



SUMMARY REPORT

Tuesday 09 June 2020

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

The following countries and languages are covered in this report:

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



Country-by-country Overview:

[Overview table indicating the presence of narratives, country-by-country](#)

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Notes on terminology and methodology:

[Working Definitions](#)

[Methodology](#)

[List of narrative and sub-narrative headings used](#)



COUNTRY-BY-COUNTRY OVERVIEW

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

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

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

Please see [here](#) for further information on the methodology used for this report.

Note: “Interactions” refers to each time that a post was actively engaged with or responded to on a particular platform. For example, Facebook interactions encompass 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.



COUNTRIES

This table indicates the presence of narratives and sub-narratives across countries, based on data from the reporting period of Thursday 04 June (00:00) - Sunday 07 June (23:59). Click [here](#) for a list of narrative and sub-narrative headings used in the CWG reports.

		Armenia	Bulgaria	Czechia	Estonia	Georgia	Hungary	Latvia	Lithuania	N Macedonia	Poland	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia	Ukraine
FAILING WEST	EU collapse					X									
	EU failure			X		X						X			
	Incompetence	X		X		X	X	X		X	X	X			
	Hypocrisy														X
	Corruption	X		X							X	X			X
	Exploitation						X				X				
	<i>General/other</i>			X											X
CONFLICT	Bio-lab			X		X								X	
	NATO as vector														
	COVID-19 war													X	X
	<i>General/other</i>														X
MALIGN ELITE	Exploitation			X		X						X		X	X
	Reshaping society					X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
	<i>General/other</i>														
MORAL DECLINE	Divine protection														
	Divine punishment														
	Religious freedom														
	Failed values														
	<i>General/other</i>														
REFRAMING RUSSIA	Russian success		X			X									
	Global leadership					X									X
	Russophobia													X	
	<i>General/other</i>														
MISINFORMATION	Hoax	X									X			X	X
	5G														
	Cure						X	X							
	Expert advice	X	X			X				X				X	
	<i>General/other</i>		X												
MISCELLANEOUS				X								X		X	X



COUNTRIES

ARMENIA

Summary

There is a slight decline in notable 'Misinformation' content, which this week was present in the demand made by Doctor Marina Khachatryan (a regular name in these reports), that she enters a hospital without masks or gloves and then undergoes quarantine (seemingly in order to test whether COVID-19 is indeed dangerous and real). 'Failing West' sub-narratives were also noted, in content targeting the government and the current Health Minister. No content regarding bio-labs was observed.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Misinformation: Expert Advice; Hoax*

- Doctor Marina Khachatryan – who appears regularly in these reports – demanding on Facebook that she be permitted to enter a hospital in order to visit patients who have tested positive for COVID-19, and stated that she would do so without wearing gloves or a mask. She would then enter quarantine for 14 days. The implication seems to be that this would allow her to test whether COVID-19 is dangerous, or is in fact a hoax (216 views, 14 comments, 14 shares).

2. *Failing West: Incompetence, Corruption*

- In an interview with the nationwide Kentron TV (99,500 subscribers on YouTube), Karen Vardanyan, the Chief Executive Officer at Union of Advanced Technology Enterprises-UATE (who has appeared previously in these reports), claimed that the pandemic will lead to a reduction of the population (due to a reduction in GDP amidst economic collapse), and suggested that the international pharmaceutical industry is behind the crisis, creating an atmosphere of fear for their own gain. He also alleged that deaths may be being falsely attributed to COVID-19. The video is headlined "The government is constantly lying, they are in very dirty deals" (1,828 views, 16 Facebook interactions).
- Separately, Karen Vardanyan also criticised the Armenian Health Minister in an interview with news.am (headlined "Arsen Torosyan should be tried in the Nuremberg procedure"). Vardanyan claimed that the reality of COVID-19 is not that bad but that it is being represented as worse because people such as Arsen Torosyan, the Minister of Health, and Nikol Pashinyan, the Armenian PM, have been granted money to fulfil various programmes and are trying to justify the amount that they have received (1,185 interactions).
- Similarly, in a Facebook post, Armen Grigoryan, a former member of the Russian TV comedy show "KBH", claimed that the anti-epidemic struggle has failed and that the COVID-19 death toll is high because "guys" (by which he appears to mean the government) are making money; in doing so, he suggests, they are betraying the



country. He also says it is a lie that there is no space in the country's hospitals. The post was amplified by sites such as Lurer.am and 168.am (642 comments, 580 shares).

BULGARIA

Summary

The 'Reframing Russia' narrative continues to be present in the circulation of articles highlighting Russian efforts to produce a COVID-19 vaccine. 'Misinformation' also persists, albeit at a low level, with the suggestion that baldness may be a risk factor in developing severe COVID-19 symptoms. Again, although the themes of 'Malign Global Elites' and 'Failing West' were not notable, 'Reframing Russia' narratives might be regarded as the flipside of the latter.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Reframing Russia: Russian Success (Also: Misinformation)*

- A short article at yandex.ru ([linking](#) to rabochy-put.ru) headlined "Coronavirus preparations are available free of charge" reported that Avifavir will be available to Russians at no cost, as part of medical insurance arrangements.
- The Bulgarian News Front site, citing the Red Star newspaper of the Russian Ministry of Defence, similarly [reported](#) that a vaccine is ready for clinical trials. The article cites Natalia Pozdnyakova, an associate at the Burdenko General Military Clinical Hospital, as saying that so far, the vaccine has been tested on animals and is ready to move on to the next stage, with 50 military volunteers taking part in trials (294 interactions).

