

# HOSTILE NARRATIVE BRIEF: WAR IN UKRAINE

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NOVEMBER 2022

BRIEF No. 16

## Hostile Narrative Brief: War in Ukraine (November 2022)

### Introduction:

Since the beginning of March, the International Republican Institute's Beacon Project has produced [regular briefs](#) on hostile narratives related to the war in Ukraine. As Russia's war of aggression continues, the Beacon Project has contracted local analysts in multiple central and eastern European countries to help support this monitoring initiative.

The month of November was marked by one significant incident which highlighted the unintended consequence of war and the potential for Russia's war of aggression to expand beyond Ukrainian territory. On November 15 a Ukrainian surface-to-air missile accidentally landed in Polish territory killing two people as Ukrainian missile defenses responded to one of the largest barrages of Russian missiles since the beginning of the war. This incident provided additional context to anti-Ukrainian messaging, including the three topics monitored in this report series: sanctions, refugees, and NATO.

Despite initial fears that a Ukrainian missile landing in Polish territory might increase anti-Ukrainian sentiment, the opposite was largely true. The incident was widely seen as a result of Russia's war of aggression and not the fault of Ukrainian in their attempt to defend their citizens from the Russian onslaught. The incident did, however, provide additional opportunities for messaging that has the potential to erode support for Ukraine. Some of the most significant points were unfortunate messaging by Ukrainian President Zelensky implying that it was a Russian missile rather than Ukrainian and some officials of NATO governments who also suggested it was a Russian attack on a NATO country. Furthermore, a misguided policy from the Polish government to wait hours before releasing official communications on the incident also ceded space in the media environment for disinformation and other forms of hostile messaging to spread.

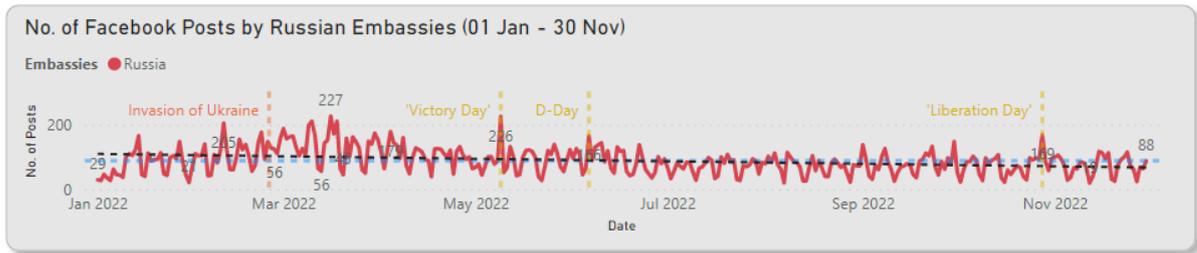
The second most important context for messaging during the month of November was the economic crisis and the implications the coming winter has for citizens to heat their homes and maintain their standards of living. Concerns around household energy security were specifically covered at length in a [special report published](#) on 05 December, but continued to provide a backdrop for much of the hostile narratives and will continue to be followed in future monthly reports. The biggest risks related to economic concerns stem largely from political opportunists using the economic crisis as a means of attacking national governments and the European Union in an attempt to gain political advantage. Although still largely limited to actors in the political extremes, a particularly harsh winter or worsening economic conditions could encourage more mainstream parties to attempt to take advantage of the situation.

### Overall Top Line Summary:

- The countries with the highest proportion of **potentially hostile** content in their media space in November are the Czech Republic (19.2%), Slovakia (18.8%), and Romania (18.6%) .
- The proportion of potentially hostile content on the three topics monitored across all countries were refugees (25.4%), sanctions (17.1%), and NATO (11.4%).
- The high number of potentially hostile content was largely driven by broader economic concerns rather than targeted anti-refugee narratives based on manual analysis of Facebook content.
- The sanctions topic was also largely driven by broader concerns of economic uncertainty and anxiety around energy security.
- NATO received largely positive coverage as a result of the missile incident in Poland and the Alliance's foreign minister meeting in Bucharest.

## Russian Embassy Activity:

(View on the [interactive dashboard](#))



- Monitoring of 44 Official Russian Embassy Facebook pages across Europe show an increase in posting activity from the summer months with October and November each recording an average of 73 posts/day compared to 71 posts/day in August.
- The Russian Embassies in Slovakia and Romania remain highly active based on the number of posts made in the November.

name	host_country	Posts by Date	No. of Posts	No. of Shares	Shares (avg.)	Post Performance (avg.)
<a href="#">Veľvyslanectvo Ruska na Slovensku/ Посольство России в Словакии</a>	SK		4767	49918	10.47	-1.42
<a href="#">Ambasada Rusiei în România - Посольство России в Румынии</a>	RO		3033	16105	5.31	-2.44
<a href="#">Посольство России в Северной Македонии/Амбасада на Русија во Сев.Македонија</a>	MK		1913	8207	4.29	-1.18
<a href="#">Посольство России в Латвии</a>	LV		1778	8463	4.76	-4.44
<a href="#">Russian Embassy in Reykjavik</a>	IS		1766	733	0.42	-14.03

- The Russian Embassy in Slovakia had the best performing post (18x better than their average post) in November with a post of gratitude to those who lit candles on the graves of Red Army soldiers on All Saints Day, using it as an opportunity to continue the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs modus operandi of using references to World War II to communicate their narratives.

Original (Slovak+Russian)	Machine Translation (Slovak+English)
<p>18.0x 1,902 +1.8K 124 +116 281 +276</p>	<p>18.0x 1,902 +1.8K 124 +116 281 +276</p>

## Country Overviews: War and Energy Security

### Bulgaria



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*A Data Pro*

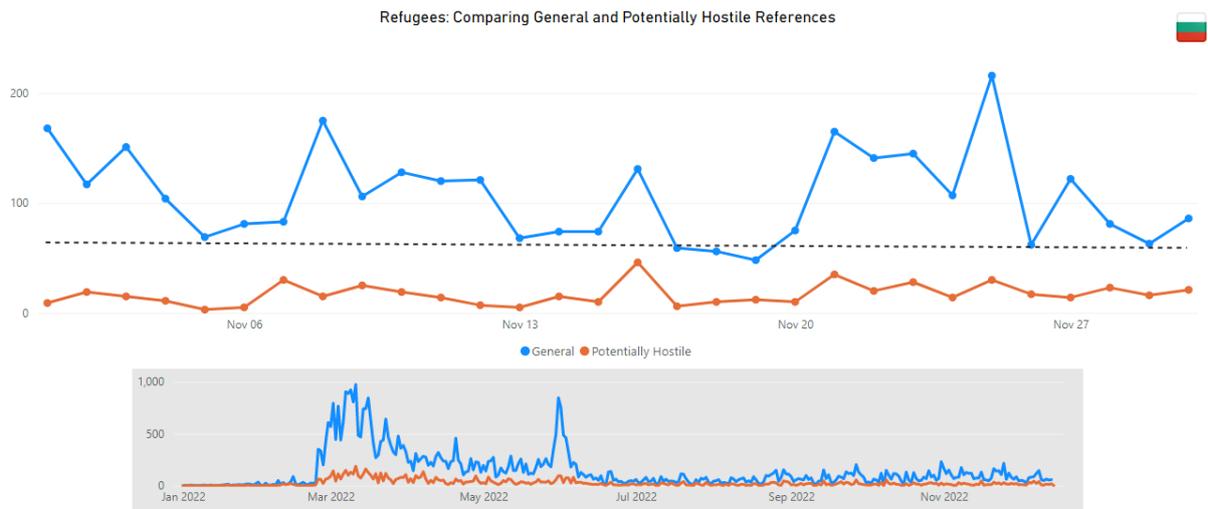
[Lubomir Donchev, Valentin Valkanov](#)  
*Human and Social Studies Foundation*

[Nikola Tulechki](#)  
*Data for Good*

### Top Line Summary:

- Reports of Ukrainian refugees complaining to the EU about Bulgaria’s treatment elicited a strong and largely negative response from social media users. The end of the month saw an increase in the number of Ukrainians leaving the country.
- Existing hostile narratives related to the economic burden of the sanctions, and Russia’s alleged ability to withstand their impact, continued to be prominent in social media conversations.
- Two major events in November heightened the public discourse around NATO’s role. A decision to send military aid to Ukraine prompted many to ask whether Bulgaria is about to take an active role in the war. The errant missiles that fell on Polish soil also inspired questions as to NATO’s readiness to activate article 5.
- Notably, Italy’s decision to take control over Lukoil’s refinery in Sicily made the headlines in Bulgaria. Many in Bulgaria saw a possible intervention into Lukoil’s business as threatening to domestic energy security and prices. Others, however, used the example from Italy as a potential action towards the refinery in Bulgaria too. Democratic Bulgaria (DB) proposed a bill, which would enable the Bulgarian government to take control over the refinery or other energy sector enterprises in case of alleged uncertainty about domestic energy security. The bill is yet to pass parliamentary approval.
- In November, there were also several occasions of suspicious and/or coordinated activity on Facebook. On 3 November, the day the Bulgarian Parliament voted in favor of sending weapons to Ukraine, five Facebook pages shared the same image in the span of an hour, with another page following suit the next day.

**Anti-Refugee:**



**Key Findings:** Hostile sentiment towards Ukrainian refugees prevailed in November. That was especially true on Facebook, where 88% of the most popular publications expressed some form of hostility. Much of the content in the first half of the month related to news about Ukrainians protesting against the changes to a government housing scheme. The particular focus on Ukrainian protests against the living conditions reinforced the existing anti-refugee notions that Ukrainians are ungrateful and spoiled “tourists”.

This concept was later exploited by [public figures](#) such as Tsoncho Ganev, a member of the far-right and pro-Russian Revival party. An [article](#), with a potential audience on Facebook of over 945,000 people, reported that Ukrainians sent a letter to the government demanding better integration policies and threatening to appeal to the EU to decrease or cease funding for the Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria if their conditions were not met. It received decidedly negative feedback amongst Facebook users, who often suggested that the Ukrainian refugees should return to Ukraine or move to a wealthier EU country instead.



Screenshot [swomen.eu](https://www.women.eu)



Screenshot [novini.bg](https://www.novini.bg)

On 15 November, the government’s announcement that Ukrainian refugees would be allowed to remain at hotels until February 2023, further ignited discussions on how they should be housed. By the end of November, several media sources had reported that the majority of Ukrainian refugees housed in Elhovo’s distribution center had decided to leave the country and seek shelter in Romania instead. Some of the hotels, housing refugees, announced that they would start evicting Ukrainian refugees due to a lack of funding for free meals.

Media outlets also regularly shared publications about Ukrainians allegedly [wreaking havoc abroad](#) and mistreating [locals](#), calling for an end to this [“misplaced solidarity”](#).

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	12	12%	88	88%
Twitter	59	84%	11	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>58%</b>

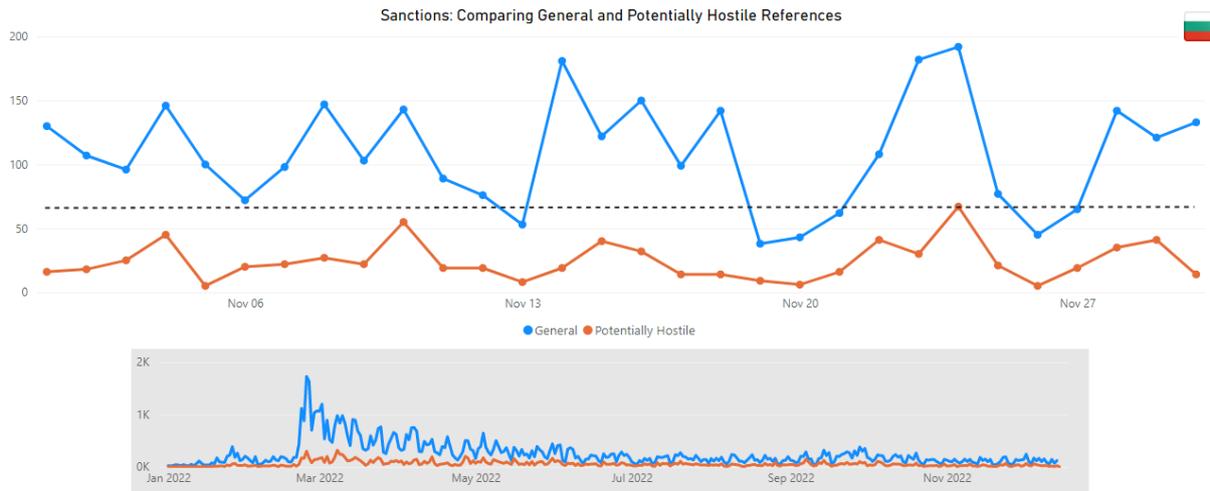
**Assessed Audience:** General Public

The controversies surrounding the extension of the re-housing program and the protests targeted the apolitical general public. Comments by far right and pro-Russian public figures usually only appeal to their electorate, now they have the potential to appeal to the average citizen, concerned about getting through the upcoming winter.

**Risk Assessment:** **High**

**Potential Impact:** In the first half of the month, there was continuing worry about the potential for a new wave of Ukrainian refugees in the upcoming months, which was exploited by media outlets and social media accounts seeking to undermine support for refugees in Bulgaria. This could exacerbate the current anti-refugee narratives and increase their negative impact on the general population. Public figures doubling down on the assumption that Ukrainians are given more privileges than Bulgarian citizens can erode state and individual support for refugees. Given the unstable domestic political situation and the lack of consistent government-level support for Ukrainian refugees, it is likely that the number of Ukrainians fleeing Bulgaria to return to Ukraine or move to another country will increase in the upcoming months.

**Anti-Sanction:**



**Key Findings:** A review of the most popular social media posts showed an equal division between those more likely to promote hostile and non-hostile content. However, this was skewed by results from Twitter which tends to be a more liberal userbase and not representative of the general public. On Facebook alone, hostile messages made up 61% of the content in the top 100 most interacted with posts. Compared to Twitter, where non-hostile posts outnumbered the hostile ones by a 3:1 ratio. The sanctions and the recent decision to send weapons to Ukraine were both referenced often in debates among politicians. In a rare TV appearance, GERB party leader and former prime minister, Boyko Borissov, [praised his political rivals](#) from We Continue the Change (PP) and Democratic Bulgaria (DB) for supporting the military aid. At the same time, he accused the former governing coalition, which included both PP and DB, of violating the sanctions by purchasing Russian oil and gas. A media report suggesting that the PP-led former government had breached the sanctions by awarding a software services contract to a Russian-owned firm [was repeatedly shared](#) by Facebook users.

