



## SUMMARY REPORT

Friday 22 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:

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Languages</b>
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
Montenegro	Montenegrin, Serbian
North Macedonia	Macedonian, Albanian
Poland	Polish
Romania	Romanian
Serbia	Serbian
Slovakia	Slovak
Ukraine	Ukrainian, Russian



## Countries

### Country-by-country Overview

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### Narratives Observed

#### Overview

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### 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, Montenegro, 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.

Note: “Interactions” refers to every time that a post was actively engaged with or responded to on a particular platform. For example, Facebook interactions refer to comments, shares, likes, and other reactions, and Twitter interactions refer to likes and re-tweets. The figures quoted in this report are the sum total of interactions across seven social media platforms.

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## **COUNTRIES**

### **ARMENIA**

#### **Summary**

During this reporting period, a range of mis- and disinformation stories were identified in Armenia. Those falling under the theme of ‘Failing West’ pointed to the notion that Armenia’s own government is incompetent and corrupt (with one story also implying that mask-wearing is being recommended for reasons other than health). Those stories offering misinformation, meanwhile, tended to challenge expert advice and consensus on vaccination and also linked 5G to COVID-19. Finally, under the theme of ‘Malign Global Elites’ it was suggested that the pandemic is being used to usher in a new world order that will benefit some but not others.

#### **Dis-/Mis-information themes**

1. *Failing West: Incompetence; Corruption*
  - In a Facebook post, Doctor Hayk Manasyan, a vocal critic of the Ministry of Health’s policies, suggested that the Ministry is banning non-governmental labs from testing for COVID-19. Manasyan insisted that this results in preventing



professionals - who are far times more experienced than those from the Ministry - from helping people. Manasyan cited a publication on the Ministry of Health website as proof, but the post does not contain any data that can prove his claims. (Whilst the government bans uncertified laboratories from conducting testing, non-governmental labs that have received a government certificate can test people.) 568 likes.

- An article on the popular website Politik.am suggests that the government has made masks mandatory because the Prime Minister's family and oligarch Samvel Aleksanyan will financially benefit from it. The headline reads: "To whom will the billions go? Who is in the mask business?"

## 2. *Misinformation: 5G; Expert Advice*

- On Facebook, one post (545 shares) from a doctor and activist posted photos of cell towers, insisting that there are many 5G towers in Yerevan (despite it being widely understood that the technology has not been introduced in Armenia yet). The same user posted a video (40,000 views, 840 shares) in which she walked around an area of Yerevan to show various towers, suggesting that they cause health problems. It was also suggested that the quarantine was intended to keep people at home whilst the government installed more towers.
- On Pastinfo.am, it was suggested that in Moldova, the church has raised concerns over microchipping via vaccination and that this is why many European countries oppose mandatory vaccination. The piece cites the Interfax agency.
- Another piece offering an anti-vaccination angle came via Tert.am where it was suggested that a drug has been developed in China that can prevent COVID-19 without the need for a vaccine. The misleading element of this story was mainly in its headline. The article is a translation of a medicalxpress.com article.

## 3. *Malign Global Elites: Reshaping Society*

- In a Facebook Live video shared 4000 times, a user suggests that the pandemic is being used to usher in a new world order. It suggests that the Armenian Minister of Health is an agent of the international organization GAVI, promoting vaccination. It also suggests that the pandemic is being used to microchip people; that statistics are being manipulated by different governments; that fear is being used to spur mass vaccination and that the global government is trying to usher in "the new normal".



## BULGARIA

### Summary

This week, content identified as containing mis- and disinformation narratives fell under two themes: 'Reframing Russia' (in a case that could also be classed as misinformation, it was suggested that Russians have superior immunity); 'Failing West' (News Front Bulgaria reported the opinion of one Turkish expert that American hegemony will end with COVID-19).

### Dis-/Mis-information themes

#### 1. *Reframing Russia: Russian Success*

- A Bulgaria News Front article entitled "Learning: Russians have higher population immunity than Europeans and Westerners" claimed that the number of deaths in Russia is far lower than in other countries. This is attributed to an interview conducted by Russia 24 with the head of the National Research Center for Epidemiology and Microbiology, Alexander Gunzburg.

#### 2. *Failing West: Other*

- On News Front Bulgaria, an article suggested that according to some Turkish opinion, COVID-19 may end American post-Cold War hegemony and that economic damage caused to the US will force the administration to reconsider its foreign policy. This opinion was expressed by Kadir Ustyun, chief coordinator of the office of Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research for Turkey, in Washington. Though not explicitly expressing disinformation, the piece's presence on the News Front site means that it may feed into the broader narrative offered by such sites that the West is failing and is relatively ill-equipped to handle COVID-19.

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## CZECHIA

### Summary



During this reporting period, mis- and disinformation stories identified in Czechia fell under the themes of 'Misinformation' (expert advice on face masks and vaccines should be dismissed; 5G is linked to COVID-19); 'Failing West' (Europe will collapse); and 'Conflict' (NATO is provoking Russia). One opinion piece also linked restrictions on freedom under COVID-19 to alleged future restrictions on freedom at stake if Islam "strengthens".

Other than the latter, the above themes have all been seen in previous reports – in particular, misinformation regarding the efficacy of masks and vaccines.

## Dis-/Mis-information themes

### 1. *Misinformation: Expert Advice; 5G*

- An article from SputnikCZ quoted a Czech singer Lou Fanánek Hagen, who thinks that wearing face-masks is not necessary, suggesting it's just an attempt of elites to find out whether people will listen to their directives. He suggests that the world has gone crazy as a result of COVID-19.
- Another article shunning expert advice and mainstream science was found on the Pravy Prostor site. The piece suggested that face masks are dangerous; that 5G makes people sick; that vaccines are dangerous (and so is Bill Gates) and that in the US, doctors are overstating COVID-19 as a cause of death. It cites individuals including Andrew Kaufman, described as a British doctor.
- The website Zprávy Dt24 featured an article including a number of conspiracy theories, such as the suggestion that people in Wuhan died because of 5G networks, which essentially cause and activate COVID-19. The article's author also suggests that vaccines are dangerous (and may be part of a plan for global depopulation). They also suggest that chemtrails are linked to the virus, serving to weaken the immune system.
- An article from Nwoo.org suggested that 5G causes COVID-19 (and the electrification of the earth). It features a video 'showing' that in cities of Czechia, 5G exists in places where COVID-19 cases have emerged. The video also features a lecture by a Dr. Cohen on the subject of electrification (as discussed in previous reports). "Nwoo" - the website name – stands for "New World Order Opposition".

### 2. *Failing West: EU collapse*

- An 18 May article on the website Extraplus discussed protests that are taking place across the EU as a response to COVID-19, suggesting that the EU is



ineffective and insufficient. It also accused the EU of providing help to non-EU states only in order to access markets.

### 3. *Conflict: War*

- An article from 18 May on Prvni Zpravy claimed that NATO is provoking Moscow with exercises near the Russian border – despite the COVID-19 crisis. The goal of this, the article suggests, is to provoke aggression from Russia. The text says that this is all according to ‘Contra Magazine’.

### 4. *Additional: Freedom, Islam, and COVID-19*

- An article from Vlastenecké Noviny, headlined “The virtual pandemic has pushed aside the risk of bestial Islam” suggested that the present crisis has pushed various “problems” into the background, overshadowing the “fact” that freedom is waning as Islam strengthens. It all draws our attention to how easily we can allow ourselves to be deprived of our liberty and put our fates in the hands of others, claims the author.

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## ESTONIA

### Summary

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

Hostile state media reported on how Estonians will adapt to life post lockdown, as well as on the growing tensions between the WHO and the US. Instances of disinformation in hostile state media criticised Estonia’s paranoia about Russian aggression and questioned the size of Estonia’s defence budget and its support for the Rail Baltic project, while an article in non-HSA media promoted the idea that lockdown is part of a plan to establish a global government.

These stories were identified by expert groups and Zinc’s internal monitoring. No discussion on social media around these articles was observed, although other conspiracy theories around the global introduction of lockdown were found.



Conversation on social media mostly linked to media sources regarded as reliable. Posts mainly concerned the gradual lifting of lockdown measures, government announcements and the status of the pandemic in other countries. The number of posts containing disinformation or misinformation continues to be low, while posts containing disinformation received little interaction.

There were no media reports in Estonian that covered the topic of COVID-19 disinformation found during this reporting period.

### **Dis-/Misinformation themes**

#### *1. Conflict: War*

One story was flagged by Zinc's media monitoring:

- Baltnews published an article claiming that Estonia's paranoia over Russian "aggression" remains despite the COVID-19 pandemic (0 interactions).

#### *2. Malign Global Elite: Global financial and political elites (including the deep state) are taking advantage of COVID-19 to reshape society*

One story was flagged by the CWG partner organisation:

- A post on meiekirik.net claimed that the pandemic had been used to violate people's basic rights and such "illiberal measures" were a prelude to a world government (interactions unavailable).

#### *3. Additional/Other:*

One story was flagged by Zinc's media monitoring:

- Baltnews published an article on the economic losses that Estonia will suffer due to the pandemic. While it is true that Estonia is expected to endure severe economic losses, experts quoted in the article used them to question the validity of the Rail Baltic projects and the size of Estonia's defence budget, both of which are regularly criticised by HSA media (11 interactions).

### **Wider social media conversation around COVID-19**

- Conversation on social media was mainly non-conspiratorial with minimal instances of dis- or misinformation, often linking to media sources regarded as



accurate. Posts mainly concerned the gradual lifting of lockdown measures, government announcements, and the status of the pandemic in other countries.

- Only three instances of disinformation were found, referencing conspiracy theories and false health advice. The number of posts containing disinformation or misinformation continues to be low, although one post received a significant number of interactions.
- A post on Ravimite ja vaktsiinide kõrvaltoimed (Side effects of medicines and vaccines), a group with 10,000 members, [linked](#) to an article claiming that vaccines against COVID-19 will use experimental new technology and will alter human's DNA. The post received 87 interactions, including 18 shares. (Flagged by the CWG partner organization)
- A post on Голос Русской Балтии. Эстония, Латвия, Литва (Voice of the Russian Baltics. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), a group with 1,8000 members, [linked](#) to an article on vpk.news.ru, which in itself is a translation of a [post](#) by Peter Koenig on fringe conspiracy site globalresearch.ca. The post claims that a pandemic was called by the WHO in order to introduce a global lockdown, halt the world's economy, and allow Bill Gates and ID2020 to vaccinate and microchip the world's population. The post also suggested there is a link between 5G and the spread of COVID-19.
- A post on Коронавирус в Эстонии (COVID-19) (Coronavirus in Estonia (COVID-19)), a group with 700 members, stated that Kundalini yoga could be a cure for coronavirus, claiming it was an effective cure for HIV, AIDs and cancer.

### Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

No coverage of disinformation was observed in Estonia during the reporting period.

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## GEORGIA

### Summary

During this reporting period, various mis- and disinformation stories were identified in Georgia. Those falling under the theme of 'Malign Global Elite' suggested that both exploitation and the reshaping of society were underway; Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg were accused of seeking the "robotization" of humanity, and vaccines were framed as a means for allowing billionaires and masons to reduce the world



population. This overarching theme has been present in the previous reporting period. Stories under the theme of 'Conflict' also fell under the 'biolab' sub-narrative, pointing in particular to "suspicious" activity around the Lugar Lab, with one suggesting that Georgia may be killing Ossetians using COVID-19. Meanwhile, misinformation from the Facebook group STOP 5G in GEORGIA suggested that death rates in Italy have been overstated. The 'Moral decline' theme was also present, with it being suggested that COVID-19 is being used against the church.

## Dis-/Mis-information themes

### 1. *Conflict: Biolab*

- On 20 May, Sputnik Ossetia [published](#) an article entitled "KGB- Georgia don't stop collecting biomaterial of South Ossetia citizens". The State Security Service of de-facto South Ossetia apparently suggested that the American biolaboratory of Georgia (the Lugar Lab) is collecting biomaterial from South Ossetian citizens (a statement from the KGB of South Ossetia includes a photo of the EU Monitoring Mission car, followed by an ambulance vehicle, as evidence of this claim). The de-facto South Ossetian KGB also claims that Georgia is continuing the genocide of Ossetians using COVID-19 and spreading it intentionally. In response to disinformation, the EUMM office in Georgia released a statement on 21 May and explained that ambulance cars have been present with EUMM patrols since its inception.
- The 18-24 May edition of the Asaval-Dasavali print newspaper quoted American journalist and Georgian Bureau Chief for Russia-affiliated Veterans Today, Jeffrey Silverman. He reportedly suggests that two years ago, the Lugar laboratory staff were hospitalized at the first clinical hospital. He claims that there are a lot of similar laboratories in the USA, but the Lugar Laboratory has more deadly pathogens. Silverman is one of the sources frequently referred to by Russian pro-governmental media outlets who are against the Lugar Lab. Russia's Channel 1 calls him a military expert and Russia 24 refers to him as a Georgia-based American journalist.
- A 21 May News Front article also [cast suspicion](#) on the Lugar Lab, asking "why is Russia concerned about Lugar Lab activities"? The article includes claims made by senior Russian figures regarding the Lab's activity, and states that Russia has been suspicious of their events, right from the start.

### 2. *Malign Global Elites: Exploitation, Reshaping Society*



- On 20 May online GeWorld.ge (116,000+ views in the past 6 months according to SimilarWeb) published an article claiming that people such as Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg are trying to make humans dependent on gadgets and to transform them into chipped “robots”. Besides offering other allegations and conspiracies, the author suggested that COVID-19 is part of a bigger plan; if it lasts for a few years, plans for human “robotization” will be fulfilled. The article was read 900 times on the webpage and was also shared on Facebook (24 likes).
- Archpriest Saba Chikaidze of the Georgian Orthodox Church (who has previously featured in these reports) reportedly suggested that COVID-19 vaccines will be used by billionaires and masons to reduce the world population to one billion. This information was [shared](#) on 20 May via the Facebook page named “Stalin”, which [linked to](#) a short piece on the site ‘Hotnews.ge’. It had limited reach; 55 likes, 1 comment and 50 shares.
- On 18 May, the website News Front also perpetuated the notion that COVID-19 is being used to reduce the world population, in an article titled “Soso Pavliashvili: Someone decided to leave people without God in this difficult time”. Soso Pavliashvili is a Russian singer of Georgian origin and develops a narrative that the global ruling elite is aiming to reduce the population amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. He claims that the elite intentionally coincided the pandemic with big religious events such as Easter, Ramadan, and Pesach in order to leave people without a God.

### 3. *Moral Decline: Religious Freedom*

- On 20 May, pro-Kremlin website Geworld.ge [published](#) an interview with an archpriest of the Georgian Orthodox Church, Guram Gamtsemlidze. He suggests that COVID-19 is used to change the world order and to fight against the Orthodox Church in Georgia. Gamtsemlidze claims that this anti-church movement is ruled by liberal forces and that financial aid to Georgia is not a gift but a loan, which global organizations such as the IMF use to gain control of the country.

### 4. *Misinformation: Hoax; Cures; 5G*

- On 21 May the Facebook Group ‘STOP 5G IN GEORGIA’, mentioned previously in CWG reports, [offered](#) a post suggesting that death rates in Italy have been misreported (and that deaths this year were in fact far lower than those in the same period of the previous year). Interestingly, the Italian source



sited by this Facebook post was in fact a factchecking article that addressed this very same misinformation.

- In the 18-24 May edition of Alia newspaper, the phytomedicine specialist Avtandil Kurdgelashvili claimed that he has medicine for those who are infected with COVID-19 or want to prevent it.

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## HUNGARY

### Summary

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

During this reporting period, three main themes were identified: concern for the post-COVID-19 economic crisis, dismissal of liberal values and interventions in crisis situations, and the presence of a malign global elite.

Compared to previous reports, there was much less direct focus on COVID-19 as a disease and its mitigation nationally or internationally in the media. Issues arising from COVID-19, such as a looming economic crisis and rehabilitation of the workforce in Hungary were given more attention both in independent media and in flagged outlets. Animosity towards opposition figures, European liberals and liberal values overall were still present, but in fewer articles and rarely correlated with COVID-19.

The social media landscape, however, showed more hostility, specifically in the comments sections of otherwise non-biased posts on flagged accounts. Followers and commentators are still fearful of a "Soros threat" and are highly sceptical of Western European countries. Comments usually dismiss any liberal idea or value, as being "planted" by George Soros, or other Western "elites".

In this reporting period, conspiracy theory websites were particularly active on social media. Proceeding with continuing narratives surrounding Bill Gates and his alleged involvement in the creation and/or the running of the COVID-19 pandemic.