2. *Misinformation: Expert Advice/Other*

- On the website Nauka.offnews.bg, it was [claimed](#) that studies have found that men with alopecia are more likely to be hospitalised with COVID-19; bald men may be at greater risk of developing severe symptoms. The article cites research from Brown University and quotes the study's lead author as saying "We believe that baldness is a perfect predictor of the severity of the disease" (782 interactions).
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CZECHIA

Summary

Cases of mis- and disinformation fell under the themes of 'Failing West' (with articles alleging EU failure and exploitation, and alleging the incompetence and corrupt behaviour of people such as health professional Roman Prymula and institutions such as the WHO), 'Malign Global



Elites' (with articles undermining Bill Gates and suggesting, separately, that COVID-19 was launched to undermine the American economy and destroy President Donald Trump); 'Conflict' (with doubt cast on the Wuhan Lab by an article citing 'Russia Today'). As last week, various articles make reference to protests in the US, suggesting that these demonstrations are supported by, for example, neo-conservatives in order to undermine President Trump. There were no noted cases of significant misinformation.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Failing West: EU Failure; Incompetence/Corruption (Also: Miscellaneous)*

- Pravy Prostor ran an article discussing Roman Prymula, a leading figure in the Czech governmental team working to fight COVID-19. Entitled "Give Prymula Power, he will Reward you with Hell", the article connects Prymula to the pharmaceutical lobby and the promotion of COVID-19 vaccines, and generally attacks him. It also suggests that COVID-19 may be a plan to instigate a controlled demolition of the economy, leading people to become indebted and go bankrupt. Prymula has been a target of criticism in these reports before (50 interactions).
- A Pravy Prostor article discussing protests taking place in the US and around the world presents these as, in part, a sign of disagreement with anti-COVID-19 measures (in Germany, for example). It also suggests that the pandemic is artificial; that it reveals the "monstrosity" of the World Health Organization (WHO); that it is an attempt by the American 'Maidan' to influence upcoming presidential elections (6 interactions).
- Another Nwoo.org article announced protests against "Corona-fascism" in Prague on 7 June, stating "Let us demand the immediate end of illegal government measures, let us end the restriction of business and the end of decrees and nonsensical regulations violating the rights arising from the Constitution of the Czech Republic and the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms and endangering the health of Czech citizens". The article suggests filing a criminal complaint against Czech Television for spreading fake news; filing complaints against the government; withdrawing from the WHO; repealing all measures related to the non-existent pandemic (93 interactions).
- An article on the Arfa site presented the views of the MEP Ivan David, suggesting that EU financial aid for economies hit by COVID-19 is a trap (1,816 interactions). Part of its headline states: "The recovery plan after coronavirus is actually a road to hell, experts say. The European Union under the dictates of extremists?" The same MEP has also criticised plans for EU financial aid to farmers after COVID-19. This has been amplified by outlets such as Pravy Prostor, Vlastenecke Noviny and Nwoo.org (7 interactions).

2. *Malign Global Elites: Exploitation*

- An article on Nwoo.org, primarily about protests in the US, claims that COVID-19 (which it dubs a "scamdemic") was launched in order to destroy the economy, undermine President Trump and remove elected leaders. It also separately suggests that microchipping may be used to establish tyranny (3 interactions).



- An Arfa (“Argumenty & Fakta”) article claimed that Bill Gates has bought a factory near Prague where he will make millions of vaccines per month. However, these will not be effective, and will contain suspicious substances: “It's here! Bill Gates bought a factory near Prague (Jevany). It is supposed to spew up to billions of coronavirus vaccines. BONUS: It will contain the substance from which the detergents are made”, reads the headline (3,663 interactions).

3. *Conflict: Bio-lab*

- An AC24 article appeared to quote Sir Richard Dearlove, a former head of MI6, apparently claiming that the new coronavirus leaked from a Wuhan laboratory whilst scientists were experimenting with bats. The article cites Russia Today (1 interaction).

4. *Miscellaneous: Tech censorship and Free Speech; US Protests*

- An article on Aktualne.cz (seen also in Slovakia) featuring video, includes claims seemingly made by actor Jaroslav Dušek that 'alternative' videos about COVID-19 are being deleted because of censors' fears (supposedly regarding their potential impact and reach). The video in question, discussed in the article and embedded video, apparently reflected on alternative methods for combatting the disease (39,304 interactions).
- A Nwoo.org - “New World Order Opposition” - article suggested that protests in the US are part of a *coup d'état* by neoconservatives to undermine Donald Trump. It describes the US protests as the country's ‘Maidan’ moment.

ESTONIA

Summary

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

Hostile state media published no articles about COVID-19 that were deemed to be disinformation. Instead, outlets turned their attention to other topics, suggesting that COVID-19 is no longer a priority for hostile state media in Estonia.

The only cases of disinformation on social media appeared in the same groups; one group containing conspiracy theories, the other containing anti-NATO disinformation. Otherwise the majority of posts were non-conspiratorial and often linked to media sources regarded as accurate. The number of posts containing keywords related to COVID-19 continues to fall, showing that conversation on the topic is less pronounced compared to earlier reporting periods.



NATO was not discussed by mainstream media coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19. Instead, Postimees reported on the EU commission's demand that social media companies report on COVID-19 disinformation, while Delfi identified and debunked two social media posts containing false health advice.

Dis-/Misinformation themes

No disinformation articles were identified by Zinc's media monitoring or the CWG partner organisation.

Wider social media conversation around COVID-19

- Conversation on social media was mainly non-conspiratorial with minimal instances of disinformation or misinformation, often linking to media sources regarded as accurate. The number of posts containing keywords related to COVID-19 continues to fall, suggesting conversation on the topic is less pronounced compared to earlier reporting periods. The number of posts containing disinformation was also low. The only cases appeared in the same groups; one group containing conspiracy theories, the other containing anti-NATO disinformation.
- The main topic of conversation was that on 5 June that 20 new cases of COVID-19 had been detected in Estonia, as [reported](#) by Delfi, causing concern in certain groups.
- Two instances of conspiracy theories were found on the group Ravimite ja vaktsiinide kõrvaltoimed (Side effects of medicines and vaccines), a group with 10,800 members. One post [linked](#) to an English-language video which claimed that governments had been using a "range of Orwellian mind control tricks" to control and deceive the general public, while another [linked](#) to a video claiming that funding re: COVID-19 benefits big pharma, Bill Gates and the WHO. These posts received over 80 interactions (identified by the CWG partner organisation).
- Two instances of anti-NATO posts were identified in the group Муниципальные выборы 2021 в Эстонии (2021 Municipal Elections in Estonia), a group with 1,400 members. One post [shared](#) a Sputnik Belarus article, that claimed that NATO exercises on the Polish border represented a "serious danger", while another post [linked](#) to an article from Rogozin-linked website riafan.ru, whose headline suggested that during pandemic the alliance was preparing for war with Russia. Both posts received fewer than 10 interactions.

Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- Postimees [reported](#) that the European commission is ordering reports from Twitter, Facebook and Google about COVID-19 disinformation on their platforms (14 interactions).



- Delfi reported on two instances of false news being spreading on Estonian social media. The first [claimed](#) that people who are vaccinated are more likely to become ill, while the second [spread](#) false claims that pregnant women should not wear masks as they reduce oxygen intake which can harm the foetus (both articles had 0 interactions).

