

*Beacon Project Research*

**FIDESZ propaganda and the Hungarian  
minority in Transylvania:  
context, channels, and narratives**

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## 1. Executive Summary

The FIDESZ propaganda in the Hungarian minority in Transylvania is mainly done through Hungary-funded regional newspapers. The main messages they send are regarding the protection and opportunities that Hungary offers for the Hungarians abroad, including being a protector of traditional values. Another aspect that is harder to quantify, yet visible in the absence of any kind of opposition towards the current Hungarian government.

The FIDESZ government exploits existing narratives in the Hungarian community in Transylvania through regional newspapers which run negative news about the Romanian government and Romanians in general. This is efficient because stereotypes already exist in society and propaganda can use this historic bias in order to amplify its effects online.

## 2. Introduction

Over the past three-and-a-half years, until June 2021, the Association for Transylvanian Media Space received approximately 20 million EUR in grants from the Hungarian government. With this funding the association, unknown until recently, has become by far the largest Hungarian-language media trust in Transylvania; according to Sipos Zoltan, editor in chief of the independent publication Átlátszó Erdély (Transparent Transylvania) and founder of the NGO with the same name. One of the purposes of this huge injection of capital was to save the Hungarian-language media in Szeklerland (the name for a Hungarian-majority area in the center of Romania - Ținutul Secuiesc). The Budapest government did not allow them to fade away in the digital area and funded the transition to the digital press. The success of this transformation is relative and thorough research on this topic has been carried out in our investigation ["Two-a-penny: 5 million euro per year for the Hungarian language media trust in Transylvania"](#). This investigation was the first step in our project. We monitored FIDESZ propaganda in the Hungarian minority in Transylvania offline by tracking the offline funding that goes in the monitored online sources.

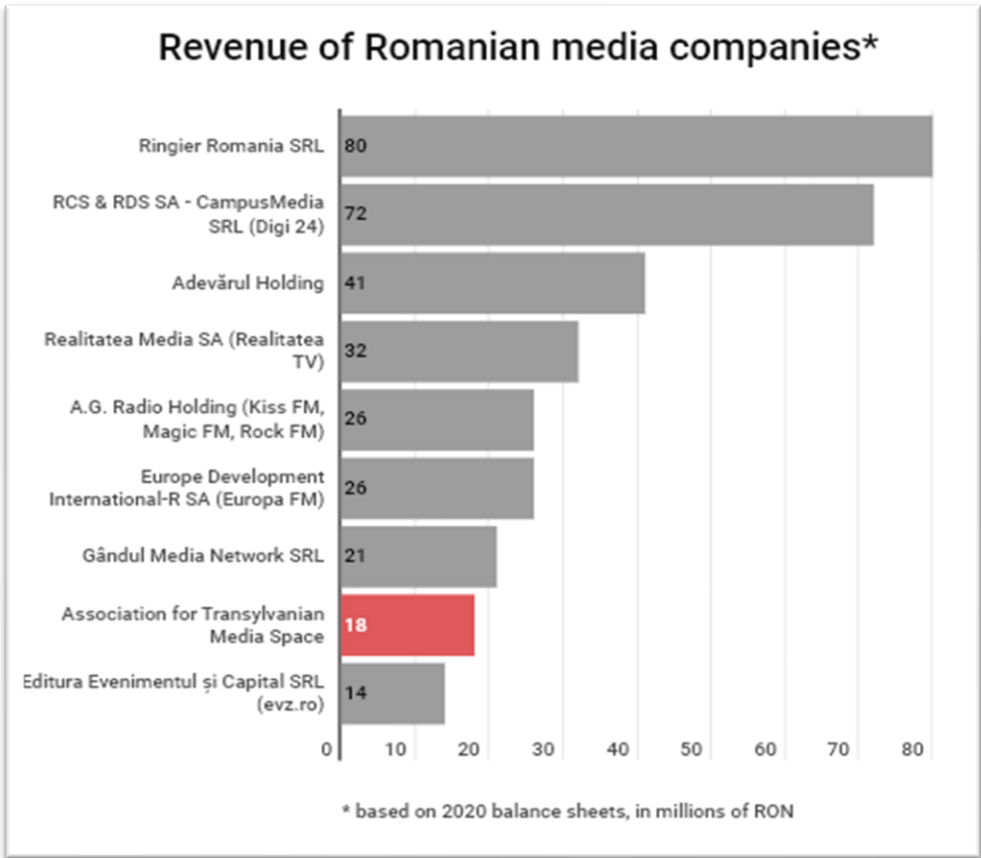
Transylvania is home to approximately 1.2 million ethnic Hungarians, almost six percent of the country's population, and one of the largest ethnic minority communities in Europe. In Transylvania, huge sums are being spent on Hungarian-language media, kindergartens, schools, and churches in order to build a sense of belonging. The purpose of funding media outlets and investing in standards of living is the Hungarian regime's desire to build a system in which Hungarians from Romania feel like they belong in Hungary. It is called the virtual unification of the nation, overcoming the Trianon treaty by striving to create a virtual nation where every Hungarian, regardless of country of residence, are virtually connected to Hungarian state institutions. The expansion and unification of media space is a very important step in this direction. This has led to strange situations with many Hungarians living in Romania being more informed about the political situation in Hungary than the political intricacies in Bucharest. Tamás Kiss, a researcher at the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, described this phenomenon as a system of ethnic parallelism in which Hungarians can live their life in Romania as a part of Hungary. This type of mentality is not unique to Romania; similar

funding can be seen in Slovenia, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine.

However, the main difference correlates this territory’s historic meaning for Hungary and translates into the amount of money directed to these communities, which has been biggest in Transylvania – roughly 145 million euros in 2017 and a similar amount in 2018. In 2018, Hungary launched the Pro Economica foundation in Transylvania, the biggest in all the region with non-refundable funds of up to 145 million euros for Hungarians that invest in tourism and entrepreneurship initiatives in the region. While we don't have exact amounts for the more recent years, partial datasets regarding the government grants suggest that the level of funding remained at least the same, and possibly increased.

Media consumption is crucial in analyzing how

regional media to disseminate Fidesz’s propaganda. We took a thorough look at the Hungarian native media that is present within Romanian territory. We analyzed the last 12 months of social media activity for 23 media outlets, each having at least 10,000 followers. Based on their interaction rates we ranked them and established which of them are the biggest and fastest growing, based on the content they promote and their reach. It is important to note that we have included in our study pages such as the regional newspaper Krónika and one of the most popular Hungarian news portals in Transylvania, Szekelyhon.ro. Both media outlets are published by Prima Press SRL, a company owned by Association for Transylvanian Media Space, which receives funding from the Hungarian government. The NGO then transfers part of the money to this company.



the Hungarian government is using local and

### 3. Methodology

To analyze how this influence is translated into social media Crowdtangle was used to observe the activity of 23 Facebook pages that represent top Hungarian media outlets at the moment and another 23 pages that belong to the most important formal and informal actors in the Romanian Hungarian community. Our focus was to see which pages have the most interactions, but most importantly to see what the most popular narratives on social media within the Hungarian community in Romania are. We formulated and followed five narratives:

1. The territory of Romania should be changed (in favor of Hungary)
2. Hungary is a protector of traditional values (protection from liberal elites, liberal EU, migration)
3. Hungarian identity in Transylvania/Szeklerland/Partium is mistreated.
4. Ethnic Hungarians in Romania should apply for Hungarian citizenship/should refresh their contact details.
5. The Hungarian state is taking care of Hungarian communities abroad

Similar research was conducted in Slovakia and Ukraine. The keywords and narratives were consulted with researchers from each country involved in the project. The entire project was supported by the IRI Beacon Project. The tools used, CrowdTangle, Pulsar, and visualization of data in Microsoft Power BI were offered by IRI Beacon Project and we had full support throughout the research process.

Using CrowdTangle we created lists to structure the Hungarian social media pages. We performed different queries based on specific keywords that were linked to each narrative to

determine which of them are predominant. The selection criteria for the pages and keywords were established with the help of our project partner, Zoltán Sipos, a well-known journalist from the Hungarian community in Romania. On the other hand, the narratives and tagging were decided along with our colleagues from Slovakia and Ukraine with the purpose of drawing similarities and differences at the end of each research.

In the second phase of the analysis, we used the Pulsar ICT tool to manually tag each narrative and double-check the filters from CrowdTangle. We took into account only manually tagged content for the analysis of narratives due to a consistent number of irrelevant posts. Each narrative got a narrative tag and a status tag: neutral, supporting, conflicting, to determine the tone and purpose of the post in the matrix of our narratives. These tags along with the narratives were decided according to best practices in social media analysis, in accordance with our Slovak colleague's research.

*Neutral - Posts that presented events without drawing conclusions or sending a direct message in any direction. Generally, they will be news updates about a specific topic that is associated with a narrative.*

*Supporting - Posts that explicitly claims the need for a specific action to be taken, that assumes an open position in favor of one of the narratives. Can also mean disseminating information through shares and interviews of politicians/influencers that support the narrative on their page.*

*Conflicting - Directly claiming the need for change through radical measures with a sense of emergency. They create supporting*

*arguments for a narrative by blaming the Romanian government or Romanians and the tone of voice and comparisons are derogatory.*

**Limitations** - We have manually tagged 4,312 posts after filtering the narrative by keywords. In the context of 66,000 results in the time period selected, the overwhelming majority of the content was social media trivia such as memes, coronavirus-related news, and daily updates on the political turmoil in Romania. In this context, we need to develop a better system of easily filtering out the noise and identifying even more relevant posts. We believe there are other relevant posts that we have not included in our

#### 4. General overview- Hungarian Media in Romania











The most effective tool in the implementation of the virtual unification mindset of the Hungarian nation in the Carpathian Basin is through digital media. Nothing has polarised our society more than misinformation and echo chambers, and nationalistic propaganda makes no exception from this rule.

research, due to the nature of the volume of data

and constant changes in the online landscape. Also, we found that the decision of assigning a tone of voice (supporting, neutral, conflicting) to each narrative through tags is a subjective

process that needs thorough consideration. This is especially true for more complex texts (interviews, op-eds) where more than one narrative is present, and contextual interpretation is needed.

We used CrowdTangle to analyze the top 10 media pages in Hungary based on their interaction and followers' growth. Little was our surprise to see pages directly funded by the Hungarian government or pages linked to the Hungarian party in Romania, UDMR.





