solidarity is crumbling. This is prevalent in the Baltics in particular (where similar narratives around NATO also continue), and in Romania, where the issue of seasonal workers being 'exploited' by Germany has been described in terms of the latter becoming 'colonial' towards the former.

- **(Baltics)** RuBaltic continues to emphasise the Baltic states' dependence on EU financial support. An article entitled "Powerless Union: Baltic hopes to avoid disaster through EU subsidies" [says](#) that any chance of EU funding for the Rail Baltica project has been dashed by the pandemic, as well as the benefit that the new infrastructure would have had upon economic recovery post-COVID.
- **(Lithuania)** The EU is failing to fight Covid-19, [according to](#) an article from Riafan.ru. In the article, which has had over 41,000 views, it is claimed that "In their attempts to "contain" the Russian Federation, Western countries are even ready to give up the fight against the coronavirus pandemic". This was reportedly stated in an interview with the Federal News Agency by a member of the Federation Council Sergei Tsekov.
- **(North Macedonia)** As reported last week, the news that the EU would be donating, among other things, 1000 blankets to North Macedonia, has been criticised and used by anti-EU campaigns online.
- **(Romania)** Following on from quotes by a number of people last week, including the journalist Sorina Matei, Gandeste Romania (132,000 followers on Facebook) has further [expanded](#) on the narrative that Romanian seasonal workers are being exploited by Germany during COVID-19. They claim that the lockdown is burying the Romanian economy, whilst allowing Germany to act as a 'colonial' power towards the country's workers. The piece quotes the former Minister for the Economy, Ilie Serbanescu, who points to what is claimed to be hypocrisy in stopping the orthodox population from participating in Easter Mass whilst allowing workers to relocate to Germany. This has seen 350 shares and 410 reactions on Facebook.

3. Incompetence

Several more claims of 'mass protests' in Europe (in the U.S. model) have been seen, which appear to attempt to play on people's potentially understandable frustration at



lockdown conditions. As has previously been the case with anti-vax narratives, this aims to engender distrust in institutions, as well as – where possible – physically weakening states and placing additional burdens on their healthcare systems.

- **(Bulgaria)** According to an interview with former diplomat and counter-terrorism expert Professor Boyan Chukov, by [BTV](#), COVID-19 is covering the collapse of the liberal order, and is seeing riots and protests occur. BTV holds around 25% of audience share, according to Nielsen.
- **(Bulgaria)** Kremlin-allied [Newsfront](#) has used interviews with food banks to push the claim that the US is facing unprecedented hunger and “endless queues for free food”.
- **(Hungary)** Further to last week’s character assassination of the opposition Green MP Tímea Szabó in the pro-government daily, Magyar Nemzet, the main pro-government channel [M1](#) has claimed that she is conspiring with Romania’s ambassador against Hungarians. While the government claims that Ambassador Lazurca is defending Szabó for her remarks questioning Hungarian government assistance in Hungarian-populated Romanian areas, the ambassador [offered](#) solidarity in a closed WhatsApp group of foreign Ambassadors in Hungary because of the obscene language and threats being directed at the Hungarian MP. Menczer’s move is an attempt to fuel anti-Romanian tensions, which are highly popular among pro-government voters and link them to the health crisis.
- **(Latvia)** An article in Press.lv [suggests](#) that the Latvian government’s perceived failure to financially support those left unemployed by the crisis is part of a plan “to provide cheap labor” for Western EU member states by leaving people with little choice but to emigrate for work. This narrative emphasizes the idea of there being an ideological split between the “haves and have nots” in the EU.
- **(Latvia)** Sputnik Latvia published an article and accompanying [video, interviewing](#) the pro-Russian publicist Vladimir Linderman, who stresses that the Latvian government’s preoccupation with “Russophobic” policy (minority language education policy is mentioned) will undermine their ability to recover from the pandemic. He also says that residents returning from other countries will constitute a “spare” part of society, unable to be integrated into Latvia’s economy. The video has been viewed over 1,600 times.
- **(Lithuania)** A *RuBaltic.ru* article [suggested](#) that Russia, not NATO, is the one that came to the assistance of Italy during the COVID-19 crisis. It claimed that



Russia must take on the position of “leader and saviour of mankind”, as the “current leader” is incapable of doing so.

