ROMANIAN LANGUAGE SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING: MALIGN NARRATIVES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

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In the context of the unprovoked February 24 Russian aggression against Ukraine and the subsequent escalation of disinformation in the social media and online space, 45north, in partnership with the International Republican Institute's <u>Beacon Project</u>, analyzed Romanian language social media data from Facebook, Twitter and Telegram for the first six months of 2022. This report includes our key summary, principal findings and methodology.

<u>Methodology</u>

The objective of our monitoring is to try to better identify and understand how hostile narratives, especially of Russian origin, percolate the Romanian language social media space (Romania and Moldova) in the context of the unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine. In order to make sense of the chaotic and heterogeneous social media space and its entanglement with malign narratives, we selected three narratives that we think are the most consequential in the broader public perception of the war. These three narratives are classified as anti-NATO/anti-US, appeasement, and energy security.

A short description of each selected narrative:
- **Anti-NATO/Anti-US**: content that demonizes NATO and the US, particularly in their respective roles in the EuroAtlantic security architecture
- **Appeasement**: narratives that promote peace in conditions favoring Russia and in the detriment of the sovereignty of Ukraine, especially formulas that promote territorial compromises that deprive Ukraine of agency
- **Energy security**: refers to narratives that reiterate Russian energy blackmail talking points, such as stoking panic over energy prices or the effects of winter.

In order to search the three social media platforms, we developed a set of syntaxes associated with these narratives. By syntax we mean a set of keywords arranged together with simple logical operators such as "OR", "AND". Applying a syntax to queries on social media platforms should result in Romanian language posts that refer to the war in Ukraine and subsequent topics.

We have searched Facebook, Twitter and Telegram for Romanian language posts and sorted them by number of interactions (the definition for interactions for each platform are <u>here, here</u> and <u>here</u>), in order to see the most viral posts in descending order. Having sorted the results, we gained a better picture of the individuals and organizations that talked about the war in Ukraine on these platforms, for the first six months of 2022.

We opened, read and analyzed **the first 100 relevant posts by number of interactions** for each social media platform. By "relevant" we mean posts that are relevant in the broader context of the war in Ukraine and the three selected narratives.

Each relevant post was assigned four tags: Relevant (YES/NO), Source Standards (Quality/Questionable/Fake Conspiracy/Unknown/Tabloid/Political Bias), Stance (oppose/neutral/support) and Country (country indicative, eg. RO, MD). Through this classification we gained insight about the Romanian language social media conversation regarding the war in Ukraine and how much Russian malign narratives permeate it.

More details regarding the methodology can be found in the Methodology – Explicative Notes section of this report.

KEY SUMMARY

When studying disinformation related to the war in Ukraine in the Romanian language social media ecosystem, it is useful to put into context how Romania, as a society, is positioning itself towards the conflict. From **this poll** from IRES (a reputable private Romanian company doing polling and market research) we find that after six months of war (August 2022) 31% of Romanians feel that Russia's invasion of Ukraine might be somehow justified, while 11% think that Russia's argument that they are fighting Nazis in Ukraine is totally justified, with another 14% thinking this argument is somewhat justified. When measuring the level of confidence in NATO to defend a member state against Russian aggression, 22% of Romanians said they lacked such confidence. According to this poll, the main sources of information for Romanians, with regards to the war in Ukraine, were televisions (87% confirmed it as a source), while the second source was social media (27% confirmed it as a source).

While it is clear that the majority of Romanians have confidence in NATO and are on Ukraine's side in this conflict, a significant percent of the population (ranging from a fourth to a third) is more or less leaning towards finding justification in Russia's actions. This is corroborated with another Beacon Project **research project** that places Romania in the "high risk" category in terms of susceptibility to Russian malign narratives, citing Eurobarometer winter 2022 data among other factors. Our research also showed that malign, anti-Ukraine narratives have a significant presence in the Romanian social media landscape with percentages similar to the ones cited in the IRES poll above.

The most obvious but nevertheless significant takeaway from this research is that **Facebook remains the dominant social media platform in Romania by far, when compared to Twitter and Telegram**. This is important because it shows us where we should focus our efforts to monitor Romanian language social media conversation in order to counter disinformation in the future, as well as to take into account into our methodology and information gathering the mechanics of Facebook, how users communicate in this particular environment (eg. Facebook groups, Facebook Watch, inbuilt anti-disinformation mechanisms, how the algorithms promote or demote a post).

