



SUMMARY REPORT

Friday 15th May 2020

This report has been produced with 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 COVID-19. 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	Armenian
Bulgaria	Bulgarian
Czechia	Czech
Estonia	Estonian, English, Russian
Georgia	Georgian
Hungary	Hungarian
Kosovo	Multiple
Latvia	Latvian, English, Russian
Lithuania	Lithuanian, English, Russian
Moldova	Romanian
North Macedonia	Macedonian, Albanian
Poland	Polish
Romania	Romanian
Serbia	Serbian
Slovakia	Slovak
Ukraine	Ukrainian, Russian



Countries

Country-by-country Overview

1. [Armenia](#)
2. [Bulgaria](#)
3. [Czechia](#)
4. [Estonia](#)
5. [Georgia](#)
6. [Hungary](#)
7. [Kosovo](#)
8. [Latvia](#)
9. [Lithuania](#)
10. [Moldova](#)
11. [North Macedonia](#)
12. [Poland](#)
13. [Romania](#)
14. [Serbia](#)
15. [Slovakia](#)
16. [Ukraine](#)

[Working Definitions](#)

COUNTRY-BY-COUNTRY OVERVIEW

This section summarises developments by country, including new or shifting narratives and key cases. For Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine, Zinc Network researchers contribute additional monitoring information, which takes three forms:

1. **Media Monitoring:** *Using NewsWhip to collate and summarise all articles containing keywords about coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19.*
2. **HSA Media Monitoring:** *Using NewsWhip to collate all articles on COVID-19 from outlets deemed to be funded by, formally or informally affiliated with, or reliably sympathetic to Hostile States.*
3. **Social Media Monitoring:** *Using open-source data collection tools and methods to monitor and analyse social media conversation about COVID-19 and disinformation around COVID-19, summarising prominent and emerging themes.*

The CWG and their partners aim to expand the scope of these monitoring practices to cover further countries and languages as the project builds.



ARMENIA

Summary

During the reporting period, a range of mis- and disinformation stories were identified in Armenia. These fell under two broad themes: that elites are benefitting from the crisis; that COVID-19 will lead to global conflict (and may indeed already be part of a “global civil war”).

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Conflict and nihilism: COVID-19 is part of World War III*

- In a TV interview with 168.am, Karen Vardanyan, chief executive officer at the Union of Advanced Technology Enterprises-UATE, suggested that COVID-19 is not a hoax and is in fact an element of hybrid warfare – the disease is part of World War III, in which information management is more important than even weapons. He describes the pandemic as part of a “global civil war” in which the richest people in the world create an atmosphere of fear in order to encourage others to beg for vaccines. He also suggests that the reported number of deaths is not real. The video has had over 10,300 views on YouTube. Vardanyan has appeared in several previous OIP CWG reports, pushing various conspiracy theories and unverified claims.
- A Facebook user regarded as spreading conspiracy theories about COVID-19 suggested that the disease is being used to establish fascism in Armenia. In his view, this is done via vaccination and by making it mandatory for people to wear masks. He suggested that the outcome may be “an end to the very existence of Armenia” and a conflict between the authorities and the population, thus “opening a wide door to the enemy”. The post has had limited reach, however (166 reactions, 90 shares).

2. *Global elites: The Minister of Health is working with foreign forces*

- On the popular website tert.am, Doctor Hayk Manasyan – an active Facebook user seen to be spreading conspiracy theories about COVID-19 – suggested that the Minister of Health is an agent of foreign forces. This came after the Minister predicted that by 8 June, there would be almost 13,000 case of infection. He suggested that the Minister works with foreign forces to create



panic. The title translates as “I have a suspicion that Arsen Torosyan is an agent of foreign forces and carries out agency activities in our healthcare system. Hayk Manasyan”.

BULGARIA

Summary

During this reporting period, content identified as containing mis- and disinformation narratives fell under the themes of misinformation (e.g. COVID-19 may harm female fertility) and the role of Russia as a strong and healthy 'saviour'. Both of these themes have been previously identified in Bulgaria.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Misinformation: COVID-19 may harm female fertility*

- Tsargrad.tv [posted](#) an article with the headline “Coronavirus may take away the chance to become a mother – scientists”. As [reported](#) by Izvestia, the article says, research from scientists in China suggests that the virus can potentially negatively affect the female reproductive system. Russian experts, says the Izvestia piece, confirm this possibility. However, the article does mention that full research on this subject has not yet been carried out; it is largely the alarming headline that can be regarded as misleading.

2. *Rising Russia: “supermen” may save the rest*

- Tsargrad.tv featured an article whose title translates as “In Russia, there are supermen with immunity to COVID-19. This is not fiction”. It [reported](#) that Ancha Baranova, a doctor of biological sciences and professor at the GMU School of Systemic Biology in the US, believes that in Russia there are “real supermen with immunity to COVID-19”. These people, the article suggests, will “save the rest”. The headline misrepresents an interview that Baranova conducted with RIA Novosti, in which she says only patients who have experience severe coronavirus symptoms (7-8% of people) will have any lasting immunity.
-



CZECHIA

Summary

During this reporting period, disinformation stories identified in Czechia included the continued suggestion that the virus is used to the benefit of global elites (e.g. George Soros). Misinformation was also notable, on subjects including the severity, origin and treatment of COVID-19.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Misinformation: statistics, cures and origins*

- An article on the website AC24 with the headline “American hospitals receive more from insurance companies if they identify COVID-19 as the cause of death” stated that a Dr. Scott Jensen (US), has said that the American Medical Association is “encouraging” doctors to artificially increase the number of reported COVID-19 deaths across that country. The image accompanying the piece suggests that the comments came from a FOX news interview.
- The website AC24 featured an article suggesting that all pandemics that have occurred since the Spanish Flu have been due to the ‘electrification’ of the Earth. The article cites a Dr. Thomas Cowan (and features a video of him giving a talk), and suggests that the dual rise of COVID-19 and 5G is no coincidence, and that the two are related.
- The website Nwoo.org presented a range of conspiracy theories and misinformation, suggesting that, for example, quarantine measures and face masks are bad for people, and that it makes no sense to hide at home because herd immunity works. The suggestion that negative feelings influence our shared energetic field was also put forward, as was the suggestion that panic is created by powerful elites because they want to control us.

2. *Global elites: Soros seeks to benefit*

- A Pravy Prostor article suggested that George Soros regards pandemics as an opportunity for rebuilding the world. The suggestion is that COVID-19 offers Soros the greatest opportunity of his life.



ESTONIA

Summary

Victory Day remained the key focus for HSA outlets, leading to a drop off in articles about COVID-19. Articles containing disinformation included a gid55.ru article that criticised Estonia for not cutting its defence budget during the pandemic and a Telegram article that suggested that documents from the German Interior Ministry proved that the extent of the pandemic has been exaggerated.

These stories were identified by expert groups and Zinc's internal monitoring. Both of the narratives identified in disinformation stories have previously been observed in Estonia. Some discussion on social media around NATO was observed, however these posts were deemed not to be instances of disinformation.

These stories were not discussed by mainstream media coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19. The sole media report identified noted that disinformation and hate speech was on the rise during the pandemic, potentially giving rise to far-right parties and movements.

Conversation on social media was mainly truthful, often linking to trusted media sources. Posts often concerned Victory Day and the relaxing of lockdown measures across the Baltics. There were significantly fewer posts containing false information compared to previous reports, although instances of false vaccination claims and anti-EU rhetoric were identified.

Disinformation themes

1. NATO

- gid55.ru criticised Estonia for not cutting its defence budget during the pandemic, claiming that the country was “taking up arms against Russia” despite the coronavirus crisis. The article received 717 interactions.

2. There is no virus

- Telegram reported on a leaked document from the German Interior Ministry, which claimed that the response to the pandemic has been a “false alarm”. The



headline was misleading, in that the document expressed the views of an individual employee, who has since been relieved of his duties. Nonetheless, the article called upon readers to find similar documents from the Estonian government.

Wider social media conversation around COVID-19

- Conversation on social media was mainly truthful, often linking to trusted media sources. Posts often concerned Victory Day and the relaxing of lockdown measures across the Baltics. Some discussion around NATO was observed, however these posts were deemed not to be instances of disinformation. There were significantly fewer posts containing false information compared to previous reports.
- A post on News in Estonia, a group with 2,800 members, claimed that a vaccination would “destroy the population adaptive ability to the virus, resulting in more dangerous strains.”
- A post on Kohtla-Järve, News, a page with 1,100 followers, [linked](#) to an article on mail.ru, originally from the website vz.ru, claiming that the coronavirus could lead to the collapse of EU, citing threats made by the EU to impose sanctions on Germany.

Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- Postimees [noted](#) that disinformation and hate speech was on the rise during the pandemic, potentially giving rise to far-right parties and movements (6 interactions).

GEORGIA

Summary

During this reporting period, various mis- and disinformation stories were identified in Georgia by the CWG. These fell under the broad themes of moral decay (vaccination will be the work of the devil); rising Russia (the country is doing relatively well at tackling the crisis); COVID-19 is being used by global elites to subdue and control populations (with Bill Gates being a common target of such theories). Notably, stories falling within the latter theme also featured elements of misinformation narratives suggesting that COVID-19 has been overstated or may be artificial.



Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Global elites: COVID-19 is being used to subdue us and is simultaneously not even that dangerous.*

A number of notable pieces of content were identified in this reporting period:

- Archpriest Saba was quoted in the national media, saying that billionaires and Freemasons – such as, he alleged, Bill Gates – want to reduce the global population to one billion, and are not even trying to hide this. Bishop Saba admitted he believed stories circulating on social media that suggest that COVID-19 is the elite’s weapon of choice; that the virus is not particularly lethal; that the vaccine will kill many people. He has advised against taking the vaccine.
- The online portal News-Front published a letter by "a Georgian doctor" stating that COVID-19 is an ordinary virus and is in fact much safer than others. It was suggested that COVID-19 is a biological weapon created by globalists to subdue other states, and that by implying quarantine measures, Georgia is aiding their goals. The article suggests that the reported statistics, and videos of people dying, are artificial and used to create panic. The end goal of this is to force citizens to have electronic identities, and to impose mass control.
- On 11 May, a member of the Helsinki Union of Georgia suggested on Facebook that the virus is artificial (“I have such a large circle of acquaintances and I could not find one infected with corona”) and that Freemasons are trying to enslave people. He argued that the next step will be vaccination and microchipping, and called for protests to end restrictions imposed by government. The post received around 890 likes, 610 comments and 1,200 shares.
- The news portal GeWorld.ge published an article from the journalist Giorgi Gachechiladze with the headline “The unanimity of Bill Gates and Pope Francis”. It furthers the conspiracy theory that Gates aims to vaccinate the global population and is spending vast amounts to achieve this end. It also claims that this initiative is supported by Pope Francis.
- In the 11-17 May edition of the newspaper Asaval-Dasavali, the astrologer Mikheil Tzagareli continued to develop the narrative that COVID-19 was created artificially, relating this to Bill Gates. He claims that Gates predicted the



pandemic in 2005 and insists that the billionaire is now waiting for the global panic to worsen, so that he can provide a vaccine that will ultimately kill many people.

- In the same edition of the above newspaper, the head of the organisation “Nation and State” claimed, amongst other things, that Bill Gates is interested in creating digital certificates for those who have survived and been tested for COVID-19, and that these might manifest as chips, implanted in people.
- Again, in the same edition of Asaval-Dasavali, the archpriest of the Georgian Orthodox Church, Davit Isakadze, stated that a decade ago, Bill Gates created a club with members including the Rockefellers, Soros and others. He claims that they are lobbying for the installation of 5G technology in order to gain control over populations, and suggests that vaccination will be used to reduce the world population.

2. *Conflict and nihilism*

- Gulbat Rtskhiladze, the editor of News-Front and director of the pro-Russian ‘Eurasian Institute’ NGO, suggested in an interview with the news outlet GeWorld that Georgia should not participate in experimentation with possible anti-COVID-19 drugs, and suggested that the country should direct money not towards a vaccine but towards the economy: “We all realized that this is not a deadly infection. It is time for our country, which has scarce resources to survive, to look ahead”.
- On 13 May, Sputnik Georgia published quotes from Sergei Lavrov, suggesting that the USA is developing biological laboratories close to the border of the Russian Federation, mainly in post-Soviet territories. He suggested that the US is not transparent about its activities, and made reference to the Lugar Lab, in Georgia.

3. *Rising Russia*

- Online portal News-Front published an article suggesting that “Liberal media is trying to discredit Russia and Belarus at the same time”. The author suggests that Russia only has such high numbers of COVID-19 patients because they have increased testing, and suggests that Belarus is also coping far better than its neighbours, evidenced by its low reported death rate.



- Online portal GeWorld published an article entitled “Why the West is against Georgia-Russia direct dialogue?” Its author, a journalist, develops the narrative that suggests that Western countries are hindering dialogue between Georgia and Russia, as they fear that Russia can offer more than the MAP (the Membership Action Plan of NATO). The author claims that the EU is forcing Georgia to change its constitution, amongst other things, and insists that the West does not care about how Georgia fights COVID-19.

4. *Failing West: Europe has failed*

- On 13 May, GeWorld published an interview with Levan Chachua, head of the political party ‘Georgian Idea’, in which Chachua developed the narrative that the EU is not the future for Georgia, and claimed that the EU has failed to support member states such as Italy and Spain amidst COVID-19. The piece also made reference to globalists who are trying to reduce the world population and warned against vaccines for COVID-19.
- On 13 May, GeWorld featured an interview with Dimitri Lortkipanidze, the head of the Primakov Center. Lortkipanidze develops the narrative that the EU has no future, suggesting that this was proven when it failed in fighting COVID-19. He claims that Georgian society should reject EU integration. And should accept Russia's proposal to restore dialogue with Georgia.

5. *Moral decay: vaccination is the work of the devil*

- Bishop Nikoloz suggested that if people are forced to receive a vaccine against COVID-19, this would be an “act of the devil”. The article reports: “With these words, Reverend Nicholas responded to the statement of Bishop Saba, Bishop of Khoni and Samtredia, according to which the vaccine that will be created will serve to subdue man”.

HUNGARY

Summary



Disinformation, misinformation and conspiracy theories are identified either by OIP groups, or through our monitoring of COVID-19-related coverage as promoted by hostile state media and other outlets.

During this reporting period, there were five key themes:

- The EU betrayed Hungary and is controlled by liberals associated with George Soros.
- Soros' accusations that PM Orban used the coronavirus pandemic to gain dictatorial powers are unfounded.
- A government clampdown on those who share fearmongering content related to COVID-19.
- A treatment for COVID-19 made in Hungary will soon be ready.
- In Hungary, the severity of the epidemic is diminishing.

Most of the analysed reports were factual and presented few distortions. However, much energy was invested by the government-backed media into discrediting the mainstream/liberal media.

A lingering topic was that European politicians are engaged in a massive disinformation campaign regarding the disputed coronavirus law both in Brussels and in individual member states. There are reports on most government backed portals that Hungary and its people are under attack and that mainstream liberal media is spreading fake news.

So-called "Soros-manipulations" were still very popular both in the traditional media and on social media. However, these were not necessarily in direct connection with COVID-19. Commentators on social media often evoked a western liberal elite led by Soros and/or Bill Gates. At the same time, fringe conspiracy theory pages remain extremely critical of China when it comes to potential abuses of personal liberties in the wake of the health crisis.

There was less immigration-focused media coverage in comparison with last week, as well as an overall dip in Bill Gates conspiracies and COVID-19 related misinformation. However, on social media false claims about a medicine/cure developed in a Hungarian lab were gaining traction, along with anti-immigration and anti-Soros rhetoric in general.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. Western states (and George Soros) are taking advantage of Hungary



- As part of continuing attempts to discredit international criticism over the controversial emergency legislation, pro-government media outlets such as Origo.hu, [slammed](#) Hungarian NGOs, including the Political Capital Institute, that participated in a stakeholder consultation launched by the European Commission. The consultation addressed the rule of law in Hungary and the government's political response to the COVID-19 crisis, calling these organisations members of the "Soros network."

Eight Hungarian NGOs – including the Political Capital Institute – are participating in a [consultation with the European Commission](#) to assist the top EU executive body in preparing its country-specific rule of law report about Hungary and the its government's handling of the coronavirus crisis. In the coming months, the Commission is due to publish such a report about all EU countries.

After the participation of the aforementioned NGOs was made public, Origo alleged that these organisations are the domestic branch of a secret international network run by George Soros. These organisations are accused of attacking Hungary in the middle of the pandemic, whereas, in reality, the eight NGOs, which are popular targets in pro-government propaganda, are non-partisan, independent and not under the influence of the U.S.-Hungarian billionaire.

- 888.hu, a right-wing, strongly pro-government outlet, asserted that Hungary was once again [not treated](#) (7100 interactions) fairly by the European Parliament when it didn't allow the Justice Minister Judit Varga to speak out and defend Hungary in the debate around the Hungarian coronavirus law.
- PestiScracok.hu referred to a letter in which PM Orban [requested](#) (17000 interactions) that the President of the European Parliament let the Justice Minister represent him at the debate because he is "fully invested in coordinating the fight against the coronavirus epidemic". His request was [denied](#) (51000) by the European Parliament President, explaining that, according to EU rules, only Heads of State and Government can take the floor in such debates. This stirred outrage and was widely condemned by all pro-government or government backed media outlets, which claimed that such unfair treatment only proves that the EU is run by liberals and the Soros-network. Origo.hu, a vocal government portal, and others [speculated](#) that the European Parliament didn't want to give the floor to Hungary because it refuses to accept the Soros plan for perpetual bonds.



- As a response to the EP President's request that PM Orban be present at the debate in person and not the Justice Minister, the Minister in question threatened diplomatic consequences, citing that thanks to COVID-19 the PM was fully invested in his duties and that she had the authority to represent the country. Government-supporting media outlet 888.hu and others [reported](#) on it, suggesting a power move on behalf of the government (4500 interactions)
- Justice Minister Varga [published](#) the speech she would have given in the EP debate, strongly condemning the EU and accusing it of betraying Hungary in the midst of the pandemic. PM Orban reacted on his Facebook page with admiration, saying: "This is how a Hungarian amazon fights!" This was picked up and widely circulated on all government-backed outlets, gaining 3000 thousand interactions in 4 hours and much more on social media.
- Hirado.hu, a pro-government online news portal wrote that Hungary is under attack from the West and the liberals who [orchestrated](#) (1300 interactions) a disinformation campaign against Hungary, most likely because it is handling the COVID-19 pandemic too well.
- Right wing media outlet Minden Szo echoed Hungarian officials saying that Hungary must stand its ground against outside forces. Hence, the Foreign Minister [summoned](#) (2500 interactions) the ambassadors of 5 Nordic countries to address the fake news they are allegedly spreading.

2. George Soros is using COVID-19 to undermine Hungary

- According to [Szazadvég's](#) poll, a pro-government newspaper, Hungarians reject George Soros' plan to "indebt Europe", according to which the EU should issue perpetual annuity bonds worth EUR 1-15 trillion in order to alleviate the economic difficulties caused by the COVID-19 epidemic. (421 interactions)
- Pestisracok.hu, a right wing pro-government online portal, [accused](#) the Budapest government of colluding with the Soros Foundation to purchase only 160 coronavirus tests with the \$1 million donated by Soros, covering only the elderly population of one neighbourhood, while the rest of the money is unaccounted for.
- Most mainstream media [picked up](#) (15100 interactions) George Soros' interview about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, published by Project Syndicate. In this interview, he accused Orban of taking advantage of the pandemic to appoint himself as a dictator. He also asserted that the Hungarian Parliament's only now functions to automatically approve the PM's decrees,



which he believes violate European rights and law. Government media strongly [dismissed](#) these claims and called the accusations non-sensical and boring.