- **(Latvia)** “Economist Evgeniy Zayvec” (little has been found regarding them elsewhere online) gave an interview on Baltkom radio which was covered in the Press.lv portal, in which they [suggested](#) reducing Latvian government staff by half, as they are only used to implement “far-fetched developments by EU officials” (in particular, environmental policy). Zaycev (or Zaitseva) also predicts that “some areas of activity” will cease to exist in the “new world” post-COVID-19 (implying those of the Union).
- **(Romania)** Claims of protests across Europe against lockdown measures have now spread to Romania. Luja.RO [stated](#) that “Europe is revolting against house arrest”, with little evidence – a narrative which has previously been seen in Germany. The post points to the U.S.A as providing the model for popular protest against COVID-19 measures, and also points to how ‘informed citizens’ are sceptical of lockdown strategies.
- **(Ukraine)** The prominent pro-Russian portal *Strana.ua* continues to [overstate](#) the possibility of anti-lockdown protests to incite internal destabilization in Ukraine. Articles now include headlines such as “Will there be a Quarantine Maidan in Ukraine”; this [serves](#) also to discredit the 2014 revolution by equating it with any potential protest, whatever size and however motivated.

4. Russia as saviour or victim

Claims of Russophobia in the Baltics continue in a similar vein to previous weeks. There has been a shift, however, from claims that Russophobia is preventing Russian aid from being accessed by Baltic countries, to claims that – in the run up to Victory Day – Soviet veterans are the heroes that liberated Europe, and that during the COVID-19 pandemic this shouldn't be forgotten.

- **(Latvia)** Following the decision in the Saeima to place an equal ban on the wearing of Soviet military uniforms to the existing one on wearing those of Nazi Germany, the Russian embassy in Latvia has [responded](#) fiercely against what they view as ideological “Russophobia” in the Latvian government, irrepressible even in the midst of a pandemic. Soviet veterans are described as the “heroes who liberated Latvia and Europe from fascism”. Struggles around historical revisionism are stepping up as Victory Day on May 9th approaches.
- **(Latvia)** Russian-language media, including [Nation-News.ru](#) amongst other outlets, push the story initiated in a statement by Russian MFA Sergei Lavrov,



that many “small” EU countries wish to ask Russia for aid but are “banned” by their Western allies, who continue to seek to “contain” Russia. These comments were also broadcast on RT.

5. Moral decay

The moral decay elements of disinformation around COVID-19 focus on the failure of the liberal economic and democratic model to deal with the virus, with greed as a factor of Western capitalism hampering any response efforts.

- **(Moldova / Russia)** An Article in Sputnik Moldova [quotes](#) Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Serghei Riabhov’s statement that depicts the outbreak as a curtain falling to expose the truth of a multipolar global power structure, and Russia’s place in a struggle for dominance. He says the pandemic has “significantly increased the risk of major conflicts” between the world’s most powerful states. Riabhov also makes reference to potential nuclear war and the “declining influence of the UN”.
- **(Ukraine / Russia)** One of Russia’s top TV channels, Russia 24, broadcast a segment in Weekly News with Dmitry Kiselyov, which [questioned](#) the West’s commitment to liberal values in a time of crisis, sardonically claiming that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the “Western values system” to “somehow become obsolete”. Ukrainian statehood was also undermined, in referring to Ukraine as an “American-European project”. The channel’s YouTube platform has 4.84 million subscribers.
- **(Russia)** St Petersburg based Absolut.TV held an [interview](#) with a professor and economist who claimed that the main focus of the impact of COVID-19 should be the economic crisis, which has been caused by the greed of capitalism. He also implied that there will be forced vaccination.

6. Orthodox Influencers

The focus from the weekend remains around the Moscow-Patriarchate backed Ukrainian Orthodox Church, some of whose monks have contracted the disease after the leadership was heavily critical of Ukraine’s lockdown measures around Easter.

- **(Ukraine)** Pravda.UA [reports](#) that the representative of the Moscow-Patriarchate aligned Ukrainian Orthodox Church (which has been critical of Ukrainian lockdown measures, but many of whose monks have now contracted



the virus) has claimed that he was misquoted by Russian media when they stated he'd said that every monk had contracted the virus.

Statistics and Cures

1. False statistics, causes and effects

Amongst similar signs (c/f Guinea below) that those pushing disinfo/misinfo are beginning to create narratives to encourage doubt about vaccines in development, alongside vaccines themselves, the WG has seen claims that the first volunteer has died. There have also been continued claims that the virus is worse than reported in countries such as Bulgaria.

