



SUMMARY REPORT

Tuesday 26 May 2020

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

The following countries and languages are covered in this report:

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



Countries

Country-by-country Overview

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2. [Bulgaria](#)
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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, 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.

COUNTRIES

ARMENIA

Summary

During this reporting period, a range of mis- and disinformation narratives were identified in Armenia. As previously, there was significant misinformation alleging that 5G is linked to COVID-19 (with Facebook being a key space for the sharing of such claims). ‘Malign Global Elite’ also remains a prominent theme, with a number of suggestions being made that COVID-19 is a cover for the introduction of a New World Order of some description. Such claims also featured in the previous report.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. Misinformation: 5G

- On Facebook, the Doctor and political activist Marina Khachatryan (who is an active promoter of 5G conspiracy theories and has featured previously in this report) posted photos of a site in Yerevan, claiming that unknown objects are being “montaged” onto cell towers overnight, and that this can be dangerous for health. (282 likes, 88 comments, 545 shares).
- In a Facebook post, Lusine Haroyan-Dallakyan, - a 2018 Prime Ministerial candidate who is promoting a range of conspiracy theories - published a photo of a medical masks box with a label saying that masks do not provide protection against COVID-19. Whilst the government has introduced mandatory wearing of masks, Haroyan-Dallakyan has insisted that this decision in fact has nothing to do with the pandemic. In her post, she writes: “What an awkward thing happened ... Look at the box, the manufacturer of the mask wrote in golden English that it does not provide protection against corona” (24 comments, 1,300 shares).



- Similarly, on Facebook, the blogger Hrayr Kostanyan, who regularly creates posts promoting New World Order conspiracy theories (and has featured previously in this report), published a new video suggesting that the pandemic is fake and that masks are useless. Kostanyan referenced the aforementioned post by Lusine Haroyan-Dallakyan to support his claims. (1,800 likes, 540 comments, 1,700 shares, 49,000 views).

2. *Malign Global Elites: Reshaping society/Exploitation (Also: Failing West: Exploitation).*

- Father Sahak Galstryan spoke live on Facebook, repeating conspiracy theories about Bill Gates, mandatory vaccination and microchipping. He claimed that the post-revolutionary government of Armenia is a puppet of Bill Gates, and also insisted that COVID-19 is not dangerous - it is a “masquerade”. (542 likes, 1,007 shares, 748 comments, 47,000 views).
- Via Facebook Live, the doctor and political activist Marina Khachatryan (who has featured previously in these reports) claimed that the real number of COVID-related deaths is being concealed; that the virus does not cause pneumonia; that warnings about the “new normal” (found in other countries, and also made by the Minister of Health in Armenia) are in fact a sign of globalist elites preparing for the New World Order. This content therefore also features misinformation narratives, and those supporting the notion of a ‘Failing West’ (118 shares, 4,900 views).

BULGARIA

Summary

This week, content containing disinformation narratives fell under the theme of ‘Failing West’, supporting the sub-narrative that suggests that western institutions such as the World Health Organization are incompetent and potentially corrupt, and that we will never really know the truth about COVID-19.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Failing West: Incompetence/Corruption*

- A long article on the Bulgarian News Front site (from 21 May, though in circulation during this reporting period) reports that the World Health



Organization has decided to conduct an independent investigation into measures taken to combat COVID-19. The article suggests that this is reminiscent of the decision of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to investigate chemical attacks in Syria, and suggests that in both cases, real geopolitical conflicts were brought into the realm of the “bureaucratic playgrounds of international organizations”, implying that the ultimate aim of such investigations is to support and approve the dominant global order. The article suggests that we will never know the actual truth about COVID-19, and concludes: “A geopolitical conflict has already been established and this is the only thing that matters” (3 interactions)

CZECHIA

Summary

During this reporting period, mis- and disinformation stories identified in Czechia fell under the themes of ‘Misinformation’ (with multiple suggestions that COVID-19 is being overstated, including by politicians who are using it to spread fear and should be punished); ‘Conflict’ (with the suggestion that the virus leaked from a Wuhan lab); Malign Global Elite (with the suggestion that the virus was genetically engineered or is being used to serve the ends of people such as Bill Gates); ‘Failing West’ (with content supporting the narrative that Western institutions, including those of Europe, have failed).

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Misinformation: Hoax*

- On the website Zvedavec, an article questions the statistics surrounding COVID-19, citing Scott Jensen of Minnesota (also a state senator) who suggests that if a patient is diagnosed with COVID-19 and connected to pulmonary ventilator, the hospital will receive a significant amount of reimbursement from Medicare. (25 interactions).
- On Zpravy DT24, an article suggests that fear of COVID-19 is unfounded. It quotes two “experts” and also includes the suggestion that Russia and China considered COVID-19 to be a bio-terrorist attack, and have therefore decided to close cities in order to prevent the movement of people. It also suggests that the West will destroy itself, even without a pandemic. It appears to cite the 'Hermitix' podcast. (127 interactions).



- An article on the website Vlastenecké noviny suggested that according to statistics, there is no COVID-19 epidemic in Czechia, and the PM and his team are therefore liars. "Statistics make it clear that there is no epidemic here, and no pandemic at all", says the article. "Grandma and his henchmen are liars. Will they be punished on the throat?". The article thus also overlaps with the narrative category of 'Failed West' and the sub-narrative of 'Incompetence'. (996 interactions).

2. *Conflict: Bio-Lab*

- An article from The Epoch Times supports the suggestion that COVID-19 may have come from the Wuhan lab, citing research from the University of British Columbia, MIT and Harvard. It also cites the perspective of Czech virologist Soňa Peková. The web page features a video entitled 'What is Real?', with the headline: "Virus NOT From Animals in Wuhan Market; 62 Nations Call for Investigations". (955 interactions).

