

BREAKING EUROPE



Revealing Russian disinformation networks and active measures fuelling secessionism and border revisionism in Central and Eastern Europe



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper is the summary of the results of an over a year-long research project covering the Kremlin's and pro-Kremlin actors' disinformation campaigns and active measures related to territorial revisionism in six countries - Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania and Serbia - during a period of heightened nationalism and historical revisionism involving World War I commemorations between 1 January 2018 and 15 April 2020. Political Capital has assessed in numerous studies how the Kremlin transformed European far-right parties and extremist organisations harbouring age-old territorial or other grievances against other countries into pro-Russian political assets since the early 2000s. In this study, we set out to understand the inner workings of "revisionist" disinformation campaigns as tools of destabilisation on a local and regional level. The research utilised a novel methodology that combined qualitative content-analysis with the analysis of networks and social media statistics to reveal communication strategies and the dissemination of revisionist ideas in Central-Eastern Europe. For more information on the project, please visit our [thematic website](#).

We are grateful to the authors listed below. We are also grateful to the Open Information Partnership, particularly Tom Southern and Seraphina Hintze, for their insights, cooperation and support for this research project. We would like to thank Dr. Vivian Walker, the executive director of the United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy for her patient guidance and useful critiques of the studies and the research methodology. All errors and omissions are our own.

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In partnership with: Emerging Futures Institute [Poland], Global Focus [Romania], Centre for Contemporary Politics [Serbia]; Ukraine Crisis Media Center [Ukraine].



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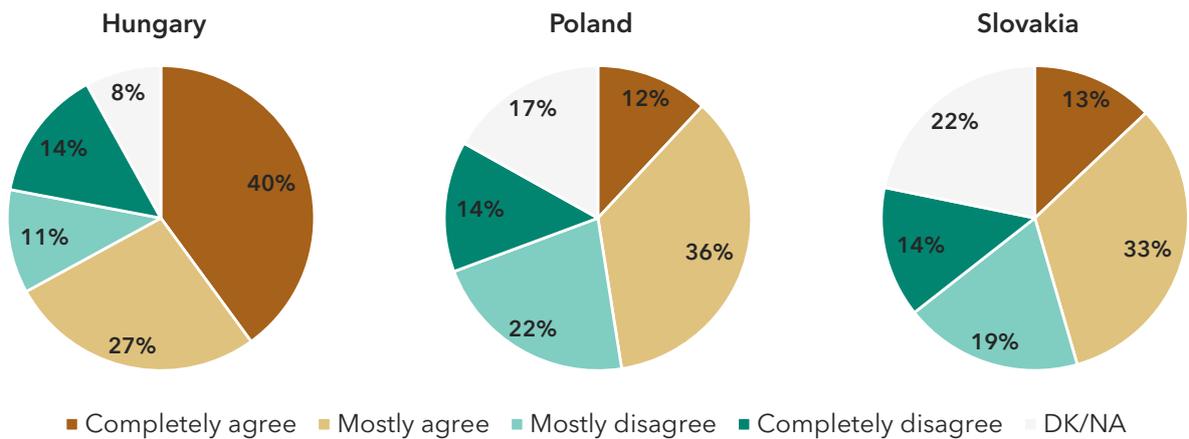
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INTRODUCTION