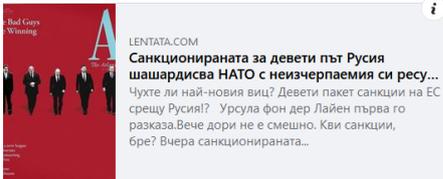
As the beginning of the EU’s embargo on Russian oil approached, the caretaker government’s decision to pursue the export of petroleum products made from Russian crude at a Russian-owned refinery drew increased criticism from [politicians](#) and [pundits](#).

Pro-Russian Facebook groups and pages posted that [the sanctions are designed](#) to establish [a global US hegemony](#). One of the most widely-shared publications came from a blogger and conservative activist, who claimed that Bulgaria’s adherence to the sanctions [contradicts its national interest](#). A [commentary](#) that likened the sanctions to a “joke” and exalted Moscow’s supposed economic and military strength became popular, gaining close to 5K interactions in total. The Russian Embassy in Sofia chimed in, [claiming](#) that the sanctions hurt Europe much more than Russia. Many fringe outlets shared a fabricated quote by High Representative Josep Borrell supposedly claiming that heating homes above 17 degrees was a crime against European values. It also circulated on social media, despite being [debunked](#) by the Bulgarian National Radio. Its reach was further amplified after it was reposted by far-right politicians [Tsoncho Ganev](#) (Revival party) and [Volen Siderov](#) (Attack party).

Original (Bulgarian)

**Карбовски**  
26 ноември в 17:48 ч. · 🌐

**МИЛЕН МИЛУШЕВ:**  
Вчера санкционираната за девети път Русия приема бюджет-заложената инфлация е 5 процента?! При над 20 процента в санкционирания ЕС?! Санкционираната за девети път Русия онзи ден пусна на вода най-големия ледоразбивач в света. Санкционираната за девети път Русия преди дни пусна под вода най-тихата, респективно невидима, подводница в света. Санкционираната за девети път Русия започна серийно производство на междуконтиненталната ракета "Сармат", която може да носи 10 ядрени бойни глави с общо тегло над 100 тона и обхват 18000 км. - това гарантира сигурността на държавата за 50 г. напред.



1,8 хил. 210 коментара 229 споделения

Machine Translation

**Karbowski**  
November 26 at 5:48 pm · 🌐

**MILEN MILUSHEV:**  
Yesterday, Russia, sanctioned for the ninth time, adopted the budget - inflation is set at 5 percent?! At over 20 percent in the sanctioning EU?! Sanctioned for the ninth time, Russia launched the world's largest icebreaker that day. Sanctioned for the ninth time, Russia launched the world's quietest, or rather invisible, submarine a few days ago. Sanctioned for the ninth time, Russia has started serial production of the Sarmat intercontinental missile, which can carry 10 nuclear warheads with a total weight of over 100 tons and a range of 18,000 km. - this guarantees the security of the state for the next 50 years.



1.8 borders. 210 comments 229 shares

Original (Bulgarian)

**Посолство России в Болгарии**  
29 ноември в 16:54 ч. · 🌐

**#AntiRussianSanctions**

■ Световната икономика продължава да търпи осезаеми загуби поради тотално свиване на търговско-икономическите връзки с Русия от колективния Запад и подтикване към това на други държави. Практически във всички страни се отбелязва забавяне на икономическия растеж. Редица водещи западни икономики в същност се оказват на ръба на рецесията. Намаляват се доходите на населението. Забележими загуби търпят предприемачи. Остръ социално-икономически проблем е безпрецедентно високата инфлация, особено в Европа.

⬇ Според Центъра на стратегически проекти, на фона на санкциите спрямо Русия чуждестранен бизнес е загубил към 240 млрд долл. Най-силно са пострадали американски компании, оцелели с над 100 млрд долл. В Европа ако съдим по БВП, най-сериозно на Русия е оказал най-голямо влияние във икономиката на Франция (минус 2% от БВП), Швеция (минус 1.5%), Великобритания (минус 1.3%) и Дания (минус 1%).

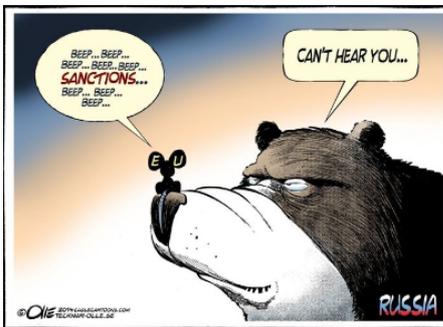
⬇ Така, например, решението да напусне руския пазар струва на американската компания McDonald's 1.3 млрд долл. Американската нефтосервисна корпорация Halliburton е продала руските си активи, които се оценяват на 340 млн долл. Разходите, които ще носи един от най-големите финансови конгломерати - американската компания CityGroup, се оценяват примерно на 170 млн долл., при това към 2.3 хил. сдружения и 15 клона ще бъдат съкратени. Компанията Microsoft оценява своите разходи поради свиване на дейността в Русия на 126 млн долл.

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■ Мировая экономика продолжает нести ощутимые потери вследствие тотального сворачивания коллективным Западом торго-экономических и инвестиционных связей с Россией и принуждения к этому других государств. Практически во всех странах фиксируется замедление динамики экономического роста. Ряд ведущих западных экономик, по сути, оказались на грани рецессии. Сокращаются доходы населения. Ощутимые потери несут предприниматели. Острый социально-экономическая проблема - беспрецедентно высокая инфляция, особенно в Европе.

По оценке Центра стратегических разработок, на фоне санкций в отношении России иностранный бизнес потерял около 240 млрд долл. В наибольшей степени пострадали американские компании, потерявшие более 100 млрд долл. В Европе в расчете на ВВП ущерб компаний из России оказал наибольшее влияние на экономику Финляндия (минус 2% ВВП), Швеция (минус 1.5%), Великобритания (минус 1.3%) и Дания (минус 1%).

Так, например, решение покинуть российский рынок обошлось американской компании McDonald's в 1.3 млрд долл. Американская нефтесервисная корпорация Halliburton продала российские активы, которые изначально оценивались в 340 млн долл. Расходы, которые понесет один из крупнейших финансовых конгломератов - американская компания CityGroup, оцениваются примерно в 170 млн долл., а под сокращение попадут около 2.3 тыс. ссуждений и 15 филиалов. Компания Microsoft оценила расходы из-за сворачивания деятельности в России в 126 млн долл. США.



Machine Translation

**Embassy of Russia in Bulgaria**  
November 29 at 4:54 pm · 🌐

**#Anti-RussianSanctions**

■ The world economy continues to suffer tangible losses due to total contraction of trade and economic ties with Russia by the collective West and incitement of other countries to do so. A slowdown in economic growth is observed in practically all countries. A number of leading Western economies have actually found themselves on the brink of recession. The incomes of the population are decreasing. Entrepreneurs suffer noticeable losses. An acute socio-economic problem is the unprecedentedly high inflation, especially in Europe.

⬇ According to the Center of Strategic Projects, against the backdrop of the sanctions against Russia, foreign business has lost about 240 billion dollars. American companies suffered the most, with losses of over \$100 billion. In Europe, if we judge by GDP, Russia's exit had the biggest impact on the economy of France (minus 2% of GDP), Sweden (minus 1.5%), Great Britain (minus 1.3%) and Denmark (minus 1%).

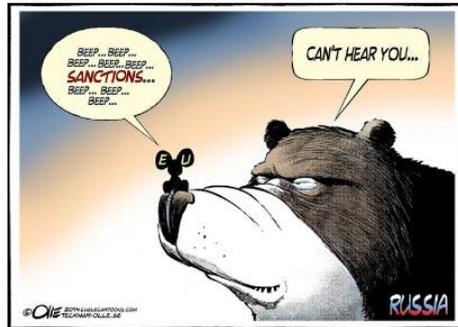
⬇ So, for example, the decision to leave the Russian market cost the American company McDonald's \$1.3 billion. The American oil service corporation Halliburton has sold its Russian assets, which are estimated at 340 million dollars. The costs, which will be borne by one of the largest financial conglomerates - the American company CityGroup, are estimated at approximately 170 million dollars, while 2.3 thousand employees and 15 branches will be laid off. The Microsoft company estimates its costs due to the reduction of activity in Russia at 126 million dollars.

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■ The world economy continues to suffer tangible losses as a result of the total curtailment by the collective West of trade, economic and investment ties with Russia and forcing other states to do so. Practically in all countries, a slowdown in the dynamics of economic growth is recorded. A number of leading Western economies, in fact, were on the verge of recession. The income of the population is decreasing. Entrepreneurs bear the tangible losses. An acute socio-economic problem is unprecedentedly high inflation, especially in Europe.

According to the Center for Strategic Studies, against the backdrop of sanctions against Russia, foreign business lost about \$240 billion; American companies suffered the most, losing more than \$100 billion. In Europe, in terms of GDP, the departure of companies from Russia had the greatest impact on the Finnish economy (minus 2% of GDP), Sweden (minus 1.5%), Great Britain (minus 1.3%) and Denmark (minus 1%).

For example, the decision to leave the Russian market cost the American company McDonald's \$1.3 billion. The American oilfield services corporation Halliburton sold Russian assets, which were originally estimated at \$340 million, about 170 million dollars, and about 2.3 thousand employees and 15 branches will be cut. Microsoft has estimated the cost of winding down operations in Russia at \$126 million.



Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	39	39%	61	61%
Twitter	31	76%	10	24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>50%</b>

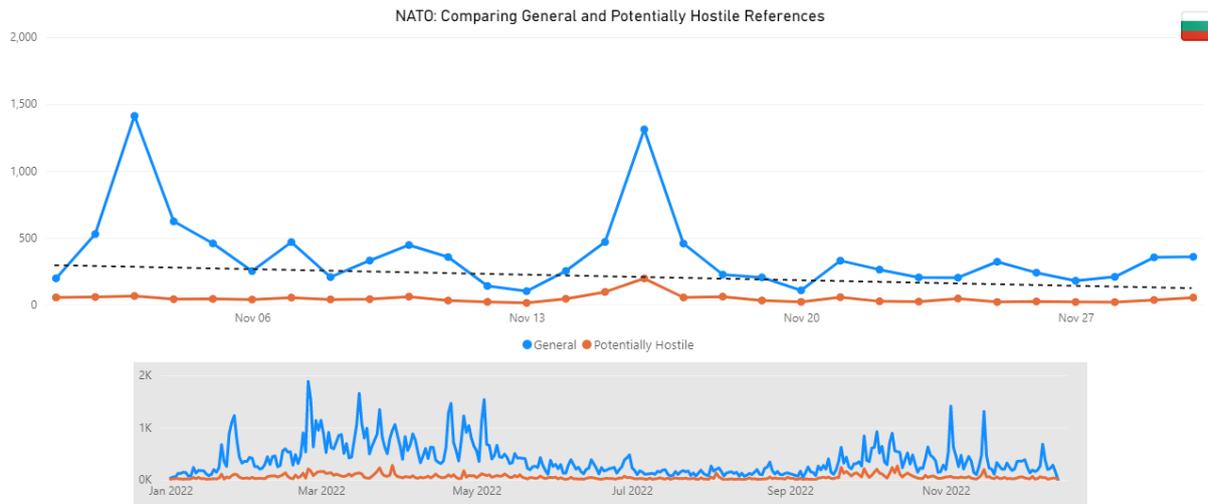
**Assessed Audience:** General Public

Due to a tense political situation, many politicians adopted various anti-sanctions-related narratives in populist attempts to win over the general public's support.

**Risk Assessment:** **Medium**

**Potential Impact:** Russian supporters tend to highlight that many countries have retained or even expanded their trade ties with Moscow. Such notions can further erode the already limited general support for sanctions, coming mainly from worries about internal economic instabilities. In the current tense political environment, parties accuse each other of openly or covertly supporting Moscow. The repetition of these narratives could increase attitudes of distrust towards politicians' commitments to the anti-Russia sanctions.

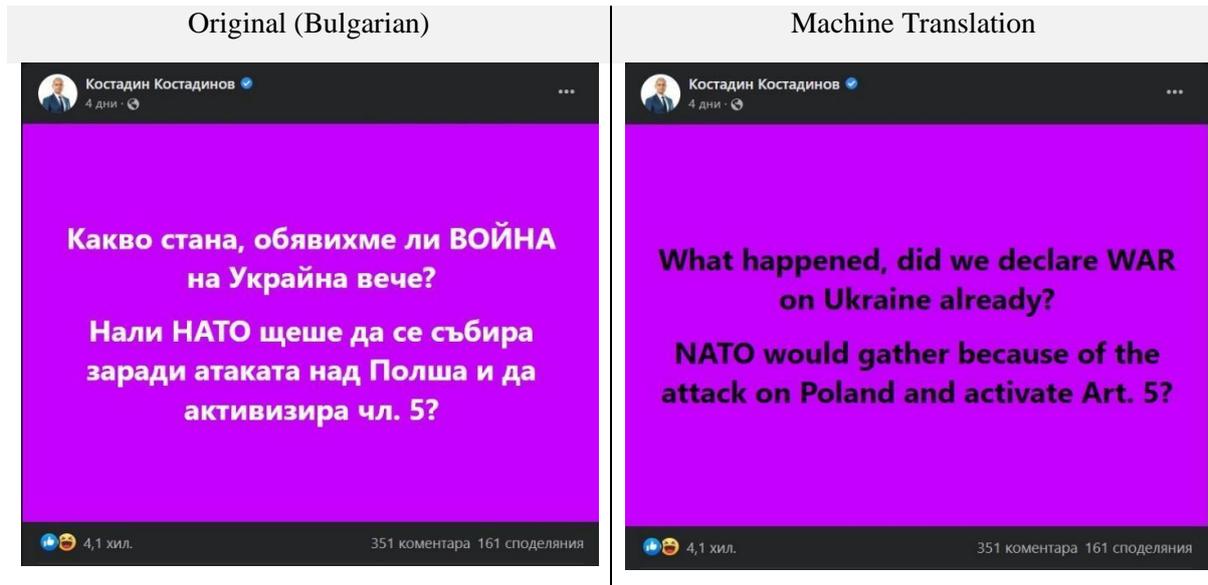
**Anti-NATO:**



**Key Findings:** Non-hostile messages slightly outnumbered the hostile ones during the month. However, the bulk of the non-hostile conversation again took place on Twitter, whereas Facebook, which is considered to be more representative of the general public, witnessed most of the hostile publications. Two major events in November fueled media coverage related to NATO: the Bulgarian parliament’s decision to send weapons and military aid to Ukraine, and the deadly incident in which two errant rockets landed on Polish territory. The spike in NATO mentions is clearly visible the day after the accident in Poland on November 16. Regarding military aid, media outlets have been writing about the current inventory reviews [in the military warehouses](#), which show [what armament the government is able to send to Ukraine](#). However, the positive coverage in relation to the NATO narrative ends here, with 68% of the most engaged Facebook content containing hostile messages.

