Period: July 12 – 26, 2022

Top Line Summary:

- Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán delivered a speech in Băile Tuşnad, Romania that was widely condemned for its explicitly racist content and contained multiple messages supporting hostile narratives often used by Russia and its proxies, which can have a significant impact on transatlantic unity and democratic institutions.
- Hungarian messaging on its war and sanction policy continues to be used as an example by opposition forces and political extremists in other countries. Orbán’s speech on 23 July may further spread these narratives.
- Continued reporting on Ukrainians returning home has further promoted the narrative that they were not really refugees but rather seeking benefits in Europe. Portraying Ukrainians as tourists or economic migrants remains the most prominent narrative.
- Extremist political opposition parties have been successfully pushing anti-NATO messaging on Facebook as they seek to portray government leaders as pawns of the West and NATO as an imperialist force.
- The general posting activity of the official Facebook pages of 44 Russian Embassies in Europe have continued to trend down since 1 June. However, the average number of posts between 12 – 26 July increased to 72.13 per day compared to 68.67 posts per day during the preceding two-week period. This also resulted in a decline in the average number of interactions to 187.06/post compared to 207/post during the same periods as well as a decrease in the number of shares these posts received, further reducing their potential to spread on Facebook.

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 to find out how you can contribute.

- Facebook posts from the Russian Embassy in Iceland continue to have disproportionate activity accounting for the 2nd largest number of posts (144) during the last two-week period. Meanwhile Slovakia and Romania remain some of the most active embassy pages monitored.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Embassies</th>
<th>No. of Posts</th>
<th>Posts by Date</th>
<th>No. of Shares</th>
<th>Shares (avg.)</th>
<th>Post Performance (avg)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russian Embassy in Belgrade</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>751</td>
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<td>2.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russian Embassy in Sofia</td>
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<td>Russian Embassy in Prague</td>
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<td>12.39</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Russian Embassy in Washington</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>12.38</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Top 5 most active Russian Embassy Facebook Pages monitored between 12-26 July. Source: Beacon Project Dashboard, CrowdTangle
Narratives

1) From the Headlines:

On 23 July Viktor Orbán gave a traditional speech at the Bálványos Free Summer University and Student Camp in Băile Tușnad, Romania. The camp is organized as a youth festival promoting intellectual debate and dialogue between Hungarians and the Hungarian diaspora. While Orbán’s past speeches have also caused controversy, such as in 2014 when he outlined his vision for Hungary to be an ‘illiberal democracy’, this year’s speech was the most extreme and described as “worthy of Goebbels” by one of Orbán’s long-term advisors who resigned following the speech.

In addition to the condemned rhetoric on ‘race-mixing’, the speech also carried messaging supporting anti-EU, anti-Ukrainian, and anti-NATO narratives often used by Russia and its proxies justify its invasion and attack democratic institutions and the transatlantic alliance. While not an exhaustive list below are some direct quotes from Orbán’s speech and some of hostile narratives they support.

The war was manufactured to create conditions that allow for others to force their will:

“And we thought that the Cold War could never return, but now many world leaders are working on reorganising our lives into a world of power blocs.”

“[…] the Americans are pursuing a bolder sanctions policy, as we are seeing in the shadow of the current Russo-Ukrainian war; and they have set about strongly encouraging their allies – in other words us – to buy supplies from them.”

“There is now less talk about migration, but, believe me, nothing has changed: Brussels, reinforced with Soros-affiliated troops, simply wants to force migrants on us.”

“Hungary’s historical experience tells us that if a country is forced to adopt a foreign policy that it does not want, even if that policy needs to gain two-thirds of the votes in the EU, then quite simply the name for this is imperialism.”

Russia’s invasion was a defensive action in response to Ukrainian aggression and Western imperialism:

“Hungary is a NATO member and our starting point is that NATO is much stronger than Russia, and so Russia will never attack NATO. The statement that Russia will not stop at Ukraine is a weak – but understandable – propaganda talking point used by Ukraine.”

“[…] the Russians are seeking to achieve by force of arms the security demands that they had previously sought to achieve through negotiation.”

“[…] a Russian official said that they will push forward in Ukraine until the front line is so far advanced that from there the weapons possessed by the Ukrainians will not be able to hit Russian territory. In other words, the more that NATO countries supply modern weapons to the Ukrainians, the further forward the Russians will push the front line. This is because they are a military nation that thinks only in terms of security and is only interested in ensuring that it is not attacked from Ukrainian territory.”

