

HOSTILE NARRATIVE BRIEF

WAR IN UKRAINE

Political Context: Ukraine



June 2023



About The Beacon Project

The International Republican Institute strengthens citizen voices and helps make their leaders more accountable and responsive. To put it simply, IRI encourages democracy in places where it is absent, helps democracy become more effective where it is in danger and shares best practices where democracy is flourishing.

Vladimir Putin is actively trying to sway public opinion throughout Europe using hostile propaganda, disinformation, and political subversion as a way to destabilize its neighbors. Therefore, in 2015, IRI launched the Beacon Project to counteract this misinformation.

The Beacon Project does not prevent disinformation from occurring—a laudable but impossible goal. Nor does it confront every instance of disinformation—though we work with partners who do just that. IRI's focus is to dismantle the underlying conditions that allow disinformation to spread. Strengthening democracy is the best approach for nations to respond not just to today's threat, but to better endure in the face of future threats in whatever form they take.

Publication Details

The Beacon Project (powered by IRI)
Hostile Narrative Brief: War in Ukraine • Political Context: Ukraine

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June 2023

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The USA and Poland were in a spotlight of Facebook talks in Ukraine during the year of Russian full-scale invasion

At the same time the cases of the Czech Republic and Lithuania prove the old truth that quantity does not always mean quality, and it is possible to reach the high attention and loyalty of the Ukrainian audience even with a minimal media presence.

As part of IRI's year-long study of how Russia's full-scale invasion was discussed in the online media space of multiple Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries in terms of support for Ukraine, several separate samples and country reports were made for Ukraine.

The full IRI study is available [here](#).

Regarding separate samples on Ukraine, one of them is aimed to analyze the quantity and quality of references to the EU, NATO and eleven countries from among Ukraine's Western allies, especially the United States, the United Kingdom, Great Britain, Germany, France, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Bulgaria. 1,159,789 most popular Facebook-posts in Ukrainian language were collected based on keyword matches from January 2, 2022 to April 21, 2023.



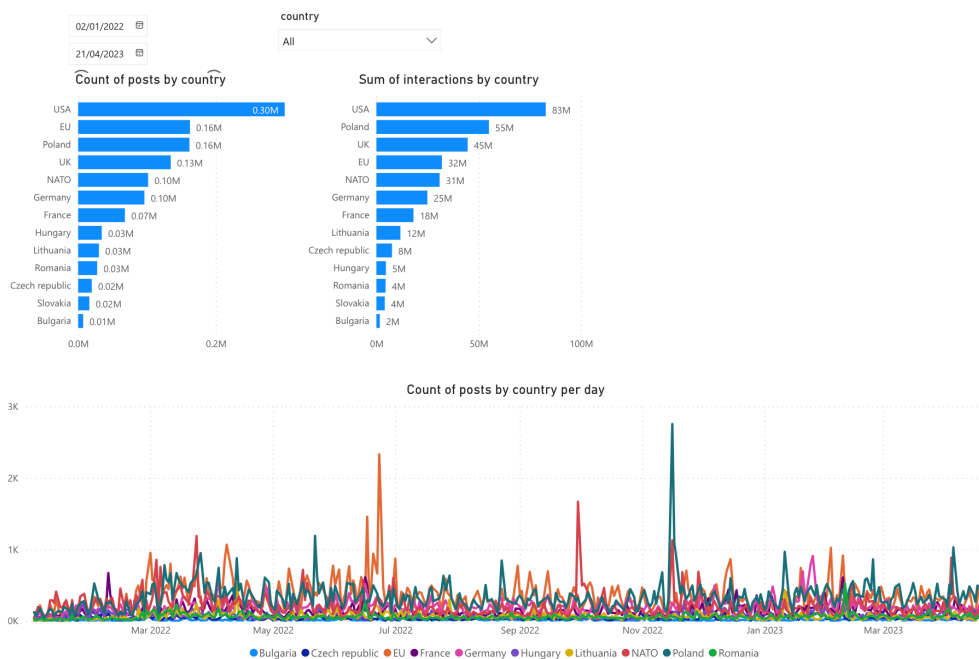
Key Conclusions

1

With the exception of Poland, the attention of discussions on Ukrainian-language Facebook is focused on the G7 countries of the sample and the EU and NATO as alliances.