GEORGIA

Summary

Cases fell under the themes of 'Conflict (with the outlet GeWorld continuing to cast suspicion on the Tbilisi-based Lugar Lab); 'Failing West' (with content undermining both the EU and the US, based on their approaches to COVID-19); 'Reframing Russia' (with claims that Russia has created a successful anti-COVID-19 drug and that Russian health systems are superior); 'Malign Global Elites' (with Bill Gates-related theories continuing to circulate) and 'Misinformation' (including re: mask-wearing). 'Moral Decline' narratives – and Orthodox influencers – were notably absent from content highlighted in this reporting period.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Conflict: Bio-lab*

- A GeWorld.ge article [suggested](#) that the Lugar Lab is dangerous. It quoted media figure Giorgi Iremadze's claims that the Lab was not properly checked in 2018, and that it is therefore legitimate that Russia wants its specialists to be permitted access to it. Iremadze also insists that in the southern part of Russia, as well as in the US, unknown viruses were spread and that this may be related to the Lab. He also says that the US built several laboratories in Ukraine, Armenia and Kazakhstan, and claims that they are used to produce biological weapons for the Pentagon. He quotes Jeffrey Silverman (an American Journalist and the Georgian Bureau Chief for Russia-affiliated Veterans Today; he has appeared previously in these reports), who reportedly claims that the Lab was built by Turkish workers who did the work to low quality, placing it at high risk for leaks of viruses, etc. (56 interactions).
- An [article](#) from clickbait site 15.infocovid-19.ru (181 interactions) was [shared](#) by the aforementioned Facebook group - "Stop 5G GEORGIA!!!". The article is based on the reported views of a Dr. Rashid Butar, who claims that Bill Gates and Antony Fauci are to blame for the pandemic and argues that the virus was created in a US lab, authorised by Antoni Fauci (who knew years ago about the approaching pandemic (5 comments, 19 shares).

2. *Failing West: EU Collapse/Failure and Incompetence*

- On 3 June, the GeWorld.ge website [published](#) an article from journalist Beso Barbakadze, who suggests that the EU has failed to help Italy. Barbakadze says that the post-pandemic time will be difficult for all countries, and that no state will be able



to help another. He insists that Georgia must not rely on Europe: “The West left Italy in poverty and can you imagine how they will behave in the case of Georgia?!” (31 interactions).

- On 7 June the outlet Saqiform published a translation of an interview that its Editor-in-Chief, Anro Khidirbgashvili, gave to News-Front TV. The interview was in part about the situation in the US, which has experienced COVID-19, economic crisis and riots. Khidirbegashvili suggested that the US and the EU cannot handle the pandemic (compared to China, for example). He also claimed that the US will inevitably fail and that he cannot wait to see which pioneer in the Georgian government will acknowledge this and start to condemn the US and Western values more broadly (15 interactions).

3. *Reframing Russia: Russian Success and Leadership*

- The GeWorld.ge website published an interview with the journalist Nika Korinteli, who suggests that Russia and Asian countries have been more efficient than Western ones in the fight against COVID-19. He insists that Russia built successfully on the experience of the Soviet medical system, when the Black Death virus, imported in 1959 from India, was abolished in 19 days. The headline reads: “The West is losing prestige and charm” (12 interactions).
- The pro-Kremlin Saqinform.ge site published an article entitled “The first anti-coronavirus medicine was registered in Russia”. Citing the RIA Novosti agency, it claims that the medicine, Avifavir, has been tested and proven to work and that it has been used in Japan against different flus since 2014.

4. *Malign Global Elites: Exploitation/Reshaping Society*

- On 8 June, a user from the group “Stop 5G Georgia!!!” (a regular feature in this report) shared a Russian-language video reportedly depicting the “microchip vaccines” that Gates and others are seeking to use to achieve their sinister goals. However, the syringe seen in the video is in fact one designed for animals. The video had limited reach: 38 likes, 12 comments, 100 shares.

5. *Misinformation: Expert Advice*

- On 7 June, the Facebook page “Stalin” shared an image of the head of the Lugar Lab, Paata Imnadze, with a post stating that face masks are bad for people, as people wearing them breathe in carbon dioxide, which causes disease. “Stalin” also claims that the masks are obligatory only because the government wants to make money before parliamentary elections in autumn. According to the post: “this is not a coronavirus, but a thievery-virus”. Similar claims on the face masks being ineffective or counterproductive were made through clickbait webpages as well. This particular Facebook post had limited reach: 58 reactions, 26 comments, 13 shares.



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 the current reporting period, there were fewer reports directly linked to COVID-19. Two main narratives were observed, regarding the failures of liberal societies and exaggerated claims about the likelihood of an imminent cure.

COVID-19-related posts on social media were published mostly by conspiracy theory pages and groups. Bill Gates continued to be a recurring feature, but conspiracy pages also exaggerated current ongoing trials of potential COVID-19 treatments.

No coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19 was recorded this week.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Failing West: Incompetence; Exploitation*

Zinc's media monitoring identified the following:

- Justice Minister Judit Varga [declared](#) in a meeting with the EU ambassadors in Budapest that the Hungarian defence against the COVID-19 pandemic was one of the most successful in Europe. This message has been repeated in the past month in all government-backed press and on social media, mentioned usually in favourable comparison with liberal countries (Sweden, Belgium, Spain) which are depicted as having failed to manage the crisis (3200 interactions).

The CWG partner organisation identified the following:

- Pro-government media outlet Magyar Nemzet [claimed](#) that George Soros stands to benefit from the proposed €500bn European Recovery Fund proposed by Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron, which it alleges will also accelerate European integration (2400 interactions).

2. *Misinformation: Cure*

Zinc's media monitoring and the CWG partner organisation identified the following:

- Ripost, a pro-government tabloid, [claims](#) in an article that the cure for COVID-19 can be found in every household. While the text makes clear that research is still ongoing, the sensationalist headline implies that a cure may be imminent. (159 interactions). This has also been picked up by Kimondott Igazságok, (Outspoken truths), which also



[posted](#) about new potential breakthroughs in easing COVID-19 symptoms. The article suggests ibuprofen can help patients with breathing difficulties. Even though the text explains that research is still ongoing, the title suggests that researchers confirmed the drug can cure COVID-19 (151 interactions).

- Ripost [published](#) a similarly misleading article, claiming that a vaccine has been developed in a Hungarian lab. Like the previously mentioned article, the most misleading part is the title and the beginning of the article, which then explains that this is one of many projects working on a vaccine (1300 interactions).