TOP 10 PAGES BY TOTAL INTERACTIONS			
Comments, shares, reactions			
1		Maszol.ro	1.77M
2		Székelyhon	1.31M
3		itthon.ma	757,502
4		Főtér.ro	634,161
5		Erdélyi Magyar Televízió	632,777
6		Krónika	481,951
7		Kolozsvári Rádió	320,646
8		Mária Rádió Erdély	229,723
9		Transindex.ro	210,416
10		Udvarhelyi Hírportál	196,729

Source: Crowdtangle

4.1 Maszol.ro

The website Maszol is the successor to the daily [Új Magyar Szó](#), which folded due to financial reasons in 2012. It was created by the editorial staff of the daily newspaper and is published by the Progress Alapítvány Foundation. The foundation was created by the largest Hungarian political party, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR). Progress receives most of its yearly budget from DAHR. Maszol is known in the community as the quasi-official communication channel of the DAHR. Maszol.ro resembles a mix of local

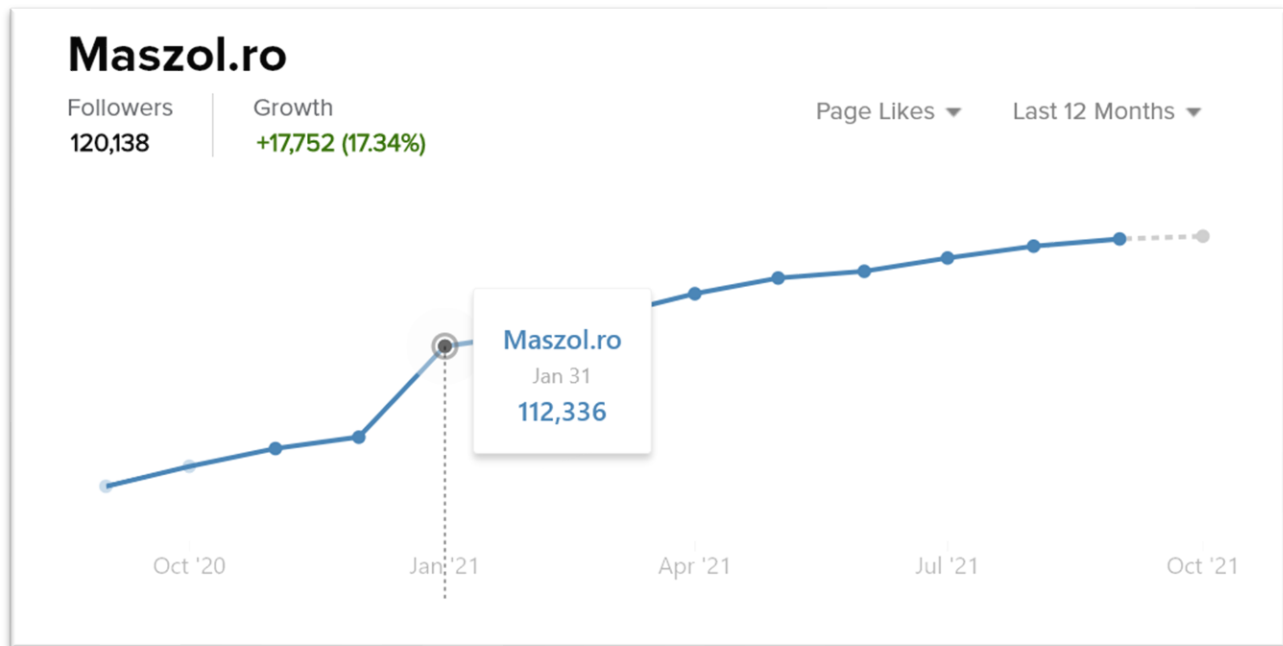
and national news supporting mostly the narratives of the DAHR. Its op-ed editorial team is visibly right-wing, with editorialists who repeat the same communication panels (migration, LGBT, EU) as the Hungarian government. It has the biggest number of interactions on social media by far with over 1.2 million shares, comments, and reactions in the last 12 months. This is matched with consistent growth in its follower's number of 17.7% in the same period of time.

Countries	Traffic Share		Traffic	Keywords
Worldwide	<div><div></div></div>	100%	116.1K	46.9K
 RO	<div><div></div></div>	80%	92.6K	7.8K
 HU	<div><div></div></div>	17%	19.4K	25K
 DE	<div><div></div></div>	1.6%	1.9K	2.5K
 US	<div><div></div></div>	<0.1%	333	3.1K
Other	<div><div></div></div>	1.7%	1.9K	8.5K

Source: [Semrush.com](#)

On the other hand, its main source of traffic is sharing the content it produces on its website maszol.ro, which has an average of 116.1

thousand visitors per month, 80% of this traffic being located in the Hungarian community in Romania.



Source: CrowdTangle.

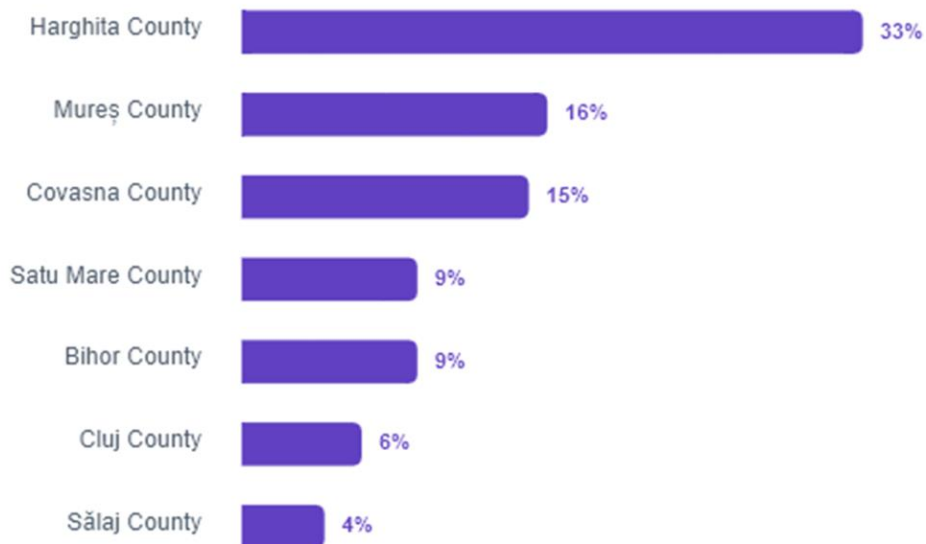
We could observe a sudden growth in the number of followers due to an ongoing campaign in January 2021. Its monthly budget according to the Ad Library was about 300 euros (approximately 1,500 Romanian RON). The content promoted had a mainstream approach typical to a newspaper. They boosted

specific articles with different topics like the Romanian elections, Viktor Orban's opinion about Romanian Elections, interviews with Hungarian mayors and politicians. Each ad had the same strategy and a budget of 25 euros. The page specifically focused on the geographical area from the graph below.



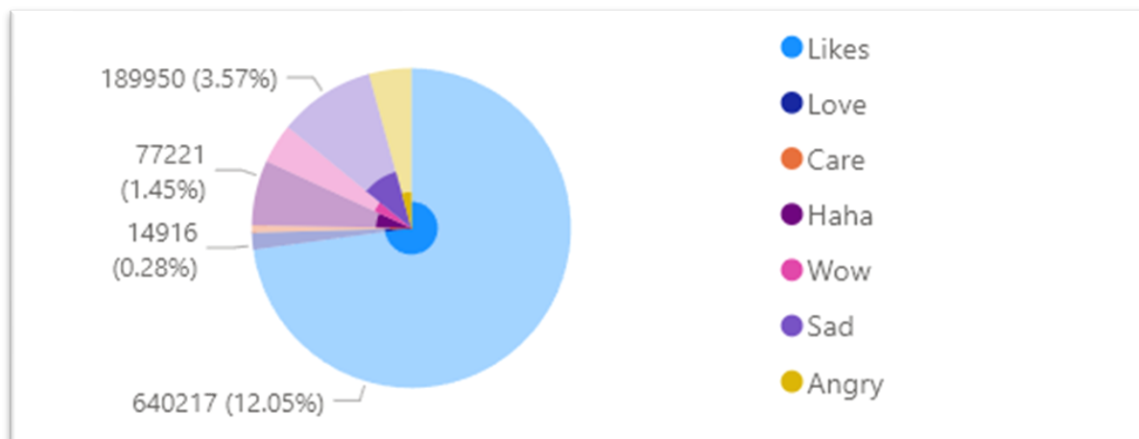
### Where this ad was shown

The regions where people who saw this ad are located.



Source: Ad Library

### The distribution of reactions on Maszol.ro page in the last 12 months



Source: Visualization of CrowdTangle data in Microsoft Power BI, processed in Pulsar. Done in collaboration with IRI Beacon Project.

The content on the page is a mix of neutral content that aims to serve as an information source about the pandemic, Romanian politics, and current events and posts that focus on presenting updates in a neutral and at the best

supporting manner with a focus on the following messages: Hungary is taking care of the Hungarian communities abroad and is a protector of traditional values.

Example 1. [Post from 15th March 2021](#) - Over Performing with over 2,400 reactions, 98 comments, and 73 shares.

Tone of voice - Neutral

Source: Facebook



**Context:** The article quotes Viktor Orbán's message for Hungarians. *"We Hungarians have mastered what we know about freedom in the grip of the enemy powers that are attacking us, fighting on the battlefields and remembering the loss of our heroes. We have learned that*

*freedom is not an ideology, but our blood-acquired right to use our language, nurture our exceptional heritage and arrange our lives according to our own minds,"* wrote Viktor Orbán. Source: [Maszol.ro](https://maszol.ro)

Example 2 - [Post from 9 February 2021](#) with 9,300 reactions, 357 comments, and 866 shares.

Tone of voice neutral



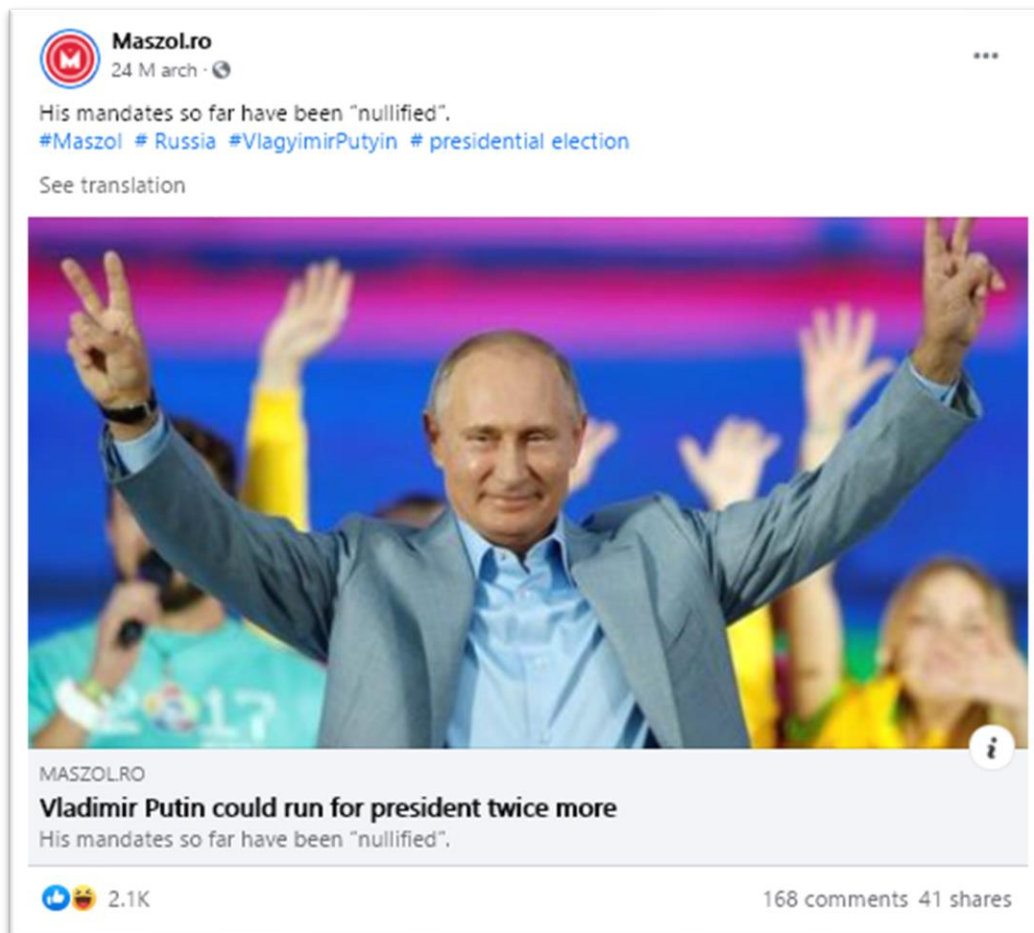
Source: Facebook

This was huge news in Romania at the time, especially due to Romanian admiration of German culture. The article clearly presents the news in a positive light and supports the Romanian local hero.