The incident in Poland provoked contradictory sentiment towards NATO allies. The major political parties in the Parliament were more cautious with statements on the topic, while the pro-Russian Revival party [used the uncertainty of the situation](#) to question the willingness of the Alliance to

activate article 5 if needed. MEP Ivo Hristov commented on the [missile crash](#), suggesting that the EU’s continuous support for Ukraine could be abused by Kyiv. Hristov, who is a member of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), also speculated that the Ukrainian government, which claimed that the missile’s origin was Russian, wanted to engage NATO and the rest of Europe in the war. BSP made the news on 26 November as well when its supporters rallied against the government’s decision to send weapons to Ukraine. BSP’s leader Kornelia Ninova shared a [post](#) on her Facebook page calling for Bulgaria’s neutrality and a peaceful resolution.



Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	25	25%	75	75%
Twitter	86	83%	14	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>45%</b>

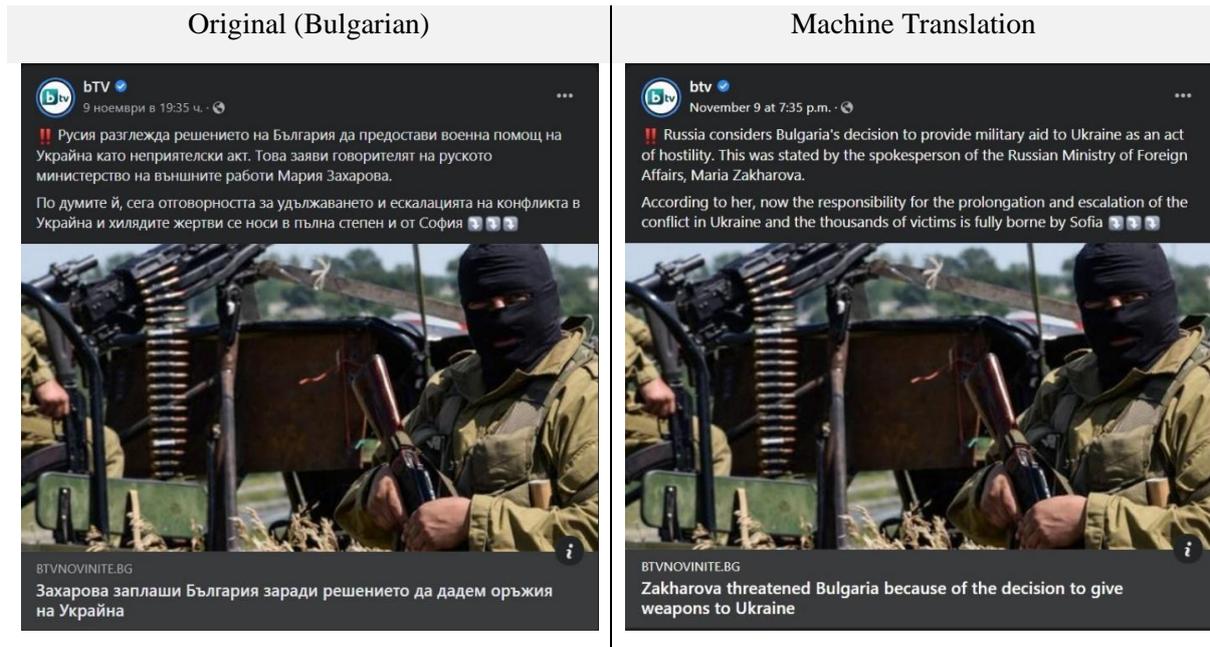
**Assessed Audience:** General Public

Influential public figures are divided in their opinions on both hot topics during this reporting period. This rift further amplifies the discourse and allows for a wider audience to be influenced by negative messaging. There is a [popular argument](#) that sending weapons to Ukraine risks Bulgaria taking an active part in the war, while its support is seen as too limited to influence the course of the war. Moreover, sending military equipment to Ukraine [will compromise the country’s own defense](#). When the argument is made in this way, coupled with a common narrative that Bulgaria’s defense is outdated and very limited, the ordinary citizen is more likely to be influenced by anti-NATO sentiments.

Potentially wider reaching are comments asking [ironically](#) whether NATO will go to war with Ukraine. Pro-Russian [media](#) figures also play scenarios where Ukraine poses as Russia to fire rockets into Poland and thus provoke the activation of Article 5. Russian MFA spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, also made a public [statement](#) blaming the Bulgarian government for sending military aid to Ukraine, and accusing them of bearing ‘full responsibility for prolonging the war in Ukraine.’ Such statements could further rekindle an old West vs East discourse amongst the Bulgarian public.

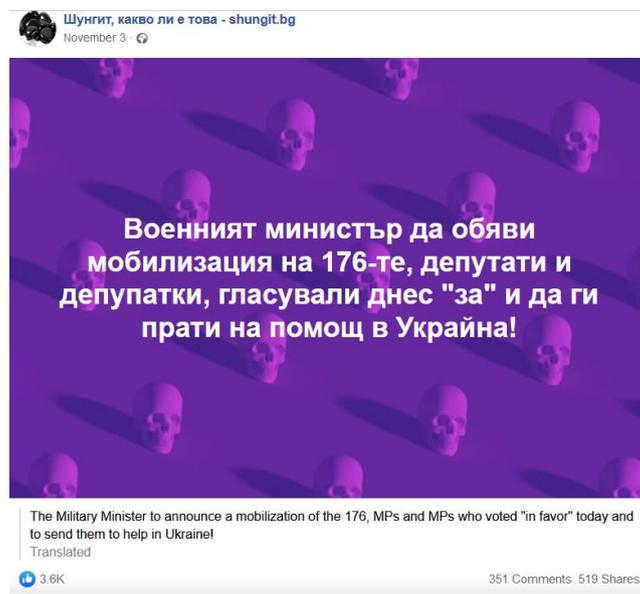
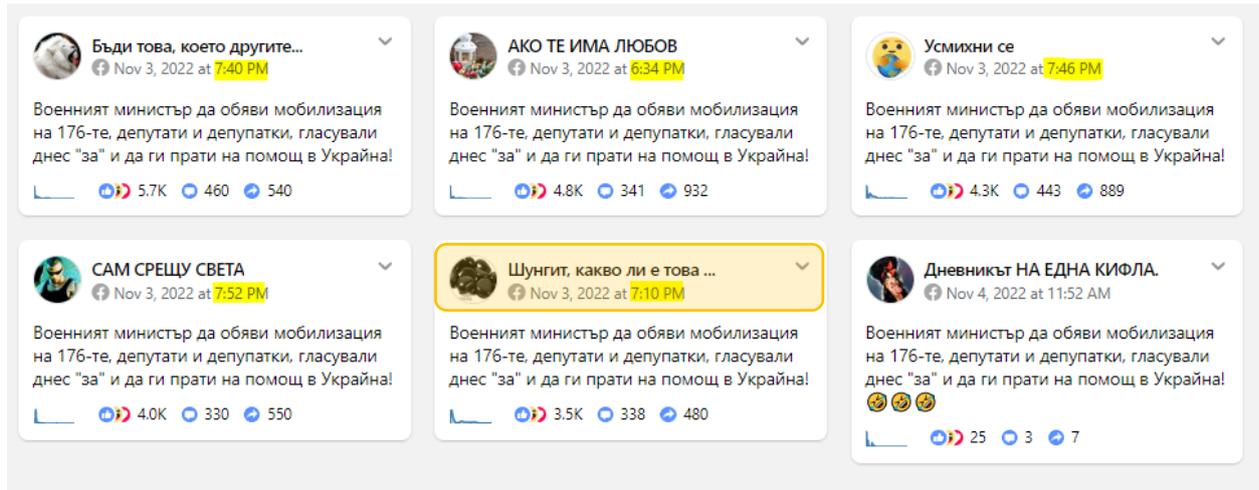
**Risk Assessment: High**

**Potential Impact:** A shared worry is the possible escalation of the war and the possibility of future NATO intervention. This ties to another concern - the extent to which NATO could provide security to its member states. The contested origin of the rockets that fell on Polish soil further sparks speculations on the subject, heightening the anti-NATO sentiments. Internally, Bulgaria is in a destabilizing [political crisis](#) and the topic of the war in Ukraine induces further social anxiety. Despite the clear [statement of Jens Stoltenberg](#) that future conflict on the territory of NATO members is highly unlikely, a significant part of Bulgarian society is still uncertain about the Alliance’s effectiveness.



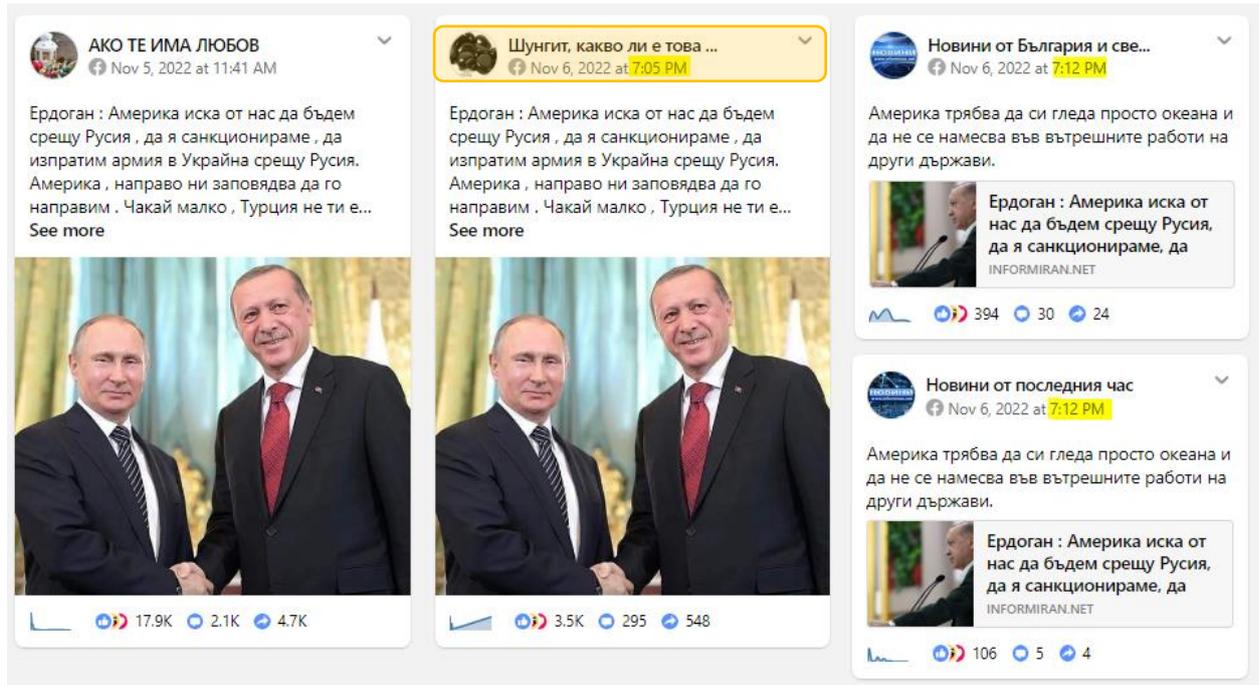
**Suspicious activity on social media**

On 3 November, the day the Bulgarian Parliament voted in favor of sending weapons to Ukraine, several Facebook pages shared an image encouraging the Minister of Defense to mobilize all 176 MPs who voted in support of the proposal and send them to the front lines in Ukraine. Apart from one post published on the next day, the remaining five posts were all published between 6:34 and 7:52 PM on the same day. Initial examination of other similar posts by the pages suggest a possible case of coordinated behavior. However, further analysis will be conducted to corroborate these findings.



The [post\(s\)](#) generated over 27K interactions, including more than 2.8K shares, with social media users commenting that this decision puts Bulgaria in a perilous position and agreeing that the pro-Ukrainian MPs who approved the provision of military assistance should be sent to Ukraine. Some users expressed anger and fear that their children could be mobilized, while others criticized the West, the EU, and US President Biden, specifically, for their involvement in the war.

Another case of suspicious activity involved the month's [top post](#) in terms of interactions. It appeared on November 5 on a Facebook page that commonly publishes content related to love, religion, and traditions. The post contained a fabricated statement allegedly made by Turkish President Recep Erdogan, which was loaded with strongly anti-American and pro-Russian messages. A day later, the fake quote appeared on fringe news websites and was subsequently shared on other pages within a very short time, including one of the pages involved some of the other identified suspicious activity.



The fabricated quote was characterized by unnatural syntax, misspelled words, odd punctuation, and the use of Russian letters that do not appear in the Bulgarian alphabet. The same linguistic markers could be seen in other popular [posts](#) made during the period. These posts shared other characteristics, too: all of them contained disinformative quotes by world leaders such as [Erdogan](#), [Putin](#), or [Orban](#); all were decidedly anti-Western, and most evoked feelings of fear (e.g. of poverty or nuclear war); almost all appeared on [pages](#) not specifically dedicated to politics or current affairs. These cases of possible coordinated inauthentic behavior will be examined in more detail in focused report.

