



SUMMARY REPORT

Wednesday 15th April 2020

This Summary Report was 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 have been provided by OIP partners, including Zinc Network and Bellingcat.

The following countries and languages are covered in this report:

Countries	Languages
Armenia	Armenia
Belarus	Belarussian
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
Slovakia	Slovakian
Ukraine	Ukrainian



OVERVIEW

Key new or shifting narratives

1. **(Baltics-wide)** An emerging narrative appears to be that the Baltics are reaping the consequences of their negative view of Russia and will need to change their views if they are to survive the economic fallout.
2. **(Belarus)** There has been significant coverage of the claims made by Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko, that there have not been any deaths in Belarus from COVID-19, that Belarussian doctors are better prepared for the crisis than other countries and that doctors have access to a specific combination of more effective drugs.
3. **(Hungary)** Pro-Kremlin sites have attacked London's "leftist" mayor for failing to prepare for the pandemic and making the city a hotspot. Pro-government media has attacked perceived opponents for supporting "liberal" figures during the crisis, notably George Soros, and criticised Sweden for allegedly giving up on the elderly while doing nothing about high infection rates in areas with a high population of immigrants (based on an RT article).
4. **(Hungary/Slovakia)** Criticism of China by Kremlin allied media in Hungary and conspiracy sites in Slovakia has increased. There is no evidence this has been directed, but it may indicate Kremlin allied media intend to push anti-China narratives.
5. **(Georgia)** There have been claims by a Russian tennis player turned politician, Marat Safin, that the WHO and Bill Gates are going to use the COVID-19 crisis to implant microchips into people (also picked up in Slovakia). A separate Facebook group has claimed that 'Jewish Dynasties' will use the crisis to force "microchipping" of communities. This may indicate an emerging narrative.
6. **(Lithuania)** has seen several new narratives, including that the US requires the Lithuanian government to purchase tests made there, that "rock salt" prevents COVID-19, and that the WHO has caused mass hysteria.
7. **(Poland)** Comments that appear directed by Kremlin allied media around the closure of Kaliningrad's EU borders due to COVID-19 are amplifying the narrative that Poland is going to annex the region. This reinforces similar content in Russian media promoting the idea that the Suwalki region should vote to leave Poland.
8. **(Russia)** Aid issued to the US and other western governments continues to play out on state media, pushing the narrative of a strong Russia – capable of dealing with the threat – versus a weak West.
9. **(Ukraine)** Kremlin allied media has again highlighted the idea that Ukraine will fracture due to COVID-19. This was pushed on 14th April 2020 by Alexey Pushkov, who is seen as the driving force behind the 'EU disintegration' narrative.



NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Disinformation

1. [Immigration/EU Failure](#)
2. [Government incompetence](#)
3. [Russia as saviour](#)

Misinformation

1. [False statistics](#)
2. [False cures](#)

Conspiracy

1. [Virus created in lab](#)
2. [Planned pandemic](#)
3. [5G](#)
4. [NATO](#)
5. [George Soros](#)
6. [Anti-vax](#)
7. [World Health Organisation](#)

Additional

1. [Information suppression](#)
2. [Response to Russian & Chinese aid](#)
3. [Chernobyl fires](#)

DISINFORMATION

1. Immigration

Illegal immigration is a leading cause of COVID-19 spread, migrants carry the virus, ethnic minorities carry the virus

- **(Hungary)** The daily Magyar Nemzet, a pro-government outlet, has [claimed](#) that the COVID-19 hotspots in Sweden are areas with high immigration and that the Swedish government have supposedly 'given up' providing ICU beds to the elderly. The same outlet [accused](#) George Soros of supporting 'pro-immigration' mayors in Hungary and Italy, after the Open Societies Foundation donated 1.1m euros to Milan and Budapest to fight COVID-19.

2. Failure of the EU

Failure to respond to the pandemic, disunity amongst member states



- **(Moldova)** In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bogdan Țîrdea, MP from Moldova [said](#): “I want to ask the citizens: have you seen this help from the EU? Me neither. I've seen the help of China and Russia. The EU has given us zero!”. As of 30th March 2020, the European Commission has redirected €140m to Eastern Partnership countries, including Moldova.
- **(Romania)** Sputnik has [claimed](#) that seasonal agricultural workers are being exploited and exposed to the virus. This was [echoed](#) in Facebook posts by several journalists.