When it comes to geopolitical aspects, fringe homepages continued to use mixed and often contradictory approaches. While some conspiracy pages claimed that the United States Army invented the virus as a biological weapon (allegedly with funding from the



Gates Foundation), others tried to explore and establish a link between COVID-19 and China.

## Dis-/Mis-information themes

### 1. *Failing West: Incompetence*

The CWG partner organisation flagged the following relevant story:

- [Index.hu](#), largest independent online news portal and [M1](#), Hungary's main pro-government state media channel clashed over effectiveness of Chinese-imported ventilators. After the Hungarian government in April purchased so-called non-invasive (NIV) ventilators from a Chinese intermediary company, independent weekly Magyar Hang [wrote](#) (31000 interactions) that the type of ventilators purchased by the government are useless since they are designed for home treatment and not treatment in emergency care.

Zinc's media monitoring observed the following stories:

- PestiSracok.hu, in another critical article [discredited](#) (179 interactions) one of the main independent media outlet, Index, which presented Sweden's number of COVID-19 deaths. In Sweden, the monthly mortality rate came close to a decade-high peak in April due to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the Stockholm statistical office. However, the article claims that Index underplayed the situation and approved of the liberal Swedish government's strategy, even though its handling of the crisis led to mass death.
- The Austrian Minister of the Interior fears a second wave over group infections, [writes](#) (153 interactions) PestiSracok.hu. The article stresses the differences between the national conservative and Viennese social-democratic approach, suggesting that the Viennese administration is obstructing conservative efforts to save lives.
- An article [published](#) (202 interactions) on Origo.hu, the most vocal government-backed outlet, reported that the government has already spent more than 600 billion forints on protection against the COVID-19 pandemic. It details how much money and energy it invested in ensuring citizens' and businesses financial survival, while the opposition party only impeded them at every step. It talks about the efforts to create at least as many jobs as were lost due to the pandemic. It also dismisses the suggestions brought forward by the opposition, which were never actually considered and speculates that those would have had catastrophic consequences if introduced.



## 2. *Failing West: EU failure*

Zinc's media monitoring observed the following stories:

- Hirado.hu and Pestiscracok.hu, both strong pro-government media outlets, [reported](#) (1200 interactions) that Gyorgy Bakondi, defence advisor of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said in an interview that the government will not accept the ECJ verdict on a transit zone for migrants. He evoked that illegal immigrants are also a threat to public health, as it is not known how many of the 130,000 people on the Balkan route were infected with the virus.
- Additionally, PestiSracok.hu [added](#) (315 interactions) on a statement by European Commission spokesman who said that migrants rescued from the sea and stranded on ships must be transported to a safe port after the expiry of the quarantine for the COVID-19 pandemic, while the Maltese Government is responsible for their welfare. The undertone of the article feeds into Hungary's anti-immigration narrative and once again suggests that countries are being forced to take in migrants against their population's will.
- PestiSracok.hu [cited](#) (799 interactions) a [blogpost](#) (712 interactions) from Tuzfalcsoport, in which they comment on George Soros' interview where he expressed his concerns that the far right received significant support in Italy during the COVID-19 crisis and feared that Italy is on a path to leave the EU . Both articles severely criticized Soros saying that it is natural for him to be afraid since the EU benefits him the most, and Brussels abandoned Italy and other Member States in a time of crisis. They imply that Italy would be better off with Salvini as leader, because the leftist administration had clearly failed.

## 3. *Malign global elite: Exploitation*

- Origo.hu [followed up](#) (887 interactions) once more on George Soros' post-pandemic economic relief with an [interview](#) with Novoszáth Péter and Boros Imre, both well-known economists. The economists argue that the plan would force a usury-based credit bond into the European Union. They added that it is also unclear which investor groups from which part of the world, what religion and culture is really behind this plan - to whom Europe can become forever committed, suggesting animosity towards any other culture and "the Other" in general. They even went as far as saying that Soros wants to buy himself the ability to buy history, saying: "It is also certain that the construction has never remained a purely financial solution from the history of György Soros - whether from the time of the fighting against Napoleon, the Crimean War or the abolition



of slavery. Lenders, explicitly or implicitly, also bought the right to shape history with their money”.

#### 4. *Failing West: Hypocrisy*

In another article, PestiSracok.hu [reported](#) (2000 interactions) on a [video](#) (572 interactions) from Fidesz’ communication director, Hollik Istvan, in which he criticized opposition figures and demanded apologies for their actions and statements against the government nationally and internationally. In the video he said that there were opposition MPs who envisioned a coup d’état and shamed others who called the government a dictatorship. He stressed that these were clearly lies since the PM will give back all special powers to the Parliament invested in the Government for the COVID-19 crisis at the end of May.

### **Wider social media conversation around COVID-19**

- Pro-government propaganda page on Facebook, [ELÉG](#) (Enough) (152873 likes on Facebook) shared an edited video (802 interactions, 226 comments and 835 shares) from a news program of independent broadcaster ATV in which opposition MP Gergely Arató compared the number of COVID-19 deaths in CEE countries and accidentally told the reporter that “unfortunately, Hungary is doing great from this perspective [of low death tolls]. While a number of pro-government media outlets picked up the unfortunate slip, the aforementioned Facebook page went further, openly suggesting that the opposition is rooting for the virus and wants to see more COVID-19 deaths.
- [Kimondott Igazságok](#) (Outspoken Truths) (17000 likes on Facebook), conspiracy theory page, which has 16975 likes on its Facebook page, picked up a [video](#) from a relatively unknown Hungarian YouTube channel that has been watched by close to 50,000 viewers, the conspiracy homepage suggested the recurring theory concerning the involvement of the Wuhan Institute of Virology in the creation of the novel coronavirus.
- [Kimondott Igazságok](#) (Outspoken Truths) Facebook page cited Reuters, about the recent decision of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to order an indefinite halt for the Seattle Coronavirus Assessment Network, a project also supported by the Gates Foundation that offered testing kits for home use. While Kimondott Igazságok correctly pointed out that the home testing program was shut down over issues related to regulation, categorization and safety, the title and the beginning of their article suggested that the FDA intervened to stop an illegal vaccination programme promoted by Bill Gates. Another conspiracy



theory on the page was related to Bill Gates' research in COVID-19, and the fact his organisation purchased the blood of healed patients, to set up a genetic bank and create a so called "new man" genetically modifying people to his specifications. Those who will be rich enough will be able to participate in his "New World" will restart humanity with 300 other rich families.

- János Drábik, far-right conspiracy theorist (19867 likes on Facebook) [said](#) in a YouTube video that COVID-19 is an engineered virus that was artificially developed in the United States, most likely in Ford Detrick, a U.S. Army medical command in Maryland. Drábik also suggested a potential connection between why U.S-Iranian tensions "suddenly" ceased to be covered by the international mainstream media and how Bill and Melinda Gates might have been financially involved in the creation of the virus. Going further, Drábik claimed that global business elites might have been instrumental in seizing the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity to reshape the global economic order.
- A VilagHelyzete Blog (1700 likes on Facebook) and [Valóság amit tudnod kell \(75000 likes on Facebook\)](#), fringe pro-Kremlin homepages, extensively [analysed](#) (1200 interactions) Elon Musk's recent tweet and podcast, calling it a "truthbomb" that proved the COVID-19 pandemic was used to manipulate people for the benefit of powers behind the scenes. In Musk's video, he says that there is an overdiagnosis of COVID-19 and every death is counted as being due to COVID-19 whatever its real causes.
- Vilagfigyelo.com and Vilaghelyzete.com (37000 likes on Facebook) [wrote](#) an article on how the reduction of the population has already begun, and COVID-19 was just the opening blow. It argues that the "elite" in the USA developed the virus, with Bill Gates coordinating the genocidal project. It also speculates that this was just the beginning before the real attack arrives. Both the social media post and the respective video were ultimately aimed at Bill Gates, David Rockefeller and the U.S. business elite as creators of the virus and the schemes to exploit it.
- Uj Vilagtudat (New World Conscience) [posted](#) (1100 interactions) that an Italian lawmaker is demanding the arrest of Bill Gates for "vaccine crimes" and his role in globalism.
- Many major conspiracy theory pages, Kimondott igazságok (Outspoken truth) (17043 likes on Facebook), Titok terminal (Secret Terminal) (50000 likes on Facebook) and Vilag helyzete (Status of the world) (37000 likes on Facebook) [posted](#) an article in which they argue that the virus was planned by China, because there is evidence that the virus acts more aggressively in the West



than it did in China. This proves, they claim, that China planned the pandemic all along to become the dominant power in the world.

- Alternatív hírek (Alternative News) (2100 likes on Facebook), Világ helyzete (Status of the world) and Titkok szigete (Island of secrets) (33000 likes on Facebook) [posted](#) a video (13100 views) with a German doctor, who claims that doctors respect hierarchies too much to think for themselves and will obey the laws that are told to follow. In the video he also says that practically all deaths were counted as COVID-19 regardless of their true causes, and that is why the numbers are not representative.

### Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- Origo.hu's Facebook page (70 interactions and 54 comments) [positioned](#) Italy as an example of mismanagement of the COVID-19 crisis. It claimed that thanks to the bad decisions of its left-wing government, Italy was plunged into an even deeper crisis in the midst of the pandemic. Surprisingly most of the comments appear to criticise the article for its right-wing bias.
- FIDESZ' Facebook page strongly [condemned](#) (2000 interactions) the behaviour of the opposition during the pandemic. The post claimed that the left obstructed efforts to mitigate the crisis by not supporting the COVID-19 emergency powers law, and instead reported Hungary to Brussels and spread anti-Hungarian disinformation internationally.

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## KOSOVO

### Summary

This week, one case of misinformation was identified in Kosovo, adding to those noted in previous reporting periods.

### Dis-/Mis-information themes

#### 1. *Misinformation: other*

- An article in Gazeta Mejdani (with a reach of 10,000+ and 14,000 followers on Facebook) [reported](#) that a second wave of COVID-19 had once again hit China, putting 108 million people under quarantine "Coronavirus hits China again, this time terribly: Over 108 million people have been quarantined!". The information



is sourced from Bloomberg however, the details appear to be reported out of context, framing a prognosis/projection as a simple fact, and skewing the original reporting on which it claims to be based.

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## LATVIA

### Summary

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

HSA output during the reporting period was extremely critical of the government, noting flaws in its economic response to the crisis and claiming it was using the virus to increase its powers. Several articles about the failure and collapse of the EU were also observed.

These stories were identified by expert groups and Zinc's internal monitoring. The narratives identified in disinformation stories this week have previously been observed in Latvia. Social media conversation around these articles was not observed.

These stories were also not discussed by mainstream media coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19. Articles focused on the charges against a Latvian man who spread disinformation, false health claims supported by the Latvian Homeopathic Association, and a video circulating on Latvian social media containing false claims about the virus.

Conversation on social media mainly linked to well-regarded media sources. Conversation concerned the development of the pandemic in Latvia, life after lockdown and the pandemic situation in other countries. The number of posts containing disinformation and misinformation compared to previous reporting periods was low, but those containing misinformation referenced COVID-19 conspiracy theories.

### Dis-/Misinformation themes

#### 4. *Malign Global Elite: Reshaping Society*

One story of interest was flagged by the CWG partner organisation in Latvia:



- Baltnews claimed that the government is using the COVID-19 crisis to increase its powers, claiming it was the latest stage in Latvia's "journey away from democracy" (17 interactions).

#### 5. *Failing West: EU Failure*

One story of interest was flagged by Zinc's media monitoring:

- Sputnik Latvia, citing comments from regular contributor Aleksandr Novosich, claimed that larger EU countries will prevent the union from supporting Latvia after the crisis and will look to protect themselves first (212 interactions).

#### 6. *Failing West: EU Collapse*

One story of interest was flagged by the CWG partner organisation in Latvia:

- Sputnik Latvia cited the opinion of a Latvian businessman who claimed that, following the pandemic, the EU will split, Latvia will become bankrupt and the country integrated into a united Eurasian space (70 interactions).

### **Wider social media conversation around COVID-19**

- Conversation on social media linked mainly to well-regarded media sources. Conversation concerned the development of the pandemic in Latvia, life after lockdown and the pandemic situation in other countries.
- There were fewer posts containing disinformation and misinformation compared to the previous reporting period. Posts that contained misinformation referenced conspiracy theories, most notably that the virus was a human creation.
- A post on RODINA.LV - ФОРУМ РУССКОЙ ЛАТВИИ. (RODINA.LV – RUSSIAN LATVIAN FORUM), a group with 4,300 members, linked a video claiming that the coronavirus was a special operation initiated by Putin, Trump and Xi Jinping in order to eradicate the "secret world order". Moreover, a post on Наконец-то United Latvija! (Finally, United Latvia!), a group with 1,500 members, linked to a video of Sergei Kurginyan, leader of the Russian nationalist movement 'Essence of Time'. In the video Kurginyan claims that the virus could be synthetic and could have originated in Fort Detrick, USA. The same video was also seen in a Lithuanian group.



- A post on Covid-19 Latvija, a group with 3,900 members, shared a post from the Facebook page Источник (Source), which claimed that Bill Gates' vaccines had been ruinous, paralysing 496,000 children.

### Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- LSM, as well as nra.lv, la.lv and Delfi, published an article on the charging of Nik Endziņš, a Latvian man who called for the extermination of Chinese people and spread disinformation about the pandemic. Endziņš faces a maximum of two years in prison for hooliganism, and up to five years in prison for inciting national hatred on the Internet (18 interactions).
- Jauns published an article on the Latvian Homeopathic Association, who were criticised for spreading false health claims after stating that Covid-19 could be effectively treated with a solution containing an arsenic (34 interactions).
- Delfi reported that a video of Dietrich Klinghardt, a physician known for practicing alternative medicine, was circulating on Latvian social media. The article stated that in the video Klinghardt promotes hydroxychloroquine as a cure to COVID-19 and gave credence to the theory that 5G has contributed to the spread of the virus (16 interactions).

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## LITHUANIA

### Summary

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

Hostile state media reported mainly on the easing of lockdown restrictions and government statements about the pandemic, publishing no articles that were deemed disinformation. Fringe media site Laisvas Laikraštis continued to claim that a COVID-19 foundation ran by ex-president Dalia Grybauskaitė is exhibiting illegal activity.

This story was identified by the CWG partner organisation. There was no social media conversation identified that specifically concerned this narrative.

Conversation on social media was mainly factual, often linking to trusted media sources. Posts often concerned the lockdown relaxations and the state of the pandemic in other countries. Posts containing disinformation and misinformation



referenced the theory that the number of COVID-19 deaths is being exaggerated, as well as COVID-19 conspiracy theories, especially theories surrounding vaccinations.

Articles about coronavirus disinformation in the Lithuania media reported on the potential dangers of anti-vax disinformation, the volumes of COVID-19 disinformation in Lithuania and conspiracy theories spread by sources close to the Kremlin.

## Disinformation themes

### 1. *Failing West: Incompetence*

One story of interest was flagged by the CWG partner organisation in Lithuania:

- An article on fringe media site *Laisvas laikraštis* claimed that Lithuanian prosecutors are refusing to start an investigation regarding the supposedly illegal activities of a foundation aimed at fighting the effects of COVID-19 ran by ex-president Dalia Grybauskaitė (interactions unavailable).

## Wider social media conversation around COVID-19

- Conversation on social media was mainly factual, often linking to trusted media sources. Posts often concerned the lockdown relaxations and the state of the pandemic in other countries. Several posts contained videos or articles that were critical of Neil Ferguson and Imperial's COVID-19 modelling, while several groups mocked the news that Lithuania had assigned €100,000 to medics fighting COVID-19 in the US.
- Posts containing disinformation and misinformation referenced the theory that the number of COVID-19 deaths is being exaggerated, as well as COVID-19 conspiracy theories, especially theories surrounding vaccinations.
- A post on UNFOLLOW 15min.lt, a group with 46,500 members, shared a screenshot claiming that funeral homes were forcing relatives to sign papers stating that their relatives had died of COVID-19, as the Lithuanian state "needs to receive more financial support from the EU". The post received over 300 interactions (flagged by the CWG partner organisation in Lithuania).
- Another post on UNFOLLOW 15min.lt, linked to a video claiming that a cult of elites in the US were behind lockdown measures and were planning the mandatory vaccination of citizens. The video promoted the debunked theory that vaccines can cause autism. Moreover, a post on Висагинас - без цензуры.



(Visaginas – without censor.), a group with 5000 members, [linked](#) to a video claiming that Bill Gates and the Clinton Foundation had created the virus in order to enforce mass vaccination and human chipping, while another video [posted](#) on Русская Литва (Russian Lithuania), a group with 15,000 members, supported the theory that Bill Gates wants to vaccinate and chip the world's population and that those who don't get vaccinated will face discrimination.