3. Government clampdown on 'fearmongering' content relating to COVID-19

- Mainstream media [reported](#) that the government has begun to clamp down on people who criticise the government's handling of the pandemic, under the excuse that they are spreading scaremongering news or stories. A 64-year-old man was detained on such charges (34000 interactions). Opposition actors were [concerned](#) about this persecution and breach of fundamental rights and free speech, while the police and the government dismissed the accusations as fake news, adding that the 64-year-old man was arrested not only for this, but for other reasons that were not given.

According to the prosecution, "the man's act did not constitute a crime in the absence of a factual element, since the commission of the crime requires the perpetrator to distort or publicize a false fact or fact to the public, which may adversely affect the outcome of the defence. And the incriminating Facebook post doesn't contain that." He posted on his Facebook page: "You are a cruel tyrant, but remember, the dictators have all failed so far" (21000 interactions)

- Also the mainstream media [reported](#) (32000 interactions) that a day later, police officers detained another elderly person on similar suspicions. Janos Csóka-Szűcs, who is a disabled pensioner and a member of Hungary's second largest opposition party Momentum, was taken into custody for sharing the Facebook event of a "honking protest" organized by a Hungarian opposition MP against the government's move to free hospital beds from people in need (to prepare for a potential COVID-19 outbreak), and noting that "1170 beds were also freed in Gyula".

While both men were briefly detained and interrogated about their respective social media posts, they were both allowed to leave the day they were taken into custody.

In both cases, the actions of the police were based on Hungary's heavily criticized COVID-19 emergency legislation, adopted on March 31st, that allows the Hungarian government and the country's law enforcement authorities to criminally prosecute those who intentionally spread falsehoods or distortions in relation to the pandemic that interfere with the successful protection of the public. Those charged can be sentenced to up to five years in prison.



The fact that the two pensioners have not “interfered with the successful protection of the public” was confirmed by the respective prosecutors, who did not initiate any charges against the men.

Simultaneously, as the vast majority of the pro-government media remained silent, Hungary’s main public media channel [M1](#) continued to portray Kusinszki [the suspect of the first case] as a criminal, even a day after the authorities confirmed that he will not be prosecuted. M1 is under heavy government control and runs a new segment called Fake News Tracker.

4. Immigration

- 888.hu, a right wing media outlet, [said](#) (1300 interactions) that Italy reached an agreement to resettle illegal immigrants in the country. This includes the legal settlement of more than half a million immigrants who have so far been without a residency permit. Migrants previously or currently working in the agricultural sector, most of whom are from Africa or the Middle East, can receive a six-month extendable residence permit. Similarly, carers for the elderly, housekeepers or other members of domestic staff working for Italian families will be prioritised, including non-EU Eastern Europeans.

5. Government approval is on the rise

- An article [published](#) (3700 interactions) by 888.hu claimed that Hungarians are very satisfied with the government’s efforts to curb the COVID-19 epidemic and that if elections were to be held today, Fidesz would earn 70% of the vote.

Wider social media conversation

Activity on social media was largely in line with what we found in our media monitoring. Most of the posts were built on articles posted on mainstream outlets, however some distorted the message of the articles.

We identified six major themes which overlapped with the media monitoring but were more pronounced on social media:

1. The European Parliament doesn’t allow Hungary to participate in a plenary debate on Hungary’s COVID-19 law.
2. A preliminary large-scale study on randomized testing of the population for COVID-19 show promising results.
3. The Government’s outstanding handling of the COVID-19 crisis.
4. Anti-Soros and anti-elite.



5. A Hungarian medicine for COVID-19.
6. Migration.

1. The European Parliament doesn't allow Hungary to participate in a plenary debate on Hungary's COVID-19 law

- Fidesz' Facebook pages and other government backed media, such as [HirTV.hu](https://www.hirtv.hu) and [M1](https://www.m1.hu), are strongly pushing the narrative of Hungarian representatives [standing their ground](#) (more than 11000 video views and 1300 interactions) and fighting against foreign (Western) interference in domestic matters, saying "It is a shame that even in the midst of a coronavirus epidemic, the left and the Soros network do not rest. While 160,000 people have died in the epidemic in Europe and millions have lost their jobs, even in this situation these forces are not preoccupied with the fate of European citizens, but with the attack on Hungary."
- Posts [stirring](#) criticism and outrage over the European Parliament's refusal to allow Hungarian Justice Minister Judit Varga to represent Hungary in the plenary debate on its controversial COVID-19 law (6500 interactions in 4 hours). Numerous posts condemn and accuse Brussels of being anti-democratic and under George Soros' "orders". [ATV.hu](https://www.atv.hu) and [magyarhirlap.hu](https://www.magyarhirlap.hu) also posted about this.
- Judit Varga [posted](#) her defence speech that she was unable to present at the European Parliament. In her speech she accuses the EU of betrayal in the midst of a fight against COVID-19. PM Orban also [reacted](#) on his Facebook page, expressing his gratitude and admiration saying "This is how a Hungarian amazon fights." (5700 interactions in 4 hours)

2. Preliminary large-scale study on randomized testing of the population for COVID-19 show promising results

- The randomized study with 17778 people tested for coronavirus was going viral on social media. The posts misreport that only 2 people tested positive which proves very low levels of community infection. The complex statistics of the study were distorted and different conclusions were presented:
 - a) the epidemic is [exaggerated](#) and not as dangerous as it seems (posted in a conspiracy theory group – Tények és talányok - which has 5100 members on Facebook);
 - b) the opposition is only [scaremongering](#) and spreading fake news related to the government's decision to lift some of the restrictions (posted on Szeretlekmagyarország.hu Facebook page which has 580,634 likes)



These posts usually use sensationalist and click-bait titles, but [reference](#) to quality media sources.

3. The Government's outstanding handling of the COVID-19 crisis

- ATV.hu, a pro-government tv channel, [referred](#) (2400 interactions) to a recent poll showing that the approval rates for Fidesz have only grown since the beginning of the year, probably because of the efficient handling of the epidemic. This was also [circulated](#) in the pro-government Facebook group “Konzervatív Keresztény Nemzeti Eredmények és Küzdelmek Magyarországon” which has 3800 members.
- ATV.hu also [reported](#) that Japan has congratulated Hungary on its handling of the coronavirus crisis.
- Origo, the government's mouthpiece, [posted](#) to their Facebook page that the government did a good job ensuring there is access to disinfectants for everyone, so much so that there is plenty left for exporting. They also [posted](#) that all the deceased were from in or around the capital, supporting the previous government backed claims that the Mayor of Budapest is responsible for the heightened crisis situation in the capital.

4. Anti-Soros and anti-elite

- Alternatív hírek, a potentially HSA backed conspiracy site, and [Vilaghelyzete.com](#), a fringe conspiracy outlet, [pointed](#) to a recently introduced bill in the United States Congress that is “satanically” named H.R. 6666 and will require every citizen to be tested for COVID-19, vaccinated against the virus and traced in some format. While Vilaghelyzete.com suggests that the U.S. congressional bill is a tool that will lead to a secret and globally functioning surveillance system, the draft legislation is about creating grants for institutions in healthcare and education to run mobile testing sites and hire staff to perform diagnostic tests and contact tracing. The claim comes after multiple conspiracy theorists in the U.S., mostly of the American far-right, promoted similar suggestions.
- The Tenyek es talanyok conspiracy group (with 5100 members) [posted](#) that the illuminati and an “elite” are spreading fake news and want us to believe in the existence of COVID-19 so that they can manipulate us. They published a [YouTube video](#) with more than 7,000 views.



- HirTV, a government supported TV channel and online media outlet, attacked George Soros, [dismissing](#) his claims that PM Orbán has dictatorial ambitions.
- Eleg! a pro-government Facebook page with over 150000 likes, [denounced](#) George Soros' suggestion that the EU to implement perpetual bonds, claiming that his plan is only to indebt Europe forever and cement his power.
- Conspiracy page Titkok szigete (33000 likes on Facebook) [posted](#) that Western Civilization has once again only shown how fragile it is. The page shows pictures alleging huge queues in Switzerland, the richest country in the world, for food supplies.
- The [Felháborító Hírek](#) (15,500 likes on Facebook) conspiracy page [wrote](#) that digital dictatorship is being introduced worldwide under the guise of a pandemic.

5. A Hungarian medicine for COVID-19

- The Hungarian government [posted](#) (1800 interactions) on its Facebook page about a medicine that potentially treats COVID-19. They suggested that the medicine is a Hungarian invention, while in reality the drug already exists and will only be approved and potentially manufactured in Hungary from September 2020.
- This was also picked up by other [right-wing](#) pages (Szamok – a baloldali alhírek ellenszere – 28,233 likes on Facebook), government backed [media pages](#) (47 interactions) and conspiracy theory pages like [Rendkívüli Hírek](#) (18,723 likes on Facebook), [Kimondott Igazságok](#) (16000 likes on Facebook) and A [Világ Titkai](#). They claim that the drug was developed in a Hungarian lab and it is already ready for use in Hungary.

6. Migration

- Anti-immigration posts have increased. The Hungarian national television broadcaster M1 [published](#) (34,681 likes) an interview with a migration expert blaming the EU for including migration quotas on the agenda for debate, even though member states have not agreed to it and external borders of the EU should be closed.
- The government's most vocal supporter, Origo.hu, [claimed](#) in a Facebook post that insufficient medical equipment and severe economic downturns following the pandemic will trigger mass migration.



7. Other

- [Titkok szigete](#) (33,000 likes on Facebook) and [Titok Terminal](#) (50,771 likes on Facebook) claimed that Hungarians are somehow better in fighting COVID-19 than other people because of their genetics and stronger ancestors.
- Hiteles Hitek (8800 likes on Facebook), a pro-government conspiracy page, continued [reporting](#) on an interview with a Hungarian doctor claiming that Hungary has won the battle against COVID-19.
- Rendkivuli Hitek (18000 likes on Facebook) [claims](#) that it is already known when the pandemic will end and refers to the Hungarian “miracle” medicine that is supposedly set to be manufactured in Hungary from September.
- Titkok szigete (33000 likes on Facebook) [writes](#) that medical professors claim that the coronavirus was exaggerated. It claims that we are panicking, and the virus will pass regardless of any measures.
- [Titok terminal](#) and [Titkok Szigete](#) wrote about the WHO’s statement suggesting that COVID-19 might linger for a long time. Both entries claimed that current restrictions could stay in place forever.