Context: "A Romanian trucker in Germany managed to prevent a road accident that could even end in tragedy on Monday in Germany. According to German press reports, the driver of the Romanian-numbered semi-trailer tractor, noticing near Neuss-Uedesheim, noticed a car approaching him, realized the woman was unconscious and used his truck to stop the car." Source: [Maszol.ro](https://www.maszol.ro)

**Example 3** [Post from March 24, 2021](#) with 2.100 reactions, 168 comments, and 41 shares.

**Tone of voice - neutral**



Source: Facebook

*Context: "Vladimir Putin, 68, has been at the helm of Russia for 21 years now. Between 2000 and 2008 as President - then the term of office of the Head of State lasted only four years - and then between 2008 and 2012, as Prime Minister due to constitutional constraints. Under an amendment to the law passed on Wednesday,*

*he cannot be re-elected as Russian head of state who has held this position for two terms. Under the amendment, this restriction does not apply to the president who was in office at the time of last year's constitutional amendment."*  
Source: [maszol.ro](https://www.maszol.ro)

Other top posts that follow the same pattern:

1. [July, 19th 2021 - BREAKING !! A final decision was made: István Beke and Zoltán Szőcs FREE](#)

The post had 1,400 reactions, 105 comments, 138 shares.

Tone of voice-Neutral

1. [July, 10th 2021- A young inventor from Covasna can be the discoverer of the year.](#)

The post had 1,400 reactions, 48 comments, 177 shares

Tone of voice- Supporting

1. [July 17, 2021 - The best of Transylvania - Harghita county: the Unitarian church in Szeklerland- a Maszol.ro portálról](#)

The post had 1,800 reactions, 108 comments, 170 shares

Tone of voice – Neutral

## 4.2 Székelyhon

Székelyhon (meaning: Home of the Szeklers) is one of the largest news websites in the

Hungarian community (the other very popular website is maszol.ro, the audiences of the two are roughly the same). Székelyhon is published by Prima Press SRL, a company owned by the Association for Transylvanian Media Space financed by the Hungarian government.

The website focuses on the local news about Szeklerland, an area in Transylvania where Hungarians are the majority. The tone of the materials is usually neutral. The website never publishes pieces critical towards the Hungarian government, news about the Hungarian opposition, and is only very rarely critical towards DAHR (in the past, when DAHR was not the local ally of Fidesz, they were somewhat more critical).

They publish neutral or positive news about local issues and steer away from stories that are conflictual/controversial, or critical towards politicians, public persons or businessmen from Szeklerland.

With a total of 1,319,318 interactions (likes, shares, comments) and with a monthly average of 94,237 interactions, Székelyhon is the second most interacted page with 129,974 followers and over 500 thousand owned videos views. They have constant growth in followers, but no active campaigns available in Facebook's Ad Library except for the promotion of its newly launched application in September 2021. Transylvanian Media Space Association has bought Székelyhon with money from the Hungarian state and is one of the most popular online portals.

## In Szekler ✓

Followers

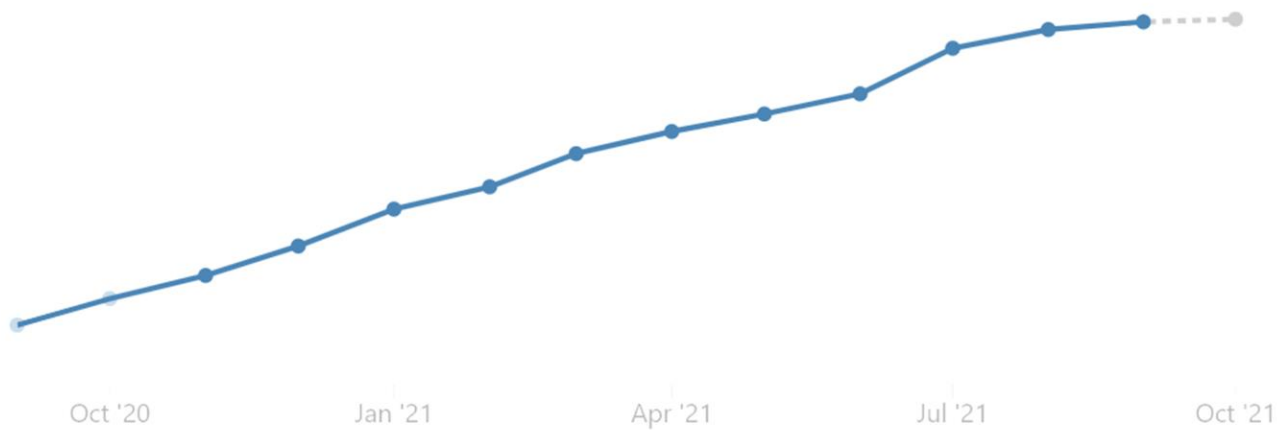
129,974

Growth

+7,822 (6.40%)

Page Likes ▼

Last 12 Months ▼





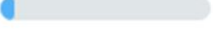

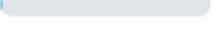

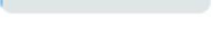
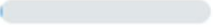


Source: CrowdTangle

Its main content on social media is sharing articles from the website [szekelyhon.ro](http://szekelyhon.ro) that surpasses [maszol.ro](http://maszol.ro) in monthly traffic with over

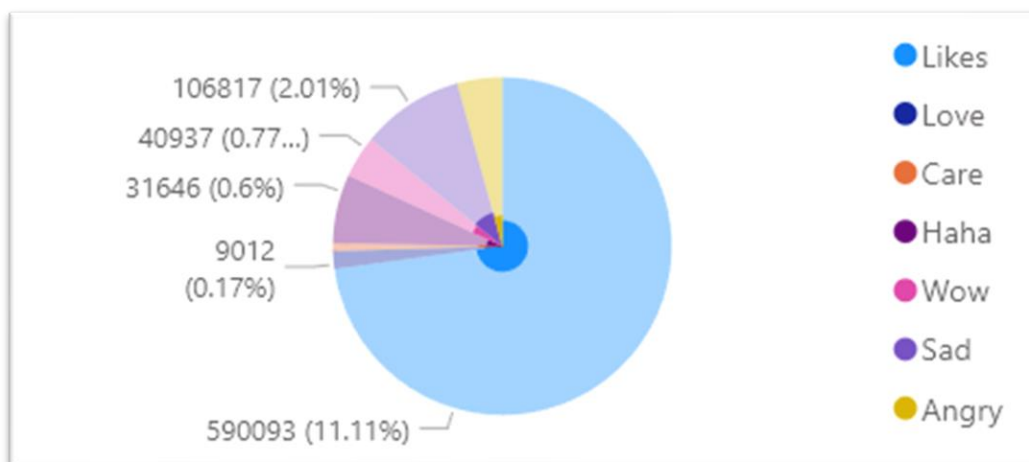
231 thousand visitors. Its main audience is located in Romania in the Hungarian community.

## Traffic distribution by country

Countries	Traffic Share	Traffic	Keywords
<b>Worldwide</b>	 100%	231.9K	31.7K
 RO	 90%	209.4K	5.9K
 HU	 6.9%	16.1K	16.1K
 DE	 1.1%	2.6K	1.5K
 US	 <0.1%	438	2K
Other	 1.5%	3.4K	6.1K

Source: Semrush

## Distribution of Reactions (Likes, Care, Love, etc.) on Szekelyhon.ro



Source: Visualization of CrowdTangle data  
in Microsoft Power BI, processed in Pulsar.  
Done in collaboration with IRI Beacon  
Project.



The content on the page is a mix of neutral content that aims to serve as an information source about the pandemic, Romanian politics, and current events and posts that focus on presenting updates in a neutral and at the best supporting manner with a focus on the following messages: Hungary is taking care of the Hungarian communities abroad and is a protector of traditional values.

**Example 1 - [September 30, 2021](#)** - The post has 1,200 reactions, 22 comments, and 54 direct shares. Using the Crowdtangle extension we can see it has also been shared to the following public groups: Scythian-Hungarian ancestry and to Hírek.ro - Transylvanian news portal. It totally gathered 111 shares and 2,300 Facebook interactions.

**Tone of voice - Neutral**

**Example 2. [Post from May 21, 2021](#)**- The Hungarians of the world are represented by the equestrian pilgrims who arrived to say

The post has 4,000 reactions, 47 comments, and 136 shares.

**Tone of voice - Neutral**



Source: Facebook.





Source: Facebook.

*Context: The participants of the Pentecostal Equestrian Pilgrimage were greeted in Miercurea Ciuc on Friday afternoon, after which they were handed the blessed prayer ribbons of the municipalities of Harghita County and*

*Miercurea Ciuc. It was said at the event, although the Pentecostal farewell can be organized this year with certain restrictions, the Hungarians of the world are still celebrating together. Source: [szekelyhon.ro](https://szekelyhon.ro)*

**Example 3 - [Post from July 17 2021](#) - We give space to the Hungarian word (Video)**

**The post has 2,100 reactions, 87 comments, and 117 shares.**

**Tone of voice - Supporting/Neutral (Protecting traditional values)**



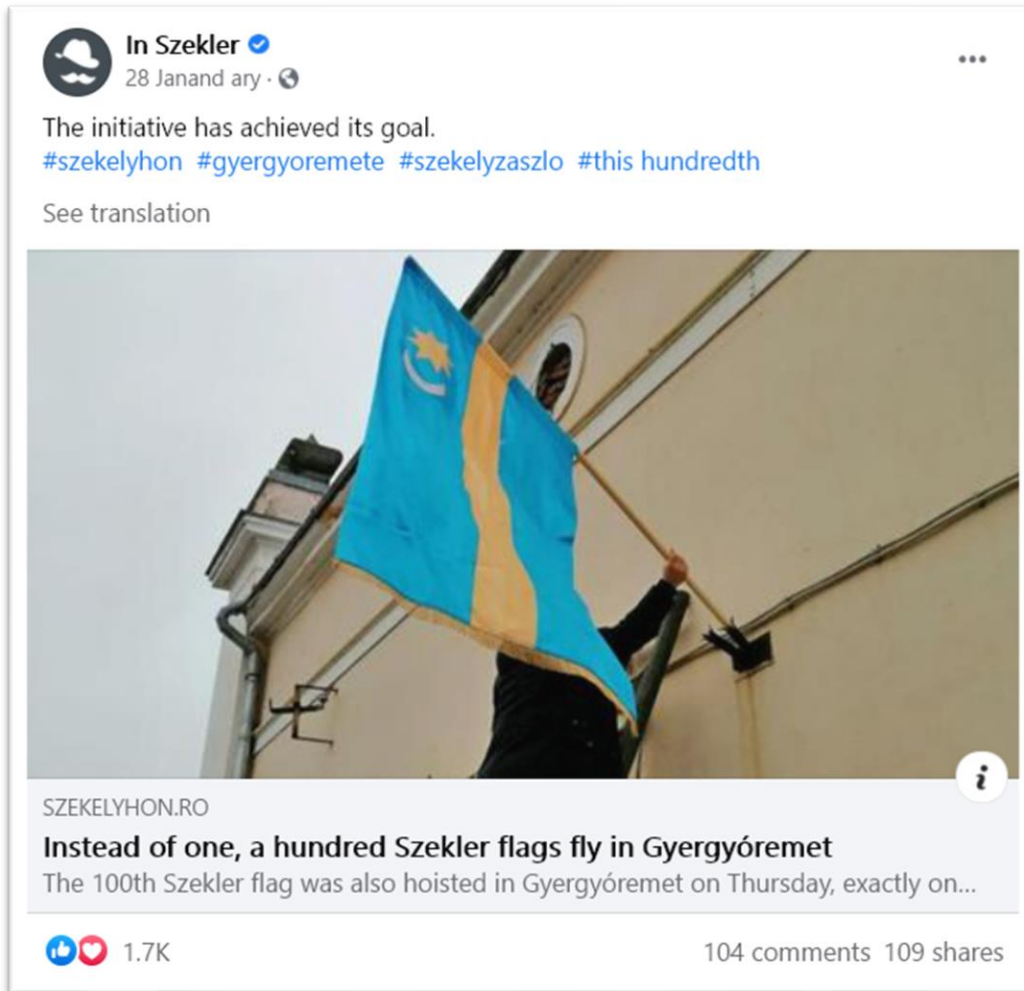
Source: Facebook

Context: The post promotes its own YouTube channel and application as an environment dedicated to the Hungarian community and its culture.