- Русская Литва (Russian Lithuania) [linked](#) to a video of Sergei Kurginyan, leader of the Russian nationalist movement 'Essence of Time'. In the video Kurginyan claims that the virus could be synthetic and could have originated in Fort Detrick, USA. The same video was also seen in a Latvian group during the reporting period. Another post in the group [linked](#) to a video also claiming that the virus had been created in a lab and gave credence to the theory that it was created in an American lab in Ukraine.

### Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- 15min [reported](#) that vaccination efforts may be threatened by a lack of trust in vaccines promoted by anti-vax disinformation (320 interactions).
- Diena [reported](#) that, according to the Lithuanian military, the number of COVID-19 disinformation cases in the country remains high, despite the number of COVID-19 cases in the country falling (0 interactions).

Obzor [reported](#) that the EU Commission has established links between conspiracy theories and sources that are close to the Kremlin (0 interactions).

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## MOLDOVA

### Summary

This week, a number of narrative trends have been identified, with themes including: 'Misinformation' (via a report on an alleged survey claiming that Moldovans do not believe in the situation as it has been presented to them, and a Sputnik.md article suggesting that Italian and British leaders do not think that a vaccine will soon be discovered); 'Failing West' (with the suggestion that the WHO is incompetent); 'Malign Global Elite' (in articles from the often-cited Flux.md, implicating Bill Gates and George Soros in COVID-19).

### Dis-/Mis-information themes



1. *Misinformation: Expert advice; 5G*

- Sputnik.md (more than 4.5 million visits in the past six months according to SimilarWeb data) posted an article headlined “Warning: It is not known when and if there will be a coronavirus vaccine”. Whilst this may be somewhat correct, the article stresses that both the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte have stated that no vaccines against COVID-19 will be discovered soon. Sputnik Moldova says that these premieres have conveyed that the world must adapt in order to live with COVID-19 and that it cannot wait to be saved by developing a vaccine. This story also overlaps with a narrative that suggests a ‘Failing West’ and the incompetence of western/liberal states.
- An article on the kp.md daily website was headlined “You are lying: Moldovans are sure that the coronavirus is an invention, that they are infected through tests and that these are the machinations of the world's rich”. [Claiming](#) to present the findings of a survey, it states that 50% of Moldovans think COVID-19 is simply a common flu, that the crisis has served to destroy the country’s economy, and that 5G antennae are complicit in COVID-19’s spread. The findings are attributed to an “association” that has done a “sociological survey”. 186 shares on Facebook.

2. *Failing West: EU Failure; Incompetence*

- A Sputnik.md article citing RIA Novosti [states](#) that Donald Trump sent a strong message to the World Health Organization (WHO), threatening that the US would give up its membership of that body if reforms were not made. The article suggests that the WHO is incompetent and has not taken sufficient action against COVID-19.

3. *Malign Global Elite: Reshaping Society, Exploitation*

- Flux.md again [implicated](#) George Soros in COVID-19, this time in an article with inflammatory imagery, arguing that people working at Soros-funded ‘OpenDemocracy’ are using the COVID-19 crisis to push their “anti-family agenda”.
- The same website, Flux.md, also [implicated](#) Bill Gates in COVID-19, suggesting that he is preparing a vaccine, which he apparently admits could lead to hundreds of thousands of people being killed or injured. The article featured a video, stating “Bill Gates admits 700,000 people will be injured or killed by his coronavirus vaccines”.



## MONTENEGRO

### Summary

Disinformation, misinformation and conspiracy theories are identified through Zinc's monitoring of COVID-19 related coverage, as promoted by hostile state media and other outlets.

In this reporting period, Zinc identified three relevant disinformation narratives: Reframing Russia (Russian success); Moral Decline (Religious freedom); and Conflict (COVID-19 war).

COVID-19 coverage in pro-HSA media largely focused on the fact that the quarantine was now being relaxed. Prior to this decision, they commented on the unauthorised procession in Nikšić on 13 May in honour of St Vasilije Ostroški and the subsequent arrest of Joanikije Mićović, the leading Serbian Orthodox bishop, for breaking lockdown rules.

In wider media coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19, the majority of coverage came from state broadcaster Radio i Televizija Crne Gore (RTCG, Radio and Television of Montenegro). This commented on media literacy and how it can be used to fight disinformation, as well as the role of the Church in guiding the public and keeping them informed.

On social media, users mostly focused on the end of lockdown and individuals' experiences, with many concluding that they now missed the peace and quiet. Users also reflected on the procession in honour of St Vasilije Ostroški and the detention of Bishop Joanikije.

### Dis-/Mis-information themes

#### 1. *Reframing Russia: Russian success*

- Pro-Russian outlet [in4s](#) covered the story of how Russia built 16 hospitals in just two months, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### 2. *Moral decline: Religious freedom*



- Pro-Russian outlet [Borba](#) ran a story on how the government is using the COVID-19 lockdown as a pretext to ‘crack down’ on the Church and its followers. The accusations covered in the article were made by the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, who fiercely condemned the detention of Joanikije Mićović, detained the previous day for participating in a procession to celebrate St Vasilije Ostroški’s Day (72 engagements).
- The most engaged-with story in this period, from pro-Russian outlet [in4s](#), also covered the demonstrations against the arrest of Bishop Joanikije (8,342 engagements). However, this story was not framed as an attack on religious freedom.

### 3. *Conflict: COVID-19 war*

- Pro-Russian outlet [in4s](#) amplified a story from Austrian media, running an article on how NATO is trying to provoke Moscow in the midst of a pandemic by running military manoeuvres near the Russian border (52 engagements). They also covered a [story](#) on Russian submarines being well-equipped to protect against the virus (49 engagements).

## **Wider social media conversation around COVID-19**

- Social media posts in Montenegro, in the covered period predominantly focused on what life will be like after quarantine. Several users proudly shared the fact that Podgorica is now a COVID-19 free zone. Equally, the arrest of the Serbian Orthodox Bishop was commented on by a few users.
- Amongst the most-engaged with [tweets](#) came from Aivo Orav, EU ambassador to Montenegro, who documented the delivery of EU-funded medical equipment as a donation to Montenegro (119 engagements).
- The fact that Podgorica was proclaimed COVID-19 free on 14 May was shared by a lot of users. The original [tweet](#) came from the Montenegrin Institute for Public Health (368 engagements).
- Another predominant theme in the period of interest was the fact that the quarantine has been lifted and how this affects people’s lives. Some tweeted they missed the quarantine and the quiet sounds of nature because the traffic is now becoming unbearable.
- Equally, the protest against the arrest of Bishop Joanikije was mentioned by pro-Kremlin media. The online portal Crnogorci [tweeted](#) Prime Minister Duško



Marković's statement in which he stated that Montenegrins should serve their own country, not somebody else's, pointing out that 26 Montenegrin police officers were hurt in the arrest of the bishop. This is a reference to the fact that Bishop Joanikije is a senior member of the Serbian Orthodox Church, which has been accused of favouring the interests of Serbs over Montenegrins, leading to tensions between the two nations. (142 engagements).

## Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- RTCG, the state-owned broadcaster, ran a [story](#) on how the Orthodox Church has been active in spreading disinformation in Montenegro. They analysed the data produced by the Centre for Democratic Transition, a Podgorica-based think tank which judged that while the media in Montenegro has served the public interest, the Church was an active participant in spreading disinformation, as they routinely gave advice on behaviour which could negatively affect the health of citizens (81 engagements).
- RTCG also ran an article [claiming](#) that media literacy programmes could be the answer to stopping disinformation, a story that was also picked up by the independent daily [Vijesti](#). According to the article, 7 out of 10 Montenegrin citizens recognise improving media literacy as a long-term solution to this problem.

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## NORTH MACEDONIA

### Summary

During this reporting period, mis- and disinformation stories in North Macedonia fell broadly into the following themes: 'Misinformation' (largely focussed on 5G); 'Malign Global Elite' (including two articles highlighting alleged Satanist conspiracies); 'Conflict' (with one article subtly suggesting, largely through misleading reporting, that China and America are set for war). There appears to have been a slight reduction in 'Reframing Russia' narratives in this period. Those implicating global elites in COVID-19, however, remain present, as does misinformation.

### Dis-/Misinformation themes

#### 1. *Misinformation: 5G*

- A blog post on the website [Horoskop-krajnicki](#) claimed that the motherboards of 5G antennae contain the word 'COV 19'. This conspiracy theory was noted by CWG partner organisations in the previous reporting period.



- Similarly, a post on the Kukuriku website entitled “Conspiracy theory - The coronavirus is a scam, as evidenced by a \$10 banknote”, [claimed](#) that the present pandemic was planned and that the ten-dollar Australian banknote is proof of this; COVID-19 is, the article alleges, being transmitted by 5G to serve the ends of a secret society of billionaires. This content therefore also contains elements of the ‘malign global elite’ narrative, below. It has been shared on three Facebook pages/groups with approximately 80,000 followers.

## 2. *Malign Global Elite: Reshaping Society*

- A Facebook page named ‘Macedonia and Russia Orthodox Union’ used an article regarding a possible new wave of COVID-19 to [suggest](#) that Satanists are preparing a second wave of a supposed global-fascist media virus.
- The comments of Italian MP Sara Cunial [continue](#) to gain attention in the region. Vesnik reported that Cunial had called on colleagues to oppose plans for mandatory vaccination, and repeated her claim that behind such efforts stand “corrupted elites, deep state” and people such as Bill Gates, whom she alleges has been working on a policy of depopulation. The article features an embedded video and has been shared on six Facebook pages/groups with approx 325,000 followers.
- Online news outlet Sloboden Svet [featured](#) an article by the “eminent” Russian political scientist Leonid Savin (published, it says, on the “Internet portal “Geopolitics””), connecting COVID-19 to Bill Gates, vaccination, microchipping and Satanism. It has been liked 413 times and shared on four Facebook pages/groups with up to approximately 30,000 followers.

## 3. *Conflict: War*

- The Popara website [reported](#) on the possibility of an economic war between the USA and China. As previously with Popara content, the main misinformation element of this content appears to be the headline: “A new war against/between China and America: It will be like a Nuclear Bomb!”. It begins: “A new war has erupted between the United States and China over the sale of American chips from the Chinese company Huawei, and China and the United States are threatening each other with the first economic war in which one of the world's largest companies could be destroyed”.

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## POLAND

### Summary



During this reporting period, misinformation continued to be notable, with themes including 5G (YouTube videos suggesting its association with COVID-19) and the suggestion that the crisis has been overstated. Stories falling under the theme of 'Malign Global Elite', suggesting that elites wish to reshape society amidst the pandemic, were also present. Both of these implicated Bill Gates. It is notable that much of the aforementioned content was drawn from Facebook and YouTube.

## Dis-/Mis-information themes

### 1. *Misinformation: 5G; hoax.*

- A YouTube video posted to a number of Facebook groups (46,944 views) suggested that 5G aids the spread of COVID-19. Another YouTube video meanwhile suggested that a 5G nanochip may be hidden in any future vaccine against COVID-19. The latter video has received around 51,000 views.
- The Facebook group 'I Don't Believe in Coronavirus' (which has close to 68,000 members) continues to be active. It recently implied that COVID-19 is not so dangerous, in a post suggesting that people who are infected but have no symptoms may not be able to infect others, posting this link to an English site.

### 2. *Malign Global elite: Reshaping Society*

- A Facebook post from 'Wolne Media' framed in a misleading manner an interview between Bill Gates and CNBC TV, to suggest that Gates has publicly admitted that his vaccines will kill or ruin the health of hundreds of thousands of people. This has since been branded as False Information by Facebook.

A YouTube video from the channel wRealu24 meanwhile suggested that Bill Gates will be arrested by the Italian government, drawing on a quote from an Italian parliamentarian to promote the narrative that that country wishes to arrest Gates. It suggests that Gates is posing as a "philanthropic saviour and healer of the world". The video has had over 192,000 views.

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## ROMANIA

### Summary

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



During this monitoring period, we identified a range of disinformation stories in Romania. Disinformation stories are identified either through our groups flagging them or through monitoring coverage of COVID-19 in hostile state media outlets.

There has been a continued prevalence of narratives describing mainstream media outlets as being effectively bribed by the government, as well as claiming that the novel coronavirus is less harmful than a flu.

One of the latest and most criticised measures taken by the Romanian government to control the pandemic following the end of the lockdown is represented by the recently imposed temperature checks at the entrance in supermarkets and other stores. These are conducted by the security staff of the stores, and are mandatory for every person trying to enter the premises.

During this monitoring period, these stories broadly fell into four key themes: state violence, conspiracy theories about Bill Gates, the threat of dictatorship, and Chinese obstructionism. Most of these stories were identified by both Zinc's media monitoring and CWG expert groups.

Some of the narratives identified in disinformation stories this monitoring period have previously been observed in Romania, such as the theory concerning a planned pandemic and anti-vaccination stances. There was social media commentary around some of these narratives, as well as on recent developments such as the mandatory thermo-scanning at the entrances of shops and other public spaces.

Mainstream media covered two of the disinformation strands, focusing on debunking conspiracy theories shared on Romanian Facebook groups, the automatic diagnosis of COVID-19 for all patients and, alternatively, the refusal to treat patients that suffer from other ailments.

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

### **Dis-/Misinformation themes**

#### *1. Malign global elite; Reshaping society*

This story has been identified by both Zinc and CWG partner organisations.

- Gandeste [published](#) a blog post in which the author claims that Romania is a globalist experiment of a New World Order, in which liberties are being taken



away from people one by one. Although he does not deny the existence of the virus, the author claims that the COVID-19 death toll has been falsified in order to scare people into foregoing their liberties in addition to communist disinformation that has allegedly been spread by the Romanian secret services. Further, the post states that the scanning of temperatures when entering public spaces is a step in this alleged experiment, in order to make people get used to the exercise of arbitrary power, as a precursor to the establishment of a dictatorship. (648 interactions)

## 2. *Misinformation; Hoax*

The following stories were identified by Zinc:

- Stiri pe Surse [claims](#) that a Romanian Archbishop who tested positive for COVID-19 and subsequently passed away did not die because of the virus but rather because of a heart attack. The article claims that his death certificate falsely cited the cause of death as COVID-19 in order to promote public hysteria and to keep people in their homes. (1700 interactions)
- Stiri pe Surse [published](#) an article concerning a Romanian doctor's Facebook post in which he claims that COVID-19 has been blown out of proportion. He states that the mortality rate is much lower than that reported by the relevant authorities and that the common flu kills more people than COVID-19. The doctor has been previously known for highly controversial statements on the topic of the ongoing pandemic, stating routinely that the novel coronavirus is much less harmful than a regular flu, and even declaring on a previous occasion that he would be glad to [infect himself](#) to prove his point. In the most recent declarations, he stated once again that this coronavirus has killed in Romania less people than the flu, declaring that only 200 people have died, much less than the official figure of 1100. Additionally, he evoked the narrative that doctors are systematically pressured or even bribed to conceal the truth regarding this epidemic in Romania. (4100 interactions)
- Luju [published](#) an article which quotes two controversial doctors in Romania, known for promoting false cures, in which they claim that the pandemic is not as serious as the authorities make it out to be. They also state that scanning people's temperature when entering shops and other public spaces is illegal and unconstitutional, that the mortality rates are much lower than previously believed, that herd immunity will develop, and that we will not need a vaccine. (2400 interactions)



- Justitiarul [published](#) a highly vitriolic bog post in which it accuse the Romanian President and several ministers and experts of genocide against Romanian people. The claims include the following: that the pandemic is a hoax and that implementing lockdown measures had no scientific or legal basis, that people have died in the waiting line for hospitals that refused to treat them because they did not have COVID-19, that they suppressed core civil rights and liberties and were discriminatory towards the older population. (15,200 interactions)

### 3. *Failing West; Corruption*

The following stories were identified by Zinc:

- Active News [reports](#) on the statement of a well-known lawyer and critic of the government, claiming that the country-wide state of alert should be ended. He claims that the restrictions imposed by the government are undermining democracy in Romania and that people's liberties are being infringed. He hints that the restrictions on gatherings are intended to prevent people from protesting against a tyrannical government. (920 interactions)
- Sputnik Romania [claims](#) that the police is acting with brutality against people that refuse to have their temperature checked. Following the emergence of a video depicting policemen forcefully detaining an elderly person, several influencers opposing the lockdown have reacted with posts that harshly criticise the authorities and their measures for the state of alert. The video in question only shows the sequence when the person does seem indeed to be detained with the use of force by some policemen. However, there is no detail on the justification of their action, this encouraging speculation by several influencers presenting the action as an example of the states' repressive means of implementing the temperature checks. In a statement, the representatives of the police have stated that the person appearing in the video was detained after behaving aggressively after not being let into a store following his refusal of getting his temperature checked.