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

- On the website Extraplus, an article suggests that "A professor at the University of Australia claims that the coronavirus is genetically engineered to infect as many people as possible". The article cites 'The Week' and reports the comments of a Prof. Petrovsky (from a team of scientists at the aforementioned university), speaking to the Daily Mail. Though not explicitly claiming that the virus was created by a global elite, the article subtly supports the narrative that suggests it was made intentionally, for malicious ends. (62 interactions).
- An article on the website Arfa claims that many people who are assisting Donald Trump in fighting COVID-19 are in fact working for Bill Gates, and are therefore promoting vaccines because they work for organisations that seek to vaccinate the global population. The article feeds into the narrative that suggests that Gates wishes to use a vaccine for nefarious ends, and offers a video as "evidence". (138 interactions).

4. *Failing West: Corruption/Hypocrisy; EU failure.*

- An article on Arfa has the headline "Mr. Vaccine Strikes Back: A monstrous conflict of interest in the shadow of Roman Prymula, general of the "war on coronavirus". Cooperation with large pharmaceutical companies for billions? Shocking report". The piece reports on medical professional Roman Prymula, branding him as the Dr. Fauci of Czechia and suggesting that he has connections to 'big pharma' and companies that are testing vaccines. The



implication appears to be that Prymula is corrupt or not to be trusted. (1,916 interactions).

- On the website Sifra, an article with the headline “Surprising finding: Coronavirus prolongs life”, suggests that the virus exists so that people can be manipulated. It compares the pandemic to 9/11 (of which it raises various conspiracy theories), and suggests that the crisis serves to control us and that after it, we will see a new economic reality. The article suggests that people do not think critically enough, and quotes an interview with singer Lou Fananek Hagen (mentioned in previous a report), who has said that he does not wear a mask because he does not follow the herd. (1,262 interactions).
- An article noted in previous reports continues to circulate in different media (e.g. the website Megazpravy), featuring the view of former judge Stefan Harabin, suggesting that the European Commission is ineffective and has failed regarding COVID-19. Harabin is regarded as a conspiracy theorist with strong anti-EU opinions. (67 interactions).

ESTONIA

Summary

This week, content identified as containing mis- and disinformation narratives fell under two themes: ‘Malign Global Elite’, and ‘Failing West’ (under the sub-narrative of ‘Incompetence’). The former narrative featured the World Health Organization (WHO) and Bill Gates as its villains, both accused of attempting to meddle in the lives of Africans. The latter narrative saw the Estonian government criticised for allowing its farming industry to suffer.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Malign Global Elite: Reshaping Society*

- A Facebook post was shared, reporting that the President of Madagascar, Andry Rajoelina, had claimed that the WHO had offered him \$20 million to add toxic chemicals to his country’s natural COVID-19 cure. He is reported to have said: “Europeans hacked our remedy; they have added poisons to kill only the Africans, [just] as they wanted to do with the vaccines that we protested against.” (36 reactions, 14 comments, 26 shares).
- Another Facebook post was shared reporting that Bill Gates is facing criminal charges in Italy and Nigeria. The post alleges that Gates attempted to bribe Nigerian members of parliament to pass a vaccination law, and that Italian



lawmakers have called on Gates to be held to account for his alleged crimes against humanity (53 reactions, 70 comments, 9 shares).

2. *Failing West: Incompetence*

- Various outlets, including RusVesna (2 interactions) and Izvestiya (20 interactions), report that the Estonian government is refusing to allow seasonal migration from Ukraine. Estonian farmers have asked for guest workers to be allowed entry, but the government has so far refused to listen to them, despite the ruinous effect that this will have on fruit picking and other agriculture. The articles do not discuss the reason for the restriction, which is the continuing high levels of COVID-19 in Ukraine.

GEORGIA

Summary

During this reporting period, various mis- and disinformation stories were identified in Georgia. Those falling under the theme of ‘Failing West’ pointed to perceived friction between European states, but also suggested that the Tbilisi-based Lugar Laboratory is incompetent and has done little for Georgia (such claims fall within a sub-narrative that overlaps somewhat with that of ‘Conflict: Bio-lab’). The Lugar Laboratory is a focal point of criticism in almost every CWG report regarding Georgia. Meanwhile, misinformation persists, particularly regarding the effects of 5G. One additional story was also noted, in which it was implied that wheat imports from the USA may be linked to the spread of the disease.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Failing West: Incompetence; EU collapse (also: Conflict: Bio-lab).*

- On 22 May, the website Saqinform published an article with the title “How efficient Lugar Laboratory is for Georgia?”. The author of the article, Paata Gamkrelidze, claims that Lugar Laboratory has a positive image in fighting against COVID-19 thanks only to good PR from western partners. He says that the Laboratory is in fact inefficient, and suggests that its real aim remains secret and that its activity is linked to US military research. The article overlaps with the narrative that suggests that COVID-19 was made in a lab.
- On 23 May, News Front published another article on the subject of the Lugar Laboratory, headlined “How effective is the Lugar Center for the needs of



Georgia?” Although not directly related to COVID-19, the article spreads allegations serving to undermine the Lab, arguing that it has probably done nothing to combat the brown marmorated stink bug (BMSB), an insect destroying the harvest in western Georgia. News Front suggests the Lab is instead being used for something else – perhaps for “American military research”. The article was shared on the social network and according to CrowdTangle it received 98 likes, 81 comments and 21 shares.

- On 23 May, a Sputnik Ossetia article reported that France had recently won a victory over Germany by forcing it to issue Corona bonds. The article insists that the financial resources gained from these bonds will be distributed among France, Italy, Spain and other countries, and that Germany and other countries with stable economies will be left without anything - this will cause discontent and may be followed by the election of other leaders, protecting their national interests. If this happens, the authors claim, Europeans will blame Russian trolls or Chinese propaganda, instead of taking responsibility.

2. *Conflict: Bio-lab; War*

- An article from Saqinform reiterated the narrative that US biolaboratories, including the Lugar Lab, are not working on creating vaccines, but are in fact the source of spreading viruses. Unlike the articles cited above, this one explicitly suggests that COVID-19 may have been made in a lab. The author suggests that the network of US-funded laboratories in the post-Soviet region has had no result in the fight against COVID-19 and that the medical institutions have done nothing to protect citizens. The article also suggests that the pandemic might instead be a rehearsal for the new world war, and promotes the opinion that COVID-19 was artificially created in military biolaboratories with the aim of destroying the human immune system and depopulating rival states. The article cites a March/April News Front interview with Saqinform Editor-in-Chief Arno Khidirbegishvil.