For Facebook, posts labeled as "oppose" gathered significant numbers of the total interactions for the top 100 relevant posts that we have analyzed, ranging from 30,8% (Appeasement narrative) to 50% (Anti-NATO/Anti-US narrative). The Energy Security narrative registered 38% of total interactions from posts labeled as "oppose". This findings roughly aligns with the findings of the IRES poll cited above.

KEY SUMMARY

Videos tend to be the most prevalent form of Facebook post, especially when looking strictly at posts labeled as "oppose". The fact that this type of content generally gathers the most interactions shows that it has a deeper impact on viewers than text or podcast/audio. It is also more time consuming to analyze for this type of research and may be prone to alteration with an ever increasing set of tools, including tools related to artificial intelligence, that may turn into a future deluge of fake videos that show real individuals delivering fake messages.

For Facebook, posts labeled as "oppose" are significantly "louder" than posts labeled as "support". By louder we mean that the ratio between the percentage of interactions and the number of posts that those interactions were generated from is >1. For example, for the Energy Security narrative, 29 posts (from 100 relevant posts analyzed) generated 38% of the interactions, for the Anti-NATO/Anti-US narrative, 47 posts generated 50% of total interactions and for the Appeasement narrative, 21 posts generated 30,8% of total interactions. The opposite is true for posts labeled as support.

For Facebook, in terms of total interactions, the Anti-NATO/Anti-US narrative had, by far, the highest number, with 1,926,633 interactions, followed by Appeasement, with 1,271,404 interactions and Energy Security, with 1,150,882 interactions. This may be due to the fact that there is overlap between the posts analyzed in each narrative, because the same post may be energy security related, as well as anti-US, for example and the Anti-NATO/Anti-US narrative tends to be a broader subject that may integrate more specific narratives such as Energy security and Appeasement.

Based on the number of interactions gathered, ranging from 5% (for the Anti-NATO/anti-US narrative) to 23,8% (for the Appeasement narrative), **Moldova is a significant part of the Romanian language Facebook conversation**. For the Appeasement narrative, it actually "punches" above its demographic weight in relation to Romania (Moldova has approximately 14% of Romania's population). As we have seen in our equivalent Hate Speech against Ukrainian refugees reports, where Moldova gathered 41%-42% of total interactions, on some topics **the Moldovan Facebook space is key to understanding disinformation in the broader Romanian language social media space and deserves further dedicated research in the future**.

With regards to the types of sources on Facebook that generated these posts/interactions and their publishing standards, the situation is bleak and it may explain the high percentages of posts labeled as "oppose". Posts from sources labeled as Fake/Conspiracy and Questionable have consistently gathered more than double or even triple the number of interactions than posts from sources labeled as Quality generated. In the case of the Anti-NATO/Anti-US narrative, posts from sources labeled as Fake/Conspiracy and Questionable gathered 53% of all interactions, while interactions from sources labeled Quality registered at 16,1%. For this narrative, posts from Questionable sources gathered the most interactions (30%). Most of the time, content from Fake/Conspiracy and Questionable sources opposed Ukraine. **This means that quality mainstream media content is crowded out in a sea of questionable content and disinformation that may be promoted under Facebook's algorithms that are favorable to divisive content.**

KEY SUMMARY

Content from Political Biased sources rank number one in terms of interactions gathered on Facebook for two of the three narratives (Appeasement - 38,5%; Energy Security - 31,6%). It is useful to reiterate that we have labeled as "Political Bias" sources that are either politicians, political organizations regardless of where they place on the political spectrum and regardless of whether they hold an executive function or not. This means that we labeled Maia Sandu (current President of Moldova) as a Political Biased source, as well as politicians from AUR (Alliance for the Union of Romanians, a far-right Romanian party), for example. For the Energy Security and Anti-NATO/Anti-US narratives, 73,6%, respectively 69,7% of interactions gathered by this type of source are from posts labeled as support. For the Appeasement narrative, interactions from posts by Political Biased sources, labeled as support, registered 23,1%, with the most interactions being from posts labeled as "neutral", mainly due to how we defined the "neutral" stance for this narrative. Political Biased sources in general are supportive of Ukraine and its cause but the drawback is that in a highly polarized political and social environment, content from politicians / political parties tends to be discounted offhand by people that are in opposition with that particular politician/political party, **thus Political Biased sources being the number one type of source in terms of interactions gathered in two of the three narratives might rather be characterized as something negative**.