### 4. *Misinformation; Cure*

The following story was identified by Zinc:

- Stiri pe Surse [claims](#) that a Chinese research team is on course to produce a drug that could cure COVID-19 and immunize people to the virus, thus foregoing the need for a vaccine. (154 interactions)

### 5. *Conflict; Bio-lab*



The following story was identified by Zinc:

- Ziaristii [reports](#) that China is opposed to an investigation into the origin of COVID-19 and the way in which it spread so rapidly. The article hints that the statement of the Chinese Minister for External Affairs that such an investigation would be premature is in fact a cover-up for the truth, that the virus was deliberately created in Wuhan. (4600 interactions)

#### 6. *Miscellaneous*

The following stories were identified by Zinc:

- Luju [reports](#) that patients who are not COVID-19 positive are not treated in hospitals and that many of them are simply left to die by medical staff. (517 interactions)
- Active News [published](#) an article on the Facebook post of a well-known doctor, who regularly post controversial opinions, claims that the state is wrong in imposing thermo-scanning at the entrances of public spaces, suggesting that the infrared temperature gun may cause serious medical afflictions. (520 interactions)
- Stiri pe Surse [claims](#) that thermo-scanning and the alleged notion of a legal temperature limit could lead to several categories of people being entirely banned from entering shops. These include women who are ovulating or pregnant and some cancer patients, among others. The article also suggests that the government is incompetent in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. (384 interactions)
- Ziaristii [reported](#) that American professors that are working on developing a COVID-19 vaccine are on course for becoming billionaires. This is because they have bought shares in Moderna, an American pharmaceutical company, whose value has increased by 300%. (255 interactions)
- Newsweek Romania [claims](#) that China is experiencing a new wave of COVID-19 and that 100 million people have been placed under strict lockdown once again. (13,500 interactions)

### **Wider social media conversation around COVID-19**



- The majority of posts relating to the coronavirus linked to trusted local and international media sources.
- Many continue to interact with posts or stories claiming that the pandemic was planned or a hoax. On some highly populated groups, Facebook users seemed to agree, referring to various cases in which death certificates had allegedly been falsified to cite COVID-19 as the cause of death.
- A new Facebook post by journalist Sorina Matei is [linked](#) to an article written on her website developing the narrative that the majority of the press has been essentially bribed by the government to present favourable coverage of its actions and the official version regarding the risks of the virus. The article is detailing how many funds has each outlet received. Journalist Sorina Matei is routinely posting articles that challenge the official reports concerning the coronavirus pandemic. She has previously criticized the government's lockdown, and published several posts promoting misinformation. (100 shares)
- A new YouTube video by influencer and former MP Metin Cerchez is [presenting](#) a plethora of disinformation narratives and proposes a convoluted conspiracy theory explaining the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In the view of the author, the coronavirus pandemic originated in a laboratory in Wuhan, that was financed by Anthony Fauci. The pandemic was planned by a masonic occult that dominates the world and aims to rip off financial benefits from the crisis. Other disinformation narratives are present as well, like the idea that mainstream media outlets are being bribed by the government. (15,500 views)
- The post from Facebook page "Gandeste Romania" is [linked](#) to an article from a website with the same name. The content of the article is [building](#) on the narrative describing the COVID-19 pandemic as exaggerated and presented in a sensationalistic way by the media. The experts warning about the dangers posed by the new virus are deemed unprofessional and politically affiliated, while the ones that oppose the lockdown represent the real professionals, that dare to oppose the original version presented by the authorities.
- The omission of churches from the list of places which are allowed to re-open after the lockdown is lifted continues to be discussed on several groups and orthodox influencer pages on Facebook, with people commenting that this is a breach of their freedom of conscience and of religion.
- The case of the supposed police brutality towards an individual that refused to have his temperature taken has been widely discussed on social media.



Notably, Florian Capsali, anti-Western influencer [has reacted](#) on facebook (158 shares) as well as journalist [Mircea Badea](#) (529 shares).

### Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- Stiri pe Surse [reports](#) on the statement made by State Secretary Raed Arafat that the Romanian secret services are monitoring various websites which are spreading fake news and disinformation stories.
- Digi24 [published](#) an article denouncing priests from the Republic of Moldova who are spreading disinformation among churchgoers. These representatives of the Church of Moldova are encouraging people to refuse vaccination, and promoting conspiracy theories related to Bill Gates and 5G.
- Digi24 [reports](#) that news of Bill Gates' arrest, that have been shared widely in Romanian Facebook groups are fake. The article discusses various conspiracy theories and argues that these are rooted in larger narratives which are spread on social media.
- Ziare [published](#) an article on the President's statement that there are irresponsible agitators that are spreading conspiracy theories and aiming create social tensions.
- Libertatea [reports](#) that Raed Arafat, who is in charge of administrating Romania's medical response to COVID-19, shared fake news during a televised interview. Arafat had mentioned wanting to avoid a situation like that in Japan, where allegedly new cases had increased by 1000% after relaxing lockdown measures. This was shown to be fake news.

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## SERBIA

### Summary

Disinformation, misinformation and conspiracy theories are identified through Zinc Network's monitoring of COVID-19 related coverage as promoted by hostile state media and other outlets.

In this reporting period, Zinc identified one relevant disinformation narrative: malign global elite (reshaping society). The pro-government tabloid Blic amplified claims by an Italian MP, Sara Cunial, that Bill Gates has been seeking to reduce the world



population and establish his personal domination over the world under the ruse of seeking a vaccine for COVID-19.

On social media, users mostly focused on whether the elections should be held and what consequences this might have, some reflect on the lockdown period in Serbia.

Wider media coverage of disinformation around COVID-19 included media commentary about a piece of Australian research into whether the virus was man-made and the existence of a fake voter registration portal that was in reality a data harvesting tool.

### Dis-/Mis-information themes

#### 1. *Malign global elite: reshaping society*

- The most engaged-with article in the period of interest came from the pro-government tabloid [Alo](#). It amplified accusations by an Italian MP, Sara Cunial, that Bill Gates has sterilised millions of women in Africa and paralysed half a million children in India, in the service of his goal of “turning people into slaves”. (13,249 engagements). The article also reports that Cunial linked COVID-19 to 5G. It did not take a position on the truth of these claims. Note that in April 2019, Cunial was expelled from her party, the Five Star Movement, due to her support for anti-scientific conspiracy theories.

### Wider social media conversation around COVID-19

- The upcoming elections were among the most spoken-about topics in the reporting period once again. The most active user on this topic was academic and politician Janko Veselinović, who [tweeted](#) a warning that whoever engages in election campaigning while new cases are still emerging is directly responsible for endangering the lives of their fellow citizens.
- Many users reflected on the lockdown and pandemic. President Vučić’s [statement](#) that post-crisis Serbia will have the best recovery package in history was widely ridiculed.
- In light of Vučić’s statement that a flare-up of COVID-19 cases may see elections deprioritised, opposition politician Saša Radulović, of the Dosta je bilo (Enough is enough) movement, [tweeted](#) that this statement signifies an imminent second period of lockdown, implying that a state of emergency serves the interests of those in power.



## Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- The most engaged-with story in the period covered came from the pro-government tabloid [Blic](#), which reported details of a report from Australia about whether or not the virus might be artificial (431 engagements). The story was also picked up by a range of outlets such as [Telegraf](#), [Informer](#) and [Alo](#).
  - The [Serbian government's official webpage](#) warned citizens about a fraudulent voter registration portal, that is in reality a data-collection exercise. The warning was shared by Russian state-funded [Sputnik](#) (105 engagements) and independent dailies such as [Danas](#).
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## SLOVAKIA

### Summary

During this reporting period, mis- and disinformation content in Slovakia highlighted by the CWG fell under the following themes: misinformation (masks are unhealthy; testing may not work; anti-vaxers are unjustly criticised); malign global elites (Bill Gates and others are using the crisis to exploit others and reshape society); Failing West (the EU is failing). Additionally, it was suggested that big tech companies are censoring free speech, on the side of the World Health Organization (WHO).

### Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Misinformation: expert advice; cure.*
  - Picus Capital – a news website – featured an article [suggesting](#) that face masks slowly kill people. Former Slovak MP Peter Marček (who is openly pro-Russian), it reports, is writing an open letter regarding the situation in Slovakia to the PM and President of the Parliament. In the letter he also claims that facemasks are slowly, but surely killing people, weakening immune systems, harming the respiratory tract, lungs, and brain due to the lack of oxygen.
  - On the Infovojna site, an article [suggested](#) that tests for COVID-19 do not necessarily work. Featuring an 'explanatory' video, it explains two scientific theories, and uses this as a basis to suggest that viruses are not actually contagious, and that testing cannot truly detect whether someone is sick.
  - A Zem a Vek article [reported](#) the misinformation that Madagascar has developed an organic cure for COVID-19. The article also suggested that the World Health Organisation (WHO) offered that country millions of dollars to poison this cure. The article cites a source called 'Tanzania Perspective'.



- A further Zem a Vek article with the headline “New focus of propaganda: “antivaxers” [criticised](#) those who attacks ‘anti-vaxers’, suggesting that such criticism comes at the point when pharmaceutical cartels are seeking big profits from mass vaccination and are seeking to make it mandatory.
- On Facebook, Zem a Vek [reported](#) that Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg has been interrogated over Facebook’s alleged censorship of vaccination critics. The post – featuring video - has had 260 shares and over 11000 views.

## 2. *Malign Global Elites: Reshaping Society; exploitation*

- In Hlavny Dennik, an article reported on an Italian MP’s criticism of that Bill Gates (mentioned in previous CWG reports), and builds on this to [suggest](#) that she is asking that he is arrested for “crimes against humanity”, including his anti-COVID-19 efforts.
- An article from Hlavne Spravy also [suggested](#) that warnings over a possible second wave of COVID-19 are being used simply to spread fear. The article accuses the WHO of spreading this fear and suggests that it may all be for the end goal of getting people vaccinated. The author also implicates Bill Gates as someone who could earn billions from a vaccine.

## 3. *Failing West: EU failure*

- An article on the website Napalete, [quoted](#) Slovak MEP Milan Uhrík from the extremist party ĽSNS suggesting that whilst Brussels is going to help Slovakia to handle the economic situation as a result of COVID-19, it will also take the money back in taxes; Brussels just wants to abuse the crisis to increase its power over the state (1200 interactions on Facebook).

## 4. *Misc: Tech Censorship*

A Hlavny Dennik article [claims](#) that Big Tech companies like YouTube are censoring alternative opinions regarding COVID-19; they remove everything that differs from the recommendations of WHO.

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## UKRAINE

### Summary



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

This report sees a continuation of a number of previously-identified narratives: COVID-19 is less dangerous than seasonal flu; Ukrainian farmers cannot earn money as quarantine hits hard; the Ukrainian medical system is in ruins because medical reform has failed; Ukraine is dealing poorly with the pandemic; the easing of quarantine has led to massive new infections in Ukraine; the liberal model of the world order is fading; and the world is changing, so there is no point in economic sanctions against Russia.

Social media conversation focused on the death of a Ukrainian doctor diagnosed with COVID-19. Other major topics of discussion centred around mass vaccination and the Chief Sanitary Doctor of Ukraine announcing Ukrainians can count on the opening of the beach season this year. Disinformation narratives around COVID-19 testing, COVID-19 cures and treatments, and COVID-19 being a hoax were also observed proliferating in the Ukrainian social media environment.

Media coverage of disinformation concentrated on the Security Service's report that it had exposed 370 Internet agitators who distributed false claims about the coronavirus, 17 under the guidance from the Russian Federation. Other coverage was once again given to countering dangerous health-related misconceptions about COVID-19, including narratives that zinc can cure the virus, or that religious temples are immune to COVID-19 penetration. Popular conspiracy theories, including Bill Gates's involvement in COVID-19's 'creation' were also present this reporting period.

### **Dis-/Misinformation themes**

#### *1. REFRAMING RUSSIA: Russophobia*

- Flagged by the CWG partner organisation, occupying authorities in Crimea pushed for lifting sanctions. Radio Sputnik's telegram channel, with over 9K followers, cited Crimea's governor Sergey Aksyonov, who highlighted the pointlessness of sanctions in a post-pandemic world. (8K views).

#### *2. MISINFORMATION: Hoax*

- HSA outlet Ukraina.ru published an article citing American doctors Dan Erickson and Artin Massihi who claimed COVID-19 is less dangerous than seasonal flu (24 interactions).

#### *3. MISCELLANEOUS: Ukrainian government failure*



- Strana and Hvylya engaged with the narrative that Ukrainian farmers are unable to sell their products due to lockdown restrictions. (377 FB interactions).
- Strana published an article that attacked medical, stating that it has to be terminated (204 interactions). Another article from Strana stated that no matter what kind of medical reform is implemented in Ukraine, health care in the country will not improve (185 interactions).
- From-ua claimed that Ukrainian officials see mass testing as an opportunity to 'steal' and 'siphon off money' (213 interactions).
- From-ua, with no factual basis, also reported that easing of quarantine has led to a spike in new infections in Ukraine (50 interactions).
- HSA outlet Ukraina.ru warned that Russia might have to find a way to deal with a flow of infected refugees from Ukraine. Vladimir Kornilov, the source of the story, stated that due to 'complete lack of proper COVID-19 testing in Ukraine' it will be highly challenging to determine whether people intending to cross the border with Russia are healthy (0 interactions).
- Flagged by the CWG partner organisation, Pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine continue to target the Ukrainian government in regard to quarantine in temporary occupied territories. Natalia Korolevska, former Minister of Social Policy under President Yanukovich and current member of Opposition Platform – For Life, placed the responsibility for Ukrainians in occupied territories solely on the government in Kyiv, erasing occupying authorities from the picture (674 interactions).

#### 4. *FAILING WEST: liberal model of world order is failing*

- HSA outlet Ukraina.ru published an article featuring prominent Russian propagandist Rostislav Ishchenko that the liberal model of world order is slowly reaching oblivion (80 interactions).

### **Wider social media conversation around COVID-19**

- The death of Ukrainian doctor Maksim Belinov diagnosed with COVID-19 was a popular topic of conversation on social media. While some posts on Facebook appealed to treat quarantine security measures responsibly, others used the occasion to criticise authorities for an insufficient supply of protection gear. Another common topic of discussion was the statement of Chief Sanitary



Doctor of Ukraine announcing Ukrainians can count on the opening of the beach season this year. The decision was arrived at based on evidence that sea salt, together with ultraviolet radiation, kills the causative agent of coronavirus disease. Social media users, however, seriously doubted the scientific logic of it. Social media reaction towards mass COVID-19 testing in Ukraine was awash with misunderstanding and negative commentary.

- Two Facebook groups contained posts about yet another deadly virus found in China – bird flu (N5H1). Upon opening the links from the posts, however, it becomes evident that the virus does not transmit to humans. Nevertheless, posts on Зе!Команда (Ze!Team), a group with 99K members, and Не Будь Байджим (Don't be indifferent), a group with 167K members, were able to attract more than 300 likes in total. Commenters were blaming China for the current crisis.
- Renewed interest was observed in a statement by doctor from Rivne, who claimed that COVID-19 does not qualify as a severely hazardous infection and insisted that panic around the pandemic is a well thought through experiment. This story was noted in previous reporting periods. During the reporting period, two groups shared articles on the doctor's comments; pro-Zelensky's public support groups ze2019.com, a group with 57,000 members, and Зе!Команда (Ze!Team).
- A social media vlogger from Lviv begun pushing the narrative that authorities in Ukraine are conducting genocide of Ukrainian nation by being hesitant to exit quarantine. In a video from 17 May, that was viewed 66K times, the author reports that no active COVID-19 patients were found after paying a personal visit to local Ternopil's hospitals which led him to believe that the pandemic is fake. The video was picked up by local Ternopil's Facebook pages and groups. On 18 May, the vlogger calls on Ukrainians to against what he calls a 'genocide'. The video was viewed 11,000 times and shared 577 times.
- Украина – Народная Инициатива (Ukraine – People Initiative public group), a group with 24,000 members) contained a post about what was called "serious diagnostic error" in COVID-19 treatment and that COVID-19 can be treated with simple Aspirin. Identical message appears on the group Из Харькова с душой (From Kharkiv with love), and paged Новости Украины (News Ukraine) and News Ukraine Ukr1.
- bn24.biz.ua, an online media outlet that publishes sensationalist, clickbait news, produced an article which portrayed the decision of central government to update the category of people that are obligated to test for COVID-19 testing



as unnecessary. The message was reposted by вороги народу (enemies of people), public group with 253,000 members, where it received over 170 interactions. Only a slight percentage of comments pointed out there is nothing wrong with the decision, however, the rest were unanimously against it. Other posts informing about the commencement of mass COVID-19 testing in Ukraine, even on neutral Facebook groups and pages, were overshadowed by 'angry face' reactions.