Example 4 - Post from [January 28, 2021](#) - Instead of one, a hundred Szekler flags fly in Gyergyóremet (Remetea, Harghita)

The post had 1,700 reactions, 104 comments, and 109 shares.

Tone of voice - Neutral (Protecting traditional values)



Source: Facebook

Context: The 100th Szekler flag was located in the center of Gheorgheni, in a building owned by the Catholic parish. With this, the initiative embraced by the Hungarian Association of Transylvania (EMSZ) achieved its goal: instead of a Szekler flag removed from the main square of the settlement as a result of a court ruling, a hundred people were hoisted across the village. Source: [szekelyhon.ro](http://szekelyhon.ro)

Other top posts that follow the same pattern:

April 4th, 2021 - [Food consecration in Miercurea Ciuc in the Romanian press](#)

Tone of voice - Neutral



Source: CrowdTangle

1. **May 22, 2021- [Together again - the mountain saddle of Csíksomlyó was populated on Pentecost Saturday](#)** **Tone of voice - Supporting Traditional Values**



Source: CrowdTangle

1. **May 22, 2021- [Speaker of the Pentecostal farewell: as long as we remain the people of Csíksomlyó, we will have a future](#)** **Tone of voice - Supporting Traditional Values**

We need to look into the eyes of the Blessed Virgin Mary, see her smile, to be comforted, to be strengthened. #szekelyhon #punkosdibucsu #sons #predication #unnepibeszed #masent



### Speaker of the Pentecostal farewell: as long as we remain the people of Csíksomlyó, we will

We need Csíksomlyó, we need the protection of Our Lady of Csíksomlyó, so that we can survive, it is important ...

SZEKELYHON.RO

56.8x 4,861 +4.8K 190 +178 236 +227

Source: CrowdTangle

#### 4.3 [lthon.ma](http://lthon.ma)

This is a news website that does not belong to either of the big media conglomerates in the community. The odd domain name (.ma) is a Moroccan extension and has a Hungarian meaning: “ma” means “today”, thus several Hungarian websites use Moroccan domains to personalize their URL.

The name of the website is a play of words: “itthon.ma” means in Hungarian “Home.today”, the motto “Erdélyország a mi hazánk” means “The country of Transylvania is our home”.

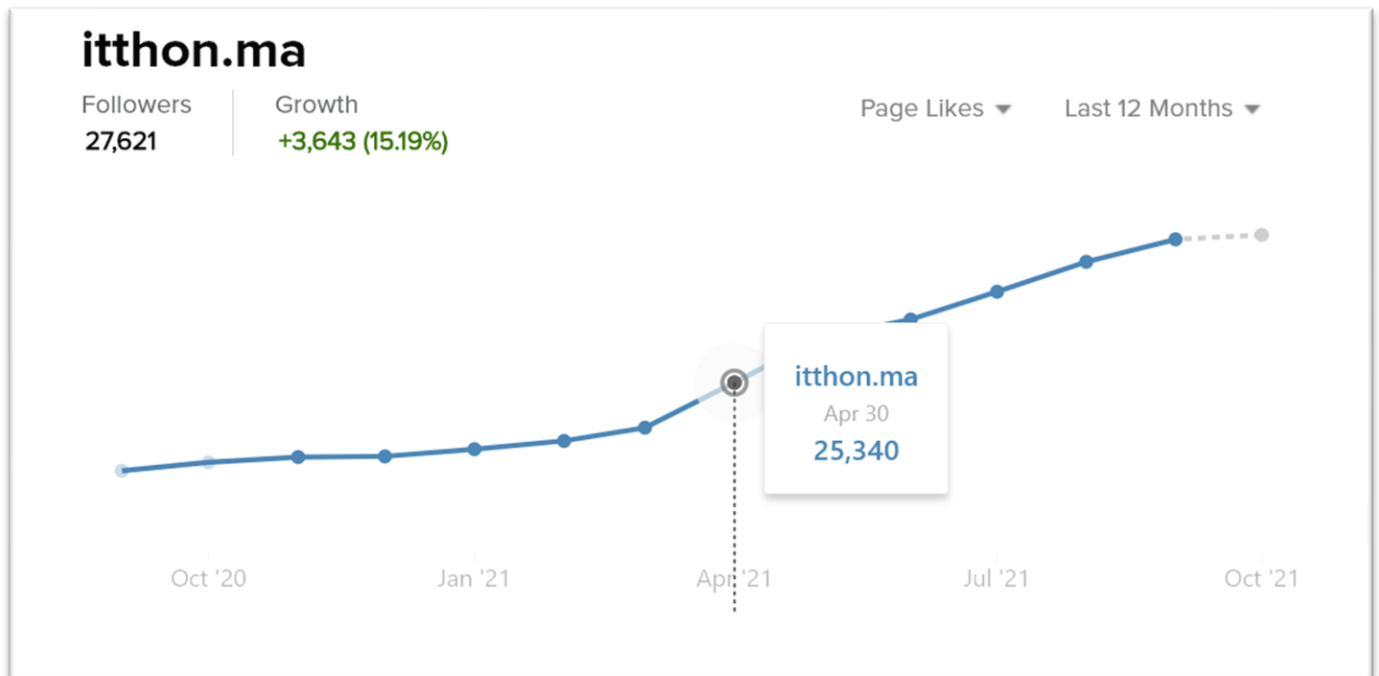
The domain was registered by GoDaddy Online Services Cayman Islands Ltd.

and doesn't have a publisher included in their [Impressum](#). If one clicks on the “[donate](#)” button, the link goes to a page with the banner of a Hungarian foundation where the president of the board is [István Szávay](#), a former MEP of the

far-right Jobbik party. Therefore, we can safely assume that the main funder/publisher of this website is Magyar Szív – Magyar Szó Alapítvány. The logo of the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office and the largest fund for the Hungarian community abroad, the Bethlen Gábor Fund also can be seen among their supporters.

Content-wise the page seems to have an overall Hungarian nationalistic narrative. News about Hungary and the Hungarian government is neutral/positive, while news about Romania is usually negative/critical. There is a visible interest in news about the geopolitical situation in Eastern Europe and the role played by Russia. Most of their content is copy-pasted from other sources, the editors seem to rewrite only the titles into more “clickable” ones.



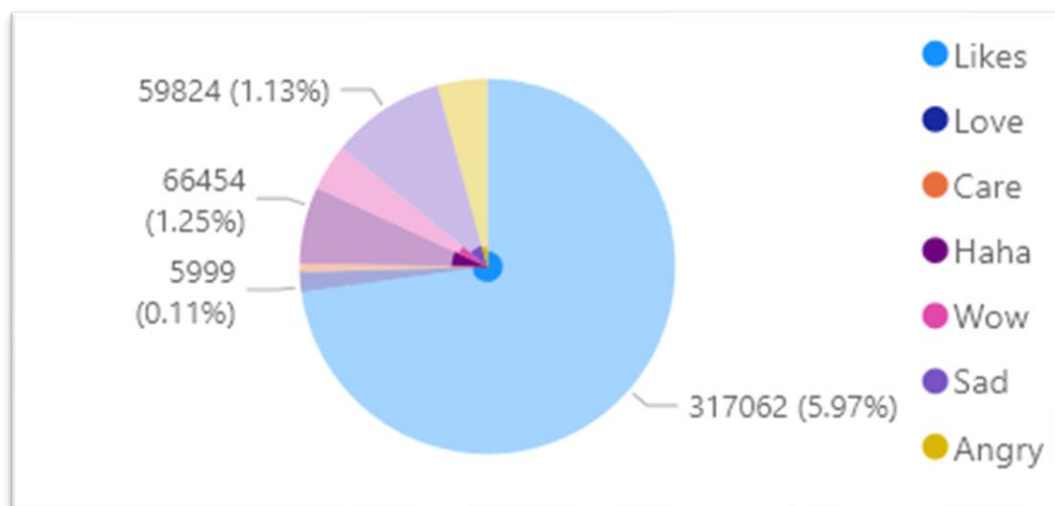


Source: CrowdTangle

The page has 760,764 (reactions, comments, shares) and a monthly average of 54,340. The sudden increase is registered in the period when conflicting organic posts were posted. For example, the post - Putin called the Romanians invaders is a top post with over 10 thousand interactions. The Facebook post leads to an [article](#). Putin argues that the former member

republics of the Soviet Union should regain the territories they owned when they entered the Soviet empire. In such circumstances, of course, the unification of Romania and the Republic of Moldova is out of the question, making the case for the dissolution of the Romanian territory that belongs to other states such as Hungary and Russia in his view.

## Distribution of Reaction on Itthon.ma



Source: Visualization of CrowdTangle data in Microsoft Power BI, processed in Pulsar. Done in collaboration with IRI Beacon Project.

### Example 1 - Post from [July 20, 2021](#)- Putin called the Romanian Invaders

**10 thousand reactions, 930 shares, 839 comments**

**Tone of voice - Supporting traditional values/ Hungarians are mistreated/ Romanian territory should be changed**

Other shares:

- ERDÉLY NEM ROMÁNIA (TRANSYLVANIA IS NOT ROMANIA). The public group with 14 thousand members, 708 interactions registered with the share.
- Szabad Erdélyi Fórum (Free Transylvanian Forum) - Public group with 36 thousand members, 465 interactions registered on the post.



Source: CrowdTangle

**Context:** “Putin also mentions Hungary and Poland, albeit in the context that throughout history, Russians have lived within the borders of these countries (in the case of Hungary, you can think of Ruthenians). In Ukraine, by the way, according to the official, legally stated position, the Hungarians are occupiers (a non-indigenous minority) who took away “ancient Ukrainian” (Kievan Rus) territories from

Ukraine, which according to them always existed. This statement, which falls into the category of falsification of history, does not make sense even if, for some reason, Putin's position is the unquestionable truth, since this topic would belong to the Hungarians and the Russians if Russia and Ukraine were already a people.” Source: [itthon.ma](http://itthon.ma)

**Example 2 - [July 1st, 2021](#) -The Szeklers (Hungarians in Romania) won: they set the flag**

**8,700 reactions, 288 comments, 338 shares. Another significant share of the article is**

**from the public group Erdély (Transylvania) where it had 1,000 interactions (likes, comments, shares)**



**Context from the article:** "The mayor of Sepsiszentgyörgy (Saint George City) recalled that in January 2010 the local government adopted a resolution on the city flag. This was followed by numerous lawsuits initiated by Dan Tănasă, while in 2016 the Brasov panel court ruled that the municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe could not use the city's flag. According to Árpád Antal, anticipating the court's negative decision, a law was initiated and passed in the parliament in 2015, in which it was decided that settlements could have their own flag. "At that time, we adopted another council decision, which we sent to the Ministry of Development, but there were a bunch of documents in the drawer, until January of this year, when Minister Attila Cseke pulled the documentation out of the drawer and the decision was adopted." listed by

