

## HOSTILE NARRATIVE BRIEF: WAR IN UKRAINE

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**BREIF NO. 5**  
**APRIL 05, 2022**

Period: March 28- April 4, 2022

**Top Line Summary:**

*(NB this report was compiled prior to new round of sanctions announced by the US and EU following revelations of war crimes)*

- **The decrease in coverage of the war in Ukraine by major media and quality online media outlets increases space for malign influence and disinformation.** As outlets shift to coverage of other topics it cedes space to voices seeking to undermine support for Ukraine or use the crisis for political gain despite the potential consequences for Western unity.
- **Anti-immigrant and far right movements** continue to focus on the perceived favourable treatment of Ukrainian refugees at the expense of citizens. The potential convergence of economic concerns (inflation, recession, increasing consumer and energy costs, etc. see next point) and the cost of supporting refugees, is concerning and needs to be monitored.
- **Increasing consumer price threatened to undermine continued public support for sanctions** as messaging about rising prices is used by political opportunists against sitting governments.
- **Anti-NATO** messaging continues to be more indirect, with content promoting pacifism and neutrality as the primary vector for criticism of NATO, the US and broader Western responses to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.
- The official Facebook pages of **44 Russian Embassies in Europe** continue to be highly active, however, the last two weeks saw a **lower number of posts** compared to the activity since the Feb 24 invasion. They **posted 915 times** between March 28 – 04 April (-43 than previous week) averaging **130.71 posts per day** (119.75 in previous week). This week also saw a **decline in the number of total interactions** including shares and resulted in the **average post performance from the Embassy’s to be -1.27**. The decline in post performance marks a distinct downward trend which would be lower if not for the highly performing (+32.68) Page of the Embassy in Italy. The general decline perhaps indicates that the audience is suffering from fatigue or are less receptive to these narratives.



- From February 20 – April 04 the **only Russian Embassy Facebook Page to lose followers is the mission in Albania** (-45/-0.42% followers) resulting in a net increase of +14.16% in followers across all Pages. Significantly the Pages of the Missions to **the UN in Geneva** (+1,261/119.53%), **Italy** (+11,520/61.94%), **Greece** (+11,520/61.11%), and **Bulgaria** (+9,055/19.53%) have all seen significant increases. The **Embassy in Italy continues to receive a positive reception** to its posts with many supportive comments written in Italian. The Embassy mixes Russian state perspectives on the war in Ukraine along with more traditional Embassy posts on **cultural activities** such as Russian museums and theaters promoting Italian culture, **feeding the narrative of Russian-Italian friendship**.

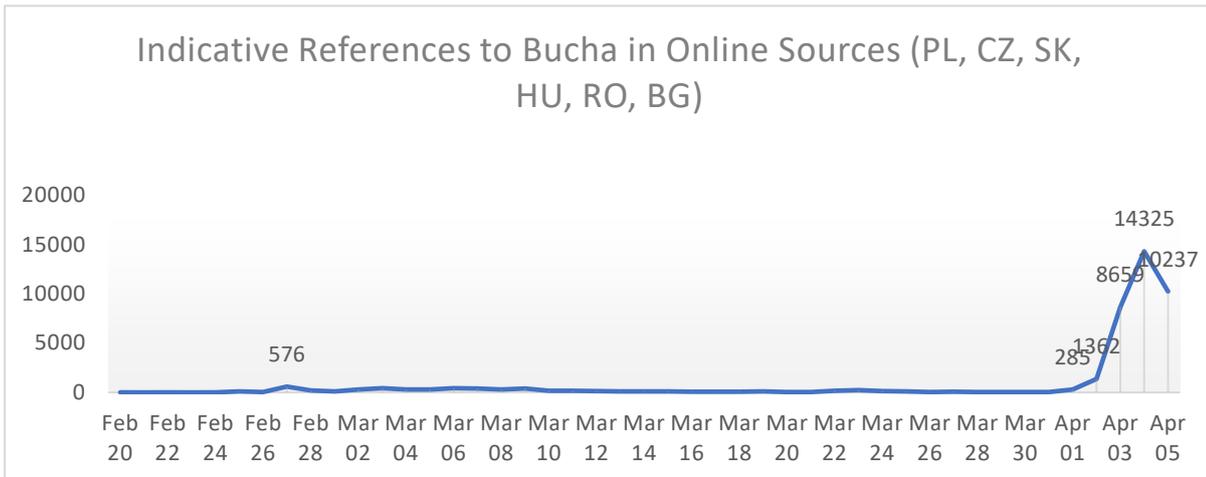
*To monitor the situation live, the Beacon Project has launched a [Facebook tracker to monitor the Russian \(and Chinese\) Embassy activity](#). You can contribute by providing links to the*

**Official Social Media pages of the Russian Embassies in your country. Contact [beaconproject@iri.org](mailto:beaconproject@iri.org) to find out how you can contribute.**

**Narratives**

**1) From the Headlines:**

The evidence of **massacre in Bucha** at the hands of Russian soldiers was one of the most reported on topics in the last week. Between March 28 – April 04 **24,766 mentions** were found in online media (Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, YouTube, Online News, Forums, and Blogs) in Polish, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, Romanian, and Bulgarian languages. This marked a nearly 3000% increase from coverage in the week prior.