The USA, Poland, the EU, NATO and Great Britain are the leaders in terms of the number of mentions and interactions. The United States leads within these two criteria by a wide margin. At the same time, Poland is the second “*shadow leader*” of the attention of Ukrainian Facebook users.

Such important Western allies of Ukraine as France and Germany are perceived in Ukrainian Facebook as “*the middlings*”: important but not decisively.



Immediate western neighbors of Ukraine, such as Slovakia, Hungary or Romania, or other countries on the eastern flank of the EU and NATO, like the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Lithuania, were much less in the spotlight.

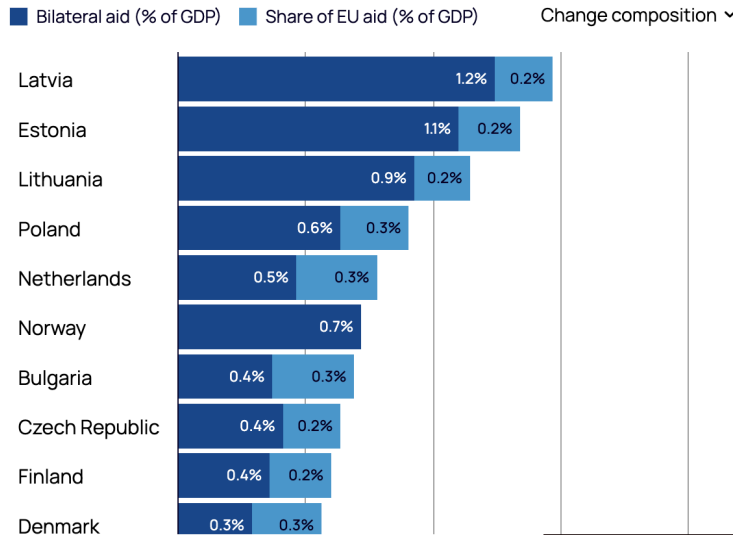
Such configuration is in many cases inversely proportional to the rating of the countries according to the volume of their aid to Ukraine as a percentage of their GDP, which amounted to the year of the Russian invasion by the **Kiel Institute** for the world economy.



Government support to Ukraine: By donor country GDP, incl. and excl. EU share



Commitments Jan. 24, 2022 to Feb. 24, 2023. Data on 40 donor countries; scroll to see more countries



Source: Trebesch et al. (2023) "The Ukraine Support Tracker" Kiel WP

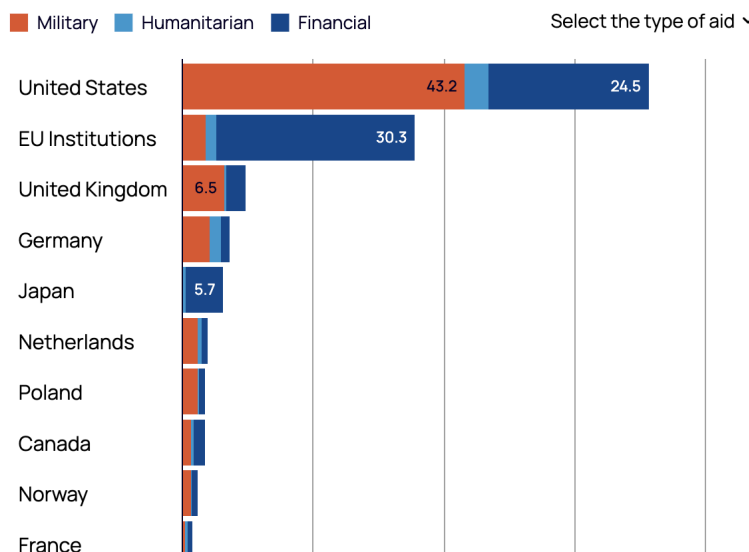
ifw-kiel.de/ukrainetracker

In Kiel's rating Lithuania, Poland, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia are much higher on the list than the United States, the United Kingdom, France or Germany. Although in absolute numbers (not in % relation to GDP) both the rating of Facebook attention of Ukrainians towards specific countries and the rating of aid to Ukraine from them coincide more with the United States in the top position.