The broad themes of disinformation that we have encountered in the analyzed posts on Facebook are **"America is the instigator of the war", "Europe will freeze without Russian gas", "Romania should adopt neutrality so as to not be dragged into the war", "NATO expansionism provoked Russia", "Romanian leaders blindly follow the Americans"**. Another common theme is the lack of a clear distinction between the aggressor and the victim and the direct or indirect equating between the two. Of course, we also see whataboutism, especially relating to America's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, comparing the conflicts and their premises.

Twitter is not the platform of choice for Romanians and this has been evident in the difference between the number of total interactions gathered across the three platforms when compared to Facebook. Nevertheless, this does not mean that monitoring the Romanian language conversation about the war in Ukraine is devoid of value. Just because Twitter is not the go to social media platform for Romania in the present, it does not mean that we will not see growth in the future.

The biggest difference for Twitter data when compared with Facebook, besides the total interactions gathered, is that there is a higher percentage of posts (and subsequent interactions) that support Ukraine. For the Anti-NATO/Anti-US and Energy Security narratives, interactions from posts labeled as "support" are in clear majority (68,9%, respectively 65,8%). In the case of the Appeasement narrative, interactions from neutral posts are the vast majority (80,7%) because of how we have thought of the neutral concept in the context of this narrative.

KEY SUMMARY

With regards to the types of sources **on Twitter** that generated these posts/interactions and their publishing standards, the situation is almost exactly reversed when compared to Facebook, meaning that **posts from sources labeled as Fake/Conspiracy and Questionable have consistently gathered more than two or three times less the number of interactions than posts from sources labeled as Quality generated**. Twitter, not having the population of users that Facebook has, has this higher percentage of Quality sources which usually are mainstream established publications, that by default are also on this platform and do not face the wave of Fake/Conspiracy and Questionable sources that drown their content on Facebook.

On Twitter, content from Unknown sources rank number one in terms of interactions for two of the three narratives (Anti-NATO/Anti-US - 34,8%; Energy Security - 35,4%). For the Appeasement narrative Political Biased sources dominated the total number of interactions gathered, 49,3%, mainly due to the tweets from Maia Sandu, Moldova's President. This predominance of sources labeled as Unknown in fact is an indicator of the prevalence of private individuals, not public figures or political parties, institutions, or other organizations.

The broad themes and narratives on Twitter opposing Ukraine mostly mirror what we have seen on Facebook, with ideas like **"America wants war", "We should negotiate for Russian gas and not pay for expensive American gas (LNG)", and a general undercurrent of illiberal values that (in the respective users opinion) are more aligned with Russia than with a decadent West/America**.

As we have stated in the Methodology, we selected and processed Telegram data in a different manner than Facebook and Twitter data. Because we have preselected the accounts that we wanted to search with the syntaxes for the three narratives, we did not get 100 relevant posts per narrative. Also, because there were a lot of preselected accounts that were previously researched and were known to spread disinformation, **this skewed the results towards posts opposing Ukraine. Nevertheless, this Telegram research generated 194,676 views from 49 posts.**

Because of how Telegram is designed as a messaging app and social media platform, focused on anonymity and no content moderation, it is here where we found the most vile type of disinformation narratives. This ranged from anti-Semitic conspiracy theories regarding Jews (cabals, owning global financing, controlling the US), biolabs in Ukraine, hard anti-Ukrainian views mixed with Covid-19 disinformation (the vaccine is the sign of the devil, Vladimir Putin is the only one that can defeat globalism). **There is a definitive ultra religious motivation behind some of the channels/accounts.**

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - APPEASEMENT

From the outset, we need to clarify the thought process of labeling the stance of the posts for this narrative: neutral posts were considered those that promoted the idea of peace, without disclosing the means in which this peace may happen or did not have a clear opinion on the approach. Posts marked as being in support were those that made a clear distinction between the aggressor and the victim and which were not willing to make any territorial compromises for Ukraine, while the ones marked as oppose were those that promoted peace usually under any conditions possible and that promoted negotiations with the Russian side so that the occupied regions of Ukraine would remain in their possession.