- A website belonging to former president Poroshenko's TV channel Pryamiy published an article about Poroshenko's initiative to construct a COVID-19 testing laboratory in Western Ukraine, which had been disregarded by president Zelensky. According to the news story, Zelensky is trying to prevent Poroshenko from winning political support. The story was shared to the TV channel's Facebook page, receiving 601 shares, Про Мову (About Language), receiving 187 shares, and to 100 other FB groups and pages, the vast majority of which are supportive of Poroshenko.
- Метеора (Meteor), a Facebook page with 124,000 followers, posted a video featuring British conspiracy theorist David Icke who draws a parallel between city of Wuhan installing 5G towers and the spread of COVID-19 in the city. The video has been shared more than 5,590 times since 18 May.
- A video appeared on Однокласники (Classmates), a Facebook group with 134,000 members, in the narrator tries to convince the viewer that COVID-19 is a 'biological weapon' that was rolled out at exactly the 'right' time when Chinese economy began to overtake the American economy, asserting that COVID-19 is product of American creation.
- Replyua, a page with over 1,000,000 followers, posted an opinion that city authorities in Ukraine are in collusion with public transport carriers and using the quarantine regulations to their own benefit by making people pay extra (67 interactions).

### Coverage of dis/misinformation relating to COVID-19

- Texty.org, an independent media outlet, produced an article in which debunked the misconception that COVID-19 is less dangerous than seasonal flu (112 FB interactions).
- The Security Service of Ukraine informed citizens that it had detected 370 COVID-19 'fake agitators' disseminating disinformation, 17 of which were alleged to be under the command of Russia. Many mainstream Ukrainian outlets engaged with



the story, including Fakty, Interfax, Espresso, TSN, Censor, Detector Media, and Ukrinform.

StopFake debunked several major disinformation narratives, including that COVID-19 tests kits are contaminated (28 interactions), or that data on the real number of deaths in New York is understated (44 interactions), or that COVID-19 has not impacted mortality rate in France (39 interactions).



**NARRATIVES OBSERVED**

**Overview**

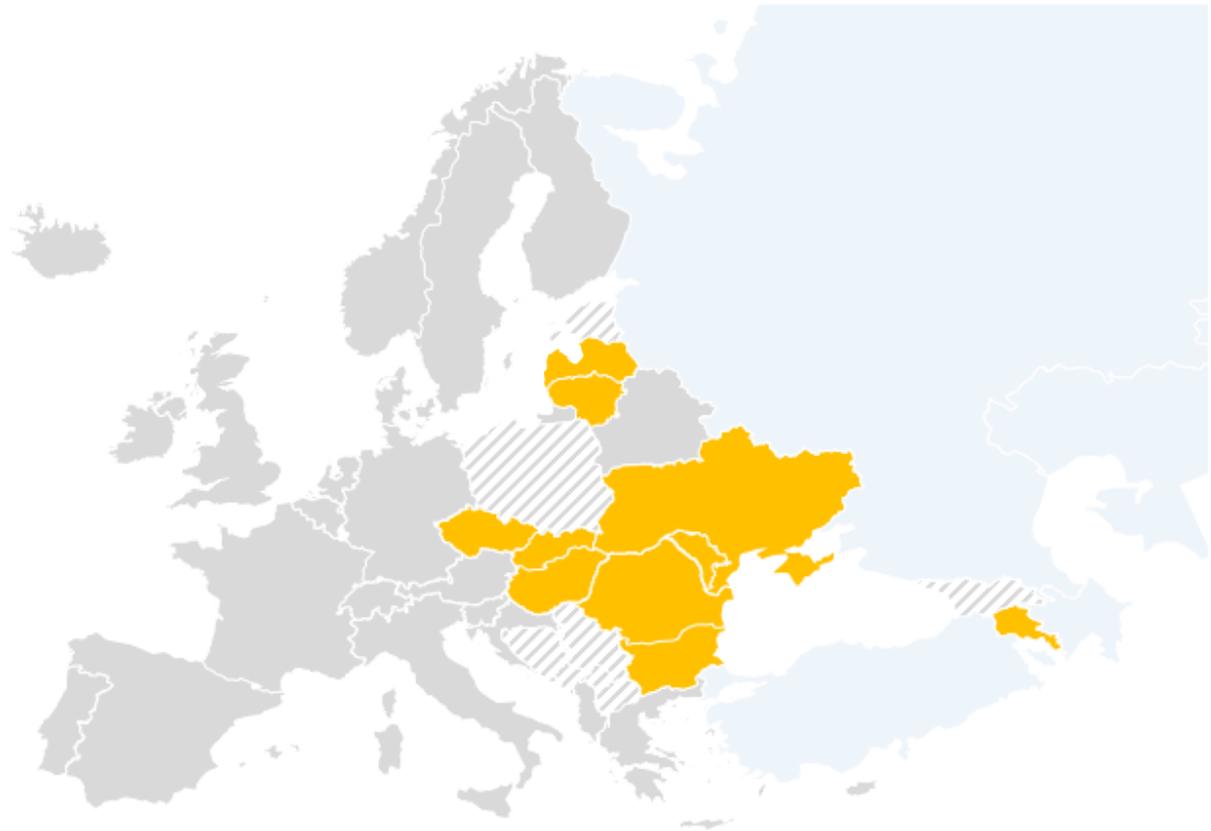
		AM	BG	CZ	EE	GE	HU	KO	LT	LV	MD	MO	NM	PL	RO	SB	SK	UA
<b><u>FAILING WEST</u></b>	EU collapse			x						x	x							
	EU failure						x			x							x	
	Incompetence	x					x		x		x				x			x
	Hypocrisy						x											
	Corruption	x							x						x			
	Exploitation														x			
	<i>General/other</i>		x															
<b><u>CONFLICT</u></b>	Bio-lab					x			x						x			
	NATO as vector																	
	COVID-19 war			x	x							x	x					
	<i>General/other</i>	x																
<b><u>MALIGN ELITE</u></b>	Exploitation				x		x											x
	Reshaping society			x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
	<i>General/other</i>																	
<b><u>MORAL DECLINE</u></b>	Divine protection																	
	Divine punishment																	
	Religious freedom	x		x		x						x						
	Failed values					x	x											
	<i>General/other</i>																	
<b><u>REFRAMING RUSSIA</u></b>	Russian success		x									x						
	Global leadership																	
	Russophobia				x													x
	<i>General/other</i>																	
<b><u>MISINFORMATION</u></b>	Hoax													x	x			x
	5G	x	x		x	x				x	x		x		x			
	Cure	x			x	x				x					x		x	
	Expert advice	x	x		x	x					x				x		x	
	<i>General/other</i>								x									
<b><u>MISCELLANEOUS</u></b>					x		x		x	x					x	x	x	x



## NARRATIVES

The summaries in the following section are based on content submitted for the previous two reports; those of 15 and 19 May.

### 1. FAILING WEST



 Narrative is present in country

 Hashed area indicates narrative is not present in country

Sub-narratives that constitute this narrative:

**a. EU collapse: The EU is collapsing due to COVID-19**

**b. EU failure: The EU is failing in its duty to help other states deal with COVID-19**



- c. Incompetence: Western/liberal actors' response to COVID-19 is incompetent**
- d. Hypocrisy: Western/liberal actors' response to COVID-19 is hypocritical**
- e. Corruption: Western/liberal actors' response to COVID-19 is corrupt**
- f. Exploitation: States and global institutions are taking advantage of COVID-19 to exploit others**

All of the above were present in this reporting period.

### **Comparison of narratives across countries**

Narratives suggesting that the West is failing and dealing inadequately with COVID-19 continue to be observed in most countries covered by the CWG. In this reporting period, cases suggesting that the European Union is failing and/or working to nefarious ends were notable in Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Latvia, Estonia, Romania and Hungary. Meanwhile, cases pointing at the alleged incompetence of national-level governments and/or leaders (including regarding 'lockdown' measures) were notable in Bulgaria, Estonia, Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania and Ukraine. A large number of cases within the 'Failing West' theme were identified in Ukraine and Hungary; in the former, these tend to focus on national-level failure (of Ukraine and other states), whilst in Hungary, these tend to focus on both perceived EU failure and the failure of other states and actors.

#### *EU failure, collapse and incompetence*

Content pointing to alleged EU failure, collapse and incompetence at the macro level was notable in Latvia (e.g. Baltnews [reported](#) that Latvia cannot rely on the EU to save its transit industry, and that EU unity is fading), Estonia (a post on a page with 1000+ followers, linked to an article claiming that COVID-19 could lead to the collapse of EU), Moldova (Sputnik suggested, for example, that France is at odds with Italy over the easing of COVID-19-related restrictions – with European solidarity at stake; Flux.md suggested that COVID-19 was weakening both Germany and the EU), and Georgia (on 13 May GeWorld published an interview with the head of the 'Georgian Idea' party, developing the idea that the EU is not the future for Georgia; the site also ran a separate interview in which a guest also suggested that the EU has no future, as proven by COVID-19). Eurosceptic narratives were also found in Romania, targeted mostly at Germany's alleged self-interest in agreeing with and implementing financial support measures, and [suggesting](#) that the EU has no future. In Ukraine, too, Mykhailo



Pogrebinsky, a pro-Russian political analyst who appears regularly on Russian state-controlled channels and channels linked to Medvedchuk, claimed that there is now “a great amount of doubt in liberal democracy, globalism and so on being the gold standard.” Kremlin-backed channels have on many occasions used the pandemic to promote the idea that liberal democracy is flawed.

Such content appeared to be most prominent in Hungary, however, with outlets suggesting that the EU fails to protect its members and has betrayed Hungary (which is in any case controlled, it is alleged, by liberals linked to Soros), and one lingering topic being that European liberals are engaged in a vast disinformation campaign both in Brussels and in member states. Recently, European politicians’ criticisms of Hungary have also been attacked by fringe conspiracy sites, and – as part of continuing attempts to discredit international criticism of emergency legislation in Hungary - pro-government outlets have slammed Hungarian NGOs and others, branding critics part of the “Soros network”. 888.hu has also asserted that the country has been treated unfairly by the European Parliament, as have outlets such as HirTv.au, M1 and Fidesz Facebook pages.

#### *Criticism of lockdown measures*

This period also saw multiple cases of content critical of ‘lockdown’ measures. Notable examples were seen in Czechia (where [Sputnik](#) quoted a politician’s criticism of European Commission recommendations on the easing of restrictions) and Estonia (where a Sputnik radio item [suggested](#) that the government had turned the country into a police state).

#### *Domestic incompetence*

In a similar vein, some hostile content also suggested that governments were incompetent and undeserving of trust at the national level. In some cases (e.g. Lithuania, Ukraine, Georgia, Romania), content pointed at the government of the same country in which that content was circulating. In Lithuania, such content seemed prevalent, including suggestions that the government is “destroying” the healthcare system. In Romania, it was suggested that the government is exaggerating COVID-19 in order to (e.g.) pursue various business deals, and that the Prime Minister has [established](#) a dictatorship in Romania through COVID-19 measures (the Facebook page of Luj.ro meanwhile continues to criticise the president). Similarly, in Ukraine, it was suggested that people with COVID-19 were unsupported by the government, that the authorities were incompetent, dishonest or both (plans for exiting quarantine were [framed](#) as incompetent). Indeed, anti-government content was notable in Ukraine in this period, and – as reported on 15 May – outlets such as Strana.ua also produced content to suggest that the breakaway republics are handling the crisis well. Meanwhile, in countries such as Hungary and Serbia pro-government outlets have



praised their leaders' handling of COVID-19. In Hungary, for example, ATV.hu suggested that the country had been congratulated by Japan.

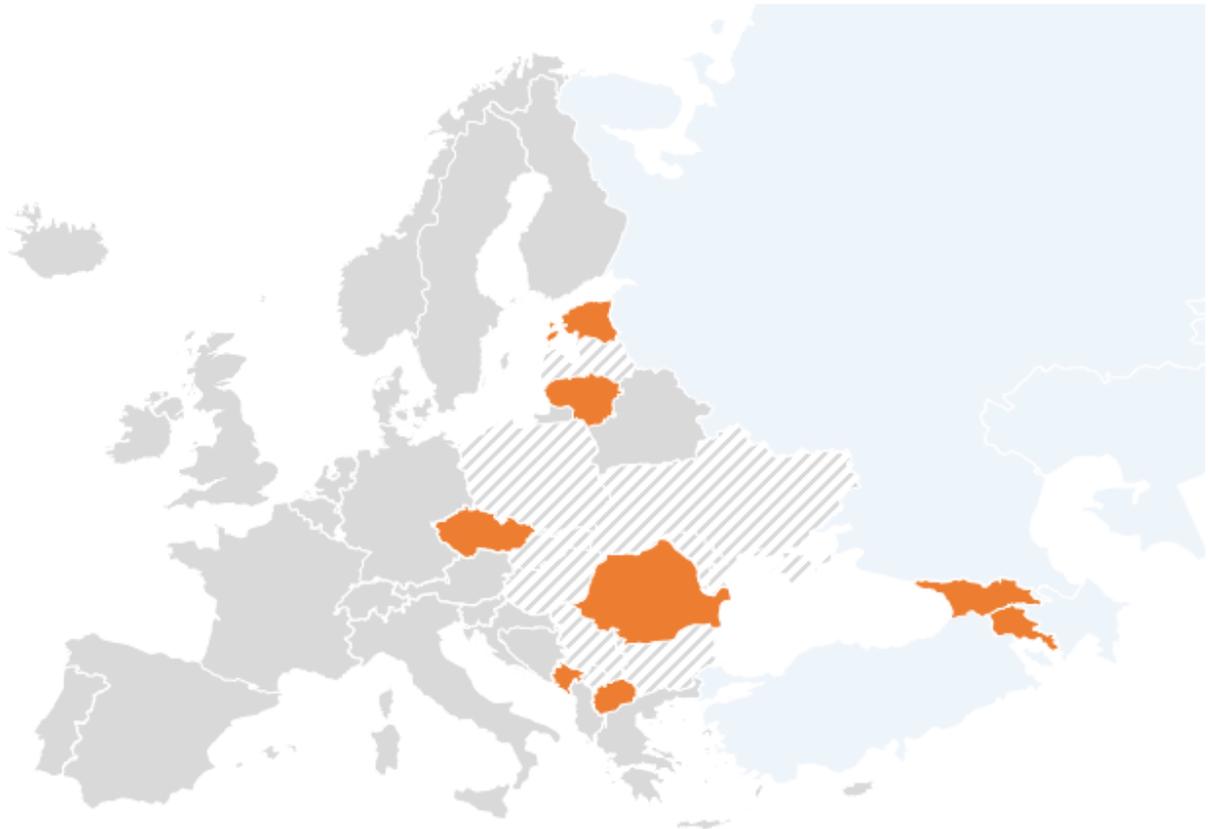
### *Criticism of other governments*

Finally, there were cases of content serving to undermine the response of national governments in other countries. In Bulgaria, News Front reported on a Russia Today interview with a British doctor, who is said to have stated that the NHS is struggling with COVID-19. Such content, combined with that which suggests that people in European states have had enough of 'lockdown', support the 'Failing West' narrative.

'Failing West' has been present in the majority of territories covered by the CWG for some time. However, its presence in both Ukraine and Hungary is notable. It has also received support through social media conversation, notably in Hungary (e.g. via the Fidesz Facebook page and government-related social media), where conversation around tensions with the European Parliament (relating to Hungary's COVID-19 law) has been significant. In Ukraine too, the 'Failing west' narrative has spread not only via news outlets but directly via politicians such as Vadim Rabinovich, on Facebook.



## 2. CONFLICT



 Narrative is present in country

 Hashed area indicates narrative is not present in country

Sub-narratives that fall within this theme:

- a. **Bio-lab: A state or global institution created COVID-19 in a laboratory**
- b. **NATO as vector: NATO soldiers are spreading COVID-19**
- c. **COVID-19 war: COVID-19 will be used to provoke or justify military aggression**

All of these sub-narratives were present during this reporting period.



Content falling within the ‘conflict’ theme was identified in a number of countries covered by the CWG, though some of those that feature heavily in other narrative sections – Hungary, for example – are notably (relatively) absent. Areas where content was identified as suggesting that COVID-19 will be used to provoke or justify military aggression included Kosovo and Armenia – it perhaps being significant that both are relatively small countries. In Kosovo, a popular blog (120,000 followers) shared a post suggesting that WWII is imminent, whilst the Bota Sot site ran a piece with a headline suggesting that Russia had a secret plan to divide Kosovo and gain control of resources in the north. Thus, the suggestion that COVID-19 could bring both internal and global conflict was present. In Armenia meanwhile, in a widely-shared TV interview with 168.am, Karen Vardanyan, chief executive officer at the Union of Advanced Technology Enterprises-UATE, suggested that COVID-19 is an element of hybrid warfare; it is part of World War III.