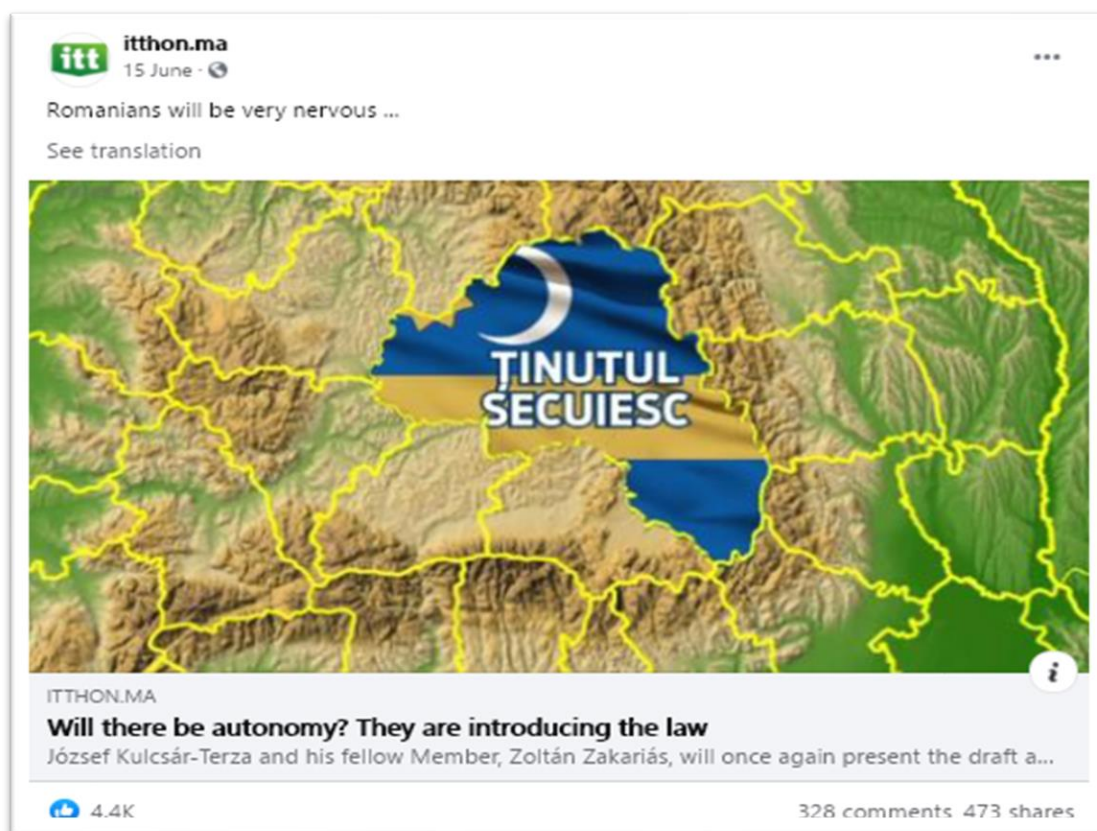
the mayor. According to Árpád Antal, it is also clear from this process that not only legislation is enough, but the will is also needed to apply it. And there is a will if there is a presence, and now, after half a year, the DAHR's government presence has already seen visible results."

Source: [ltthon.ma](http://ltthon.ma)

**Tone of voice - Supporting traditional values/ Hungarians are mistreated**

**Example 3 - [June, 15th, 2021](#) - Will there be autonomy? They are introducing the law**

**4,400 reactions, 328 comments, 473 shares. Another significant share was made in the public group ÉN IS SZÉKELY VAGYOK (I am Szekler <sup>1</sup>too) which had 698 interactions.**



Source: Facebook

<sup>1</sup> Szekler means Hungarian from the Romanian community

**Context from the article:** “József Kulcsár-Terza and his fellow Member, Zoltán Zakariás, will once again present the draft autonomy of Szeklerland to the Bucharest legislature. The parliamentarians of the Hungarian Association of Transylvania (EMSZ) spoke about this at the meeting of the Regional Self-Government Working Group of the Forum of Hungarian Representatives of the Carpathian Basin in the Hungarian Parliament in Budapest.

According to a press release issued by the EMSZ press office, the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of Europe, chaired by Pál Zsigmond Barna and Zsolt Molnár, also discussed the minority protection aspects of the Hungarian Council of Europe, local government problems in the Carpathian Basin and European citizenship initiatives” Source: [Itthon.ma](https://itthon.ma)

**Other top posts that follow the same pattern:**

1. Oct 2, 2021- [Ukraine received a huge slap from Russia and Hungary](#)



Source: CrowdTangle

**Context:** “Russian gas company Gazprom stopped transit of natural gas to Hungary from Ukraine on Friday, a few days after the Hungarian and Russian parties signed a fifteen-year agreement to purchase 4.5 billion cubic

meters of Russian gas a year from Serbia, which will be operational on October 1. via the Hungarian interconnector and from Austria.” Source: [Itthon.ma](https://itthon.ma)

1. August, 26, 2021 - [Hungarians and Szeklers “took back” Úzvölgye \(PICTURES\)](#)

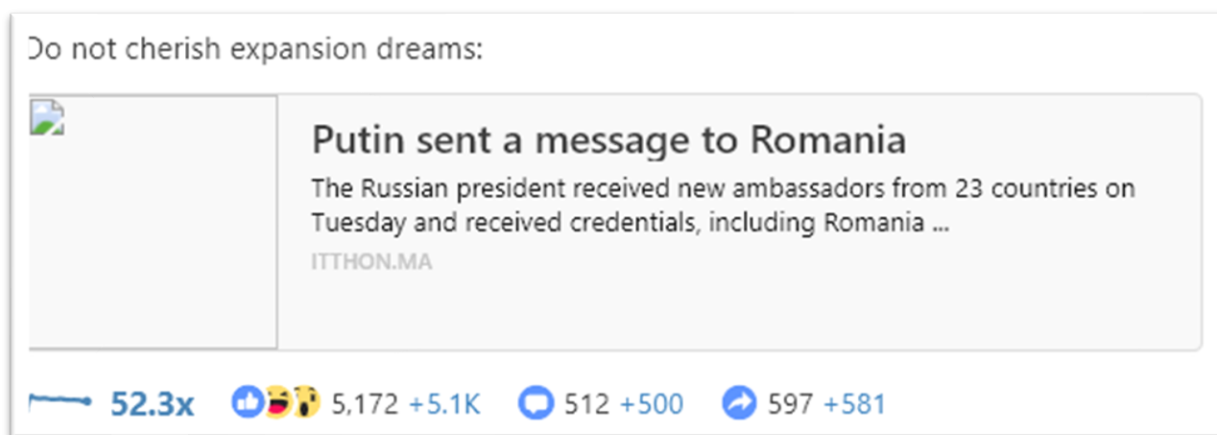


Source: CrowdTangle

**Context:** "A commemorative ceremony was held on Thursday at the Úzvölgyi (Valea Uzului in Romanian) military cemetery in the II. On the occasion of the 77th anniversary of the battle of World War I there. Hundreds of people came to

the event from here and beyond, and the 97-year-old veteran of Mihály Bartha from Úzvölgy, whose comrades rest in the cemetery, was also present." Source: [itthon.ma](http://itthon.ma)

1. May 19, 2021 - [Putin sent a message to Romania](#)



Source: CrowdTangle

**Context:** 'The Russian President stated: "Our relationship with the Republic of Moldova is

based on tradition and friendship, as well as on a spiritual community that our nations can



claim. This year will be the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the bilateral Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. We will continue to seek a balanced solution to the problem of Transnistria (Transnistrian Republic), the

granting of a special status that takes into account the territorial integrity and independence of the Republic of Moldova. " Source: [itthon.ma](http://itthon.ma)

Hungarian media outlet vs national Romanian media outlet

Itthon.ma vs Agerpres

In order to offer you a complete perspective about how fast a site like Itthon.ma (27 thousand followers) is growing right now we compared them with a traditional national site from Romania, that has (90 thousand followers) on its main Facebook page, named Agerpres.

NAME	AVG. INTERACTION RATE	
 itthon.ma	0.55%	<div></div>
 AGERPRES	0.02%	<div></div>

As we can clearly observe, the differences are in huge favor of Itthon.ma with the followers and likes growth rate almost 3 times higher than the one of Agerpres. The most visible difference comes in the average interaction rate, where itthon.ma averages 0.55 and Agerpres averages only 0.02 interaction rate.

This shows us how powerful a page like Itthon.ma is while spreading huge amounts of fake news that are meant to emotionally manipulate the Hungarian community from Romania into embracing a more nationalistic approach.

Source: CrowdTangle

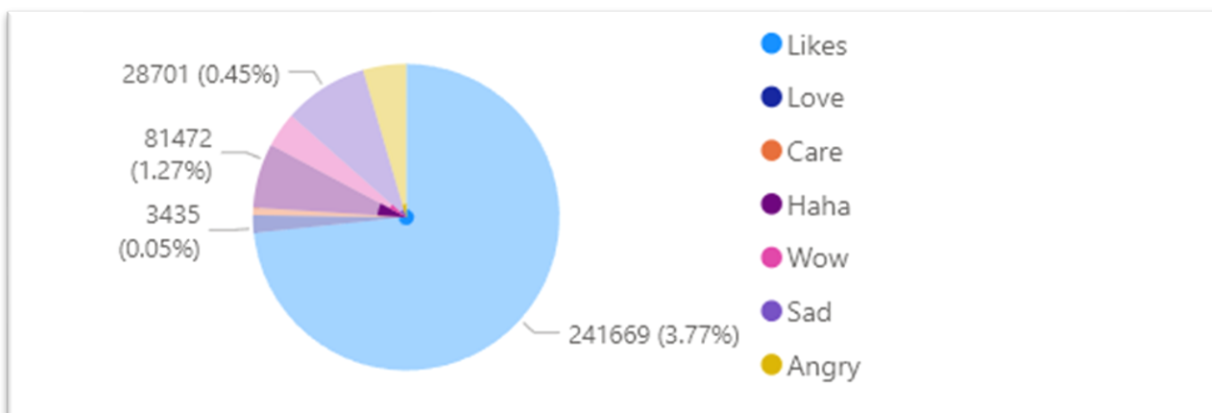
#### 4.4. [Főtér.ro](#)

Főtér (meaning: Main Square) is a news/opinion website that is part of the media conglomerate funded by the Hungarian government. It does publish news about current affairs, but it is not a news website in the classic sense: most of its materials are commentary linked to current events. They also translate Romanian opinion pieces.

Hungary and the Hungarian government, as well as the Hungarian community in Romania, are usually depicted in a neutral/positive light, while there is a critical/dismissive attitude towards the Romanian government and authorities, and life in Romania in general.



Source: CrowdTangle



Source: Visualization of CrowdTangle data in Microsoft Power BI, processed in Pulsar. Done in collaboration with IRI Beacon Project.

**Example 1 - [September 10th, 2021](#) -**  
**Hundreds of local police officers were fired.**  
**They could not read or write**

**The post had 2,900 reactions, 352**  
**comments, and 771 shares.**

**Tone of voice - Supporting, Hungarian**  
**identity is mistreated**

**Context:** *“Because of the very good salary bonuses for local police officers, a lot of incapable policemen were hired. According to the mayor, this is the case elsewhere, not only in the 6th district of Bucharest. We nod, of course, because we saw local cops elsewhere.”*  
Source: [Foter.ro](#)



Source: Facebook

**Example 2 - [May 19, 2021](#) - Do Hungarians**  
**take Transylvania? The Hungarian state took**  
**the Zsibó castle from the nose of the Szilágy**  
**County Council**

**The post had 3,900 reactions, 444**  
**comments, and 335 shares**

**Tone of voice - Neutral**





Fötér.ro  
19 May · 🌐

...

There was an unexpected turn in the case of the vomited Wesselényi Castle.

See translation



FOTER.RO

**Do Hungarians take Transylvania? The Hungarian state took the Zsibó castle from the nose of the Szilágy County Council**



3.9K

444 comments 335 shares

Source: Facebook

Other top posts that follow the same pattern:

1. [March 12, 2021- A Romanian apologized for damaging a Hungarian flag.](#)

Well, there are still pleasant surprises.



**It's like this: a Romanian man apologized for damaging a Hungarian flag ...**

No, this is not April 1st news, there are still a few weeks until then.

FOTER.RO

57.9x 4,765 + 4.7K 252 +239 254 +245

Source: CrowdTangle

1. [May, 8th, 2021 - For this reason alone, it was worth moving Europe for Szeklerland](#)

The SZNT signature collection has been completed, and the threshold was also met in Belgium on the last day. We show in which countries the European Citizens' Initiative for National Regions has been signed.



**For this reason alone, it was worth moving Europe for Szeklerland**

The SZNT signature collection has been completed, and the threshold was also met in Belgium on the last day. We show in which country ...