- **(Armenia)** In a Facebook [post](#) viewed over 2000 times (and using shots of people falling on the streets in China, allegedly due to coronavirus) it is claimed that the pandemic is fake because a real pandemic features people falling over on the streets. By contrast, smiling patients with mild symptoms – as is apparently the case in Armenia – indicate that the pandemic is not real.
- **(Bulgaria)** Blitz.BG has [used](#) statistics from the National Coronavirus Operational Headquarters to highlight the 'frightening' developments in Bulgaria. It appears to be sensationalist coverage, as the higher statistics are due to higher levels of testing, and there are no changes in the basic ratios of infection or death.
- **(Georgia)** Far-right activist Bega Vardosanidze went [live](#) on Facebook on 26th April to discuss 'Coronavirus fraud', claiming that the virus is no worse than seasonal flu. The same narrative was developed by pro-Kremlin TV channel Obieqtivi, where an Israeli citizen called Niko Beliashvili was quoted as saying that COVID-19 was created artificially to destroy the world economic model. This acquired 7.5k views on Facebook.
- **(North Macedonia)** In a story from *Na Pauza* that has since been removed, it was reported that the first volunteer for testing the Covid-19 vaccine in the UK had died.
- **(Poland)** Salon24 (4.5m unique users in 2019) [claimed](#) – now deleted - that the first volunteer for a vaccine, Alisa Granato in Oxford, had died. This is not true.

2. False cures



Last week was relatively quiet for false cures, but new proposals from the weekend claim that both nicotine and cannabis are being used to prevent or treat COVID-19, and that masks actually make the virus worse, rather than helping.

- **(Armenia)** Referring to ‘Assistance Publique - Hopitaux de Paris’ data, lvarunk.com (14,000 visitors per month) has claimed that nicotine prevents or inhibits the spread of COVID-19.
- **(Bulgaria)** Alpha TV, a nationalist and pro-Kremlin channel, has [interviewed](#) an unnamed person who has claimed that wearing masks is more dangerous than not, and that they are designed (possibly by the Chinese) to make people sick.
- **(Slovakia)** Slovakia’s *Hlavný Denník*, picking up a [story](#) from Breitbart, reported that Israel will start to use a cannabis drug to cure COVID-19 patients. The story has so far had 1400 shares on Facebook.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

1. The virus was created in a lab

No new narratives have appeared around the virus being made in a lab, but previously-identified claims around the virus being much older than it actually is, that it was a by-product of AIDS research, and that it was created by U.S. or Chinese interests abound across the Caucasus, Balkans, V4 and Eastern Europe.

- **(Armenia)** In a Facebook [post](#) that was then reported more widely by outlets such as Lurer.com and others, former doctor and political activist Marina Khachatryan suggested the coronavirus was created in 1965.
- **(Georgia)** Kremlin-allied [NewsFront](#), which has previously claimed the virus was made in a lab as a by-product of AIDS research, wrote that an antidote to COVID-19 was developed years ago in Israel – based on a story from the [Christian Daily](#) website - and that it exists only to sell vaccines and make money. This acquired 47 shares on Facebook.
- **(North Macedonia)** According to an article in [Magazin](#), scientists unintentionally created COVID-19 in a lab. The article explained that “leading Russian microbiologist” Petar Chumakov thinks that the coronavirus was created by scientists in Wuhan who did “absolutely crazy things” in the lab while they studied the pathogeny of the virus.



- **(Slovakia)** An article in Slovakia's *Hlavný Denník*, shared 900 times on Facebook, [amplifies](#) conspiracy theories that Covid-19 was made in a lab in the U.S.A and exported to China. The article also claims that Russia is encircled by American biochemical labs, and has been [picked up](#) by other outlets.
- **(Ukraine / Russia)** The Russian Ministry of Defence-affiliated TV channel *Zvezda* [broadcast](#) a programme that included a segment suggesting that U.S. military biolabs may be behind the pandemic outbreak. It specifically targeted the Lugar Center in Georgia (a focus of anti-U.S bioweapon conspiracy theories), claiming “dozens of employees did of the mysterious illness.” The segment also referred to there being fifteen U.S. biolabs in Ukraine, a claim previously made by Viktor Medvedchuk. This narrative serves both to incriminate the U.S. and disparage the sovereignty of Georgia and Ukraine.