Coverage of disinformation about COVID-19

- Clashes between the government and Budapest’s opposition mayor Gergely Karácsony are continuing over the handling of the pandemic in the Hungarian capital. While politicians Fidesz and pro-government media outlets [again hit](#) out at Karácsony for the allegedly chaotic situation at an elderly care home that has emerged as a hot spot for COVID-19 deaths, the Budapest mayor [slammed the government](#) for sending elderly people back to care homes from hospitals without being tested. Karácsony pointed to statistics published by the health authorities that suggest the majority of infections are originating in hospitals.
- The moderately well-known [Doktor Gődény](#), a medical influencer (94000 followers) who often advocates for alternative healthcare and launched a petition to protest the compulsory wearing of face masks, posted a video featuring a number of international doctors and medical experts. In the video, the legitimacy of the restrictions seen in the past two months was questioned and the real health impact of COVID-19 was downplayed, suggesting that it is nothing more than a seasonal flu.



In the beginning of the video, Gődény introduced the experts as doctors who are oppressed by the mainstream media and investigating why freedom of movement is being curbed.

- Origo.hu and [Kimondott Igazságok](#) (17000 followers), a fringe pro-Kremlin outlet, [alleged](#) (599 interactions) that a drug called favipiravir had been proven as an effective treatment against COVID-19 in Asia. They claimed that from September the drug may be authorised and manufactured in Hungary. While the texts correctly highlighted that the aforementioned drug is yet to undergo a number of tests, its wording also suggests that the Hungarian government is responsible for the first working treatment for COVID-19.
- News that transportable coronavirus patients will be taken to two hospitals in Budapest for treatment [stirred outrage](#) (54000 interactions) and a series of accusations from the opposition as well as a series of denials and dismissals as fake news from the government. However, it seems that the issue originated with a badly communicated intervention rather than political manipulation.
- 888.hu [claimed](#) (108 interactions) that researchers at the Research Institute for Experimental Medicine (KOKI) were among the first in the world to examine the brains of people who died of coronavirus infection. The article asserted that the researchers' findings may lead to new treatment methods, with an emphasis on this as a Hungarian initiative and a strong nationalist sentiment.
- The article [published](#) (511 interactions) by hirado.hu, a strong pro-government outlet, reported that the BBC praised Hungarian healthcare and the government's pandemic response. It emphasised that although the virus appeared late in Hungary, it was the first country to take strict measures to curb the epidemic.
- The Rector of the Semmelweis University announced the partial result of a large-scale study after testing more than 17000 people for COVID-19. He argued that the contamination level in the Hungarian population is very low and that mass testing would not bring much benefit, contrary to what opposition figures and the media claim. These results ended up being interpreted and misreported on by primarily government-backed outlets.

The preliminary results include 8276 swab samples, of which only 2 tested positive. From 1524 blood samples analysed so far, only 9 people have been found to have contracted the virus. Extrapolated to the entire population, this shows that an estimated 243 to 7230 people might be infected. Cross-



contamination numbers could fall between 22 399 and 92 624. This shows that infection rate is very low and herd immunity cannot be taken into account. This data was used by different outlets, like [pestisracok.hu](#), [to show](#) (2300 interactions) that the danger has passed.

- The same university rector said in an interview for M1, which was then [picked up](#) (177 interactions) by [pestisracok.hu](#), that anyone who joins the above mentioned COVID-19 screening will also protect their family. He added that there will certainly be no major COVID-19 epidemic until the fall because people adhere to the rules, everyone's immune system gets stronger in the summer, and the virus doesn't like heat and ultraviolet radiation. The article was severely underplaying the dangers of the epidemic.
- Another statement by the rector claimed that there is no longer a COVID-19 epidemic in Hungary, only an epidemic threat, but that doesn't mean that there will be no second wave or people should let their guards down. However, the message of the statement was underplayed by [rtl.hu](#)'s article (1100 interactions).

KOSOVO

Summary

During this reporting period, mis- and disinformation stories in Kosovo fell under two themes: COVID-19 will lead to global conflict; COVID-19 was created in a lab. The latter narrative was also present in Kosovo in the previous reporting period.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Conflict and nihilism: COVID-19 will lead to World War III*
 - The Facebook page 'Blue TV - Cudira nga Bota' (more than 120,000 followers) shared a blog post [suggesting](#) that World War III is imminent due to COVID-19 and (related) disintegrating relations between China and the USA. Citing international "experts", the post suggests that Albania may become one of the safest places to be, due to its large number of bunkers.
2. *COVID-19 was created in a lab: Wuhan has something to hide*



- The news outlet Bota Sot posted an article on the disappearance of a scientist who worked at the Wuhan lab. “She has disappeared without trace and cannot be found”, claims the piece, whose content is not sufficiently cited or sourced, and which fuels the conspiracy theory that the Chinese government may be responsible for her going missing (and, implicitly, may have something to hide regarding activity at the lab).

LATVIA

Summary

Victory Day remained a focus for HSA outlets during this reporting period. Significant attention was paid to a tweet sent by Defence Minister Artis Pabriks, in which he suggested that people who visited the Riga Victory Day monument that end up infected with COVID-19 should have to pay for their own treatment. While HSA outlets widely reported on the story, only a handful were deemed examples of disinformation. Other articles containing disinformation included Baltnews claiming that following the pandemic the EU will not support Latvia economically and Sputnik Latvia using the UN’s reaction to the COVID-19 crisis to disseminate Kremlin narratives around sanctions.

These stories were identified by expert groups and Zinc’s internal monitoring. The narratives identified in disinformation stories have previously been observed in Latvia. Social media conversation surrounding Pabriks’ tweet was significant, although few linked to articles containing disinformation.

These stories were not discussed by mainstream media coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19. Articles focused on the spread of false claims on social media that the pandemic is being faked, the arrest of a Latvian man who called for the extermination of the Chinese race, and a statement by Director of the NATO Center for Strategic Communication Excellence suggesting that the spike of disinformation around COVID-19 had been less severe in Latvia.

Conversation on social media was mainly truthful, often linking to trusted media sources. Posts often concerned Victory Day in Latvia, especially Artis Pabriks’s tweet. Users reacted negatively towards his comments, although few linked to stories that were deemed examples of disinformation. Posts containing disinformation often concerned conspiracy theories and false health advice.



Disinformation themes

1. EU failure

- Baltnews reported that Latvia cannot rely on the EU to save its transit industry, which has been hit by the coronavirus pandemic. The article stated that everyone “will have to rely on themselves” as EU unity fades in the midst of COVID-19. The article received no interactions.

2. Russophobia on 9 May

- RuBaltic published an article which used a misleading headline to report the tweet of Defense Minister Artis Pabriks, in which he suggested that people who visited the Riga Victory Day monument that end up infected with COVID-19 should have to pay for their own treatment. The headline stated that the suggestion was made “in Latvia”, not making it clear that it was a suggestion made by a single individual. The article also suggested that the lockdown period had realized the Latvian establishment’s dream of cancelling Victory Day celebrations. The article was shared 154 times and received 1,540 interactions.

3. Russia as savior or victim

- Sputnik Latvia reported that UN Secretary General António Guterres has called countries to lift restrictions and cooperate during the COVID-19 crisis. Sputnik used the article to assert that the UN was controlled by the US, deny Russia’s involvement in the Ukrainian conflict, and claim that sanctions had damaged EU economies more than Russia’s. The article only received 2 interactions.

Wider social media conversation around COVID-19

- Conversation on social media was mainly truthful, often linking to trusted media sources. Posts often concerned Victory Day in Latvia, especially the tweet by Defence Minister Artis Pabriks. Users reacted negatively towards his comments, although few linked to articles containing disinformation. Other posts containing disinformation often concerned conspiracy theories and false health advice.
- Several videos identified in previous reports were found again, suggesting the same material is being reused in order to spread false information about the virus.



- A post on the People’s Power Front, a page with 1,400 followers, [suggested](#) that you could get COVID-19 by wearing a mask. The post stated that “if you were once vaccinated against the flu, you will have been infected with a coronavirus, which activates when you wear a mask. Wearing masks activates your own viruses, and you get sick from them.”
- A RuBaltic article [shared](#) by RIGA., a page with 3,400 followers, and included in a post on Rodina.lv – Forum for Russian Latvia, a group with 4,200 members, used a misleading headline to report the tweet of Defense Minister Artis Pabriks, in which he suggested that people who visited the Riga Victory Day monument that end up infected with COVID-19 should have to pay for their own treatment. The headline stated that the suggestion was made “in Latvia”, not making it clear that it was a suggestion made by an individual. The article also suggested that the lockdown period had realized the Latvian establishment’s dream of cancelling Victory Day celebrations.
- Several groups, including Russian Community in Latvia, Rodina.lv, Latvia and the World Around and Club “Riga and People of Riga” displayed posts [containing](#) a video from the channel ‘A Yesli Chestno’. The video was an interview with a military signalman who claimed that 5G and microchipping formed part of the pandemic. The video has since been [deleted](#) from Club “Riga and People of Riga”.
- A post in Rodina.lv – Forum for Russian Latvia, a group with 4,200 members, linked to a video titled “Doctor Shiva: Coronavirus is a weapon made by pharmaceutical companies, Bill Gates and the Clinton Foundation.” Doctor Shiva refers to Shiva Ayyadurai, who has [gained notoriety](#) over the pandemic period for spreading misinformation about the virus and its origins. The video [posted](#) on the group has since been removed from YouTube.
- A post on SARAFAN.LV (official group), a group with 26,000 members, [linked](#) to a video by a Latvian blogger that contained numerous instances of misinformation. The blogger stated that the information in video had come from a website called [Corona Hoax Cure](#), founded by Leonard Caldwell, a promoter of debunked “alternative” cancer cures. In the video, it is claimed, among other things, that a US hospital being sponsored by Bill Gates is recording every death as COVID-19 related, that governments have enacted lockdowns in order to weaken people’s immune systems and that the virus is three times weaker than a common cold. The video has been viewed over 300,000 times on YouTube.