3. Incompetence

Failure of Western governments, progressive regimes, opposition parties

- **(Baltics)** Kremlin allied RuBaltic.RU has published [exaggerated](#) claims of the economic impact in the Baltics, notably Estonia. This feeds into the [narrative](#) that the Baltics will not be able to survive without Russia's help, and that the West – including the UK, EU and USA – is unable to assist.
- **(Czechia)** A conspiracy site has [shared](#) videos of a man in an empty hospital in Berlin which was supposed to be dedicated to COVID-19 patients, as well as [falsely reporting](#) about empty coffins in New York.
- **(Hungary)** Fringe pro-Kremlin conspiracy Facebook site, Titkolt hírek (11,000 likes) [claimed](#) that London's “leftist mayor”, Sadiq Khan's inadequate preparation for COVID-19 made London an “epidemic hotspot”, and the opposition mayor of Budapest is equally underprepared. Pro-government online news outlet orgio.hu [accused](#) French President Emmanuel Macron of trying to silence French microbiologist Didier Raoult, who alleged to have found a possible cure based on the anti-malarial drug Hydroxychloroquine. Pro-government Pesti Srácok site [alleged](#) that the opposition mayor of Budapest, Gergely Karácsony is spraying a disinfectant called Metasept on the streets of Budapest despite the disinfectant's harmful effect on citizens' lungs.
- **(Latvia)** St Petersburg based RioFan [threaded](#) anti-NATO, anti-EU and anti-Latvian government messaging in its criticism of Latvia's refusal to cancel NATO training during the crisis. Additionally, Sputnik, one of the most popular sites amongst the Russian speaking population, promoted the view that Latvia is failing to test people for COVID-19.
- **(Russia)** The TV-channel Zvezda, affiliated with Russian Ministry of Defence, has again [pushed](#) the narrative of the morally bankrupt and incapacitated West that is bested by the Russian government in times of pandemic. The video had 55,000 views on YouTube as of 14th April.
- **(Ukraine)** Pro-Kremlin site Strana.ua (approximately 48m visits in March 2020) has used the pandemic to [increase tensions](#) between Ukraine and Poland, particularly around Polish migrant workers in Ukraine.



4. Russia as “saviour”

Russia will find cure, bringing aid to worst-hit countries, minimal impact felt in Russia

- **(Moldova)** Sputnik Moldova portal [disseminated](#) a narrative promoted by the pro-Kremlin media, that the Russian Federation will find the antidote against COVID-19. There is no evidence of official corroboration from the WHO to substantiate this statement.
- **(Moldova)** Sputnik Moldova portal [published](#) articles [highlighting](#) the superiority of Russia, as it helps countries such as Italy and Serbia.
- **(Slovakia)** Influential disinformation outlet Slobodny Vysielac published a story about Russian soldiers helping to disinfect hospitals in Italy, with [fake](#) pictures.

MISINFORMATION

1. False statistics

Misquotes, incorrect statistics, hyperbole, inciting panic

- **(Latvia)** Moscow based Eurasia Daily has [jumped on](#) criticism (by the former Latvian Minister of Justice) of the Russian media’s influence on Russian-speaking teenagers during the lockdown. The site brands this “russophobic” statement as positive for the Latvian security services. The Harmony Party, which partly represents the interests of Russians in Latvia, has referred to this as a hate crime.
- **(Slovakia)** Slovakian disinformation page, Hrot, (6,000 followers) has [claimed](#) that measures adopted worldwide to tackle COVID-19 will lead to mass famine.

2. False cures

Increases to risk of exposure / serious illness, false strategies for protection

- **(Armenia)** The Armenian website Hraparak.am (170,000 visits per month) published an [article](#) stating “Russian scientists announced that the most effective medication against Coronavirus called Mefloquine had been discovered in Russia. It completely blocks the infection development.” The primary source of the info was a [statement](#) disseminated by the Russian Federal Medical and Biological Agency.
- **(Armenia)** The Noyan Tapan YouTube channel posted an [interview](#) entitled ‘Armenian scientist has a suggestion: “Will cure any coronavirus patient within 3 days”, which promotes false cures for COVID-19. The video has over 230,000 views on YouTube as of 14th April 2020.
- **(Georgia)** The leader of the pro-Kremlin Alliance of Patriots Party [claimed](#) that he knew of no Georgian priest who had tested positive for COVID-19, and consequently planned to attend



church over Easter. He also claimed the measures taken were an [affront](#) to Georgian religious life.