- **Total number of interactions for Facebook: 1,271,404 (for the first 100 relevant posts)**
- Facebook posts: Support (17%) - with 16,9% of interactions / Neutral (62%) with 52,3% of interactions / Oppose (21%) with 30,8% of interactions
- **Total number of interactions for Twitter: 1708 (for the first 100 relevant tweets)**
- Twitter posts Support (12%) with 7,4% of interactions / Neutral (66%) with 80,7% of interactions / Oppose (22%) with 11,8% of interactions

76%

■ Romania
■ Moldova

Percentage of interactions for
Facebook relevant posts by
country
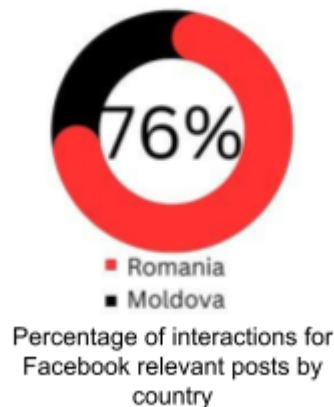
- Number of posts from Romania on Facebook: 73 with 76% of interactions of which 20,4% are of support, 39,1% neutral and 40,4% oppose;
- Number of posts from Romania on Twitter: 98 with 50,5% of interactions of which 14,7% are of support, 61,8% neutral and 23,4% oppose
- Number of posts from Moldova on Facebook: 27 with 23,9% of interactions of which 5,8% are of support and 94,2% neutral.
- Number of posts from Moldova on Twitter: 2 with 49,5% of interactions. Both posts are neutral.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - APPEASEMENT

- On Facebook, 3,7% (48,187) of total interactions came from Fake/Conspiracy sources (of which all oppose Ukraine), 38,5% (490,356) of interactions came from Political Biased sources (of which 23,1% are of support, 48,4% neutral and 28,5% oppose), 8,1% (102,531) of interactions came from Quality sources (of which 28,6% were in support and 71,4% neutral), 16,3% (207,440) of total interactions came from Questionable sources (of which 21,3% were neutral and 78,7% oppose) and 33,3% (422,890) from Unknown sources (of which 17,3% are of support, 73,3% neutral and 9,4% oppose).

- On Twitter 6,8% (117) of total interactions came from Fake/Conspiracy sources (all oppose Ukraine), 49,3% (843) of total interactions came from Politically Biased sources (all neutral), 19.3% (328) of total interactions came from Quality sources (of which 13,1% are of support and 86,9% neutral), 3,8% (65) of total interactions came from Questionable sources (of which all are oppose), 20,8% (355) of total interactions came from Unknown sources (of which 23,7% are of support, 70,7% neutral and 5,6% oppose).

- **The conversation on Facebook is dominated by neutral posts with 62 posts and 52% (664,718) of the total number of interactions. Around a third of these posts came from Political Bias sources, especially from Maia Sandu, President of Moldova**. Another considerable amount came from Unknown sources, with around 50% of them being distributed by musicians, public figures, journalists or religious figures. Most of them promote the idea of peace as a way to stop the harm of innocent people.

- As mentioned above, **Maia Sandu is one of the top accounts sharing content related to this narrative. She has 16 posts with a total of 17% (216,064) of the total number of interactions. 15 of those 16 posts are neutral while her general stance is clearly supporting Ukraine**. Her posts mostly promote the idea of peace and the neutrality of the Republic of Moldova, while being very cautious of not threatening Russia in any direct way. Only one of these posts is more militant and implies not making any compromises in obtaining peace. It was posted following her visit in war-torn Ukraine.

- There were only 21 posts labeled as oppose, but the percentage of the total number of interactions gathered by these posts is 30,8% (390,976). **One of the reasons is that these posts come mostly from influential public figures, such as Anamaria Gavrilă or Cozmin Guşă, with high numbers of followers.**

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - APPEASEMENT

- The post that has the most interactions on Facebook is from Anamaria Gavrilă, with 5,7% (71839) of all interactions gathered by the relevant posts. Anamaria Gavrilă is currently an independent member of the Romanian Parliament, but initially she was elected as part of the anti-European, far-right party AUR (The Alliance for the Union of Romanians). **Her main narrative is that Romania will be dragged into the war if we do not stop supporting Ukraine and adopt neutrality. She uses populist and nationalist narratives in her anti-US and anti-NATO speech.**

- **The conversation on Twitter was dominated by neutral posts with 66 tweets and 80,7% (1379) of the total number of interactions**. This high percentage of the total number of interactions clearly has to do with the fact that Twitter is not the main social platform of choice for any of the sources, but the content is also shared there, as there are other platforms, such as Facebook, that allow the content to be shared immediately on other social media.