3. *Misinformation: 5G; Hoax*

- A 25 May Facebook post from the group ‘Stop 5G in Georgia’ calls for an investigation into leading public health officials there, and suggests that COVID-19 is a hoax; “...we demand launching an investigation for participating in a conspiracy against the population...”. The post received 33 likes, 19 comments and 6 shares.
- Similarly, the social media influencer Koba Kuprashvili, who regularly appears on different pro-Russian national media, has linked the high death toll from COVID-19 in Sao Paolo to the 5G network in that city. The Facebook post received 70 reactions, 19 comments and 26 shares.



- Various Facebook posts have supported the claim that 5G is linked to COVID-19 and is bad for human health. On 21 May, the Facebook page “Georgia First” shared a video, originally posted on a Russian-language Facebook Page “Meteora”. It contains an interview with conspiracy theorist David Icke, who links COVID-19 to 5G and develops a narrative that COVID-19 is used to install 5G antennae around the world. Facebook has branded this video as containing false information (567 comments, 6,900 shares)

4. *Additional: COVID-19 linked to US wheat imports*

- In the 18-24 May edition of Alia newspaper, it was stated that previously, wheat was heavily imported to Georgia from Russia and other Eurasian countries, but that due to COVID-19, these countries banned this import. As a response, the US decided to provide wheat to Georgia. The author claims that this wheat must be checked, because it may be genetically modified and cause deadly disease. The article thus appears to somewhat suggest that wheat and COVID-19 may be linked, or that the latter may come from the US.

HUNGARY

Summary

During this reporting period, dis- and misinformation articles focused mainly on the ‘failing West’, criticising the EU for its unfair attitudes to Hungary, the Western media for publishing ‘fake news’, and liberal governments for their failed responses to the pandemic.

Social media conversation around these topics was minimal. These mainly concerned conspiracy theories such as Bill Gates’ involvement in the pandemic, the exaggeration of the danger posed by the virus, and the theory that the pandemic was planned.

Compared to the previous reporting period, George Soros, Bill Gates and miracle cures were less present in media, but still highly popular among conspiracy sites. Vaccine scepticism appeared mostly in conversations below various, sometimes unrelated, Facebook posts.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

Zinc’s media monitoring found the following themes and stories:



1. *Failing West: hypocrisy, incompetence, exploitation*

- Origo.hu and Magyar Hirlapand, both pro-government outlets, reported that Brussels refuses to apologise for their criticism of the Hungarian coronavirus law and opposition MEPs compete with each other to spread fake news in Brussels (3,300 interactions). In another article, Origo accused Western media of spreading fake news about Hungary in order to undermine the Hungarian national-conservative government (1,300 interactions). It presented Western media outlets as “fake news factories” that falsely reported on the coronavirus law.
- PestiSracok.hu, a right wing, pro-government outlet, accused the EU of having double standards, claiming that the Swedish response to COVID-19 was not criticised by the EU while the Hungarian model was (1,600 interactions).
- Origo.hu published an article in which it strongly condemns Paris’ handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, blaming it on its liberal leadership (64 interactions). Simultaneously, it also praises right-wing scientist, Didier Raoult, who claimed that hydroxychloroquine was effective in treating COVID-19. Despite studies disproving his theory, the article accused the Macron Presidency of silencing Raoult because of his political views.
- Hirado.hu, a pro-government outlet, reported on a survey which showed that the vast majority of Hungarians consider that it was justified to introduce a “state of emergency” in Hungary for the time of the COVID-19 pandemic (253 interactions). This, according to the outlet, proves that the liberal opposition lost an important political battle. The Institute taking the survey noted that the results will be important to take into consideration in the case of a next wave of the pandemic, when opposition should not interfere anymore with the government’s measures and the will of the people.
- Tuzfalcsoport.blogstar.hu, a far-right and pro-government blog, wrote a strongly critical article about the French-German post-COVID-19 economic relief plan (4,300 interactions), sarcastically calling the plan the foundation of a “liberal empire”. The text also praised Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s firm stand against so called “debt slavery”.

Wider social media conversation around COVID-19

The CWG partner organisation flagged the following social media stories:



- Kimondott Igazságok (*Outspoken truths*), the Facebook page of a fringe conspiracy site, suggested that Bill Gates has not donated money to help solve the crisis, but rather to establish a global network with the aim of manipulating international organisations and the media.
- Kimondott Igazságok claimed that Prince William, who in 2017 warned that overpopulation could lead to a “terrible impact” on the world, made a Freudian slip about a secret plot to murder billions of human beings. The text points to Agenda 21, a non-binding sustainable development action plan of the United Nations that is a hidden attempt to silently reduce population.
- Valóság, amit tudnod kell (*Reality that you need to know*), the Facebook page of a fringe conspiracy site, picked up a recent parliamentary address given by Sara Cunial, a pro-Russian Italian MP from Italy’s ruling 5 Star Movement, who accused Bill Gates of committing crimes against humanity. According to her speech, the US billionaire is conspiring to gain absolute control over humanity in the wake of the current health crisis.

Both the CWG partner organisation and Zinc’s media monitoring flagged the following story:

- A number of Facebook pages, including György Gődény, a medical influencer, Oltáskritikus Életvédők Szövetsége - Vaccine Critics Life Protection Assoc., a Facebook page with 6,000 followers, and a post on Tenyek es Talanyok (Facts and Findings), a Facebook group with 5,700 members, claimed that the threat posed by COVID-19 is insignificant, using a subtitled video of a German group of doctors who criticised lockdown restrictions in Germany. The video claimed that the novel coronavirus is nothing more than a seasonal flu, with both the anti-vaxxers and György Gődény suggesting that none of the restrictions were necessary.

