



SUMMARY REPORT

Tuesday 02 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
Moldova	Romanian
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](#)

1. [Armenia](#)
2. [Bulgaria](#)
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[Notes on terminology and methodology:](#)

[Working Definitions](#)

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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 every 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 submitted and analysed for this report. Click [here](#) for a list of narrative and sub-narrative headings used in the CWG reports.

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



COUNTRIES

ARMENIA

Summary

During this reporting period, 'Misinformation' narratives were especially notable, with expert advice being undermined through content that challenged the utility of both face masks and quarantine, and also claimed that the pandemic would soon be over. One notable piece of content also fell within the theme of 'Failing West', suggesting that the Prime Minister's family has its own mask business and is therefore corrupt. Separately, the Armenian health minister continues to be criticised – this week in a post with limited reach suggesting that he is the puppet of the World Health Organization and is being directed by masonic organisations.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. Misinformation: Expert Advice

- Claims about masks being useless continue to spread. In a Facebook video, the former head of Masis Hospital made this claim, and [urged](#) people to refuse wearing them. The Facebook page ““Coronavirus=Scam of the Century” (2,453 followers) posted a fragment of her talk, and received 104,000 views as of 1 June 2020.
- Similarly, the blogger and conspiracy theory amplifier Hayk Kostanyan (who has featured previously in these reports) [posted](#) a montage of different statements by doctors, world leaders and WHO employees seeming to talk about how mask-wearing is not useful. The text in Kostanyan's post accompanying the video states: “I have only one goal: not to allow you to become a slave by believing in the lies of the agency network.” (408 comments, 4,200 shares)
- An article on Analitik.am [claimed](#) that Norway analysed country data and announced quarantine was useless and the fight against coronavirus could be just as effective without it. It has received 709 Facebook interactions, according to Crowdtangle.
- On Haylur24.ru, an article [claimed](#) that a well-known Chinese expert on infectious diseases claimed that COVID-19 will disappear within a month, leaving behind only its harmless mutation. The article is a republication of one published in April by a range of clickbait websites and news organisations, including Lurer.com, and has received 4,824 Facebook reactions according to Crowdtangle.

2. Failing West: Corruption (Also: Malign Global Elites: Exploitation).

- A Facebook video from doctor and political activist Marina Khachatryan (mentioned previously in these reports) showed a pack of masks produced in Armenia and [repeated](#) the debunked claim that the Prime Minister's family has their own mask production business. Khachatryan has promised to post a new video featuring more details. The video has been viewed 7,300 times but has so far been shared only 92 times.



- Attempts continue to be made to undermine the Armenian Health Minister. In a Facebook post – though with limited reach (42 shares so far) - the aforementioned doctor and activist Marina Khachatryan [claimed](#) that the Minister is a puppet of the World Health Organization and that his announcements are under Masonic influence.
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BULGARIA

Summary

Content promoting the ‘Reframing Russia’ narrative was again especially notable (relative to other countries) during this reporting period. Claims included: that a Japanese citizen was pleasantly surprised at medical treatment received in Russia; that Russia has developed an anti-COVID-19 drug (content notable mainly for the fact that it is circulating amongst Bulgarian audiences); that outlets such as the Financial Times and the New York Times have exhibited Russophobia (as noted elsewhere in previous reports). Other themes present include ‘Malign Global Elites’ (implicating Henry Kissinger in COVID-19) and ‘Failing West’.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Reframing Russia: Russian Success; Global Leadership; Russophobia*

- The website Vz.ru [reported](#) that Japanese citizen Asuka Tokuyama has described how she was treated in a Moscow hospital to which patients with suspected COVID-19 are referred. She was pleasantly surprised at how Russia copes with the disease. The article is headlined “A patient from Japan revealed the secret of low mortality from coronavirus in Russia” (87 interactions).
- The same website, vz.ru [reported](#) that the first drug against COVID-19 in Russia – Avifavir – had received approval from the Ministry of Health. Whilst this may not necessarily be false information, it is perhaps notable that this content is circulating in Bulgaria. The article cites RIA Novosti (9 interactions).
- Tsargrad.tv [mentioned](#) an American edition of the journal Foreign Affairs, describing how against the backdrop of recent “false information” from the Financial Times (FT) and New York Times (NYT) (regarding the mortality statistics coming from Russia), the journal evaluates Russia’s fight against COVID-19 in a “political way”, considering how the pandemic may have affected the political situation inside the country. The article suggests that the American edition of Foreign Affairs in fact praises Russia’s fight against COVID-19, and frames that interpretation as fairer than that provided by outlets such as the FT and NYT (5 interactions).

2. *Malign Global Elites: Reshaping Society*

- Content on the website Istinskitenovini.bg [alleged](#) that Henry Kissinger is part of a group that – thanks to the work of Bill Gates – seeks to control and manage microchipped people. With the headline “Shock: Kissinger is for chipping the



population!", it cites an electronic publication, Rai Al Youm, which appears to be UK-based (24 interactions).

3. *Failing West: Other*

- The website Istinskitenovini.bg [reported](#) that the head of the National Crisis HQ in Bulgaria had suggested that those who refuse to be vaccinated against COVID-19 should be imprisoned for up to five years (with fines also raised), and that the HQ plans to propose this to the National Assembly. This appears to be a story with little factual basis, and is understood to have taken the alleged comments out of context (23,819 interactions).

CZECHIA

Summary

During this reporting period, mis- and disinformation stories identified in Czechia fell under the themes of 'Misinformation' (with the suggestion that COVID-19 has been exaggerated and that expert advice should be ignored or suspected); 'Malign Global Elite' (with content targeting the World Health Organization and Bill Gates), 'Failing West' (with one item criticising the competence of the World Health Organization, drawing on recent statements made by US President Donald Trump) and 'Conflict' (with the suggestion that US biolabs in the region are not to be trusted). These are all familiar narrative themes in Czechia.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Misinformation: Hoax; Expert Advice*

- An article from Arfa (also in Slovakia's 'Zem a Vek') cited data to [claim](#) that 92% of people in Czechia who supposedly died because of COVID-19 in fact died primarily because of another disease. The article compares COVID-19 to flu, and suggests that the media has unnecessarily spread panic among the population. The title reads "Shocking statistics! The state declassified data on "dead with coronavirus" in the Czech Republic: 92% did not die of COVID-19. And what's more: Mortality is lower this year than last year and the year before - by two thousand! An epidemic or a cruel joke?" (1,443 interactions)
- The websites Vlastenecke Noviny and iDnes [suggested](#) (as was also suggested by Infovojna in Slovakia) that COVID-19 is not as dangerous as claimed, and that the mortality rate is far lower than that stated in official statistics. It also suggested that tests do not work properly, and that instilling fear in people is the best way to control them, with COVID-19 being an example of this strategy (996 interactions).



- On the website Otevři svou mysl (also on Slovakia's Infovojna), a video and a transcript of it suggested that vaccines are dangerous, and that they are being made mandatory (to the benefit of large companies). It also claimed that Bill Gates wants to reduce the world's population, and suggested that in future we may have to show a vaccination passport or a tattoo to show whether we have been immunised. The video is entitled/described as: "Robert Kennedy Jr. and Dr. Andrew Kaufman talk about the dangers of vaccines and new v-accine technology that affects the genetic makeup of our cells" (147 interactions).

