

HOSTILE NARRATIVE BRIEF: WAR IN UKRAINE

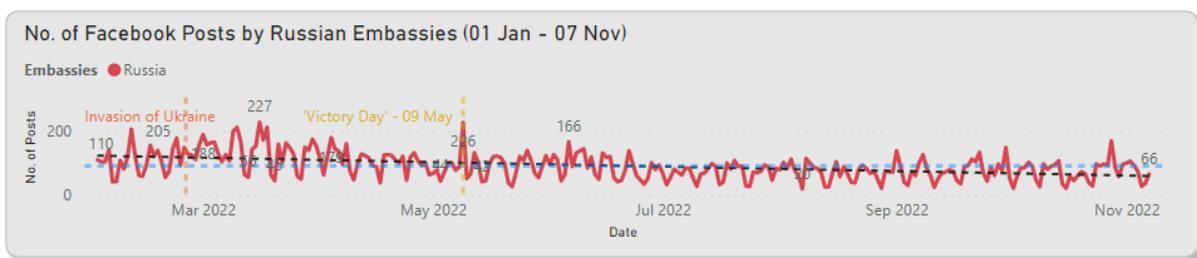
FALL OVERVIEW
AUG 25 - NOV 7, 2022

BRIEF NO. 15
NOVEMBER 7, 2022

Period: August 25 – November 07, 2022

Overall Top Line Summary:

- Political representatives in the monitored countries largely condemned the Russian aggressive actions in Ukraine and proclaimed support for Ukrainian leadership; the general public in analyzed countries for the most part adopted similar position.
- At the same time the concerning trend is lack of political consensus about the approach towards Ukraine. This was particularly visible in Bulgaria where the question of approach towards the war become the central topic of discussions before the parliamentary elections in October; similarly in Czech Republic and Slovakia some elements of parliamentary opposition arguing for a neutral or more non-aligned position.
- The discussion about the sanctions and its perceived impacts are likely to intensify as winter approaches and energy use increases. A particularly harsh winter or further disruptions in energy supplies is likely to significantly increase messaging hostile to the sanctions regime.
- The risk related to spread of disinformation attracted significant attention of research community and spread specific false stories discrediting Ukraine was uncovered in most of the analyzed countries
- The general posting activity of the official Facebook pages of **44 Russian Embassies in Europe have generally continued to trend down since June**. However, there has been an increase in activity since the beginning of September. The average number of posts between 01 Jul – 31 Aug was 70.23 post per day which **increased to 75.57 per day between 01 Sep – 07 Nov**. Although there was a significant decline in the **average number of interactions to 151.85/post compared to 176.20/post** during the same periods as well as a decrease in the number of shares these posts received to 12.83 down from 15.07, 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 Slovakia and Iceland continue to have the largest number of posts since the last report (Aug 24)**. While the pages with the most number of shares countries to be those of the Embassies in Italy and Bulgaria.

Topic Overview:

Refugees:

Narratives hostile to Ukrainian refugees were generally of lower significance in all analyzed countries. Examining the top 100 engaged with posts on Facebook and Twitter for all the countries showed that 22% of the content contained hostile messaging toward refugees. However, the more influential social network throughout the region, Facebook, had a slightly higher proportion at 26%.

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform (All Countries)				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	442	74%	158	26%
Twitter	301	86%	49	14%
Total	664	78%	136	22%

Hostile narratives about Ukrainians being treated more favorably than local residents continued to be present, however, a broader *us-vs-them* narrative was more notable. Flooding in Bulgaria showed how this narrative can be exacerbated by non-war related events. A similar pattern is likely should a harsh winter force residents to make hard choices about their energy consumption and living standards. Opposition parties and political extremists have proven willing to engage in this hostile messaging in an attempt to undermine the government and score political points which could fuel increased political instability as well.

Risks by country



Sanctions:

Narrative criticizing the sanctions received the second highest number of results within the top 100 most engaged with Facebook and Twitter content with 200 posts. This accounted for 18% of the most engaged posts referencing sanctions. A significantly lower number of Twitter references containing hostile messaging skewed the overall numbers, as 30% of Facebook posts reviewed contained content that has the potential to undermine support for the sanctions.

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform (All Countries)				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	419	70%	181	30%
Twitter	482	96%	19	4%
Total	901	82%	200	18%

Many of the messages related to the alleged indispensability of Russian gas to the functioning of the local economy and heating system and often highlighted perceived benefits of Serbia and Turkey who have not joined the western sanction regime. Additional arguments against the sanctions focused on the alleged ineffectiveness of them to hamper the Russian economy and the narrative that they in fact

are doing more damage to European economies and standards of living. More so than the other two topics the anti-sanction narrative appears more appealing to the general public and has also been promoted by a wider array of political parties from the democratic center to the extremist fringes of the political system. The receptiveness of these narratives is expected to increase as the economy continues to suffer from inflation and winter sets in requiring more people to use expensive heating to stay warm.



NATO:

The relevance of narrative critical to NATO varies across the region; receiving the highest count of hostile content in the most engaged Facebook and Twitter post overall, with 208 post found. This was however, driven by significantly higher numbers in Bulgaria (62 hostile posts), Slovakia (60 posts), Romania (29 posts), and Czech Republic (28 posts).

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform (All Countries)				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	408	68%	192	32%
Twitter	484	97%	16	3%
Total	892	81%	208	19%

The prominence is especially noticeable in Bulgaria where the countries strategic allegiances become central for political discussion with relevant political players advocating for neutrality while some more to the political extreme advocate for a referendum on NATO membership. The second highest proportion of hostile narratives was found in Slovakia where a similar albeit less intense debate is underway in which some significant political voices criticize NATO for a escalating the conflict.



Country and Regional Overview:

Lithuania:

Top line summary:

September:

- *Lithuanian non-profit, non-governmental organization CRI (Civic Resilience Initiative), aiming to increase resilience in security, media-literacy, disinformation, cyber, civil and grass-root activities, has recently issued a report called “[MEDIA MONITORING REPORT: ANTI-UKRAINIAN WAR PROPAGANDA IN THE BALTIC STATE](#)”. Investigating what the most prevalent propaganda narratives in the Baltic region’s news outlets in the Russian language are, CRI has presented debunked disinformation with examples, thus increasing citizens’ resilience to fake information and cleaning currently incredibly fragile information space.*
- *Minister of Foreign Affairs [Gabrielius Landsbergis visited](#) Odesa where, together with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Defense of Ireland, Simon Coveney, he met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba, and visited the port of Odesa. G. Landsbergis emphasized that Lithuania was and remains one of the main supporters of Ukraine; he emphasized the duty of the international community to ensure that Russia is held accountable for the crimes committed in Ukraine*
- *Independent technology think tank DebunKEU [issued a report](#) on Kremlin-aligned actors’ activity in Lithuania in September. It noticed that discussing the situation on the frontlines; propagandists tried to omit the topics of the successful Ukrainian offensive or the Izium massacre. Instead, they accused Ukraine of shelling the Zaporizhzhia NPP and claimed, quoting Viktor Orban, that Western powers are to blame for the war in Ukraine*

October:

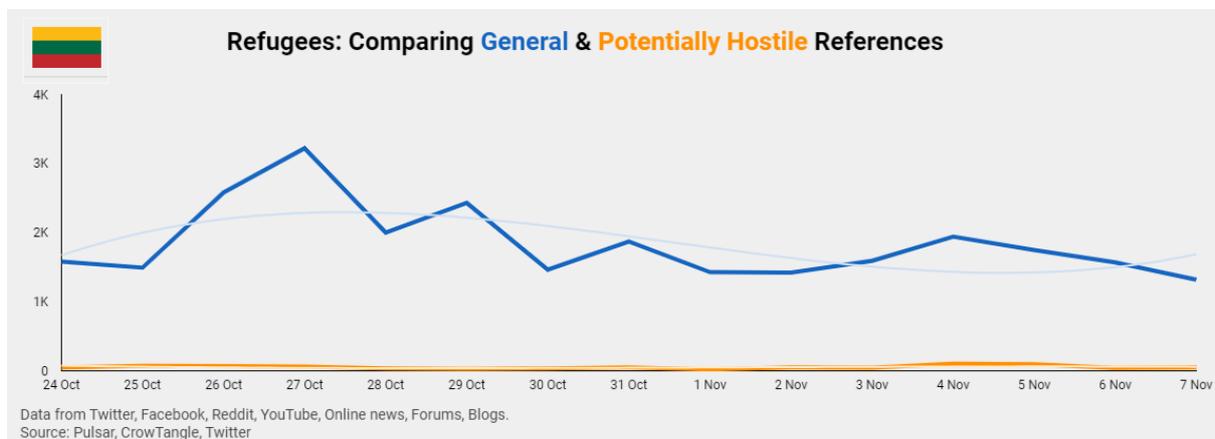
- *Pro-Kremlin media stated that Zelensky is intentionally escalating the local war to a global conflict by demanding the West launch “preventive strikes” on Russia. President allegedly requires NATO’s visible involvement in the war, which would mean the start of a world war. Kremlin-aligned authors escalate the idea, picturing Zelensky as a selfish leader, persuading others to fight his war and endangering the whole world. Article issued by Kremlin-aligned news media outlet [laisvaslaikrastis.lt](#), comments supporting the stance and predictions of the upcoming World War III - are all over the Lithuanian media, eroding the support for Ukraine as a measurement of safety.*
- *Statements made by Elon Musk were picked up and reported, as he was calling for Ukraine to seek a negotiated solution to the Russian invasion and permanently cede Crimea to Russia. Such a statement has taken the headlines, as Musk has been supplying Ukraine with Starlink. This satellite platform has proven critical in supporting infrastructure across Ukraine and countering Russian disinformation since the early days of the war. Reported on independent media [delfi.lt](#). Statement by Elon Musk gave an impulse for one of the most popular recent tweets by Lithuanian – president Gitanas Nausėda responded to Elon Musk, condemning his stance on Russia’s invasion, generating nearly 133k likes and 16k retweets of his [tweet](#).*
- *Inflation and energy crises were again blamed solely on the West’s false political approach and Ukraine’s prioritization over domestic issues. Article on Ukraine’s prioritization and the need to draw boundaries for its help in [Respublika.lt](#),*

encouraging people to limit the assistance provided for Ukraine in war. To express further dissatisfaction with the inflation, “never-ending” support for Ukraine and officials’ recent decisions, citizens were invited to join a [protest](#) following their anti-governmental narrative.