The piece also parrots a claim seen in a Latvian portal in the April 24th Report, that the U.S. has been “gathering [...] genetic data” on Russians - a claim originating with President Putin in 2017.

Zvezda has 997,000 YouTube subscribers. The video in question has been viewed over 3,850 times.

2. Planned pandemic / Bill Gates conspiracy

Spotted content in several countries has seen the “London Olympics’ planned the pandemic” conspiracy evolve. This has now moved (originally from North Macedonia) to Poland, where it has been claimed to be a Masonic plot, rather than one by the Illuminati as stated in other countries. The Bill Gates conspiracy continues, with some claiming that his interest in mandatory vaccination is financial, whereas others state it is for more nefarious purposes such as depopulation (even going so far as to say that he is continuing Hitler’s work). One source points to Roger Stone as the originator of the Gates conspiracy, though others previously have stated it was Alex Jones.

- **(Bulgaria)** [Pogled.info](#) (c. 70,000 followers) states that they have solved the mystery of COVID-19’s creation, and that it was made in a U.S. lab by 12 U.S. virologists, 2 Chinese experts, and a U.S. professor. Additionally, it was supposedly funded by Bill Gates, who may have done this so that he could create a vaccine to microchip people and reduce the global population – partially by making women infertile. Interestingly, this article points to Roger Stone, the jailed Trump adviser, as the originator of this claim.



- **(Czechia)** An article from the influential AC24 [suggested](#) that the pandemic may have been planned a long time ago. The piece cited a journalist, Benjamin Fulford, who points to the new British twenty-pound note, on which one can perceive a 5G transmitter, above which is a symbol of coronavirus, and was reported previously by the OIP WG.
- **(Czechia)** An article from the Czech *Protiproud* combined several existing conspiracy theories surrounding COVID-19. These included the [suggestion](#) that the virus was exported from the U.S.A to China, Italy and Germany. The article claims that the pandemic is orchestrated by the CIA and 'Deep State', with the purpose of weakening President Trump ahead of the upcoming American elections.
- **(Georgia)** Kremlin-allied [Newsfront](#), and far-right activist [Bega Vardosanidze](#), have continued to push claims of microchipping as a response to COVID-19, dubbing it "Obligatory Chippization". They cite this in connection to other narratives, including that COVID-19 is being used to reduce the world population. 61 shares and 21 shares respectively.
- **(Hungary)** Following on from claims by other fringe pro-Kremlin sites last week (such as *Vilaghelyzete.com*), [Kimondott Igazságok](#) stated that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has a stake in CureVac, a German pharmaceutical company which is often the Bête Noir of US far-right conspiracy groups. CureVac supposedly has the potential to roll out a vaccine, and thereby enrich Gates.
- **(Poland)** Andrzej Wyciu (116 subscribers) posted a video (21,000 views) claiming that the London 2012 [Olympics] opening ceremony was held by the Masons to herald COVID-19. As noted, this is a slight change to the 'illuminati' plot seen elsewhere. This also highlights the occasional discrepancy between a user's follower count and the potential for their content to spread.
- **(North Macedonia)** Various claims have been made about Bill Gates: *Popara* [reported](#) the claim that none of Gates' children are vaccinated; *Sloboden Svet* reported the claim that Bill Gates wants to create a new human race ("Bill Gates continues where Hitler stopped"); *Tocka* [reported](#) that a petition has been launched in the USA asking for an investigation into the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, due to "crimes against humanity and misuse of medicine".
- **(Romania)** On his [blog](#), Daniel Roxin, an influencer and journalist who usually publishes highly speculative historical documentaries with a focus on the



ancient Dacians (and whose audience tends to be more nationalist) has claimed that Bill Gates is only pursuing a vaccine – and mandatory vaccination – for financial gain. Roxin has 6.6k likes on Facebook.

- **(Serbia)** Government-friendly tabloid Alo ran a headline [implying that Bill Gates will be investigated for crimes against humanity](#). However, the body of the text makes it clear that there is merely a petition that has been launched demanding such an investigation, albeit one signed by over 400,000 people.
- **(Slovakia)** In Slovakia's [Hlavný Denník](#), an article shared 2400 times on Facebook amplified existing conspiracy theories about Bill Gates, claiming that he produced the virus and now wants to kill much of the world population via vaccination. The piece quotes Robert F. Kennedy Junior. It cites Epoch Times as its primary source.