2. *Malign Global Elites: Reshaping Society (Also: Misinformation: Hoax)*

- The website Otevři svou mysl, entitled "Who is Bill Gates? Revealing the Dark Agenda and Ideology", featured a video and accompanying text (seemingly a transcript of the former), containing yet more conspiracy theory content regarding Bill Gates (as did Infovojna in Slovakia), suggesting that he seeks to control our identities, transactions and bodies. The article features the previously-noted conspiracy theories regarding population control and immunity passports, and suggests that Gates is motivated by the ideology of eugenics (567 interactions).
- The website nwoo.org - "New World Order Opposition" - shared a complex conspiracy theory implicating the World Health Organization, Bill Gates and others in the pandemic. Part of a "series" presenting the WHO as a kind of 'mafia' organisation, it suggests that it and the UN created an NGO named 'GPMB', which published a document asking national governments to give them more money and control. The article also includes a theory regarding "Event 201" (in which representatives of various organisations apparently experienced a simulation of a pandemic situation) (31 interactions).
- The Arfa website promoted an article – featuring a FOX News video of Donald Trump - suggesting that COVID-19 is not a real pandemic, and that it is being used to the benefits of global elites. For example, it alleges, Bill Gates is cooperating with China and that therefore, when Trump says that China controls the World Health Organization, this really means that Bill Gates controls it. The article suggests that the pandemic is really only happening in order to enrich the world's richest people (1,985 interactions).

3. *Failing West: Incompetence*

- An article from AC24 (similar to those from Zem a Vek and Hlavne Spravy in Slovakia) somewhat undermined the World Health Organization, suggesting that it supported China in allowing citizens from Wuhan to travel around the world, thereby spreading the disease. The article is presented in the context of President Donald Trump declaring the ending of the US relationship with the WHO (45 interactions).

4. *Conflict: Bio-Lab*

- The website Prvni Zpravy repeated (in an article from 28 May) the suggestion that US bio-labs are dangerous, reporting that between 2005 and 2014 the Pentagon's Threat



Reduction Agency upgraded several biolaboratories in Ukraine to “prevent the spread of technologies, pathogens and knowledge... that may be used in the development of biological weapons.” The article’s headline takeaway from this is: “The US has eight laboratories in Ukraine with dangerous infections!” (321 interactions).

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.

There was little overt disinformation in this reporting period. Hostile state media either covered the progress of COVID-19 in Estonia relatively dispassionately, or turned their attention to other topics. The only example of disinformation came from RuBaltic, who promoted the narrative that the Baltic states will receive little to no help from the EU following the pandemic.

This story was identified by Zinc’s internal monitoring. The narrative that the EU will serve little help to the Baltics following the pandemic has been observed previously in Estonia.

This story was also shared on an Estonian Facebook group, where it received some interaction. Otherwise, this was the only instance of disinformation or misinformation observed on social media during the reporting period, with the majority of posts being non-conspiratorial and often linking to media sources regarded as accurate. The number of posts containing keywords related to COVID-19 continues to fall, suggesting that conversation on the topic is less pronounced compared to earlier reporting periods.

The story was not specifically discussed by mainstream media coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19. Instead, topics such as an anti-vaccination video and Russians’ attitudes towards COVID-19 were reported.

Dis-/Misinformation themes

1. *Failing West: EU Failure*

One story was flagged by Zinc’s Media Monitoring:

- An article published by RuBaltic claimed that the Baltics will receive little to no support from the EU coronavirus response fund, claiming that the three states and Poland are “far away from discussions” (289 interaction). This was shared on Муниципальные выборы 2021 в Эстонии (‘Municipal elections 2021 in Estonia’), a Facebook page with 1,400 members. It received just 12 interactions.

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.
- An [article](#) from Delfi, which stated that 96% of Italians who died from COVID-19 had other underlying illnesses, appeared in several groups. Comments often ridiculed the article for pointing out something that many claimed to already know. The article has received over 29,000 interactions, a huge number for an article in Estonia.
- Other topics of conversation included the decision to allow a group of foreign nationals to enter Estonia without having to quarantine for 14 days, and the appearance of four new cases of COVID-19 in Narva, which was a cause for concern in many Ida-Virumaa-based groups.

Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- Delfi [reported](#) on a video gaining popularity on Estonian social media, in which an Irish professor claimed that a coronavirus vaccine could lead to thousands of deaths. The video has received 75,000 views and 132 interactions.
- Novaya Gazeta [reported](#) on poll that suggested that nearly a third of Russians think that COVID-19 is made up or that its danger has been exaggerated (123 interactions).

GEORGIA

Summary

During this reporting period, various mis- and disinformation stories were identified in Georgia. These fell under the theme of 'Misinformation' (with vaccination and 5G being framed as suspicious and complicit in harm to human life), 'Conflict' (the virus was created in a lab; American biolabs should be regarded with suspicion), and 'Malign Global Elites'.

There was no notable 'Moral Decline' or 'Failing West' content in this reporting period.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Conflict: Bio-Lab*

- On 29 May, Sputnik [published](#) an article by Ria Novosti author Galia Ibragimova who claims that in 2018, the number of people infected with meningitis in Kazakhstan increased dramatically. Journalists and bloggers claimed, the article says, that the USA intentionally spread this virus to probe the effectiveness of a biological weapon invented in an Almaty laboratory. This narrative is part of an ongoing campaign against US-founded laboratories, including the Tbilisi-based Lugar Lab (8 interactions).



- An item on TV Obieqtivi similarly [suggested](#) that COVID-19 was artificially created. On 27 May, Irakli Gogava, head of the 'Laboratory of the Development of Georgia', suggested that COVID-19 raises suspicion and that events such as the deaths of various COVID-19-associated scientists, around the world, for example, is not a coincidence. He also repeated the suggestion attributed to Nobel Prize winner Luc Montagnier - that the virus was created artificially.

2. *Malign Global Elites: Exploitation (Also: Misinformation: Hoax).*

- On 27 May, pro-Kremlin website Geworld.ge [published](#) journalist Armaz Saneblidze's quotes regarding COVID-19 being created as a global fraud in order to gain billions of dollars. Saneblidze talked about a 2010 article published in a British newspaper, with the title "WHO and conspiracies related to pandemic", in which the authors claimed that the World Health Organization is corrupt. He compares the present pandemic with the Swine Flu pandemic of 2009, and claims that the global panic was created artificially to gain a lot of money from the disease, but the "fraud" was revealed by plucky journalists. He also provides 'data' suggesting that different countries were buying large amount of vaccines against Swine Flu, but that as the pandemic subsided, only 6 million of them were used, with the rest being destroyed (28 interactions).
- On June 1, News-Front published an article on the Rockefeller Foundation and the alleged threat of a new totalitarianism emanating from the US. The article is based on "research" from the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), a Canada based non-profit organisation, and claims to "expose" an operation of "COVID-19 Control". The article claims that the end goal is to control populations with military-type techniques, through digital tracking and identification systems provided by tech giants such as Facebook, Google and Apple. As a result, it says, "there would be further concentration of economic and political power in the hands of an even narrower elite sector" and "This, in summary, is the plan the Rockefeller Foundation wants to implement in the United States and beyond" (83 interactions).