Additionally, Zinc’s media monitoring found a number of stories on social media:

- FIDESZ EU and other pro-government social media accounts discussed MEP Balazs Hidveghi’s interview on Deutsche Welle’s political talk show. All posts presented Hidveghi as exceptionally brave for “setting the reporter straight” and rejecting the accusations implied by the reporter’s questions. Commentators showed significant gratitude for fighting back at a “biased media”.
- Vilaghelyzete (Status of the World), a Facebook page with 9,700 likes, and Alternatív Hírek (Alternative News), a Facebook page with 2,100 likes, posted that Google are planning to access personal accounts in order to delete the



false documentary ‘Plandemic’, that has gone viral around the world. The text stirred outrage in the comment section as well as links to the ‘Plandemic’ video were re-shared.

Coverage of mis/disinformation relating to COVID-19

- There was no notable coverage of mis/disinformation relating to COVID-19.

LATVIA

Summary

Disinformation in HSA and HSA-aligned media criticised the establishment’s response, with two articles criticising the EU and predicting its potential collapse, and another article claiming the Latvian government are using nationalist politics to hide its inability to guide the country out of the pandemic. Article received insignificant levels of interaction.

Dis-/Misinformation themes

1. *Failing West: EU collapse; EU failure; incompetence*

- Sputnik Latvia claimed that the EU’s disapproval of the Baltics states’ decision to open up borders was a precursor to the union’s collapse. The article cited Leonid Krutakov, who claimed that the pandemic may lead to the formation of a new association “based on fundamentally different conditions” (1 interaction).
- RuBaltic claimed that the Baltic states will not be receiving future subsidies from the EU as the largest, wealthiest countries in the EU had been hit hardest by the virus and would therefore be unable to support poorer countries (2 interactions).
- Baltnews claimed that the Latvian government are turning to nationalist politics to order to hide their inability to lead the country out of the coronavirus crisis (40 interactions).

LITHUANIA



Summary

This week, content identified as containing mis- and disinformation narratives fell under two categories: Failing West (more specifically the claim that the Lithuanian government's actions were inept or illegal), and scientific misinformation around COVID-19, as conspiracy theories about 5G and vaccinations continue to spread.

No anti-US, anti-NATO or anti-EU narratives regarding COVID-19 were observed during the latest period of analysis. Narratives regarding the “illegality” of the quarantine restrictions were prevalent in the usual news media outlets, while anti-vaccination narratives have been observed in COVID-19-dedicated social media groups. Recent protests against quarantine, against vaccination and against 5G were covered widely and positively on social media, suggesting that similar future actions may attract a sympathetic audience.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Failing West: incompetence*

- Pro-Russian, pro-Ukrainian separatist outlet RusVesna has accused the Lithuanian government of failing to take care of the health of its citizens during the pandemic. By refusing to allow NGOs to provide food and care to the needy, on the grounds that such measures would break quarantine, the state is revealing its disregard for the wellbeing of its population, the article alleges. (2 interactions)
- Right-wing site Pro Patria has claimed that older people in Lithuania are being discriminated against by the state, because government guidelines encourage them to avoid public places and events. (277 interactions)
- Laisvas Laikrastis, a news outlet widely regarded as pro-Kremlin, has alleged that the quarantine is illegal, because according to the law, 5% of the population need to be inflected before quarantine measures can be imposed. (46 interactions)

2. *Misinformation: 5G; other*

- A video showing Astra Astrauskaite, an activist with a history of anti-government protest, was widely shared on Facebook. In the video, taken at the anti-quarantine protests of 22 May, Astrauskaite claims that the quarantine is illegal, condemns the rollout of the 5G mobile network, and claims that mandatory vaccination is unconstitutional. The top comment called for George Soros to be thrown out of Lithuania. (251 shares, 234 comments).



- In a YouTube video, Andrius Lobovas, an anti-vaccination activist, has called on Lithuanians to resist all vaccinations, including for COVID-19 should one be developed. He repeated debunked claims that vaccinated children are less healthy than unvaccinated ones and that vaccines cause autism. (2,636 views).
- Relatedly, a petition against mandatory vaccination is being spread in COVID-19 social media groups. As of 26 May, it had over 4,100 signatories.

MOLDOVA

Summary

This week, a number of narrative trends have been identified, with themes including: 'Misinformation' (5G); 'Failing West' (with content suggesting EU fission and failure); 'Malign Global Elite' (with content supporting the suggestion that vaccination is dangerous and not to be trusted). As in the previous reporting period, Sputnik.md, Flux.md and the politician Iurie Rosca continue to be prolific in spreading such claims.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Misinformation: 5G*

- On Facebook, the politician Iurie Rosca shared video material mentioning the alleged dangers of 5G technology and suggesting that it is linked to COVID-19.

2. *Failing West: EU Failure*

- A Sputnik.md article suggests that Europe is more divided than ever, because its officials do not know how to manage COVID-19. Because of this, it claims, countries such as Italy may wish to break away.

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

- An article from the Flux.md site, which claims to offer "news and analysis", provides the text of an interview with the "Russian Orthodox thinker and economist, V.Yu. Katasonova for the YouTube channel of the Book World



publishing house” (it also features embedded video). It contains the suggestion that there is no such thing as COVID-19 and that the crisis has been promoted by global elites with aims that include curbing population growth and reducing the global population; changing the economy; weakening nation states; creating world government (123 interactions).

- Also on Flux.md, an article claimed that increasingly, "experts" such as Bill Gates have been instructing the public that mass gatherings and any semblance of “normalcy” will not return until a vaccine is created and distributed to the masses. The article thus supports the suggestion that Gates, “controversial philanthropists”, and others are promoting a vaccine for malicious, self-interested reasons. It also links vaccination to possible gene damage (2 interactions).
- The politician Iurie Rosca also claimed in a Facebook post that mass protests are being prepared in Russia, should it try to pass a law on forced vaccination.