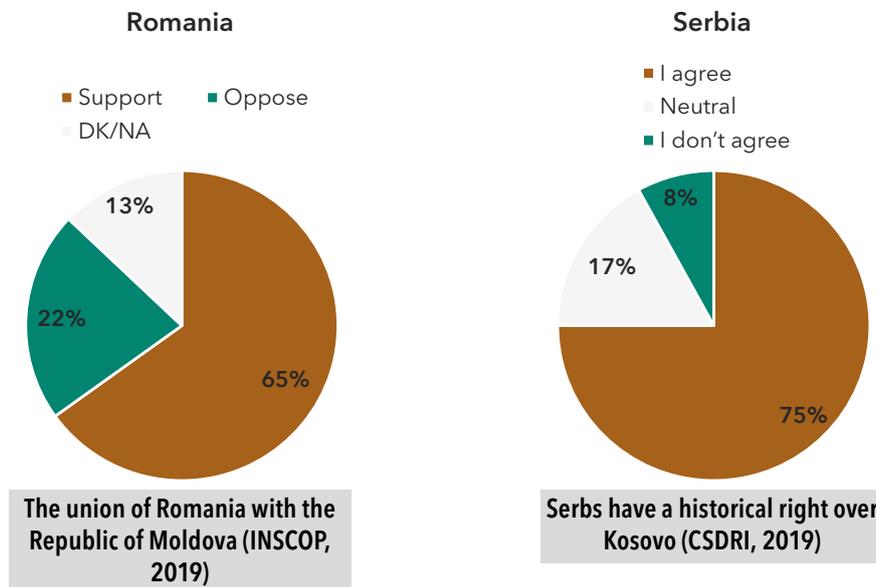
Since the start of the Crimean War in 2014, Russia has masterfully exploited societal divisions present in Ukrainian society and abroad. The war against Ukraine was part of the Kremlin’s long-term foreign policy attempt to preserve or (re)gain influence over the post-Soviet space, which we discussed already in our study in 2017 concerning the activity of pro-Russian extremist groups in Central and Eastern Europe.¹ The “grand strategy” of secessionism and irredentism devised by Moscow’s former chief strategist Vladislav Surkov set out to destabilise and federalise Ukraine by provoking conflicts between Russian and Hungarian minorities on the one side and the Ukrainian far-right on the other,² and supporting secessionist-nationalist organisations with a pro-Russian agenda in Central and Eastern European countries.³

There is clear demand for such policies. As a Pew Poll from 2020 indicates,⁴ a considerable proportion of the population in Central Europe expresses a desire to regain their respective countries’ lost territories (see the graph below).

While the mobilisation of nationalist movements against Ukraine in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary has borne little tangible benefits,⁵ revisionist narratives are being successfully injected into local political discourses by the Kremlin and its pro-Kremlin media on a continuous basis. To that end, the Kremlin has made “active measures” and hostile state disinformation campaigns focusing on territorial claims a permanent element of its foreign policy toolkit for two main reasons. According to Russia expert Anton Shekhovtsov,



There are parts of neighboring countries that really belong to us (Pew Research, 2020)



Surkov and other Russian stakeholders consider “information counterattacks on the West” to be the best available means of projecting Russian power and destabilising the global liberal order.⁶ As Russian Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces Valery Gerasimov noted, information warfare provides “wide asymmetrical possibilities for reducing the fighting potential of the enemy.”⁷ Russian public diplomacy efforts to “influence foreign audiences” through dialogue, accompanied by a soft power strategy built around the *Russkiy Mir* or “Russian World” narrative, on the other hand, are not working simply because Russia “lacks the soft power resources necessary to attract foreign publics,” notes Vivian S. Walker, the executive director of the United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy.⁸

As part of its disinformation campaigns, Russia uses a lot of malpractices to exploit the historical grievances in Central and Eastern Europe. Russian disinformation narratives thrive on nationalism-fuelled grievances about territorial loss, especially in the aftermath of the two World Wars. With the 100-year anniversary of the end of World War I and the treaties succeeding it, territorial revisionism once again became a part of mainstream and fringe political rhetoric, especially in Central and Eastern European countries. Different interpretations of historical or current-day territorial conflicts in the CEE region became rhetorical flashpoints, generating national discourses filled with perceived historical wrongs, chauvinist ideologies and disgruntled commentary about national identity, language, and origin. Russian disinformation strategies took advantage of these narratives of territorial revisionism, especially in Central-Eastern-Europe, where chauvinistic attitudes prevail in the general population and in pro-Kremlin, far-right subcultures. According to DGAP’s Russia and geopolitical expert András Rácz:

“The Russians know quite precisely how one can make use of ethnic tensions in Central-Eastern Europe, because they know the region. (...) They engaged in such disruptive behaviour during the Second World War.”