FOTER.RO

54.7x 4,524 +4.5K 139 +126 318 +309

Source: CrowdTangle



**Context:** "The SZNT signature collection has been completed, and the threshold was also met in Belgium on the last day. We show in

which countries the European Citizens' Initiative for National Regions has been signed." : [Foter.ro](http://Foter.ro)

1. [April 27, 2021 - Advertising flag case: human rights court pays damages to Romania for László Tőkés](#)



Source: CrowdTangle

**Context:** "It is becoming more and more difficult to follow the scandalous decisions and lawsuits related to the setting of flags, but several of our readers will surely remember the hair-raising

decision of the Bihor County Court in 2014, which he literally classified the blue-gold-yellow and then the Partium flag as an advertising flag." Source: [Foter.ro](http://Foter.ro)

## 5. Narratives analysis

### 1. Hungarian identity in Transylvania/ Szeklerland/Partium is mistreated.

This is a long-time existing narrative in the Hungarian community: the majority (individual persons or state institutions) are mistreating the Hungarians by not being sensitive/compassionate to their special needs (incapacity) or knowingly stripping them of their

rights (ill-will), making them "secondhand citizens". According to this narrative, the ultimate goal of the majority is to assimilate the Hungarian minority. Autonomy and language rights are the only way to preserve the community.

2. Hungary is a protector of traditional values (protection from liberal elites, liberal EU,

migration)

This narrative was created by the Fidesz government during the migration crisis: the Hungarian government is the last bastion of traditional culture in Europe. It protects the traditional family, Christianity, values, etc. in an environment where these are challenged both from outside (migration) and from inside (decadent and weak Western elites).

### *3. Hungary is taking care of the Hungarian communities abroad*

In Romania, the most popular narratives by a close margin were connected with the needs of the Hungarian community in Romania, both culturally and economically, and how the Hungarian government can take care of their needs, sometimes in comparison with the ill-will or incapacity of the Romanian government. Distrust in authorities is the main theme not only among the Hungarian community but also among Romanians. The role of the Orban regime is to clearly create a sense of ethnic parallelism, in the way of fulfilling the need for

belonging to the greater nation of Hungary, but also in practical issues [by building kindergartens in Transylvania.](#)

The mission and propaganda are not new, what has changed are the institutional tools and their exploitation in the digital age. The sense of belonging in the virtual world is much easier to obtain due to the disappearance of physical boundaries, especially for a community that wants unification in a way or another. Using this to spread propaganda to create an excessive positive image of the Hungarian government was an easy task especially since it has invested massively in buying or funding regional newspapers in Transylvania. The delimitation of these narratives is mainly for the purpose of our research, they co-exist in the Hungarian society in Romania and are equally spread through the pages that we analyzed. This means that communicating the narrative Hungarian Identity is mistreated in Romania is done at the same time while sending the message that Hungary is a protector of the Hungarian communities abroad.

## **5.1 Narrative - Hungarian identity in Transylvania/ Szeklerland/Partium is mistreated.**

László Tőkés is the character for whom people initially gathered in the street, on December 15, 1989, in Timișoara. Pastor Tőkés, 37, was an opponent known for his petitions against the demolition of villages, for the anti-communist verses recited in public. When he refused to be exiled from Timișoara, he sparked a revolutionary movement that spread across the country and overthrew the communist regime in Romania.

This is how the Romanian Revolution began, through Tőkés' courage to face the system, but the human rights oppression, more exactly the Romanian oppression of the Hungarians in Transylvania remains one of the factors that contribute to the skepticism and Hungarophobia the community faces, especially from older generations.

## Pages that supported the narrative

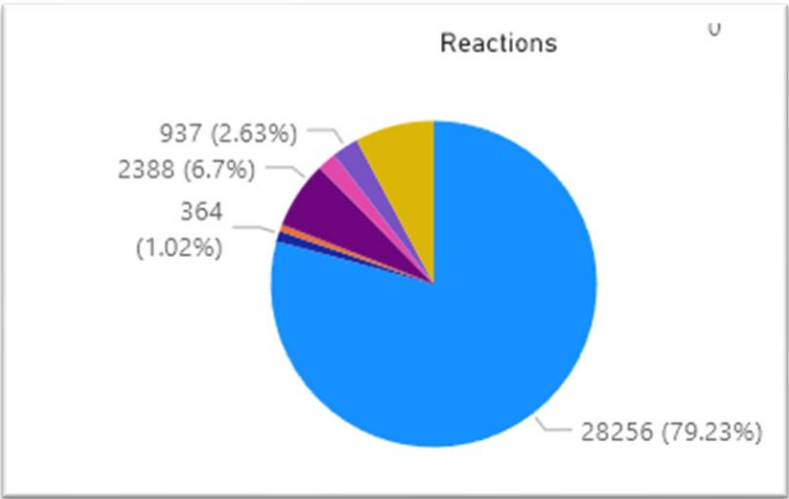


Source: Visualization of CrowdTangle data in Microsoft Power BI, processed in Pulsar. Done in collaboration with IRI Beacon Project.

Translated into social media we can see how the main sources fueling this narrative are the newspapers funded by the Association for Transylvanian Media Space that massively shares content from each other: Kronika and Székelyhon, respectively their main websites

and Facebook Pages. We have manually reviewed 183 posts from this narrative, filtered by keywords and we observe it reached 28 thousand interactions in the period of time monitored.

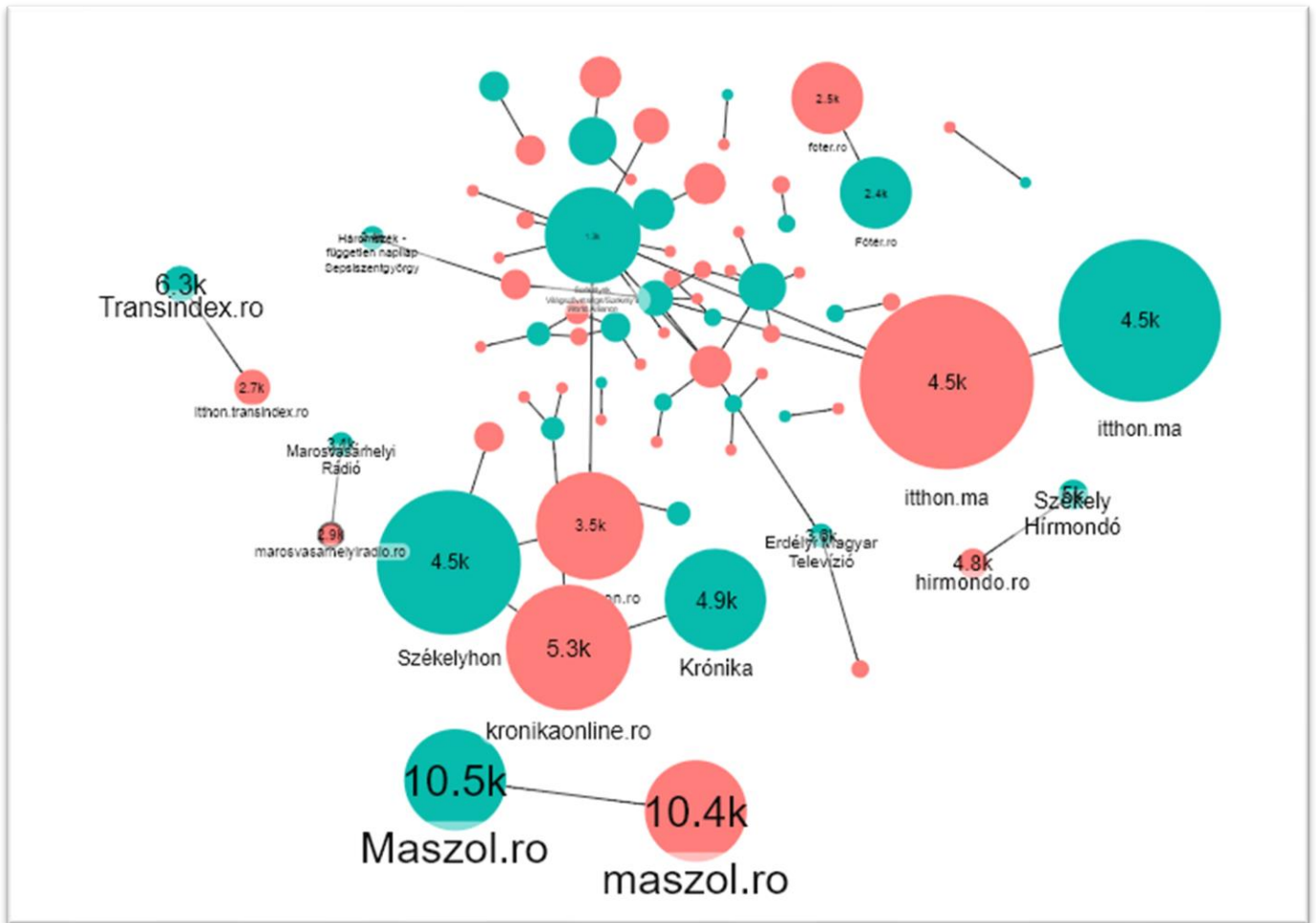
**Distribution of reactions in the tagged posts**



*Source: Visualization of CrowdTangle data in Microsoft Power BI, processed in Pulsar. Done in collaboration with IRI Beacon Project.*

The overwhelming majority of the content distributed was mainly articles from the

websites associated with the Facebook Pages. (146 out of 183 posts)



Source: Visualization of CrowdTangle data in Microsoft Power BI, processed in Pulsar. Done in collaboration with IRI Beacon Project.

Main messages can be seen around political decisions regarding public display of Hungarian culture, public treatment, and statements from politicians, as well as the bad management of the Romanian government in taking care of the Hungarian community.

**Example of top post - [August 30, 2021](#) - Traian Basescu, Ex-President of Romania**

**was punished for his hatred towards the Hungarian community in Romania.**

The post had 5.200 reactions, 389 comments, and 231 shares. The post was also shared on the public group Szekler info (Transylvania info for Hungarians) where it had 156 interactions.



Source: Facebook

**Context:** "As is well known, in connection with last year's labor conflict in the bakery in Gheorgheni, former head of state Traian Băsescu stated: "Hungarians are generally very frustrated people and, due to their frustration, are unable to tolerate others". The politician, who is currently a member of the European Parliament, was reported to the National Anti-Discrimination Council (ODT) by Hunor Brassai, chairman of the Transylvanian Hungarian People's Party in Târgu Mureș, head of the youth organization. Source: [itthon.ma](http://itthon.ma)

**Context:** "Another survey confirms that there is a collective paranoia among Romanians in Hungarian affairs: Hungarians, and especially

**Example of top post - [April 30, 2021](#) - According to the majority of Romanians, Hungary's main goal is to reclaim Transylvania**

The post had 4,300 reactions, 1,000 comments, and 209 shares. Another significant share was made on the community (Facebook) Szeklerland is also Transylvania with 96k followers, gathering an additional 1k interactions.

Hungary, expect only the worst. The survey was prepared by the Laboratory for the Analysis of Information Warfare and Strategic

Communication (LARICS) under the auspices of the Romanian Academy, which is usually expiring in Hungarian topics and presents “analysis” that spread false news, but it is very instructive.

According to the results of a survey conducted by telephone between 12 and 23 April on a representative sample of 1,000 people. 66.2 percent of the respondents agree with the statement that Hungary's goal is to separate Transylvania from Romania.” Source: [itthon.ma](http://itthon.ma)



Source: Facebook



## 5.2 Narrative Hungary is a protector of traditional values (protection from liberal elites, liberal EU, migration)

### Pages that supported the narrative

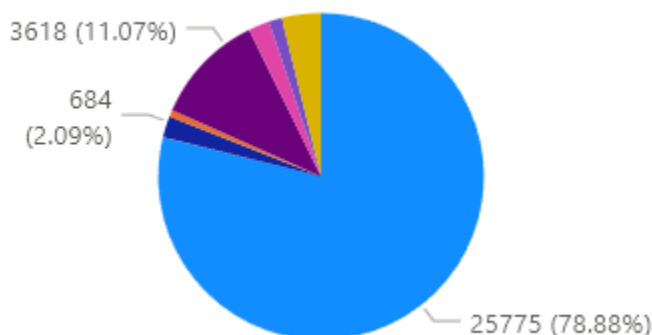


Source: Visualization of CrowdTangle data in Microsoft Power BI, processed in Pulsar. Done in collaboration with IRI Beacon Project.