3. *Misinformation: Expert Advice; 5G; Cure*

- On 25 May (therefore in the previous reporting period, though currently in circulation), a Deacon of the Georgian Orthodox Church, father Saba (who has featured previously in these reports) [discussed](#) the alleged harm of vaccination on a TV Mtavari talk-show. According to him, vaccination against COVID-19 should not be accepted, as it would cause disease and lead to the patient's death. The video has received 13,895 views on YouTube (12 interactions).
- On 31 May, the Facebook page "Секрет гриффита Griffith's secret გრიფით საიდუმლო" [shared](#) an article originally posted by the Facebook group "[Stop 5G in Georgia](#)". It contains a list of cities and countries in which the installation of 5G was halted, and thereby perpetuates the narrative suggesting that 5G antennae are spreading COVID-19. The post has received 265 shares via the Facebook group so far (91 comments, 267 shares).
- On 31 May, the moderator of the group "Stop 5G in Georgia!!!" shared a Sputnik Georgia article originally published in 2018, with the headline "The whole country of



Georgia is a walking laboratory – an honest interview with Saakashvili advisor”. The interview with Jeffrey Silverman - Georgia Bureau Chief for Russia-affiliated Veterans Today - is about the “risky” activities that the US is conducting in Georgia, particularly regarding the Tbilisi-based Lugar Laboratory. The original article was read more than 20,000 times. However, the Facebook post received only 8 reactions and was shared only 6 times (4,008 interactions).

- On 31 May, a Facebook post shared by the group “Stop 5G in Georgia!!!” suggested that the cure for COVID-19 has in fact already been invented. George Kennan’s Telegram-like Facebook post argues that a woman with knowledge of herbal medicine has created a drug that proved to be successful, as it helped several COVID-19 infected patients who are now virus-free. The post received 95 likes, 32 comments and 81 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 this reporting period, attacks on the EU and liberal values were common in the press and on social media. Additionally, the misinterpretation and misreporting of statistics about COVID-19 and false health tips were picked up in the press as well as distributed on social media. There were contradictory reports in the independent press and government-friendly outlets.

On social media, conspiracy theory pages sharing “expert” encounters and downplaying the severity of the pandemic were the most popular.

Compared to previous periods, narratives re: Bill Gates and George Soros were less present.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Failing West: Exploitation*

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

- Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has announced a new national public consultation about the COVID-19 pandemic and the restart of the economy. This will also include questions about the George Soros-supported idea of issuing perpetual bonds, which the survey states will “result in debt slavery”. Origo.hu and other pro-government outlets hinted that Hungary should not accept a deal which, in their claim, would only benefit Western countries.



2. *Failing West: Incompetence*

The following story was identified by the CWG partner organisation:

- Origo.hu, a pro-government outlet, reported on 54,000 faulty masks which were provided by the EU. Origo.hu [used](#) the story to incite anti-EU sentiments (1400 interactions).

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

- Hirado.hu, one of the government's main news outlets, and PestiSracok, a pro-government opinion portal, [continued](#) to paint Sweden as the highest profile state failure of the COVID-19 crisis. It highlighted that the Swedish National Bank expects an economic downturn of 7-10%, that unemployment could reach 10%, and that the number of deaths in Sweden stands out worldwide.

3. *Failing West: Corruption*

Zinc's media monitoring flagged the following:

- M1, the national TV channel, and its written counterpart Hirado.hu, [alleged](#) that even though 75% of Hungarians are satisfied with the government's handling of the pandemic, fake news distributors continue to mislead people about the legislation (142 interactions).
- Tuzfalcsoport.blogstar.hu, a right wing, pro-government blog, [wrote](#) about an op-ed written by Marco Gombacci, a political analyst and freelance journalist in Brussels. Gombacci stated that Hungary hadn't become a dictatorship during the pandemic and accused Western journalists of failing to thoroughly research the laws introduced in Hungary (796 interactions).

Wider social media conversation around COVID-19

During the reporting period, social media posts mirrored what was reported in the media. The opposition and Western media were the target of many posts from government-friendly accounts.

The following was identified by the CWG partner organisation:

- Kimondott igazságok (Outspoken Truths) referenced an Australian journalist who suggested that the U.S. government is using the current health and economic crisis to provoke a world war aimed at crushing China.

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



- A video was [published](#) in Koronavirus STOP!, a public Facebook group with 5,600 members, featuring German doctor Ulrich Kraemer, who ardently denounced the German government and other experts for blowing the COVID-19 pandemic out of proportion. A similar article was shared by the Hungarian anti-vaxxer community, which referenced a German doctor who questioned what the scientific community knows about viruses with the aim of downplaying the significance of the current situation and warning against vaccinations. As of 2 June, this post had been removed.

The following was identified by Zinc's social media monitoring:

- A post on Tenyek es talanyok (Facts and findings), a Facebook group with 5,900 members, linked to an NBC4 video about a burning apartment building. The text above the video condemned the media for not reporting live from the worst hit COVID-19 hotspots. The author claims that the lack of such reports shows how the media and governments are manipulating the public, hinting that the COVID-19 pandemic is not real. The post received 84 interactions.
- Kimondott igazságok (Outspoken truths), a Facebook conspiracy theory page with 17,336 followers, [re-posted](#) an old article about how the coronavirus attacks the blood and not the lungs, extracting the oxygen from it. It received over 150 interactions.

Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- No significant coverage of disinformation around COVID-19 in the wider media was identified this week.

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 critical of the Latvian and other Western governments, although the number of articles deemed disinformation was lower than in previous reports and engagement levels were average to insignificant.

These stories were identified by CWG partner organisations. The narratives identified in disinformation stories this week have previously been observed in Latvia.

Social media conversation referenced these narratives, with a RuBaltic video that criticised the Latvian government for its lack of economic cooperation with Russia appearing on several groups. Moreover, conspiracy theories surrounding the spread of COVID-19 continue to appear. Otherwise, conversation on social media mainly linked to well-regarded media



sources and was non-conspiratorial. The number of posts containing disinformation and misinformation was lower in this reporting period, as was the overall number of posts containing COVID-19-related keywords.

These stories were not specifically discussed in wider media coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19, although news site *Latvijas Avīze* published an article on disinformation narratives linked to COVID-19 that have been published by pro-Kremlin media.

Dis-/Misinformation themes

1. Failing West: Incompetence; Corruption

The following stories were flagged by the CWG partner organisation:

- Baltnews claimed that the Baltic economies will suffer unless cooperation with Russia is reinstated. It called the threat of Russian aggression “a myth” and criticised the Baltic states’ short-sightedness (58 interactions).
- Sputnik published an article quoting the general director of the Cooperation Council of the Latvian Agricultural Organization, Guntis Vilnītis, who believes that Latvia declared lockdown in order to harm small and medium businesses to benefit larger corporations (2 interactions).