Wider social media conversation around COVID-19

- Titkok Szigete (Island of Secrets), [referring](#) to a New York Times opinion editorial about global inequality, claimed that transnational corporations are using the shadow of the pandemic as cover to gain exclusive dominance over natural resources such as drinking water, fertile lands, and vegetables and fruits (61 interactions).
- Kimondott Igazságok (Outspoken truths), a fringe conspiracy page, [re-posted](#) an article about how the EU is using the pandemic to introduce mass surveillance. This was then posted on several other conspiratorial Facebook pages such as Titkok Szigete (Island of Secrets), Titok Terminal (Secret Terminal) and Amiről a tudomány nem beszél (What science doesn't talk about). The post used an interview with Yuval Noah to claim that the EU will follow the examples of the Chinese and Russian governments to introduce "total surveillance" over its population (5621 interactions on Kimondott Igazságok).

Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

No coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19 was recorded.

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.

Hostile state media output during the reporting period remained heavily critical of the Latvian government, while one Sputnik article promoted the idea that Soviet medicine may have contributed to low levels of death in former USSR countries.



These stories were identified by CWG partner organisations and Zinc's media monitoring. The narratives identified in disinformation stories this week have been previously observed in Latvia.

Social media conversation containing mis- and disinformation did not reference these narratives, instead turning to anti-EU, anti-NATO and anti-vaccination narratives. Otherwise, conversation on social media mainly linked to well-regarded media sources and was non-conspiratorial. The number of posts containing disinformation and misinformation remained low during this reporting period, although engagement with some posts was significant.

These stories were not discussed in wider media coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19. Media reports instead focused on Bill Gates' reaction to conspiracy theories about him, as well false miracle cures.

Dis-/Misinformation themes

1. Failing West: Incompetence

The following were identified by Zinc's media monitoring and by the CWG partner organisation:

- Baltnews [published](#) an article which claimed that the pandemic had highlighted the “hopelessness” of Latvia, heavily criticising the government for its confused and insufficient support for individuals and businesses (76 interactions)
- Baltnews [published](#) an article which quoted Miroslav Mirofanov, the co-chair of the Russian Latvian Union, who claimed that the Latvian government were submitting a bill to ban the wearing of the St George Ribbon in public in order to hide their incompetence at handling the pandemic. The St George Ribbon is worn in Russia and abroad as a memorial symbol for Soviet soldiers who died in WW2 (79 interactions).

2. Misinformation: Cure

The following was identified by the CWG partner organisation:

- Sputnik [published](#) an article which quoted Russian doctor Aleksandr Miasnikov, who suggested that the BCG vaccine (Bacillus Calmette–Guérin vaccine), widely administered during the Soviet Union for tuberculosis, was a key reason as to why former Soviet countries had not been as affected by COVID-19. BBC's Reality Check [pointed](#) out that the WHO has stated that there is currently no evidence to suggest that BCG protects people from COVID-19 (4 interactions).

Wider social media conversation around COVID-19

- Conversation on social media was mainly non-conspiratorial, often linking to media sources regarded as accurate. Popular conversation topics included the George Floyd protests and their implication on the spread of the virus, the beginning of tourist season



in Latvia and several sarcastic posts about social distancing which proved popular in groups.

- Only a handful posts containing disinformation were identified, which spread anti-NATO, anti-EU sentiment and vaccine hesitation. While posts containing disinformation were limited, interaction levels were relatively high.
- A post [published](#) by a blogger claimed that COVID-19 vaccines were being rushed, were ineffective and could be dangerous. The post received over 250 interactions, including 130 shares. The user is a regular sharer of anti-vaccine content and often received significant interaction (post identified by the CWG partner organisation).
- A post on Русское Общество в Латвии (Russian Society in Latvia), a group with 2,700 members, claimed that 20 infected NATO soldiers had entered Lithuania and suggested that NATO is a vector for the virus' spread. The posts received 35 interactions.
- A post on Русская Община Риги "РОР" (Russian Community of Riga "RCR") copied the content of a [blog post](#) by the Worker's Front of Latvia, which among other things claimed that capitalism was to blame for Western governments' poor handling of the virus and that the EU had disintegrated during the crisis. Engagement was minimal.

Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- Apollo, as well Jauns, Skaties and TVNet, [covered](#) an BBC interview with Bill Gates, in which called conspiracy theories against him stupid and weird and stated throughout his career he has never dealt with microchips (26 interactions).
- LSM [interviewed](#) a toxicologist based in Australia who warned against COVID-19 miracle cures (23 interactions)

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.

There was little overt disinformation in this reporting period. Hostile state media either published objective content about the progress of COVID-19 in Lithuania or turned their attention to other topics. Disinformation was nonetheless observed, with one Sputnik article denying claims that Russia is spreading disinformation.

Conversation on social media did not concern these topics and often linked to media sources widely considered trustworthy. The number of overall posts about COVID-19 fell from the previous reporting period, while the number of instances of dis- and misinformation were low and received insignificant engagement. Posts containing dis- and misinformation were found solely on the group UNFOLLOW 15min.lt, which has been repeatedly identified as a hotbed



for dis- and misinformation. While posts on the group in Russian received little interaction, the group's following continues to grow.

The only article published by the Lithuanian media outlined instances of false information that had been published by hostile state actors, aimed at portraying Lithuania as a failed state.

Dis-/Misinformation themes

1. Malign Global Elite: Reshaping Society

The following was identified by Zinc's media monitoring:

- Sputnik amplified the Russian Embassy in Vilnius's statement that the Foreign Ministry's claim that Russia are spreading disinformation is based on questionable evidence and pattern of distorted and purely one-sided views (23 interactions).

Wider social media conversation around COVID-19

- Conversation on social media mainly linked to media sources widely considered trustworthy. The main topic of conversation was the low levels of COVID-19 in the country, with many Vilnius-based users pleased to more residents in the city centre. The overall numbers of posts containing COVID-19 keywords continues to fall, suggesting that audiences' attention is being drawn elsewhere.
- The number of posts containing disinformation and misinformation remained low during this reporting period, as well the overall number posts containing COVID-19-related keywords. Posts containing dis- and misinformation also received low levels of interaction. Instances of dis- and misinformation mainly referenced conspiracy theories about the pandemic and were often found on one Facebook group.
- As observed in previous reports, several examples of content promoting conspiracy theories and misinformation were observed on UNFOLLOW 15min.lt, a Facebook group with 50,000 members. Examples include a videos that amplified Bill Gates's supposed role in the spread of COVID-19 and spread anti-vaccination misinformation. While these posts received fewer than 20 interactions, the popularity of the group is growing, with the group gaining 5,000 more followers over the last three weeks.

Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- 15min.lt reported that hostile state media outlets such as Baltnews and Sputnik were taking advantage of the pandemic to spread disinformation about Lithuania being a failed state. One example given was a Sputnik Lithuania article, which claimed the government was using lockdown to hide its poor record on crime (9 interactions).



NORTH MACEDONIA

Summary

Notable content perpetuated the narratives of 'Misinformation' (in an article citing outdated World Health Organization advice to suggest that mask-wearing is not that essential or effective); 'Failing West' (in reports on Italian protests, described as expressing opposition to Bill Gates, 5G and the Conte government); 'Malign Global Elites' (with articles offering a broad range of conspiracy theories implicating the EU, George Soros, Bill Gates and others in COVID-19, and featuring the suggestion – observed elsewhere in this and previous reports – that the crisis is being used simply to test how much populations can withstand control and “torture”).

'Reframing Russia' narratives were not observed in this period, nor was content discussing the group of German doctors who challenge the established science regarding COVID-19.

Dis-/Misinformation themes

1. *Failing West: Incompetence (Also: Malign Global Elites: Reshaping Society)*

- An article from the Infomax news outlet (3,783,000 visits in the past six months according to SimilarWeb data) reported on protests in Italy, describing them as “massive protests against Bill Gates”. The article states that protestors took to the streets for a range of reasons, including anger with PM Giuseppe Conte and his government over its handling of the pandemic. Other demonstrators, it says, were worried about vaccines or 5G. The article cites the news outlet Politico (381 interactions).

2. *Malign Global Elites: Reshaping Society*

- An article on the Kolozeg site alleged that the EU planned a vaccination passport back in 2018, and claimed that “violent vaccinators for the mutilation of humanity, the EU and Bill Gates”, via various corrupt actions and connections, have long promoted mandatory vaccinations for nefarious ends and gains. The text suggests that due to the lack of broad support for such an idea, these elites needed a pandemic; an EU document on the ‘roadmap’ regarding vaccination, it claims, provides proof that this is the case. The article was shared on Facebook pages/groups with a total of around 100,000 followers (1,905 interactions)
- A post from Sloboden Svet, shared on Facebook pages with a total of around 33,000 followers, claimed that COVID-19 is an experiment conducted by George Soros and global fascists, and that these people have continued this ‘experiment’ in Macedonia in order to “measure the extent to which a nation, spiritually and mentally, can withstand...torture” (1,718 interactions).

3. *Misinformation: Expert Advice*



- Online news outlet Sloboden Svet offered misleading information on mask-wearing by citing outdated recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO). Shared on a Facebook page with 6,000 followers, the article suggested that masks should only be worn in special cases and that if a person lacks certain symptoms, they need not wear one. It features an image seen previously in this report (see Armenia), of what appears to be mask packaging, saying that the masks will “not provide any protection against COVID-19” (400 interactions).
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POLAND

Summary

Narratives observed included: ‘Misinformation’ (in an opposition politician’s claim that COVID-19 is a hoax, used as a pretext to usher in greater control over people’s lives); ‘Failing West’ (in the allegation that the government is using the crisis to devalue and sell Polish mines); ‘Malign Global Elites’ (in two suggestions that the disease and/or the crisis were introduced for the benefit of global financial elites). Content implicating Bill Gates and George Soros, or strongly referring to a ‘New World Order’, was not observed.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Misinformation: Hoax (Also: Failing West: Incompetence, Exploitation)*

- The anti-EU politician Janusz Korwin Mikke, as reported by Wprost, stated that “there is no outbreak of coronavirus” and that there are in fact fewer deaths than there were last year; that the danger is being exaggerated and fear is being stoked unnecessarily; that the government is using the crisis to introduce new laws that extend control over people. The politician has more than 763,000 followers on Facebook (11 interactions).

2. *Failing West: Corruption*

- A video posted by the founder and moderator of the Facebook Group “I Don’t Believe in Coronavirus” (90,000 members) claimed that the government intentionally ‘created’ the pandemic so that Polish mines will be affected, closed and sold (at a lower value than would otherwise have been the case). The video has received more than 3,200 views on YouTube.

3. *Malign Global Elites: Reshaping Society*

- The fringe outlet Gazeta Warszawska, via Facebook and its website, presented the opinion that lockdown and COVID-19 have been introduced intentionally in order to generate a global economic crisis from which global elites – the “global financial



oligarchy” can then profit (this suggestion is similarly observed elsewhere in this report). The author speaks of an “artificial psychosis of fear” (2,115 interactions).

- An article from a currently little-known WordPress site Głos Gminny was posted to Facebook, discussing and sharing the ‘Plandemic’ video and arguing that global elites have created the pandemic in order to force people to be vaccinated and to thereby make large profits. It discusses the Rockefellers at some length (520 interactions).

ROMANIA

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.

A range of disinformation stories were identified in Romania. The global dominance of allegedly nefarious actors such as George Soros and Bill Gates continues to be reported by fringe far-right media, while other articles were critical of the government, claiming that the state is acting not acting in the interests of the population but in support of the interests of a business-governmental nexus. Other narratives that were disseminated with reduced intensity include scepticism towards the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines and the deliberate economic and financial exploitation of the lockdowns by corporate or state actors. It should be noted that over past weeks coverage of the pandemic by fringe media outlets has declined, with outlets instead turning their attention to other topics.

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 the threat posed by an alleged malign global elite.

There was social media commentary around some of these narratives. COVID-19 related posts on social media were published mostly by conspiracy theory pages and groups. Most posts referenced an old narrative that that a malign global elite is using COVID-19 to control and reshape society.

The wider media did not cover any of the disinformation strands that Zinc identified.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Failing West: Incompetence; Corruption; EU Failure*

The following were identified by Zinc’s media monitoring and the CWG partner organisation:



- Capital [re-published](#) an op-ed originally shared by Jerusalem Post in which three professors claim that social distancing measures have led to a new religion of fear. It is claimed that experts, politicians and the media contributed to destroying the economy, undermining civil liberties, by effectively placing people under house arrest, and damaging their psychological health (15,500 interactions).
- Stiri pe Surse [reports](#) on the statement of a Romanian doctor who criticizes the way in which the Romanian government handled the pandemic. In particular, she claims that hospitals refused to treat patients that did not test positive for COVID-19, which has led to chronic illnesses being exacerbated and to people dying without medical care (6700 interactions).
- A blog post published by Cunoaste Lumea [claims](#) that the COVID-19 crisis was blown out of proportion in order to deepen the economic decline of Romania. The author claims that the financial injection from the EU is intended to enslave Romania, by robbing it of its production capacity and natural resources, instead turning it into a purely consumerist society where foreign corporations can sell low-quality products (4400 interactions).