01-07 November:

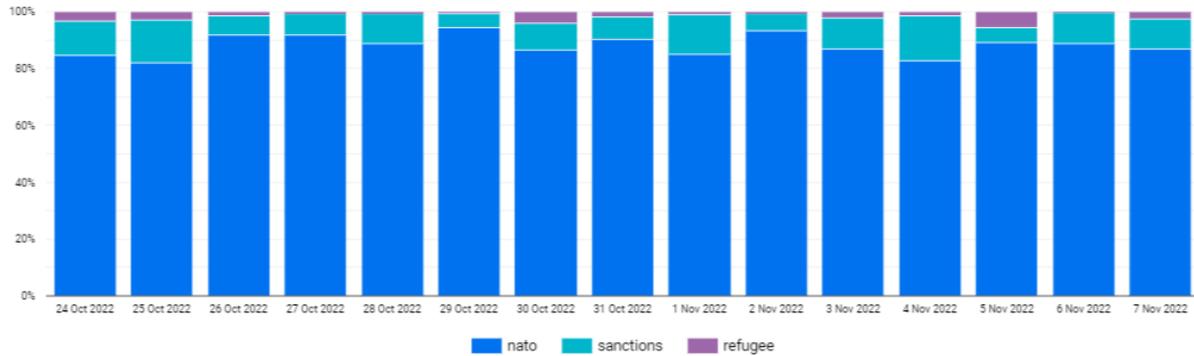
- Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT) issued [an international study](#) on Kremlin propaganda, largely related to Ukraine. Mainly focusing on how the same messages, highly beneficial for Kremlin, are being spread through different countries, the article is easily accessible to a wide audience, raising their resilience to disinformation.
- One of the most active pro-Ukrainian activists, Lithuanian comedian Oleg Surajev, together with his volunteer-driven IK funds, [opened an exhibition about Ukraine](#) called “Tracing the Outlines of Ukrainian History: Louder”. The exhibition aims to make Ukraine’s history and its evolution echo louder around the world. It not only teaches about the country’s history but also, while being accessible to the general public, generates additional financial support for Ukraine.
- A European Union report, publicly published and quoted in Lithuanian [Independent media](#), warned people about the additional effects of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Such as the Russia’s misuse of terms such as ‘Nazi’ and ‘genocide’ to describe the government of Ukraine in an attempt to justify their war likely fueled broader anti-Semitism in Europe.

Anti-Refugee:



Key findings: During the period Oct 24 – Nov 07, the general references to refugees as well as anti-refugee content continued to decline. When compared to the other tracked topics, references to refugees also account for the small proportion of references. Mentions of refugees and anti-refugee narratives in Lithuania peaked soon after the Russian invasion when Ukrainians were forced to flee their country. Now, as the situation has begun to settle there have been lower levels of Ukrainians entering Lithuania and coverage has reduced as well. However, should an increased number of Ukrainians be forced from their country it is likely this will be exploited by anti-immigrant and pro-Russian actors.

Social Media Posts by Topic (General References)



Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	89	89%	11	11%
Twitter*	-	-	-	-
Total	89	89%	11	11%

**technical issues prevented Twitter data from being analyzed*

Assessed Audience: Followers of Kremlin aligned sources

Potential Impact: While the vast majority of content in the media space is supportive or neutral and Ukrainian refugees, one of the more popular hostile narratives targeting the refugees is typical of other anti-immigrant rhetoric and focused on their perceived inability to integrate into Lithuanian society. In some rare cases people view them as potentially hostility and use caution or avoid interacting with them whenever possible. This avoidance likely further exacerbates their perception that they have difficulty integrating and could deepen their receptiveness to the hostile narratives.

Risk Assessment: *Low*

Anti-Sanction:



Key findings: Between Oct 24 – Nov 07, the trend of anti-sanction narratives remains the most active of the three monitored topics. This is likely due to its close relationship with broader criticisms of the governmental and its perceived role in price increases in the country. Anti-sanction narratives were present since the first sanctions were applied on Russia, with the common statement that the ‘sanctions hurt the West more than Russia’ being a primary line of argument. Notably, mentions of

potentially anti-sanction narratives have been trending down since October 25 in Lithuania and have continued to trend down since they peaked in June and July on account of the Lithuanian decision to ban and reinstate the rail transportation of sanctioned goods in and out of Kaliningrad. However, despite the decreased intensity of the topic, there are examples that have received significant interactions online. One notable example is from a Facebook page that is viewed as sympathetic to the Kremlin line, Respublika.lt (70,000+ followers), which received over 1.5k interactions on their post which used the recent protests in Czech Republic to talk about the need for Lithuanians to also think about themselves and reduce support for the sanctions to alleviate energy concerns ahead of the winter.



Typical example of Facebook [post](#) with hostile content encouraging reduced support for Ukraine.

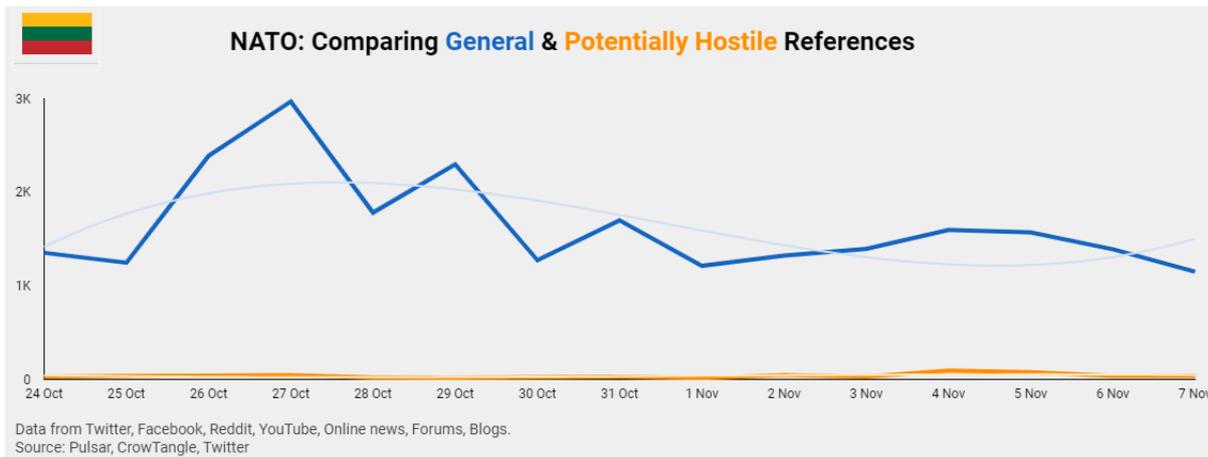
Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	78	78%	22	22%
Twitter	89	89%	11	11%
Total	167	85%	33	17%

Assessed Audience: *Opposition Party Supporters, Followers of Kremlin aligned sources*

Potential Impact: *With winter approaching concerns around energy costs are likely to increase and has the potential to increase support for anti-sanction messaging. Furthermore, anti-government voices, especially from the more nationalist right, may exploit the economic situation to gain support. Increased support to nationalist or protectionists parties can have the potential to destabilise the political current political landscape and bring support for the sanctions regime into question. There is the potential these positions can also be exploited by direct Russian influence operatives to undermine wider support for Ukraine.*

Risk Assessment: *Medium*

Anti-NATO:



Key findings: Between Oct 24 – Nov 07, references to NATO have continued to trend down since a spike in activities at the end of September. Although still a small portion of the overall conversation, content with an increased likelihood of being hostile to NATO has slightly trended up during the reporting period. The predominant messaging has been related to discussions of a NATO possibly bringing about a 3rd World War. Other lines of argument stated that “NATO is a completely untrustworthy organization”, with numerous articles from sources largely aligned with the Kremlin’s views, such as ekspertai.eu (3,500+ Facebook followers), criticize NATO for its alleged provocative claims and lies. They argue that NATO publicly states that “they cannot lose this war” despite previously claiming that it is not even involved in it. Content on ekspertai.eu also accuses NATO of increasing tensions with Russia and tried to portray Lithuania’s NATO membership as a highly questionable security warranty. Kremlin-aligned media used the war in Ukraine to question the reliability of NATO and diminish people’s trust in it, portraying the organization more as a threat than protection. Even the headlines of quality Independent media such as delfi.lt (618k+ Facebook followers) state “Russia: Ukraine joining NATO would lead to World War III”. These headlines further associate NATO with a potential 3rd World War.

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	95	95%	5	5%
Twitter	96	96%	4	4%
Total	191	96%	9	5%

Assessed Audience: Opposition Party Supporters, Followers of Kremlin aligned sources

Potential Impact: While support for NATO remains high and the proportion of the media space which contains hostile messaging toward NATO is small with a narrow audience, any increase in political instability is likely to be exploited by anti-western and anti-establishment political actors. Lithuania is not immune to the increasing populist trends across established democracies, and increased political activity as people being staking claims in the 2024 elections have the potential to increase this risk.

Risk Assessment: *Low*

Take note: NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg said that the Alliance will further step up support for Ukraine while strengthening the Alliance’s defence. Actions taken by NATO and, more importantly, counteractions taken by Russia and their effect on Lithuanians will determine the further escalation or de-escalation of the anti-NATO narrative.

Poland:

Top line summary:

September:

- *Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki has [appointed Stanisław Żaryn as Government Plenipotentiary for the Security of the Information Space of the Republic of Poland](#), a new position created by decree in August 2022. Among the tasks of the Plenipotentiary and his Information Space Security Team is to neutralise various types of systemic incidents that use information or false information against Poland and Polish interests.*
- *[The Digital Media Initiative has published a report “Mapping controversial narratives related to the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine in Polish-language social media”](#). According to their research, controversial narratives that they found could be divided into seven thematic areas, in order of engagement: refugees, historical massacres, national and economic insecurity, disease, corruption, coronavirus and conspiracy theories. Additionally, according to the report, depending on which medium is used, different topics of disinformation are popular. Thus, Twitter users are primarily exposed to content about the threats that await Poland if it continues to support Ukraine. Facebook is dominated by content referring to the problematic Polish-Ukrainian history. On Telegram, due to its peculiarities (primarily its high anonymity, decentralisation and reliance on private channels for conversations), there are much more conspiracy theories about the war.*
- *Polish Twitter has been stormed with anti-Ukrainian astroturfing campaign. It pushed #StopUkrainizacjiPolski to the top of Poland’s trending list over the course of four days. [The DFRLab determined the campaign was largely inauthentic, as the primary accounts behind its promotion created a false impression regarding its relative popularity in Poland](#). A review of Twitter data using the monitoring tool Meltwater Explore showed that around 46,000 tweets mentioned this hashtag between August 24 and 27. A closer look at mentions revealed that a small group of hyperactive accounts promoted the hashtag, with some of these accounts exhibiting signs of bot-like behavior.*
- *[According to a survey by Ipsos](#), the wave of support for Ukrainian refugees is diminishing, with involvement in supporting Ukrainian families falling from 61% to 40% among the Polish public since March. Personal involvement in helping is declared by 40% of respondents, and 32% have someone in their family who continues to help refugees. The largest number of respondents – 41% - have a close friend or acquaintance who supports Ukrainian women and Ukrainians. In the early days of the war in Ukraine, personal involvement in aid actions was declared by as many as 61% of respondents. This is a huge percentage. Six months later, the wave of aid is subsiding - involvement in aid actions is down by 21 percentage points.*

October:

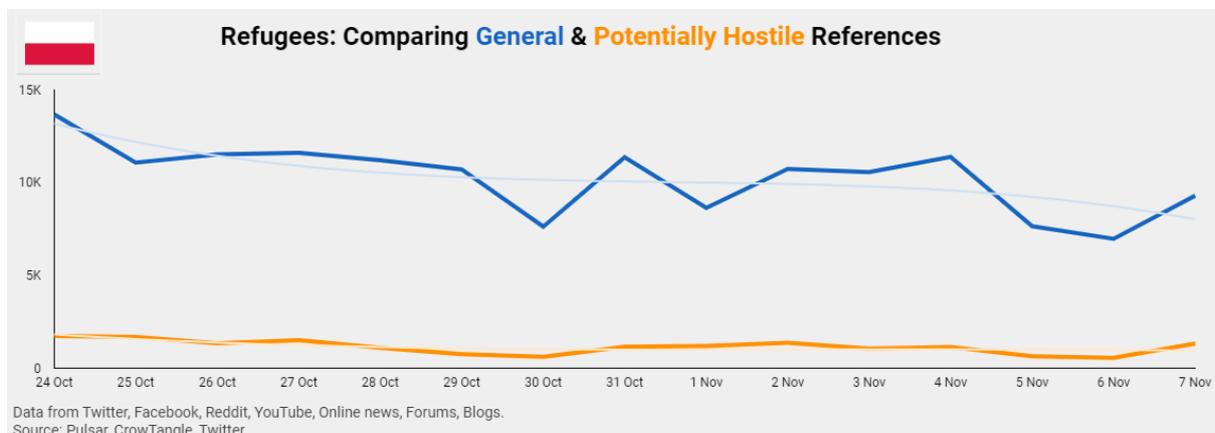
- *[As reported by Stanisław Żaryn](#), Government Plenipotentiary for the Security of the Information Space of the Republic of Poland, a campaign to create panic among Poles was identified in social media. It included lies about the Polish government's preparations to flee the country. The aim was to discredit the government, but also to sow panic in connection with the war in Ukraine.*