NORTH MACEDONIA

Summary

During this reporting period, mis- and disinformation stories in North Macedonia fell broadly into the following themes: ‘Misinformation’ (with content suggesting that Hungary will soon have a vaccine; repeating the false claims that the Japanese scientist Tasuku Honjo believes that COVID-19 was not naturally created; proposing that the virus is artificial); ‘Malign Global Elite’ (with the suggestion that Bill Gates may not only be benefiting from any future vaccine, but may also have helped to create the disease); ‘Failing West’ (with the suggestion that Italy may leave the EU, which is struggling to stay united amidst the crisis). Again, there appears to have been a slight reduction in ‘Reframing Russia’ narratives. Those implicating global elites in COVID-19, however, remain prevalent, as does misinformation.

Dis-/Misinformation themes

1. *Failing West: EU collapse*

- An article from the online news outlet Infomax (shared on two Facebook pages/groups with approx. 127,000 followers) draws on statements recently made by George Soros, in order to (misleadingly) suggest that Italy will leave the EU. The article appears to simply quote Soros, but somewhat feeds into the narrative that suggests that the EU is doomed to failure and is breaking under the pressure of the COVID-19 crisis (124 interactions).



2. *Misinformation: Cure; Hoax; Expert Advice (Also: Malign Global Elites: Reshaping Society).*

- Another article from the popular Infomax site (3,783,000 visits in the past six months according to SimilarWeb data) offers a somewhat misleading headline suggesting that Hungary is on the verge of discovering a vaccine for coronavirus. Asking: “Is a Hungarian coronavirus vaccine on the horizon?”, the article describes Hungarian institutions as competent and experienced and suggests that the Hungarians were among the first in Europe to isolate the virus. The article has been shared on two Facebook pages with around 127,000 followers (28 interactions).
- A Maski Magazin article recycled a story reported several weeks ago, wrongly suggesting that Japanese scientist Tasuku Honjo had claimed that COVID-19 is not natural but manmade. Honjo has refuted these claims (56 interactions).
- A Sloboden Svet article with the headline “Serbian pulmonologist Nestorovic: Coronavirus is artificial, Bill Gates vaccine is bad” offers the perspective of a pulmonologist who suggests that COVID-19 is artificial and not especially serious. The article also suggests that the vaccine supported by Bill Gates is “bad” - the pulmonologist would never accept it. The article has been shared on three Facebook pages with approximately 33,000 followers (56 interactions).

3. *Malign Global Elite: Reshaping Society*

- In a similar vein to the above article, which suggests that a vaccine supported by Bill Gates is not to be trusted, an article from Popara repeated the claim that Bill Gates “patented” the coronavirus itself back in 2018. It suggests that at the same time, Bill and Melinda Gates developed a financial role in “resolving” the ensuing crisis. Thus, the virus is likely to have been created on purpose, claims the author. The article features an image of Gates montaged with one of the UK's Professor Neil Ferguson, and also features a video of the latter being interviewed (52 interactions).

POLAND

Summary



During this reporting period, misinformation continued to be notable, with themes again including 5G and the suggestion that COVID-19 has been overstated (in particular, the suggestion that statistics are not to be trusted and that medical professionals have incentives to over-diagnose COVID-19 and state it as a patient's cause of death). The theme of 'Malign Global Elite' was also strong, with content largely suggesting that public understanding of COVID-19 was being manipulated by the powerful, in order to introduce heavy social control. Content explicitly implicating Bill Gates was less prevalent in this period.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

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

- A post on the Facebook Group "I Don't Believe in Coronavirus" (approx 69,000 members) included content originally posted to the Jarek Kefir blog, where it was claimed that doctors and nurses are being intimidated and banned from speaking out beyond the "WHO line". The post also included the claim, seen elsewhere in this and previous reports, that diagnosing someone as having COVID-19 "pays off" financially. (4,743 interactions)
- Similarly, on the PL national television morning show (and its website) a famous windsurfer joined a discussion on fake news surrounding COVID-19. The windsurfer challenged another guest - a doctor – asking them how it could be the case that cashiers, for example, are not globally infected with COVID-19. They also made the claim that doctors in, for example, the US, are being paid to diagnose patients as having COVID-19. The content has been shared on social media, with various further posts generated by the event. (3 interactions)
- Content originally posted by the fringe outlet wiesci24.pl, suggesting that being asked to wear masks is unlawful and that people should not wear masks in public space, was shared by the aforementioned Facebook group "I Don't Believe in Coronavirus". In arguing that edicts from the authorities are unjust and not to be trusted, this content arguably also falls under the heading of 'Failing West: Incompetence/Hypocrisy'. (508 interactions)
- The website saloninformacyjny.pl featured a post (in mid-April) that has since been shared by numerous Facebook groups (the most popular one having more than 69,000 members), repeating the conspiracy theory connecting 5G to COVID-19. The author of the post claims that in parts of China where 5G was introduced, a higher number of COVID-19 cases were found. (347 interactions)

2. *Conflict: Bio-Lab/Malign Global Elite: Reshaping Society*

- The fringe outlet Warszawska Gazeta, which has a print and online version, featured an article suggesting that COVID-19 was created by humans. The



article is based on an interview with the “journalist and writer” Witold Gadowski. Comments featured include: “From the information I have, getting it from friends working on the best biochemical technologies in laboratories in California, there is nothing comforting.” (253 interactions)

3. *Malign Global Elite: Reshaping Society/Exploitation (Also: Failing West: Exploitation).*

- A link posted to the Facebook group “I Don’t Believe in Coronavirus” (approx. 69,000 members) included content originally posted to YouTube with the heading “End of virus. End of freedom. Deception of history”, suggesting that the official reported number of deaths is misleading; that the virus is not dangerous; that it was introduced to societies to help governments to imprison people and more heavily control their societies. (104,992 interactions)
- The website ‘independenttrader.pl’ featured a post – then shared with numerous Facebook groups – offering the familiar suggestion that COVID-19 was invented and introduced to societies by humans (rather than being naturally generated). However, adopting a relatively uncommon angle, the post goes on to imply that countries that are/were in deep economic crisis (such as China, the US, or Germany) may have created the pandemic in order to break the global economy; in the world that follows, it will be easier to reboot the economy and to consolidate financial markets. The article offers an embedded video attributed to Phil Konieczny, entitled “Pandemic of fear and poverty in Poland - Crisis of the century”, and also points readers towards Noam Chomsky’s ‘Theory of Manipulation’. (27,213 interactions)
- In a similar vein, a post found on the website prisonplanet.pl (and shared on Facebook pages and the website renesans21.pl) presented the COVID-19 crisis as coordinated by mainstream media, who, the article claims, have shared a global lie with the public, using panic messaging and manipulative techniques of deception. The article suggests that the media work hand in hand with bankers, politicians and other elites, who have the goal of controlling human minds and activity. The article makes reference to Naomi Klein’s book “The Shock Doctrine”. (177 interactions)