- **(Moldova / Belarus)** Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko was [quoted](#) in Sputnik Moldova and Flux.md saying “no one will die of coronavirus in Belarus”. He claimed doctors in Belarus have a unique combination of drugs to fight the virus, as well as saying any reported COVID-19 deaths were caused by a “bouquet of chronic diseases” suffered by patients. This narrative was also [evident](#) in North Macedonia’s media space.
- **(Latvia)** Baltnews Latvia has claimed that those [most resistant](#) to COVID-19 are the children of the Soviet 1980s. This is, supposedly due to the West’s over reliance on medication, while Soviet medicine was focused on encouraging self-reliance.
- **(Lithuania)** A post on the Koronavirusas Europoje Facebook page [suggested](#) that a rock salt solution can prevent COVID-19. This has relatively little reach (79 comments) but appears to be a new narrative.
- **(North Macedonia)** A statement from the Russia agency also [appeared](#) in NM media space, claiming that Russia has created a vaccine.
- **(Poland)** Janusz Korwin Mikke, leader of the pro-Russian Konfederacja Party claimed that children should [stay at home](#) as they carry the “plague” but do not get sick from COVID-19.
- **(Romania)** Several large TV channels and websites [distributed](#) the idea that the lower number of deaths in Romania is due to “anti-covid genes”. These include mainstream and trusted channels such as ProTV and Digi24, as well as some [newspapers](#). Nationalist blogs have taken this further, [claiming](#) that the Roma are inferior in fighting COVID-19.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

1. The virus was created in a lab

- **(Armenia)** The Armenian news agency Armenpress published a [fact-check](#) of an article in Russian online outlet Moscow Komsomolets, which had written on 9th April 2020 suggesting that US military virologists were based in an Armenian laboratory, stating that “dangerous viruses may one day come out of laboratories and infect the people”.
- **(Georgia)** Georgian language website ABCnews.com.ge [reported](#) that Harvard University professor Charles Lieberman was arrested for creating the COVID-19, and that he potentially supplied China with the nanotechnology to make it. This was replicated in other sites which were designed in a manner similar to western publications, including bbcnews.ru and



abcnews.com.ge. Mythdetector (MDF) has identified the IP addresses of these sites as based in St Petersburg.

- **(Slovakia)** The most influential Slovakian disinformation Facebook page Hlavné Správy (55,000 followers) has [claimed](#) US media is spreading Chinese propaganda by criticising President Trump.

2. A global elite planned the pandemic

- **(Georgia)** The Patriotuli Gvardi Facebook group (40,000 followers) claimed that the 'Jewish dynasties' are ruling the world, and can [create](#) any virus they wish. It claims that the result will be the microchipping of the general population.
- **(Hungary)** Anti-Semitic fringe portal Kuruc.info [accused](#) an American orthodox community of inflating the price of masks to profit from the epidemic.
- **(Hungary)** Fringe pro-Kremlin Valóság publication [claimed](#) that China designed the virus to buy Western assets and win "the third world war without even firing a shot."
- **(North Macedonia)** An article has [appeared](#) about tennis player Marat Safin, in which he claims that COVID-19 was developed as a first step towards installing microchips in the global population.

3. 5G caused COVID-19

- **(North Macedonia)** Disinformation space in NM is dominated by conspiracy theories about the harmful effects of 5G, including inciting people to mass protest when the lockdown is lifted (all the more concerning due to upcoming parliamentary elections, a potential flashpoint). See this [post](#) as well as this [article](#) from a local TV station, interviewing "random" civilians. MOST Network believes people are starting to believe in a link between 5G and coronavirus.
- **(North Macedonia)** 5G conspiracy theories are primarily spreading via TV shows or online interviews featuring conspiracy theorists/influencers from Western countries, with Serbian subtitles. This [video](#), entitled 'It will be more tragic than Chernobyl – an opinion about 5G technology' is in English with no subtitles, featuring David Icke. The video has now been removed by the user yet continues to be distributed on Serbian Facebook. Elsewhere the [video](#) 'Vaccines + 5G' published by a page called Daily dose of wisdom, has garnered over 550,000 views and 10,000 shares since 12th April 2020.
- **(North Macedonia)** In another [video](#), 'American doctor explains that 5G network had provoked the coronavirus', Dr Thomas Kouan is featured. This was later removed by YouTube.