- *After Russia and Ukraine, Poland ranks third among Belarus's neighbours in terms of the number of mentions on the portal of the newspaper owned by the Lukashenko administration "SB. Belarus Today" (Russian: 'СБ. Беларусь сегодня'). [According to a report by the Belarusian organisation Media IQ](#), Poland is one of the main targets of Belarus' internal propaganda. Propaganda constantly discusses about a military threat to Belarus from Poland. There is talk of direct plans by Poland to carry out military operations on the territory of Belarus. Almost from the first days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Lukashenko's propaganda (following Putin's propaganda) regularly announces the entry of Polish troops into western Ukraine. Since the beginning of the humanitarian crisis orchestrated by the Lukashenko regime on the Polish-Lithuanian border in 2021, the state media have emphasised that it is the policy of Warsaw and Vilnius that is criminal, described as "on the edge Nazism" and leading to the death and suffering of refugees. The main narratives included also propaganda on historical events shared by Poland and Belarus and accuses of Poland being exploited by Washington.*
- *[As reported by the EDMO](#), energy disinformation is coming to the fore, with disinformation actors spreading fake news about the gas crisis in Europe with increased vigor. With the heating season approaching, the EU infosphere may be flooded with false claims about the sources of the energy crisis. For example, false information has been circulating in 12 countries (including Poland) suggesting that the Swiss government will allegedly pay people who decide to denounce their neighbors if they heat their homes at too high a temperature.*
- *Harmful posts have appeared online advising against taking potassium iodide tablets in case of a radiation emergency, [the Scientific and Academic Computer Network \(NASK\) reported](#). It added that this type of narrative is an example of disinformation aimed at polarizing Poles on the issue of security.*

01-07 November:

- *[According to Demagog](#), more and more false information about COVID-19 vaccination is being disseminated in the Polish information space. The most recent example is an interview with the leader of the Polish anti-vaccine movement, Justyna Socha, in which she repeated many of the most popular conspiracy theories and disinformation narratives that have been spread in recent months.*

Anti-Refugee:



Key findings: General references to refugees in monitored media remained fairly stable between October 24 and November 7, with a peak of 13,637 posts on October 24 and a minimum of 7,633 on October 30. Proportionately to these fluctuations, the percentage of potentially hostile narratives changed, regularly accounting for about 10% of the total, with a peak of 15% and a minimum of 8%. The refugee topic generated the most content of the three topics examined in this report, also the total number and percentage of potentially hostile content is the highest in this case. No upward or downward trend is discernible over this time period.

Most of the identified content strongly supports pro-refugee policies, and reports on political and economic issues related to them in an accurate manner. However, several continuing trends of undermining the legitimacy of Poland's acceptance of refugees or creating a negative image of them among the Polish public can be discerned. One example, posted by a Polish twitter profile with 4,000+ followers, uses a manipulated statement by the Mayor of Berlin, who allegedly said that the city she manages has exhausted its capacity to accept Ukrainian refugees, to undermine Poland's ability to accept them and to create a picture of the situation according to which Ukrainians are treated better in the country than Poles.



In a similar way, a twitter user with 5,000+ followers, argued that Poland provided excessive aid to Ukrainians since in other countries, such as German, they are housed in refugee centers which should also be the case in Poland.



Another potentially hostile content is pushed by far-right politicians and nationalists who criticize the Polish government for its aid to Ukrainians and call for halting any financial assistance to Ukraine and stopping the "Ukrainization" of Poland. These political circles are very active on social media, where they have built a sizable base of active followers. This is particularly evident when we analyze the top-100 most popular Facebook posts and tweets on this topic. Correspondingly, as many as 19% of posts and 33% of tweets contain potentially hostile content, the vast majority of which is the work of these entities. As much of this content is coming from the political right provides some evidence

that political actors on the far-right are using the refugee issue in an attempt to gain political momentum. The increasing number and popularity of such activities by well-known politicians is particularly dangerous in the context of the economic crisis and the so-called "war fatigue," which together can result in a drastic reduction in the willingness to help Ukrainian refugees.

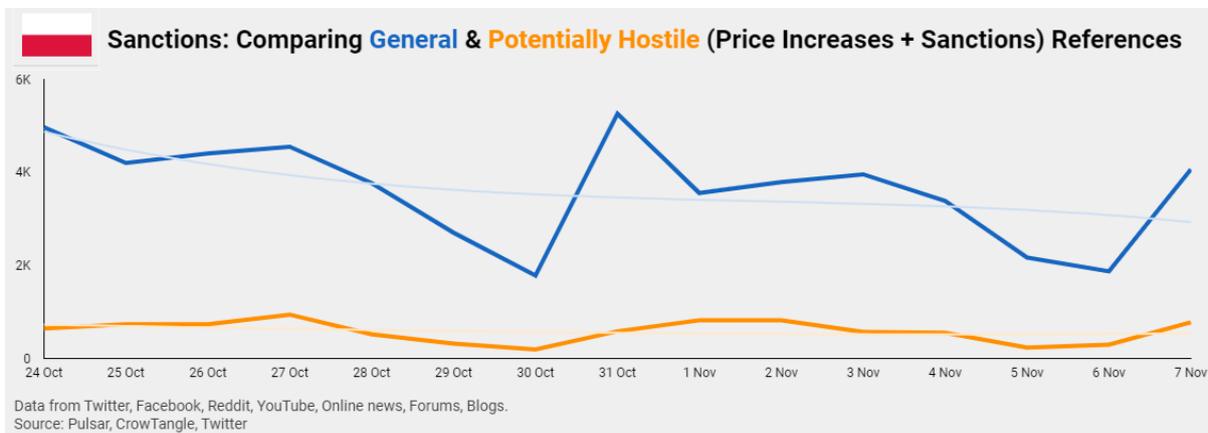
Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	81	81%	19	19%
Twitter	67	67%	33	33%
Total	148	74%	51	26%

Assessed Audience: Far-Right Political Groups, Pro-Russian Groups

Potential Impact: Although the preponderance of content about refugees is positive, we see a consistent value of potentially hostile narratives. Analyzing the posts containing them, we can see that they resonate most with anti-Ukrainian circles in the case of Twitter and with the general public in the case of Facebook. This gives rise to a dangerous mix when we consider the emerging "war fatigue", the increasing economic and energy crisis which is being linked by many to the presence of such a large number of refugees in Poland, and recent poll results which show that the wave of support for Ukrainian refugees is subsiding among Poles. This may lead in the coming months to an increasingly rapid decline in the willingness of Poles to economically support refugees from Ukraine and, consequently, lead to pressure on politicians to reduce the level of aid, especially important in the context of the upcoming parliamentary elections in Poland. Promotion of anti-refugee narratives can also serve as a platform to gain popularity by the far-right political parties.

Risk Assessment: *Medium*

Anti-Sanction:



Key findings: Mentions to sanctions and high prices have changed between 5261 and 1785 per day during the period of Oct 24 – Nov 07, and fluctuate in this range in a fairly constant manner. Most of them concern the current situation in the Polish energy market and are part of the heated discourse between the pro-government and the pro-opposition audiences. For the most part, however, the identified content does not directly link these discussions to sanctions and the war in Ukraine. Individual cases link these issues by arguing about the futility of banning Russian coal imports, the need to agree to payments in rubles for Russian gas creating an image according to which Polish aid to Ukraine is the reason for rising energy prices. Potentially hostile narratives accounted for between 10% and 23% of the total. Similarly, when analyzing top 100 Facebook posts and tweets we can see just a small number of them being potentially hostile. This suggests that the discussion around sanctions and high energy prices is focused on domestic policy issues, and the need to impose and

maintain sanctions on Russia is not widely disputed. The war in Ukraine and the need to contain Russia are widely seen as the Rationale of State of Poland, which may require sacrifices among the Polish public as well. The low presence of potentially hostile narratives is an indicator that extreme opposition voices have little traction in the wider public discourse.

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	96	96%	4	4%
Twitter	93	93%	7	7%
Total	189	95%	11	6%

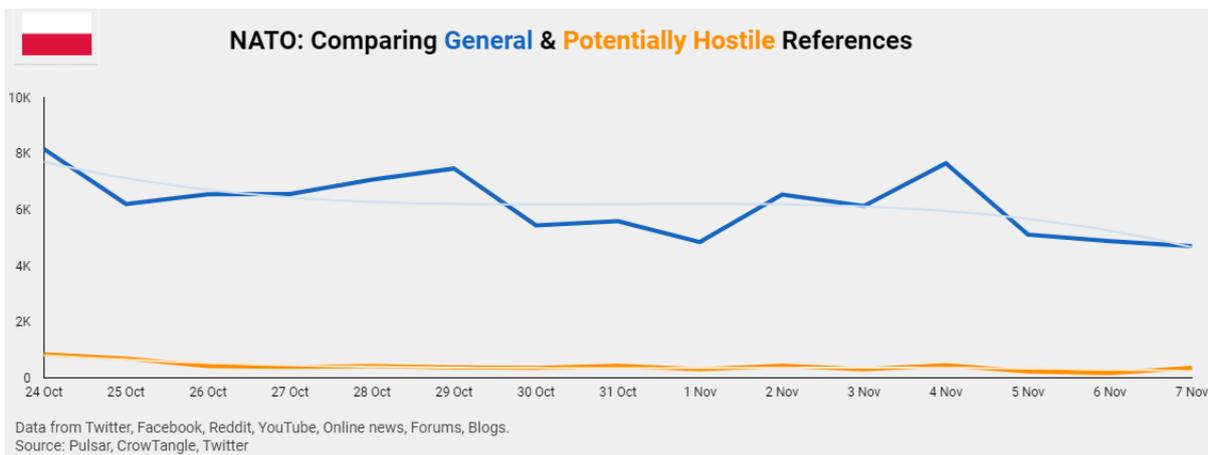
Assessed Audience: Far-Right Political Groups, Pro-Russian Groups, Conspiracy Followers

The main audience of potentially hostile narratives are the anti-mainstream, pro-Russian and far-right circles. One can see attempts to tie the war in Ukraine in this context to conspiracy theories about COVID-19, the Great Reset and the 2030 Agenda, which are all supposed to be part of a plan to impoverish societies and eradicate the middle class. General public in this case is not the primarily targeted audience, what can be evidenced by a small level of interactions with the potentially hostile content.