Data from Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, Youtube, Online News, Forums, and Blogs (source: Pulsar & CrowdTangle)

The vast majority of coverage appears to be covering the story in a factual way based on the evidence at hand, namely that this was a massacre by Russian soldiers of civilians and a potential war crime. A sample of the top 50 most interacted with posts on Facebook in these languages found that **43 supported the position that this was committed by Russian soldiers**, while **7 cast doubt on this narrative**. The most common pro-Russian narrative was that this was staged by Ukraine (often ordered by the US) in order to portray Russia as criminals. Pages reporting the factual information accounted for **12,857,794 followers and 236,299 interactions** compared to only **193,575 followers and 31,004 interactions** for the pages supporting the pro-Russian position.

Romanian language accounted for 29 out of 50 of the top interacted with posts which was largely driven by the [post by Moldovan President Maia Sandu](#) announcing a day of mourning for the people of Bucha and condemning ‘crimes against humanity’.

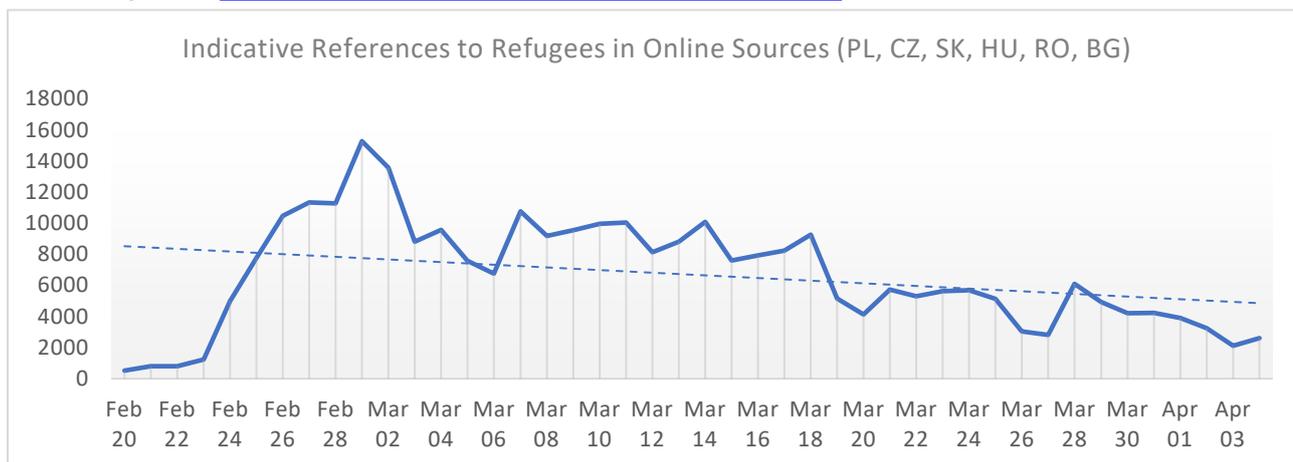
Videos reportedly showing bodies that are moving have been widely distributed as evidence that Ukraine staged the incident. From the top 50 most interacted with posts [one from Slovakia received the most interactions](#) (supposedly being [viewed 100,000 times](#)).

**2) Medium/Long-Term:**

**ANTI-REFUGEE AND BROADER ANTI-MIGRANT**

While references to refugees across multiple online platforms remains significantly high compared to pre-invasion levels, a significant downward trend has continued since March 18. While the coverage remains primarily sympathetic to the refugees, messaging that undermines support for them is receiving significant interactions on Facebook.

The primary messaging continues to be that **Ukrainian refugees are being treated better than local citizens**. Some of the most interacted with posts from [Hungary](#), [Romania](#), [Czech Republic](#), [Slovakia](#), and [Bulgaria](#) between 28 March – 05 April carried this message. In contrast, **messages of support for refugees are receiving the most interactions in Poland** with the most popular story being about [Ukrainian refugee’s cleaning up a park in Poland](#) to thank their hosts.



Data from Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, Youtube, Online News, Forums, and Blogs (source: Pulsar & CrowdTangle)

**Assumed Target Audience:**

**General public** of bordering countries (**Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova**), **Far-Right political actors, Anti-immigrant movements**