- **On Twitter, most of the sources (60,6%) were Quality online newspapers**. Although, when you take into account the fact that they only sum up to 285 interactions (16,7%), their impact is not that significant.

- Maia Sandu has the post with the most interactions on Twitter by far, which is also a neutral one. Her post has 843 interactions, almost half (49,4%) of all 100 posts analyzed.

TELEGRAM - APPEASEMENT

- Total number of views for Telegram: 21300

- The syntax used for the query generated only 4 posts that dealt with the general topic of peace in the context of the war in Ukraine.

- All of the analyzed posts were from Romania of which 3 were labeled oppose, while one of them was labeled support.

- The syntax generated 2 distinct sources, one being Fake/Conspiracy and the other one being Political Bias.

- The 3 opposing posts are from the channel AG_RealEducation. This channel promotes the most extreme conspiracy theories such as Neo-Nazis have taken over America's leadership, 9/11 is a CIA/Mossad plot, Jews own the world's finances, biolabs in Ukraine, etc.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - ANTI-NATO / ANTI-U.S.

- **Total number of interactions for Facebook: 1,926,633 (for the first 100 relevant posts)**
- Facebook posts: Support (41%) - with 39,6% of interactions / Neutral (12%) with 10,3% of interactions / Oppose (47%) with 50% of interactions
- **Total number of interactions for Twitter: 9755 (for the first 100 relevant tweets)**
- Twitter posts Support (63%) with 68,9% of interactions / Neutral (12%) with 14,5% of interactions / Oppose (25%) with 16,5% of interactions

95%

■ Romania
■ Moldova

Percentage of total interactions for
relevant Facebook posts by country
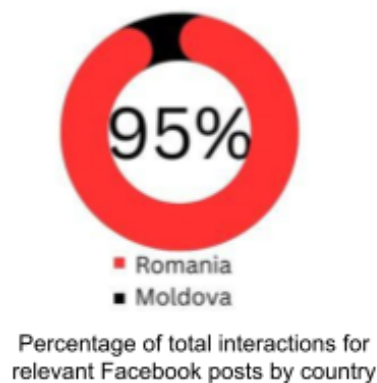
- Number of posts from Romania on Facebook: 94 with 95,1% of interactions of which 40,2% are of support, 8,2% neutral and 51,5% oppose;
- Number of posts from Romania on Twitter: 95 with 97,4% of interactions of which 68,9% are in support, 14,8% neutral and 16,1% oppose.
- Number of posts from Moldova on Facebook: 6 with 4,8% of interactions of which 28,6% are of support, 50,4% neutral and 20,8% oppose.
- Number of posts from Moldova on Twitter: 1 with 0,7% of interactions (support for Ukraine)
- On Facebook 22,6% (435,856) of total interactions came from Fake/Conspiracy sources (of which all oppose Ukraine), 20% (386,748) of interactions came from Political Biased sources (of which 69,7% are of support, 4,4% neutral and 25,7% oppose), 16,1% (310,940) of interactions came from Quality sources (of which 94,9% were in support, 5% neutral), 30,4% (587,282) of total interactions came from Questionable sources (of which 27,1% were in support, 4,4% neutral, 68,3% oppose), 1,3% (26,060) of total interactions came from Tabloid sources (all support) and 9,3% (179,747) from Unknown sources (of which 7,3% are of support, 77,6% neutral and 15% oppose).

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - ANTI-NATO / ANTI-U.S.

- On Twitter 2,6% (257) of total interactions came from Fake/Conspiracy sources (all oppose Ukraine), 6,7% (658) of total interactions came from Politically Biased sources (of which 95,1% are of support and 4,8% oppose), 34,8% (3400) of total interactions came from Quality sources (of which 77,3% are of support, 22,6% neutral), 11,3% (1111) of total interactions came from Questionable sources (of which 32% are of support, 16,2% neutral, 51,6% oppose), 44,3% (4329) of total interactions came from Unknown sources (of which 71,9% are of support, 10,7% neutral) and 17,3% oppose)

- **Half of the interactions gathered for the top 100 relevant posts on Facebook are in opposition to NATO/US**. This is in contrast with the general perception of European and transatlantic consensus on the war in Ukraine. Not all posts are espousing disinformation in the specific context of the war in Ukraine but they are relevant because they weaken the perception of the Alliance in Romania, thus having an impact on the course of the war.