2. Reframing Russia: Global Leadership

The following story was flagged by the CWG partner organisation:

- Sputnik claimed that the West is preventing countries from asking Russia for humanitarian aid during the pandemic. Referencing an article written by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in hostile state funded media outlet *The Global Times*, the article stated that when Washington is unable to help a country, it also prevents Russia from doing so (13 interactions).
- Related to this, five Facebook groups shared a RuBaltic video which claimed that the Latvian government were “killing” their own ports by rejecting lucrative imports of Russian coal. The video stated that ports were suffering due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but that Latvia’s commitment to the EU’s Green New Deal, which among other goals aims to reduce the continent’s use of coal, would cause even more hardship. The video appeared on Русское Общество в Латвии (Russian Community in Latvia), a group with 2,600 members, Голос Русской Балтии. Эстония, Латвия, Литва (Voice of the Russian Baltics. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), a group with 1,800 members, RODINA.LV - ФОРУМ РУССКОЙ ЛАТВИИ (Rodina.lv – Russian Latvian Forum), a group with 4,300 members, Latvia 2.0., a group with 11,300 members, and ЛАТВИЯ И МИР ВОКРУГ (Latvia and the World Around), a group with 1,000 members. The video was shared by the same user on three of the groups.

Wider social media conversation around COVID-19



- Conversation on social media was mainly non-conspiratorial, often linking to media sources regarded as accurate. A popular topic of conversation was how Jūrmala has been named one of the safest beaches in Europe to visit this summer due to Latvia's handling of the pandemic. A sarcastic joke, which claimed that a new mutation of the virus would cause people to wash their feet as well as their hands, also proved popular on several groups.
- A RuBaltic video was widely shared criticising the government's action on Russian imports, as was a post from the same outlet supporting the conspiracy theory that 5G has played a role in the virus's spread.
- A user on Covid-19 Latvija, a group with 3,900 members, shared a post that claimed that 5G was linked to the spread of COVID-19. The author of the original post claimed his brother worked at Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media in Russia and that the ministry was building 5G towers despite evidence of 5G's impact on public health.

Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- Latvijas Avīze [published](#) an article on disinformation narratives used by pro-Kremlin media during COVID-19. It noted an RuBaltic article that claimed that the pandemic had incited a wave of hatred towards Slavs (27 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 relatively objective content about the progress of COVID-19 in Lithuania or turned their attention to other topics. Disinformation was observed in Baltnews as well as hostile state-aligned outlet Laisvas Laikraštis, with the former predicting a wave of emigration from Lithuania and the latter accusing the leading party of using the crisis to bolster its popularity.

Conversation on social media did not concern these topics and often linked to media sources widely considered to be trustworthy. The number of posts containing disinformation and misinformation was lower this reporting period, as well the overall number posts containing COVID-19-related keywords. Instances of dis- and misinformation mainly referenced well-known COVID-19 conspiracy theories, especially on the group UNFOLLOW 15min.lt.

These stories were not specifically discussed by mainstream media coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19, although 15min.lt published an article on the coverage of COVID-19 in pro-Kremlin media, while alfa.lt published an article on disinformation surrounding the Lugar Research Centre in Georgia.



Dis-/Misinformation themes

1. *Failing West: Incompetence; Corruption*

The following story was identified by Zinc's media monitoring:

- Baltnews claimed that Lithuania is preparing for another wave of emigration as thousands of unemployed Lithuanians prepare to leave the country (108 Facebook interactions).

The following story was identified by a CWG partner organisation:

- Laisvas Laikraštis accused LVŽS (Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union), the largest party in the Lithuanian parliament, of using COVID-19 for its own political gain. The article stated that the party had deliberately let the virus spread in order to receive praise for solving the crisis prior to the elections (46 Facebook 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 continued to be the government's decision to extend lockdown to 16 June.
- The number of posts containing disinformation and misinformation was lower this reporting period, as well the overall number posts containing COVID-19-related keywords. Instances of dis- and misinformation mainly referenced well-known COVID-19 conspiracy theories.
- An anti-vaccination video was posted on Комитет "Русскоговорящая Клайпеда" (The Committee For Russian-speaking Klaipeda), a group with 1,200 members. The video consists of a clip from Joni Table Talk, a chat show on Daystar, an American evangelical Christian-based religious television network. In the video, guests, among them Robert F. Kennedy Jr, discuss the dangers of a COVID-19 vaccine, claiming that rushed vaccine production could weaken people's ability to fight the virus and could result in a 20-30% death rate. The same video was observed during the last reporting period on other Klaipeda-based Facebook groups.
- Another anti-vaccination video from a Lithuanian blogger, identified by a CWG partner organisation, was shared on the Facebook group UNFOLLOW 15min.lt, which has 46,500 members.
- Several examples of content promoting conspiracy theories were observed on UNFOLLOW 15min.lt. Examples include a video that compares the current quarantine measures to the holocaust and another video that details the "global coronavirus conspiracy". Given the repeated appearance of the group in reports, it is clear that it is a hotbed for COVID-19 disinformation.

Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19



- Alfa.It published an article on disinformation surrounding the Lugar Research Center in Georgia, with false information claiming that it has played a role in spread of COVID-19 (16 interactions).
 - 15min published an article on pro-Kremlin propaganda. The article claims that pro-Kremlin sources are not only trying to increase panic and confusion over the virus, but also using the pandemic to justify old narratives (13 interactions).
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MOLDOVA

Summary

This week, various narrative trends were identified, with themes including: ‘Failing West’ (with the suggestion that the EU is incompetent and unwieldy; that Russia is more likely to emerge ascendant after COVID-19; that states such as Hungary are to be praised over Germany), ‘Malign Global Elites’ (with the claim that elites are using the crisis to promote abortion) and ‘Conflict’ (with suspicion cast once again on US biolabs). As in previous reports, Sputnik, Flux.md and the politician Iurie Rosca continue to be prolific in spreading such claims. The ‘Reframing Russia’ narrative was not notable. ‘Misinformation’ also appears to be low.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Failing West: EU Failure/EU Collapse; Incompetence (Also: Reframing Russia).*
 - The pro-Kremlin outlet Sputnik.md (4,530,000 views in the last six months according to SimilarWeb data) continues to heavily promote the suggestion that the EU is failing. In an article stating that “The European Commission’s economic recovery plan calls for investment in green energy and is to Russia’s advantage”, the EU was criticised for not having concrete solutions for emerging from COVID-19, whilst China, Russia and Cuba were praised. The article also reported that anger in Italy has increased, thus also hinting at the sub-narrative of ‘EU collapse’.
 - Sputnik.md also drew on comments made by George Soros (mentioned in previous reports) in order to suggest that the European Union is failing, due to its institutional infrastructure being insufficiently sound – and too unwieldy – to tackle a fast-moving crisis such as COVID-19. The article also appears to suggest that any action or solution pursued by Soros should be regarded with suspicion (2,676 interactions).
 - Another Sputnik.md article praised Hungary’s Viktor Orbán for the way in which he has approached COVID-19, praising him for consulting people on measures to revive the economy (and, apparently, for consulting with people in order to find out their opinion regarding George Soros). The headline reads: “Viktor Orbán consults the public on anti-crisis measures and Soros’ plan” (101 interactions).
 - A Flux.md article claimed that in Germany, children can be taken away by the state if they do not have a COVID-19 health certificate, and that children can therefore “effectively” be abducted by the government. The article feeds into the suggestion that some measures taken against COVID-19 by Western states are excessive, unjust and incompetent (173 interactions).