Government support to Ukraine: Type of assistance, € billion



Commitments Jan. 24, 2022 to Feb. 24, 2023. Data on 41 donors ; scroll to see more donors



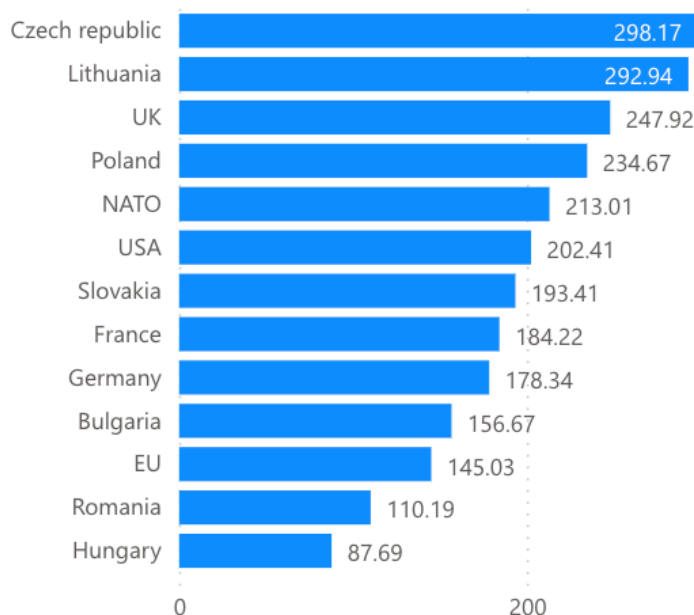
Source: Trebesch et al. (2023) "The Ukraine Support Tracker" Kiel WP

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2

However, countries such as the Czech Republic and Lithuania, having one of the lowest and average number of mentions within our sample, respectively, have the highest average number of likes per Facebook post (almost 300 likes). This demonstrates an obvious sign of the sympathy of the Ukrainian Facebook audience to messages about these countries.



The average number of likes per Facebook post by country

The Facebook panel allows different types of likes, not just positive, but our analysis of 100 most popular Facebook posts by country in Ukraine proves that debates on the Czech Republic and Lithuania in Ukrainian Facebook **were positive**.

3

The extremely low average number of likes per post about Hungary (only about 90 likes) is striking, taking into the account the fact that in terms of the number of mentions, Hungary is ahead of all other immediate western neighbors of Ukraine, with the exception of Poland.

That is, Hungary was discussed a lot on Ukrainian Facebook, but without much enthusiasm.

This is due to the extremely small amount of good news from Hungary, based on a separate sample of the 100 most popular Facebook posts about Hungary in Ukraine, available [here](#).