## Czech Republic

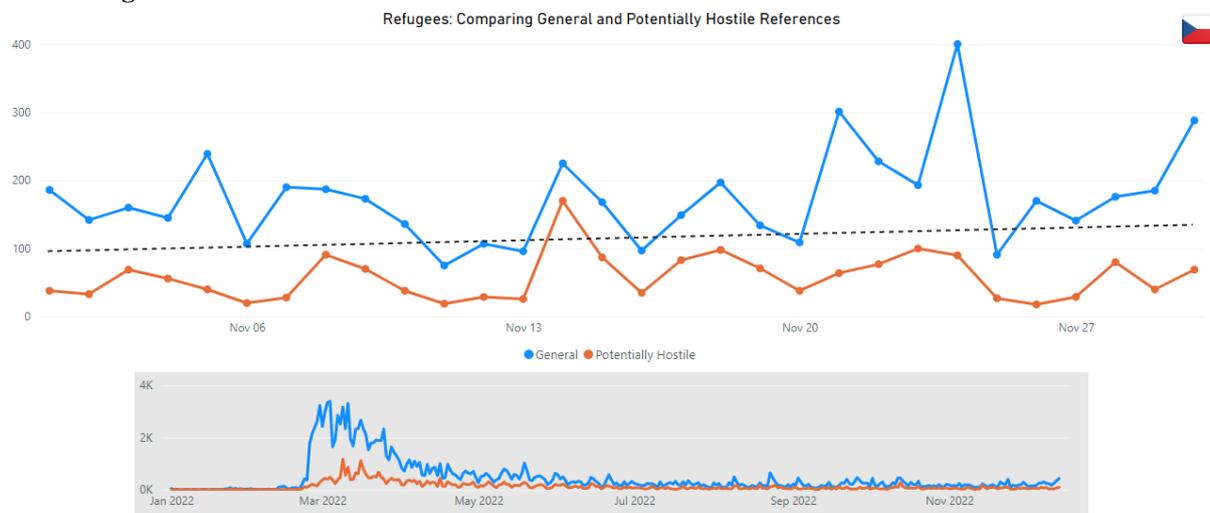


**Analysts:**  
 Kristina Sefcikova  
 Prague Security Studies Institute

**Top Line Summary:**

- Anti-sanction narratives pushed by far-right parties such as Freedom and Direct Democracy party (SPD) were the most salient, making up 71% of the analyzed Facebook posts. Regarding the topic of increasing prices, they continually underplay the role of Russian weaponization of energy and rely on a strong anti-government rhetoric.
- A lot of online attention was drawn by information about the training of Ukrainian soldiers in the Libavá military training area in the Czech Republic. Opposition parties present this as involving the Czech Republic in a war that is not theirs, while also using a large sum of taxpayer money. There is also a potential threat of increased distrust towards the government because of rushed statements made after the explosion in Poland and which could lessen support Ukraine.
- A new [survey](#) shows that the Czech population’s support of Ukraine is slightly decreasing. More than half - 53% - still support aid for Ukrainian refugees, compared to 65% in March 2022. However, 45% are against this aid. Support for stopping energy supplies from Russia is growing and now the issue divides the population approximately in half - 48% want to stop, while 47% do not. Support for military supplies aid to Ukraine also slightly lowered from 61% in March to 53% in October, 44% are against.

**Anti-Refugee:**



**Key Findings:** The most popular posts belonged to Tomio Okamura, member of Parliament and leader of the far-right opposition party Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD). In these posts, [Okamura](#), like other right-wing politicians, accuses the government of not doing enough to support their own citizens and to manage the energy crisis. Allegedly, the government is only defending the interests of Washington, Brussels, and Kyiv. Okamura and others on the far-right generally promote [the stance](#) that no more Ukrainian refugees should be accepted while Czechs are struggling to meet basic needs in the current economic situation. The alleged overwhelming burden was [emphasized](#) especially in connection to the public healthcare system and the government budget. Negative reactions were also provoked by an [announcement](#) by the Minister of the Interior, Vít Rakušan, who said that the Czech Republic will be able to accept another 150,000 refugees with the coming winter.

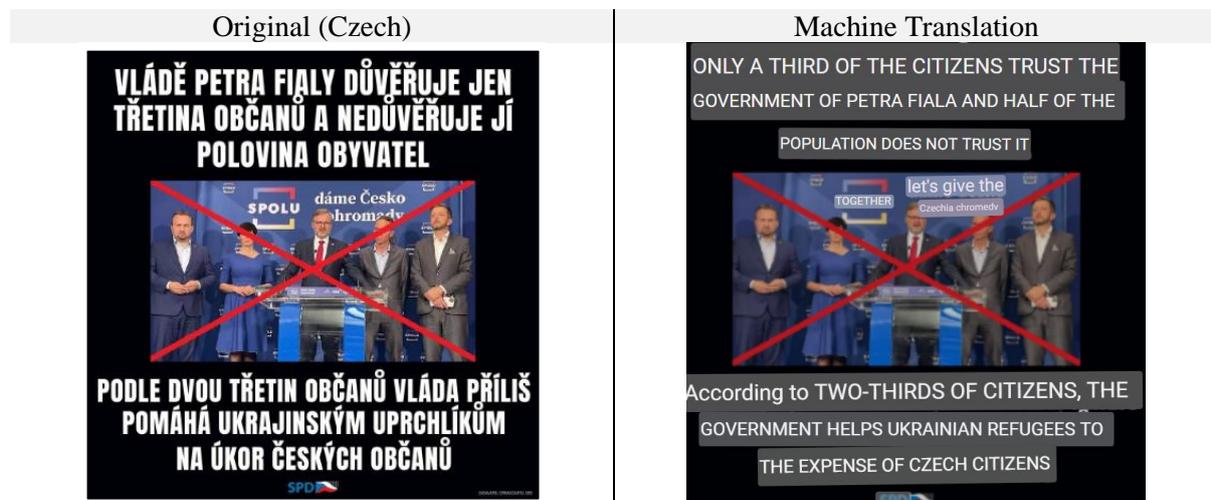
Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	59	59%	41	41%
Twitter*	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>41%</b>

*\*Twitter's use is limited in the Czech Republic and not representative of the overall debate in society, therefore, it has not been analyzed to prevent potentially misleading results.*

**Assessed Audience:** SPD voters and other far-right supporters, general public

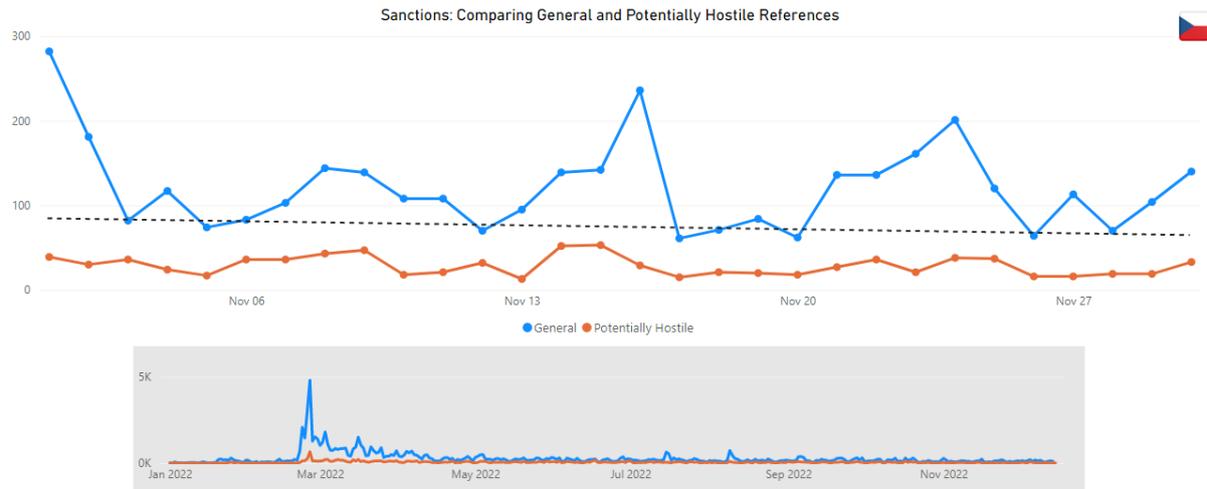
**Risk Assessment:** **Medium**

**Potential Impact:** Recent [polls](#) show that more than half of Czechs think the Czech Republic should continue to help Ukrainian refugees. However, this support is on a downward trajectory having lowered from 65% in March to 53% in October. Besides potentially fueling lowered solidarity towards refugees, hostile narratives can also undermine the government by attempting to portray it as one that looks after Ukrainian interests over its own citizens. This, combined with potential increased influx of refugees in the winter could increase political instability with support going to parties that take a more critical or openly hostile stance toward Ukraine.



Example of an image posted by [Tomio Okamura](#) & [Radim Fiala](#) of the SPD party on Facebook

**Anti-Sanction:**



**Key Findings:** Anti-sanction narratives were dominant in the monitored period, spread mainly by members of Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD). Regarding the topic of increasing prices, they continually underplay the role of the Russian weaponization of energy and rely on strong anti-government rhetoric. They [claim](#) the government of Petr Fiala (ODS) is to blame for inflation and that his priority is supporting Ukraine and continuing the armed conflict above Czech interests.

This messaging was intensified in response to the [training](#) of Ukrainian soldiers in the Libavá military training area in eastern Czech Republic. The far-right politicians argue it will cost Czech taxpayers almost a billion Czech Crowns (~€41 million) while Czech citizens and businesses receive no help in facing the economic crisis. An alleged lack of support for big businesses in comparison to the neighboring countries was another frequent [line](#) of messaging from extremist politicians.

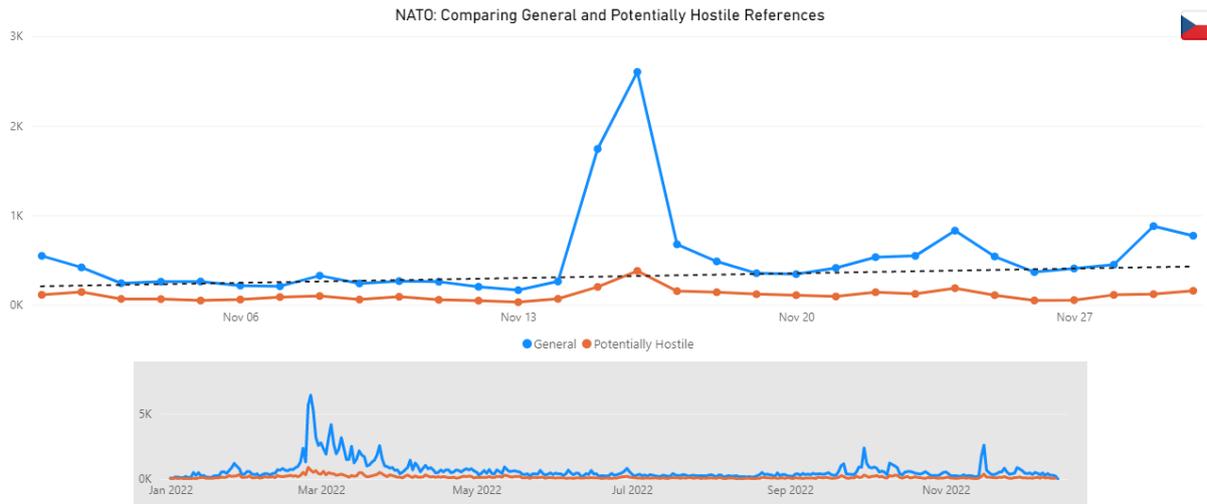
Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	29	29%	71	71%
Twitter*	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>71%</b>
*Twitter's use is limited in the Czech Republic and not representative of the overall debate in society, therefore, it has not been analyzed to prevent potentially misleading results.				

**Assessed Audience:** far-right and other opposition parties, general public

**Risk Assessment:** **Medium-High**

**Potential Impact:** With [recent polls](#) showing that 66% of Czechs think the government does not do enough to address high energy prices, there is a receptive audience to narratives that explain the increased costs of living through sanctions or other government policies, especially in connection to the sensitive topic of providing military support. There is potential for increased political instability which could weaken support for the government's policies, including those in support of Ukraine.

Anti-NATO:



**Key findings:** Following the errant missile that fell in Poland on 16 November, opposition parties [criticized](#) both the government and Ukraine for calling for retaliation on Russia without all the evidence being reviewed. This was portrayed as confirmation that they are seeking to escalate the conflict and incite direct military involvement of NATO. This fed into a more general narrative which blames the West for trying to start World War Three. However, the biggest attention during November was drawn by information about the [training](#) of Ukrainian soldiers in the Libavá military training area. Opposition parties [presented](#) this as dragging Czechs into a war that is not theirs, on top of that for a big sum of taxpayers’ money.

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	50	50%	50	50%
Twitter*	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50%</b>
*Twitter’s use is limited in the Czech Republic and not representative of the overall debate in society, therefore, it has not been analyzed to prevent potentially misleading results.				

**Assessed Audience:** Opposition supporters, right-wing supporters

**Risk Assessment:** **Medium**

**Potential Impact:** According to [recent polling](#), more than half of Czechs fear that the current war in Ukraine will spill over into global conflict, with supporters of opposition parties, SPD and ANO, were most fearful. There is a potential threat of increased distrust towards the government because of rushed statements after the explosion in Poland and which have lessened support for aid to Ukraine. Generally, the topic of military aid is sensitive and feeds into a wide pacifist narrative of peace at any cost. SPD is also [trying](#) to gain political advantage based on the fact that they were the only parliamentary party that voted against the training of Ukrainian soldiers. As support for governing party coalition, SPOLU, [decreases](#) and anxiety and fatigue about the war grows there is a greater opportunity for political parties less supportive of Ukraine to gain political momentum and put pressure on the government to change its course vis-à-vis Ukraine.

Original (Czech)

**Tomio Okamura - SPD**  
23 November at 15:30

Odmítáme, aby se na našem území za naše peníze cvičili vojáci Ukrajiny. Nechceme nechat naši zemi zatáhnout do války! Vláda Petra Fialy (ODS) plánuje cvičit na našem území až čtyři tisíce ukrajinských vojáků v pěti měsíčních intervalech, což by mělo stát český státní rozpočet v letošním a příštím roce dohromady téměř jednu miliardu korun. Přitom kvůli této vládě strmě roste zadlužení státu a českým občanům a firmám postiženým astronomickým růstem cen energií a veškerých dalších nezbytných nákladů se žádné pomoci nedostává. Prioritou Fialovy vlády je však podpora Ukrajiny a Ukrajinců v pokračování válečného konfliktu.

Hnutí SPD je proti tomu, aby peníze vybrané od českých daňových poplatníků, které mají sloužit českým občanům, směřovaly prioritně na Ukrajinu a výcvik jejích vojáků u nás. Je to navíc nepřijatelné v době, kdy i nám aktuálně schází (podle vyjádření vedení armády) 3 500 vojáků na doplnění pro naši obranu nedostatečných početních stavů.

Rovněž nechceme na našem území žádné cizí armády a vojáky. Není v našem zájmu zapojovat se do konfliktu mezi Ukrajinou a Ruskem a nechceme také, aby se na našem území školili vojáci a jednotky, které budou dále válčit a zabíjet na Ukrajině. Hnutí SPD chce mír a podporuje ukončení konfliktu.