This study analyses the Kremlin’s or pro-Kremlin actors’ disinformation campaigns and active measures related to territorial revisionism in six countries – Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania and Serbia – during a period of heightened nationalism and historical revisionism between 1 January 2018 and 15 April 2020, when official commemorations of WWI treaties took place. We have not set out to define the Kremlin’s overall strategy to destabilize European security and economic cooperation to shift the balance of power in its favour; rather we seek to understand the inner workings of “revisionist” disinformation campaigns as tools of destabilisation on a regional level.⁹ The research in this group of countries provides insight into revisionist disinformation strategies applied by Russia in Eastern Europe – both in countries within and outside the EU and NATO – and the players that are receptive to such rhetoric.

We hope that our research results can provide local elites, the Euro-Atlantic community and the wider public with insights and tools to better identify and thwart Russian hostile information operations based on societal divisions and identity politics to upend European peace and stability.¹⁰

METHODOLOGY AND THE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The geographical scope and timeframe of the media research study was defined to reflect disinformation activities addressing territorial disputes. Research techniques, further detailed in Annex 1, combined traditional desktop research, expert interview with statistical and big data analysis of Facebook pages, posts and websites' hyperlink dissemination networks.

To properly study revisionist messages, communication campaigns and their sources, we selected six Central and Eastern European countries based on three criteria. They had to (1) be affected by territorial changes after World War I due to the significance of the current centenaries of the post-WWI peace treaties in or around 2020; (2) experience domestic political discourses addressing territorial revisionism; and, finally, (3) be subjected to revisionism-focused pro-Kremlin disinformation campaigns. Poland, Hungary, and Romania met our initial criteria for selection. However, desktop research revealed that communication campaigns focused primarily on World War I were not prevalent in the three other countries. As a result, we decided to select the most forcefully debated or presented revisionist issues by pro-Kremlin media in those three countries under review, which turned out to be pro-Russian "separatism" in Slovakia, the status of Kosovo in Serbia, and Russian territorial revisionism in Ukraine.

Following the timing of national anniversaries and commemorations related to World War I, we conducted media monitoring between 1 January 2018 and 15 April 2020 to reveal Russian hostile influence operations - targeting the 100 years anniversaries of Romania's Great Unification in 2018,¹¹ and the Versailles and Trianon treaties concluding World War I in 2020 commemorated by Hungary and ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia. For the operational definitions of "narratives," "revisionism" and "disinformation" please see Annex 2.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Our research revealed that the Kremlin is successfully projecting power and leveraging historical or current-day revisionism over Central-Eastern Europe to forward its agenda against the Euro-Atlantic community and Ukraine. The Kremlin's disinformation campaigns focusing on territorial revisionism are put forward either by pro-Kremlin far-right and paramilitary groups or local pro-Kremlin networks of media in Central-Eastern Europe.**
- **There is a demand for such foreign policy and external affairs related communication.** As a Pew Poll from 2020 indicated,¹² a considerable proportion of the population in Central Europe would like to take back territories after past conflicts.
- **Altogether, we identified 19 new revisionist domestic narratives, 11 of which express territorial claims against neighbours, for example Polish or Hungarian extremist claiming that parts of Western Ukraine should join their respective countries. These are at the heart of the Kremlin's disinformation campaigns in a region where diplomatic conflicts over minorities are prevalent and revisionist attitudes run high, affecting between 48 and 67% of local populations.**
- Pro-Kremlin media is proactively utilising local inter-ethnic conflicts or commemorations of WWI and WWII to escalate bilateral tensions between Ukraine and its neighbours, claiming that Ukraine is a "fascist" or "undemocratic" country unable to adhere to European norms and values, as it happened in relation to the arson attack against the Hungarian minority's cultural centre in Uzhhorod in Ukraine.
- **The Kremlin's disinformation campaigns have been relying on a string of successful active measures executed by German, Polish, Russian agents of influence to directly pit against each-other national governments, as well as majorities and minorities in Hungary, Ukraine, Slovakia and Poland.** Such cases included, for example, blowing up a Polish commemorative statue in Ukraine or the disruption of Polish WWII commemorations by "Fascist" provocateurs.
- **In terms of the number of domestic revisionist narratives, Hungary witnessed the highest number of "aggressive" territorial claims against neighbours, followed by Serbia, Romania and Poland in both mainstream and fringe media.** "Victimhood" narratives fearing revisionism were most prevalent in Ukraine and Romania.
- **Domestic "aggressive" or "victimhood" narratives, for example about Hungary plotting to reclaim Transylvania from Romania, were used by Russian disinformation campaigns in the frames of three primary revisionist strategies.** They all justified local revisionism by applying the Kremlin's "victimhood frame" to ethnic minorities living in Ukraine, Romania, or Kosovo.
- **The first strategy of bilateral inter-ethnic exploitation applied in Hungary, Romania and Poland further escalated bilateral diplomatic conflicts between EU and NATO member states** via disinformation campaigns implemented by far-right groups and pro-Kremlin media. Such action included the Uz valley incident in Romania or the arson attack against the Hungarian minority in Western Ukraine.
- **The second strategy of boosting pan-Slavic solidarity directly spread Russian revisionist narratives about Crimea, the "Donetsk People's Republic" or the "Luhansk People's Republic" territories through Russian officials or activists in Slovakia and Serbia.** This strategy legitimised Russian land grabs by evoking the concept of pan-Slavic brotherhood between nations and drawing parallels between Crimea as a Russian territory and Kosovo as a part of Serbia.
- **The third strategy of retelling the story of territorial aggression in Ukraine tried to reinterpret the Russian military aggression as a "civil war" or "freedom fight,"** while questioning the sovereignty of the Ukrainian state and Ukrainian national identity based on religion, language or ethnicity.