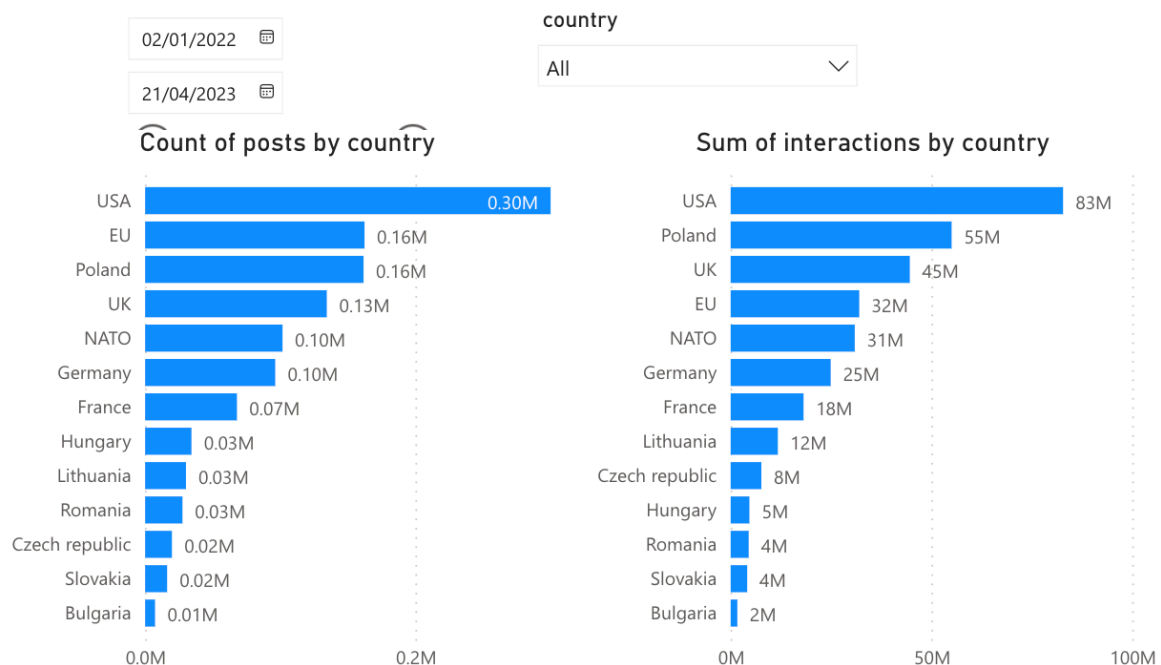


Meanwhile, the case of Romania, which looks similar to Hungary from the first glance, deserves special attention. The country has some of the lowest scores in our sample across all criteria - both a low number of mentions and a low overall and average engagement on those mentions. However, the often lower quantitative indicators than in Hungary do not at all mean that Romania has a worse image in Ukrainian Facebook. As mentioned earlier, a separate study of the 100 most popular Facebook posts about Romania in the Ukrainian-speaking segment of Facebook indicates that there is simply a lack of information about this country in general.

4

Slovakia was definitely underrepresented on Ukrainian-language Facebook during the year of the Russian invasion. Being the immediate neighbor of Ukraine, as well as the country that was the first to transfer air defense systems (S-300) and MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine, as well as other weapons, attention to Slovakia in the Ukrainian segment of Facebook is extremely weak. This can be seen from one of the smallest number of mentions, the general interaction on these mentions, in particular the least number of comments, although the average number of likes for these mentions is quite high.

However, Bulgaria, which, according to investigations ([Politico](#)) and studies (Kiel Institute), became a key donor of Soviet weapons and fuel for Ukraine in the first weeks and months of the war, is even more underestimated than Slovakia in this regard. Unfortunately, Bulgaria closes our list with the fewest mentions and interactions on those mentions.