3. 5G caused COVID-19

5G content was relatively light towards the end of last week. Nevertheless, it continues to be popular amongst conspiracy theorists, and is starting to merge with others. For example, in Poland and Georgia, the WG has now witnessed the first claim that the vaccine microchipping conspiracy (usually claimed to be Bill Gates), is a 5G vaccine/microchip.

- **(Georgia)** The relatively prominent [Stop 5G Georgia](#) Facebook group has stated that 5G antennae are being installed in Georgia but no-one is talking about it, and once successfully complete the government will require everyone to be microchipped. 198 likes, 227 comments, 107 shares.
- **(Moldova)** Iurie Rosca, a Moldovan MP for the Christian-Democratic People's Party continues to share videos on his Facebook profile which claim the pandemic is being spread by 5G. A video [posted](#) yesterday in which an individual called Iulian Dinca shares the "TRUTH ABOUT COVID-19" has only been shared 3 times thus far; however, a video [shared](#) by Rosca himself two weeks ago has now been shared over 3,700 times.
- **(Moldova)** A Romanian Orthodox blogger, 'Daniel Vla', has published a piece which [claims](#) that the US military may be installing 5G antennas during the pandemic has been widely shared on Facebook in Moldova, receiving over 14,000 likes, over 4,330 comments and being shared over 4,500 times. The blog contains photos purporting to show "Romanian and American soldiers" and cites WhatsApp messages from claiming to be from witness monks and nuns in the Neamt mountains.



- **(Poland)** According to Electromagnetyczny Swiat Nowotworow (Electromagnetic World of Cancer), Coronavirus and 5G are made by “them” or “the people governing the Earth” to reduce the world population. This has [acquired](#) close to 100,000 views, and follows usual tropes around world government and population control. It was reposted by the ‘I Don’t believe in Coronavirus’ Facebook page.
- **(Poland)** Government spokesperson Stanisław Zaryn [debunked](#) a social media claim that the COVID-19 vaccine will contain a 5G nanochip. The Youtube video to which he refers had around 32,000 views. Key quote: “We are 100% sure about 5G nanochips in the vaccine. It will help governments locate you anytime, anywhere”.

4. NATO

Broadly absent at the end of last week, a new narrative around North Macedonia’s membership of NATO claims that it is causing division at a time when unity is needed to fight COVID-19. This continues along lines that have previously been seen before – where claims were made that North Macedonia would be better saving the NATO membership fees to pay for medical equipment – with a slightly subtler message.

- **(Bulgaria)** The Bulgarian language version of Kremlin-allied Newsfront has [claimed](#) that US biolabs are operating illegally close to Russia’s borders, and whilst they talk about infection protection ‘it is only one step from defense to attack’, implying the USA may use its capabilities there to attack Russia. This is similar to previous narratives seen in Ukraine and Georgia.
- **(Latvia)** RAMBLER/NEWS reported a story originating in Rossiyskaya Gazeta which [claims](#) that in March Spain withdrew its request to NATO for assistance and medical equipment in its fight against COVID-19 after receiving only 10% of what was asked for.
- **(Russia)** As quoted on Bulgarian site Mni.bg, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a claim that North Macedonia’s membership of NATO has made the response to COVID-19 harder, as it continues to create dividing lines. Key quote: "To date, there is no justification for the need for the Republic of Northern Macedonia to join NATO. The local population was promised economic growth, increased investment and the rule of law. But such a thing does not require joining a military alliance at all. On the contrary, Skopje will now be required to increase defense and delivery costs for Western, mainly US, weapons and



equipment. This is the price the Macedonian people will have to pay for giving up their sovereignty in a military-political aspect”

5. George Soros

The narrative around Soros has shifted slightly, crystallising around the idea that his proposals for perpetual bonds as a means to ease the financial problems cause by COVID-19 are merely part of a scheme to enrich himself at Europeans’ expense. This is less conspiratorial (in the sense of Soros being part of a Jewish or world government conspiracy) and appears to be an attempt to latch onto something he has actually proposed. This is supposedly part of the ‘Second Soros Plan’, following on from the ‘First Soros Plan’, which was allegedly to flood the EU with migrants and tear down the nation state.