10K 1.3K comments 2K shares

Machine Translation

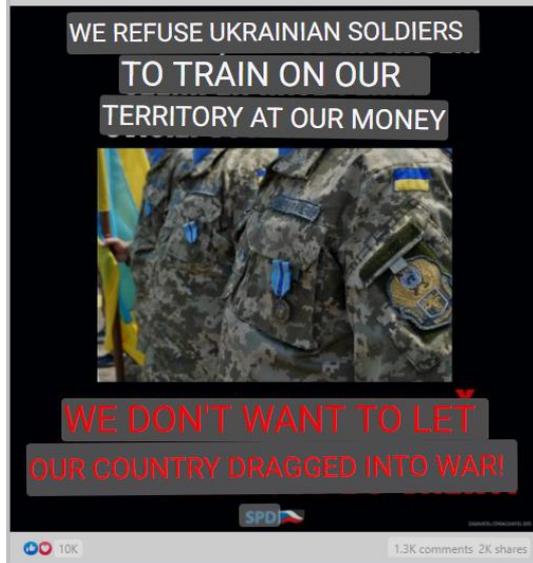
**Tomio Okamura - SPD**  
23 November at 15:30

We refuse to have Ukrainian soldiers trained on our soil with our money. We don't want to let our country go to war! The government of Peter Fiala (ODS) plans to exercise up to four thousand Ukrainian soldiers on our territory in five-month intervals, which should cost the Czech state budget this year and next year almost one billion CZK. Yet, due to this government, the debt of the state and Czech citizens and companies affected by the astronomical rise of energy prices and all other necessary costs is not received any help. However, the priority of the Violet government is to support Ukraine and Ukrainians in the continuation of the war conflict.

The SPD movement is against the money collected from Czech taxpayers, which are supposed to serve Czech citizens, to be directed as priority to Ukraine and the training of its soldiers in our country. In addition, it is unacceptable at a time when we also currently need (according to the military leadership) 3,500 soldiers to supplement our defense of insufficient numerous states.

We also don't want any foreign armies and soldiers on our soil. It is not in our interest to get involved in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, and we also do not want soldiers and units to be trained on our territory who will continue to fight and kill in Ukraine. The SPD movement wants peace and supports an end to the conflict.

[See original](#) · [Rate this translation](#)



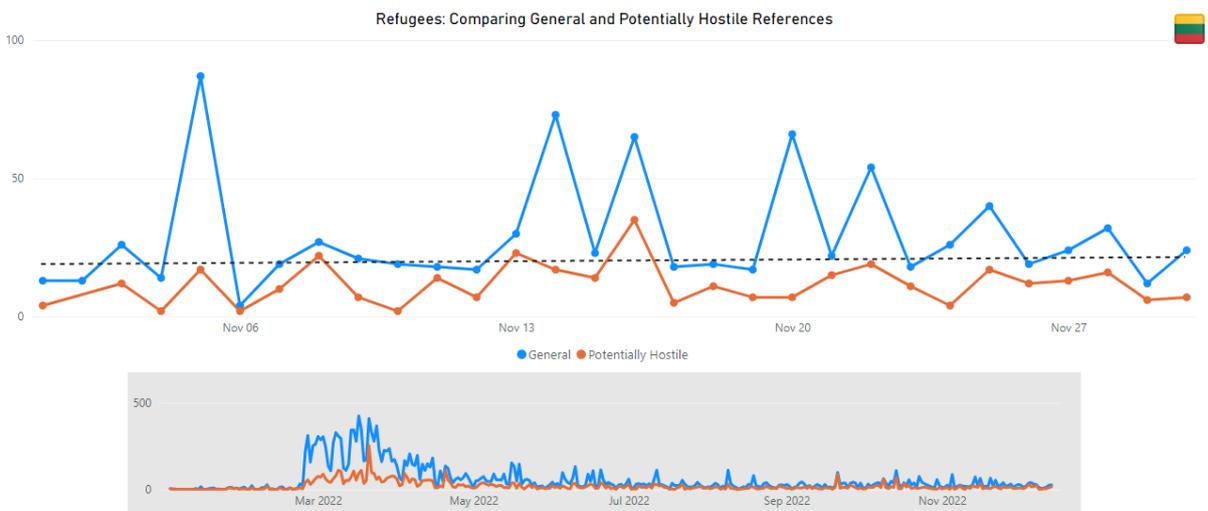
10K 1.3K comments 2K shares



**Top Line Summary:**

- A Lithuanian initiative has bought marine drones for Ukraine. Lithuanian journalist Andrius Tapinas, who had previously raised funds for the Bayraktar drone for Ukraine, shared it on [Twitter](#): “It is official. Lithuanians bought a marine drone for Ukraine for \$250 000.[...]”.
- Lithuania’s Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis gave [an interview for CNN](#), covering the errant missiles that fell in Poland, claiming that “the Russian attacks are becoming riskier; they are targeting locations closer to the NATO border; therefore, I think it’s almost inevitable that we will see more of these sort of events, incidents also on NATO territory.” At the end of the month, the Foreign Minister, together with fellow ministers of the Baltic and Nordic neighbor countries, [visited Ukraine](#), meeting president Volodymyr Zelensky. Landsbergis emphasized the necessity to continue providing help to Ukraine until the official victory in the war.
- Lithuanian non-profit, non-governmental organization CRI (Civic Resilience Initiative) issued a public and easily accessible [toolkit](#) on how to fight disinformation. 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.

**Anti-Refugee:**



**Key Findings:** In November, 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 a 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. National broadcaster LRT has published [a public survey](#) which reveals that Lithuanians' hostility towards refugees has decreased and has grown towards Russians. During the reporting period, quite a lot of [independent media](#) channels have even published articles where Ukrainian refugees are being pictured as rescuing specific businesses due to the lack of workforce in the country. However, if a suddenly increased number of Ukrainians is forced to leave their country again (due to intensified bombings, unbearable conditions, etc.), it is likely this will be widely exploited by anti-immigrant and pro-Russian actors, and the narrative will reemerge again.

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	66	96%	3	4%
Twitter*	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4%</b>

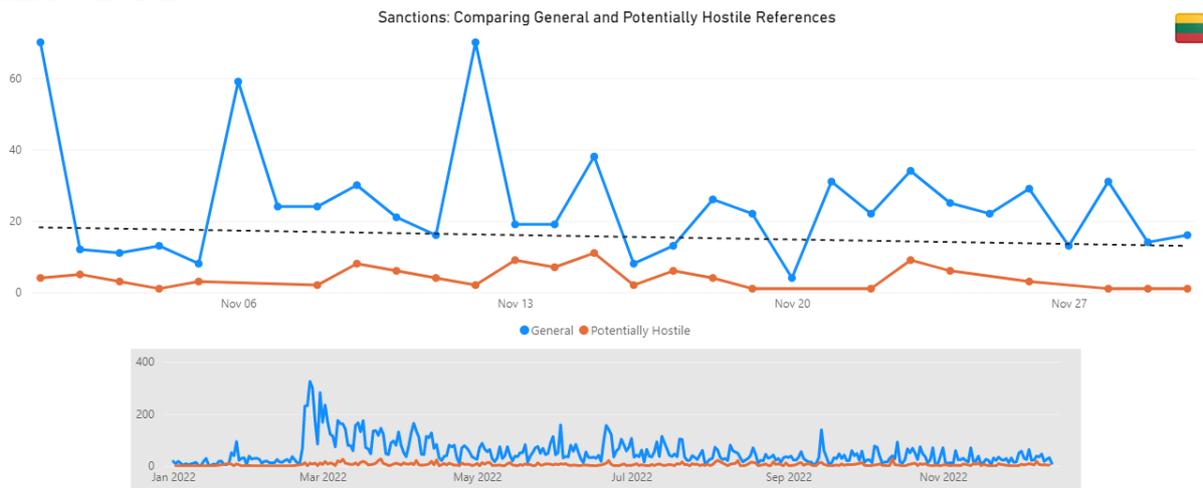
*\*Twitter's use is limited and not representative of the overall debate in society, therefore, it has not been analyzed to prevent potentially misleading results.*

**Assessed Audience:** Followers of Kremlin-aligned sources

**Potential Impact:** The vast majority of the most interacted with Facebook posts reviewed is either supportive or at least neutral towards Ukrainian refugees. However, hostile anti-immigrant narratives such as Ukrainians perceived inability to integrate into Lithuanian society or that Ukrainians are stealing jobs from Lithuanians, are still present. The effect of immigrants and financial support for the newcomers are also closely associated with the local economic hardships. If the general economic situation worsens, it is likely to accelerate the hostile narratives against the refugees.

**Risk Assessment:** Low

**Anti-Sanction:**



**Key Findings:** During November the trend of anti-sanction narratives held similar relevance during the monitored period, mostly in its close relationship with broader criticisms of the government and its perceived role in price increases in the country. However, the amount of social media posts spreading this narrative decreased visibly (lesser numbers visible in the breakdown of top stories below). Anti-sanction narratives have been 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 this argument. The same argument is being used when the electricity crisis and the price increase for heating/gas are being portrayed as direct consequences of the previously imposed sanctions. However, the absolute majority of posts analyzed during this reporting period factually covered the situation of electricity in Ukraine instead of focusing on Lithuania’s struggles. Despite the decreased salience of the anti-sanction narrative, there are examples with significant interactions online that combine blaming the government of Lithuania for poor competencies together with a ‘unreasonable sanctions’ narrative.

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	44	100%	0	0%
Twitter*	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>

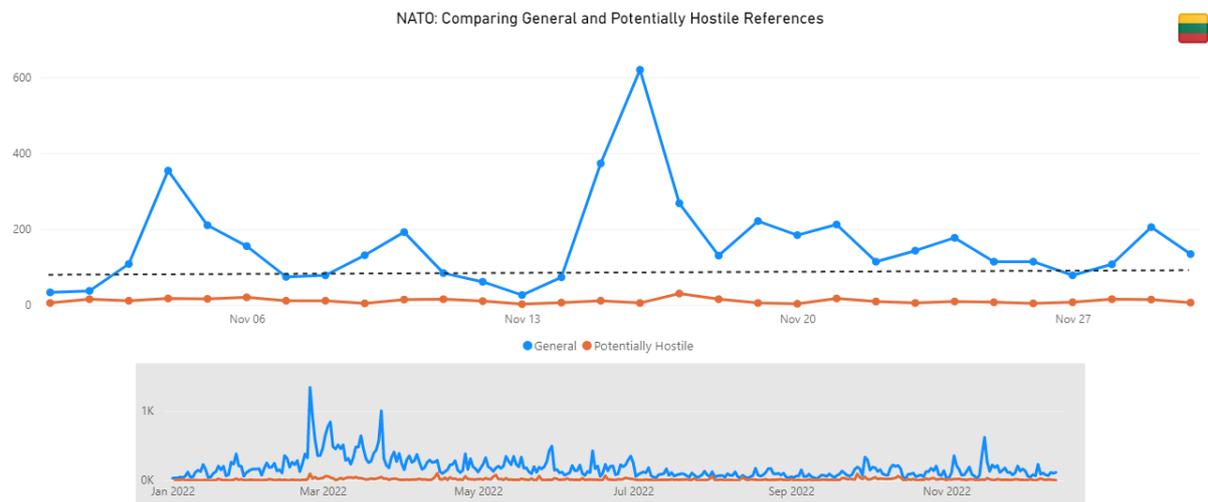
*\*Twitter’s use is limited and not representative of the overall debate in society, therefore, it has not been analyzed to prevent potentially misleading results.*

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

**Potential Impact:** As the winter season starts and the prices of electricity/heating hits the people of Lithuania, concerns around energy costs are still likely to increase and hold the potential to accelerate the growth of anti-sanction messaging. During this reporting period, lower engagement of anti-sanction messages is slightly surprising and goes against initial forecasts. However, the first weeks of wintertime will show if this trend holds.

**Risk Assessment:** Low

**Anti-NATO:**



**Key Findings:** Of the three monitored topics, references to NATO narratives became the most active of the three monitored topics, as the deadly explosion in Poland forced discussions about a possible NATO response. The majority of content presented general commentary about NATO and were not assessed to be hostile in nature. However, the situation in Poland presented a potential shift in anti-NATO messaging. While the previously dominate anti-NATO narrative was related to fears of escalation into World War Three or presenting it as an untrustworthy and provocative organization, now, the primary argument was its ineffectiveness and incapability of making decisions. Kremlin-aligned media used the incident in Poland to question the reliability and even dignity of NATO and the

alliance’s members, claiming that there was a conspiracy (laisvaslaikrastis.lt) to legitimately involve NATO in the war. Moreover, such claims were backed up with purely anti-NATO sentiments, stating that the alliance is an aggressive organization rather than a defensive security guarantee for its members. A Facebook page that is viewed as sympathetic to the Kremlin line, Respublika.lt (70,000+ followers) is an example (presented below) for anti-NATO reactions after the incident in Poland, as most of the comments discouraging support for Ukraine, as it would be safer to step back from this war.

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	91	91%	9	9%
Twitter*	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9%</b>
*Twitter’s use is limited and not representative of the overall debate in society, therefore, it has not been analyzed to prevent potentially misleading results.				

**Assessed Audience:** Followers of Kremlin-aligned sources, Opposition Party Supporters, indecisive NATO audience and potential new followers of the idea

**Potential Impact:** While the general support for NATO remains high, recent events raised questions about NATO activities and its role as a region’s guarantor of security. The lack of immediate and visible reaction to the rocket impact in Poland might affect the audiences that have been neutral towards NATO. Moreover, the [recent political maneuvering](#) by opposition parties against the leader of the ruling Homeland Union party, Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis, raised doubts about the country’s foreign policy. Even though the opposition’s interpellation failed, the increase in political instability provides an opportunity to be exploited by anti-Western and anti-establishment political actors that could disrupt the countries current pro-Ukraine and pro-NATO foreign policy.