2. *Malign Global Elite: Exploitation; Reshaping Society*

The following were identified by Zinc's media monitoring and the CWG partner organisation:

- Smart Radio [reports](#) on an interview with writer Bernard-Henry Lévy, who claims that the COVID-19 pandemic was exploited to establish a regime of terror which would lead to an authoritarian world government. In particular he singles out environmental activists who are allegedly relishing over the lockdown measures (7100 interactions).
- Antena 3 [reports](#) on the statement of a Romanian forensic psychologist who claims that global organizations such as the WHO have manipulated the population. He cites the WHO's reluctance to declare hydroxychloroquine as a COVID-19 treatment as proof of the fact that this organization is part of a secret population control experiment (1500 interactions).
- Departamentul de Informatii Romania, a blog designed to look like a government web page, [claims](#) that the Ministry of Health has banned the autopsy of patients who supposedly died of COVID-19. The author claims that this measure was taken to conceal the fact that the pandemic was exaggerated in a plot to establish a New World Order (1900 interactions).
- An article [published](#) by Sputnik quotes and comments on some declarations of the president of Belarus, Alexandr Lukashenko. The main narrative advanced is the notion that through the destruction of the economies of some countries, the world's wealthiest elites are enriching themselves by trillions of dollars. (632 interactions).

3. *Miscellaneous*

The following was identified by Zinc's media monitoring and the CWG partner organisation:



- Fringe media outlet Nationalisti [published](#) an article quoting declarations by Dr. Vasile Astarastoe, known for past controversial statements on the novel coronavirus and the pandemic. In the article, the doctor argues that although he is generally supportive of vaccination, any new COVID-19 vaccines are likely to pose health risks for the people that outweigh the health risks associated with COVID-19 (103 interactions).

Wider social media conversation around COVID-19

- The majority of posts relating to COVID-19 were factual and linked to trusted local and international media sources.
- Many social media users 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 sense of frustration with the way in which the Romanian government has handled the pandemic was also present, with [calls](#) made for the President to resign.

Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

No coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19 was recorded.

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.

Zinc identified one relevant disinformation narrative: 'Malign Global Elites' (Reshaping society), with Kurir reporting that Russian communists have confirmed that Bill Gates is using the vaccine to enslave people. Ironically, the same outlet ran quotes from Gates discussing conspiracy theories about him, which he has called "almost hard to deny" because they are "so stupid".

On social media, users mostly shared a photo of Belarussian president Lukashenko with a compilation of quotes about his distrust of the WHO. Other content that was widely shared involved conspiracy theories about authorities trying to regain control by planning to separate children from their families and place them in special centres in the second wave of the virus, and a video explaining how Germany admitted that the pandemic was a false alarm.

Wider coverage of disinformation around COVID-19 focused largely on providing overviews covering the four most prominent types of travel news that were too good to be true and how disinformation has been making it harder to distinguish the real news from fake news.



Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Malign global elites: Reshaping society*

- Pro-government [Kurir](#) ran another story with a headline claiming that Russian communists have confirmed that Bill Gates is using vaccines to enslave people. The article explains that the leader of the Communist Party of Russia said that he 'believes that a possible vaccine against the new coronavirus is a capitalist conspiracy to implant microchips in people and ensure their "digital enslavement"' (29 interactions).

Wider social media conversation around COVID-19

- The most engaged-with [post](#) came from the Facebook group Stop prisilnoj KORONA vakcinaciji i globalizaciji (Let's put a stop to forceful Coronavirus vaccination and globalisation). The post shared quotes from Belarussian president Lukashenko, in which he calls the WHO a "criminal organisation" and praises the Orthodox ties of brotherhood that unite Serbia and Belarus (1.3k Likes, 60 Comments, 642 Shares). The post ended with a salutation to the brotherly Orthodox Belarus and Orthodox Serbia, calling for a crackdown on the WHO mafia. Comments under the post predominantly praised Lukashenko's stance and his words about Belarus and Serbia.
- Another post in the group 'Brat do brata složno iz inata' (Brother to brother, together out of spite) [shared](#) a YouTube video advancing the conspiracy that a second wave of COVID-19 is planned in order to tear children and their parents apart to normalise top-down control under the guise of public health concerns. The video has been viewed nearly 55,000 times. The subtitles link vaccination to Kawasaki disease (3 Comments, 17 Shares).
- Another theory [shared](#) in the group Saznajmo istinu o Koroni (Let's find out the truth about Corona) was a YouTube video with 122,113 views explaining that a group of German doctors has called COVID-19 a false alarm (4 comments, 14 shares).

Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- The online portal Telegraf [ran](#) an article covering four news stories about travel after the pandemic that it called "too good to be true." These included misleading information that the Japanese government would pay for half the cost of tourists' visits and that all Emirates passengers would be tested for the virus (6 interactions).
- The news aggregator Vesti [covered](#) an article from [Radio Slobodna Evropa](#) (Radio Free Europe) in which they cover how disinformation has been jeopardising the legitimacy of actual real news. According to the article, disinformation that has been widely shared includes false cures, false narratives and conspiracy theories (the RFE article has 29 interactions).



- Kurir [covered](#) a recent statement by Bill Gates, who has spoken out against the conspiracy theory about his role in COVID-19. Gates is quoted as saying that it's "almost hard to deny" the theory "because it's so stupid." (76 interactions).

SLOVAKIA

Summary

Mis- and disinformation content highlighted by the CWG again fell under the themes of: 'Misinformation' (including further assertions that there will be no second wave, and the suggestion – seen previously in the CWG report - that a fifteen year old American girl invented 'social distancing' some years ago and that such measures are therefore not based on hard science); 'Conflict' (with one article amplifying suspicion surrounding the Wuhan lab); 'Malign Global Elites' (with claims implicating Bill Gates and the World Health Organization, plus continued suggestions that the pandemic is being used to increase population control and surveillance); 'Reframing Russia' (in the circulation of an academic's opinion that the West is pursuing a 'hybrid' information war with Russia despite being in the middle of a pandemic). 'Failing West' narratives were less present, though the WHO continued to face criticism.