- Finally United Latvija!, a group with 1,500 members, contained a post [linking](#) to an interview by the channel 'A Yesli Chetsno' with Dr Buttar Rashid, an American who has been noted as spreading false claims about COVID-19.¹ In the interview he claimed, among other things, that actors were being hired to pretend to be ill with the virus, that hospitals were lying about the numbers dying from COVID-19, that doctors were forcing people to use ventilators under orders from the government and that Bill Gates was responsible for the spread of the “fake epidemic”.
- In rodina.lv, a user [posted](#) a video claiming that you could cure yourself from coronavirus within a day. The method, explained by a man claiming to be a doctor, consisted of spraying vodka on a mask and inhaling it in order to fill the lungs with alcohol. The video was identified in Estonian groups in a previous report (see 12 May report).

Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- Delfi [reported](#) that false claims over the extent of the coronavirus were spreading on social media. The article stated that false claims such as the crisis was invented to control people, hospitals are actually empty, doctors are forced to falsify information, and that in Lithuania people were offering payment for falsified death certificates were among those being spread by users (49 interactions).
- LSM, la.lv and Skaties all [reported](#) on the sentencing of Niks Endziņš, who was charged for publishing a video containing false information in which he called the extermination of the Chinese race (35 interactions).
- LSM [reported](#) that the Strategic Communication Subcommittee was calling for a clearer definition of mis- and disinformation in the midst of the COVID-19 “infodemic” (15 interactions).
- TVNET, Skaties, la.lv and press.lv all [reported](#) on a statement by Jānis Sārts, Director of the NATO Center for Strategic Communication Excellence in Riga, in which he claimed that the “infodemic” surrounding the coronavirus crisis has been less severe in Latvia due the small number of people who speak Latvian and the general resilience of the population to disinformation (11 interactions).

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-flu-vaccine-tests-covid-19/false-claim-flu-vaccine-makes-people-test-positive-for-covid-19-idUSKBN22I367>



LITHUANIA

Summary

Victory Day was the key focus for HSA outlets this week, leading to a drop off in articles about COVID-19. Disinformation articles in other media outlets were also low, although Ekspertai.eu claimed that the government is destroying the healthcare system by focusing too heavily on coronavirus and halting other healthcare services.

This story was all identified by expert groups. The narrative identified in disinformation stories has previously been observed in Lithuania. There was no social media conversation identified that specifically concerned these narratives, although conversation around the notion that the pandemic has been exaggerated was noted.

Disinformation stories picked up by the media focused on international instances of disinformation. LRT reported on the effect of HSA disinformation in Italy, 15min reported on the controversial “Plandemic” documentary, and Lrytas reported that Twitter will now tag posts containing false or misleading claims about COVID-19.

Conversation on social media was mainly truthful, often linking to trusted media sources. Posts often concerned the lockdown relaxations announced by the Lithuanian government this week and the different dates at which these relaxations would come into force. Posts containing disinformation linked to conspiracy theories, as well as anti-NATO and anti-EU narratives.

Disinformation themes

1. Government incompetence

- Ekspertai.eu claimed that the government is destroying the healthcare system by focusing too heavily on coronavirus and halting other healthcare services.

Wider social media conversation around COVID-19

- Conversation on social media was mainly truthful, often linking to trusted media sources. Posts often concerned the lockdown relaxations announced by the Lithuanian government this week and the different dates at which these relaxations would come into force. Posts containing disinformation linked to conspiracy theories, as well as anti-NATO and anti-EU narratives.



- A video identified in a previous report was found again in a Lithuanian group, suggesting the same material is being reused in order to spread false information about the virus.
- Posts on Russian Lithuania, a group with 14,500 members, and Lithuania in Russian. Russian-language forum in Lithuania, a group with 3,300 members, [linked](#) to an article from gid55.ru, which criticised Estonia for not cutting its defence budget during the pandemic, claiming that the country was “taking up arms against Russia” despite the coronavirus crisis.
- A post on Real in Visaginas, a group with 7,000 members, stated that the coronavirus could lead to the collapse of EU, citing alleged threats made by the EU to impose sanctions on Germany.
- Posts on Info Visaginas, a group with 2,900 members, and Visaginas For and Against, a group with 900 members, [linked](#) to a video claiming that the virus had been widely exaggerated by politicians and the media. It contained clips of 11 different doctors and academics, all of whom offer “alternative” views on the pandemic. This video was identified in Latvian groups in a previous report (see 12 May report).

Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- LRT [reported](#) that Kremlin and Chinese propaganda may have had an effect on the Italian population, with Italians now having a more favourable attitude towards Beijing (47 interactions).
- 15min [reported](#) on the “Plandemic” documentary, a film by discredited researcher Judy Mikovits containing multiple false claims about the virus. The article stated that doctors had debunked the claims made in the film and that social media executives had pledged to remove the video from their platforms (7 interactions).
- Lrytas [reported](#) that Twitter will now tag posts containing false or misleading claims about COVID-19 (1 interaction).

MOLDOVA

Summary



During this reporting period, a number of narrative trends have been identified, with themes including: the EU (Germany in particular) is failing; that global elites are complicit in COVID-19 (and that Bill Gates especially is implicated in this). The latter narrative appears to be especially heavily promoted by the portal Flux.md, a “news” portal believed to be founded by Moldovan politician Iurie Rosca.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *The Failing West: EU failure.*

- An article on Sputnik.md [claimed](#) that in the context of COVID-19, there is an increasing number of cases of Romanian workers being exploited in Germany, including in slaughterhouses. The story states that such stories have emerged in both the Romanian and international press, and suggests that German does not respect Eastern European workers during the time of COVID-19. Its headline translates as “Germany: The humiliating situation of Romanians working in slaughterhouses - "culture of ignorance". According to SimilarWeb data, Sputnik.md has received over 4.5 million visits in the past six months.
- An article on the website Flux.md suggested that COVID-19 was weakening Germany and the EU. The article [describes](#) George Soros as “the great shadow puppet master” and says that he is angry that the EU, “an indispensable institution for the globalist world, is squeaking at every joint and is in danger of falling apart”. It cites an interview given by Soros to the British daily newspaper The Independent.

2. *Global elites: vaccination and 5G are related, and dangerous*

- The website Flux.md [posted](#) a video whose title translates as “Agorafilia - the path to freedom”, in which politician Iurie Rosca speaks against 5G and vaccination as part of a “satanic plan” that must be stopped. He implicates Bill Gates and others in an alleged plan to install 5G worldwide and introduce enforced vaccination.
- Another Flux.md piece – whose title translates as “Bill Gates, who's the man? The connection to the Coronavirus” - again linked Bill Gates to COVID-19, [offering](#) a list of reasons as to why we should be doubtful of his claims about vaccination. The piece has had 25 shares so far via Facebook.



- A further Flux.md piece [suggests](#) that Bill Gates' wife, Melinda, promotes forced vaccination. The article provides a zoomed-in image to make the claim that "Bill Gates' Catholic wife wears an inverted (satanic) cross when promoting the vaccination of all". 594 likes and 365 shares on Facebook.

3. *Misinformation*

- A piece from the Orthodox blog Saccisv.wordpress.com - warning: it features distressing imagery - [claimed](#) to provide a list of "what gets into vaccines", suggesting that these include the cells of monkeys and aborted children. The post has had limited impact so far (13 likes, 2 shares).

NORTH MACEDONIA

Summary

During this reporting period, mis- and disinformation stories in North Macedonia fell broadly into the following themes: Russia is rising (and may soon have a vaccine); global elites (specifically, Bill Gates) should be suspected for being complicit in COVID-19; government incompetence (Bulgaria is rising up against restrictions and 5G/vaccination). Content including misinformation also suggested that the crisis has been overstated and may be a scam.

Dis-/Misinformation themes

1. *Rising Russia: a vaccine may be imminent*

- The popular online news outlet Tocka.com.mk [reported](#) that it is expected that the Russians will have a vaccine for COVID-19 ready later this year. It reported: "The director general of Russia's Viktor Research Center, Rinat Maksutov, told a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin today that the examination of the vaccine against the coronavirus of 300 volunteers would be completed in June." The article headline suggests that the vaccine could be ready by September. It has been viewed over 2,000 times and shared on one Facebook page/group with approximately 180,000 followers.



2. *Misinformation: vaccination is dangerous*

- A Sloboden Svet article (shared on two Facebook pages/groups with approximately 77,000 followers) [claims](#) that until a vaccine for COVID-19 is found, people will be vaccinated with the one used for seasonal flu, which it claims weakens the immune system. The article states: “In conditions of the so-called COVID-19 pandemic, most of the world lives in fear, except for those who understand that this whole theater is a big scam that will be written in the annals of history...”. It also provides a link to a statement from Dr. Anthony Fauci’s testimony before the US Senate, on the likely efficacy of any new vaccine.

3. *Global elites: Bill Gates is complicit and should be suspected*

- A short article on the online news portal Magazin reports on an interview that Bill Gates gave to The Late Show on US TV, in which he reportedly said that preventative measures taken against the next pandemic may also be useful against any potential bioterrorist attack. The article content (which is understood to have originally featured on Sputnik Serbia, whose piece includes the video of the Gates interview) [misleads](#) the reader into thinking that Gates is in fact announcing a future bioterrorist attack.

4. *Government Incompetence: there are protests in Bulgaria 5G, Gates and vaccination*

- A Sloboden Svet piece (shared on two Facebook pages with approximately 25,000 followers) [featuring](#) embedded video and limited written content, claims that protests in Bulgaria are against 5G, Bill Gates, and forced vaccination. The anti-government protests, [organised](#) by pro-Russian fringe nationalist party Vazrazhdane (Revival) are generally anti-government, with some anti-lockdown sentiment. Although some of the protestors may believe various conspiracies regarding COVID-19, it would be false to characterise the video content as depicting protests specifically against 5G, Gates and vaccination.

POLAND

Note: the below data on Poland covers the period 8–15 May.