**Risk Assessment: Medium**

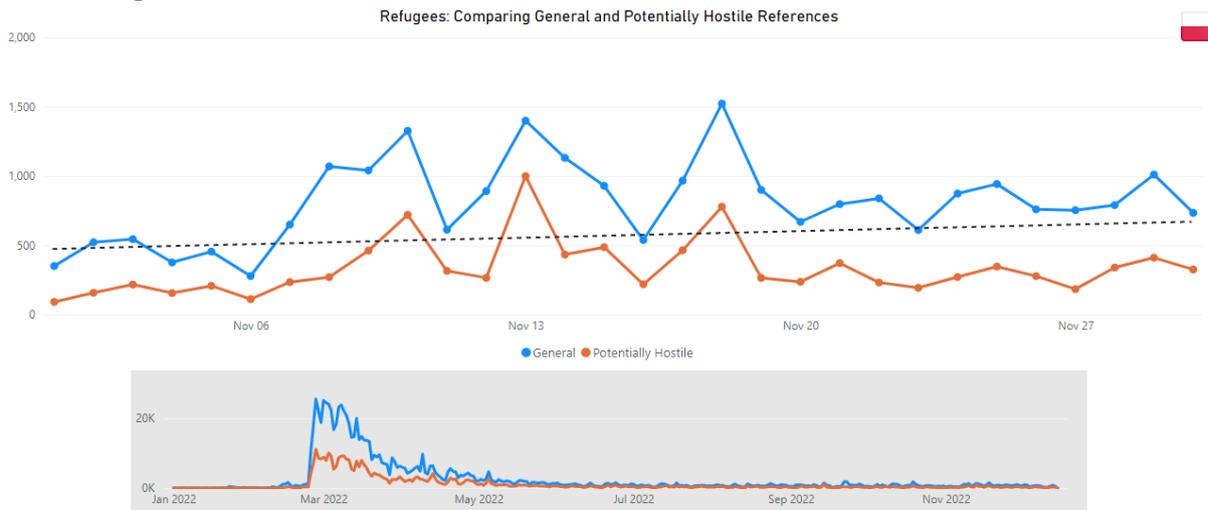
**Take Note:** In Lithuania motions of interpellation are similar to no-confidence rulings in other parliaments and have been initiated by opposition parties in an attempt to weaken the current government. The opposition has harshly criticized not only the Foreign Minister but all of the cabinet while stating that “Lithuania’s foreign policy has become unpredictable under the current government.” Landsbergis became the fourth member of the current cabinet to face an interpellation in the parliament, while the opposition has mentioned preparing two more (Energy Minister Dainius Kreivys and Minister of Environment Simonas Gentvilas). The high number of interpellations is one indication of the current disunity in the parliament. Keeping in mind that Lithuania is not immune from the increasing populist trends across Europe, these ongoing and constantly increasing tensions between the government and opposition parties have the potential to destabilize the political landscape of Lithuania.



**Top Line Summary:**

- On 15 November a missile fell on Przewodow in Eastern Poland, a village just a few kilometers from the border with Ukraine. [According to high-level officials](#), it was most likely an accident involving a stray missile fired by Ukrainian air defense, that failed to reach its Russian target. Initially, the accident unleashed a flood of speculations and contradictory reporting, including disinformation.
- The missile incident has been used to spread anti-Ukrainian messages across the three analyzed areas - focused on refugees, sanctions, and NATO. Pro-Russian disinformation sources started, from the first moments after the incident, to blame Ukraine, NATO, or the United States, and portray it as a planned attempt to drag Poland and NATO into war.
- Poles want Ukrainian refugees to contribute to their cost of living in Poland. According to a [survey](#) conducted by IBRIS, a majority (57.7%) of Poles support at least partial payment for the stay of Ukrainians, while 62% of respondents in favor of the policy were supporters of the government, only slightly less, 56%, were voters of opposition parties.

**Anti-Refugee:**



**Key Findings:** References to refugees in monitored media during November were marked by multiple spikes, however, the largest occurred in the days following November 15 when the Ukrainian missile accidentally fell on Poland. There was less fluctuation regarding potentially hostile content. This remained at similar average levels before and after 15 November as before the missile incident. This provides an indication more general comments about the war in Ukraine were initiated by the accident, but it did not appear to translate to increased hostility toward refugees.

However, limited attempts to connect anti-refugee narratives with the missile incident were observed. According to them, the missile strike was a part of a deliberate Ukrainian attack on Poland, which should have negative consequences for Ukrainians living in Poland. Much of this content has been produced by sources connected to far-right political parties or by well-known anti-Ukrainian online media outlets.

Instead, the more prominent potentially hostile narratives were driven by debates on the cost of hosting Ukrainians in Poland. Some sources critical of the Ukrainian refugees were exaggerating the 'living costs' of the refugees borne by Polish society, which they claimed was a major factor behind the current economic crisis. Attempts to link the topic of refugees to the European Union were also detected. In these messages the EU is accused of failing to provide financial assistance to Poland, despite the burden of several million refugees from Ukraine on the country.

Among the messages analyzed, it is also possible to see attempts to create fear and insecurity among the public by threatening another wave of refugees in 2023, which is expected to exacerbate the economic crisis.

In an interesting example, Polish help towards refugees and Ukraine has been criticized in the context of Antony Blinken's statement. The US Secretary of State listed Poland among the countries that still have the most to do in terms of compensation or restitution processes concerning property formerly owned by Jewish citizens. This triggered far-right circles to portray it as an example of US exploitation of Poland where Poland bears the costs of financial aid to refugees and arming Ukraine, while receiving criticism instead of gratitude from Washington. All this has been placed in the context of anti-US and antisemitic sentiments. The messages were disseminated by, among others, a Facebook page of [National Movement Party](#) (pl. Ruch Narodowy) with 160,000+ likes, gaining around 50,000 video views.

Original (Polish)	Machine Translation
<p> <b>Ruch Narodowy</b> 9 November · 🌐</p> <p><a href="#">Follow</a> <a href="#">...</a></p> <p><a href="#">Overview</a> <a href="#">Comments</a></p> <p>Oto wdzięczność Amerykanów za pomoc w wojnie na Ukrainie. PiS myślał, że jak zaświeci wydaniem miliardów na uchodźców i zniszczy własny kraj embargiem węglowym, byleby tylko być pierwszy w sankcjach, to stanie się pupilkiem USA i bohaterem świata.</p> <p>Tak to nie działa!</p> <p>Blinken, Sekretarz Stanu USA i amerykański Żyd mówi jasno: MACIE ZAŁATWIĆ ROSZCZENIA I DOMAGAMY SIĘ TEGO JAKO USA.</p> <p>Co z tego, że pomagacie? Widać, że was stać, to pomagajcie dalej. Żydzi i tak wezmą "swoje".</p> <p>Podajcie dalej! Precz z absurdalnymi roszczeniami wobec Polski! See less</p>	<p> <b>National Movement</b> 9 November · 🌐</p> <p><a href="#">Follow</a> <a href="#">...</a></p> <p><a href="#">Overview</a> <a href="#">Comments</a></p> <p>This is the gratitude of Americans for their help in the war in Ukraine. PiS thought that if it would shine by spending billions on refugees and destroy its own country with a coal embargo, just to be the first in the sanctions, it would become the darling of the USA and the hero of the world.</p> <p>Yes it doesn't work!</p> <p>Blinken, the US Secretary of State and an American Jew, makes it clear: YOU HAVE TO SETTLE THE CLAIMS AND WE ARE DEMANDING IT AS US.</p> <p>What about helping? You can see that you can afford it, so keep helping. The Jews will take "their" anyway.</p> <p>pass it on! Down with absurd claims against Poland! See less</p>



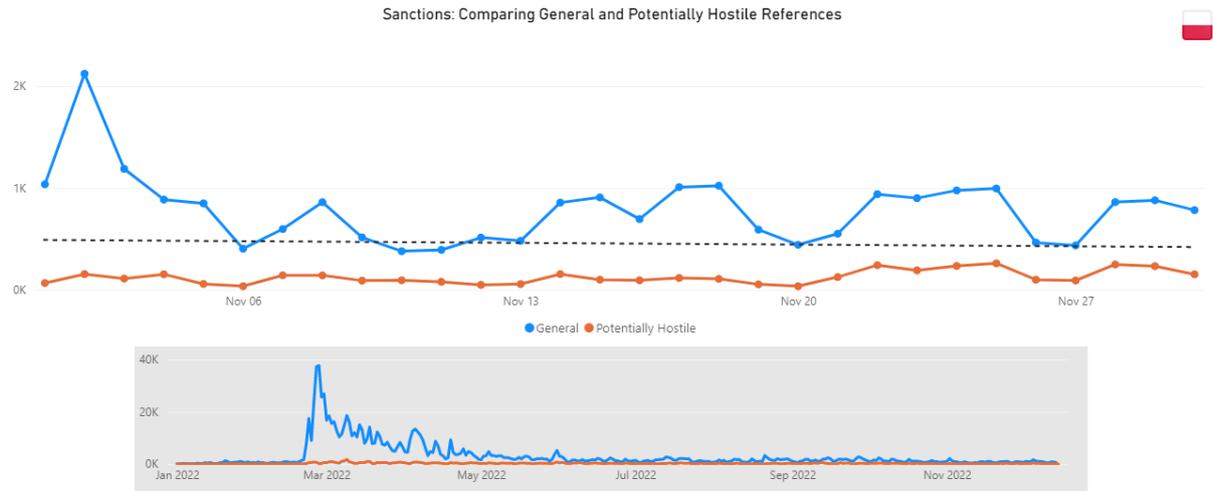
Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	81	81%	19	19%
Twitter	82	82%	18	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>81.5%</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>18.5%</b>

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

**Risk Assessment:** **Medium**

**Potential Impact:** Although the preponderance of content about refugees is positive, we see a consistent level of potentially hostile narratives. Analyzing the posts containing these narratives, 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. Recent polling results have shown that the wave of support for Ukrainian refugees is subsiding among Poles, thereby providing potentially fertile ground for anti-refugee narratives to flourish. In addition to putting pressure on politicians to continue to overwhelmingly support Ukraine and its refugees, there is a broader risk that anti-refugee narratives can serve as a means of far-right political parties to increase support ahead of upcoming elections.

**Anti-Sanction:**



**Key Findings:** Mentions of sanctions across the monitored media have continued a steady decline, however, there was some increases in general references around the missile incident of November 15. In general there has not been a significant uptick in the proportion of potentially anti-sanction messaging with it hovering around 23%. Similar proportions were observed when analyzing the top 100 most engaged with social media posts which resulted in 21% of messaging being assessed as hostile toward the sanctions.

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	91	91%	9	9%
Twitter	67	67%	33	33%
<b>Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>21%</b>

The majority of potentially hostile narratives were referencing the economic crisis. These primarily blamed Kyiv for Poland having to bear the costs of its refugees and the financial impact the war has had on the Polish economy. Poland often being portrayed as the biggest loser of the war, with the ordinary people seen as victims of misguided Polish policies related to the war.

The subject of sanctions is also referenced in narratives that alleged that the sanctions are designed to economically benefit of the United States. They claim that the US profits from reduced Polish imports of energy resources from Russia, by increasing its energy exports and dictating its own terms.

Among the top 100 popular posts were also those using completely false information, e.g. talking about Poland's free fuel supplies to Ukraine being behind the high prices at petrol stations or claiming that the war was planned by 'elites' to trigger migration and divide Ukraine into two spheres of influence.

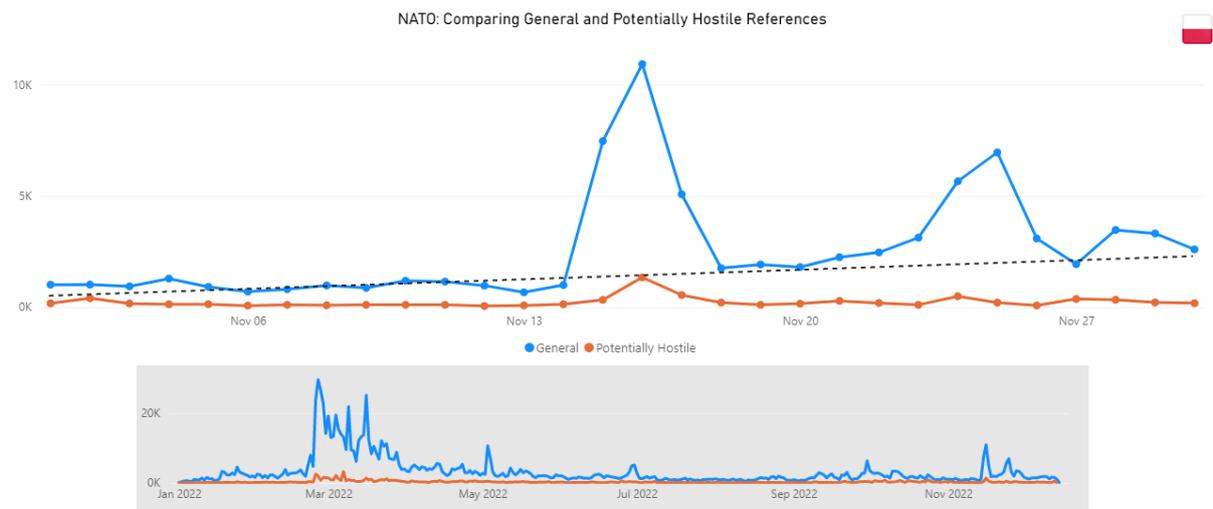
An attempt to promote an anti-Ukrainian slogan on Twitter “Polska w ruinie dzięki Ukrainie” (eng. Poland in ruins thanks to Ukraine) was also observed. This slogan was pushed by multiple anti-Ukrainian Twitter users, however it did not gain any significant traction at this point. However, any attempts at coordinated artificial amplification of this, and other anti-Ukrainian messaging, should continue to be monitored.

**Assessed Audience:** Supporters of Konfederacja party, general public

**Risk Assessment:** **Medium**

**Potential Impact:** While there is little risk of reducing support for sanctions and the economic fallout on Russia, the deepening economic and energy crisis is leading to more voices calling for a reduction in economic aid for refugees from Ukraine. This may increase susceptibility to the anti-refugee narratives propagated by far-right parties, which may be an important development in the context of the upcoming parliamentary elections.

**Anti-NATO:**



**Key Findings:** Predictably, references to NATO recorded a significant peak during and after the missile incident on Nov. 15. This incident dominated the messages related to NATO. However, as was the case with anti-refugees references, this peak did not significantly increase the proportion of potentially hostile narratives, which accounted for less than 8% of the total mentions in November. Even at its peak on Nov. 15, the potentially hostile messages only made up 10.4% of the overall mentions. This provides one indication that intense discussion around the incident did not result in a higher level of negative messages regarding NATO or military aid to Ukraine.