**Potential Impact:**

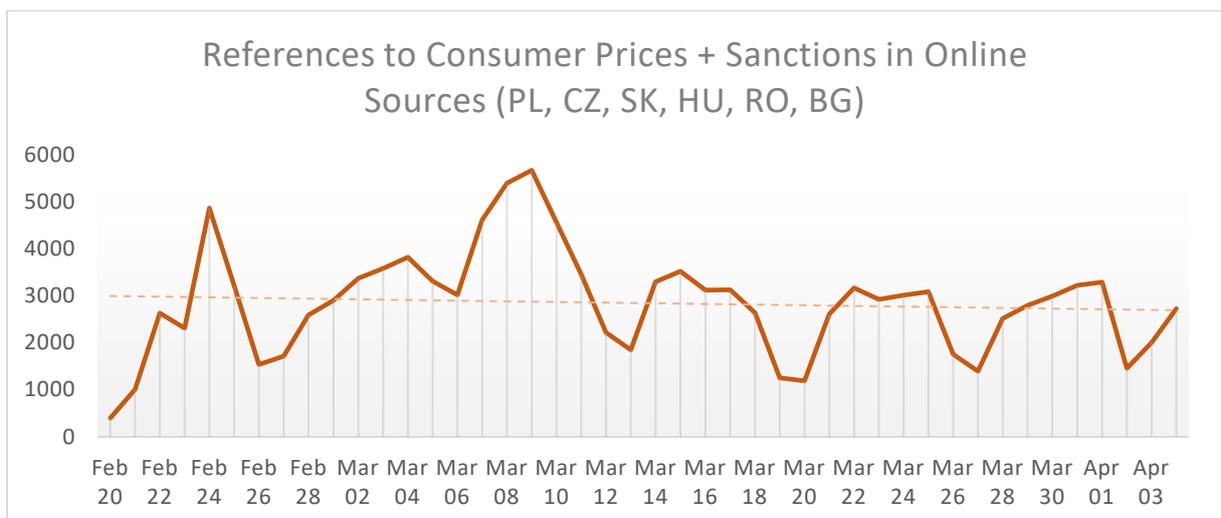
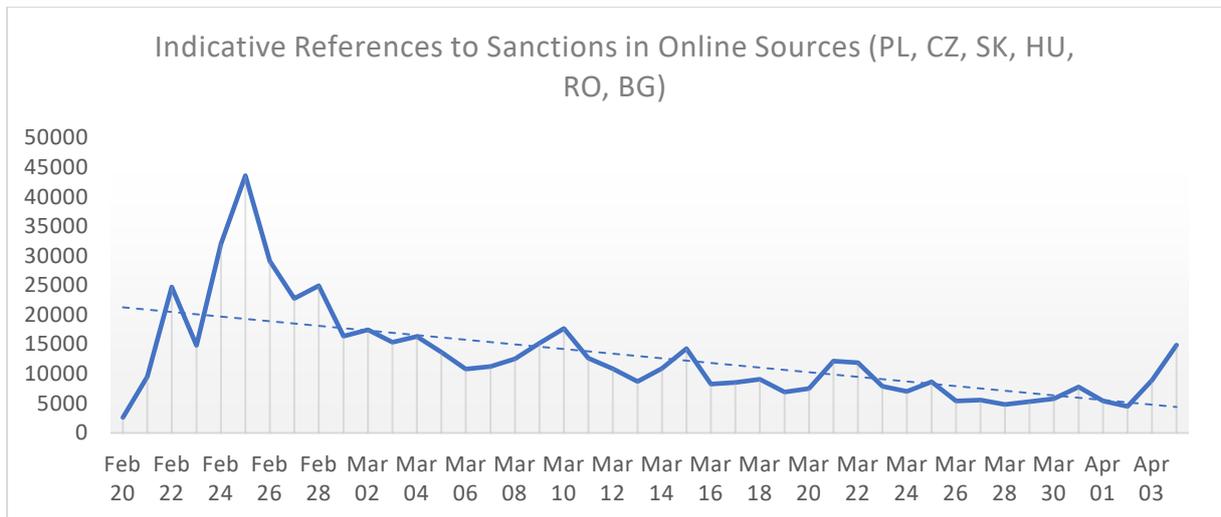
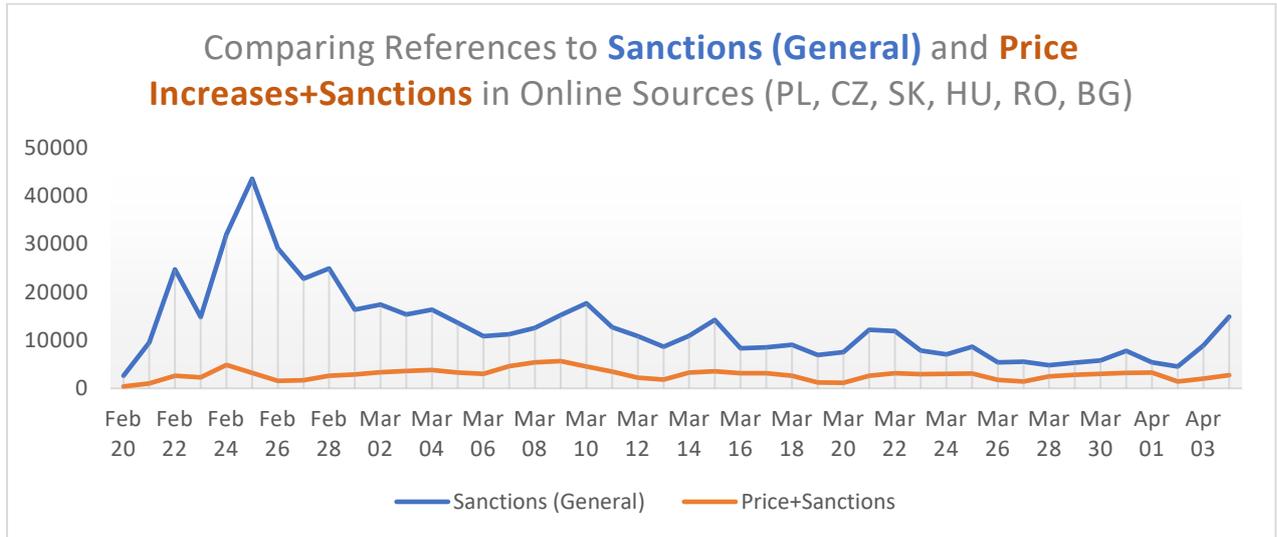
The **primary risk** continues to be major media outlets giving less space to quality coverage on the refugee crisis which cedes room in the media environment to more extremist voices who seek to undermines support for the refugees and by extension Ukraine. Parliamentary elections in Hungary on 3 April saw the re-election of Fidesz with a super majority in the parliament and the emergence of a new **far-right party, Our Homeland Movement**, is not likely to result in a reduction of anti-immigrant/refugee messaging and could provide **additional mainstreaming of narratives that undermine support for Ukraine**. In particular, the **public statements by President Zelensky attacking Viktor Orban and the Hungarian government’s position, appears to have galvanized his supporters and fed into the narrative that he is the only one who speaks for and safeguards the interests of the Hungarian people**.