Summary

During the above reporting period, mis- and disinformation stories in Poland fell broadly under two themes; the COVID-19 crisis is a hoax or over-stated; global elites are implicated in COVID-19 (including via 5G, microchipping and vaccination schemes). Bill Gates continues to be a significant focal point of the latter narrative. In addition, a video seen over 8,000 times on YouTube suggested that in China, people infected with COVID-19 are being 'locked down' in boxes.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Misinformation: the crisis is false or over-stated; tests do not work*

This reporting period saw a number of notable pieces of content containing misinformation, propagated via blog sites, online outlets, Facebook and shared videos:

- The far-right outlet Gazeta Warszawka (online and in print) propagated the narrative that the pandemic is not real and is instead a governmental conspiracy invented in order to control people. It presented its opinion that “when the dust settles, we will talk about an epidemic that did not exist”.
- A video that has received close to 50,000 views (posted by a channel named “aTVBe Zdrowy Kanał”) discusses what it labels as the potentially “shocking” truth that effective tests for COVID-19 do not exist and that we therefore cannot be sure that someone has died as a result of the disease.
- The website dziennik-polityczny.com, which is also active on Facebook, posted an interview with a supposed medical expert claiming that there is in fact no pandemic. Although in the body of the article the expert mentions that a pandemic does in fact exist (if defined against World Health Organisation terminology), the text is misleading in its framing and presentation. Its headline, in translation, reads: “The dirty truth about coronavirus. The head of the infectious department presents politically incorrect facts”.
- The far-right outlet ‘W realu 24’ posted a video on its channel (over 281,000 views to date) with the title “Edyta Górniak at Rola: "As long as I'm alive I won't be vaccinated"! On a pandemic of fear, faith and politics!” In the video, the Polish pop singer Górniak says that she supports narratives put forward by the



channel, such as that the pandemic is a conspiracy, lockdown is a kind of terror, and that people should not be forced to be vaccinated.

- A WordPress blog site entitled 'Covid-1984' featured a post with a headline suggesting that the virus is trivial, not fatal, and that a vaccine will be useless. It opens with the words: "Over time, an increasing number of scientists and researchers independent of state authorities raise their voices regarding "pandemics", true mortality and other aspects of COVID-19", and also includes the suggestion that lockdown is unjust. The piece mentions various scientists. It has been posted to various Facebook groups, but reach data is unavailable.
- A live video posted to Facebook by a man living in the US was shared by Polish audiences. The man describes himself as an independent thinker, and claims that there is no need to wear masks, because there is no virus. The video includes the suggestion that the crisis is in fact a vehicle designed to undermine President Trump.

4. Additional: in China, infected people are being imprisoned in boxes

- A short video seen almost 8,000 times suggests that in China, people infected with COVID-19 are being put into 'lockdown' in boxes. There is no evidence that this is in fact the case. The account that posted the video has tagged it with the title "Infected people packed into boxes! China", and the additional description translates as "Inhuman treatment of people!".

ROMANIA

Summary

On 13 May, the law designed to replace the "state of emergency" with a "state of alert" was passed in parliament and it is set to come into effect on 15 May. This would effectively mean a partial lift on the lockdown, with some businesses re-opening and with people being granted more freedom of movement with the mandatory requirement of wearing masks.

During this reporting period, disinformation stories broadly fell into five key themes:

- The pandemic was planned by globalist elites or it does not exist at all



- The measures taken to contain the spread are exaggerated in order to establish a dictatorship
- Denying people access to churches undermines freedom of religion; alternatively, that the pandemic is a consequence of people turning away from God
- Some conspiracy theories continue to spread, such as the harms of vaccines and to the creation of the virus in a Wuhan lab.
- Eurosceptic narratives have been targeted mostly at Germany's alleged duplicity and self-interest in agreeing with and implementing financial support measures. Anti-western media outlets have taken advantage of and widely shared George Soros' declarations on the danger that COVID-19 poses to the European Union's future.

Most of these stories were identified by both media monitoring and our expert groups. Some of the narratives identified in disinformation stories this week have previously been observed in Romania, such as Orthodox influencers acting as agitators, the planned pandemic and anti-vaccination stances. There was social media commentary around some of these narratives.

Mainstream media covered two of the disinformation strands, focusing on:

- Debunking conspiracy theories shared on Romanian Facebook groups
- The automatic diagnoses of COVID-19 for all patients and, alternatively, the refusal to treat patients that suffer from other ailments

Other conversations on social media around COVID-19 focussed on generic frustrations with lockdown and some well-known conspiracy theories.

Dis/Mis-information themes

1. The government is using COVID-19 as an excuse to establish a dictatorship
 - National [reported](#) that Prime Minister Ludovic Orban established a dictatorship in Romania through the measures aimed at combating COVID-19 (934 interactions). Additionally, Lujă [claims](#) that Romania's president is essentially a dictator that is using the "state of alert" as a means to further enhance his control of the country.
 - Several outlets [reported](#) that the Romanian police bought a facial recognition system to track whether people are respecting social distancing measures; this is seen as an assault on privacy and a way of taking more money away from people through fines (3,110 interactions).



2. Western states (Germany) are taking advantage of Eastern states

- [Sputnik reports that](#) Germany is using the coronavirus crisis to invest heavily in its companies, thus gaining an unfair advantage over other European countries suffering economic damage (226 interactions). The text is also misleading in its description of the type of funding that Germany is implementing, the 52% figure being not a sum of money allocated by the European Union, but rather the total financial support approved by the German government.
- [Flux24 reports that](#) Angela Merkel is offering financial aid to EU countries under the condition that they buy Germany's exports later.

3. False statistics, causes and effects

- The Iosefina Pascal blog [claimed](#) that an Oxford study shows that the pandemic has ended; all the protection measures still in place are part of a plot to establish a dictatorship (5,881 interactions).
- A high-profile anti-vaccine figure [praised](#) the experiment of businessman to show that the pandemic does not exist. He deliberately went in a COVID-19 cluster and then claimed he tested negative, claiming that this is proof the virus does not exist (1,000 interactions).

4. Planned pandemic conspiracy

- Sputnik Romania praises an 83-year-old woman who tested positive for COVID-19 and refused to be hospitalised, alluding to the idea that the pandemic has been blown out of proportion or premeditated. This story has been picked up by other outlets. (14,400 interactions)
- Flux24 claims that the Romanian President deliberately exaggerated the severity of the pandemic in order to facilitate the acquisition of natural resources and services by private buyers. (6,300 interactions)
- The Justitiarul blog claimed that the pandemic was planned by the New Global Order, which, allegedly, is a freemason global government (9,938 interactions). In a separate blog post, Justitiarul claims that the pandemic was planned by a globalist movement to destroy civil liberties through scaremongering and creating 'pandemic psychosis' (4,775 interactions).

5. The EU is failing



- Luju [reported](#) that George Soros considers that the ongoing pandemic poses an existential threat to the EU and to the human civilization in general (4800 interactions). Eurosceptic media has widely shared George Soros' remarks on the risks posed by the coronavirus pandemic to the EU and the general global balance of power. The general tone of the articles is tied with the idea that if even George Soros, a perceived mastermind of occult global organisations, is predicting a destabilisation of the EU, then an actual collapse of the block must be indeed imminent.

6. False cures

- Ziaristii published an article claiming that plasma treatment can cure COVID-19, citing a Lombardy study. (362 interactions)

Wider social media conversation

The majority of posts relating to the coronavirus were factual and linked to trusted local and international media sources.

- The story that Bill Gates [was arrested](#) by the FBI received over 250,000 interactions on Facebook, with most commenters labelling it as fake news, but nevertheless expressing that they want Gates to be tried for crimes against humanity and even sentenced to death. Relatedly, a photo of Melinda Gates was edited to look as though she is wearing an inverted cross and shared across several highly populated groups, receiving thousands of interactions. Some Facebook users claimed that this showed that she is a Satanist or a Freemason.
- The majority of instances of disinformation related to conspiracy theories, false health advice and claims that the danger of COVID-19 has been exaggerated to establish a dictatorship. For instance, an Active News article [describing](#) digital citizen surveillance from around the world to track the spread of COVID-19 had over 2300 interactions on Facebook. Similarly, an article on a Romanian politician's pro-vaccine stance [was](#) twisted to sound as though he supports the extermination of those who oppose vaccinations and inflamed public opinion in Facebook groups, with over 5000 interactions.
- The omission of churches from the list of places which will be allowed to re-open after the lockdown is lifted has also been discussed on several groups and orthodox influencer pages, with people commenting that this is a breach of their freedom of conscience and of religion.



Coverage of Covid-19 disinformation

- Digi24 reports that the Minister for Finance accused PSD, the opposition party, of exploiting the pandemic by sharing fake news for political and financial gain (49,500 interactions).
 - Republica published an article in which two scientists debunked conspiracy theories shared on Romanian Facebook groups (21,627 interactions).
 - A blog post on Moise argues that the pandemic showed just how gullible Romanian people can be especially by paying attention to conspiracy theories that might endanger the most vulnerable citizens (8000 interactions).
 - Defense Romania [reports](#) that the Ministry of National Defence bought software for monitoring the spread of fake news in Romania (460 interactions).
 - Several mainstream outlets [published](#) articles about the experiment conducted by Romanian businessman Viorel Catarama to attempt deliberate infection in order to prove that COVID-19 does not exist (429 interactions).
-

SERBIA

In this reporting period, we identified no articles that could be categorised as disinformation according to the working group definition. Instead, coverage of COVID-19 in our selected media outlets focused on envisioning life after lockdown and the reopening of Serbia's borders. The statements of President Vučić and of high-profile pulmonologist Branimir Nestorović featured prominently, as did various international stories such as Bill Gates' warning of future bio-terrorist threats and Dean Koontz's 1981 novel 'The Eyes of Darkness' and whether it predicted the current pandemic.

On social media, users mostly focused their attention on what decisions and actions the authorities have been making, criticising President Vučić for statements which many saw as inappropriate and self-serving. The EU summit on the Western Balkans held in Zagreb was also mentioned.

Wider media coverage included the discovery that the director of the Cardiovascular Disease Institute in Belgrade had ordered a batch of fake COVID-19 tests from a businessman suspected of crime, the above-mentioned Dean Koontz theory, and a



plea from a German epidemiologist for social media platforms to put a stop to the spread of false information on COVID-19.