Risk Assessment: *Low*

Potential Impact: *The widespread disapproval among the Polish public of Russian aggression against Ukraine and awareness of the threat that a Kremlin victory could bring to Poland means that narratives condemning sanctions and calling for their lifting and reduction have little chance of breaking through to the general public. The primary concern would be if the far-right voices promoting the hostile narratives successfully tap in to the audiences of other topics such as Covid-19 or broader anti-immigrant narratives which may not be actively pro-Russian but susceptible to being nudged in to promoting anti-Ukrainian views.*

Anti-NATO:



Key findings: *General references to NATO recorded a downward trend over the period studied, fluctuating between 8,163 and 4,692 posts. It is noteworthy that posts containing potentially hostile narratives referring to NATO make up a much smaller portion than in the case of the other two categories analyzed. The only visible potentially hostile narrative focused on the potential escalation of the conflict to directly involved Poland. This is a repetition of established Kremlin narratives that have gained traction in some Western countries.*

As we can see from the analyzed data, the presence of potentially hostile content that would take aim at NATO, its military capabilities or military aid to Ukraine is marginal. This is due to the overwhelming support among the Polish public for NATO and the Alliance's relevance to Poland's security, which means that opposing content has little receptiveness among the Polish public.

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	92	92%	8	8%
Twitter	96	96%	4	4%
Total	188	94%	12	6%

Assessed Audience: Pro-Russian Groups, Conspiracy Followers

Risk Assessment: *Low*

Potential Impact: The potential impact of these narratives is very limited being largely confined to the small section of society that holds pro-Russian views. Attempts to spread anti-NATO views amongst the wider audience are not effective and are not perceived to have an impact in the foreseeable future. Beyond anti-NATO messaging, there is some potential for messaging around the escalation to nuclear war gaining traction which may contribute to undermining military support for Ukraine. However, further monitoring of the receptiveness of the nuclear narrative is required to understand if it will contribute to any diminished support for NATO or military aid for Ukraine.

Czech Republic:

Top line summary:

September:

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs plans [to open a new Representative Office](#) in eastern Ukraine in the city of Dnipro. According to the preliminary plan, Czechs are to be "in charge" of the Dnepropetrovsk region during post-war reconstruction.
- The Czech MFA [stated](#) that the Russian partial mobilization and pseudo-referenda escalate Russia's imperial aggression and leads to further deaths of Ukrainians and Russians. However, Czech fringe [websites](#) known for spreading disinformation interpret the mobilization as a reaction to Western escalation of the conflict via their weapons supplies to Ukraine claiming the West brought the world to the brink of an international conflict.
- The United States [will provide](#) the Czech Republic with \$106 million in military support. As part of the second package to help Ukraine, the funds are intended for further modernization of the Czech Army and for partial compensation of Czech supplies of material to Ukraine. The military help provided to Ukraine has sparked and supported narratives about the West being the aggressor, provoking Russia into starting the war as such and also into the partial mobilization. The far-right opposition in the Parliament is calling for an end to the war, to stop providing military and/or humanitarian aid to Ukraine or even any symbolic steps in the name of Ukraine's support. They are calling for total focus on solving the economic and energy crisis and securing stable energy supplies and better standard of living, whatever it takes (even relying on Russian gas once again).

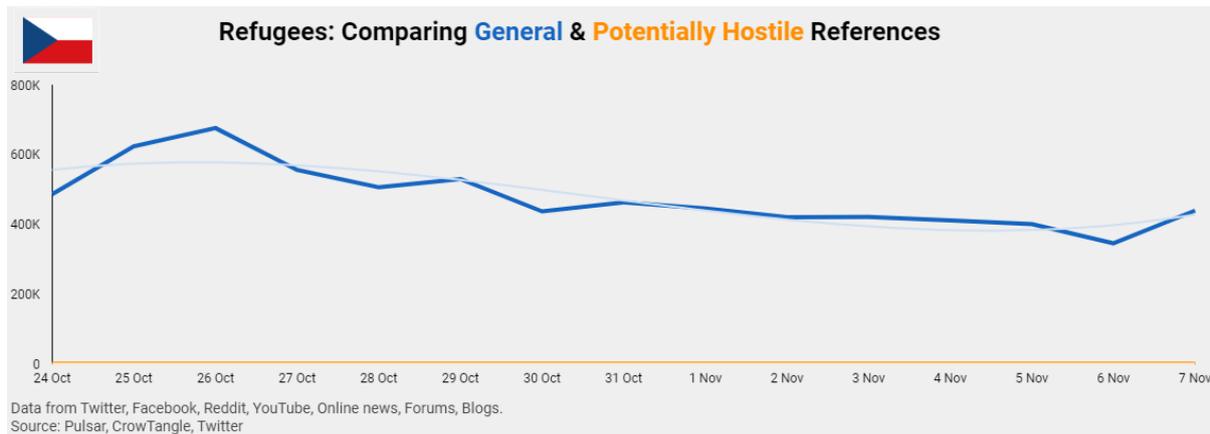
October:

- EU leaders *discussed* the energy situation in Europe and further assistance to Ukraine at an informal meeting of the European Council in Prague. High energy prices and further aid to Ukraine were the most important topics of the informal summit of the European Council, which took place on Friday 7 October 2022 at the Prague Castle as part of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union.
- Information *appeared* on fringe websites spreading disinformation in relation to the explosion on the Kerch bridge claiming that the USA is preparing to deliver nuclear weapons to Ukraine. Ukraine is allegedly responsible for the explosion on the Kerch Bridge and it was a terrorist act to which Russia had to respond appropriately. Blaming the Ukrainian army for attacking civilians also continues on these platforms.
- People *gathered* on Wenceslas Square in Prague to express support for Ukraine on the occasion of the Day of Defenders of Ukraine. Similar gatherings were held in more than 70 cities.

01-07 November:

- Ukraine *will receive* 90 t-72 tanks thanks to the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and the United States.
- President Volodymyr Zelensky *seeks* to build “defense relations” between Ukraine and the Czech Republic. The leader stated this in an interview with Czech television.

Anti-Refugee:



Key findings: The most active actor was Tomio Okamura, member of Parliament and the leader of far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy Party (SPD). The general message was that *basic help* for refugees is good but not if it is at the expense of Czech citizens. Using a widely seen narrative across Europe, Okamura and his allies criticize the government for not doing enough to support their own citizens manage the energy crisis while it “*obviously*” has billions to invest in social benefits for refugees. One of the primary narratives was that the refugees are a *financial burden* on national services which the healthcare system mentioned often.

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	68	68%	32	32%
Twitter	100	100%	0	0%

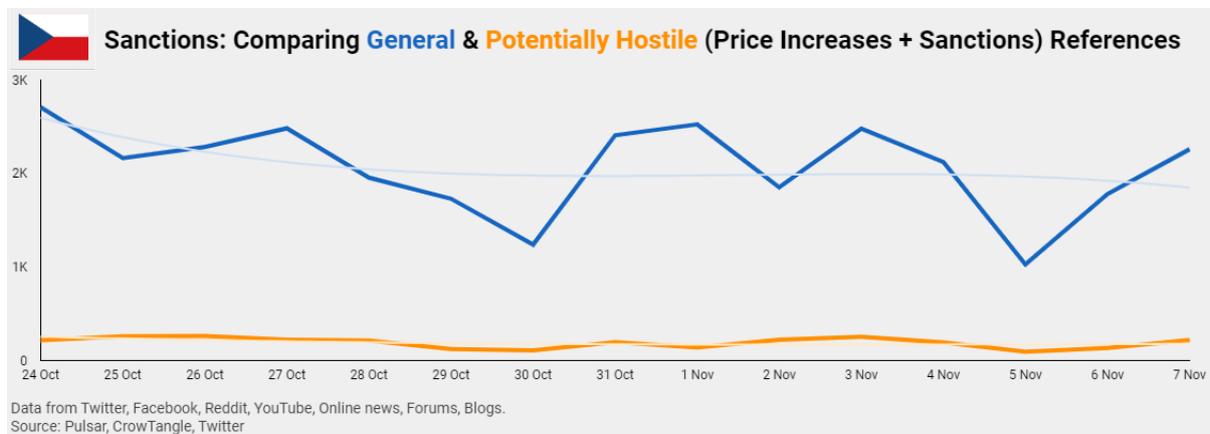
Total	168	84%	32	16%
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Assessed Audience: SPD Supporters, other Far-right Supporters

Risk Assessment: *Medium*

Potential Impact: Besides lowering solidarity towards refugees, these narratives also undermine the government by attempting to portray it as one that looks after Ukrainian interests over those of the Czech state and people. [Polls](#) have recorded a decrease in support for the governing SPOLU coalition and an increase for Okamura’s SPD which has increased its support from 10% to 13% since February. This combined with the increase in support for the main opposition party, ANO, points to increased potential for political instability which could weaken support for the government’s policies, including those in support of Ukraine.

Anti-Sanction:



Key findings: Anti-sanction narratives were dominated by the opposition parties, mainly Okamura’s SPD and members of the ANO party of populist former Prime Minister Andrej Babiš. Okamura previously [underplayed the role](#) of Russia’s weaponization of energy and instead painted the energy crisis as being brought on by destructive government and EU policies such as the Green Deal, Emissions Trading System, and the European Energy Exchange in Leipzig. These actors often call for peace negotiations instead of “destructive” sanctions.

Original

Machine Translation



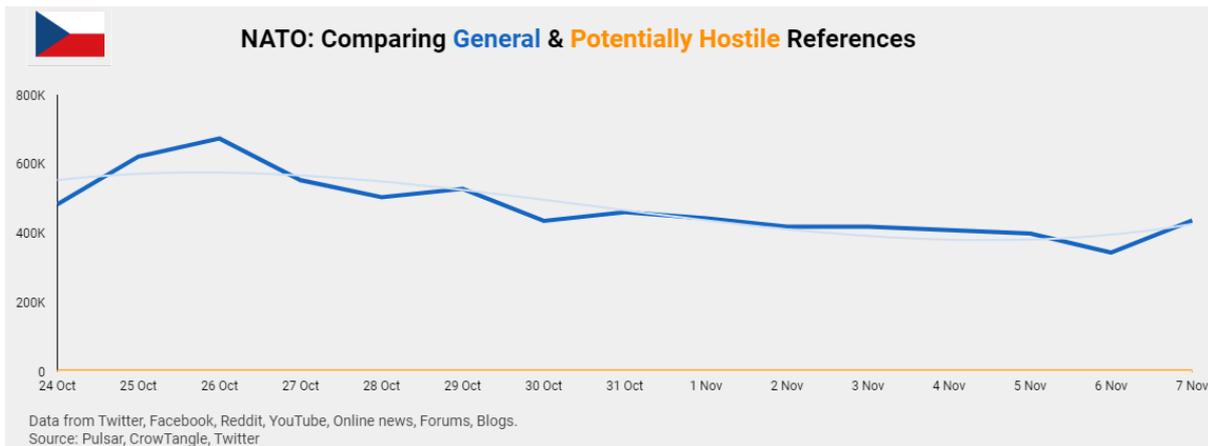
Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	56	56%	44	44%
Twitter	100	100%	0	0%
Total	156	78%	44	22%

Assessed Audience: General Public, Supporters of Opposition Parties

Risk Assessment: *Medium*

Potential Impact: With [recent polls](#) suggesting that 66% of Czechs think the government doesn't do enough to address high energy prices, there is a receptive audience to narratives that explain the increased cost of living on the sanctions or other policies of the government. With the far-right SPD exploiting the conflict to mobilize recent high profile protests in Prague together with far-left groups and the main opposition ANO party leading in opinion polls, there is increased potential for political instability. With anti-sanction narratives largely focusing on cost of living issues that concerns the broader general public there is substantial potential for this narrative to receive a broad receptive audience.