Dis-/Misinformation themes

1. *Misinformation: Hoax; Expert Advice*

- Claims regarding the unlikelihood of a second wave of the pandemic continue to circulate. Zem a Vek again [quoted](#) the Czech virologist Soňa Peková saying that there will most likely be no second wave and that COVID-19 will probably disappear before Christmas (323 interactions).
- Separately, Zem a Vek quoted Ibrahim Maiga a Slovak singer and actor of African heritage, reportedly [claiming](#) that there are only a couple of COVID-19 cases in Africa and that the official statistics are thus fabricated. Maiga also expressed opposition to vaccination and suggested that measures to curb COVID-19 serve to control the masses (572 interactions).
- Badatel – another outlet that features regularly in this report – also posted an [article](#) stating that COVID-19 is comparable to flu, quoting three 'leaked facts' that show the 'truth' about COVID-19. It quotes a Russian professional working on the pandemic describing it as 'bullshit'; quotes leaked Danish official emails suggesting that COVID-19 cannot be labelled as a dangerous disease; quotes a leaked German study cited in an alternative newspaper claiming that the disease is just as dangerous as others and that protective measures may kill more people than the disease itself (849 interactions).
- Repeating a claim seen in the last edition of this report, Zem a Vek [claimed](#) that social distancing was created by an American schoolgirl whose father worked as a scientist for the US government and passed the idea to Homeland Security. The article quotes 'research' by conspiracy theorist Michel Chossudovsky and suggests that people



losing their jobs in the age of COVID-19 are therefore experiencing hardship, all based on the idea of a fifteen-year-old girl, rather than on hard scientific evidence (262 interactions).

2. *Conflict: Bio-lab*

- A Hlavný Denník article claimed to quote Sir Richard Dearlove, a former head of MI6, apparently claiming that the new coronavirus leaked from a Wuhan laboratory whilst scientists were experimenting with bats. The article cites Russia Today (131 interactions).

3. *Malign Global Elites: Reshaping Society/Exploitation*

- A Zem a Vek article suggested that COVID-19 could be part of a psychological operation against the general public. The author claims that various signs point to this: the WHO did not take action early enough; Bill Gates is a strong influence over the WHO and is known for his vaccine work; it is also 'known' that Gates works on population control. The article suggests that it is hard to trust organisations such as the WHO and the Center for Disease Control, as they have supported harmful vaccines (271 interactions).
- Similarly, Zem a Vek amplified a video from conspiracy theorist Tibor Rostas claiming that COVID-19 is just a tool to better control people, as it enables mass surveillance and makes control easier. The video has received more than 1,800 views on YouTube, and also suggests (as seen in last week's report) that distanced learning makes people stupid and that this is what elites want (16 interactions).

4. *Reframing Russia: Russophobia (Also: Conflict: COVID-19 War)*

- A Hlavný Denník article entitled "The West's hybrid war with Russia continues despite the coronavirus" cited the portal lenta.ru to claim that the west – namely the US – is waging hybrid war with the Russian Federation; despite being in the middle of a pandemic, it is seeking to control information space. It is therefore necessary, suggests the article, to limit the activities of Western 'non-profit organizations' in Russia, where young people increasingly spend time online. This is the reported view of Sergei Sudakov, a professor at the Academy of Military Sciences (10 interactions).

5. *Miscellaneous: Tech censorship and Free Speech*

- An article on Infovojna (seen also in Czechia) includes a video and features claims seemingly made by actor Jaroslav Dušek that 'alternative' videos about COVID-19 are being deleted because of censors' fears (supposedly regarding potential impact and reach). The video in question, discussed in the article, apparently reflected on possible alternative methods on how to combat COVID-19 (1,609 interactions).



UKRAINE

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.

This report sees a continuation of a number of previously-identified narratives: positive statistics on COVID-19 for Ukraine should not give rise to excessive optimism; the Black Lives Matter protests in the US are partly caused by economic hardships after extensive lockdown; recurring narratives attacking medical reform in Ukraine; decisions over quarantine in Ukraine are driven by politics; the IMF's arrangement for Ukraine to help address COVID-19 is exploitative; Europe is disintegrating during the pandemic.

A number of newly occurring narratives were identified: Kyiv is more wary about COVID-19 spreading among Ukrainian soldiers than among than citizens; the military is preparing a provocation at a checkpoint with occupied territories, which have been closed due to COVID-19.

COVID-19 is playing an ever-decreasing role in social media conversation. Nevertheless, pages and groups of interest criticism president Zelensky's handling the crisis, at times with false information, for instance, that he prohibits hospitals from accepting medical protective gear donated by former president Poroshenko. A negative evaluation of Ukraine's deal with the IMF persisted, while an attack on medical reform in Ukraine continues.

Media coverage of disinformation concentrated on Bill Gates discussing conspiracy theories about him, which he has called "almost hard to deny" because they are "so stupid". Other coverage of disinformation was published by fact-checking StopFake that refuted claims that Sweden has admitted it chose a wrong approach to tackle the pandemic, and that Germany admitted that the global pandemic was a false alarm. Mainstream outlet Focus.ua dismissed the idea that the virus was manufactured in a Chinese laboratory.

Dis-/Misinformation themes

1. *Malign Global Elite: Exploitation*

- Pro-Kremlin news site News-Front [called](#) the conditions that the IMF is likely to impose on Ukraine "enslaving" and claimed that they will lead to school closures and the collapse of medical care whilst turning Ukraine into a "third-rate, backwards colony" (interaction data not available).

2. *Failing West: Corruption, Hypocrisy; General/Other*



- Sensationalist news site Hyser [wrote](#) about how Ukrainians are at the end of their tether with the current state of affairs caused by COVID-19 crisis and quarantine. “Mass revolt is expected” (1,030 interactions).
- From-ua [cited](#) a doctor from from Donetsk describing reforms by controversial ex-minister Ulana Suprun as ‘anti-reform’ and ‘a cancerous tumor’ for Ukraine (479 interactions).
- Strana, a major amplifier of pro-Kremlin narratives in Ukraine, [produced](#) an article covering the protests in the US following the killing of George Floyd, headlined: "The US has lost its status as a guardian of freedom and democracy". (332 interactions).
- Politeka [referred](#) to the Russian-Ukrainian entrepreneur and political commentator Andriy Palchevsky, who said quarantine in Ukraine would both make the Ukrainian economy weaker and worsen the COVID-19 outbreak. He also suggested Ukraine might never get out of quarantine (308 interactions).