- **The conversation on Facebook was dominated by Fake/Conspiracy and Questionable sources (53% of total interactions gathered for relevant posts)**. Quality sources only gathered 16,1% of total interactions, meaning that content that portrayed the war in Ukraine in substantive and objective terms (for example, clearly delineating the aggressor and the victim) was drowned in content that espoused disinformation and/or approached the topic of the war from a clickbait/bombastic angle.

- **The unique source on Facebook with most interactions gathered (17% - 165,142) for posts labeled as oppose is Sorin Ovidiu Vântu**. He is a businessman who was convicted for economic crimes and has turned into a videoblogger. In his videos he routinely publishes disinformation aimed at the United States and NATO. In the posts that were analyzed for this report, he says that "America wants a global war in Europe", "Russia is the country assaulted by America through NATO", he equates NATO troops stationed in Romania with occupation forces and accuses America of stationing troops in Romania to protect a puppet government in case people revolt against them.

- **For Twitter**, there was a much smaller percentage of interactions from posts labeled as oppose (16,5%). Most of the posts that opposed NATO/US are from individuals, not public figures. **The most common recurring theme in these tweets is portraying America as an instigator of war**.

- The relatively low percentage of interactions from posts labeled as oppose on Twitter might be explained by the fact that **the majority of posts came from Quality sources and from Unknown sources (from which 71,9% were of support)**. This may indicate that for now, Twitter is not the platform of choice for Romanians and thus disinformation is concentrated on Facebook but it may still change in the future, if the platform gains traction with Romanians and Romanian speakers.

TELEGRAM - ANTI-NATO / ANTI - U.S.

- Total number of views for Telegram: 117267

- The syntax used for the query generated only 23 posts relevant in the context of the war in Ukraine.

- All of the analyzed posts were from Romania of which 18 were in opposition of Ukraine and 5 neutral.

- The syntax generated 2 distinct sources, both Fake/Conspiracy

- 92% of the total views gathered by relevant posts are from the channel AG_RealEducation. This channel promotes the most extreme conspiracy theories such as Neo-Nazis have taken over America's leadership, 9/11 is a CIA/Mossad plot, Jews own the world's finances, biolabs in Ukraine, etc.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - ENERGY SECURITY

- **Total number of interactions for Facebook: 1,150,882 (for the first 100 relevant posts)**
- Facebook posts: Support (51%) - with 45,3% of interactions / Neutral (20%) with 16,5% of interactions / Oppose (29%) with 38% of interactions
- **Total number of interactions for Twitter: 6733 (for the first 100 relevant tweets)**
- Twitter posts Support (52%) with 65,8% of interactions / Neutral (16%) with 16% of interactions / Oppose (32%) with 18% of interactions
- Number of posts from Romania on Facebook: 86 with 85,5% of interactions of which 47,7% are of support, 13,8% neutral and 38.3% oppose;

86%

- Romania
- Moldova

Percentage of total interactions on Facebook for relevant posts by country
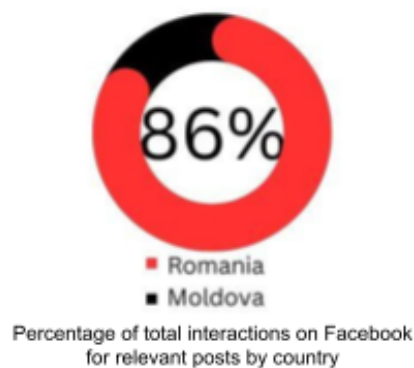
- Number of posts from Romania on Twitter: 96 with 97% of interactions of which 67% are of support, 16,1% neutral and 16,8% oppose
- Number of posts from Moldova on Facebook: 13 with 19% of interactions of which 32,5% are of support, 30% neutral and 37,3% oppose.
- Number of posts from Moldova on Twitter: 1 with 0,8% of interactions (support for Ukraine)
- On Facebook 15,8% (182,949) of total interactions came from Fake/Conspiracy sources (of which all oppose Ukraine), 31,6% (364,347) of interactions came from Political Biased sources (of which 73,6% are of support, 9,8% neutral and 16,5% oppose), 14,7% (169,672) of interactions came from Quality sources (of which 74,3% were in support, 25,6% neutral), 23,8% (274,273) of total interactions came from Questionable sources (of which 29,6% were in support, 8,9% neutral, 61,4% oppose), 1% (12,182) of total interactions from Tabloid sources (all neutral) and 12,8% (147,459) from Unknown sources (of which 31,5% are of support, 50,8% neutral and 17,6% oppose).