Additionally, **political instability in Bulgaria** increases the prospects of snap elections this year, which could further **undermine the support for Ukraine and refugees** as parties look to take advantage of the crisis for political gain. Although the **major political parties in the frontline states continue to offer strong support**, hostile sentiment does not appear to be declining and remains a **medium risk** to support for Ukraine.

**ANTI-SANCTION/CONSUMER PRICES**

Although the announcement of new sanctions saw a noticeable increase in general references to the sanctions, the overall trend has continued to trend down. However, mentions of price increase in

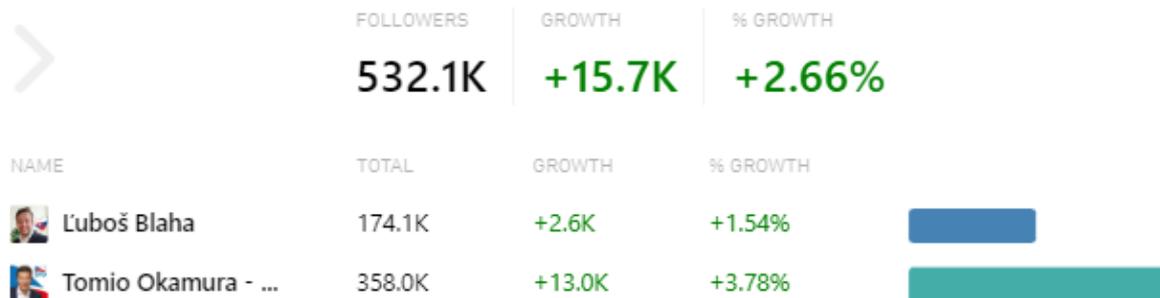
relation to sanctions has largely maintained its average levels. Without new sanction packages announced, the volume of online mentions is likely to continue its downward trajectory and provide additional space for messaging that questions the need and efficacy of sanctions.



Data from Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, Youtube, Online News, Forums, and Blogs (source: Pulsar & CrowdTangle)

Keyword matching from public Facebook pages from Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria revealed 1,944 posts referencing sanctions or consumer price increases related to the crisis in Ukraine between Mar 28 – April 04. Sorting by the number of interactions shows that in general the most interacted with content are posts criticizing the actions of the government. Posts in the Czech Republic and Slovakia from [Tomio Okamura](#) of the far-right Czech SPD party and Slovak socialist MP [Luboš Blaha](#) continue to receive a large number of audience engagement. Since the week of the Russian invasion of February 24, both of these pages have seen a growth in followers and appear to be using the crisis for political gain.

COMBINED TOTAL FOLLOWER GROWTH > 02/20/22 - 04/05/22



Growth in Followers Since Feb 20 - Apr 05. Source: CrowdTangle

**Assumed Target Audience:**

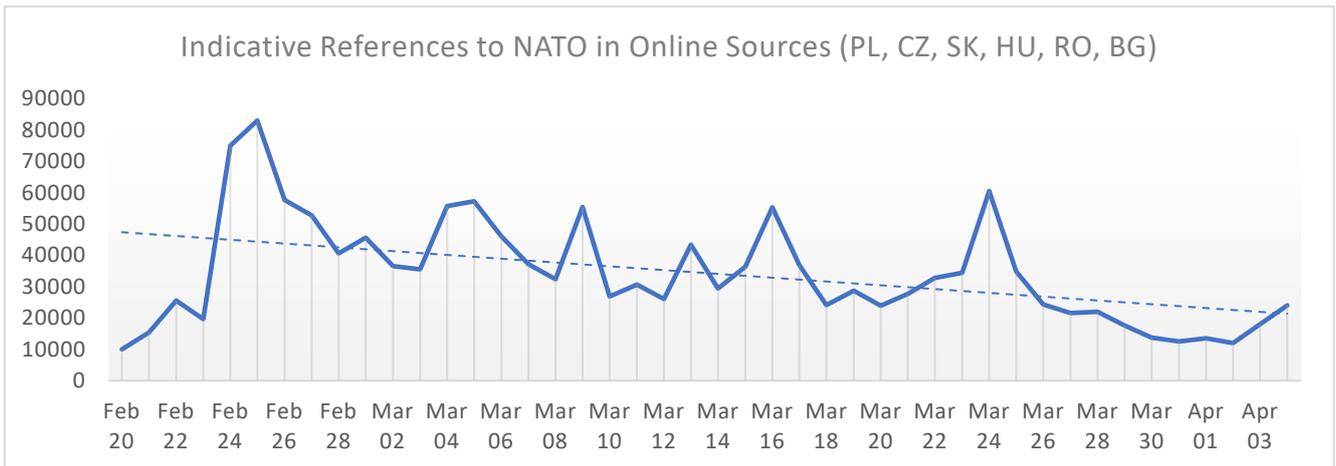
**General Public**

**Potential Impact:**

The **primary risk** remains that political actors will continue to exploit the economic conditions for political gain and weaken support for the sanction regime. Without continued quality reporting on the impact of and need for sanctions there will be increased space in online media for political opportunists to undermine the sanctions. As political unity shows signs of fraying in several countries and at the European level there is a **high risk** that public and political support for the sanctions will decrease.