### *NATO*

By contrast, whilst this reporting period featured further content discussing NATO (in particular, responses to comments recently made by NATO’s Jens Stoltenberg regarding misinformation spread by China and Russia), content specifically suggesting that NATO soldiers are spreading COVID-19 in the region was not especially present. In Estonia, the website gid55.ru criticised the country for not cutting its defence budget during the crisis, suggesting that the country was “taking up arms against Russia” despite the coronavirus crisis. The article received 717 interactions, and could be regarded as indirectly suggesting that military conflict may come from COVID-19.

### *Virus made in a lab*

Meanwhile, the suggestion that COVID-19 was made in a lab persists in countries including Czechia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova and Romania. Many of these stories (Czechia, Slovakia, Ukraine) suggest that the virus has an American origin. In Ukraine, on his [YouTube channel](#), Viktor Medvedchuk pursued the subject of “American biolabs” in Ukraine, having previously demanded the authorities investigate them. Though Medvedchuk has not explicitly linked the labs to COVID-19, the timing of his claims implies an alleged connection to COVID-19. This narrative has been strong in Ukraine in previous reporting periods, as also in Georgia, for example. Indeed, Sputnik Georgia recently published quotes from Sergei Lavrov, making reference to the Lugar Lab in that country and suggesting that the US is not transparent about its activities. Lavrov’s comments were also promoted by Sputnik in Moldova.



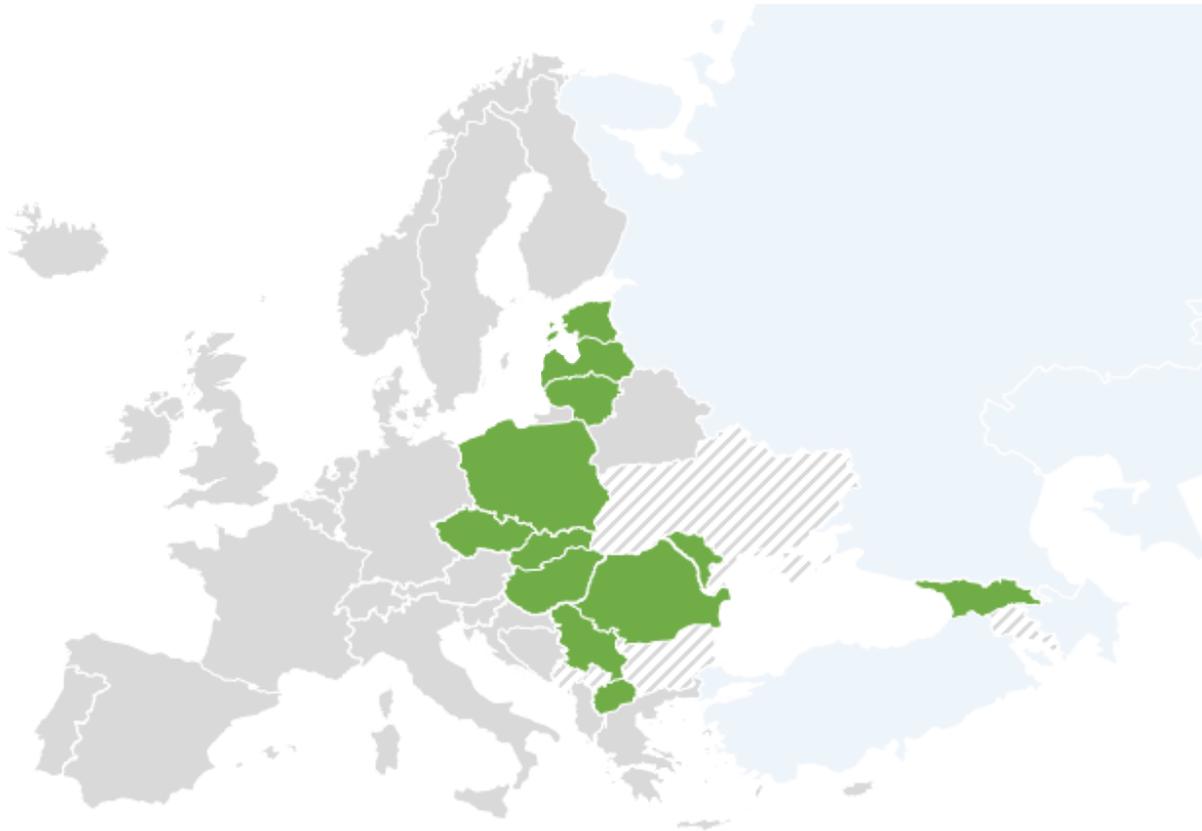
In a slightly different vein, in Kosovo, one news outlet posted an article on the disappearance of a scientist who worked at the Wuhan lab. “She has disappeared without trace and cannot be found”, claims the piece, which fuels the conspiracy theory that the Chinese government may be responsible for her going missing (and, implicitly, may have something to hide regarding activity at the lab). However, in pointing at China rather than the US, this article is in a minority within this sub-narrative.

The suggestion that the virus was created in a lab has been present in most CWG reports recently. However, it is arguably the case that content pointing to the Tbilisi-based Lugar Lab may be a little less present currently than in recent weeks. ‘Conflict’ narratives also appear notably absent from Hungary, which remains relatively active re: other narratives (concerning e.g. the ‘failing west’ or ‘global elites’).

ON social media, some discussion around NATO was notable in this period (in Estonia for example, and in Lithuania where posts containing disinformation linked to anti-NATO narratives). In Latvia, one video shared on the group Covid-19 Latvija also suggested that it was still too early to determine whether the virus appeared naturally or was created in a lab. Regarding Ukraine, it should be noted that the social media reach of claims made by Viktor Medvedchuk is significant – Medvedchuk has 49,900 subscribers on YouTube, and the aforementioned broadcast in which he pursued the subject of “American biolabs” had rece



### 3. MALIGN GLOBAL ELITE



 Narrative is present in country

 Hashed area indicates narrative is not present in country

Sub-narratives that constitute this narrative:

- a. **Exploitation: Global financial and political elites (including the deep state) are taking advantage of COVID-19 to exploit others**
- b. **Reshaping society: Global financial and political elites (including the deep state) are taking advantage of COVID-19 to reshape society**

Both of the above were present in this reporting period.

#### Comparison of narratives across countries



There was a preponderance of narratives claiming that a malign elite was attempting to take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic, either to benefit themselves politically and financially, or to engage in population engineering on a global scale. These conspiracies sometimes feature specific billionaires, notably Bill Gates and George Soros, and sometimes an unnamed cabal of shadowy puppetmasters. They also often relate to older or broader conspiracy theories, such as the New World Order. They have been observed across almost every market monitored by the CWG.

### *Bill Gates*

Gates features more than any other actor. His support for, and funding of, vaccine development programmes, and his historical comments in favour of curbing global population growth, have led conspiracists of all varieties to imagine him either behind the creation of the pandemic, or at least ready to take advantage of it.

Flux, from Moldova, makes explicit the link between Gates' vaccine development and population reduction, while Infovojna from Slovakia links Gates's vaccines to big pharma, implying that he stands to benefit financially from the pandemic. Asaval-Dasavali, from Georgia, claims that Gates would like to see millions of people die from his so-called vaccines, and (in a separate article), to implant the survivors with microchips.

Gates is often taken to either sit at the pinnacle of power-hungry billionaires, or to be emblematic of them. A video from the Hungarian VNTV places him at the centre of an interlinked web of conspiracies, that COVID-19 is a biological weapon created by the elite to benefit the banks and solidify the elites' control over the world. An article on Slovakian site Zem a Vek places Gates in a position of power in the WHO, as does its fellow Slovakian publication Hlavny Dennik, which also links Gates to Davos, which it accuses of making the decision to shut down the world economy via COVID-19 in January. A Georgian priest is quoted in the newspaper Asaval-Dasavali as saying that Gates founded a secret society a decade ago, along with the Rockefellers, Soros, and others, to use technology and vaccines to reduce the world population. Gates's image is also used to further sensationalise a story on Fort-russ.com in Bulgaria about the link between unemployment and premature death.

Gates is also a bridge to other conspiracy narratives. He is linked to the anti-vax conspiracy by Otevrisvoumysl, a Czechia-based website with readers in Bulgaria. He is linked to the 5G conspiracy by Flux in Moldova, and by ProgressNews in Georgia, which amplified comments to this end by Italian lawmaker Sara Cunial (also amplified by Zem a Vek in Slovakia). Saqinform, also in Georgia, also links Gates to the 5G conspiracy, while comparing the Microsoft founder to Stalin. Staying in Georgia, the



local version of NewsFront linked him to the Lugar Lab, a popular local conspiracy theory that has been amplified on many occasions by Kremlin-backed media.

Also in Georgia, GeWorld links Gates with Pope Francis, who is alleged to also support global vaccination for nefarious ends. Infovojna in Slovakia does the same. The anti-Catholic angle is also emphasised by Flux in Moldova, which accuses Melinda Gates, Bill's wife, of Satanic motives for supporting mass vaccination. A Georgian priest accused Gates of links with the Freemasons, and of trying to kill over 6.5 billion people (with the vaccine, rather than with the virus, which, he claims, is not itself deadly). COVID-19 is the work of "the Talmud-Zionist banking elite", according to North Macedonian portal Sloboden Svet, which depicts Gates, uniquely, as a puppet rather than a controller.

Perhaps most outlandishly of all, Magazin, a North Macedonian online news outlet, accuses Gates of announcing plans to carry out a bioterrorist attack in the future, using out of context footage from a television interview.

### *George Soros*

Second only to Gates in terms of notoriety is George Soros, though the overwhelming majority of Soros-related content originates in Hungary, sometimes directly from the government. PM Viktor Orbán's defence advisor accused Soros' network of NGOs, in consort with the EU and local liberals, of trying to undermine Hungary's border regime. A number of pro-government media outlets amplified comments from government officials accusing Soros and his 'network' of using the pandemic to undermine Hungary. Origo, a government mouthpiece, also accused Soros of controlling Greta Thunberg, in a piece that mocked her appearance on a panel where COVID-19 was discussed.

Either attacking Soros' power and influence or ridiculing his perceived failures is a common strategy in pro-government media in Hungary. PestiSracok, a right-wing pro-government media outlet, claims that Soros pressured the EU into criticising the state of emergency declared by Orbán in response to the crisis, a story also run by Origo. PestiSracok and pro-government newspaper Szazadvég amplified calls for Hungary to reject the so-called coronabonds suggested by Soros as a way to mitigate the post-pandemic financial crisis, and PestiSracok also accused Soros of collaborating with the (opposition-controlled) city government of Budapest to misdirect funds meant to purchase testing kits. 888, a pro-government news outlet, accused Soros of being hungry for power but continually thwarted in his attempts to bring down the Hungarian government.



Minimal non-Hungarian content about Soros was observed. Czech site Pravy Prostor suggests that the pandemic offers Soros the greatest opportunity of his life to reshape the world, while conversely, Flux of Moldova claimed that Soros, a “shadow puppet master”, was worried the crisis would see the end of the EU, “an indispensable institution for the globalist world.”

#### *New world order*

Coverage that named neither Gates nor Soros was also widespread. The Asavali-Dasavali newspaper from Georgia drew on the long-established New World Order conspiracy theory to claim that global elites are using COVID-19 to reduce the world’s population. The New World Order conspiracy was also cited by a Romanian blog, which claimed that the Freemason-led shadow world government planned the pandemic with the intention of spreading fear and destroying civil liberties.

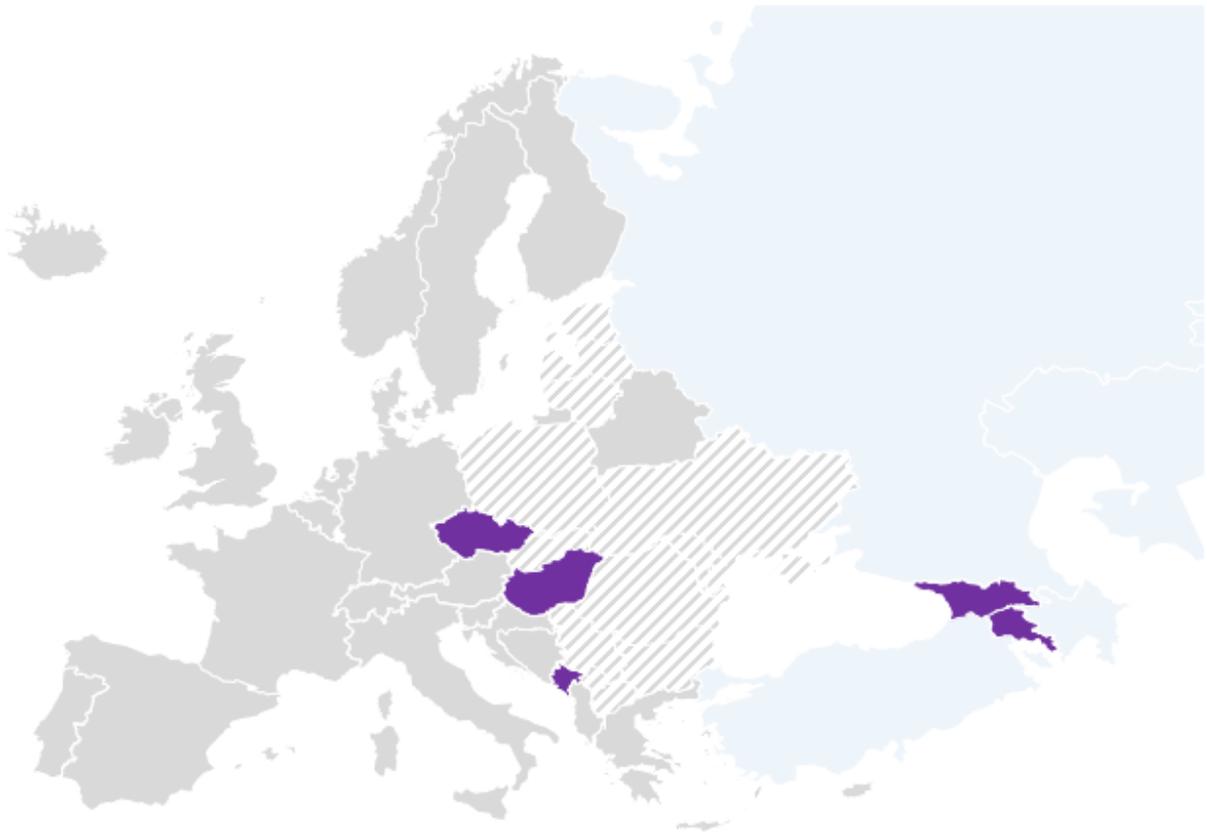
#### *Planned pandemic*

Similar theories, absent the New World Order, were widespread. Puterea of Romania carried the remarks of a former TV host that the pandemic was deliberately engineered to deprive people of their liberties, while in a similar vein, Czech website Nwo accused elites of fomenting panic around COVID-19 to aid population control measures. The Georgian version of News-Front published a letter claiming that COVID-19 is a biological weapon created by globalists to better control populations by electronic surveillance. Aparatorul of Moldova claimed that mass microchipping of humans was being undertaken by ‘globalists’ in response to COVID-19. It also announced that Sweden would be the first country to introduce mandatory chipping.

Kosovan outlet Lajmi i Fundit cited an Italian doctor as claiming that elites have engineered the COVID-19 crisis for financial reasons (he claims the pandemic is a ‘media fraud’), so that they might buy companies cheaply and sell vaccines to everyone.

Finally, Slovakia’s Hlavny Dennik quoted an interview given by Roger Waters of Pink Floyd to RT, in which he claims that COVID-19 has revealed how people need to cooperate, which is impossible when politicians serve corporate interests. These comments are framed in a way that implies the existence of a dark elite conspiracy preventing such co-operation from happening.

## **4. MORAL DECLINE**



Narrative is present in country



Hashed area indicates narrative is not present in country

Sub-narratives that constitute this narrative:

- a. Divine protection: Only God can protect us from COVID-19**
- b. Divine punishment: COVID-19 is a punishment from God**
- c. Religious freedom: Emergency measures against COVID-19 are an attack on religious freedom**
- d. Value failure: COVID-19 has revealed that Western values are obsolete**

Narratives that fall within the CWG's working definition of moral decline were notable mainly in Romania and Georgia in the time period covered by this section. They were also identified in Hungary and Moldova. The most common sub-narrative was that which suggests that emergency measures taken against COVID-19 are an attack on



the church or on religious freedom. In Romania, for example, the omission of churches from the list of places that will be allowed to re-open after the 'lockdown' is lifted has been discussed on several groups and orthodox influencer pages, with people regarding this as a breach of their freedom of conscience and of religion. The suggestion is that denying people access to churches undermines freedom of religion. Given this, some have been rebelling against current precautions; outlets such as Ziaristii [reported](#) on the decision made by the Church of Romania to continue performing Holy Communion using the same cup and spoon for thousands of churchgoers, citing that these are the Orthodox rules.