- Based on the best performing revisionist fringe Facebook pages and posts, we concluded that **the successful dissemination of revisionist narratives in social media depends on five factors: a high number of followers, extremist political movements capable of mobilisation, cross-posting of content, nationalistic rhetoric and conspiracy theories running against official or mainstream explanations of territorial conflicts.**
- **The network analysis of pro-Kremlin webpages revealed a centralised model of dissemination in Serbia, Romania, Hungary and Poland**, where central-nodes of pro-Kremlin media either disseminated Russian news agency contents directly to domestic audiences or legitimised their revisionist messages by incorporating data, statements published by prestigious third-party media, such as the BBC or Deutsche Welle. In Ukraine and Slovakia, parallel networks of pro-Kremlin pages were created either to circumvent the official ban on the Kremlin's mouthpieces (Ukraine) or reach out to both far-right and far-left audiences (Slovakia).
- **A visible and highly cohesive network of pro-Kremlin webpages could be observed in Ukraine, Poland and Slovakia, capable of executing coordinated disinformation campaigns, online and offline mobilisation.**
- **The revisionist disinformation strategies, networks of pro-Kremlin pages pose a direct national security threat to the countries involved or the Euro-Atlantic Community** since they are mobilising online or offline local far-right or paramilitary groups, hundreds of thousands of followers on social media platforms. Therefore, anti-Ukraine, anti-NATO, anti-USA or anti-EU disinformation campaigns can become a long-term fuel for revisionist claims in Central-Eastern Europe.

RECOMMENDATIONS

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Historical reconciliation between Central-European countries must be institutionalised** via joint (bi- and multilateral) commemorations. Historical commemorations on governmental, academic and civic levels should become a permanent element of bi- and multilateral relations to prevent the weaponization of Russian territorial revisionist narratives during historical commemorations in bilateral diplomatic tensions.
2. **Official communication should avoid any ambiguity**, accidental dis- or misinformation regarding historical commemorations, the Russian military aggression in Ukraine or elsewhere. Fuelling nationalist narratives of victimhood by governments and political parties only plays in the hands of Russia.
3. **Develop Stratcom state capacities directly dealing with local pro-Russian communication networks.** Governments should be able to monitor, debunk or alert domestic actors, EU or NATO member states to Russian disinformation campaigns targeting vulnerable audiences, such as minorities, far-right groups, fringe media.

TACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Transparency: Information about Russian active measures should be communicated swiftly by local intelligence agencies** to politicians, local media capable of offsetting the impact of revisionist disinformation campaigns in the public sphere. Annual Reports of Intelligence services might add to the transparency, such as in the Czech Republic.
2. **Isolation: "Victimhood" or "aggressive" narratives fuelling revisionism, secessionism should be pushed back** by governmental agencies, independent media and NGOs monitoring extremist movements and pro-Kremlin local communication networks.
3. **The strategy of "retelling the story of territorial aggression" should be countered by permanent cooperation platforms** between Ukrainian and Central Eastern European journalists when it comes to the coverage of the Ukrainian conflict and bilateral issues.
4. **Target the "strongest links": Expose and attack the strongest or central links of dissemination networks.** The network analysis revealed the weakest points of fringe networks involved in territorial disinformation campaigns. Local politicians, independent media and big service providers, such as Facebook, Google, Twitter, should, therefore:
 - a. **Alert the public** to the online or offline mobilisation of pro-Kremlin networks of actors;
 - b. **Take down or hamstring the activity of "central nodes"** in dissemination networks through legal or financial measures;
 - c. **Unmask revisionist rhetoric** as military aggression, a tool of hybrid warfare
5. **Publish annual security reports.** The national security threat posed by territorial disinformation campaigns should be addressed by regular national or regional reports published by intelligence agencies about pro-Russian disinformation networks and actors, which would assist the anti-disinformation activities done by independent media, fact-checking organisations and local politicians.

REVISIONISM IN NUMBERS

The relevance of revisionism-related (dis)information can be judged by the demand for and impact of revisionist messages. On the demand side, revisionist attitudes are the most prevalent in Central and Eastern European countries compared to the West. Some form of territorial revisionism is supported by 75% of Serbs, expressing a historical right over Kosovo,¹³ and 67% of Hungarians supporting territorial claims against neighbours, followed by a high percentage of respondents in Romania (65%),¹⁴ Poland (48%), Slovakia (46%), according to recent representative surveys.¹⁵ When it comes to the impact of disinformation campaigns concerning revisionism, revisionist messages and narratives also gain significant traction among the local and regional audiences based on our research. Some of the disinformation campaigns and “active measures” analysed in the *Disinformation trends and strategies* chapter were international scandals widely discussed in the national media of several countries at the same time. Among those, we can find the arson attack against the Hungarian minority’s headquarter in Western Ukraine in 2018, which was covered in three articles on Sputnik,¹⁶ one on TASS¹⁷, and five on Russia Today.¹⁸ The Uz valley conflict between the Hungarian minority and Romanian majority regarding the use of a World War I cemetery in 2019, which prompted Sputnik Moldova-Romania to publish altogether six articles, with an aggregate Facebook outreach of 31549 (number of interactions). Similarly, the conspiracy theory about President Trump striking a deal with President Putin about returning Transylvania to Hungary was posted several times in 2018, 2019 and 2020 on the main Hungarian conspiratorial/clickbait sites and garnered more than 53000 Facebook interactions.¹⁹

As seen in the revisionism factsheet below, revisionist or revisionism-related discourses produced significant amounts of data over the course of 28 months. We collected altogether more than 86 thousand articles and 1760 Facebook posts related to current-day or historical causes of revisionism in the six countries under review. Based on representative samples of over 500 articles in each country, we could identify altogether 63 narratives related directly or indirectly, concerning issues of national identity, minorities, historical commemorations etc., to revisionism. 19 narratives focused solely on territorial claims (“aggressor” narratives) against neighbouring countries or expressed fear of territorial revisionism (“victimhood” narratives.) These narratives reach altogether hundreds of thousands of users in the six countries through social media, as seen in our **Total number of fans of fringe Facebook pages table**, while pro-Kremlin fringe websites embedded their messages into hyperlink-networks of several hundred webpages for a stronger impact on audiences – either to direct audiences to other pro-Kremlin websites or legitimise their revisionist claims through well-respected third-party sources.