The conversation around NATO-related topics has been dominated by the missile incident in Poland. This event triggered a flood of speculation and conjecture. The poor information policy of the Polish government likely provided space to the speculation and potential conspiracy theories as their first official release of information came hours after the incident. This created an information void, which was filled by many online sources that often don't require time to fact-check and investigate stories, including those spreading disinformation, misinformation, and pro-Russian propaganda.

Among the potentially hostile content, we can see two main trends. The first was presenting the missile incident as a Ukrainian or American provocation with an objective to drag Poland and NATO into a direct war with Russia. This was disseminated by Polish right-wing portals like [wprawo.pl](http://wprawo.pl) (32k+ followers) which stated in a [post](#) that the missile strike was a planned Ukrainian provocation to drag NATO into war.

### Original (Polish)

**Wprawo.pl**  
17 November

To co wydarzyło się pod Hrubieszowem nosi wszelkie znamiona ukraińskiej prowokacji, mającej na celu wprowadzenie Polski do bezpośredniej wojny z Rosją. Właśnie dowiedziałem się, że 15 metrów od nieszczęsnego ciągnika mieści się spory magazyn nawozów sztucznych.

Jeśli któraś ze zbłąkanych rakiet trafiła by w ów magazyn, to ustalenie pochodzenia rakiety byłoby niemal niemożliwe. Jeżeli była to prowokacja, to oznacza że Ukraińcy zainspirowali ją spontanicznie, bez porozumienia z Waszyngtonem.

Moja teza robocza: jeśli w ciągu najbliższych dni Amerykanie będą naciskać Ukraińców na rozmowy pokojowe, to oznaczać będzie, że mieliśmy do czynienia z oczywistą prowokacją i próbą przedłużenia gasnącego konfliktu o kraj należący do struktur NATO.

Na zdjęciu poniżej – Bejrut tuż po wybuchu magazynu z nawozami w zeszłym roku 🇺🇦

[Maciej Przegon](#)

[See translation](#)



389 94 comments 98 shares

### Machine Translation

**Wprawo.pl**  
17 November

What happened near Hrubieszów bears all the hallmarks of a Ukrainian provocation aimed at introducing Poland to a direct war with Russia. I just found out that 15 meters from the hapless tractor there is a large warehouse of artificial fertilizers.

If any of the stray rockets ended up in this warehouse, it would be almost impossible to trace the origin of the rocket. If it was a provocation, it means that the Ukrainians inspired it spontaneously, without consulting Washington.

My working thesis: if in the next few days the Americans will press the Ukrainians for peace talks, it will mean that we were dealing with an obvious provocation and an attempt to prolong the fading conflict over a country belonging to NATO structures.

Pictured below is Beirut just after the fertilizer warehouse explosion last year 🇺🇦

[Maciej Przegon](#)

[See translation](#)



389 94 comments 98 shares

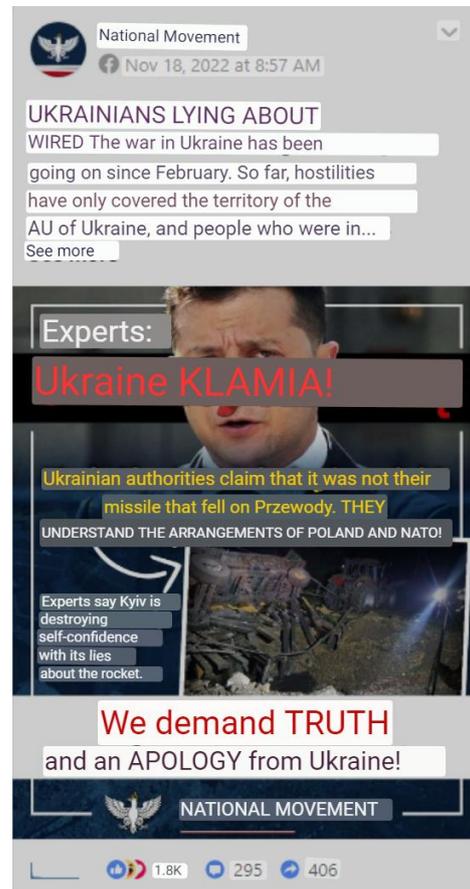
The second trend, which has been more visible, calls President Zelensky’s a liar by presenting his denial that the missile that hit Eastern Poland belonged to Ukraine next statements to the contrary by Presidents Biden and Duda. By doing this, they are trying to undermine all statements by Zelensky and Ukrainian officials since the start of the war. This unfortunate statement by Zelensky has created an opportunity for pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian actors to spread doubts about the credibility of the Ukrainian regime and has the potential to undermine wider support for Ukraine.

One of the source to use Zelensky’s statement is the far-right Ruch Narodowy party, which made 13 [posts](#) on their regional Facebook pages stating that Ukrainians are lying and Poland should demand an apology and compensation from Kyiv.

Original (Polish)



Machine translation



Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	89	89%	11	11%
Twitter	86	86%	14	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>87.5%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>12.5%</b>

**Assessed Audience:** Pro-Russian Groups, Conspiracy Followers

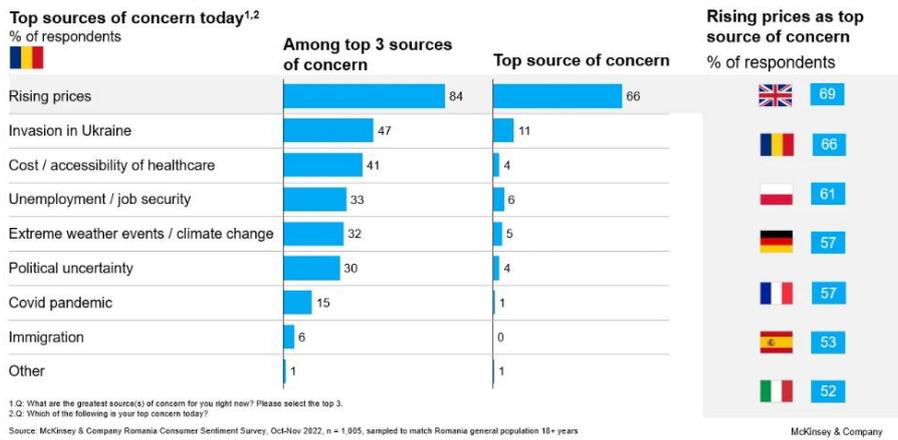
**Risk Assessment:** Low

**Potential Impact:** The potential impact of these narratives is very limited and largely confined to the small section of society that holds pro-Russian views. Attempts to spread anti-NATO views amongst a wider audience are not effective and are not predicted to have an impact in the foreseeable future.

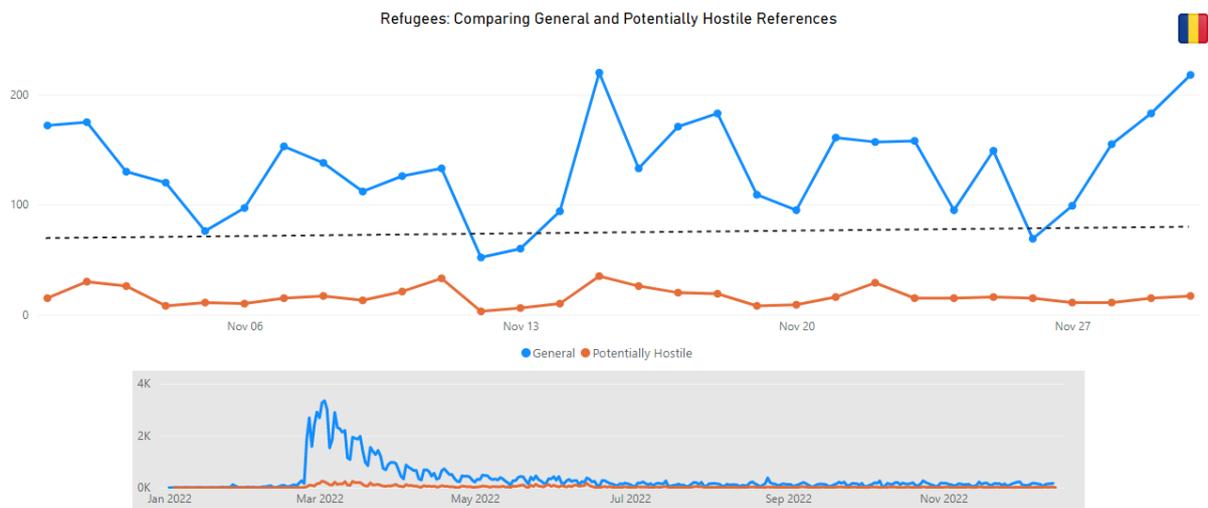


**Top Line Summary:**

- US State Secretary Blinken was in Romania in order to attend the NATO Foreign Ministers’ Meeting. The focus of the meeting was the discussion surrounding increased support for Ukraine, in the context of the Russian invasion and NATO’s strategic plans to assure security for its member country.
- According to [McKinsey’s Consumer Sentiment Survey, conducted in November 2022](#) Romania’s consumer confidence is among the lowest in the region, high inflation being the top concern with the Russian invasion of Ukraine coming in second.



**Anti-Refugee:**



**Key Findings:** In November, the general references to refugees, as well as anti-refugee content, continued to be at a relatively low level, and receive the lowest number of references when compared to the other monitored topics of sanctions and NATO. The general concern, however, was Romania’s ability to continue its financial support to refugees. A story about a local [priest](#) whose association was unable to help Ukrainian refugees due to needs of Romanian mothers and children is typical of the main lines of argument against further support for refugees. Most of the messaging is not rooted in xenophobia, but rather domestic economic concerns. It is one indicator that fatigue and worsening economic situation in Romania is the primary driver of messaging critical of Ukrainian refugees.

War fatigue is in place in Romania and there are increased calls for further support from the EU to alleviate some of the burden on domestic resources. The EU has been used as the context for further refugee related narratives, as the decision on whether Romania should be admitted to the Schengen area has been a focal point. There is a popular sentiment that the EU should grant Romania, and Bulgaria, access to the Schengen area in recognition for how they have managed the influx of Ukrainian refugees in their territory. Romania has often been referred to as the “guardian of the EU’s door” that should be rewarded for its efforts with Schengen admission.

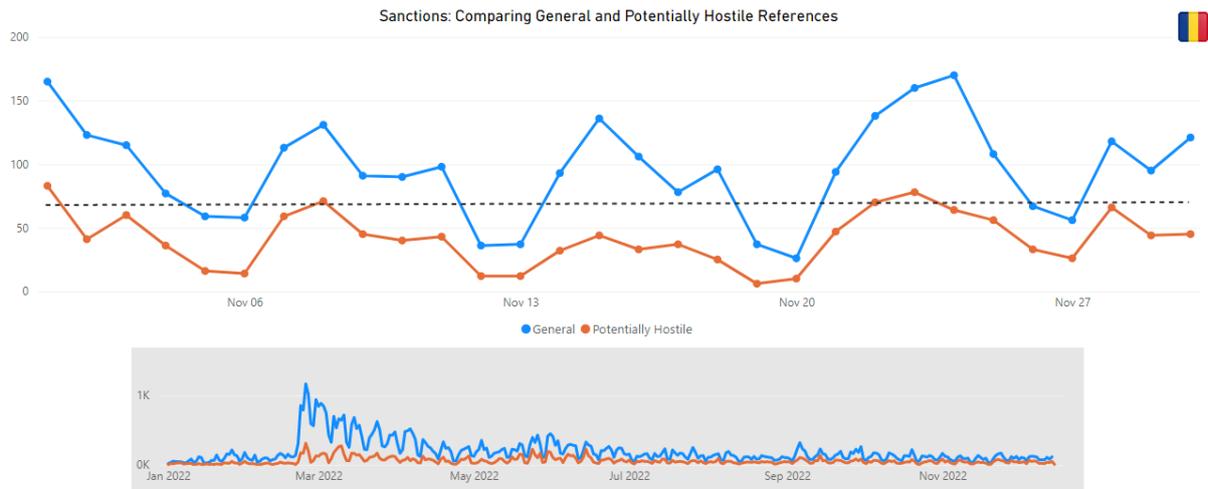
Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	89	89%	11	11%
Twitter*	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11%</b>
*Twitter’s use is limited and not representative of the overall debate in society, therefore, it has not been analyzed to prevent potentially misleading results.				

**Assessed Audience:** General Audience. There is general doubt and uncertainty about Romania’s economic situation among the population. As the [McKinsey report highlighted](#), Romanian consumers try to adapt to rising prices, putting in question how much longer they can support the refugees.

**Potential Impact:** With the economic outlook remaining the biggest concern for Romanians this winter, it is important to highlight that the relative levels of anti-refugee messaging remain very low. The Romanian general public continues to have an overwhelmingly positive view of the Ukrainian refugees; however, internal economic concerns and domestic poverty levels remain a potential issue that can be exploited by actors seeking to undermine support for Ukraine.

**Risk Assessment:** **Low-Medium**

**Anti-Sanction:**



**Key Findings:** The media monitoring data from Romania continues to show that general and potentially hostile references to sanctions are closely correlated. When general references increase so too do the potentially hostile references. This provides some indication that potentially hostile messaging is not driven but specific incidences but, instead, is part of the more general conversation. Analysis of the content shows that much of the content that is potentially hostile toward the sanctions are related to more general economic concerns such as inflation. Apart from isolated messages that were directly against sanctions due to fear of retaliation and punishment from Russia, most of the anti-sanctions messaging was placing blame on the EU for economic problems faced in the region. Romania is often portrayed as a puppet of the West and sources producing critical or openly hostile content question why the country is struggling despite having so many natural resources.