3. *Reframing Russia: Global Leadership*

- Russian state-owned outlet Ukraina.ru [published](#) an interview with Russian political philosopher Sergey Ivannikov who drew attention to instances of European discord amid the COVID-19 pandemic and expressed his satisfaction at the sight of ordinary Italians extending thanks to Russian doctors for helping their country. Mr. Ivannikov also argued attempts by Western politicians to blame China for the pandemic is a manifestation of the global inferiority complex of the Western mentality. (interactions data not available)

4. *Conflict: COVID-19 War; General/Other*

- Ukraina.ru [claimed](#) the Ukrainian military is preparing a provocation at a checkpoint with occupied territories. The purpose of this, according to the article, is to create the preconditions for a humanitarian catastrophe on separatist-controlled territory before the visit of OSCE (50 interactions).
- Russian state-owned outlet Ukraina.ru [wrote](#) about how the COVID-19 crisis revealed how the Western world is “in great need of an external enemy to explain the causes of certain troubles and problems” (13 interactions).

5. *Misinformation: Hoax*

- A widely shared [article](#) from pro-Kremlin Politnavigator ridiculed the idea of publishing daily statistics of COVID-19 cases in Ukraine, when allegedly more people die from tuberculosis in Ukraine than of COVID-19 (14,075 interactions).

6. *Miscellaneous:*

- Pro-Kremlin website From-ua [covered](#) an incident involving a group of people beating up a tram driver after he requested they wore face masks. The outlet said that police officers on the scene did not detain the suspects, drawing attention to the Russian



narrative in relation to Ukraine that it is a land of lawlessness. In reality, a criminal case has been opened and investigative actions are underway (1,360 interactions).

Wider social media conversation around COVID-19

- A Christian religious Facebook page Слово Божие (Word of God) with 147K followers [posted](#) a video that promoted the idea that only God can protect humanity from COVID-19 (987 likes + 126 comments + 620 shares).
- Антипопулист (Antipopulist), a Facebook public page with 99K followers, [wrote](#) that president Zelensky personally called one of the hospitals in the Donetsk region and prohibited them from accepting medical gear donated by former president Poroshenko (1,599 likes + 290 comments + 1,107 shares).
- A [publication](#) on the Russian website Inforuss which claimed “Coronavirus was launched by the USA, Ukraine may be involved” was observed on several Ukrainian Facebook groups and pages of interest (1,208 interactions).
- YouTube channel of pro-Russian Medvedchuk-owned outlet NewsOne [featured](#) a talk-show during which the host claimed that the IMF is demanding that former Health Minister of Ukraine – Ulana Suprun – is reinstated. Ulana Suprun has been under constant attack from Russian media for initiating ‘western liberal’ medical reform in Ukraine (42,271 views, 1.1K likes).

Coverage of dis/misinformation relating to COVID-19

- Independent fact-checking organisation StopFake [shared](#) a piece from Russian outlet Insider that refuted a disinformation narrative that claimed Sweden has admitted it had chosen wrong approach to tackle COVID-19 pandemic (82 interactions).
- 24tv [engaged](#) with the story of Bill Gates commenting on the conspiracy theory about himself related to vaccines and microchipping (82 interactions). Unian also covered this story.
- StopFake [refuted](#) a disinformation narrative circulating online about an alleged secret German report that COVID-19 is a hoax (67 interactions).
- Focus [covered](#) comments from an MI5 source rejecting the idea (pushed by the ex-head of MI6, among others) that COVID-19 was manufactured in a Chinese laboratory (29 interactions).
- Segodnya [published](#) an article listing ten widely shared misinformation cases related to COVID-19 cures and prevention (9 interactions).



NOTES ON TERMINOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY:

WORKING DEFINITIONS

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

Disinformation

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

Misinformation

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

Conspiracy theories

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



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



LIST OF NARRATIVE AND SUB-NARRATIVE HEADINGS USED:

1. FAILING WEST

- 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

2. CONFLICT

- 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

3. MALIGN GLOBAL ELITE

- 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

4. MORAL DECLINE

- 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

5. REFRAMING RUSSIA

- a. **Russian success:** Russia is dealing well with COVID-19
- b. **Global leadership:** Russia is helping other states deal with COVID-19
- c. **Russophobia:** Russia is being victimised in relation to COVID-19 YES

6. MISINFORMATION

- a. **Hoax:** COVID-19 does not exist, 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

7. MISCELLANEOUS / OTHER



METHODOLOGY:

CWG partner organisations report on disinformation in Armenia, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine. Zinc Network's own researchers augment these reports for Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Ukraine, and make additional reports for Belarus, Montenegro and Serbia, where there is no CWG partner organisation.

Zinc Network researchers draw on three different sorts of material for consideration in internally-authored reports, in addition to what is provided by CWG partner organisations. First, instances of COVID-19 coverage in selected media outlets; second, social media discussion around COVID-19; and third, coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19.

The first kind is identified by using open-source media monitoring software. Zinc researchers apply a list of keywords relating to COVID-19 to a list of pre-identified media outlets, selected because they are either Hostile State-backed or routinely sympathetic to Hostile States or their strategic objectives. This data is then exported, and the top 25 stories by engagement are then tagged according to a narrative code frame – there are seven narratives, including 'miscellaneous', plus one for 'not disinformation'. This is done for the purposes of identifying how Hostile State-backed or Hostile State-friendly media selects and frames its coverage.

This data sheet (which is submitted separately) is also used to create a line chart depicting the volume of occurrences of each narrative in each country over the reporting period, with the total number of interactions for each narrative. This is done to compare the relative impact and popularity of each narrative over the reporting period.

The second type of content, social media conversation, is identified using two different social listening tools, one for analysing Facebook, the other for a variety of other social media platforms. Through a combination of keyword searches and monitoring of selected groups and pages, chosen to be representative of the wider population, researchers outline the major themes being discussed around COVID-19 on social media. The relative attention given to Facebook or other platforms depends on their usage in the market under investigation. This is done to understand as far as possible how citizens in each market view disinformation, especially in the context of any narratives identified above.

The third variety of material, like the first, is identified by using open-source media monitoring software. Researchers combine the COVID-19 keyword list with another keyword list of terms relating to disinformation ('fake news', 'hoax', 'propaganda', etc.), and apply it to all media outlets in the country under investigation. This returns all instances of reporting about disinformation, and is done to understand to what extent disinformation is being recognised as such in the wider media environment.

If the country in question is one where a partner organisation is also operating, the Zinc researcher compares their findings with those of the partner group, and collates them accordingly into one unified report. This is finally summarised in an overview, with similarities and differences between the material found in each sub-section noted and discussed.