**ANTI-NATO**

General references to NATO in online media remain significantly above pre-invasion averages but have been trending down. More detailed searches of public Facebook pages focusing on keywords that have the potential to reflect Anti-NATO narratives resulted in 1,048 posts between 28 March–4 April.



A sample of the post shows that the **majority of coverage is factual content and in support of their countries' membership in NATO** with a significant number of posts celebrating the anniversary of joining NATO in [Slovakia](#) and [Romania](#). In Romania, **even the far-right AUR party celebrated the anniversary of membership in a statement** supporting the role of NATO in Romania's national security. However, the **top-rated comments under the post appear to be from their supporters disagreeing with this sentiment and instead making statements about NATO imperialism**. Coverage in the **Czech Republic and Bulgaria was where most anti-NATO content received the highest interaction rates**.

**Assumed Target Audience:**

**Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, other NATO member states.**

**Potential Impact:**

The **primary risk** remains that anti-NATO narratives will continue to be used alongside anti-refugee and anti-sanction messaging to build a broader base of support receptive to this messaging. However, political support for NATO continues to be high amongst the most influential political actors across the alliance, therefore, the risk to support for NATO amongst the general public is **assessed to be low**.

**Country and Regional Overview:**

**Poland:**

- [Konkret24.tvn24.pl](https://konkret24.tvn24.pl) warned about a new fake news story that started going viral on Polish Facebook. The post reads: "Tonight and tomorrow, a radioactive cloud from Chernobyl will pass over Poland all day (caused by forest fires near Chernobyl). Polish media practically does not disclose it. Stay at home tomorrow, do not open the windows. Share this message with as many people as possible." As konkret24.tvn24.pl writes: "Information warning against the alleged radiation threat from Chernobyl is sent en masse on the Polish Internet. We warn you against disseminating it - this is fake news. The purpose of such disinformation is to create fear in society. (...) it is another installment of the disinformation related to the war in Ukraine. It is no accident that it coincides with information from Chernobyl from 31 March that Russian troops withdrew from the site of the nuclear power plant. About a thousand Russian soldiers were there, and another five hundred in the city of Chernobyl itself. Ukrainian and Belarusian media reported that Russian soldiers, who occupied the Chernobyl power plant and the exclusion zone were sent to a radiation disease treatment center in

Belarus." This was yet another attempt to use fear of nuclear threat and the consequences of widening war and the Ukrainian internal situation in general against Polish society.



- A statement by the Russian Ministry of Defense was disseminated in the Polish information space, in which it claimed that Bucha was a Ukrainian provocation. Following to this, the narrative of the Ukrainian provocation and/or "set up" in Bucha was spread on Polish social media. The other narrative was about this being a "hoax"; this example reads: " Bucha. March 31 (three days ago). The cheerful mayor reports that the Russian army has left the city. It did not mention any dead bodies on the roads, terrible destruction, and mass graves. Only two days later, photos and videos of people lying by the road appeared":



Bucza. 31 marca (trzy dni temu). Radosny burmistrz informuje, że armia rosyjska opuściła miasto. Nie wspomina o żadnych trupach na drogach, straszliwych zniszczeniach i mogiłach zbiorowych. Dopiero dwa dni później pojawiają się zdjęcia i filmy wideo z ludźmi leżącymi przy drodze,

1:20 PM · 3 kwi 2022 · Twitter for iPhone



149 Tweetów podanych dalej 18 Cytatów z Tweeta 507 Polubień

- Other example of anti-Ukrainian narrative regarding Bucha: " The same actor, the same Bucza, at the same time ... Only the mood is slightly different. Well, a good actor will play everything. Especially for the right pay.":



Ten sam aktor, ta sama Bucza, w tym samym czasie... Tylko nastrój jakby nieco inny. No, ale dobry aktor wszystko zagra. Zwłaszcza za odpowiednią gażę.



2:37 PM · 5 kwi 2022 · Twitter Web App

155 Tweetów podanych dalej 7 Cytatów z Tweeta 666 Polubień

- Russian media outlet RIA Novosti used the words of Polish MP Janusz Korwin-Mikke, who questioned the footage from Bucha, the article reads: "MP of the Republic of Poland questioned the "mass killings" of people in Bucha. Member of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, leader of the coalition of Eurosceptics and nationalists from "Konfederacja" party Janusz Korwin-Mikke doubted the "mass killings" of people in the Ukrainian Bucha near Kiev, which the Russian Defense Ministry considers as another provocation. "Have you

noticed that the houses are almost intact (Probably not...)? Have you ever wondered why people are buried in mass graves, and not their relatives (36,000 people lived in Bucha)? And why didn't the relatives remove these bodies from the streets?" - Korwin-Mikke wrote on Twitter, commenting on the video from Busi Street."