ROMANIA

Summary

This week, content promoting dis- and misinformation fell into the following themes: ‘Misinformation’ (notably, in the form of an article shared via Facebook, suggesting that temperature checks should be resisted); ‘Malign Global Elites’ (in the form of a



post by an MP suggesting that restrictive measures imposed by the government are linked to the work of a global occult that seeks to achieve world domination); ‘Failing West’ (with content suggesting both EU failure and the alleged incompetent and corrupt behaviour of the Romanian government).

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Misinformation: Expert Advice*

- A post on the Facebook page of Lujo.ro shared an article from the website of the same name in which statements from lawyer Gheorghe Piperea were quoted and commented upon. The statements suggest that temperature checks are “illegal and abusive” and that people should challenge them, insisting that Romanians should “refuse to be humiliated”.

2. *Malign Global Elites: Exploitation*

- Romanian MP Liviu Pleasoianu reacted to an alleged incident of police brutality at a Bucharest supermarket by posting a series of comments on Facebook. In one of these, he reiterates the theory that the restrictive measures imposed by the government are part of a plan by a global occult organisation that manipulates world governments with the aim of achieving world domination. The post has had more than 1,000 reactions so far, and is also critical of masks and thermometer use.

3. *Failing West: Incompetence/Corruption; EU Failure*

- A Sputnik.md article (3,457 views) quoted and commented on statements made by Romanian MP Varujan Vosganian. The main narrative present in the article suggests that the pandemic has been used by the government to make dubious business deals with several businesses that are benefiting from the pandemic, in particular regarding the purchasing of masks. This article also overlaps with the ‘Misinformation’ narrative suggesting that expert advice is not to be trusted.
- A Sputnik.md article (over 300 views in less than two hours) continued the outlet’s coverage of anti-lockdown activity in other European states, presenting a description of the supposed size, scale and justifications for anti-lockdown protests in Germany. The article speaks of “dozens of protests” taking place across the country and misleadingly claims that water cannons were used to disperse anti-lockdown protestors in Hamburg. However, other outlets have



been reporting that anti-lockdown protests in Germany have in fact been on the wane.

- Also on Sputnik.md, an article suggests that the EU is more divided than ever amidst the economic fallout from COVID-19, and that solidarity is lacking. The article hones in on Italy's discontent in particular, and has the headline: "Europe, more divided than ever because of money".
- A Capital.ro article used quotes from George Soros, regarding the fragility of the EU amidst the pandemic, to suggest that the collapse of the Union may be imminent.

SERBIA

Summary

In this reporting period, Zinc identified one relevant disinformation narrative: malign global elite (other). The pro-government tabloid Alo reported on claims by high-profile pulmonologist Branimir Nestorović, who reportedly claimed he would not get vaccinated because the vaccine being produced by Bill Gates' company will not be effective and will contain artificial substances, which is a cause for concern.

On social media, users mostly focused on reporting the latest current events, COVID-19 data and opinions from experts on the crisis worldwide. Users joked about Bill Gates and the backlash he has been facing.

Wider media coverage of disinformation around COVID-19 focused largely on Nestorović and his distrust of vaccines. Pro-government tabloid Blic covered the response from Wang Yanyi, director of the Wuhan laboratory at the centre of a number of conspiracy theories, to US accusations that the virus is man-made.

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 covers the TV interview with the pulmonologist Nestorović, who claimed that he would not get vaccinated because the vaccine being developed by Bill Gates' company is bad, inefficient and contains artificial substances, which he says was later confirmed by Greek researchers (2,686 interactions).

Wider social media conversation around COVID-19



- Private users shared articles on different statements from Serbian doctors and speculated whether the virus was man-made and whether someone knew where and how it would spread, such as [this interview](#) with a doctor, Danica Grujičić. Users also shared an [article](#) by the pro-government Informer reporting on a meeting between President Vučić and representatives of five other countries, who reportedly praised Serbia for the work they did in battling the virus.
- Users widely shared a tweet in which a person joked about being at his local café and seeing Bill Gates lurking in a '5G' t-shirt trying to find his next victim to put a chip in, and warned everybody to run, clearly showing that they are aware of the conspiracy theories going around.

Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- The most engaged-with article in the period of interest came from the aggregate portal [b92](#). It covers the TV interview with Nestorović, who claimed that he would not get vaccinated because the vaccine being developed by Bill Gates' company is bad, inefficient and contains artificial substances, which he says was later confirmed by Greek researchers (2,548 engagements). The story was also picked up by the portal which serves to 'promote love towards Serbia everywhere' [Srbin](#), and the independent [Vesti](#), as well as the aggregate portal [Naslovi](#) multiple times, with articles originating from the portal [Mondo](#), pro-government [Kurir](#) and [b92](#) among others.
- Another prominent story relating to COVID-19 came from the pro-government [Blic](#), who reported that Wang Yanyi, director of the Wuhan Institute of Virology, has dismissed US accusations that the virus is man-made.