2. *Conflict: Bio-Lab*

- A Sputnik.md article entitled “Why Americans Need Biological Laboratories in Central Asia and the Caucasus” [repeated](#) the claim that biological weapons are being created in US laboratories. The article quotes the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Sergei Lavrov, who states that the US has biological weapons labs in several countries. The text refers to the number of people infected with COVID-19 in Kazakhstan, leading to the suggestion that this number could be influenced by the existence of a US lab close to the country.

3. *Malign Global Elites: Reshaping Society*

- An article from Flux.md [claims](#) that the pandemic is being used to promote abortion, and that the rich “globalists” of the world met secretly in New York in order to pursue population control, with abortion being a key goal. The article mentions Bill Gates, David Rockefeller, Ted Turner, Oprah Winfrey, Warren Buffett, George Soros and Michael Bloomberg, and is signed by Iurie Rosca, a former politician from Moldova (66 interactions).

NORTH MACEDONIA

Summary

During this reporting period, content in North Macedonia perpetuated the narratives of ‘Failing West’ (drawing on quotes from Belarus’ President Lukashenko), ‘Malign Global Elites’ (with one item citing a 2019 performance by Madonna as evidence that COVID-19 is an ‘occult ritual’ and another suggesting that George Soros is behind protests currently taking place in the US) and ‘Reframing Russia’ (with the suggestion that Russia will emerge ascendant from COVID-19). ‘Misinformation’ was also common, with all sub-narratives present. Notably, during this reporting period, the first protests against 5G and vaccination were held in Skopje.

Dis-/Misinformation themes

1. *Failing West: Incompetence*

- Press 24 reported that Belarus’ President Lukashenko had [praised](#) his country’s anti-COVID-19 measures (in particular, the decision not to halt production), comparing them as better than those in the West. The article featured the suggestion – seemingly from Lukashenko himself - that the pandemic was “half-disease and half-politics” and was shared on four Facebook pages/groups with approximately 400,000 followers (58 interactions).

2. *Reframing Russia: Global Leadership*



- The 'Reporter' site [featured](#) comments from Russian MFA Ryabkov, expressing the view that after the pandemic there will be a new world order in which Russia should assume the role of defender of world peace, and guarantee the sovereignty of small countries. Ryabkov believes that economic recession caused by the pandemic will lead to this new situation. The article has been shared on one Facebook page with approximately 80,000 followers, and cites vestinet.rs (23 interactions).

3. *Misinformation: Hoax/Expert Advice; Cure; 5G.*

- An article from Kolozeg [misused](#) an analysis by the American Center for Disease Control and Prevention to claim that the fatality rate of COVID-19 in the US was in fact far lower than stated - indeed, "there was no first wave". The article suggests that this 'finding' has undermined the "narrative of the political class". It was shared on three Facebook groups/pages with a total of approximately 30,000 followers (1,124 interactions).
- Similarly, an article [posted](#) at Ekran.mk suggested that scientists have been lying to people about COVID-19 and observed that an increasing number of people are saying that the pandemic is more of an 'economic' plague than a medical one. The article, undermining the notion of expert scientific knowledge, was shared on three Facebook pages/groups with a total of approximately 186,000 followers (19 interactions).
- The website Kurir [reported](#) a former senior Russian doctor's claim that the virus will "lose strength" in the autumn, making any vaccine redundant; from that time onwards, it will behave simply like flu. The article has been shared on nine Facebook groups/pages with a total of approximately 1,000,000 followers (44 interactions).
- The Republika website [reported](#) in an extremely short article that the Serbian pulmonologist Branimir Nestorovic (mentioned previously in these reports) is seeking to acquire medicine from Japan for inflammation of the pancreas, as it has been found to help to treat COVID-19. The page has been shared on five Facebook pages with a total of approximately 550,000 followers (21 interactions).
- The website Mexpress [shared](#) a video of birds allegedly attacking a 5G tower in Australia, because they apparently felt it to be a threat to them. This has been shared on one Facebook page with around 140,000 followers. The piece cites the Daily Mail, and does say that this is the view of "some conspirators", but nonetheless seems to share/amplify the theory that COVID-19 and 5G are related.
- Separately, Skopje1 [reported on](#) protests in Skopje re: 5G, vaccination and COVID-19 (18 interactions).

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

- An article on the Kolozeg site [references](#) current protests in the US (regarding the death of George Floyd in police custody in Minnesota), suggesting that these are in fact a 'scenario' (outcome or example) of George Soros' actions against democracy – to "destroy Trump" - and that protests appear to be "coordinated". The article does not focus on COVID-19 but its attempt to undermine Soros could be regarded as part of the promotion of the broader narrative in which Soros is framed as a suspicious actor who has played a role in global events such as COVID-19 and may seek to benefit



from them. The article was shared on 12 Facebook groups/pages with a total of approximately 80,000 followers (1,174 interactions).

- Freeglobe.mk [suggested](#) that Madonna's 2019 Eurovision performance highlighted COVID-19 as an occult ritual. Featuring an image of Madonna performing beside a person in a gas mask, the article begins "This text is practically a retrospective of the symbolism found during the final of Eurovision 2019 and the analysis of Madonna's extreme symbolic and controversial performance." The article has been shared on two Facebook pages/groups with a total of approximately 25,000 followers (342 interactions).

POLAND

Summary

During this reporting period, misinformation continued to be notable, with content suggesting that the virus is not real and that expert advice should be dismissed. As before, much content categorizable as 'Misinformation' overlapped with the theme of 'Malign Global Elites: Reshaping Society' (e.g. the suggestion that 5G, not COVID-19, is responsible for deaths, and that the network is being used to install world government and population control). The theme of 'Malign Global Elites' was also present (including the suggestion that the Rockefellers are implicated in COVID-19, as seen elsewhere in this report), as was 'Failing West'. Content explicitly implicating Bill Gates continues to appear relatively absent.

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Misinformation: Hoax (Also: Malign Global Elites: Reshaping Society); 5G*

- The fringe website 'Killuminati' [suggested](#) that high mortality rates attributed to COVID-19 are a mistake, as death is in fact a result of incorrect treatment for breathlessness symptoms. The article appears to cite a doctor, and also offers the opinion that medical professionals are acting on the recommendations of experts associated with the Bill Gates Foundation, and that these recommendations in fact harm both patients and the economy (54 interactions).
- The Facebook Group "I Don't Believe in Coronavirus" (90,000 members) [continues](#) to suggest that the virus is not dangerous (144 shares).
- An article on the fringe outlet Gazeta Warszawska (online and print) [suggested](#) that COVID-19 does not exist and that people are dying because of 5G. It states: "there is no coronavirus; what people are dying of is the result of the introduction of the 5G network, which is a necessary step to install a world government and introduce mass control of the inhabitants of all developed countries (those from Third World countries are not independent anyway) (753 interactions).