REVISIONISM FACTSHEET

	HU	PL	RO	RS	SK	UA
Articles	10,001	9,682	2,953	7,982	5,437	52,761
Posts	601	406	49	83	163	440

Total number of relevant documents analysed (website articles, Facebook posts)

	HU	PL	RO	RS	SK	UA
Total	17	5	10	6	10	14
of which revisionist	3	1	5	3	2	5

Total number of identified narratives

	HU	PL	RO	RS	SK	UA
Far-right						
pages	20	10	10	7	7	12
fans	660,175	597,006	93,915	230,923	82,446	256,755
Minimum number of unique fans ¹¹⁸	132,391	210,157	19,595	153,283	36,255	131,313
Pro-Kremlin						
pages	30	19	5	10	21	5
fans	1,972,721	706,294	42,126	303,226	272,305	125,996
Minimum number of unique fans	580,806	265,356	18,133	143,310	75,623	66,227

Total number of fans of fringe Facebook pages

	HU	PL	RO	RS	SK	UA
Root domains	17	12	7	20	7	11
Hyperlinked URLs	146	783	225	339	365	1,143

Size of revisionist pro-Kremlin networks

REVISIONIST CAUSES

The expansion of our initial research focus of WWI-related revisionism to include contemporary territorial conflicts meant that we could analyse a variety

of different revisionist narratives to understand how the Kremlin is able to weaponize such causes as part of disinformation campaigns in general.

TRIANON: A QUESTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Revisionism regarding the Treaty of Trianon remained relevant to this day in two countries under review, Romania and Hungary, asking the same age-old questions. The new nation states formed after World War I faced the same controversial issues regarding the definition of nation or national identity. Romania after the Great Unification of 1918 became a multi-ethnic state trying to reconcile the notion of a Romanian nation state with differing national, for example German or Hungarian, identities. At the same time, Hungary became an ethnically homogenous society, a nation state by the book, which had to come to terms with the existence of Hungarian diaspora communities living in neighbouring countries. The Treaty of Trianon or colloquially known as “Trianon” has become a turning point in regional revisionism for two key reasons. The former Hungarian imperial political elite could not accept the new borders and loss of territories, Hungarian ethnic populations of the former Hungarian Kingdom; therefore, it pursued an active and militarily aggressive revisionist foreign policy between the two world wars - resulting in revisionist diplomacy, wars, occupations against neighbouring countries.²⁰ Although Hungarian official and mainstream revisionism has been put to rest by the Soviet occupation and the creation of the Soviet bloc, and then by integration into NATO and the European Union, the territorial argumentation behind Hungarian far-right revisionist ideas continue to be present to this day.^{21 22} **The far-right Hungarian subculture pursues a latent revision of the Trianon Treaty, which they deem to be the only remedy to the division of the Hungarian nation.**

The issue of Trianon in the Romanian context concerns the Great Unification of Bessarabia, Bucovina and Transylvania. Therefore, revisionist narratives in Romania address either Moldova or

Transylvania. To a lesser extent, pro-Kremlin media accused the Romanian government of a “hidden revisionist” or “interventionist” agenda of trying to unify Moldova with Romania. Although such narratives have less impact on the Romanian media space and public, considering the accession procedure of Moldova to the European Union and the close cultural, religious, economic etc. relationships between the two countries, Russia is actively involved in stirring territorial disputes. The establishment of Transnistria in Eastern Moldova in 1990 as a Russian puppet state and a “frozen conflict” served as a staging ground for Russian military personnel, shady businesses. Pro-Kremlin media has been used as a tool to destabilize Moldova and, by extension, Romania, a member of the EU and NATO.²³ Regardless, given the evident antagonism between Hungarian and Romanian historical interpretations of the Trianon Treaty and the extremist views of Hungarian far-right groups on the issue, most of the Romanian “victimhood narratives” about revisionism concern alleged Hungarian or ethnic Hungarian plans to achieve territorial revisionism against Romania. These narratives are well served by a mutual cultural and social disconnect between the Romanian majority and Hungarian minority populations that are not only rooted in linguistic, cultural differences, but in Romanian Socialist or nationalist “nation-building” political processes that viewed ethnic Hungarians as incapable or unwilling to integrate into Romanian society. Romanian distrust towards Hungary or ethnic Hungarians is fuelled by the current effort of the Hungarian minority, also supported by the Hungarian government, to attain territorial autonomy for Harghita, Covasna and part of Mureş counties, the three administrative territories constituting Szekler Land (Ținutul Secuiesc or Székelyföld).