We have manually reviewed over 200 posts, already filtered with the help of keywords (Details in methodology). The narrative is one of the most prominent in the Hungarian community

in Transylvania, with our tagged posts having 25 thousand reactions in the period of time analyzed.

### Distribution of reactions in the narrative

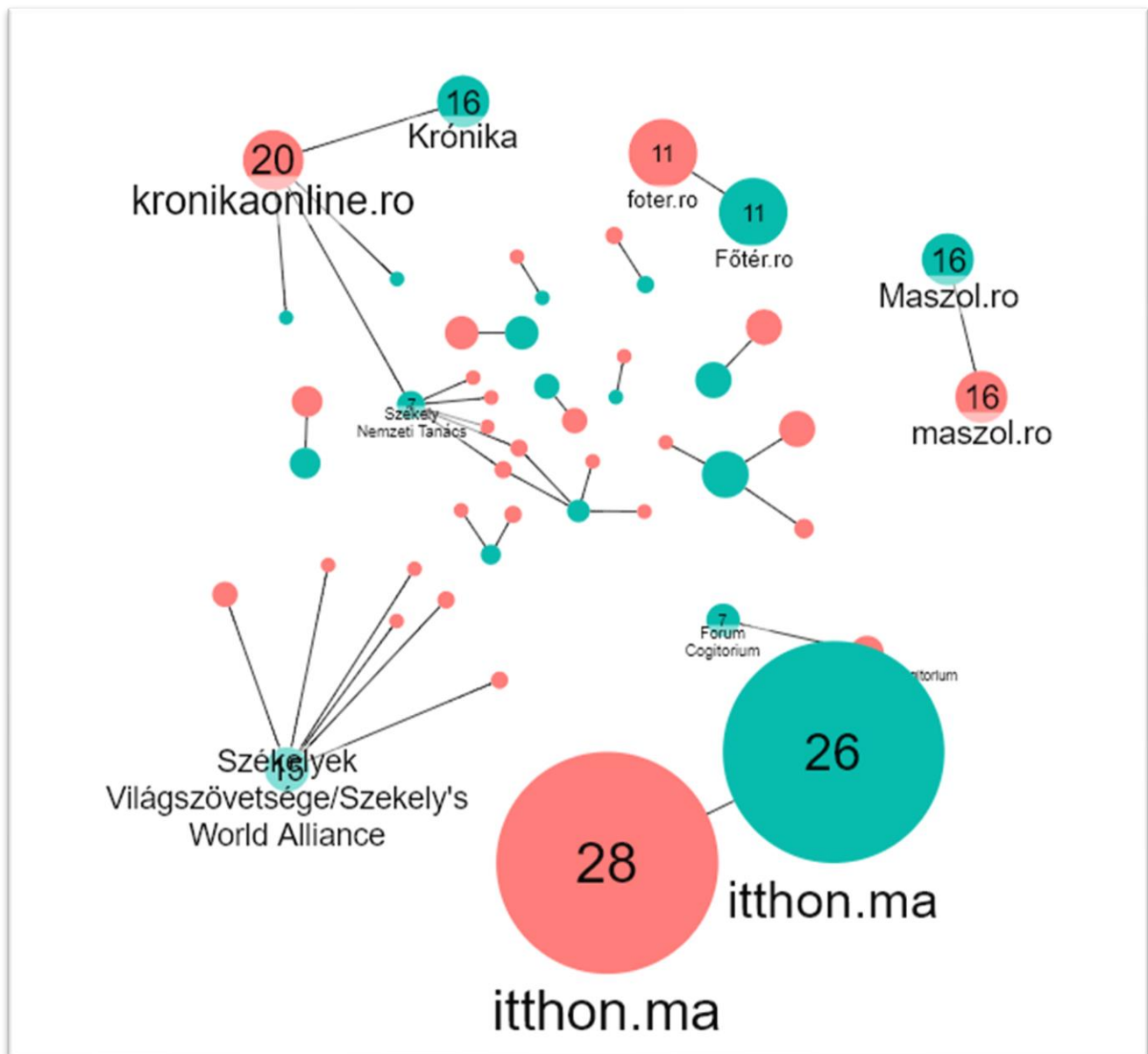




Source: Visualization of CrowdTangle data in Microsoft Power BI, processed in Pulsar. Done in collaboration with IRI Beacon Project.

The main source for this narrative was Itthon.ma alongside Foter.ro and Kronika Online.ro. There is a great emphasis on the catholic religion and its importance for the community in the context of the Orthodox majority in Romania, family values, and the

cultural preservation of Hungarian traditions. In the last months, we could observe an increase in the anti-LGBTQ sentiment, but we did not gather enough information to make an assessment of the issue.



Source: Visualization of CrowdTangle data in Microsoft Power BI, processed in Pulsar. Done in collaboration with IRI Beacon Project.

**Example of top posts [August 12, 2021](#) - Hungarians are the most conservative in Romania**

The post had 2,300 reactions, 72 comments, and 81 shares.



Source: Facebook

**Context:** "The Hungarian community is the most conservative in Romania - at least the part that pollsters identify as DAHR voters.

However, as the DAHR is a member of the right-wing European People's Party in principle,

and the other two Hungarian parties define themselves as conservative, and their politicians won a parliamentary seat on the DAHR list in the December elections, this statement applies to the entire Hungarian community." Source: [Footer.ro](#)

Example of top post - [April 19, 2021](#) - The inciting Romanian journalist, who covered the Hungarian Days in Cluj-Napoca, lost all lawsuits

\*Also belonging to the narrative Hungarian identity is mistreated

The post had 5,600 reactions, 151 comments, and 271 shares. The article was shared in the Facebook community Szeklerland and

Transylvania where it got an additional 500 interactions.



Source: Facebook

**Context:** "Diana Apahidean, as an external employee of TVR's Cluj-Napoca regional studio, made an encouraging report about Beatrice's concert at the Hungarian Days in Cluj-Napoca. In it, she suggested Stalin, Hitler, and the

Islamic State were portrayed in a favorable light. TVR's Cluj-Napoca regional studio terminated the contract with the journalist in September 2016,

claiming they had no framework for external staff. Diana Apahidean, currently a spokeswoman for the mayor's office in Turda, didn't let go: she filed a lawsuit against the court for a year, suing TVR Bucharest and the

regional studio. The journalist claimed EUR 100,000 in property damages for violating his professional reputation and human dignity”  
Source: [ltthon.ma](http://ltthon.ma)

### 5.3 Narrative Hungary is taking care of the Hungarian communities abroad

#### Pages that supported the narrative



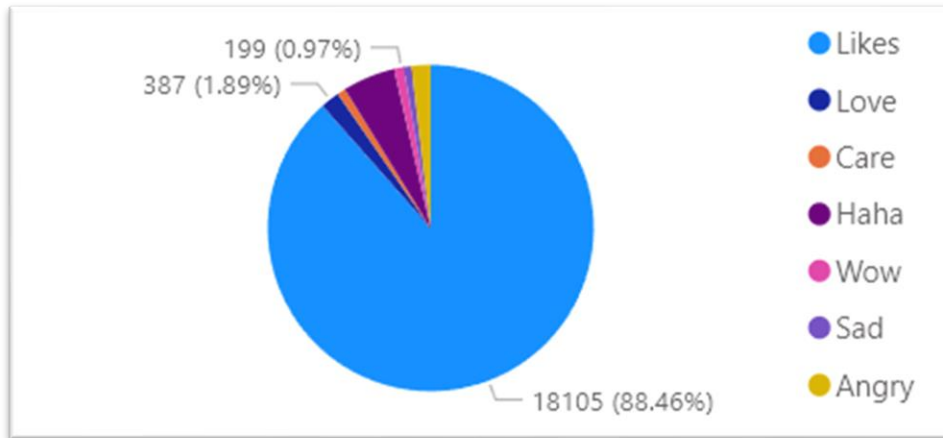
Source: Visualization of CrowdTangle data in Microsoft Power BI, processed in Pulsar. Done in collaboration with IRI Beacon Project.

This narrative has its roots in the early 90's when after decades of denial during the communist regime, the Hungarian government stated that it is responsible for all Hungarians living abroad and started supporting them both

financially and politically. Since then, Hungarian communities abroad see the Hungarian government as their only real ally and protector while being under constant threat (see narrative 1.)

The narrative had 18 thousand reactions in the 190 posts reviewed, including 190 manually tagged posts.

## Distribution of reactions in the narrative



Source: Visualization of CrowdTangle data in Microsoft Power BI, processed in Pulsar. Done in collaboration with IRI Beacon Project.

### Example - [August 21, 2021](#) - Actor Vilmos Meleg received the Award for 'Hungarianness' Abroad

The post had 103 reactions on the Bihari Naplo Page and five comments but was shared on

multiple public groups ([NEWS, INFORMATION, Oradea, and its countryside](#)) adding an additional 500 interactions.

**Bihari Napló**  
21 August · 🌐

Award for foreign Hungary, named after Zoltán Kallós in 2019 Zsolt Semjén deputy prime minister and János Pótápi state secretary were handed over.  
<https://www.erdon.ro/.../kulhoni-magyarsagert-dijat.../>  
 ⚙️ · See original · Rate this translation



ERDON.RO

**Külhoni Magyarságért Díjat kapott Meleg Vilmos színművész - ERDON**  
 Ciucur Losonczi Antonius – Nagy öröm és megtiszteltetés volt számomra, hogy Szent István-n...

👍❤️ 103

5 comments

Source: Facebook

**Context:** “The prize can be awarded to Hungarian and foreign persons and organizations engaged in outstanding activities in public life, education, culture, preservation of

the nation's heritage, church life, science, mass media, and economic self-organization for the benefit of Hungarian communities abroad.”

Source: [Erdon.ro](https://www.erdon.ro)



Example - [August 13, 2021](#) - A four-star wellness hotel is being built next to the Gyimesfelsőlok summer toboggan run.

The post had 360 reactions, 8 comments, and 23 shares.



Source: Facebook

#### 5.4 The least interacted narratives on social media in the period December 2020-September 2021.



Source: Visualization of CrowdTangle data in Microsoft Power BI, processed in Pulsar. Done in collaboration with IRI Beacon Project.

Euro trans was the main page for both narratives since the Eurotrans Foundation, established in 2004, is to encourage interregional, domestic and international, cross-

border cooperation, and the participation of Hungarians from Romania in projects funded by Hungary and also in achieving dual citizenship.