2. *Malign Global Elites: Reshaping Society*



- The website dziennik-polityczny.com reported that clairvoyant Krzysztof Jackowski took part in a musical challenge and “revealed the truth about coronavirus”, drawing attention to the “the terrifying truth”. The article describes a song written by Jackowski, offering the thesis that COVID-19 was planned by global elites in order to control societies. The article has been shared via the Facebook group “I Don’t Believe in Coronavirus” (25 interactions).
- A Blog Post from treborok.wordpress.com suggested that the Rockefellers knew about the pandemic, and that the decision regarding global “closure” (aimed at the collapse of the global economy and underlying social structure) was taken in Davos on 21-24 January 2020. The post has been shared with Facebook groups, the most popular of which has around 90,000 members (1,387 interactions).

3. *Failing West: Incompetence/EU Failure*

- An article from the fringe outlet Gazeta Warszawska (online and print) (whose Facebook group has around 90,000 members) associated French involvement in the construction of the Wuhan lab with the spread of COVID-19. Although the article does not explicitly suggest that France is responsible for the pandemic or the creation of the virus, it implicitly suggests this, and also implies that EU policy towards the pandemic is yet to be fully understood and revealed. Its headline reads: “French trail of coronavirus. Several important questions arise” (227 interactions).

ROMANIA

Summary

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

During this monitoring period, a range of misinformation and disinformation stories were identified. Stories broadly fell into three key themes: Western/liberal actors’ response to COVID-19 is incompetent or corrupt; global financial and political elites are taking advantage of COVID-19 to exploit others or to reshape society; and misinformation about COVID-19.

Other topics that appeared were the alleged global dominance of secret business-political organisations and nefarious actors (George Soros, Bill Gates) and the role of 5G in the spread of COVID-19.

These stories were identified by both Zinc’s media monitoring and CWG expert groups. Some of the narratives identified in disinformation stories 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.



Wider media coverage of disinformation reported on the EU's alleged plot to enslave the Romanian people by lending money to alleviate a potential economic crisis as well as conspiracy theories shared on Romanian Facebook groups and in outlets that regularly publish disinformation stories.

Other conversation on social media around COVID-19 focused on generic frustrations with restrictions and protection measures, plus some well-known conspiracy theories.

Dis/Misinformation themes

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

The following was identified by Zinc Network's media monitoring:

- Stiri pe Surse [reports](#) on a study that allegedly shows that asymptomatic carriers of COVID-19 are not contagious. The article goes on to claim that this study shows that asking these people to self-isolate has no scientific basis; instead it is a means to inflate COVID-19 case numbers and promote hysteria in order to deny people the exercise of their civil rights (4,400 interactions).
- Luju [claims](#) that both Romania's Minister for Health and the President have undermined people's right to life, because they have blown the pandemic out of proportion while denying those with chronic conditions access to adequate healthcare (2,700 interactions).
- Luju [reports](#) on Romanian doctors who were hospitalized after testing positive for COVID-19, despite being asymptomatic. The doctors claim that they felt like prisoners, being locked in hospital rooms and forced to take Paracetamol and Vitamin C. (774 interactions)

The following was identified by the CWG partner organisation:

- Stiri pe Surse [published](#) an op-ed which claims that Western states have exploited the COVID-19 pandemic in order to establish totalitarian regimes which the author likens to fascism. According to the article, the danger of pandemic has been exaggerated, even though it no more serious than seasonal flu, and the police has been used a tool for the oppression of citizens, through fines, mobile phone tracking and the harassment of those who protest against restrictions (2,800 interactions).
- Daniel Roxin, a high-profile anti-establishment, conspiracy theory-promoter who (co)-owns a number of fringe media outlets [claims](#) that the alleged abusive measures introduced in Romania are aimed at collecting data from those going to restaurants and terraces (28,200 interactions).

2. Malign Global Elite: Exploitation; Reshaping Society

The following was identified by Zinc Network's media monitoring:



- Lujă [published](#) an article on the supposed directive sent out in hospitals in Italy that bans doctors from performing autopsies and requires them to put COVID-19 as the cause of death on all certificates. The author claims that this demonstrates that the pandemic either does not exist or was blown out of proportion in order to cause mass hysteria. (1,100 interactions)

3. *Misinformation: Hoax*

The following was identified by Zinc Network's media monitoring:

- Ziaristii [reports](#) on the US withdrawing its support for WHO. According to this article, the organisation is under the control of China, as it tries to hide important facts about how the pandemic started. It is hinted that the COVID-19 might have been fabricated in a Wuhan lab, and that China is trying to cover this up (7600 interactions).

The following was identified by the CWG partner organisation:

- Relatedly, Justitiarul blog [stated](#) that the neo-Marxists/ globalists are trying to topple Trump. The same narrative [is present](#) in an Sputnik article, this time narrowing down the "*international, secret organizations sponsored by Soros*" to the ANTIFA movement (2500 interactions).

Wider social media conversation

- The majority of posts relating to COVID-19 linked to local and international media sources that are widely considered to be reliable.
- 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 on this, referring to various cases in which death certificates had allegedly been falsified to cite COVID-19 as the cause of death.

Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- Ziaristii [debunks](#) the conspiracy theory that the pandemic was planned by Gates and Soros as a form of population control. The article states that the global population has increased by nearly 34 million since the pandemic started, compared to fewer deaths.
- Several mainstream outlets [report](#) on the claim that asymptomatic carriers are not contagious. Romania TV [reports](#) that this could lead to a decrease in hospitalizations for those who test positive for COVID-19 but do not display any symptoms.
- Stiri pe Surse [reports](#) on the statement made by a Cristian Tudor Popescu, a well-known Romanian journalist, who criticizes the attempts of the main opposition party to frame the EU as exploitative. He argues that the EU is actually supporting the Romanian economy through a large sum which may be used for various development and infrastructure maintenance projects. This article counters previous EU failure narratives claiming that the EU is aiming to enslave poorer member states through the financial injection aimed at alleviating a potential economic crisis after COVID-19.



SERBIA

Summary

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

In this reporting period, no articles that could be termed disinformation were identified. Instead, articles focused on the scandal surrounding the leading pulmonologist Branimir Nestorović, who faces his license being revoked for unethical behaviour in the media, protests in Italy and various local and international updates on the development of the COVID-19 situation.

Wider media coverage of disinformation around COVID-19 focused largely on an article originating from the BBC in which the author explained the human cost of disinformation being spread, linking it to assaults, arson and deaths.

Dis-/Misinformation themes

1. *Misinformation: Hoax*

- President Lukashenko of Belarus has called the virus 'half-politics, half-illness', according to [Sputnik](#) (1,435 interactions),

2. *Miscellaneous/Other*

- There was little overt disinformation observed in HSA media in Serbia. Most coverage dealt with the scandal surrounding pulmonologist Nestorović, who has been a high-profile media figure throughout the pandemic, as he faces losing his medical license. This was covered widely, and the most engaged-with article came from the pro-government [Informer](#) (4,577 interactions). The story was also covered by [Sputnik](#) and pro-government tabloid [Kurir](#). The request to review his medical licence came from the Serbian Medical Chamber after they deemed his repeated statements in the media unethical and inappropriate.
- Another story that gained significant traction was the coverage of the protests in Rome against the lockdown in Italy. The most engaged-with article came from the pro-government [Novosti](#) (3,004 interactions). Pro-government tabloid [Kurir](#) covered the story as well.
- Other coverage of COVID-19 developments included updates on the re-opening of the border with Montenegro from [Sputnik](#) (302 interactions), and the situation in Sweden, in the pro-government [Informer](#) (148 interactions).