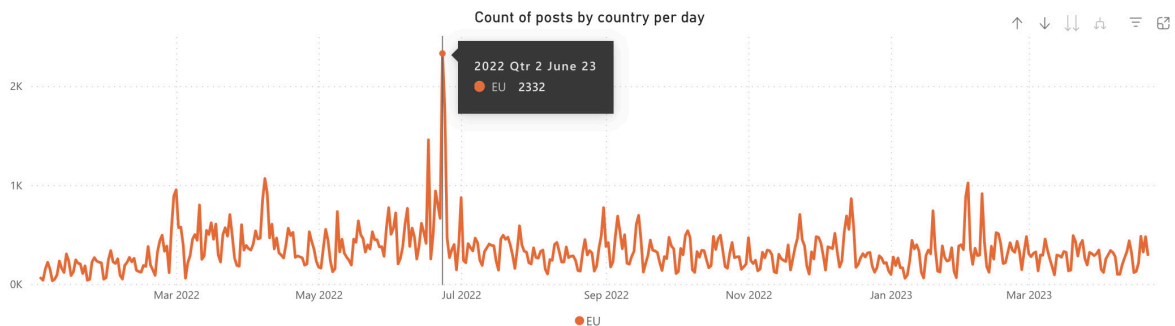


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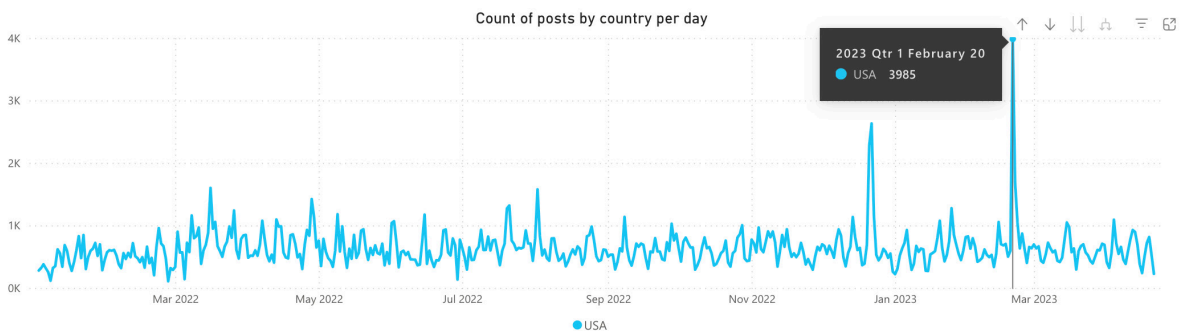
The key spikes with mentions of a particular country or alliance (the EU or NATO) on Facebook are linked to specific fateful events, turning points, not necessarily positive ones:



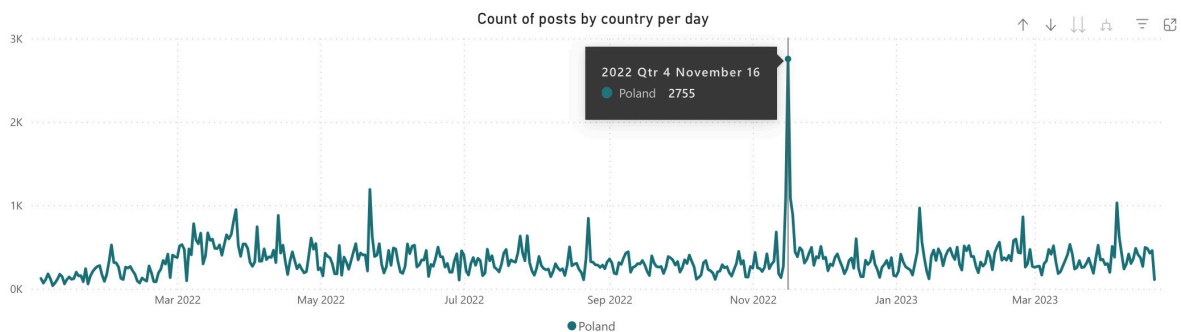
in the case of the EU, it was granting Ukraine the status of a candidate for EU membership, which was announced on June 23, 2022;



in case of the USA, it is Joe Biden's visit to Kyiv on February 20, 2023;