Обострение ситуации в ДНР и ЛНР  
**Польский депутат усомнился в "массовой гибели" людей в Буче**  
15:37, 4 апреля 2022

© Фото: Лесюнд Савридзе  
Лидер партии «Новые правые Януш Корвин-Микке» Януш Корвин-Микке. Архивное фото

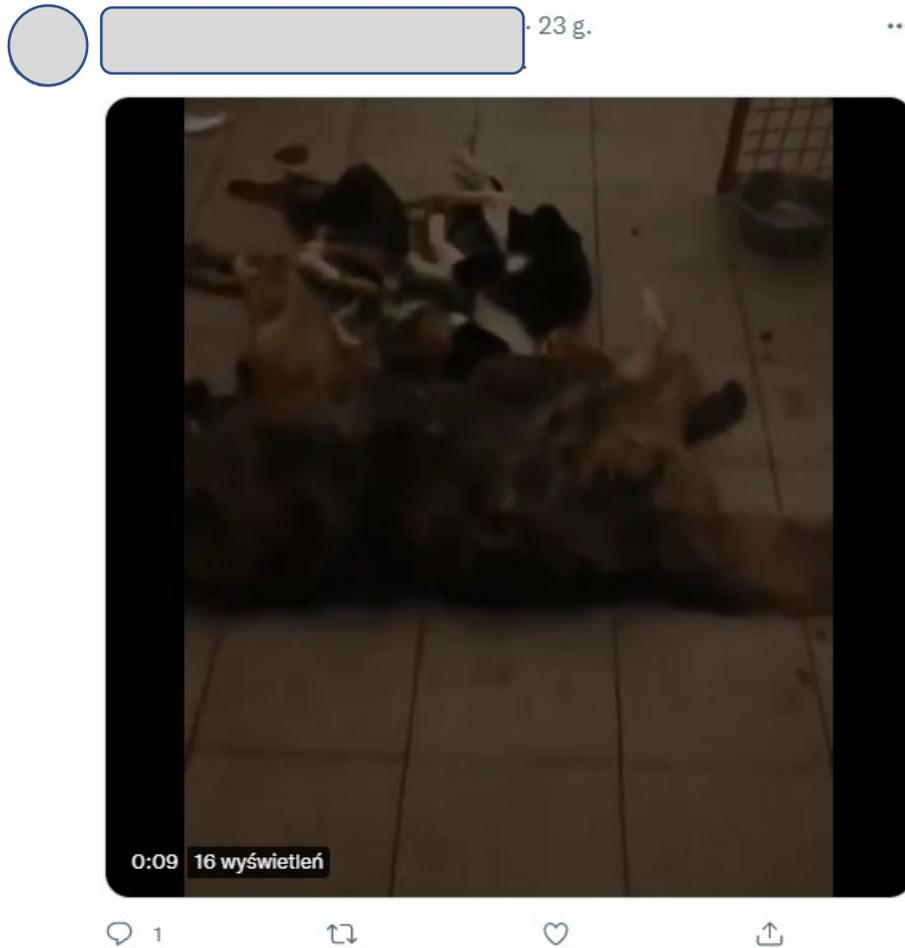
Польский депутат Корвин-Микке усомнился в "массовой гибели" людей в Буче

[Читать на сайте Ria.ru](#)

**ВАРШАВА, 4 апр – РИА Новости.** Депутат сейма Польши, лидер коалиции евроскептиков и националистов "Конфедерация" Януш Корвин-Микке усомнился в "массовой гибели" людей в украинской Буче под Киевом, которую в Минобороны РФ считают очередной провокацией.

"Вы заметили, что дома почти нетронуты (Наверное, нет...)? А вы подумали, почему людей хоронят в братских могилах - а не хоронят их родственники (в Буче жило 36 тысяч человек.)? И почему родственники не убрали эти тела с улицы?" - написал Корвин-Микке в Twitter, комментируя видеозапись с улиц Бучи.

- There is an attempt attribute Russian war crimes to Ukraine. The Polish language introduced the term “Ukronaziści”, which is a literal translation of the Russian “укронацисты” - a term used in the Russian information space.



- A new wave of anti-refugee narratives is being disseminated on Polish Twitter. These focus on the estimated 24 bln PLN (over 5 bln EUR), according to the Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, to be spent on refugees in Poland, as well as on problematic historic events and accusations of anti-Polish nationalism of the whole Ukrainian society. Additionally, stoking aversion to refugees from war-affected Ukraine continues. The term “refugee” is replaced by the term “displaced person” from Ukraine suggesting they are coming to Poland under false pretenses - with economic motives rather than fleeing Russian aggression. "In addition, there is a whole lot of privileges and freebies for already 2.5 million refugees (displaced persons) from Ukraine":

Oprócz tego doszła jeszcze cała masa przywilejów i darmochy dla już 2.5 mln uchodźców (przesiedleńców) z Ukrainy ! 🇺🇦 🇺🇦 🇺🇦