Anti-NATO:



Key findings: Anti-NATO narratives primarily attempt to portray NATO as a Russophobic organization that has dragged the Czech Republic into a war that is not theirs and prolonging it through its military support to Ukraine. Using the attack on the Kerch bridge as an example, NATO is also portrayed as a supporter of terrorist. The underlying message is that the most direct threat to the Czech Republic is not Russia, but NATO and the government for behaving aggressively in the international space.

Original

Machine Translation

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	72	72%	28	28%
Twitter	99	99%	1	1%
Total	171	86%	29	15%

Assessed Audience: Supporters of the Far-Right and Far-Left

Risk Assessment: **Medium**

Potential Impact: According to recent polling, while only 17% of Czechs consider NATO to be responsible for the start of the war 30% of the population would prefer a more neutral position between East and West. With economic hardship expected to continue and support for opposition parties expected to remain or increase there is a potential for key defense policies like the 2% GDP contribution target to be undermined and general support for NATO to weaken. These narratives are further supported by calls for peace and fearmongering about the possibility of nuclear escalation.

Slovakia:

Top line summary:

September:

- Slovak police [uncovered](#) an information operation of the Russian Federation in Slovakia. Its aim was to overwhelm the information space with a seemingly sensational fictitious report about the destruction of a cemetery of Imperial Russian Army soldiers in the village of Ladozírova in Slovakia. It is suspected that the disinformation was intended to distract from reports of recently discovered mass graves in Ukraine.
- The Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Rastislav Káčer, [spoke](#) on the phone with the head of Ukrainian diplomacy, Dmytro Kuleb. During his first phone call with a foreign partner since taking office, Káčer stressed continuing solidarity with Ukraine, including within EU and NATO structures, and the connection between Ukrainian and Slovak security.
- Slovak [aid](#) to Ukraine, in proportion to the national GDP, is in the world's top ten and ahead of neighboring Czech Republic. However, domestic pro-Russian voices have portrayed this as evidence that the government is favoring Ukrainian needs over those of Slovak citizens.
- Most [Slovaks](#) would like Russia to win the war, according to a survey. This follows from a survey by the Slovak Academy of Sciences, MNFORCE and Seesame.

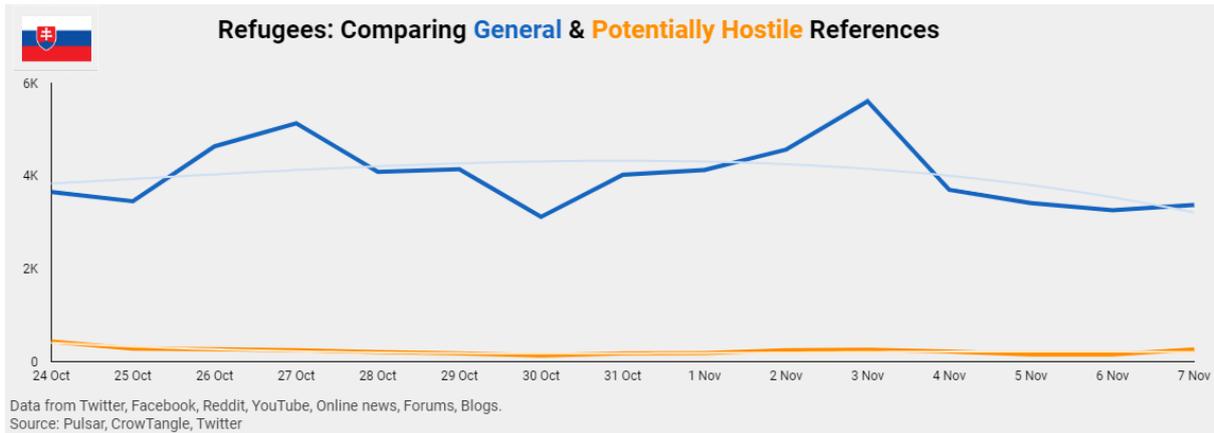
October:

- The MFA [summoned](#) the Chargé d'Affaires of the Russian Embassy and conveyed a sharp protest against Russia's repeated violations of international law and the UN Charter while unequivocally condemning their illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory.
- Ukrainian [defense](#) was strengthened by two more Slovak 155 mm Zuzana 2 self-propelled howitzers. In total, Ukraine has purchased six howitzers from the Slovakia.
- [Misinformation](#) related to the airport in Sliač which is undergoing reconstruction work claimed it was actually going to be turned in to a US military base. This false claim even made it into the municipal elections in the form of a referendum on whether the citizens of Sliač want the military base.

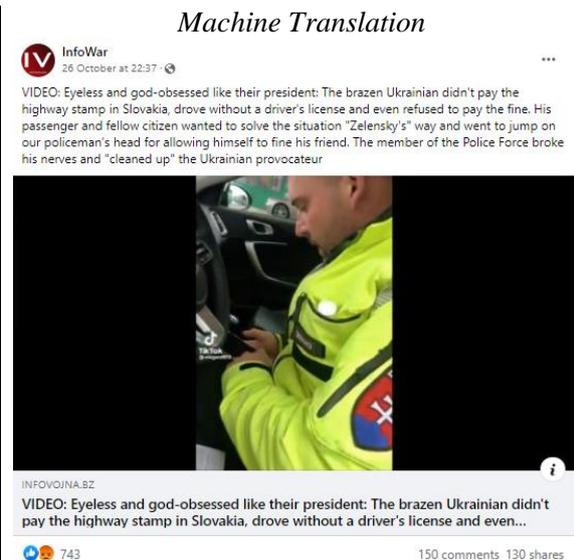
01-07 November:

- The possibility of a so-called dirty bomb being used in Ukraine was promoted by [pro-Russian actors](#) in Slovakia.
- The magazine Denník N [uncovered](#) that Slovakia serves as a warehouse for the Russian army - Slovak customs officials release a lot of goods to suppliers of Russian arms companies. "We do not decide whether or not goods exported to Russia will be used by the Russian military," the financial report replies.

Anti-Refugee:



Key findings: The topic of refugees is not overly polarized. Selective posts try to sow panic about [big waves of refugees](#) as a result of the oncoming winter and further Russian [bombings](#) of Ukrainian energy infrastructure. Claims that continued aid to refugees will destroy the already struggling Slovak society and occasional claims about ungrateful or [misbehaving](#) refugees appear, but these are more individual cases than trends.



Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	80	80%	20	20%
Twitter*	-	-	-	-
Total	80	80%	20	20%

**technical issues prevented Twitter data from being analyzed*

Assessed Audience: Supporters of far-right and other anti-immigrant groups.

Risk Assessment: *Low*

Potential Impact: Anti-refugee narratives have largely not resonated amongst the general public, with the position largely being promoted by extremist political actors who currently do not hold significant social influence. A harsh winter combined with an increase in Russian attacks on civilian centers and infrastructure could, however, results in an influx of refugees to Slovakia which is likely

to be exploited by extremists. Continued monitoring of the topic throughout the winter will be necessary.

Anti-Sanction:



Key findings: Hostile narratives related to sanctions were dominated by members of opposition parties. Significantly these have included former Prime Minister Robert Fico from the main opposition SMER party in addition to far-right representatives such as former speaker of the Parliament Andrej Danko from the Slovak National Party and the members of the Republika party. A typical anti-sanction narrative is that Slovakia cannot do without cheap and reliable Russian gas. They present the sanctions as self-destructive and increased living costs as a result of poor EU policy decision. Their claim is Slovakia should prioritize its needs and nothing else.

Original

Marián Ďuriš • Republika
25 October at 11:18

Odkaz HEGEROVI? „Aki hlúpi musíte byť? Lacná energia je najdôležitejšia podmienka fungovania priemyslu“

Sahra Wagenknechtová mala k rozpočtu a hospodársko-klimatickému plánu súčasnej nemeckej vlády prejav, ktorý má však platnosť pre politiku mnohých európskych vlád.

Ako býva u progresívcov a mimovládnych aktivistov zvykom, keď sa dostanú do vlády, vlastnú neschopnosť zakrývajú prázdnyimi sloganmi, vulgárnym pokrivaním na druhých a serióznu opozičnú argumentáciu rušia „krčmovým“ správaním.

Najväčším problémom je „grandiózna“ myšlienka vlády rozpútať ekonomickú vojnu proti nášmu najdôležitejšiemu dodávateľovi energií... A kde našiel náhradu pán (minister) Habeck? U amerických dodávateľov frakovaného plynu, ktorí zarábajú 200 miliónov za každý tanker.

Medzitým sa fabriky najradšej presúvajú do ktorej krajiny? Do Spojených štátov! Lebo cena plynu v Nemecku je teraz 8-krát vyššia ako v zámorí. Takže „robite Ameriku opäť veľkou“?

Potrebuje ruské suroviny a ruskú energiu. Preto už žiadne fatálne, ekonomické sankcie! Rokujme s Ruskom o obnove dodávok plynu.

- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/mariandurisofficial>
- YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/marianduris>
- TikTok: https://www.tiktok.com/@marian_duris
- Telegram: <https://t.me/marianduris>

[1] <https://www.sahra-wagenknecht.de/de/article/3198.treten-sie-zurueck-herr-habeck-ihre-laufzeitverlaengerung-fuehrt-zum-supergau-der-deutschen.html>

#MarianDuris #ZahranicnaPolitika #EuropskaUnia #Republika #Slovensko #german #deutsch #Bundestag #EuropskaKomisia #EuropskyParlament

Machine Translation

Marián Ďuriš • Republika
25 October at 11:18

Message to HEGER? "How stupid do you have to be? Cheap energy is the most important condition functioning of the industry"

Sahra Wagenknecht gave a speech on the budget and the economic climate plan of the current German government, which, however, is valid for the policy of many European governments.

As is usual with progressives and non-governmental activists, when they get into government, their own they cover up their incompetence with empty slogans, vulgar shouting at others and serious ones they destroy the opposition's argumentation with "tavern

behavior. The biggest problem is the "grandiose" idea of the government to start an economic war against our most important supplier of energy... And where did Mr. (Minister) Habeck find a replacement? U American fracked gas suppliers who earn 200 million for each tanker.

Meanwhile, factories prefer to move to which country? To the United States! Because the price of gas in Germany is now 8 times higher than overseas. So are you "making America great again"?