### *Religious freedom and values*

Falling somewhat within this sub-theme – and that suggesting value failure - it is also being suggested by Orthodox influencers that the COVID-19 crisis is being used as a cover for the promotion of values antithetical to the church; in Romania, Active News claimed that the UN is using funds that it received for tackling the spread of COVID-19 to instead fund and promote abortion. In a similar vein, in Georgia, religious figures have suggested that vaccination may be used to again promote values that the church does not support; [intrepressnews.ge](http://intrepressnews.ge) [reported](#) a suggestion made by Bishop Nikoloz that if people are forced to receive a vaccine, 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”. In Romania, there have also been [suggestions](#) on the site Aparatorul.md - which presents itself as "The leaflet of the Moldovan orthodox jurists' movement" – that the implantation of humans with microchips will become mandatory and that this condition has been imposed by globalists who want to control the world.

### *Religious influencers*

Perhaps not surprisingly, it is notable that disinformation overlapping somewhat with the 'moral decline' category has also been propagated by religious influencers. This is notable in Georgia, where in the newspaper Asaval-Dasavali, the archpriest of the Georgian Orthodox Church stated that years ago Bill Gates created a club with members including Soros and others, which claims to gain control over populations. In the same country, Archpriest Saba was [quoted](#) in national media, similarly saying that billionaires and Freemasons – such as, he alleged, Bill Gates – want to reduce the global population to one billion. The Bishop admitted that he believed those 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. Indeed, some religious influencers are active in the anti-vaccination movement; in Moldova, a



piece from Orthodox blog Saccisv.wordpress.com, featuring distressing imagery, claimed that vaccines include the cells of monkeys and aborted children.

The aforementioned post has had limited impact (13 likes, 2 shares). However, in Romania, some social media conversation around the above narratives was noted (Orthodox influencers acting as agitators, plus related anti-vaccination stances, are not new). The country also recently experienced its first protests against lockdown measures, when around 200 people have gathered in Victoria Square. It's understood that they were rallied by influencers known for their religious, nationalist, anti-Western and anti-globalisation stances.

## 5. REFRAMING RUSSIA



Narrative is present in country

Sub-narratives that constitute this narrative:



a. **Russian sources: Russia is dealing well with COVID-19**  
present in country



**b. Global leadership: Russia is helping other states deal with COVID-19**

**c. Russophobia: Russia is being victimised in relation to COVID-19**

All of the above were present in this reporting period.

### **Comparison of narratives across countries**

Narratives suggesting that Russia is setting high standards in its battle against COVID-19 continue to be observed in multiple states across this reporting period, where pro-Russian or Kremlin-backed outlets depict Moscow as providing moral and scientific leadership in the crisis. A complementary narrative, that Russia's enemies are using the pandemic to try and undermine it, was also widespread.

#### *Russian success*

Narratives of Russian success had two main components: the possible development of a Russian-made vaccine, and the genetic superiority of Russian 'supermen' who have a natural immunity to COVID-19. The former story was reported in North Macedonia in two forms, as two different Russian scientists suggested that a vaccine may be ready in either August or September. The latter story was reported in Bulgaria, and appears to be a selective misreading of quotes by a US-based Bulgarian scientist about the development of antibodies.

In Georgia, Ukraine and Bulgaria, Russian leadership was emphasised. A Georgian portal, GeWorld, suggested that a close relationship with Russia will provide more advantages to Georgia than one with NATO or the EU, including practical support for dealing with COVID-19. In Ukraine, Russian leadership was celebrated more obliquely, in the form of praise for the quarantine measures adopted by the self-declared breakaway republics in the parts of Donbas under occupation by Russian forces and their local proxies. In Bulgaria, the website 24chasa reported that Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić had personally thanked Putin for providing medical aid, framing it as an example of Russia's generosity during the crisis.

#### *Victimising Russia*

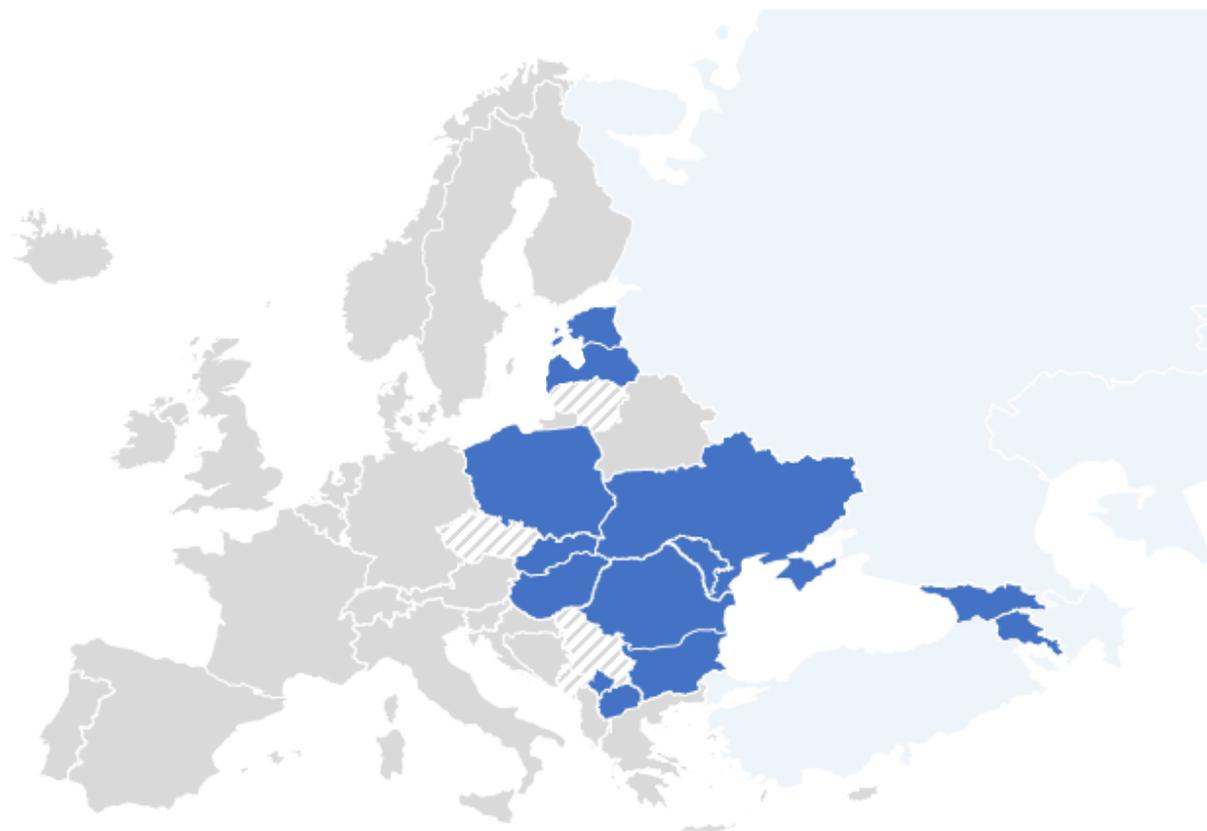
Finally, there was widespread support for the idea that Russia's enemies are attempting to exploit the crisis to victimise Russia or dismiss its achievements. Some of this is defensive: the Georgian version of News-Front blamed "liberal media" for calling attention to Russia's high number of cases, saying that it was merely because Russia was testing more than other states. Portals in Slovakia and Ukraine carried



Maria Zakharova's denial that Russia is responsible for spreading COVID-19 disinformation, and her counter-accusation that the West is itself operating an anti-Russian disinformation campaign.

The majority of these stories came from Latvia, however, where RuBaltic insisted that the cancellation of Victory Day celebrations was a realisation of the Russophobic establishment's dream, and Sputnik attacked Western media for querying Russia's published COVID-19 figures (this story was also observed on tsargrad.tv in Bulgaria). Sputnik also accused the UN, which had singled out Russia and Ukraine as countries that ought to cooperate more closely during the pandemic, of being under the thumb of the US and serving Washington's political agenda.

## 6. MISINFORMATION



 Narrative is present in country

 Hashed area indicates narrative is not present but related narratives that constitute this narrative

- a. **Hoax: COVID-19 does not exist at all, or its effects have been wildly exaggerated**



- b. 5G: COVID-19 is spread through 5G mobile technology**
- c. Cure: COVID-19 can be cured or prevented through non-conventional means**
- d. Expert advice: Official medical and scientific advice about COVID-19 should be ignored**

Narratives that fall within the CWG’s working definition of misinformation were present in the majority of countries during this reporting period. Those suggesting that COVID-19 is a hoax or has been exaggerated were prominent in countries such as Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Czechia, Estonia Hungary, Ukraine, and Romania (where stories pointing to a hoax seem especially prevalent). Often, content propagating this sub-narrative cites supposedly authoritative or influential figures and sources, in order to support claims made. Slovakia’s badatel.net, for example, claimed to [draw on](#) mortality data from the US, whilst in Romania, misinformation from the Iosefina Pascal blog [claimed](#) that an Oxford study shows that the pandemic is over. Similarly, in Lithuania, a video shared by one Facebook group featured clips of doctors and academics offering “alternative” views on COVID-19. Such content often features *international* “experts”, as was the case in a video posted by Lajkit.cz, featuring an American nurse encouraging people to question everything, or in Slovakia’s Hlavne Spravy [quoting](#) the scepticism of the Italian MP Vittorio Sgarbi. Other such content, meanwhile, features national “experts”, with one case in point being Romania’s Antena3 sharing conspiracy-theory-supporting statements from “doctor Vasile Astarastoe”.

#### *The virus is a hoax*

As part of the sub-narrative that COVID-19 is a hoax or has been exaggerated, it is notable that outlets in Czechia and Bulgaria [repeated](#) a narrative found previously in e.g. Armenia, suggesting that there are financial incentives for COVID-19 to be stated by e.g. hospitals and a cause of death.

Cases falling within the sub-narrative suggesting that COVID-19 is a hoax often overlap with those that suggest that expert advice should be ignored. Many such cases in this reporting period related to the dismissal of masks and vaccines. In Hungary, for example, [Doktor Gődény](#), an influencer with 94000 followers, who protests the wearing of face masks, suggested that COVID-19 is nothing more than seasonal flu (and later also [urged](#) followers to join a new Facebook group to advocate for “giving people their lives” back”). In North Macedonia, meanwhile, a Sloboden Svet article undermined any future vaccine, and [implied](#) that the world is living amidst a great “scam”. Significant anti-vaccine content was also observed in e.g. Moldova (including from an orthodox blog) and Poland (where far-right outlet ‘W realu 24’ [posted](#) a video



of a pop star claiming "As long as I'm alive I won't be vaccinated!"). Similarly, in Czechia, the website Nwoo.org said that quarantine and masks are bad for people (as did content from Pravy Prostor). Zem a Vek also ran similar content. However, the greatest amount of content captured suggesting that expert advice should be snubbed was found in Hungary. There, it was suggested by various outlets and Facebook groups that one can catch COVID-19 through wearing masks and that the virus is weaker than the common cold, for example. The government itself also [suggested](#) that a medicine that is being framed as Hungary-invented may cure COVID-19 – a story also promoted by pro-government outlets such as origo.hu.

### *False cures*

Lighter content promoting false cures and non-conventional treatments was also present, including in Kosovo, where a blog post on the website Blue TV/Lajme nga Bota [featured](#) the headline “Albanian surprises Americans and the world: he discovers the cure for coronavirus in Kosovo”, and cites a writer from Kosovo who has mentioned garlic as potentially capable of curing COVID-19. The post has been shared on a Facebook page with 130,000 followers. (73 interactions). One article from Latvia suggested that plasma treatment can cure COVID-19, citing a Lombardy study.

### 5G

Meanwhile, content linking 5G to COVID-19 continues to spread and was recently notable in Czechia, Slovakia, Georgia, Latvia, North Macedonia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Poland. In the former, website AC24 suggested that the dual rise of the disease and 5G is no coincidence, and a Svobodne Noviny article [featured](#) a host of conspiracy theories, including that 5G removes oxygen from surrounding areas. In Slovakia, a video of David Icke also [suggested](#) the same, linking 5G to COVID-19 and other conspiracies. The suggestion that 5G is linked to population control and microchipping was also found in content promoted in Georgia (by newspaper Asaval-Dasavali), where the Facebook page ‘Youth/Juvenile’ [posted](#) a video suggesting that 5G microcircuits are inscribed with the words ‘COV 19’. This latter suggestion also spread in Kosovo, shared on a Facebook page with 130,000 followers. 5G criticism was also found in Latvia, Moldova (propagated by politician Iurie Rosca and others) and in Facebook posts [shared](#) by several groups in Lithuania.

Misinformation is often spread via social media. However, some countries have notably active Facebook groups that may facilitate this spread (a case in point being Poland’s ‘I Don’t Believe in Coronavirus’, which has close to 65,000 members). Indeed, anti-5G material seems especially amenable to circulation via social media, as has notably been the case in Ukraine, for example, where a video showed a former military officer from Russia sharing his views on the technology.



Misinformation of all of the above types is a persistent theme in every CWG report. There are no notable changes or significant newly emerged narratives in this period. Whilst content on false cures seemed to be relatively absent in the CWG reports of 15 and 19 May, this does not appear to represent a significant trend.

## 7. MISC/ADDITIONAL



Narrative is present in country



Hashed area indicates narrative is not present in country

Additional narratives/areas of note within the reports of 15 and 19 May include:

Narratives associating immigration with COVID-19 have been prominent in Hungary, with multiple cases noted in the 15 May report, and that for 19 May, where migration was framed as a threat by outlets such as 888.hu and 444.hu, and others. In the reporting period for 19 May there were also various multiple cases of this narrative. Origo-hu, for example, [upped](#) (2100 interactions) the number of articles that it published focusing on migration and reported that police officers and soldiers had taken action against 154 illegal migrants over the past weekend, stopping them and



taking them to the border. Another Origo.hu story [talks](#) (261 interactions) about how the Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic has assigned the Serbian army to the Serbian-Croatian border so that soldiers can protect the safety and property of the population from illegal migrants.

Migration was also a subject of social media conversation in Hungary in this period; anti-immigration posts appear to have increased, and many have received a significant number of interactions. Hungarian national broadcaster M1, for example, [published](#) an interview with a migration expert blaming the EU for including migration quotas on the agenda for debate (34,681 likes), and the vocal pro-government site Origo.hu, [claimed](#) in a Facebook post that insufficient medical equipment and severe economic downturns following the pandemic will trigger mass migration.

This latter represents an example of an explicit link being made between COVID-19 and migration. It is also notable that such a narrative overlaps with those of 'Failing West' (regarding the alleged failure of the EU and of Western/Liberal actors).