### Polityka imigracyjna PIS

- Ustawa „Mieszkanie na Start” umożliwi cudzoziemcom ubieganie się o dopłaty do czynszu przez okres 15 lat  
Źródło: <https://nowakonfederacja.pl/mieszkanie-na-start-ale-dla-kogo/>
- Uczelnie otrzymują na zagranicznego studenta dotacje w wysokości 13 tys. zł (niezależnie od kierunku nauki)  
Źródło: <https://www.rp.pl/Cudzoziemcy/311299968-Uczelnie-walczą-o-zagranicznych-studentow.html>
- Polsko-Ukraińska umowa o ubezpieczeniach społecznych pozwala Ukraińcom na otrzymanie polskiej minimalnej emerytury po miesiącu pracy. Wystarczy, że Ukraińiec przepracuje na Ukrainie 25 lat, w Polsce przepracuje legalnie jeden miesiąc i może wystąpić o polską emeryturę po osiągnięciu wieku emerytalnego. Emerytury na Ukrainie są bardzo niskie 200-300 zł dlatego ZUS dopłaci brakującą kwotę 700-800 zł żeby osiągnąć minimalną polską emeryturę czyli 1000 zł. PIS odmówił wypowiedzenia Polsko-Ukraińskiej umowy  
Źródło: <http://wyborcza.biz/biznes/7,147880,22551464,tysiac-zlotych-emerytury-za-miesiac-pracy.html>

4      26      35      ↑

- The use of historical resentments and animosities between Poland and Ukraine is increasing. Besides the messages saying: "I am a Pole, I do not support Bandera's Ukraine", there are also slogans used in the past, like: "Lviv was and is Polish", "Lviv forever ours", "Lviv will return to Poland", etc., including speculations of Poland taking advantage of the current situation to retake Lviv. The Polish MFA reacted to this new trend, publishing a statement, that "Poland will never accept the annexation of any territory belonging to an independent state":

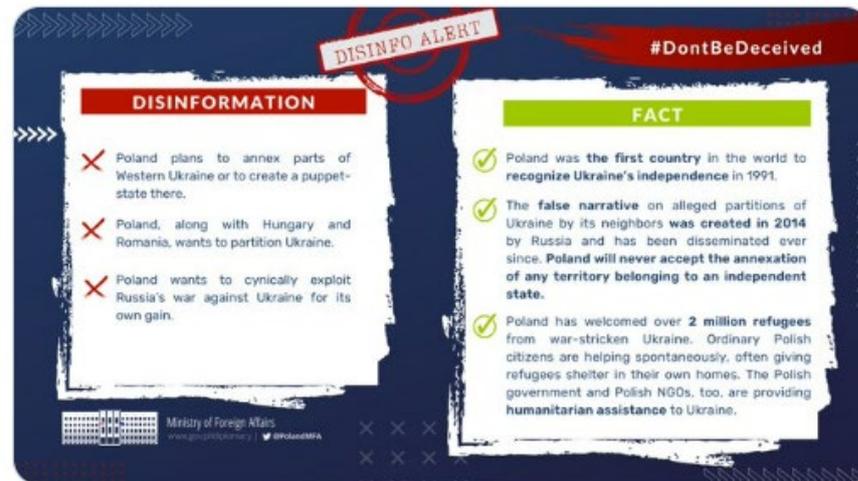


Ministry of Foreign Affairs 🇵🇱 @PolandMFA · 30 mar

A number of false allegations appeared recently accusing Poland of plotting to take over Ukrainian lands. Those claims are untrue.

Poland will never accept the annexation of any territory belonging to an independent state.

#DontBeDeceived



#WłączWeryfikację i Chancellery of the Prime Minister of Poland

38 175 246

- As noted by [Demagog](#): new "materials supporting pro-Russian propaganda appeared in social media [in Poland]. They link Russia's attack on Ukraine with the conspiracy theory according to which the Jews want to move the state of Israel to south-eastern Ukraine. Due to the fact that the materials recorded a few years ago are connected with current events, it is supposed to confirm the credibility of the source. This plan is supposed to be implemented according to the secret project "**Heavenly Jerusalem**", one of the leading figures of which is to be Harry Berkut. "If someone would like to quickly find out what is going on with Ukraine, I recommend it" - we can read in the description of the [post](#). The [film](#) was also made available on such profiles as [Młodzi Patriotci](#) [Young Patriots] or [Ogólnopolski Kanał Informacyjny](#) [National Information Channel]." Those narrative are being published and talked about on Polish alternative and fringe media like [WolnoscTV](#) or [EmisjaTV](#).
- The case of [EmisjaTV](#) is particularly interesting in reinforcing and elaborating on this narrating. Marta Czech, spokesperson for Konfederacja Korony Polskiej [Confederation of the Polish Crown], lead by Grzegorz Braun, was invited to comment about the situation in Ukraine and its consequences for Poland. In the resulting hour-long [interview](#) she stated, that: "Poland was left without a fight to be ruled international structures that want to decide about every decision of Poland and every aspect of life of Poles, and now this process is being finalized," "Polish politicians do not represent Polish interests, they intentionally pursue the interests of foreign entities, including Ukrainian nationalists", "there is a serious risk of a civil war by supporting foreign citizens at the expense of state's own citizens", "Ukraine fights with Poles in Ukraine and with Polishness in general, they do not want or even are able to assimilate in Poland, they are completely different in terms of culture and civilization", "accepting immigrants is an attempt to build a new France or a new Sweden in Poland by artificially bringing too many immigrants, is in line with the principle of divide and rule, as a plan of foreign elites to fundamentally rebuild Polish society and destroy it"; She also referred to the "Heavenly Jerusalem" conspiracy theory, which in her opinion "is not a conspiracy

theory - resettlement of Ukrainians may be an operation of migration of people from the East to the West in order to give the Ukrainian territory for others, including creating ethnic mixtures to use them for various purposes, including generating artificial conflicts, controlling the mood of the population, and Ukraine similarly like Poland, it is too weak and is also instrumentally used by global powers."