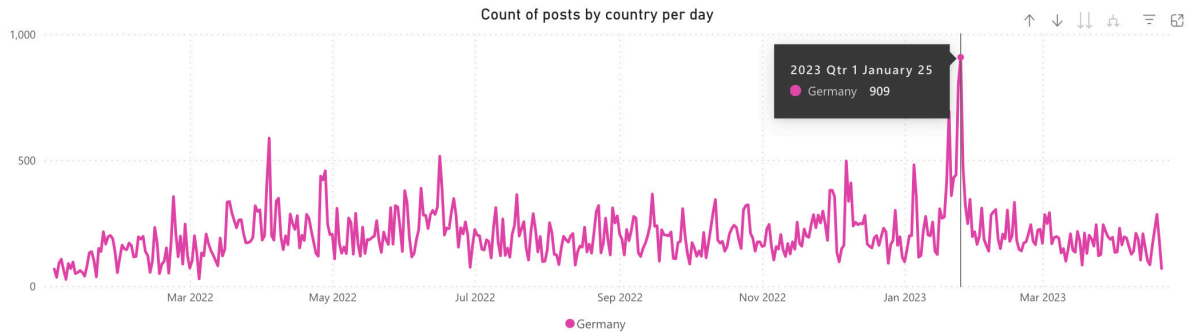


in case of Poland, it is a tragedy in Poland, when a misdirected missile of Ukrainian air defense fell on the Polish town of Przewodow during a Russian missile attack on November 15, 2022;

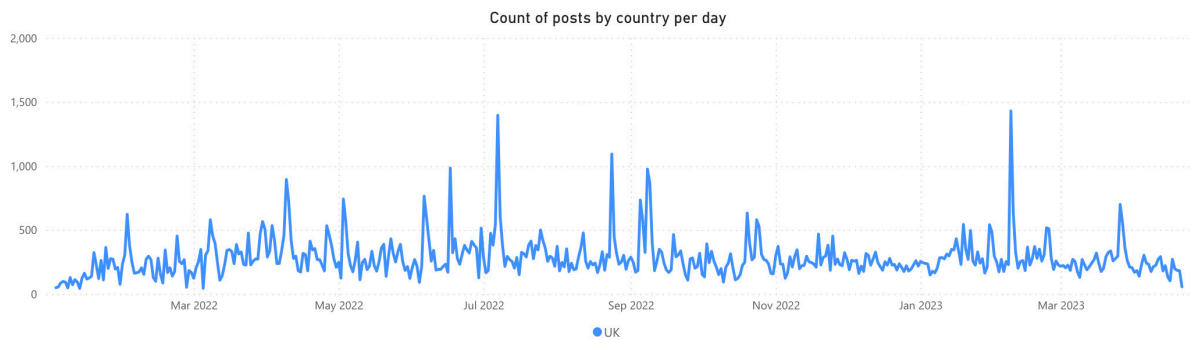




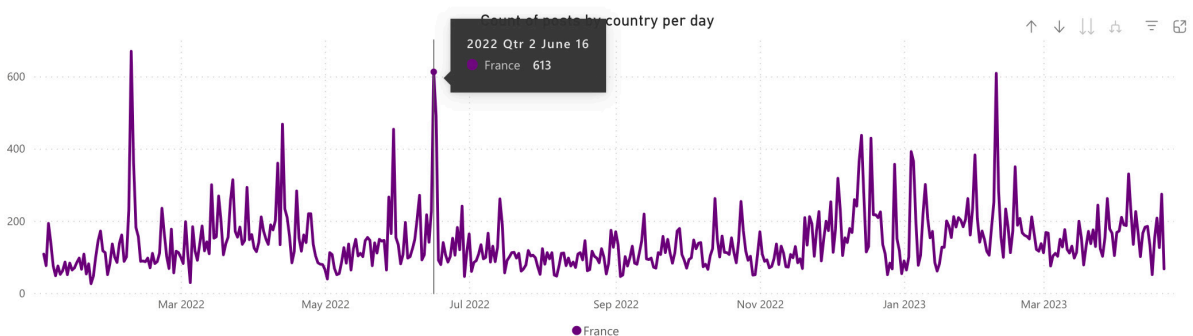
in case of Germany, this is the announcement on January 25, 2023 of the decision to transfer Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine;



in case of the United Kingdom, it is news about Boris Johnson - either his resignation from the post of prime minister of the country, or visits to Ukraine, as well as visit of Volodymyr Zelenskyi to the United Kingdom on February 2023;



In the case of France, this is Emmanuel Macron's visit to Kyiv on June 16, 2022.





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