**Narrative - Territory of Romania should be changed in favor of Hungary - popularity as**

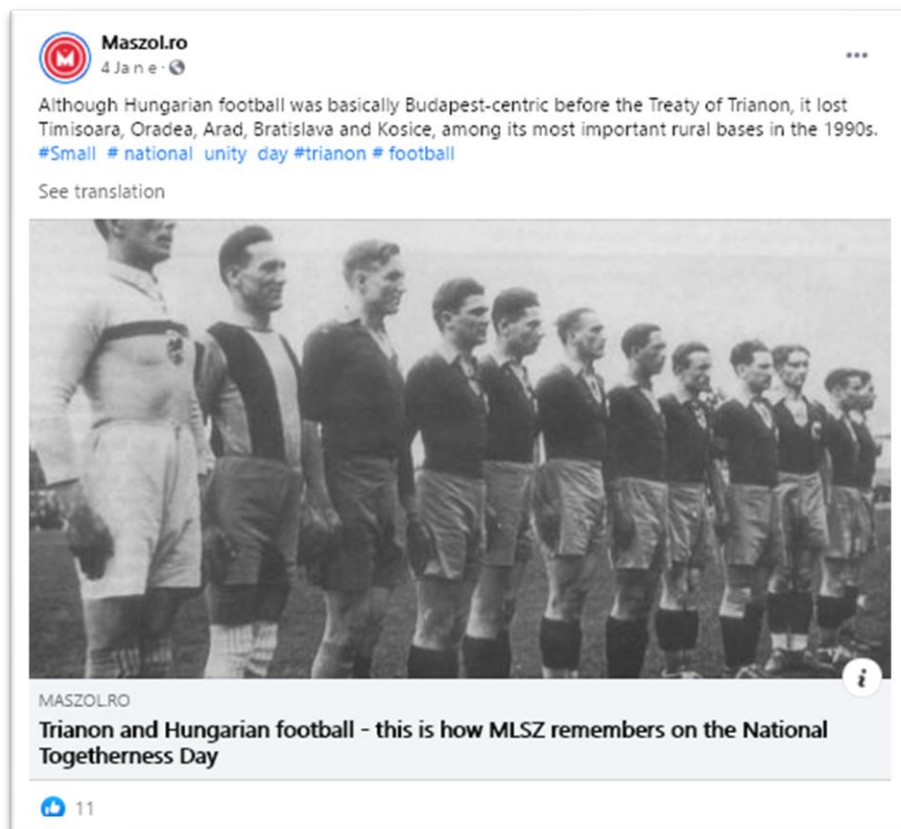
**interaction/posts, disclaimer that the majority of posts are neutral**

The term "Trianon" was very popular in the selected period. The explanation for this is that last year it was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Trianon treaty, there were loads of commemorations, articles, conferences etc. in the Hungarian community. We tagged these materials as usually "neutral" since they were mostly about presenting historical facts.

Over 178 posts were assigned to this narrative, being present in all major newspapers due to the historic event. It had an insignificant interaction average of only 45 reactions compared to the other narratives.

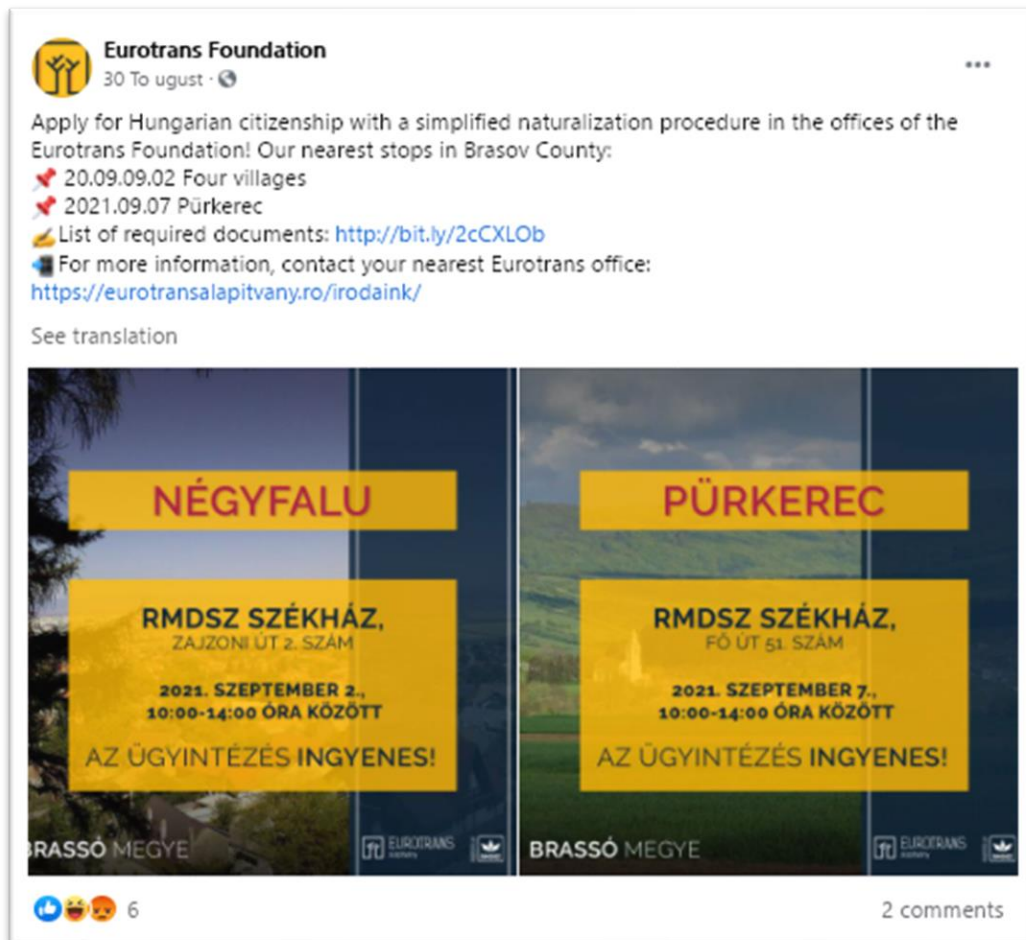
Example of post - [January 4, 2021](#) - Trianon and Hungarian football - this is how MLSZ remembers on the National Togetherness Day- a Maszol.ro portálról

Limited reach with only 11 reactions and no further actions.



Source: Facebook





Source: Facebook

## Conclusions

Our monitorization of FIDESZ propaganda in the Hungarian minority in Transylvania was carried out both online and offline. Our purpose was to get a clear picture of the influence that FIDESZ has in the community and how it is planning to use it. Viktor Orban's export of ideologies is constantly monitored by the investigative journalism outlet Átlátszó Erdély.

The investigation, **“Two-a-penny: 5 million euro per year for the Hungarian language media trust in Transylvania”** by Sipos Zoltán

was essential to our research in the online monitoring of FIDESZ's influence. What we found was predictable in nature, but completely surprising in magnitude. In the past three-and-a-half years, the Association for Transylvanian Media Space (ATMS) received almost 20 million EUR in grants from the Hungarian government. With these funds, the association, unknown until recently, has become by far the largest Hungarian-language media trust in Transylvania. ATMS' financial balance shows revenues of 18.2 mil RON in 2020 (3.6 mil EUR), which puts it on

a par with the large players on the Romanian media market, serving an audience 14 times bigger than the local Hungarian community. The Association owns important regional newspapers like Erdélyi Napló, Krónika, and one of the most popular Hungarian news portals in Transylvania, Szekelyhon.ro.

Why is FIDESZ financing the Hungarian regional media in Transylvania? The Budapest government refused to let the local newspapers die and financed their revival in the digital age. Now, according to our offline investigation, a few changes were implemented, but the cost of these are nothing compared to the grants they received. Instead of the promised innovations, we noticed instead the disappearance of criticism in the local Hungarian press towards Viktor Orban's regime. On the other hand, the Romanian government is constantly and almost entirely portrayed as a failure, in stark contrast with the Hungarian government which is presented as a success and a model for the region.

Social media has become a new tool for the FIDESZ government to spread misinformation and propaganda and fuel already existing tensions and stereotypes between Romanians and the Hungarian minority. Traditional newspapers and offline influencers moved online and built their communities on blogs, portals and social networks, mainly Facebook (by far the most important network in the whole region of Eastern Europe). We already see the unpleasant consequences of these new echo chambers on social media. When it comes to ethnic minorities, it's like building an entirely different reality.

While searching for propaganda we believe other important findings deserve to be mentioned before talking about Hungarian narratives. The general content shared is about Hungary-related news, while politicians from Hungary have a strong presence in the local community in Romania. From offering awards for

important figures in the Hungarian minority in Romania to giving interviews in local newspapers or attending traditional events, FIDESZ is portrayed as a parent figure of the Hungarian community in Romania. When it comes to news about what is happening in Romania, the most common topics are events from Transylvania. Little to no interest exists in Romanian national sports, Romanian culture or entertainment events, tv-shows and so on. The only topics of interest related to Romania seemed to be pandemic updates and news about the Romanian fragile governing coalition that eventually collapsed.

The lack of criticism towards the FIDESZ government is another interesting discovery. There seems to be no opposition in mainstream media, apart from transparency watch dogs such as Átlátszó Erdély. This happens both because the channels have no choice, like those publications directly financed by the Hungarian government, or, in some cases, the journalists sincerely believe in what they are publishing. The political opposition from Budapest is absent from the news programs reaching Transylvania, so that the policies and assistance of the Hungarian state are exclusively associated with Viktor Orban. UDMR, the ethnic party which represents the community in the Romanian parliament, understood the message and cut off all contacts with the Hungarian opposition at the beginning of the long campaign for the 2022 elections.

In our project we monitored the content of the digital media present in the Hungarian community in Transylvania by using three main criteria: topic, reach, and engagement. In our digital research, we found that the most common narratives praise Hungary as a defender of traditional values and protector of the Hungarian communities abroad. Extremely present in the Hungarian-language media is the portrayal of Romania as a failed state who is not able to guarantee the prosperity of the general



population – and even less that of the ethnic minorities. This refers to direct actions related to discrimination made by Romanian politicians, even reminding examples from the Traian Băsescu era, from 2004 to 2014. A recent event involving the former president of Romania, Traian Băsescu is his public statement about the Hungarian Minority in 2020 which accused the Hungarian minority of being “a frustrated minority”. For his ‘hungarophic’ remarks he received a fine of 1,000 euro from the National Council Against Discrimination in 2021.

Apart from the discriminatory statements, the most popular type of failure for which local authorities are blamed is the absence of quality public services, plus the lack of political stability (the latter quite obvious, lately). This is a common complaint in the Romanian mainstream media too. In the Hungarian-language media, however, the extent of criticism creates a disproportionate perspective of the reality and tries to depict the Romanian institutions as negatively as possible. One example analyzed in our research is the case of the [100 policemen fired in Bucharest](#) in an attempt by the new mayor to reform the system and make it more transparent. While the Romanian media took the news as a positive example of reform, the Hungarian-language media presented a different perspective. The mayor of the 6th sector in Bucharest, Ciprian Ciucu, explained in a public statement that uneducated policemen accept bribery and perpetuate the circle of corruption because they were under-qualified.

He decided to reform the entire administrative structure and fire a lot of corrupt and functionally illiterate local policemen. The perspective that was massively shared on the local Hungarian media was that Romanian policemen are unable to read or write, are corrupt, and heavily discriminate in their actions. The media interpreted the mayor’s actions not as a reform, but as an acknowledgment of a general problem in Romania and exaggerated the facts. To put

the impact of these type of posts into perspective, in the last 12 months, only the 3 pages (Székelyhon, Krónika, Bihari Napló) that are openly financed by the Hungarian government through the Association for Transylvanian Media Space had a total of 200 thousand followers and 2 million interactions, while having a constant follower’s growth rate of over 7% per year.

[Itthon.ma](#) and [Főtér.ro](#) were the pages that made our top with biased content about Hungary and discreditation campaigns targeting the Romanian authorities. Their followers combined are half of those of Székelyhon (the biggest news portal in the Hungarian community in Romania), but their total interactions surpass the news portal. [Itthon.ma](#) and [Főtér.ro](#) had a total of 1.4 million interactions with only 50.000 followers compared to Székelyhon that had 1.3 million interactions with over 130.000 followers. According to CrowdTangle, they managed to get this reach due to an enormous amount of shares, more exactly 139.000 during the last 12 months, more than Székelyhon with 20.000.

The reality that we acknowledged from our research is that the Hungarian community is increasingly isolated from the rest of Romania in terms of news, priorities and entertainment. The current trend is to form an information bubble in which any information uncomfortable for Viktor Orban is suppressed while distrust in the local authorities is encouraged. This is not a new trend in Transylvania. The Hungarian minority always had a desire for self-preservation, autonomy, and even affinity towards Hungary. The main difference that FIDESZ seems to make is the amount of funds it is willing to invest to isolate the community from the rest of Romania – but also from his political competitors in Budapest – and create the image of FIDESZ as the only available protector of the diaspora and its values.