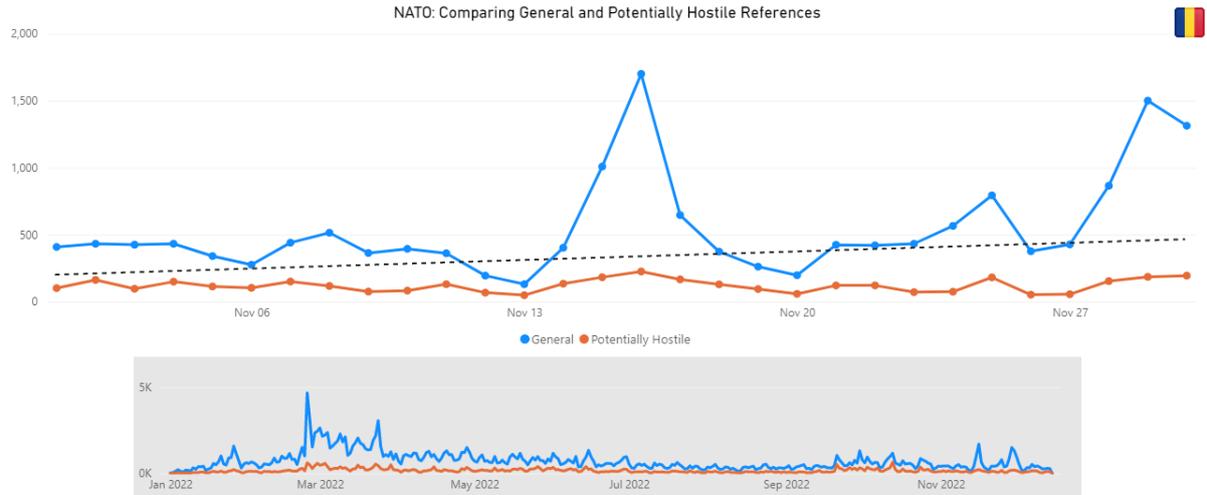
Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	95	95%	5	5%
Twitter*	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5%</b>
*Twitter's use is limited and not representative of the overall debate in society, therefore, it has not been analyzed to prevent potentially misleading results.				

**Assessed Audience:** general public, anti-systemic groups. The target of the evolving anti-sanction narrative is the general population which is already stricken by fear of economic crisis. However, the content is most effective in the anti-globalist, anti-EU and anti-NATO groups. Supporters of this narrative are mostly nationalists that are also supporters of far-right parties.

**Potential Impact:** As the anti-sanction messaging is closely linked to the economic situation the evolution of narratives hostile to the sanctions is largely dependent on economic factors such as cost-of-living and poverty. With the current economic struggles expected to continue well in to 2023 there is an increased potential for anti-systemic political actors, particularly from the far-right, to exploit the situation to increase their support. Responses by the EU and the Romanian government's handling of the economic situation is going to significantly impact the levels of anti-sanction related narratives and their receptiveness. Despite some gains by the far-right during the summer the fear of significant challenge to the government from political actors opposed to supporting Ukraine remain limited.

**Risk Assessment: Medium**

**Anti-NATO:**



**Key Findings:** The errant missile that fell in Polish territory on Nov. 15 and the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in Bucharest on Nov 29-30 caused spikes in NATO related content, however the overall references to NATO were largely positive. The proportion of potentially hostile content in the monitored media space dropped from nearly 25% in October down to 18% in November. The NATO meeting in Bucharest provided the context for the majority of anti-NATO messaging with calls for a focus on domestic issues rather than foreign interventionism.

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	81	81%	19	19%
Twitter*	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19%</b>

*\*Twitter's use is limited and not representative of the overall debate in society, therefore, it has not been analyzed to prevent potentially misleading results.*

**Assessed Audience:** Supporters of the far right and other anti-systemic political movements.

**Potential Impact:** With the majority of content continuing to portray NATO positively and hostile content limited to established anti-Western leaning sources there is limited risk to support for NATO. However, increased concerns around Romania being portrayed as a pawn for Western leaders in the Alliance have the potential to incite political opportunists to exploit this narrative for their gain. Currently, this is being driven by extremist parties on the far-right, however, cracks in political unity amongst the political mainstream could encourage others to increase criticism of NATO and weaken support for NATO and Romania's policies toward Ukraine amongst the general public.

**Risk Assessment:** Low

**Slovakia**

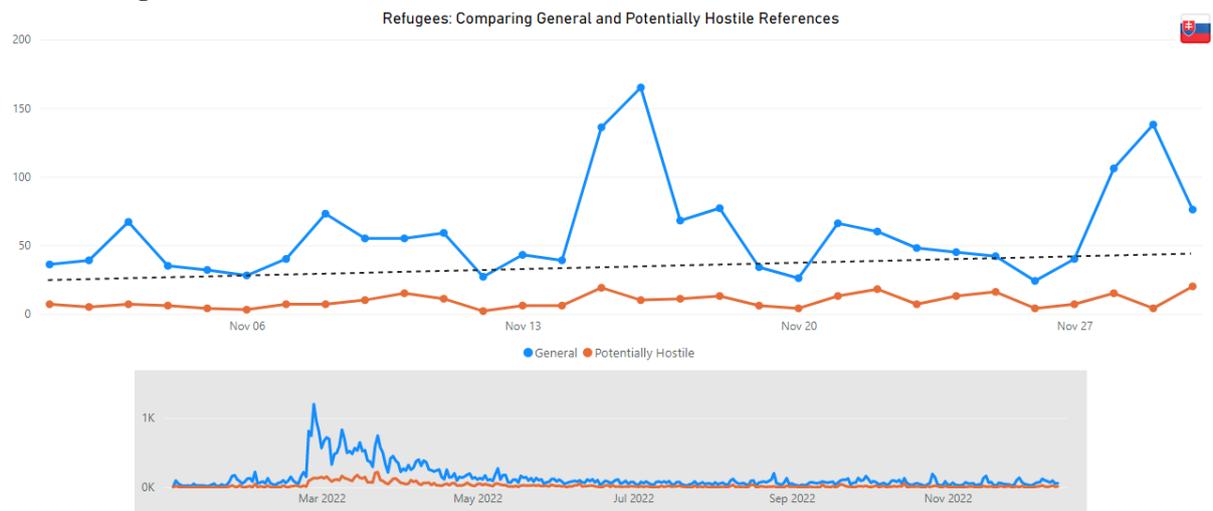


**Analysts:**  
 Kristina Sefcikova  
 Prague Security Studies Institute

**Top Line Summary:**

- Representatives of far-right opposition parties such as The Republic or Slovak National Party [present](#) NATO as the real aggressor who is leading a proxy war against Russia and does not care about Ukrainians. Numerous Slovak media outlets published Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s [claims](#) about active involvement of the USA and NATO in the war.
- Sanctions themselves are not an overly polarizing topic and are mostly included in a more general criticism of the government which allegedly does not care about its citizens and energy prices.
- The topic of refugees does not resonate strongly with the general public. Anti-refugee narratives were promoted almost exclusively by extremist political actors, the hostile messaging is scarce and fragmented.

**Anti-Refugee:**



**Key Findings:** The topic of refugees is not overly polarizing with the proportion of potentially hostile content compared to more general references to refugees at 13% during November. Selective posts with limited reach try to sow panic about [big waves of refugees](#) as a result of the coming winter, however, this sentiment remains largely confined to ultra-nationalist circles. Attempts to portray support for Ukrainian refugees as an “extremist liberal” agenda being pushed by President Zuzana Čaputová has received broader support with main opposition social-democratic SMER-SD party joining similar

[messaging](#) from the ultra-nationalist Slovak National Party. Additional narratives have tried to present the refugees as puppets and [victims](#) of a war of aggression incited by NATO or the West in general.

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	84	84%	16	16%
Twitter*	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16%</b>
*Technical issues prevented Twitter data from being analyzed				

**Assessed Audience:** Far-right and far-left supporters

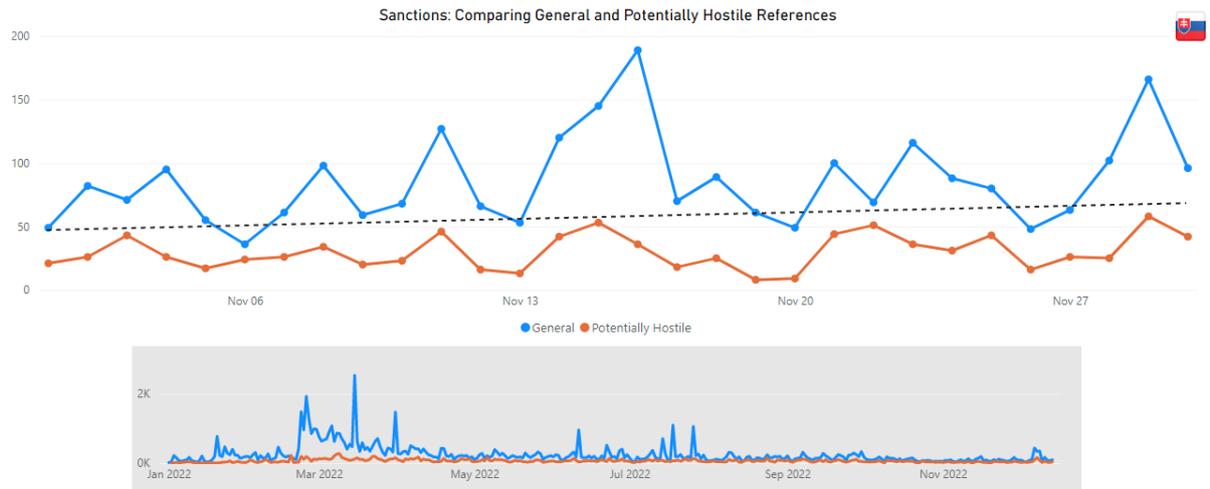
**Risk Assessment:** **Low**

**Potential Impact:** The topic of refugees does not resonate strongly with the general public. Anti-refugee narratives were promoted almost exclusively by extremist political actors, the hostile messaging is scarce and fragmented. However, the winter brings the possibility of a further influx of refugees to Slovakia. The fear of additional refugees has been presented in mainstream media and if combined with particularly harsh winter conditions and continuing economic woes could increase the resonance of anti-refugee messaging amongst the general public.



Example of image [posted](#) by the Slovak National Party's Facebook page.

**Anti-Sanction:**



**Key Findings:** The sanctions topic was not a salient topic in November with much of the conversation linked to more general discussions about the war in Ukraine and the missile that accidentally landed in Poland on Nov. 15. The potentially hostile narratives were largely confined to a few pages known for spreading disinformation and in posts of far-right ultra-nationalist groups. The Slovak National Party exploited the sanctions topic only to criticize the government for not caring about its citizens and the struggles of citizens related to energy prices. A narrative of blaming the West for using false pretexts to slow down economic cooperation and impose sanctions in general also appeared.

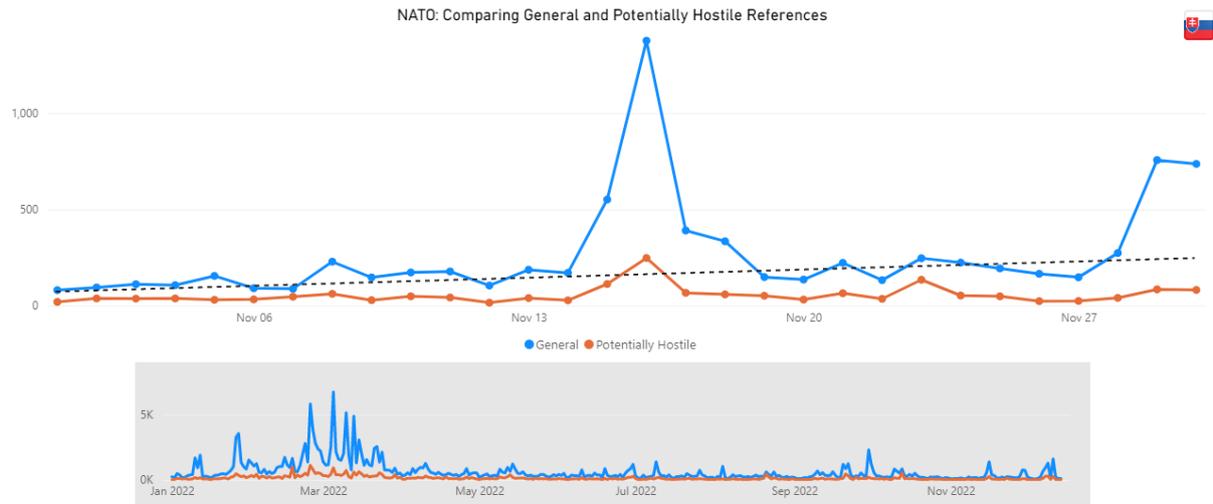
Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	85	85%	15	15%
Twitter*	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15%</b>
*Technical issues prevented Twitter data from being analyzed				

**Assessed Audience:** Far-right supporters

**Risk Assessment:** Low

**Potential Impact:** Sanctions themselves are not an overly polarizing topic and are mostly included in a more general criticism of the government. However, continued criticism of the government and implications that it cares more about Ukrainians than Slovak citizens has the potential to undermine the current government’s policies. The fact that the main opposition party uses this line of attack against the government raises the risk, but it is still assessed to be relatively low. Increased political instability could further erode support for the sanctions and for Ukraine more generally.

**Anti-NATO:**



**Key Findings:** References to NATO saw an expected spike related to the missile incident in Poland on Nov. 15 as well as the Alliance’s Foreign Ministers meeting in Bucharest at the end of the month. The increased coverage did not present a noticeable increase in the proportion of coverage that was hostile. The proportion of potentially hostile coverage compared to more general references to NATO in monitored media dropped from 21% in October to 17% in November. However, the top 100 Facebook posts analyzed presented a higher proportion with 38% of the posts containing hostile messaging. This was largely driven by representatives of far-right opposition parties such as The Republic or Slovak National Party who [present](#) NATO as the real aggressor who is leading a proxy war against Russia and does not care about Ukrainians. Ukraine is allegedly just strategic material and cannon fodder for NATO’s ambitions. [Claims](#) by Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, that the war could have been avoided if NATO did not expand to the East promote a well established Russian talking point, but still appeared in numerous Slovak media outlets. In addition to his statements on NATO expansions, he also claimed that NATO and the US are already directly participating in the war since they have provided military supplies to Ukraine. Historian and founder of a left-wing movement called Socialists Eduard Chmelár also used the missile explosion in Poland as a pretext to [criticize](#) Kyiv for alleged dangerous provocation and trying to drag NATO into the war.

Breakdown of Top 100 Engaged Content by Platform				
Platform	Not Hostile		Hostile	
Facebook	62	62%	38	38%
Twitter*	NA	NA	NA	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>38%</b>
*Technical issues prevented Twitter data from being analyzed				

**Assessed Audience:** Supporters of opposition and far-right parties

**Risk Assessment:** **Medium**

**Potential Impact:** With anti-NATO narratives mainly concentrated on the far-right, significant influence on the opinion of the general public on NATO is not expected. These narratives are mostly attractive to people already sympathetic to anti-Western perspectives. However, since Slovakia shares a border with Ukraine, Slovaks might question military support for Ukraine out of a more direct fear of involvement in the war, especially in the light of the missile incident in Poland.