- **(Hungary)** Continued attacks against George Soros have now moved towards claiming that he is trying to make money out of COVID-19. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was interviewed by the main state radio channel, Kossuth Radio, and [claimed](#) that Soros’s ‘perpetual bonds’ proposal is part of the ‘Second Soros Plan’, to enrich himself. Kossuth has around 1m listeners per day, and Orbán’s weekly interviews are always shared by many pro- and opposition channels, including the main state TV channel M1 and the two biggest commercial stations TV2 and RTL Klub.
- **(Hungary)** [Speaking](#) in a programme of main Hungarian state TV channel M1, Zoltán Lomnici Jr., a leading pro-government pundit claimed that NGOs such as TASZ, a Hungarian rights watch group, are exploiting a business opportunity when they offer to provide legal help for Hungarian in-patients who were moved out from hospitals as part of a government emergency measure to free hospital beds for the spread of COVID-19. During the interview, Lomnici draw a parallel between “the pandemic business” and the “migrant business” conducted by the allegedly Soros-affiliated NGOs, claiming that these organizations are profiting from such crises whereas these organizations are non-profit.
- **(Hungary)** Zoltán Kovács, an international spokesperson for the Hungarian government [lashed](#) out at European affairs news portal EUObserver for not publishing its full letter to the editor of the portal in which he claimed that international rights NGO Human Rights Watch is a Soros-funded organization whose criticism against the Hungarian government over its coronavirus law is because they oppose national sovereignty. Responding to Kovács, the editor of EUObserver said that the portal does not publish anti-Semitic conspiracy theories (Kovács was echoing the statements of Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán



about “the new Soros Plan.”. Kovács’ response was issued on the About Hungary blog, with 35,000 followers on Facebook.

- **(Romania)** The Fluierul.ro [website](#) has stated that George Soros’s proposal for perpetual bonds to help ease the financial impact of COVID-19 is actually a plot to further enrich himself.

6. Anti-vax

Towards the end of last week, there was relatively little new content relating to this narrative. However, over the weekend the WG has reported claims of children in Africa dying after being vaccinated, which appears to be an attempt to make a case sound ‘real’, thereby providing followers with ‘proof’ that the vaccine kills people. Separately, there have also been claims that those who refuse vaccination can be tortured by the government, which forms part of the continued push by anti-vax groups to use COVID-19.

- **(North Macedonia)** Headlined “Nano-chips in citizens’ bodies to suppress coronavirus”, a piece for Sputnik Serbia [speculates](#) about whether the COVID-19 vaccine will contain nano-chips for tracking people. It says: “...a Belgian doctor, a proponent of natural remedies and treatments, Dr. Teri Schmidt, pedagogical director of the European Institute of Natural Medicine, strongly draws attention and claims that, in collaboration with the World Health Organization, the Bill Gates Foundation is funding seven virus coronary vaccine projects, among which and introduction of the nano-chip into the human body.”
- **(Poland)** A since taken down [post](#) on the Nie Wierzę Koronwirusu Facebook group (13,034 followers) claims two children in Guinea died an hour after being given a test vaccine. The footage was about entirely different incidents related to the distribution of antiparasitic medicines in Dubreka, Guinea, in March 2020. Key quote: “This virus can be transmitted through vaccination and aims to modify human behavior, views and beliefs. In this case, the removal of the so-called God gene (VMAT2) responsible for experiencing religious experiences, intense beliefs or desires is discussed.”
- **(Poland)** Youtube and Facebook [page](#) ‘I don’t believe in Coronavirus’ has claimed that people who refuse vaccination can be tortured. This has been viewed 65,000 times. This video analyses ‘official’, fake, documents from the Polish government to justify the post.



7. World Health Organization

Last week, the WHO took a backseat in terms of conspiracy theories in favour of those focussed on Bill Gates (above). However, some recent posts in Georgia have seen claims that the WHO has made more of the crisis than necessary.

- **(Georgia)** Tato Jakhia, a cardiologist at Batumi Medical Center, has been quoted by Kremlin-allied Newsfront as stating that COVID-19 is not as dangerous as seasonal flu, and the WHO has been [lying](#) about it. 262 shares on Facebook. Similarly, The World Congress of Families (aligned closely with Kremlin insiders) Tbilisi branch has [claimed](#) that the death rate of COVID-19 and seasonal flu are the same, quoting Dr John Ioannides from Stanford University.

8. There is no virus

The sole story noted from the weekend comes from Serbia, where an Italian MP's comments have been used to claim the vast majority of deaths are not from the virus.

- (Serbia) Pro-government tabloid Kurir reported an [Italian MP's comments](#) that 96% of attributed COVID-19 deaths were not in fact from the virus.