“[…] the Russians do not want to negotiate with us [Hungarians], but with those who can force Ukraine to do what it agreed to.”

“A visiting US government official casually pushed a sheet of paper in front of him and simply said that the Hungarian Constitution should be amended on the points it contained, after which friendship would be restored. So we understand this resistance from the rest of the world to the West’s propagation of values, to its export of democracy”
Sanctions against Russia are not working while others are benefiting from them:

“The Ukrainians will never win a war against Russia with American training and weapons. This is simply because the Russian army has asymmetric superiority. The second fact that we must face up to is that the sanctions are not destabilising Moscow.”

“…the Russians are doing well. European Union imports from Russia have fallen by 23 per cent, but in the same period Gazprom’s revenues have doubled.”

Sanctions are to blame for the ongoing crises around the world (economic, energy, food security):

“Hungary has the right to say that peace is the only solution that will save human lives, and the only antidote to wartime inflation and a wartime economic crisis.”

The war is about internal issues and not for others to intervene in:

“We Hungarians see this war as a war between two Slavic peoples, and as one which we want to stay out of.”

The risk posed by the leader of an EU and NATO member country making such statements in a high-profile public speech is significant. It is a blunt expression of rhetoric that has been monitored and reported on in the Hungarian media space since the invasion. If statements like these do not elicit a response, the potential impact it can have in support of the hostile narratives and their promoters is significant.

2) Medium/Long-Term:

ANTI-REFUGEE AND BROADER ANTI-MIGRANT

Mentions of refugees across multiple online platforms has continued to trend down but is likely approaching a new post-invasion baseline level. The average daily posts containing general references to refugees in the V4+RO+BG were down to 2,682/day between July 12 – 26 compared to 2,999/day during the previous two-week period. There was, however, an uptick in the daily average for content that has a greater potential to be hostile toward refugees, as it increased to 475/day from 431/day during same period. This was largely driven by a relative increase in activity during the first week of this reporting period (July 12 – 19).

Comparing (General & Potentially Hostile) References to Refugees in Online Sources (PL, CZ, SK, HU, RO, BG)

Jun 28 - Jul 26, 2022
The proportion of content that is potentially hostile toward refugees has not exceeded the 20%/week levels recorded prior to mid-May. This reflects a media environment that is still largely supportive of the refugees. Although, with nearly 20% pieces of content having an increase potential to be hostile to Ukrainian refugees there are still risks for these messages to spread widely online. However, as previously reported the proportion of the potentially hostile messaging in Hungarian language has increased significantly since the end of June.

In addition to Hungarian content that largely focused on broader anti-migration messaging, the most interacted with content with general references to refugees tended to focus on Ukrainian’s returning home or the erosion of support for them. Regarding the erosion of support for Ukrainian refugees one of the most interacted with sources referencing refugees is Magyarforum which has multiple posts discussing how other countries have reduced their support or serviced for refugees, which is likely to present the Hungarian approach to the war in Ukraine as well as its broader migration policy as no different to what other countries, especially in the West, are doing.

**Assumed Target Audience:**

General public of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Moldova, Far-Right political actors, Anti-immigrant movements

**Potential Impact:**

As has been highlighted in previously reporting the increased activity and engagement of broader anti-migration narratives pose a significant risk to the support that has so far been shown to Ukrainian refugees. As more content presents Ukrainians returning home as a result of cuts in benefits or relocation in their host countries combines with reporting on other refugee and migrant groups originating outside of Ukraine there is an increased risk that support for Ukrainian fleeing the war will decrease. This continues to build on the narrative that the Ukrainians are tourists or economic migrants rather than refugees. Despite the potential for these narratives to reduce support for the refugees there have not been significant signs of general public support disappearing and the risk of anti-refugee narratives targeting Ukrainians remains at a medium risk medium risk.

However, flagrant anti-migrant messaging has the potential to quickly increase hostility toward refugee populations and should be monitored closely.