4. NATO aggression

- **(Lithuania)** Russian language media continues to claim that NATO troops are responsible for spreading of COVID-19 in Lithuania. The same outlet (Rubaltic) has also asserted that the US is [forcing](#) Lithuania to purchase tests made by them. Both posts garnered high engagement.
- **(Moldova)** Sputnik Moldova [continued](#) the narrative that NATO is not concerned with human health, as it continues to conduct military exercises despite the pandemic. They contrast this view with Russia who they depict as a country that prioritises the wellbeing of its people.
- **(Poland)** News portal Dzinnek Polityczny claimed that the USA is deploying additional troops to continue the 'soft occupation' of the country.

5. George Soros

- **(Moldova)** MP for Moldovan Party of Socialists Bogdan Țîrdea posted on [Facebook](#) claiming that a Moldovan nurse who had posted an emotional video about the condition from her hospital was simply spreading panic, claiming that the hospital has received "tens of thousands" of dollars for projects from the Soros Foundation, so must have enough equipment and food despite the nurse's claims.

6. Anti-vax

- **(Armenia)** The Armnews TV channel broadcast an [interview](#) with far-right anti-vax activist and doctor Marina Khachatryan). On YouTube, the video titled '*Coronavirus is a worldwide fake*' has 8930 views as of 14th April 2020. Marina Khachatryan claims the COVID-19 pandemic was planned to combat the anti-vax movement. She alleged most tests for COVID-19 in Armenia were fake and demonstrated false-positive results.
- **(North Macedonia)** Milenko Nedelkovski, a far-right and pro-Russian prominent influencer, [shared](#) a conspiracy theory video namechecking Bill Gates and "Queen of Vaccines" Hillary Clinton.
- **(Slovakia)** An anti-vax Facebook group has shared a [video](#) with medical influencers in the US claiming that vaccination makes COVID-19 symptoms worse for patients.

7. World Health Organization



OPEN INFORMATION PARTNERSHIP COVID-19 MONITORING & ANALYSIS

- **(Georgia)** ProgressNews claimed that a WHO official, Ryan Paterson, who was planning to reveal the truth behind COVID-19 died choking on broccoli. The origin of this story was a satirical Russian page, [panorama.pub](#).
- **(Georgia/Slovakia)** Sites in Georgia (including Kremlin propagandists [Newsfront](#)) and Facebook [pages](#) highlighted an interview with politician and former Russian tennis player Marat Safin, who claims that Bill Gates and the WHO knew about COVID-19 in 2015, and planned to use the crisis to insert microchips into the population. This was also picked up in the Slovakian media ([Pravda](#)) and other anti-vaccination [pages](#).
- **(Lithuania)** Controversial outlet Laisves Laikrastis has [pushed](#) the claim that the WHO has caused mass hysteria.
- **(Romania)** Far-right Facebook pages (including Mihail Neamtu, 65,000 followers) pushed the narrative that China has too much [influence](#) over the WHO, this may be related to President Trump's claims.

ADDITIONAL

1. Suppression

- **(Georgia)** Overtly pro-Kremlin site *Georgia and the World* praised China's response to COVID-19, claiming it is [not as severe](#) as measles and is overblown.
- **(Hungary)** The main state channel hirado.hu [reported](#) as "fake news" the idea that mass testing of COVID-19 patients to track community transmission of the epidemic would prevent further health and economic damage. It appears they did so because these suggestions were put forward by the Hungarian independent media and political opposition.

2. Response to Chinese and Russian aid

- **(Georgia)** The Politicano Facebook page (24,000 followers) published a post [claiming](#) that China will recover its economy faster than any other nation.
- **(Hungary)** Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó [praised](#) China in the Hungarian National Assembly for providing PPE to Hungary. Mentions of aid from the EU have been largely absent in the media or statements from the government.
- **(Russia)** On Channel 1, the main state channel in Russia, Putin's spokesperson Dmitriy Peskov [promoted](#) Russia's aid to the West as evidence of a strong Russia compared to an



allegedly incapacitated Western states. Domestic media pays substantial attention to the cases of “humanitarian aid” as in Italy, Serbia and the USA. The video had 36,000 views as of 14th April 2020.

3. Chernobyl fires

- **(Ukraine)** Pro-Kremlin political analyst Sergei Markow [writes](#) in PolitNavigator that the Ukrainian government and its ‘puppet masters’ in the US government, bear responsibility for the fires, owing to their lack of professionalism and poor decision-making. They are a *junta* and constitute “no government in the usual sense.”
- **(Ukraine)** PolitNavigator has begun [presenting](#) the wildfires as an “act of terrorism” if/as they move towards Belarus, as well as [pushing](#) the economic disinformation narrative that Ukraine has no reserve resources to effectively manage this incident.