## 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 through 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.



**APPENDIX: HOSTILE STATE MEDIA COVERAGE**

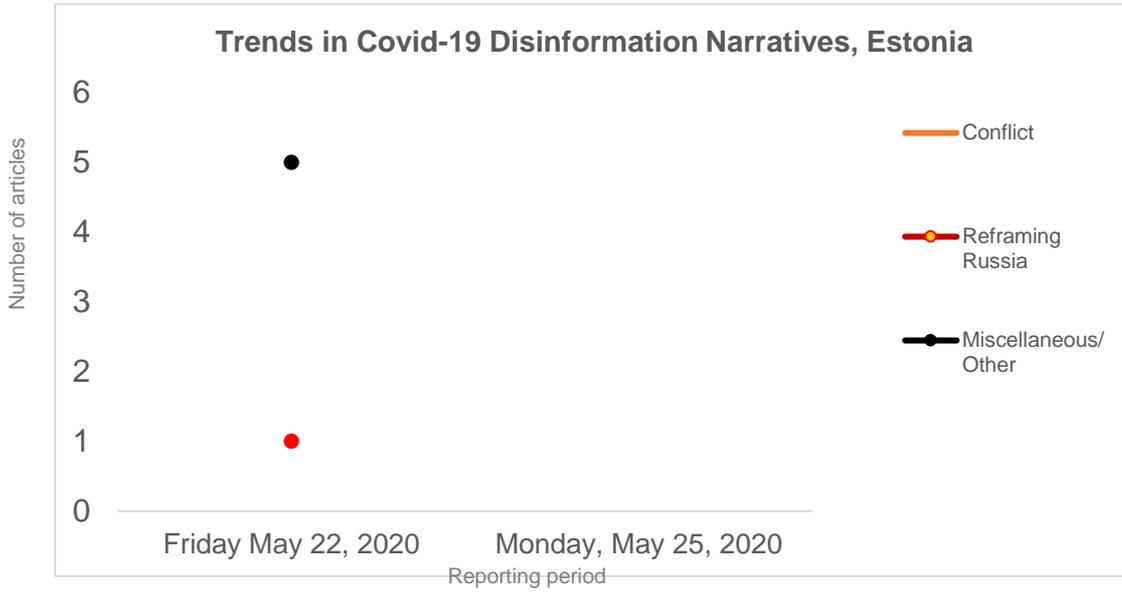
**Estonia**

Cumulative interactions on primary portal relating to this narrative in the last week

0

0

15



**Hungary**

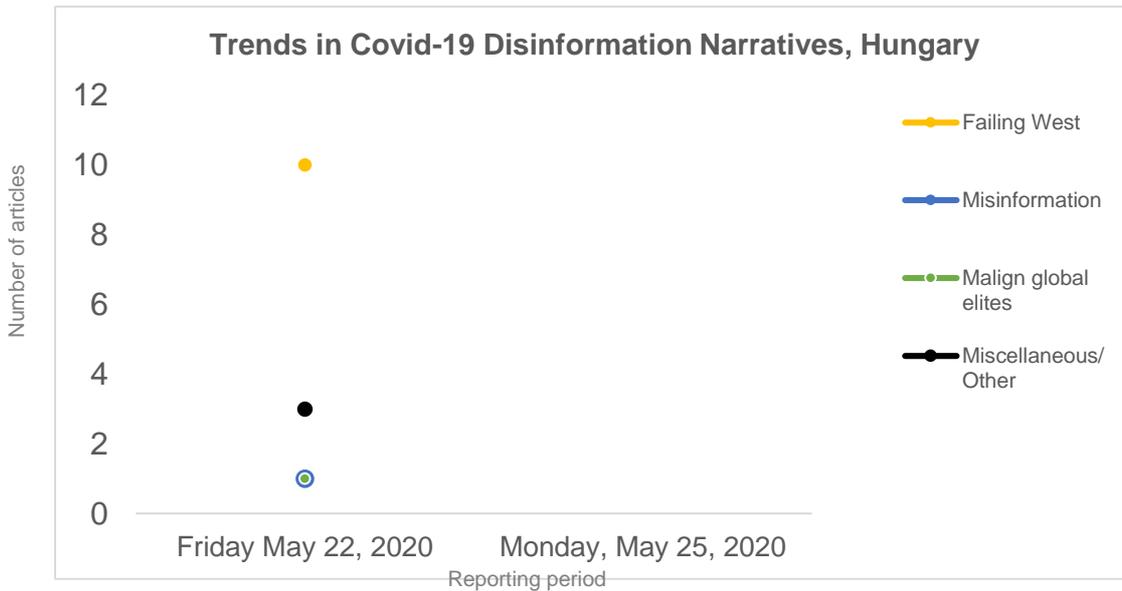
Cumulative interactions on primary portal relating to this narrative in the last week

5943

360

1893

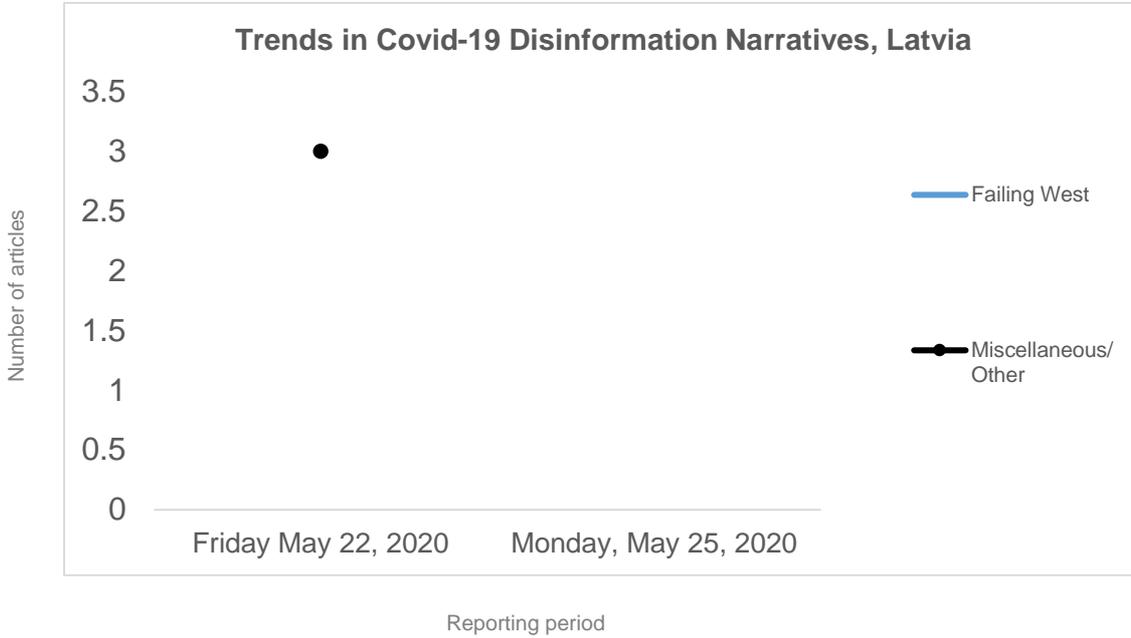
627





### Latvia

Cumulative interactions on primary portal relating to this narrative in the last week

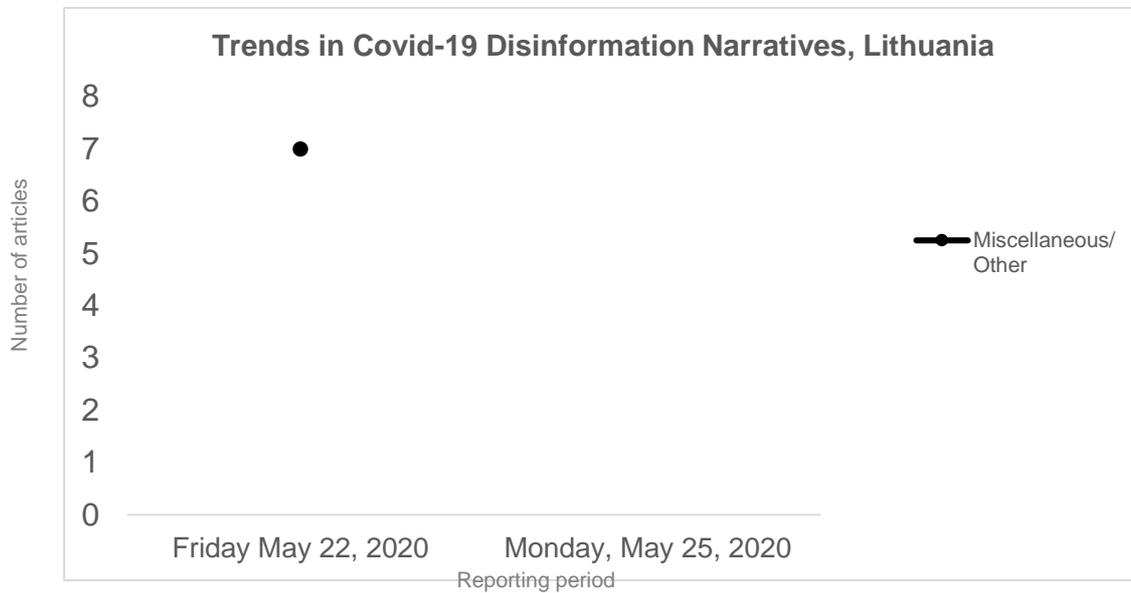


1,627

521

### Lithuania

Cumulative interactions on primary portal relating to this narrative in the last week



367



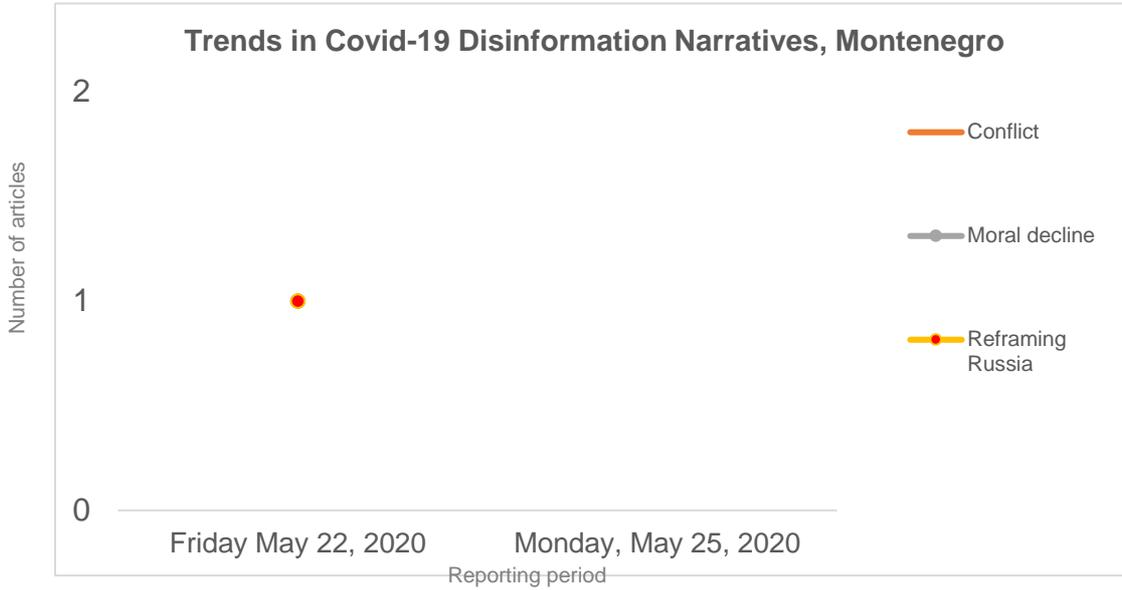
### Montenegro

Cumulative interactions on primary portal relating to this narrative in the last week

52

72

216



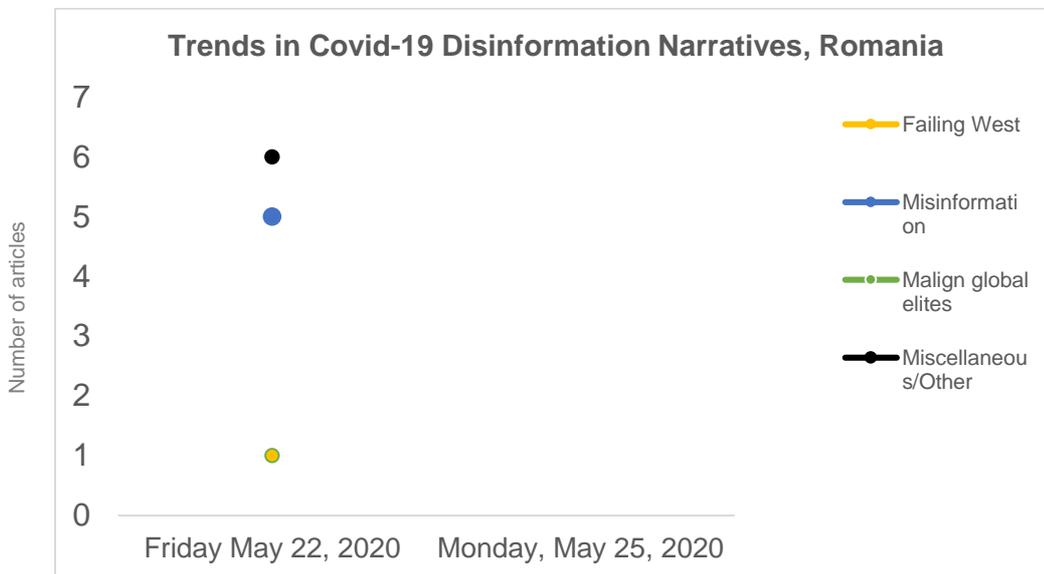
### Romania

920

23554

648

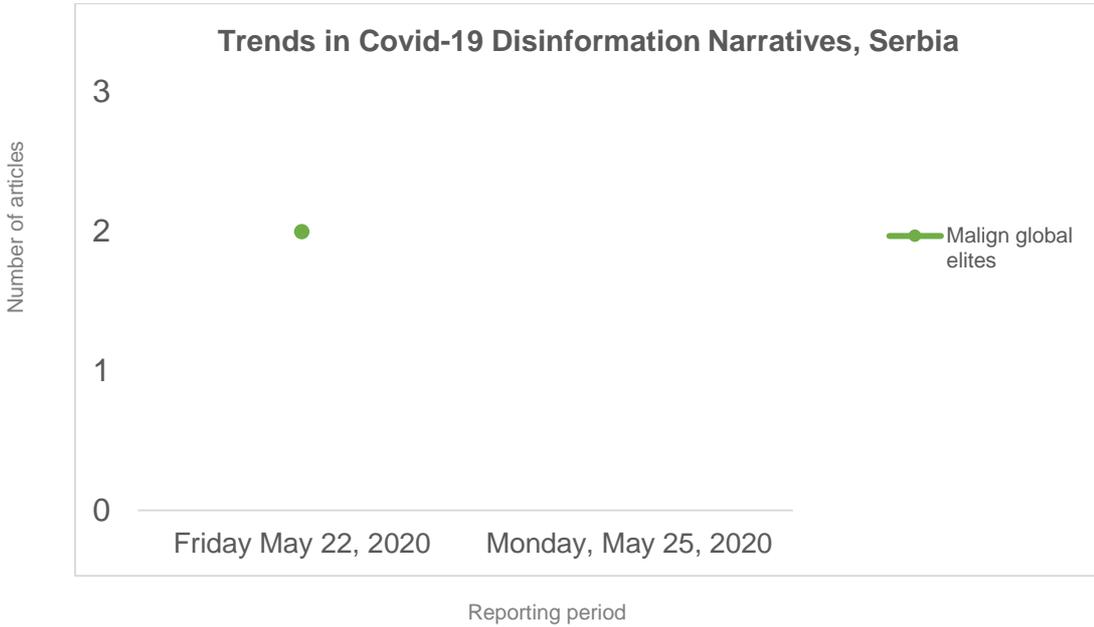
19259





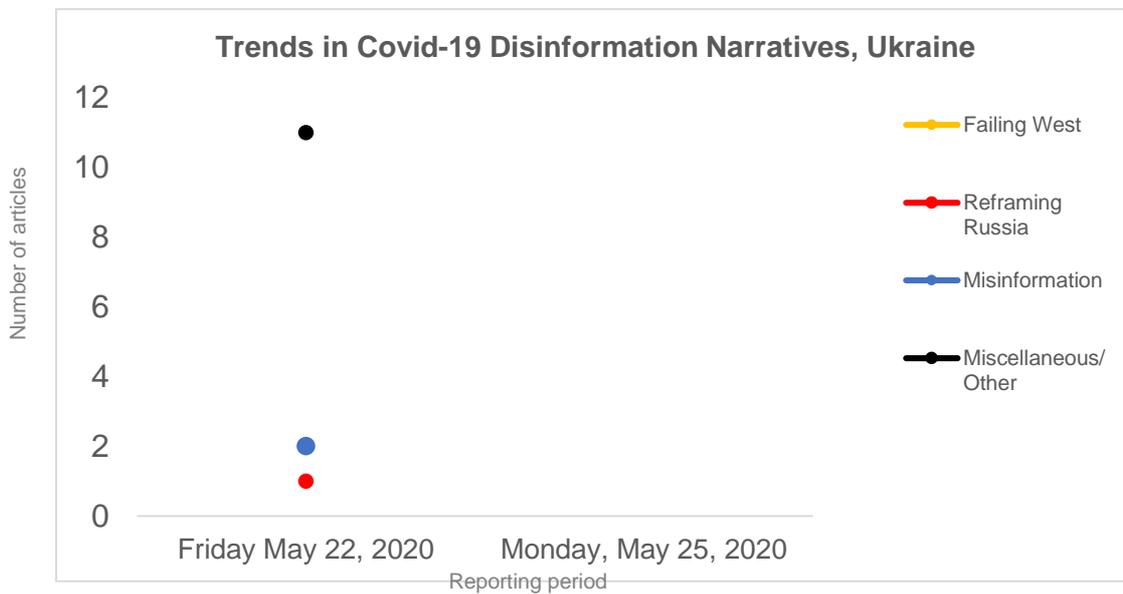
### Serbia

Cumulative interactions on primary portal relating to this narrative in the last week



15825

### Ukraine



2369

0

74

7229