Disinformation themes

- There was no overt disinformation observed in HSA media in Serbia. Most coverage dealt with reopening the borders, President Vučić's address to the nation and the statement by Bill Gates that we might be facing a second pandemic in 2025 in the form of a bioterrorist attack.
- The fact that Serbia will be reopening their borders on 1 June was covered in several outlets. The outlet [Novosti](#) put out an article with instructions by lead epidemiologist Predrag Kon for everyone to follow once the borders reopen (1132 interactions). Pro-government outlet [Alo](#) covered the story as well and shared details on what the reopening entails for the borders that Serbia has with different countries (870 interactions).
- The address of President Vučić to the nation was reported on by several outlets. Pro-government outlet [Alo](#) put out an article explaining that Vučić spoke about the COVID-19 pandemic, the upcoming elections, and other political topics, which was the first time he did so since the outbreak began (589 interactions). His address was also covered by another pro-government outlet [Kurir](#), with the headline stressing that Vučić is calling on everybody to vote in the election, that he intends to have anyone who is violent arrested, and that he will not be succumbing to the opposition's "pressure and blackmail" to lift restrictions further (549 interactions).
- A statement made by Bill Gates in an interview with the Late Show in which he stated that a second pandemic was to hit in 2025 in the form of a bioterrorist attack was widely covered. The most engaged-with story came from [Sputnik](#) (1519 interactions), and the story was also picked up by the pro-government [Kurir](#) (1512 interactions) and [Novosti](#) (840 interactions).

Wider social media conversation

Social media posts in Serbia in the covered period predominantly focused on the government's plans now that the curfew has been lifted and Serbia is preparing to reopen its borders. Some users shared their personal experience with COVID-19 testing and lockdown. The EU summit on the Western Balkans held in Zagreb was mentioned as well.



- The authorities, and especially President Vučić, were criticised for lack of concern for their citizens and only focusing on their own interests. Janko Veselinović, the leader of the PREOKRET (Change) movement, [shared](#) a video put out by the ruling SNS (Serbian Progressive Party) in which they claim that Serbia is among the best-prepared countries in fighting the virus, and accused them of hypocrisy (189 interactions). He also [criticised](#) epidemiologist Predrag Kon for not reacting to Vučić organising a public meeting at this time (435 interactions). In another [tweet](#), he called out Vučić for setting the price of a single test at 6000 Serbian Dinars for anyone who wants to vacation in neighbouring countries, explaining that it would be virtually impossible for a four-member family to afford this come summer (482 interactions).
- Several users shared their experience with the virus. Political activist Goran Davidović [shared](#) his wife's story of getting tested and receiving negative results, and the impact it had on their lives (218 interactions).
- The summit in Zagreb in which the EU leaders adopted the 'Zagreb declaration' and reaffirmed their [unequivocal support](#) for the European perspective on the Western Balkans was also mentioned by some users, who mainly reported on the fact that the event happened. The [tweet](#) issued by President Vučić's official account was the most-engaged with (146 interactions).

Coverage of Covid-19 disinformation

- The story of how Milovan Bojić, director of the Institute for Cardiovascular Diseases "Dedinje", ordered fake quick COVID-19 tests from a businessman who has been suspected of criminal activity was by far the most covered in this reporting period. The most-engaged with article, with 4934 interactions, came from the NGO [KRIK](#) (Crime and Corruption Investigation Network) and it was subsequently covered by the major independent daily [Danas](#) (1424 interactions).
- The suggestion that the 30-year old novel 'The Eyes of Darkness' by Dean Koontz predicted the virus was also among the most popular stories in the covered period. It was reported on by portals [Espresso](#) and [Naslovi](#), who shared the original articles by [Novosti](#) and [Press Online](#).
- Another story covered by [Sputnik](#), with 254 interactions, was an article about the plea by a German epidemiologist to social media giants such as Facebook, Twitter and Google, co-signed by signed by 100 other medical professionals, asking them to act to prevent the spread of disinformation around COVID-19.



SLOVAKIA

Summary

During this reporting period, mis- and disinformation content in Slovakia highlighted by the CWG fell under two broad themes: the suggestion that Global elites (from the World Health Organisation to the Pope and Bill Gates) should be suspected as being complicit in COVID-19; the propagation of misinformation regarding the nature and origin of COVID-19.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Misinformation: false cures, severity, and statistics*

- Online portal Zem a Vek, in an article reporting on the company Pfizer's attempts to find a virus, [mentioned](#) a previous Zem a Vek article in which it was suggested that a vaccine would in fact be useless.
- Another Zem a Vek article quoted a "renowned Czech doctor" suggesting that people seeking to stay healthy should top up their Vitamin D, and that face masks are not natural for the human body and may cause allergies. The article itself [encourages](#) people to "throw away" their masks.
- A piece on badatel.net [suggested](#) that COVID-19 may be a false pandemic. Drawing on mortality surveillance data from the US, the author suggests that some statistics may have been manipulated and falsified and that some people have been falsely labelled as COVID-19 victims.
- The website Infovojna.sk featured a page with the headline: "David Icke's complete banned interview on Covid-19 virus, coronavirus testing, 5G network, vaccines and the Global Criminal Syndicate". Beneath this are videos (previously deleted by other sites) [featuring](#) David Icke claiming that the virus is linked to 5G.

2. *Global elites:*

- An article found on the Infovojna website featured the headline "Pope Francis is also leading the campaign for the universal vaccination of the world's



population together with Gates”. The article [suggests](#) that the Pope may be supporting Bill Gates, and asks why the former is supporting vaccination.

- Similarly, a Zem a Vek article quoted a World Health Organisation (WHO) official rejecting the notion of herd immunity. The last sentence of the article [claims](#) that Bill Gates is a sponsor of the WHO and a proponent of depopulation via mass vaccination. It translates as: “Recall that one of the main sponsors of the WHO is Bill Gates, who has long supported the idea of population reduction and universal vaccination of humanity”.

UKRAINE

Overview

This report sees a continuation of a number of previously-identified narratives. Major ones include:

- The Ukrainian authorities are dealing incompetently with the crisis
- Western / liberal governments are incompetent

This report also sees a number of newly-identified narratives. Major ones include:

- Ukraine is poised for an outbreak of another infectious disease (tuberculosis)
- The breakaway republics are handling the pandemic well

Social media conversation focused on public scrutiny of the recent revelation from a senior public health official, who admitted the restriction on visiting parks and other recreational areas had been implemented with ‘psychological impact’ in mind, as discussed in the previous report. This became an additional impetus for the proliferation of conspiracy theories around the idea that COVID-19 is artificially created.

Another major topic of discussion online was centred around mass vaccination. The announced plans for mass vaccination against influenza this summer triggered renewed public discussion about public scepticism and fear regarding vaccination in general.

Wider coverage of disinformation was dominated by the news on how social media platforms Twitter and Facebook are dealing with fake news about COVID-19.



Messages from Facebook announcing it had identified over 50 million COVID-19 related fakes on its platform, and Twitter announcing its plans to tag fake stories, were widely shared. A particularly noticeable piece of coverage of COVID-19 disinformation was presented by BBC Ukraine that covered Russian information operation targeting American biological laboratories in Ukraine.

Disinformation themes

1. COVID-19 was deliberately created by the US (implied)

- On his [YouTube channel](#), Viktor Medvedchuk has further pursued the issue of “American biolabs” in Ukraine, having previously demanded the authorities investigate them. Medvedchuk has not explicitly linked the labs to COVID-19, but the timing of his claims made during the pandemic implies the connection. The narrative, echoing traditional Kremlin messaging on American bioweapons developed in secret labs in the states under “foreign governance”, has been previously amplified not only by explicitly pro-Russian resources such as Strana.ua, but also by 1+1, a channel linked to Ihor Kolomoisky (see previous reports). These accusations have already been debunked, as the labs in question are under control of the Ukrainian government, not Washington, though they have received US funding under the framework of a joint program to counter biological threats. Viktor Medvedchuk has 49,900 subscribers on YouTube, and the broadcast had 183,000 views as of May 15.

2. Western / liberal governments are incompetent

- Mykhailo Pogrebinsky, a pro-Russian political analyst who appears regularly on Russian state-controlled channels and channels linked to Medvedchuk, has [claimed](#) that “coronavirus has simply sped up the processes that have already been underway. There is a great amount of doubt in liberal democracy, globalism and so on being the gold standard.” Russian-backed channels have on many occasions utilised the pandemic to promote the idea that liberal democracy does not work.

3. Incompetence/dishonesty of Ukrainian authorities in dealing with COVID-19

- Strana featured an [article](#) (106 FB interactions) that drew attention to incompetence of Ukrainian authorities in planning the exiting from quarantine which led to transport ‘collapse’ in the city of Kyiv due to public transport not allowed to operate. In this regard, mayor of Kyiv Vitali Klitschko called central government to re-open an underground transport. In this regard, junk media outlet From-ua has been quick to [report](#) (223 FB interactions) that operation of



Kyiv metro 'will be restored', which is false, as no decision has been made yet in this regard. Plus, Chief State Sanitary Doctor of Ukraine noted days earlier that underground transport is going to be restored only under the 4th stage of exiting from quarantine.²

- The news about Chief State Sanitary Doctor of Ukraine Viktor Liashko admitting the restriction to visit parks and other recreational areas has been implemented with a primary purpose of 'psychological impact' has led many HSA actors in Ukraine to downgrade the severity of the pandemic. Related to Mr. Liashko revelation, Strana produced an [article](#) with a headline that instils a thought Ukraine restricted public transportation with the sole purpose lying in restricting, and not to prevent the spike in infections (1666 FB interactions). Politeka, in turn, [compared](#) Ukraine with a totalitarian state, where those in power 'threaten' its subjects and called measures taken by Ukraine as instruments of a totalitarian state (96 FB interactions).
- Russian state-owned outlet ukraine.ru came up with a [material](#) that called Ukrainians psychologic conditions severely deteriorating due to long period of self-isolation. This has been described in the context of 9 May celebration, and frustration caused by Ukrainian state refusing to celebrate the occasion with the beliefs similar to Russians.
- Pro-Kremlin media outlets Strana and From-ua [described](#) parliament's deliberation of the new law designed to support struggling sectors of Ukrainian economy as yet another attempts to [take money away from Ukrainians](#). Strana's article received 1992 FB interactions and an article by From-ua got 284.
- Pro-Kremlin actors in Ukraine continue to describe small local protests in Ukraine as 'riots' attaching photos which are meant to instil a perception of protests to be mass-scale in nature. As such, Politeka [reported](#) on yet another riot taking place in Odesa, which, Politeka notices, occurs despite the lifting of major quarantine restrictions (632 FB interactions). The same Politeka [noted](#) that situation with protests outside of Cabinet of Ministers in Kyiv 'deteriorates' and that 'police is ushered in for help', 'transport collapses' and attaches photos of what they call 'revolt' (212 FB interactions).