Coverage of disinformation relating to COVID-19

- The most relevant article in the period of interest came from the news aggregator [Novosti](#). It covers an article originally published by the BBC, in which COVID-19 misinformation is tied to various incidents of arson, assaults and death and the human cost is explained. The article was picked up by several Serbian outlets such as the independent daily [Danas](#), and the Vojvodina-based [021](#).



SLOVAKIA

Summary

During this reporting period, mis- and disinformation content in Slovakia highlighted by the CWG again fell under the themes of: 'Misinformation' (with the suggestion that deaths from COVID-19 have been overstated, that the virus is not especially dangerous, and that vaccines are not to be trusted); 'Malign Global Elite' (with the suggestion that globalists and Bill Gates are seeking to control us) and 'Failing West' (with two articles suggesting that strict measures taken against the virus may have caused a higher number of deaths).

Dis-/Mis-information themes

1. *Misinformation: Hoax; Expert Advice*

- A Zem a Vek article used incorrect data to [claim](#) that 92% of people in Czechia who supposedly died because of COVID-19 in fact died primarily because of another disease. The article compares COVID-19 to flu, and suggests that the media has unnecessarily spread panic among the population. The title reads "Czech statistics: Coronapanics is a scam, more people have died in recent years than during a "pandemic" (149 interactions)
- An Infovojna article, featuring a video and a transcript of the video, [reported](#) that vaccines are dangerous, and that they are being made mandatory (for the benefit of large companies). It also claimed that Bill Gates wants to reduce the world's population, and suggested that in future we may have to show a vaccination passport or a tattoo to show whether we have been immunised. The piece is titled "Video: Robert Kennedy Jr. and Dr. Andrew Kaufman on the dangers of vaccines and new vaccine technology that affects the genetic makeup of our cells" (131 interactions).
- Another Infovojna article [suggested](#) that COVID-19 is not as dangerous as claimed, and that the mortality rate is far lower than that stated in official statistics. It also suggested that COVID-19 tests do not work properly, and states "When you want to control people, force them to listen, or make money out of them, fear works best. COVID-19 [is] the best example" (127 interactions).
- An article on Badatel.net [suggested](#) that hydroxychloroquine is an effective drug against COVID-19 but is not being used because 'big pharma' lobbyists are unable to make significant profits from it. Meanwhile, remdesivir is ineffective yet still being used. Anything that does not make millions for 'big pharma' companies, says the article, is being censored and criminalised (993 interactions).

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

- The prolific Hlavný Denník site [featured](#) a lengthy article – translated from Russian and published by the Russian Strategic Culture Foundation - on Zbigniew Brzezinski and his book "Technotronic Era", written around fifty years ago, in which he describes how



elites will in the future be able to control citizens and have access to their data. The article – headlined “The conspiracy against humanity was announced half a century ago” - draws parallels with COVID-19 and says that today, governments are indeed trying to control people using mass surveillance (78 interactions).

- An Infovojna article, featuring a video, [offered](#) the conspiracy theory that Bill Gates is seeking to control our identities, transactions and bodies. The article features the previously-noted conspiracy theories regarding population control and immunity passports, and suggests that Gates is motivated by the ideology of eugenics (211 interactions).
- A Zem a Vek article [drew parallels](#) between the 1918-19 Spanish Flu and the COVID-19 pandemic of today, suggesting that whilst the former saw calls for greater intervention from/involvement by the League of Nations, today the same is happening but with the United Nations. The article suggests that globalist conspiracies and pharmaceutical cartels lie behind such organisations (193 interactions).

3. *Failing West: Incompetence (Also: Misinformation: Expert Advice)*

- A Zem a Vek article [quoted](#) the Nobel laureate Michael Levitt, claiming that British measures against COVID-19 have caused more deaths than they have saved. Despite Levitt not being an expert, the article presents his view as authoritative, and quotes him as saying that the real virus was simply a ‘panic’ (354 interactions).
- Both Zem a Vek and Hlavne Spravy somewhat [undermined](#) the World Health Organization, suggesting that it supported China in allowing its citizens to travel from Wuhan to travel around the world, thereby spreading the disease. The Hlavne Spravy headline reads: “The world is changing: Donald Trump has definitively ended US financial support and cooperation with the controversial WHO” (47 interactions).
- Similarly, both Hlavny Spravy and Infovojna [quoted](#) an interview with political analyst Ján Baránek, and citing him as suggesting that strict measures against COVID-19 may have caused more deaths than less restrictive measures may have done. Baránek also claims that he does not wear a mask, because he is not “a trained monkey, a parrot, or an idiot” (5,353 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 inevitable decline of EU, whose alleged incapacity has been revealed by the pandemic; that Chinese and Russian approaches to the pandemic have proven to be more effective than Western ones; and that the operation of American bio-labs in Ukraine poses a great risk to Ukraine.



We also observed the further development of a narrative observed in the previous report, regarding the IMF; namely that the recently-struck ‘stand-by arrangement for Ukraine’, to help it to address COVID-19, represents a loss of sovereignty by succumbing to foreign rule.

Social media conversation focused on the perceived unfairness of the obligations imposed by the IMF, the operation of Ukrainian-American bio labs in Ukraine (a story amplified heavily by Viktor Medvedchuk, chairman of the Opposition Platform — For Life party), and heightened critique of President Zelensky by drawing attention to rising utility payments amid the difficult economic situation caused by the pandemic.

Media coverage of disinformation concentrated on a study conducted in Russia that revealed that around 30% of Russians do not believe in the dangers posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Independent fact checking organisation StopFake debunked several disinformation narratives actively circulating recently, including that COVID-19 was planned, and is not a virus, and wearing masks causes harms. An interesting piece was produced by Dzerkalo Tyzhnia, a news website, that provided an analysis of why disinformation narratives about bio-labs in Ukraine are disseminated and who is allegedly behind them.

Dis-/Misinformation themes

1. Misinformation: Cure

Zinc’s media monitoring observed the following stories:

- Golos, which republishes Russian disinformation narratives occasionally, [produced](#) an article which claimed sunlight ‘kills’ COVID-19 within minutes (21 interactions).

2. Conflict: Bio-lab

Zinc’s media monitoring observed the following story:

- Russian state-funded outlet Ukraina.ru [produced](#) a video in which author Rostislav Ishchenko expressed the idea that American bio-labs in Ukraine that process dangerous viruses do not differ much from labs working on bacteriological weapons, claiming the perils for the hosting country are the same (39,000 views on YouTube).

3. Reframing Russia : Russian Success

Zinc’s media monitoring observed the following stories:

- Ukraina.ru [published](#) an article in which the pandemic’s consequences for Europe are claimed to have undermined internal trust due to the lack of mutual support between member states. Russia, in this context, was portrayed as a country with enormous potential for fostering international cooperation in steering its neighbours through any kind of crisis (44 interactions)



CWG partner organisations flagged the following relevant story:

- Ukraina.ru [produced](#) an article promoting the Chinese approach to COVID-19 by claiming that it was the only country that managed the crisis without panicking.