**ANTI-SANCTION/CONSUMER PRICES**

Messaging connecting sanctions to consumer price increases has continued to mirror that of more general references to sanctions since the second week of June and has become even more interconnected than the levels first seen at the end of April. The proportion of messaging that mentions sanctions and consumer price accounted for 100% of the two-week average of the overall references to sanctions for the first time during this period. This is likely to remain as additional EU agreements regarding the sanction policy on Russian energy have continued to push the message in almost all reporting on the sanctions.

Comparing References to Sanctions (General) and Price Increases + Sanctions in Online Sources (PL, CZ, SK, HU, RO, BG)
The top 100 most interacted with post on Facebook mentioning sanctions are primarily written in Slovak (39%), followed by Bulgarian (20%) and Czech (17%). The majority of the content presented are attacks on sanctions as ineffective. For example, a post by Robert Fico, former Slovak Prime Minister and leader of the Opposition SMER party, was the most interacted with post mentioning sanctions during the reporting period and attracted 338k+ views, 21k+ interactions and nearly 4k shares.

Source: Facebook's CrowdTangle
Also accounting for 17 of the top 100 most interacted with Facebook posts, was content referencing Hungary or Orbán with the majority (15/17) of it being supportive of the Hungarian stance on sanctions, interestingly, only 3 of these were written in Hungarian. Instead there were 5 posts in Czech, 5 in Slovak, and 4 in Bulgarian that referenced Hungary or Orbán. This highlights a trend previously reported on of content (especially in Bulgarian and Slovak) highlighting the perceived benefits so-called new non-aligned policies taken by Hungary, Turkey, and Serbia.

Assumed Target Audience: General Public

Potential Impact:
The threat of countries looking to Hungary, Turkey, and Serbia for cues on how to interact with Russia has only increased. It remains one of the major threats to undermining support for current and future sanction policies as governments look for ways to insulate themselves from political blowback of the economic downturn. With Europeans currently seeing price increases at the pump and already feeling uncertain over winter heating options the risk associated with anti-sanction narratives remains high without any respite insight.

Anti-NATO

The steady decline of general references to NATO has continued with the exception of the spike on 28-30 June and is expected to reach baseline levels. Between July 12 – 26 the average daily referenced to NATO decreased to 4,509 compared to 9,590 in the preceding two-week period. The decline in general references to NATO has, however, also yielded an increase in the proportion of coverage that has an increased potential to be hostile to the Alliance. While the proportion of hostile coverage still has yet to reach the 10% mark the period of July 12-26 reached the previously set high mark of 9%. This is typical of the other topics being monitored as general coverage declines there is the potential that hostile messaging can fill the void.

Comparing (General & Potentially Hostile) References to NATO in Online Sources
(PL, CZ, SK, HU, RO, BG)

Jun 28 - Jul 26, 2022

Data from Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, YouTube, Online News, Forums, and Blogs (source: Pulsar & CrowdTangle)
Examining the top 100 most interacted with Facebook posts mentioning NATO in V4+RO+BG, the majority of them (31) were in Romanian followed by Bulgarian (18), which also accounted for the highest proportion of the top 25 most interacted with posts with 9 and 7, respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Top-100</th>
<th>Top-25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romanian</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgarian</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungarian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Of the top performing posts, far-right political voices dominated with the most interacted with post coming from, George Simion, leader of the Romanian far-right AUR party receiving over 24k interactions including over 2k shares. Leader of the Bulgarian far-right Revival party, Kostadin Kostadinov received the fourth most interactions. Both posts criticize their countries position in NATO and claim it is not in the best interest of their countries with Kostadinov calling NATO membership tantamount to occupation.

Assumed Target Audience:

General public of NATO allies (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria), Far-Right political actors, Far-Left political actors

Potential Impact:
Content that is critical to NATO remained disproportionally represented amongst the most interacted with content referencing the Alliance on Facebook. While the most critical voices continue to be from largely fringe political positions on the far-right, their ability to consistently be amongst the most engaged with content and overperform their average post performance is likely one reason they have seen steady growth in their online audience with a combined growth rate of 11.21% since Feb 24. While still unlikely to significantly impact government policy extremist political actors have shown an ability to guide conversation and could potentially force more muted responses from their more mainstream competition in the future. While these extremist voices should be monitored closely their potential to undermine broader support for NATO remains limited causing the overall risk to support for NATO to remain at a medium level.