4. The breakaway republics are handling the pandemic well

² <https://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/viktor-lyashko-nastorozhennost-koronavirusnoy-1589224394.html>



- Strana.ua published an extensive piece on quarantine in the Kremlin's puppet republics, complimenting the occupying authorities for their measures, which are portrayed as effective but not exaggerated. Meanwhile, Strana attacks quarantine measures in government-controlled Ukraine (see above), specifically blaming it for being too intense, suffocating business and violating human rights. The intended contrast is aimed at deepening the anti-government sentiment among Ukrainians and portraying occupying authorities not only as independent actors, but also as highly effective ones.

Manipulations include twisting negative impacts and presenting them as positives. For example, in Donetsk, some of benefits for senior citizens, who are the most socially vulnerable group both to the disease and its economic consequences, have been cancelled. Nevertheless, it is portrayed as a measure of protection – cancelling the said benefits for public transportation (which still functions) so that the elderly “travel less and don't expose themselves to risk”.

5. Ukraine awaits an outbreak of another infectious disease

- The Minister of Health has warned about the lack of funding for tuberculosis treatment in Ukraine, and urged the necessity of medical reforms to prevent a spike in tuberculosis cases. Many pro-Kremlin media outlets, like [From-ua](#), have interpreted this to mean that ‘another infectious disease is approaching Ukraine’, potentially even deadlier than COVID-19 (784 FB interactions).

Wider social media conversation

- A series of [posts](#) have made predictions of misery and hunger to follow the COVID-19 pandemic for Ukraine. These were found in various public groups, including [Ne Bud' Baiduzhim](#) (167K members) and [Novosti Mira](#) (42K members). Another [post](#) found in [Ne Bud' Baiduzhim](#) (167K members) depicts a situation in Ukraine in which over a million Ukrainian children are on the verge of starvation.
- Abzats, a page with over 120K followers, [disseminated](#) a prediction based on comments by the Ukrainian Minister of Health about the underfunding of tuberculosis treatment operations in Ukraine. In the post, prediction is made that Ukraine is heading for an epidemic more deadly than COVID-19. Koleso Sobytii (830K followers) [warned](#) of the same thing.
- Several public pages on Facebook including [Moia Ukraina](#) (970K followers), [Sharp News](#) (454K followers), and [LifeBBCcCNN](#) (452K followers) have



claimed that President Zelensky has admitted he will be unable to deliver the promised pay rise for medics fighting COVID-19. However, Zelensky [continues to insist](#) extra payments will indeed be transferred to medics and expressed his regret that this has been delayed.

- Khvyliya (963K followers) [posted](#) that COVID-19 test kits produced in Ukraine under the order from the president's office have failed to pass the quality test of the country's Centre of Public Health. A related post from ZN.UA (119K followers) changed the story to [say](#) it is the Ministry of Health that rejected the tests. The story, which originated on late evening 12 May, has not been confirmed nor denied by any official body. Nevertheless, social media users harshly criticised authorities for being unable to make something so 'simple' as tests.
- Aktual'na Merezha Novyn (1.5M followers) [shared](#) a post from junk news outlet Globalpres which warned Ukrainians about the mass vaccination that awaits them from 1 July. According to the source, this is information from Viktor Lyashko, Ukraine's chief medical officer, who in reality has merely announced plans to buy up more vaccines against seasonal flu. The post attracted over 1,000 likes, 1,400 comments and 683 shares. Intense discussion could be observed under the post with the most prominent comments in terms of likes to be the ones with an absolutely negative stance towards the idea of vaccination
- A number of dubious medical claims were once again made, notably by Econet.ru (669K followers), which is administered from Ukraine, which [shared](#) a message about the protective properties of hydrogen peroxide against COVID-19. The post was shared more than 300 times.
- Following the public outrage that erupted after Ukraine's Chief Medical Officer admitted that restrictions on visiting parks were primarily designed for the purpose of 'psychological pressure' rather than actual virus containment, some pages began to sharing messages that the whole COVID-19 panic is artificial. Sensatsii Ukrainy (357K followers) [shared](#) a piece from fringe portal bulava.biz.ua with a claim that Ukrainians have let themselves be tricked with the whole COVID-19 'hoax'. Related to this, a [video](#) which was shared 109 times appeared on Dobro pozhalovat' v symasshedshii dom ! public group (28K members) which claims that the whole quarantine in Ukraine is fake and is perpetrated with the sole purpose of frightening people. According to the video's author, the ultimate goal of quarantine in Ukraine is to force people into a revolt with a subsequent restoration of order by Minister of Interior Arsen Avakov with the aim of winning political power for himself.



- *Goriachie Novosti Ukrainy*, a public group with 63K members, [shared](#) a link to a YouTube video dated 18 March that featured quotes from famous public individuals regarding the need to regulate the world population. The video is titled: “Rockefeller told how he was going to reduce global population”. It also contains a short episode with Bill Gates holding a vaccine and a quote “with its help we will achieve at least 10-15% of population reduction”. The post has been shared 491 times.
- In relation to the news about mass vaccination, a [post](#) appeared on *My dlia Ukrainy!* public group with 30K members in which Bill Gates is accused of being behind COVID-19 and that he allegedly has a purpose of installing chips inside human’s brains. It also featured a warning not to get vaccinated as the vaccines, according to the post, are deliberately contaminated to get everybody infected. The post received 846 likes, 331 comments and 548 shares. Fears regarding COVID-19 tests kits being contaminated is a long-standing narrative pursued by Russian information operations which still finds its way in online discussions in Ukraine.
- Beauty/health focused public page Roza Zhizni, with 143K followers, [shared](#) an article from a junk news outlet that contained a message that COVID-19 is a product of global secret society designed to frighten the population to make them easier to control. It also contains a YouTube video dated 10 April with over 400K views featuring controversial figure of Plamen Paskov from Bulgaria. Mr. Paskov has previously been noticed by independent fact checking organisations to be spreading lies regarding COVID-19.

Coverage of Covid-19 disinformation

- BBC Ukraine [published](#) an extensive analysis covering a Russian information operation that targeted American biological laboratories in Ukraine. It received the highest number of FB interactions from this week’s COVID-19 disinformation coverage sample – 331.
- Ukrainian [Pravda](#) made it known that Ukrainian prime minister has no intentions to prohibit Ukrainians wishing to leave the country from doing so. Many HSA-aligned media outlets in Ukraine have been speculating in this regard.
- Many Ukrainian media outlets [engaged](#) with the news that Facebook had identified around 50 million fake coronavirus posts on its platform. Statistics provided by Facebook also featured on Detektor Media, Unian, Focus, Comments, Telegraf and other resources.



- Another big news on how social media platforms fight COVID-19 fakes came from Twitter. As such, Ukrinform, Detektor Media, Unian, Glavcom, Korrespondent and others reported the news about Twitter planning to tag fake COVID-19 information on its platform. This story is seen as particularly important in light of the fact that Facebook reported posts with such tags are 95% less clickable.
- Outlets like 5.ua, Interfax, slovoidilo, imi.org.ua, and glavcom [published](#) articles about the Security Service of Ukraine uncovering a network of online agitators allegedly operating under the mentorship of Russia, who were reportedly calling for the overthrow of the Ukrainian government.



WORKING DEFINITIONS

The CWG uses agreed-upon working definitions to identify and categorise potential disinformation, misinformation and conspiracy theories. Cases are classified against the following criteria:

Disinformation

1. *False or misleading information spread **deliberately via HSAs or HS-aligned outlets**.*
2. *False or misleading information with unknown or unclear attribution, which **fits with known HS narratives, aims or activities**.*
3. *Content based on verifiable information which is unbalanced or skewed, amplifies or exaggerates certain elements for effect, or uses emotive or inflammatory language **to achieve effects that fit within known HS narratives, aims, or activities**.*

Misinformation

1. ***False information related to SARS-CoV-2** including, but not limited to, its spread, how it is contracted or transmitted, and the symptoms, treatment and potential cures for COVID-19.
 - *This information may be deliberately spread, as part of HS MIO, lone pranksters, copycats, trolls or organically as a result of human ignorance and uncertainty during the crisis.**
2. ***Incorrect statistics related to the pandemic**, which may include rates of contraction, transmission, mortality and death; figures on PPE, ICU/hospital capacity, or ill-informed predictions for future developments.
 - *This information may be deliberately spread via HS-aligned media, or accidentally though poor journalistic standards.**
3. *Claims and opinions (from influencers with existing platforms, or widely shared examples from relatively unknown individuals) which refute current scientific understanding of the virus and/or official recommendations.*
4. *Deliberate or no, the prevalence of this misinformation **negatively impacts public health, social cohesion or political stability**, for example by affecting the clarity of official messaging, or eroding public trust in institutions.*

Conspiracy theories

1. ***Alternative explanations** for the pandemic – including its origin, how it is transmitted and contracted, or claiming that it does not exist at all.
 - *This may involve claims of **orchestrated, malign or accidental actions by global elites** (governments, billionaires, the ‘Deep-State’ etc.), the “truth” of which is being **kept from the public**.**



2. ***Evolutions of existing conspiracy theories*** and the online communities who believe them – including from within the far-right, alt-right, religious fundamentalism, and the anti-vaccination and anti-5G ‘activist’ movements.
3. ***New conspiracy theories***, from HSA, trolls, or other unknown or organic sources, which may arise in response to COVID-19 related news.