- The Government Security Center in Poland has published "[Be ready - a guide for times of crisis and war](#)". As it stated officially: "The guide explains in a simple way how to prepare for functioning / acting in a crisis situation - what to do to avoid a threat and how to behave when it occurs. (...) The guide consists of two parts. The first contains information needed to prepare for a threat, the second - tips on how to act in a crisis. In the material we will find, among others: how to build immunity at the family level in order to increase the safety of yourself and your loved ones; how to protect yourself from disinformation so as not to succumb to panic, for example; how to behave during an alarm and what the different signals mean; how to prepare for a possible evacuation; How to behave in the event of contamination of the area, lack of electricity supply or a hostage situation; how to provide first aid."

For examples of Fake News circulating in Poland concerning Ukraine see: [Demagog](#)

*For more information see our local partners activities: [CAPD](#)*

#### Czech Republic:

- The most common disinformation narratives are: ungratefulness of Ukraine refugees, lack of social support for Czech citizens in the time of raising prices, Czech government dragging the country into the war.
- Czech Elves registered an increase of chain emails regarding the Ukraine crisis. The emails contain hate speech and disinformation about the Czech government, especially Prime Minister Fiala. (the database [here](#)). [Long term trends](#) show the chain emails shared in the Czech Republic are typically anti-EU, anti-NATO and anti-US.
- This week, the Czech Republic sent to Ukraine tens of T-72 tanks to help its army defend against Russian attacks.
- This week, the lower house of the Czech parliament has recognized the Holodomor in Ukraine in 1932-33 as a genocide.
- The government is preparing a strategy for the integration of up to half a million Ukrainian refugees.

*For more information see our local partners activities: [Association for International Affairs \(AMO\)](#), [Prague Security Studies Institute \(PSSI\)](#), [Manipulatori.cz](#)*

#### Slovakia:

[Infosecurity.sk](#) launched an English bi-weekly newsletter focusing on emerging and current disinformation trends in Slovakia. The main aim of the newsletter is to inform international partners about what is happening in Slovakia related to disinformation, and present its reports, as well as foreign media digests regarding disinformation, social media, cyber security, and privacy online. **The newsletter is available [here](#), and the link to the subscription [here](#).**

*For more information see our local partners activities: [Globsec](#), [Infosecurity.sk](#)*

#### Hungary:

- Ahead of the elections, a significant number of Facebook pages pushing a pro-Fidesz line was [established](#) with a goal to use paid adverts for smearing opposition candidates.

For more information see our local partners activities: [Political Capital](#)

#### Romania:

- **President Zelensky addressed the Romanian Parliament** via video on 4 April. In the speech Zelensky highlighted the **need to strengthen ties between Ukraine and Romania and to mutually address the issue of minority communities on both sides of the border.**
- Prior to the speech the **disruptive actors sought to exploit the topic by spreading malign narratives related to UA-RO historical territorial disputes.**
- **Four far-right politicians (1 Senator, and 3 MPs) held a meeting at the Russian Embassy in Bucharest in an unsanctioned political stunt to discuss Romania's need to be neutral**



*Meme of Romanian Senator Diana Iovanovici-Șoșoacă as Serghei Soigu found in comments under posts about her visit to the Russian Embassy*

**and** support the peace negotiations. The four politicians are on the very fringe with some of them being kicked out of the far-right AUR party. Senator Iovanovici-Șoșoacă launched her Facebook page in February 2021 and has seen a substantial rise in her followers obtaining over 450k in the last year. The stunt did produce at least one meme that has been left in comments under posts about the visit:

For more information see our local partners activities: [Global Focus](#), [Expert Forum](#)

#### Bulgaria:

- Since the start of the war, Bulgaria's anti-vax movement has shifted its focus. "Instead of fixating on COVID-19 vaccines and related conspiracy theories, they have become staunch supporters of President Vladimir Putin and Moscow and are nurturing anti-EU sentiments." Euractiv summarizes an [interview](#) with the Head of Operations Social Intelligence at Publicis Bulgaria, Georgi Auad.

For more information see our local partners activities: [Center for the Study of Democracy](#), [Institute for Global Analytics](#)

#### Serbia:

- Media reported on a phone call between Putin and President Vucic, according to which, Putin congratulated the Serbian leader and [reaffirmed](#) “their shared intention to further develop the Russian-Serbian strategic partnership and expand trade and economic ties, including in energy.” Putin “also gave principled assessments of the brutal and cynical provocation of the Kyiv regime on the city of Bucha.” Vucic’s press release [cited](#) him as saying that Serbia would continue along the European path and at the same time preserve its sincere and traditionally friendly relations with the Russian Federation.
- Serbian NGO CRTA reports the majority of the most widely read print media share narratives created by Moscow. The headlines include messages such as "Putin beats Europe or Putin’s golden ruble is a stronger weapon than any bomb".

*For more information see our local partners activities: [CRTA](#)*

#### **Bosnia and Herzegovina:**

- Serb ministers in Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Council of Ministers blocked a decision to deny access for Russia and Belarus to funds from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and Presidency member Milorad Dodik announced strengthening energy cooperation with Russia.