We need Russian raw materials and Russian energy. Therefore, no more fatal economic sanctions! Let's negotiate with Russia on the restoration of

- gas supplies. Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/mariandurisofficial>
- YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/marianduris>
- TikTok: https://www.tiktok.com/@marian_duris
- Telegram: <https://t.me/marianduris>

[1]

#MarianDuris #ZahranicnaPolitika #EuropskaUnia #Republika #Slovensko #german #deutsch #Bundestag #EuropskaKomisia #EuropskyParlament

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	49	49%	51	51%
Twitter*	-	-	-	-
Total	49	49%	51	51%

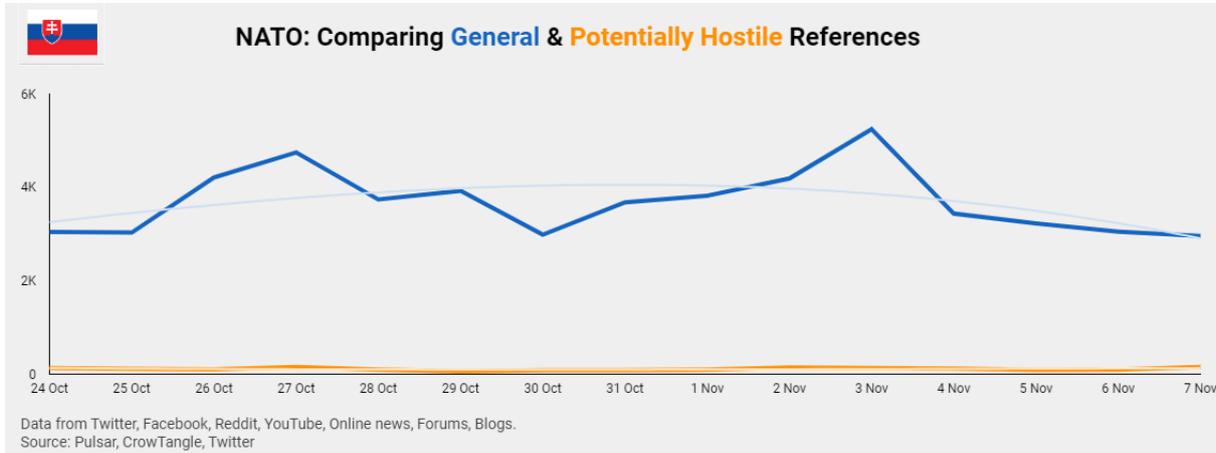
*technical issues prevented Twitter data from being analyzed

Assessed Audience: Supporters of Opposition Parties

Risk Assessment: *Medium*

Potential Impact: Given the appeal of anti-sanction narratives to a broader spectrum of political positions including the main opposition SMER party on the left and far-right parties, it has the potential to act as a bridge between the two sides. Heightened fears about the economy can further feed these narratives and strengthen support for isolationist or more non-aligned policies.

Anti-NATO:



Key findings:

NATO is presented as an aggressive organization who is definitely not defensive and who has been provoking Russia over Ukraine at least since 2014, and continues to do so. Alleged examples from the past related to NATO’s engagement in Afghanistan and former Yugoslavia are often mentioned as proof for its aggressive nature. NATO is claimed to be “a part of the problem”, not the solution to Slovak security concerns. The idea of Ukraine joining NATO is immediately called crazy. Moreover, these narratives include conspiracy theories about the US actually controlling Zelensky or the Slovak MFA. Many posts included appeals to stop the war and mainly the weapon supplies for Ukraine from the West which are not presented as needed aid but as the reason for the still ongoing war.

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	40	40%	60	60%
Twitter*	-	-	-	-
Total	40	40%	60	60%

*technical issues prevented Twitter data from being analyzed

Assessed Audience: Supporters of Opposition Parties

Risk Assessment: **Medium**

Potential Impact: Anti-NATO messaging feeds in to members of the general public who are sympathetic to non-aligned or anti-Western perspectives and receives significant traction online. The primary anti-NATO messaging focused on concerns that NATO is more problematic than beneficial for the country. Given the fact that 60/100 of the most engaged with Facebook posts mentioning NATO contained hostile messaging is one indication that this narrative has the potential to impact social dialogue on NATO and could result in undermining support for the 2% GDP commitment.

Romania:

Top line summary:

September:

- *General Directorate of Internal Protection of the Ministry of Internal Affairs [reported](#) 5,700 cyber security alerts directed at the Ministry. Most of the attacks exploited the subject of military aggression in Ukraine, with attackers attempting to obtaining pecuniary benefits, compromising the access credentials of users or temporarily disabling some IT services or resource.*
- *Romania strongly condemns the annexation of Ukrainian territories by Russia [Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs publicly recalls the fact that "no territorial acquisition" based on the violation of international law can be recognized and reaffirms its "firm" support for the sovereignty of Ukraine, as well as for the territorial integrity of this state within its internationally recognized borders, according to a press release from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(MAE\) sent to AGERPRES. The declaration was also stated by Romania's president, Klaus Iohannis and members of the current government, marking a clear position against Russian aggression.](#)*

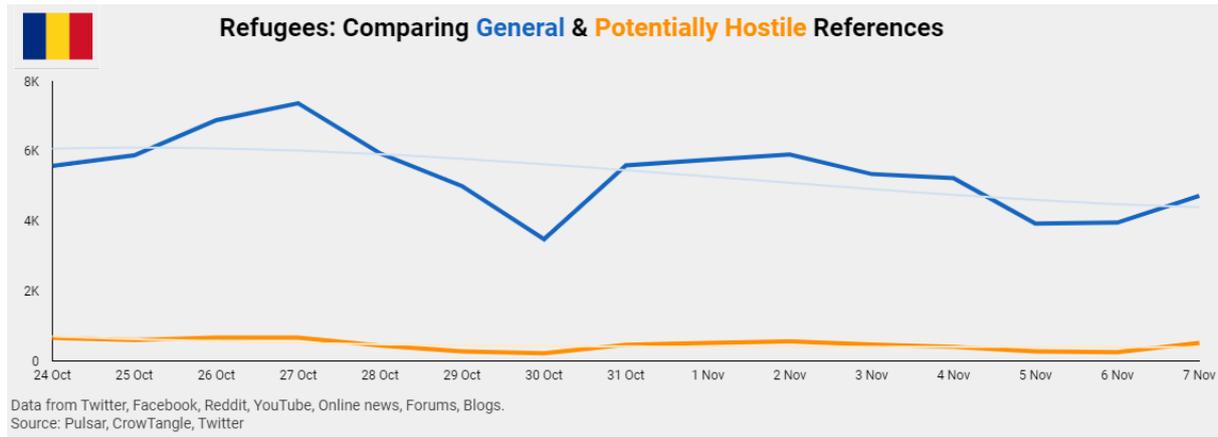
October:

- *Nadija Afanasieva, director of the Ukrainian Institute for International Policies, an independent think-tank in Ukraine, said that [elements of Russian propaganda are visible in Romania](#), as in many EU countries, including on television, without being contradicted by independent experts. An example cited by the Ukrainian expert is the fact that many Europeans believe that the current energy crisis was caused by Ukraine rather than as result of Russian aggression.*
- *Far-right party AUR managed to bring together some 3,000 participants to its [anti-Government protest organised in Bucharest](#) on October 2, Hotnews.ro reported. The rally was intended to express public discontent with the rising cost of living and was heavily promoted online by AUR representatives.*

01-07 November:

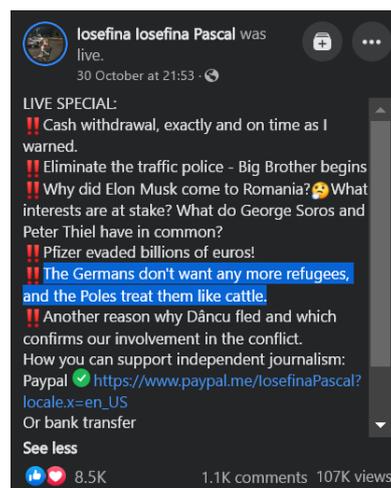
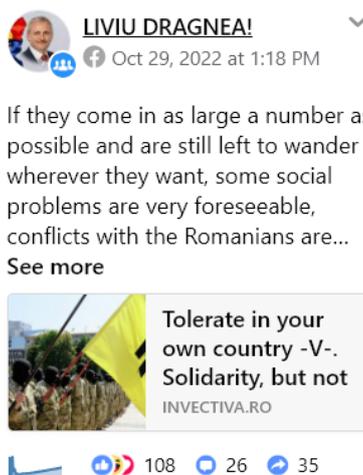
- *[The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania](#) rejects the assertions expressed by the President of the Russian Federation in the speech given on the occasion of National Unity Day, which falsely induce the idea that Romania has territorial claims against Ukraine.*
- *According to an [Avangarde poll about the war in Ukraine](#), -Romanians have a high degree of uncertainty regarding their position towards Ukraine entering EU and NATO. This hesitancy, however, doesn't translate in a lack of empathy for Ukraine, but rather in a fear of escalating the conflict by fast-forwarding Ukraine's integration process.*

Anti-Refugee:



Key findings: Anti-Refugee sentiment in Romania is generally low despite targeted efforts from far-right politicians and political influencers to spike outrage on specific events. At the beginning of the war, the anti-refugee messages were linked with Transcarpathia and called out historical discriminatory treatment received by Romanians in Ukraine. This narrative hasn't gained much traction, in part because the Chernitzki (Ukrainian) or Cernauti (Romanian) oblast where there is a high concentration of Romanians were very active in seeking support and hosting refugees from Ukraine. However, messaging on the perceived favorable treatment of Ukrainians over Romanian citizens has been gained more traction. With [23% of the population living in relative poverty](#) the temporary benefits available to refugees such as rent support, healthcare, and schooling has driven the narrative that Ukrainians are being better treated the Romanian citizens.

Between Oct 24 – Nov 07, significant anti-refugee messaging attempting to promote problems with Ukrainian integration in society have been promoted online. For example, a public [Facebook group](#) named after the former leader of the Social Democratic Party who was convicted of corruption, Liviu Dragnea (29.5k+ members) creates alarmist content foreseeing an integration conflict. Additional messaging that Europe and Romania have done their part and the humanitarian mission should end so the needs of citizens can be prioritized. These are often supported with claims that other European countries, like Germany, have changed their mind regarding Ukrainian refugees as well and towns are kicking refugees out.



Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	83	83%	17	17%
Twitter	96	96%	4	4%
Total	179	90%	21	11%

Assessed Audience: Supporters of Far-Right and Nationalist Parties, Anti-Vax Followers

Risk Assessment: *Medium*

Potential Impact: Pro-Russian sentiment is low and not a significant driver of hostile narratives, however, anti-refugee narratives have still gained traction due to the economic downturn which is being exploited by far-right and nationalist parties. Inflation, the energy crisis, and domestic political issues have the potential to derail support for refugees. The hostile narrative that gains the largest audiences seek to associate helping Ukrainians with taking funds from poor Romanians (especially children and elderly from rural areas). The far-right AUR party and other populist politicians have been particularly successful in exploiting this messaging. There is a risk this might create a lack of interest from mainstream parties of the democratic center to support refugees integration programs from fear of public backlash and paying a political price.

Anti-Sanction:



Key findings: Between Oct 24 – Nov 07, the anti-sanctions narrative created content speculating around the consequences the war in Ukraine will have on the quality of life in the Black Sea Region. The war and the conflict with Russia is justified more and more as planned by the West in anti-Western narratives, using the current economic situation and the price increases as proof of the sacrifice Eastern Europe has to make. On comparison, the hypocrisy of Western countries that have hidden deals with Russia remains a popular topic. The Romanian government is blamed for letting its citizens suffer from an increase in prices and costs in general.



Gheorghe Piperea
7 November at 10:14 · 🌐

The current Secretary General of NATO, the Norwegian Jens Stoltenberg, will become governor of Norway's central bank.

It is not this incredible Soviet staff rotation (called the revolving door pa amerikansky) that bothers the most. And neither is the fact that an ins is also suitable for the military and geostrategy, and for banking - which destroys the myth of the useful idiots of the pandemic who believed fervently in the "specialist" and the "expert" who does his job well and who forbade us let's get involved, that we are not doctors, aitistists, soldiers, bankers, but that our lives and fortunes are destroyed, and not their mountains of money.

The most disturbing thing is that Norway has made continents of money from gas and oil, as a result of the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine war, an escalation that Stoltenberg is no stranger to. Europe is going crazy, and Norway is thriving. A big and greasy bravo to the leaders of the European NATO member countries.

On the other hand, no one really cares about the purchase by the Romanian State of the 32 F-16 fighter jets, worth 388 million euros from ... Norway?