4. *Failing West: EU Failure*

Zinc's media monitoring observed the following story:

- Ukraina.ru [discussed](#) the unwillingness of the 'rich north' in Europe to give money to the 'lazy south', highlighting the existence of disagreements inside the EU amid the pandemic (165 interactions). The article in question also raised the growing potential for a split in the EU.

5. *Malign Global Elite: Exploitation*

Zinc's media monitoring observed the following stories:

- Ukraina.ru again [pushed](#) a narrative connected with the operation of American bacteriological laboratories in Ukraine. This time, it covered the story of Viktor Medvedchuk, chairman of the Opposition Platform — For Life party, appealing to the UN over what he claims to be their unlawful operation. The article incorrectly states that Ukrainians 'have no idea what these laboratories are for, except for the fact that their operation is curated from the Pentagon' (53 interactions).
- In another article devoted to American bacteriological laboratories in Ukraine, Ukraina.ru [suggested](#) that before the pandemic, Ukrainian and American authorities made every effort to hide the activity of such laboratories until it became impossible to do so (11 interactions).
- Hvylya published an [interview](#) with Maxim Iali, a Ukrainian political commentator who frequently appears on Russian television. Referring to an article from Forbes that reported how the richest people became richer during the pandemic, Iali suggested that the pandemic might be a planned action, to be repeated again in the future. He also suggested the pandemic might have been prepared by major world powers for the purposes of biological warfare. (136 Facebook interactions).
- Strana, a major amplifier of Russian disinformation narratives in Ukraine, [published](#) its analysis of the yet-unpublished IMF 'stand-by arrangement to help to address the COVID-19 pandemic'. According to Strana, Ukraine will assume responsibilities that promise a harder life for ordinary Ukrainians, including raising the retirement age, an increased tax burden, more expensive medicine, fewer schools, and higher utility payments (8,310 interactions plus 9 backlinks from Russian sources and other Ukrainian media outlets of interest).
- This story was widely covered on social media. A post with over 10,000 shares appeared on a public group supporting Elena Lukash and Andriy Portnov, politicians from the Yanukovich presidency, demanding the Ukrainian authorities to release the text of the memorandum, which the post suggests contains provisions under which all



sovereign interests of Ukraine are surrendered (11,848 likes + 1,630 comments + 10,171 shares).

- Critical social media posts from opposition politicians also circulated widely. Andrii Portnov, a former advisor to president Yanukovich, [claims](#) this is evidence Ukraine has further succumbed to foreign rule (2,600 likes + 500 shares). Similar criticism came too from allies of Zelensky: Oleksandr Dubinsky, a popular journalist and a member of Ukrainian parliament from Zelensky's party, [said](#) the memorandum with is an illustration Ukraine is under foreign rule and that its signing would be the last step of Ukraine losing its sovereignty (1,800 likes + 615 comments + 97K views).

6. *Moral Decline: Religious Freedom*

Zinc's media monitoring observed the following:

- The Union of Orthodox Journalists, which previously has been [suspected](#) of fomenting inter-confessional enmity by the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, [suggested](#) that restrictions on visiting churches has been a test of faith for true believers (86 likes + 1 comment + 21 shares).

Wider social media conversation around COVID-19

- Former Health Minister of Ukraine Ulana Suprun [talked](#) about a recent petition on the president's website against forced COVID-19 vaccination, by pointing out the fact that the person who registered the petition has a history of disseminating distorted and fake information about vaccination (5,438 likes + 902 comments + 958 shares).
- Three public groups of interest shared an [article](#) from Glavred (part of 1+1 Media, belonging to oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky) dated 18 May, about a strike of health professionals in Kharkiv. The article claims the medics were striking in protest at the official manipulation of COVID-19 diagnoses; but in reality they were protesting delays in a promised pay rise. (11,034 Facebook interactions)
- A Facebook page sharing potentially hazardous health related content, FitHacker, administered from Ukraine, [posted](#) a link to a website that wearing masks and gloves harms and accelerates COVID-19 contamination (1,600 likes + 259 comments + 2,968 shares).
- Meteora Facebook page (70K members) posted a message that members of the Italian government have urged for the arrest of Bill Gates for instigating the COVID-19 pandemic (1,226 likes + 188 comments + 1,584 shares). Fact checking organisations, like [Politifact](#), have already labelled information like this fake, by saying: "There is no evidence that calls to arrest Bill Gates are endorsed or supported by the entire Italian Parliament"
- The Facebook page Ukrainian Information War (10K members) shared a [video](#) from conspiracy promoting group Бaгнет Нaцiи (Bagnet Nation) in which the pandemic and quarantine restrictions were presented as a coordinated plan for new medical testing on Ukrainian citizens (612 likes + 61 comments + 1,326 shares).
- The Facebook page Актуальна мережа новин (Relevant news) [amplified](#) the narrative pushed by Strana that Ukrainians are demanding the prohibition of online



learning which has become prevalent due to quarantine (5,487 likes + 668 comments + 1,187 shares).

Coverage of dis/misinformation relating to COVID-19

- There was widespread coverage of a study that showed that more than 30% of Russians do not believe in the danger of COVID-19, including by [Pravda](#), Gordon, Censor, Capital, Novorosinform and others.
- ZN.UA [described](#) the history of disinformation narratives around operation of Ukrainian-American bio labs in Ukraine, by providing an analysis of why such narratives are disseminated and who is interested in its circulation (21 interactions).
- The independent fact-checking organisation StopFake [exposed](#) several major disinformation narratives related to COVID-19, including COVID-19 being a special operation from a malign global elite (67 interactions), that [COVID-19 is not a virus](#) but a bacteria and therefore can be treated with Aspirin (60 interactions), and that [wearing masks and gloves causes more harm than good](#) and accelerates COVID-19 contamination (47 interactions).
- Glavcom [revealed](#) how a priest from the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine supported fake narratives about COVID-19 vaccine and microchipping (7 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 through poor journalistic standards.
3. Claims and opinions (from influencers with existing platforms, or widely shared examples from relatively unknown individuals) which refute current scientific understanding of the virus and/or official recommendations.
4. Deliberate or no, the prevalence of this misinformation **negatively impacts public health, social cohesion or political stability**, for example by affecting the clarity of official messaging, or eroding public trust in institutions.

Conspiracy theories

1. **Alternative explanations** for the pandemic – including its origin, how it is transmitted and contracted, or claiming that it does not exist at all.
 - This may involve claims of **orchestrated, malign or accidental actions by global elites** (governments, billionaires, the ‘Deep-State’ etc.), the “truth” of which is being **kept from the public**.
2. **Evolutions of existing conspiracy theories** and the online communities who believe them – including from within the far-right, alt-right, religious fundamentalism, and the anti-vaccination and anti-5G ‘activist’ movements.
3. **New conspiracy theories**, from HSA, trolls, or other unknown or organic sources, which may arise in response to COVID-19 related news.



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

Zinc Network researchers draw on three different sorts of material for consideration in the country reports: 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.