Country and Regional Overview:

Poland:

- Spokesperson of the Minister-Special Services Coordinator Stanislaw Żaryn informed on Twitter, that there is increasing evidence that Russia is still actively participating in destabilizing the situation on the Polish and NATO Eastern borders along with Belarus: "Subsequent reports by the Polish Border Guard show that the hybrid operation using the illegal migration route to destabilize the Polish border is still ongoing. The regime of Putin and Lukashenka is thus trying to weaken the countries of NATO's Eastern flank. For many days, the Border Guard has indicated that foreigners storming the Polish border come to Belarus from Russia. This is yet another trace showing the active participation of the Russian regime in this operation. From the very beginning, Polish intelligence and security services presented a lot of evidence and information indicating that the illegal migration route should be treated as a method of hybrid warfare efforts against NATO countries."

- The Polish Government Security Center monitored Russian propaganda activities aimed at the perception of the modernization of the Polish Army. They have identified the following false Russian narratives based on threads about the modernization of the Polish Armed Forces:
  - As part of the modernization, Poland receives ‘second-class’ equipment from the allies
  - The armament delivered to Poland has a low combat value
  - Weapons suppliers will not be able to fulfill orders on time
  - Military aid provided to Ukraine significantly reduces the defense potential of the Republic of Poland
  - The modernization of the Polish Army will be ineffective and will not guarantee the Poles' security
@WeryfikacjaNASK monitors anti-Ukrainian narratives, fake news and disinformation in the Polish information space. According to their research, the anti-Ukrainian content is being constantly disseminated by different actors online, among them, during the 20-25 June there were inter alia:

- False information regarding the granting of the Polish Card to all Ukrainian refugees automatically
- False information about the alleged high crime rate among Ukrainian citizens
- The false narrative that Ukrainian refugees were taking the places of Polish students at the University of Warsaw
- False information that the Polish government wants to grant the Ukrainian minority as many as 30 seats in the Polish Parliament: 26 in the Polish Sejm and 4 in the Senate

The Polish Border Guard published the report "Traffic on the Polish borders in the first half of 2022". According to it: “Traffic on the Polish borders, which are the external borders of the EU, in the first half of this year increased by 156% compared to the same period last year. From January to the end of June, Border Guard officers checked a total of 16.4 million travelers (in both directions), in the same period a year ago by 10 million less, i.e., 6.4 million people. Contrary to appearances, compared to last year, it was not the movement of Ukrainian citizens that increased the most, but Polish citizens. This year, 4.8 million Poles have crossed the border, which is 222% more than a year ago. 8.3 million Ukrainian citizens crossed the Polish borders this year, but it is only 145% more than a year ago (3.4 million). Polish citizens, this year also accounted for 29% of all checked-in travelers (i.e., 4.8 million people), in 2021 - 23% (1.5 million). In the first half of this year, 9.2 million travelers (Poles and foreigners in total) were handled in the entry direction to Poland, and 7.2 million in the exit direction.”

For examples of Fake News circulating in Poland concerning Ukraine see: Demagog and Twitter profiles: @WeryfikacjaNASK, and @PAPFakeHunter.
For more information see our local partners’ activities: CAPD

Czech Republic:

- Latest STEM research shows that support for Ukraine, while still high, has been decreasing in the past weeks. Support dropped from 70% in April to 58% in the second half of June. Nevertheless, support for West/NATO activities in the war remains almost unchanged.

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

- Slovak Spectator reported this week that former triple Slovak prime minister Robert Fico had been put on the list of Ukrainian Centre for Countering Disinformation containing names of well-known people, mostly from the West, who disseminate Russian propaganda in different ways.
- This week, Slovakia was added (together with Croatia, Denmark, Greece and Slovenia on Russia’s list of nations that “carry out unfriendly actions towards Russian companies and citizens, reported Radio Free Europe.

Bulgaria:

For more information see our local partners activities: Center for the Study of Democracy, Institute for Global Analytics

Serbia:

- According to IRI partner CRTA, local media continue using Russian narratives while reporting on the EU energy crisis. On July 17, Blic daily published an article, “Russian winter threatens Europe,” while Objektive claimed that the EU currency is about to collapse, portraying Vladimir Putin as the one holding euro exchange rate in his hands.

For more information see our local partners activities: CRTA, BIRN

Bosnia and Herzegovina

For more information see our local partners activities: BIRN