Buying F - 16s from 40 years ago to go head to head with Poutine is equivalent to buying non-euro, leaded gasoline cars, in the process of completely switching to cars without heat engines.



5K

230 comments 1K shares

Radio Gold FM Romania

6 November at 11:45 · 🌐

⋮

✓ <https://solidnews.ro/.../razboiul-actual-este-planificat.../>

SOLIDNEWS.RO

The current war is planned to last 20 years and will be devastating to Europe. The first victim...

Author: Michael Hudson Germany has become an economic satellite of the new US Cold War against Russia, China and the rest of Eurasia. Germany and other NATO countries have been invited to impose trade and investment sanctions on each other, whic...

i

👍 🤔 😬 Francisc Gerschner and 340 others

60 comments 83 shares

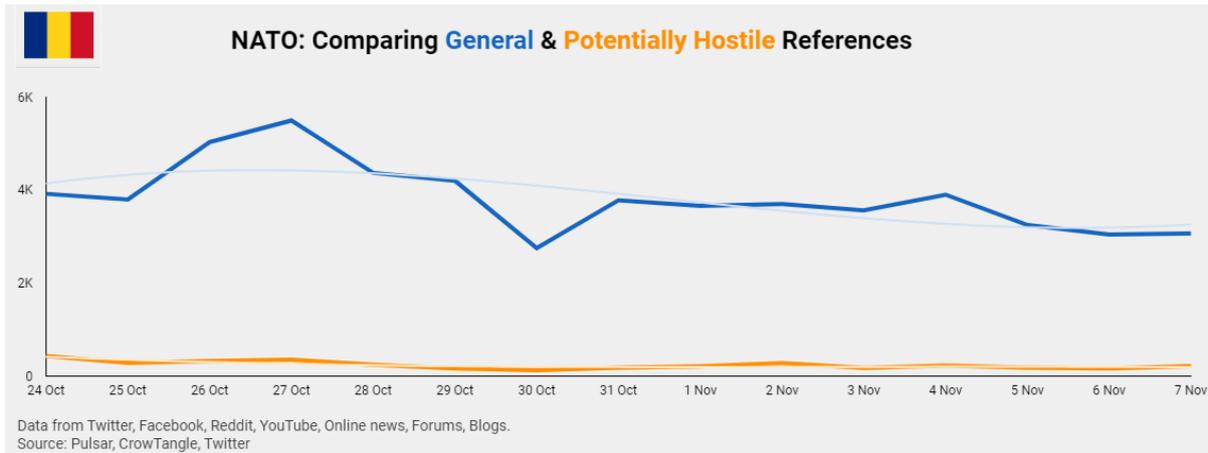
Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	80	80%	20	20%
Twitter	100	100%	0	0%
Total	180	90%	20	10%

Assessed Audience: General Public

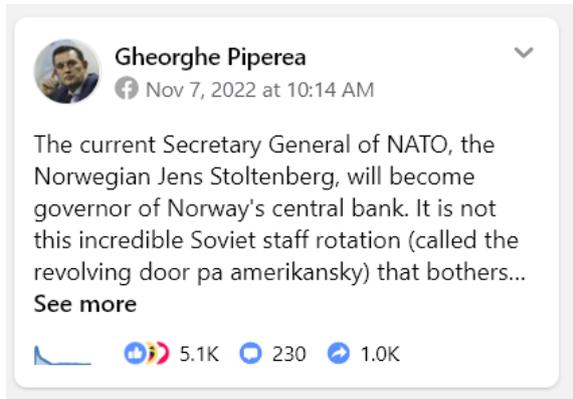
Risk assessment: High

Potential Impact: This narrative has the potential to gain more traction given the cost of living concerns of a large portion of the population as the winter season begins. As the temperature drops and gas and electricity usage increases there is likely to be a receptive audience to these narratives. Considering the active attempts to exploit this topic by political parties it is likely there will be an increase in hostile narratives in the media space that gain significant engagement.

Anti-NATO:



Key findings: During the reporting period, Oct 24 – Nov 07, references to NATO remained dominated by messaging supporting the Alliance with it clearly being seen as a guarantor of Romanian national security. The most popular narrative monitored in Romania, being considered by the majority the guarantee for our security. Anti-NATO messaging has been largely limited to political actors on the furthest fringes of the political spectrum. Former member of the far-right AUR party, Mihai Lasca (79k+ Facebook followers), is one who regularly promote anti-NATO content online. As a member of the Assembly of Deputies he promotes the view that Romania should remain neutral and stay out of the conflict which is presented as being between the US and Russia. The fear of retaliation from being a member of NATO is the most heavily exploited narrative by anti-NATO content.



Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	71	71%	29	29%
Twitter	96	96%	4	4%
Total	167	84%	33	17%

Assessed Audience: Political Extremist, Anti-Vax Followers

Risk assessment: *Low*

Potential Impact: *The majority of the Romanian general public and major political parties support NATO, there is a risk that fears of military escalation have the potential to undermine support for NATO. The hostile narrative that has the most potential to undermine support are those focusing on potential escalation leading to direct Romanian involvement in the war and the possible use of nuclear weapons. However, with the largely organic support for NATO and a historical and cultural distrust of Russia the risk for significant policy change is low.*

Bulgaria:

Top line summary:

September:

- *Bulgaria held its third parliamentary snap election since 2021 on October 2nd. Thus, parties across the political spectrum used the war in Ukraine to defend their own values and ideals over the whole of September. The pre-election campaign was dominated by the different impacts of the war in Bulgaria and Europe, the perceived energy crisis and the looming stagflation. Noteworthy, the aggressively pro-Russian party Revival (Vazrajdane) ranked the most active party in terms of media presence, as well as the leader amongst those spreading untrue information and highly polarizing propaganda messages on social media.*
- *An announcement for partial mobilization by the Russian president in the beginning of September re-kindled the war discourse in the Bulgarian public space. Following the announcement, a diverse array of political figures and groups chimed in the overall discussion on the outcome of the war in Ukraine. Supporters on either side of the conflict welcomed the decision as a clear sign of their side's success. Bulgarians in favor of Russian's 'special military operation' saw the mobilization as evidence of the nearing Russian win, while those supporting Ukraine identified the Kremlin's move as a last-resort-kind-of act, indicating desperation and massive losses.*
- *Tensions arose around rising energy bills and fears that Bulgaria had not had sufficient gas reserves for the coming winter. The hot topic was further fueled by several fluctuations in gas prices as decided by the state energy commission. Energy discourse is greatly politicized in Bulgaria which is visible not only in the light of domestic work, but also in the public aftermath of the alleged sabotage of Nord Stream 2.*

October:

- *In October, the biggest news connected to the war in Ukraine in the Bulgarian public discourse was the attack on the Crimea bridge. In the initial days, following the attack, Russian officials claimed that the alleged van, carrying explosives, had either come from or passed through Bulgaria. Naturally, these claims fueled yet more polarizing discourse, focusing on the role of Bulgaria in the conflict. In just a few days the claims were proven false, however, the event gave enough ammunition to Russian supporters within the country.*
- *Following the end of the initial government-led framework for re-housing Ukrainians who have run from the war, the caretaker government announced an extension to the housing system for another month. Originally, Ukrainians were placed in hotels, especially on the seaside which became a problem during the summer season. As a solution, the then government decided to house these families in government facilities, moving them regularly from one facility to another. The re-housing system*

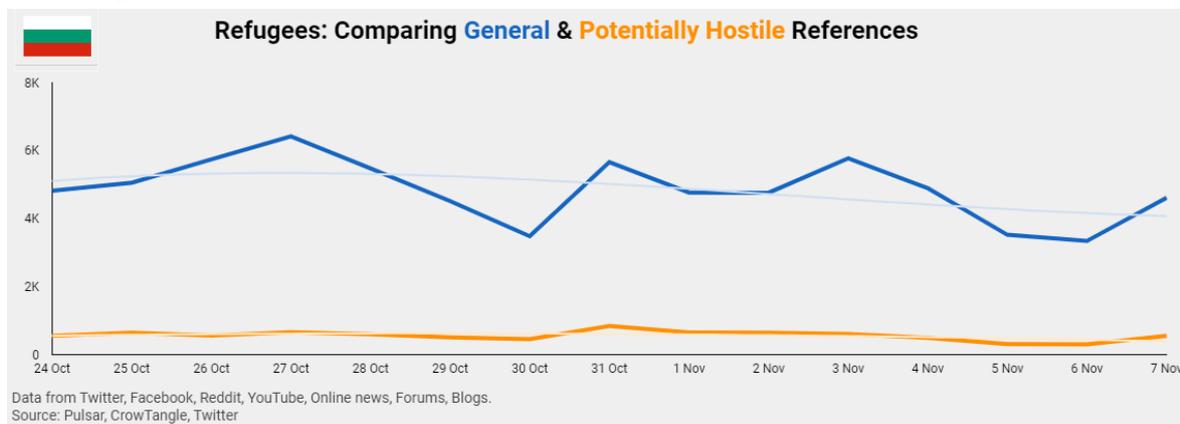
has been supported by EU funds. In the meantime, a negative sentiment against the aid, provided by the Bulgarian government, emerged in connection to devastating floods that occurred in the country.

- *Inline with other European nations, energy security and diversification continued to be a hot topic in Bulgaria in October. A major event, though, was the official launch of the gas connector with Greece. Long awaited for, the connector is a cornerstone within the energy narrative, as it is supposed to ease Bulgaria's dependence on Gazprom. It is also hoped that it will bring greater diversification of energy sources. The anticipated completion of the project led to a reduction in natural gas prices.*

01-07 November:

- *At the start of November, and during the first working days of the newly elected National Assembly, an argument emerged whether Bulgaria should provide military aid for Ukraine. After long and exhausting discussions, the vote was successful. This discussion had been ongoing from the days of the previous parliament, when an official decision could not be reached. However, evidence had emerged that Bulgaria was indirectly supporting Ukraine. Still, the terms and conditions for the provision of Bulgarian military aid to Ukraine remain unclear.*
- *Bulgaria will be ordering a second batch of F-16 jets – this is another major decision, taken by the Bulgarian parliament in the first week of November. The modernization of the country's military has long caused tensions amongst the public. The latest developments relate to an announcement from a few months ago that an order for F-16s will be delayed due to Covid-caused production issues. The most recent decision has infuriated the pro-Russian Revival party (Vazrajdana), who have previously called for protests against what they see as a national betrayal.*

Anti-Refugee:



Key findings: *Since the last reporting period in August, the anti-refugee narrative has been simmering in the background. Two significant events have led to an increase in engagement with this specific topic. On one side, Bulgaria suffered devastating flash floods in September which impacted negatively this narrative and further increased tensions between Ukrainians and the local communities. [Social media users](#) expressed anger at the government, alleging that the Ukrainian refugees were treated more favorably than their fellow citizens in need. This dissatisfaction was exacerbated by the other big event in the last while – a continuation of the relocation program, offered by the Bulgarian government, to Ukrainian refugees. In the first week of November, the re-housing of Ukrainians in the Elhovo distribution center [caused tension](#). News outlets reported on the complaints of the asylum seekers who were distraught by the [substandard conditions](#). The Minister of tourism, Ilin Dimitrov, stated that the Ukrainian accommodation program would end on 15 November*

citing budgetary deficit, and claimed that Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria received the best treatment in Europe, even though Bulgaria is the poorest EU member. Anton Kutev, a member of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), commented that the center hosts both Ukrainian refugees and Bulgarians who lost their homes in the floods. He added that both groups receive the same treatment, suggesting that Ukrainians are spoiled and ungrateful. Throughout the whole period, different actors notorious for their anti-refugee rhetoric, including news outlets, political parties, and Facebook groups, distributed [articles](#) reinforcing the same idea.



Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	41	95%	59	5%
Twitter	38	76%	12	24%
Total	79	53%	71	47%

Assessed Audience: General Public

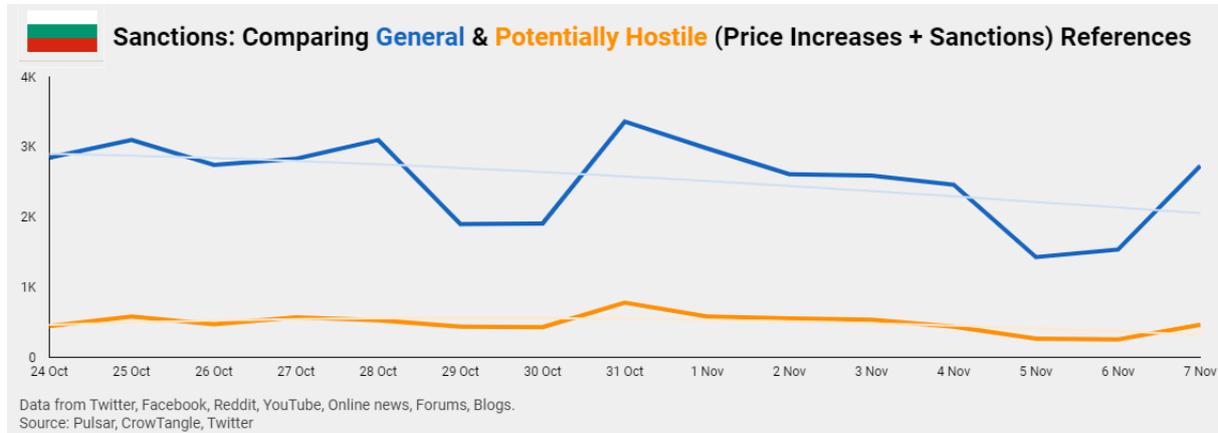
The Bulgarian society is highly polarized in terms of its support of Russia and Ukraine in the current conflict. Consequently, Bulgarians are divided in their reaction to the predominant anti-refugee rhetoric too. Generally, Bulgarian Facebook users are more receptive to disinformation and anti-refugee rhetoric, while Bulgarian Twitter users are predominantly sympathetic to Ukrainian refugees and called out attempts to erode support for asylum seekers. In light of domestic issues like flash floods or support to the re-housing programs, however, anti-refugee rhetoric could more easily reach and sway communities that don't have a clear position on the topic. The negative sentiment towards Ukrainians thus has the potential to influence large portions of the Bulgarian society, especially if it uses other contentious hot topics as comparison for treatment between 'us' (Bulgarian citizens) and 'others' (Ukrainians).

Risk Assessment: Medium

Potential Impact: Eroded support for Ukraine and a noticeable war fatigue could lead to an escalation in anti-Ukraine sentiment among local communities. The case of the flash floods in Bulgaria is a great example how an increase in an 'us' vs 'them' narrative can lead to further polarization within the Bulgarian society where there are hardcore pro-Russian and hardcore pro-Ukrainian supporters. There is also a potential for a spillover effect where the dissatisfaction is not only with the government and the government-sponsored programs for re-housing refugees, but also with the civil society sector for allocation of funds towards Ukrainians as opposed to Bulgarians. Such cases also further reinforce the idea that Bulgarians are poor and more deserving of support, causing a divide between the locals and the refugees. Aside from the civil society sector, Ukrainian refugees themselves are also at risk, as a more pronounced anti-Ukrainian attitude could make them

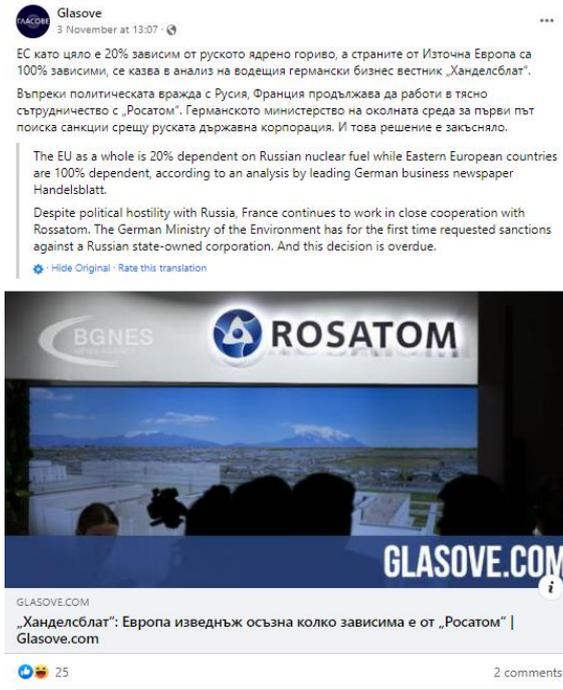
easy targets for on- and offline abuse and harassment. Due to the unstable political situation, Ukrainian refugees are often used as a scapegoat and could be on the receiving end of 'us vs. them' anti-refugee policies initiated by far-right or pro-Russian parties like Revival or BSP.

Anti-Sanction:



Key findings: Conversations about the consequences of the sanctions took a back seat during the period, overshadowed by intense discussions around the National Assembly’s decision to send weapons to Ukraine. The Parliament’s decision to send military aid to Ukraine (albeit the extent of the aid is unknown) has shifted the focus of pro-Russian politicians and pundits. Thus, the anti-sanctions topic was mostly driven by sporadic and unrelated media publications in the given time period. Stories about [Russia’s alleged successes](#) in circumventing Western sanctions and a reported surge in its international trade revenue were amongst the discussed topics under this narrative. News reports about flourishing bilateral trade ties between [Turkey](#) and Russia, [Serbia's refusal](#) to join the sanctions, and [Hungary's latest](#) attempts to obstruct the EU from introducing even more sanctions were met with approval by pro-Russian social media users in Bulgaria. Media outlets, such as pro-Russian websites [Pogled Info](#) and [Glasove](#), spread stories about Western countries purportedly re-establishing commercial ties with Russia in defiance of the sanctions, thus making a two-pronged claim: that Russia’s economic importance to Europe is insurmountable, and that Western countries are hypocritical and would violate the sanctions in pursuit of their own interests. Finally, [video reports](#) from [anti-sanction protests](#) across Europe [continued to be shared](#) widely.





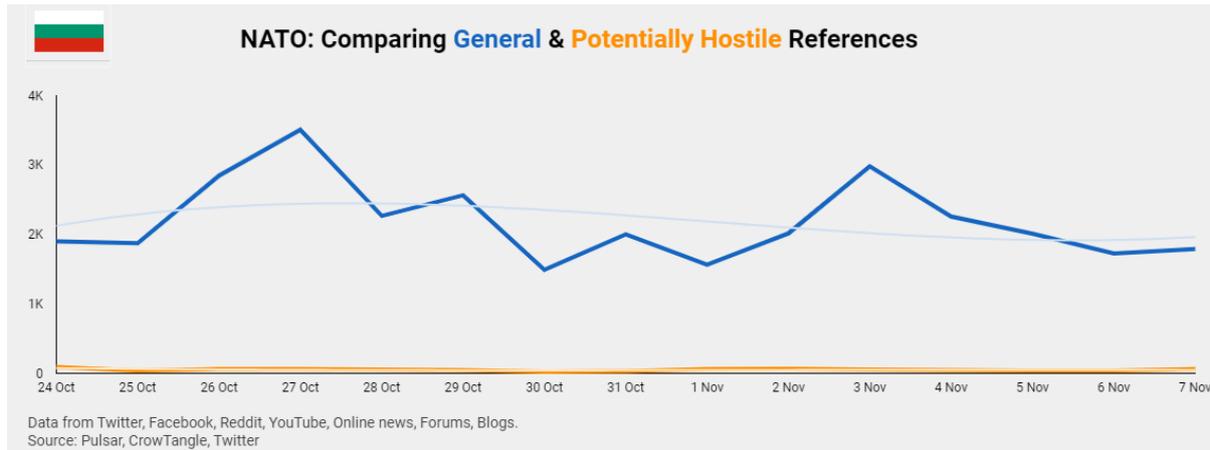
Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	60	60%	40	40%
Twitter	100	100%	0	0%
Total	160	80%	40	20%

Assessed Audience: General Public

Risk Assessment: *Medium*

Potential Impact: Case studies, where countries such as Turkey, Serbia, and Hungary are exemplified, serve to reinforce the myth that the benefits of trading with Russia are far too big to be abandoned. This suggestion is in tune with the long-standing talking point that Western countries in general and Bulgaria, in particular, are mostly harming themselves by imposing sanctions on Moscow. Another persistent myth that is being reiterated claims that Russia’s economy is surviving the sanctions largely unscathed. None of these viewpoints is new and they are more likely to reinforce the views of Bulgarians who are already pro-Russian, rather than win over large new segments of the Bulgarian public. However, when such articles emerge in non-biased media outlets, the potential to swing those in the middle towards an anti-sanction attitude is higher.

Anti-NATO:



Key findings: Discussions about the Parliament’s decision to send military aid to Ukraine largely dominated the media space in the given period, yielding most of the anti-NATO rhetoric. A fringe media’s post about Bulgarian President Rumen Radev’s [refusa to support](#) Ukraine’s NATO membership was widely shared on Facebook and applauded by pro-Russian users. Suggestions that any motion to support Ukraine militarily would weaken Bulgaria’s army or even drag it into the war were also trending. The debate intensified prior to and following the National Assembly’s November 3 official decision to send Bulgarian weapons to Ukraine. Russian-leaning party BSP, which voted against the decision, was quick to denounce it and [called itself](#) “the party of peace”. Another pro-Kremlin party, the far-right Revival, [staged a protest](#) in front of the Parliament building. While according to politicians from the Revival party, many had gathered to protest against the vote, in reality the protest [was poorly attended](#). A quote by Revival’s leader, Kostadin Kostadinov, stating that Bulgaria should leave NATO, was used as pretext to organize an [online vote on the matter](#) which received 21k+ engagements on Facebook including 450 shares.





Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	38	38%	62	62%
Twitter	97	97%	3	3%
Total	135	68%	65	33%

Assessed Audience: *General Public*

The period was characterized by a very high-stake debate about Bulgaria’s overall stance in the conflict. The anti-NATO messaging was, therefore, targeted at a wide audience, as it aimed to convince as many Bulgarians as possible that weapons should not be sent to Ukraine and that, in a broader sense, close adherence to NATO’s common positions runs against the country’s interest.

Risk assessment: *High*

Potential Impact: The public has been widely divided in its support of military aid to Ukraine since the beginning of the war. This is easily explained with the highly polarised Bulgarian society, split in its support for Russia too. Until recently, attempts to send arms were thwarted by various political actors (from across the political field), which was met with approval by the large pro-Russian segments of the local public. Most recently, the matter escalated, with statements by party leaders and the country’s President exacerbating the anti-Ukraine and anti-NATO talk. When the National Assembly finally voted in favor of granting arms to Ukraine, *the outcry* by Russian supporters was particularly loud. Stories about *upcoming protests* against the country’s NATO membership gained even more traction. Fierce anti-NATO rhetoric is likely to last and escalate when (or if) Bulgaria begins actual weapons deliveries.