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - ENERGY SECURITY

- On Twitter 2,5% (173) of total interactions came from Politically Biased sources (of which 100% are of support), 35,4% (2388) of total interactions came from Quality sources (of which 89,8% are of support, 10,1% neutral), 7,9% (533) of total interactions came from Questionable sources (of which 19,3% are of support, 9,9% neutral, 70,7% oppose), 44,3% (2989) of total interactions came from Unknown sources (of which 67,4% are of support, 26,1% neutral) and 6,3% oppose) and 9,6% (650) of total interactions came from Fake/Conspiracy sources (of which all were in opposition to Ukraine).

- **Posts that oppose Ukraine are louder than posts that support Ukraine**. While from the relevant 100 posts, 51 supported Ukraine, a slight majority, they only gathered 45,3% of total interactions, while the 29 posts opposing Ukraine gathered 38% of total interactions.

- On Facebook, Romania dominates in terms of total interactions gathered (85,5% for Romania versus 13,9% for Moldova). While there is a relatively high percentage of total interactions from posts opposing Ukraine for both Romania and Moldova (37%-38%), there is a significant difference in the support and neutral categories. **In Romania, the content is skewed towards support (with 47,7% versus 32,5%), while in Moldova the content is skewed more towards neutral (30% versus 13,8%)**. This might reflect Moldova's status as a country with a higher number of Russian-speakers and a media with a larger pro-Russian presence than Romania. In both cases, the percentages of posts opposing Ukraine on energy security are very high (more than a third).

- The Facebook **post** opposing Ukraine with the most interactions (almost 16% of all interactions coming from posts marked as oppose and the number one post from the entire 100 post selection) is an excerpt video from a local TV/media organization called Buna Ziua Iasi (with a controversial ownership) posted by an Orthodox priest called Calistrat, who has a large online following (1,097,377 at the time of posting, March 4, two weeks from the start of the invasion). In this video, asked by the host of the show about his opinion on the invasion of Ukraine, he blames the West, specifically America, for instigating the conflict "for resources and gas" and for trying to transform Eastern Europe into "a desert", "like they did in the Middle East". He constantly equates Ukraine with Russia, not differentiating between the aggressor and the victim. **The underlying argument on which this priest is constructing his speech is that Romania's and Russia's shared Orthodox faith trumps any other issue and thus the two countries should generally be on the same side culturally, politically, especially in contrast to a decadent West**.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - ENERGY SECURITY

- The first seven Facebook posts marked as support come from politicians, three of them from Traian Băsescu, Romania's former president. All of them are classified as Politically Biased sources (see methodology - explicative notes for definition). 51,3% of the total interactions gathered by posts labeled as support come from Politically Biased sources, with 24,1% coming from Quality Sources. While having politicians and political parties support Ukraine's cause and a real energy security architecture is a net positive, having much of the discourse dominated by politicians might affect public perceptions of Ukraine. For example, if an audience or individual has a natural and consistent opposition to Klaus Iohannis, Romania's president, any message that comes from the latter might be contested and the opposite view might be adopted by the former, just based on ideology, not rationality. **In other words, in a politically polarized environment, public discourse dominated by politicians, even in support of Ukraine, might not change public perceptions in that direction**.

- **For Twitter, it is important to point out that 44,3% of the total interactions for the analyzed tweets came from Unknown sources**, meaning accounts that are not easily identifiable as a particular individual or organization and for which we couldn't determine any publishing standards. This speaks about the weak presence of Twitter in the overall Romanian social media ecosystem, which is clearly visible in the ratio of the total number of interactions registered for relevant posts/tweets,1:170 in favor of Facebook. At the same time, in contrast with Facebook, Twitter showed more interactions coming from tweets in support of Ukraine (65,8% versus 45,3%), as well as lesser interactions coming from tweets in opposition to Ukraine (18% versus 38%).