SLOVAKIA

Summary

During this reporting period, mis- and disinformation content in Slovakia highlighted by the CWG fell under the following themes: 'Misinformation' (with multiple suggestions that the pandemic has been overstated, and that experts are not to be trusted); 'Malign Global Elite' (with conspiracy theories pointing to the intentions of the 'deep state' and those promoting vaccination); 'Failing West' (with the suggestion that Europe's democracies have been reduced to the level of totalitarian regimes, and that



the region faces chaos and collapse). One article also linked COVID-19 to migration, suggesting that Turkey may have been intentionally sending infected migrants to Greece. Misinformation appears to be especially strong in Slovakia (as in Czechia), with Zem a Vek being an especially ubiquitous outlet in this week's report.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Misinformation: hoax; expert advice*

- An article from Zem a Vek, which features regularly in these reports, claimed that the number of deaths attributed to COVID-19 is manipulated, including in the United States. The article repeats the suggestion that hospitals and doctors are being instructed to cite COVID-19 as the cause of death even if a patient dies of other things (437 interactions).
- Similarly, an Infovojna article quotes Dr. Scott Jensen of Minnesota (who has appeared previously in this report), who believes that doctors are stating COVID-19 as a cause of death even in cases where this is not true, and that hospitals have financial incentives to do this (112 interactions).
- In a Facebook post, the Slovak MEP Milan Uhrík from the far-right party ĽSNS attacks the Slovak PM and suggests that COVID-19 is "virtually non-existing", comparing it to the flu (531 Comments, 843 Shares).
- A Zem a Vek article claims that there is a new vaccine for the virus, but that it may interfere with human genetics and is not to be trusted. The article suggests that people are being used as "guinea pigs", and has the headline "New experimental vaccine against COVID-19: Nobody knows what they will do with your genetics". It thus overlaps somewhat with the narrative that suggests that malign global elites are using vaccination for nefarious ends (1,010 interactions).

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

- A Zem a Vek article attacks the Slovak PM and the government before moving on to link to various 'alternative' articles and conspiracy theories, including the suggestion that COVID-19 is part of the 'Deep State's' attempt to practice "demokratúra" (democracy + dictatorship) and to control the population (1,059 interactions).
- Further content shared by Zem a Vek, on YouTube, features the conspiracy theorist Tibor Rostas suggesting that we should question the "truth" given to us about COVID-19 and that the worst is yet to come, in the form of 'the Blessed Holy Vaccine'. The video has had more than 4,500 views.



3. *Failing West: EU Collapse/Incompetence (also: Moral Decline: Value Failure)*

- Another Zem a Vek article (from 21 May) claims that the media and social networks have created panic and fear around COVID-19, which has reduced modern democracies to the level of totalitarian China. It suggests that Europe is awaiting chaos and collapse, in part due to the stress of 'Afro-Asian' migration (128 interactions).

4. *Additional: Migration*

- A Zem a Vek article headlined “Migrants from Turkish camps have tested positive for coronavirus in Greece” suggests that Turkey could have been sending infected migrants to Greece to spread COVID-19, in what could be regarded as an informal biological attack (77 interactions).

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: the liberal model of the world order is fading; Ukraine is dealing poorly with the pandemic; Ukrainians will not be allowed to leave the country; Ukraine might not survive the pandemic; there are restrictions on reporting information regarding COVID-19 in Ukraine; quarantine in Ukraine is enforced and relaxed for political grounds.

This report also sees a number of newly occurring disinformation narratives: Ukraine has had to suspend its exit from quarantine due to unpreparedness; President Putin is feeling unwell; the chief medical officer of Ukraine has business interests at stake in the mass vaccination of society.

Social media conversation focused on the Head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, who has reportedly travelled to Moscow to be treated for COVID-19. The other major topic of discussion centred around an allegation that a Ukrainian doctor was compelled to diagnose a healthy patient with COVID-19. (Zinc’s media monitoring has identified this to be a recurring narrative penetrating Ukrainian social media



environment since the beginning of quarantine.) Much attention was given to the news that the pharmaceutical company American Moderna may be making progress on a COVID-19 vaccine.

Media coverage of disinformation concentrated on Google's updated COVID-19 Medical Misinformation Policy which specified the type of COVID-19 content that will be removed from YouTube. Media outlets in Ukraine reported that the Ministry of Health has refuted claims that sunbathing helps prevent COVID-19. The launch of the UN's new COVID-19 counter-disinformation initiative "Verified" was also given prominent coverage in Ukraine. This reporting period also saw the launch of a project devoted to exposing COVID-19 fake news by the outlet Ukrainian Pravda, called 'SOS'.

Dis-/Misinformation themes

1. *Failing West: exploitation; incompetence; corruption; general/other*

Zinc's media monitoring observed the following stories:

- Russian state-owned news site [Ukraina.ru](#) featured an article in which Rostislav Ishchenko, widely considered a pro-Russian propagandist, pointed out that the American financial system is a long-term problem compared to the temporary problem of the COVID-19 pandemic (149 interactions).
- Strana, a major source of misleading information in Ukraine, with a big readership, published an article covering the IMF and Ukrainian authorities reaching an agreement on a new arrangement to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Strana speculates that the laws restricting the sale of land will be relaxed, which will be unpopular among Ukrainians (310 interactions).
- Pro.ua, a website that often amplifies certain messages without proper verification, engaged in disseminating a message that Ukraine is not ready to exit quarantine. Nevertheless, in the body of the article it refutes itself, correctly pointing out that only 11 oblasts of Ukraine failed to meet the necessary requirements to qualify for the next phase of leaving quarantine (126 interactions). Identical misleading headlines also appeared on [Hyser](#), which wrongly added quarantine 'is back in place' (399 interactions), and [Politeka](#) (66 interactions).
- A major source of Russian propaganda in Ukraine, Strana, wrote an article that concludes that "quarantine in Ukraine is enforced and removed not based on medical grounds, but on political ones" (61 interactions).



- Pro.ua misleadingly reported on a statement from the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, who said up until now only foreign citizens and holders of foreign residence permits are allowed to cross the border out of Ukraine, a restriction he foresees as staying in place until the mid-July when international travel resumes. Pro.ua, however, reported this in a way that suggests Ukrainians will not be allowed to travel to Europe even after borders are open (132 interactions). An identical narrative appeared on Politeka (62 interactions).
- Hvylya published a gloomy economic analysis that predicts that 2020 might end up being the last for an independent Ukraine (350 interactions). It foresees the world being re-divided into spheres of influence, meaning that Ukraine will fall under Russia's orbit.
- From-ua published an article which questioned the real motives behind Ukraine's chief medical officer, Viktor Lyashko, pushing for mass flu vaccination, claiming (citing WHO scientists) that it does not necessarily help in fighting COVID-19 and that Lyashko has financial interests in the vaccine. Lyashko has said that the intention of mass vaccination against the flu is to lessen the burden on medics, not to cure COVID-19.