ADDITIONAL

1. Response to Chinese and Russian aid

Kremlin-aligned media continues to praise Russian (and occasionally Chinese) support in fighting COVID-19, whilst also criticising the EU and NATO for pressuring their countries not to receive said aid.

- **(Moldova)** Sputnik Moldova continues to string out content that [amplifies](#) the value of Russian (and Chinese) aid to Moldova. An article on April 24th covers the arrival of an AN-124 Russian Air Force transport plane of medical goods in Chisinau five days previously, on April 19th. Russian MFA Maria Zaharova is quoted thus: "Russia's assistance will help Moldova [...] overcome all consequences [of the pandemic.]" A Russian loan to Moldova agreed on April 17th is also emphasised as a "significant" moment in the relations between the two countries.
- **(Romania)** Sputnik Romania has republished as Sputnik France article and [quoted](#) the Russian Foreign Secretary, Lavrov, who stated that EU and NATO states are being pressured not to request help from Russia. The article details



the assistance provided by Russia to Italy as proof of Russia's generosity. 817 views on the website.

- **(Russia)** Sergei Lavrov, quoted on RT, has [stated](#) that some media are trying to present Russia's assistance to Italy as close to an invasion of both the country and NATO territory. According to Lavrov, he knows that "a number of countries in Europe, the European Union, NATO including," who would like to appeal to Russia for assistance, but are dominated by the larger powers. This follows similar narratives pushed in the Baltics last week.

2. Domestic responses to COVID-19

Actions taken by some countries to curb the disinformation around COVID-19 have been noted by those perpetrating it, who appear to be beginning to push back. Separately, there have been repeats of the claim that Italy will remain closed to tourists until the end of next year (reporting in Russia and Italy), which has not been confirmed.

- **(Armenia)** Websites such as 24news.am (which has over 3,150,000 visits a month, according to SimilarWeb) and others, referring to Russian media, have [reposted](#) the claim that Italy will remain closed to tourists until the end of the year. Other sites reported the same, referring this [La Repubblica](#) article. The Embassy of Italy in Russia told TASS that the claim was not true.
- **(Armenia)** In a video [interview](#) given to Hraparak.am (then shared more widely by various outlets), a former Yerevan City Council member, Sona Aghekyan, complained that the police would not let her go to the Armenian Genocide memorial complex (which was closed due to the pandemic). Aghekyan said shortly after that the virus is fake and the pandemic is a myth. This claim became the title of the video, which has been viewed over 6,900 times.
- **(Romania)** The Facebook [account](#) of Luja.RO issued a post claiming that the closure of two websites accused of spreading COVID-19 disinformation is being interpreted as an authoritarian move, quoting a caption from a Facebook post made by a judge from Bucharest. Key quote: "When political interests close certain websites, we can say that democracy has fallen asleep...and this will inevitably lead to the birth of a 'dictatorship with a human face'. Shared 200 times on Facebook and viewed 3,000 times on the original website. This follows a significant amount of criticism of the government's actions in tackling COVID-19 more generally over the past few weeks.



- **(Russia)** Sputnik.by has [claimed](#) that Italy will be closed until the end of the year. It appears that they have used a statement by the Italian Minister for Culture and Tourism that the country ‘might’ be closed – this has previously been misreported in several other countries.

3. Roma and ethnic minorities

- **None**

4. ‘Plan Q’

A new narrative, that appears to reference a number of themes (and the ubiquitous Q) previously raised by QANON and associated groups, states that Donald Trump is going to instigate ‘Plan Q’ to purge the world of liberal elites.

- **(Hungary)** Fringe conspiracy page [Kimondott Igazságok](#) has claimed that secret American intelligence firm launched what they called Plan Q to “get rid of” elites that are ruling the globe in the shadow of the coronavirus pandemic. The site stated that U.S. President Donald Trump and his administration are involved in a plan to remove elites that have committed crimes against humanity and kept technologies for free energy and cancer vaccination under secret. The page has 14,700 followers.
- **(Hungary)** Another fringe conspiracy site [Felháborító Hírek](#) said – based on American conspiracy theories – that the U.S. government is building a superbunker in the Cheyenne mountains where the political, financial and military elites of the world can go if the coronavirus pandemic intensifies to an unprecedented level, suggesting that elites would let others die in case of a larger outbreak. The page has 15,200 followers on Facebook.