- **Most of the analyzed tweets that oppose Ukraine stoke fears about the fact that without Russian energy the European economy will collapse and/or the winter will be unbearable for EU citizens**. The tweet opposing Ukraine which gathered the most interactions (77) says that Erdogan will not let his citizens freeze and will not apply Western sanctions to Russian energy imports. This is something recurrent in opposing tweets, authoritarians being given as example for appeasing and cooperating with Russia (eg. Viktor Orban).

TELEGRAM - ENERGY SECURITY

- Total number of views for Telegram: 56109

- The syntax used for the query generated only 22 posts that referred to energy security in the context of the war in Ukraine.

- All of the analyzed posts were from Romania of which 16 were in opposition of Ukraine, 3 neutral and 3 in support of Ukraine.

- The syntax generated 5 distinct sources (2 Questionable, 1 Fake/Conspiracy, 2 Politically Biased).

- The posts opposing Ukraine generally repeat Russian talking points, such as the fact that Romania passed a good deal offered by Russia on gas, that Europe will destroys itself economically because of Germany (primarily) saying no to Russian gas or instilling fear of water and resource rationalizations.

- 43% of the views were gathered by the channel AG_RealEducation which espouse the worst kind of disinformation and conspiracy theories, often labelling the US and the West in terms that reflect radical anti-semitism (conspiracies revolving around the idea of Jews controlling the finances of the world) and praising Putin and Russia for its Orthodox faith.

METHODOLOGY - EXPLICATIVE NOTES

(1) The exact definition of Twitter interactions used in this report is the total number of likes, retweets and replies per post.

(2) There are two categories of keywords forming each syntax, for each narrative: general keywords and hostile keywords. General keywords are used to set the broad context for each narrative (eg. "energie", "gaz" for the Energy Security narrative) and hostile keywords that refer to content that might be indicative of posts that espouse malign disinformation, especially of Russian origin. For a post to be considered in the results it must contain at least one general keyword and it may or may not contain hostile keywords.

(3) The Source Standards tag options are broadly defined but may be summed up as follows:

a. Quality: Media sources with a proven track record of following journalistic and publishing industry standards.

b. Political Bias: Sources that are either politicians, elected officials or consistently leaning towards a political ideology / political party.

c. Tabloid: Sources that are heavily reliant on a high number of clicks per article, based on bombastic, skewed content.

d. Questionable: Sources that repeatedly publish unverified content, often amplifying Russian malign narratives related to the war in Ukraine or trying to normalize Russian actions or the consequences of war

e. Fake/Conspiracy: Sources that are either fake and/or constantly promoting publicly debunked conspiracy theories, often on the lines of Covid being a hoax, Russian talking points, anti-LGBTQ propaganda.

f. Unknown: Sources that we do not have sufficient information at hand to discern its standards for creating and publishing content

(4) The post's stance tag refers to how its content is positioned (support/neutral/oppose) in relation to the official stance of Allied NATO members and Ukraine towards the war in Ukraine

(5) The data was scraped from Facebook using CrowdTangle. For Twitter we used Pulsar and for Telegram we used Python and library requests.

(6) For Telegram, we preselected the top ten Romanian language channels based on the number of subscribers as shown on https://telemetr.io/ (data from October 2022) and also added other TG channels that were subject to previous monitoring (mostly problematic channels). Because of this selective approach, with fewer channels/accounts being monitored, Telegram related analysis was presented in this report in a distinct, separate section.

(7) The channels with the most subscribers, as per data from October 2022 from telemetr.io were: @ungureanu112 (38,8 thousand subscribers), @dumitruciorici (36,5 thousand subscribers), @veritasadevarulnecenzurat (24,9 thousand subscribers), @nasultv (22,7 thousand subscribers), @wwwaurelianro (14,1 thousand subscribers), @zdgmd (13,4 thousand subscribers), @sustinatorigeorgesimion (13,4 thousand subscribers), @danmvchiticnecenzurat (13,3 thousand subscribers), @maiasandumd (12,4 thousand subscribers), @pastilarooriginal (10,7 thousand subscribers).

(8) The Country indicative is based on the location as defined by the Source, which implies that the percentages presented in this report may be significantly skewed in reality.