CWG partner organisations flagged the following relevant stories:

- The Telegram channel of the Russian state-owned Ukraina.ru (8,000 subscribers) used an old Soviet poster ridiculing the unity of Western countries and portraying them as backstabbing and treacherous. The message claims that sentiment of the poster is true for the West during the pandemic (1,600 views).
- Pro-Russian outlet Strana has attacked a new testing strategy in Ukraine. In an article published 22 May (0 interactions), it falsely claims that tests will only be open to a select few recipients.

2. Malign global elite: reshaping society

Zinc's media monitoring observed the following stories:

- Pro-Russian site Antifashist continues to attack the US-born former minister of health Ulana Suprun, with the headline "USA demands Zelensky brings Suprun back and continues the medical genocide" (3,110 Facebook interactions). Russian disinformation typically portrays Suprun as an agent of American influence and frequently links her to Soros. Suprun has been repeatedly portrayed as being tasked by Washington with undermining the health of Ukrainians.



3. *Reframing Russia: Russian success*

- Russian state-owned outlet Ukraina.ru produced an article by the Russian journalist Vitaly Tretyakov who made a point that given how well Russia is handling the pandemic, there can be no talks about a bi-polar world in which US and China are the two superpowers, but rather a tri-polar world, with Russia alongside them (125 interactions).

4. *Conflict: COVID-19 war*

Zinc's media monitoring observed the following stories:

- Russian state-owned Ukraina.ru published a piece in which Soviet-Ukrainian political scientist Mykhailo Pohrebynskyi claims that even if Ukraine manages to survive the COVID-19 threat, it will nonetheless continue sliding into the abyss (207 interactions). He also predicted that COVID-19 might cause revolutions and wars.
- Ukraina.ru also published an article in which academic Alexander Kniazev makes the point that a proliferation of local conflicts in Central Asia caused by social tensions arising out of COVID-19 pandemic is a possibility (119 interactions).

5. *Misinformation: cure*

Zinc's media monitoring observed the following stories:

- Russian disinformation amplifier in Ukraine, Strana, reported on the ability of cannabis to cure COVID-19 (23,345 interactions).

6. *Miscellaneous / other*

Zinc's media monitoring observed the following stories:

- Ukrainian new site Hvylya referenced speculated about Vladimir Putin's health, claiming that it is deteriorating and soon he will be unable to rule (1,149 Facebook interactions). The source of the story, Russian political commentator Valery Solovey, claimed Vladimir Putin was feeling unwell before COVID-19 press conference.
- Pro-Kremlin, pro-separatist News-Front published an article claiming that dangerous infectious diseases might be set to impact Ukraine, namely measles, tetanus and tuberculosis (345 Facebook interactions).



Wider social media conversation around COVID-19

- Significant attention on social media was given to reports of Chechen Republic Head Ramzan Kadyrov being flown to Moscow with suspected COVID-19. Many social media posts reflected on how a seemingly strong individual can suffer with the virus. Other popular topics included the progress made in vaccine development and Zelensky's call to prepare for a second wave.
- A post on Не Будь Байдужим (*Don't Be Indifferent*), a Facebook group with 168,000 members, referenced an incident of a doctor being compelled to diagnose a healthy patient with COVID-19. The same story was also posted on Новини України (*News of Ukraine*), a Facebook page with 1,500,000 followers. The two posts received over 1,000 shares.
- Реальна Україна (*Real Ukraine*), a Facebook page with 265,000 followers, contained a post in which Ukrainian Ministry of Health clinical trials of Ukrainian-made medical drugs were portrayed as having absolutely no chance of succeeding. The post received 629 interactions.
- The Facebook page of Ukrainian mainstream media outlet Obozrevatel, that lately has produced a high number of unverified, sensational, clickbait content, posted a message warning Ukrainians that COVID-19 might end up being not so scary compared to what is coming, referencing the government's failure to procure medication.
- A member of president Zelensky's party, Kiril Nesterenko, expressed his conviction that the Chief Sanitary Doctor of Ukraine is involved in falsification of COVID-19 PCR diagnostics. According to Nesterenko, positive results are assigned to 'undesired' elements in power (96 likes and 36 shares).
- A post appeared on a page appealing to Soviet-born individuals that questioned the real intentions of Bill Gates in his endeavour to come up with a COVID-19 vaccine on the grounds that he does nothing to develop a vaccine against something more deadly than COVID-19, namely cancer (71 likes, 35 comments, 28 shares).

Coverage of dis/misinformation relating to COVID-19

- Independent publicly and privately funded NGO Hromadske.ua reported about Google's updated COVID-19 Medical Misinformation Policy, attracting 167 Facebook interactions. The story was featured on other major Ukrainian outlets



including Pravda, Gordon, Korrespondent, AIN, Focus, 24 Kanal, UNN, NTN and others.

- Respected media outlet 24 Kanal wrote about how sunbathing actually does not help to protect one from getting infected with COVID-19 (36 interactions). The story was picked up by Golos and Strana.
- The UNN news agency produced an article about the UN launching a COVID-19 counter-disinformation initiative "Verified" (6 interactions). The story was also covered by Ukrinform, Gazeta and Day.Kiev.ua.
- UNN also reported on a representative from the Wuhan laboratory refuting popular claims on the origins of COVID-19 (0 interactions). This story also appeared on Focus and Telegraf.
- Independent fact-checking organisation StopFake dispelled a prominent disinformation narrative regarding COVID-19 circulating recently that people die not of COVID-19 but blood clots, and that Aspirin helps to prevent that (262 interactions).
- Media monitoring organisation Detector Media reported that popular Ukrainian website Pravda is launching a project devoted to exposing COVID-19 fakes (70 interactions).



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.