LVIV: FAR-RIGHT NOSTALGY AND HISTORICAL GREATNESS

Polish revisionism resembles Hungarian patterns: one of the central elements of it is being represented by far-right actors both symbolical and in everyday issues. **Since the Polish government and society is extremely resilient to any form of direct Russian political influence or direct communication campaigns, the Kremlin has been trying to create bilateral tensions between Poland and Ukraine. One of the main avenues of such indirect influence targets historical revisionism present among anti-Russian and far-right Polish groups**, such as All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska), the National-Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo Radykalny) and the National Movement (Ruch Narodowy), concerning Galicia or Eastern-Galicia, which is one of Western Ukraine's histori-

cal regions as Галичина/Halychyna.²⁴ The territory became contested (again) after World War I, during the Polish-Ukrainian War in 1918 and 1919.²⁵ Polish far-right movements express territorial revisionist claims regarding the territory based on the Polish heritage of the city of Lviv (Львів in Ukrainian, Lwów in Polish) and the surrounding area that was part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between 1387 and 1772 and currently hosts a sizeable Polish minority. Despite Poland firmly standing by Ukraine's side against the ongoing Russian aggression, far-right attitudes against Ukraine are negatively swayed by official bilateral diplomatic tensions about the appropriate commemorations of the victims of the Volhynia Massacre or the status of Ukrainian guest workers in Poland.²⁶

UKRAINE AND SLOVAKIA: ARGUMENTS FOR RUSSIAN "SEPARATISM"

Among the countries observed, Russian revisionism or "separatism" against Ukraine were the main territory-related discourses present in Slovakia and Ukraine. While the geopolitical situation in Ukraine needs no extensive explanation, since the Russian aggression against the country in 2014 started a prolonged war, historical or current revisionist narratives are a key component of the Kremlin's hybrid war against the country to relativize or reinterpret the military occupation.

The issue of territorial or border revision in Slovakia is a dual (geo)political phenomenon.²⁷ When it

comes to general matter, there is no revisionism present in Slovakia mainly due to the founding of Czechoslovakia after World War I, and later that of sovereign Slovakia. In this context, the Treaty of Trianon is viewed by the Slovak political elite as the "cornerstone" of the establishment of modern-day Slovakia and long-lasting peace in Central-Eastern Europe.²⁸ Pro-Russian "separatism" in Eastern Ukraine, on the other hand, has been supported by some mainstream and fringe political and media actors rooted in pan-Slavic sentiments and cultural bonds to Russia.

KOSOVO: THE SERBIAN CRIMEA

Serbia is the odd one out in our list of countries considering its geographical distance to Ukraine, the excellent bilateral relations between the Hungarian and Serbian governments, and the low level of activity of Hungarian extremists on its territory. **What makes Serbia a "hotspot" of territorial revisionism, revisionist narratives are three things: the status of Kosovo; Serbia's role in other territorial/ethnic disputes in the Balkans, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH); and, finally, the close political and military cooperation with Russia and President Putin.** In the

case of Kosovo, territorial realignment is a constant part of the diplomatic options, since the Serbian government refuses to recognize Kosovo's independence and tries to achieve a comprehensive agreement that could involve the revision of borders or a land swap. Regarding Kosovo, Russia is in a power-broker position by supporting the Serbian stance on Kosovo, which provides it not only with leverage over Serbian governmental politics or the country's accession to the EU, but over the Balkans in general as well.

REVISIONIST NARRATIVES

The research team conducted a representative sample analysis in each country to map all the relevant revisionist or revisionism-related narratives. We took a random, representative sample of altogether

er 3489 articles based on the SentiOne database consisting of “relevant articles” published by mainstream, far-right and pro-Kremlin media sources in the six countries.²⁹

PATTERNS OF REVISIONISM

In the table below, all the revisionist domestic narratives were listed by country of origin and the mainstream, fringe or shared discourses they were part of.³⁰ The countries were listed according to the total number of narratives, starting with the highest number on top. Narratives’ ranking in each sub-category from top to bottom followed

their share in the country samples under review. If narratives could be attributed to more than one discourses (mainstream, far-right, pro-Kremlin), they were assigned to the “shared” category to highlight their wide-spread nature in the media spaces.

Narrative/ Country	Name	Type	Discourse	% in sample ¹¹⁹
Ukraine				
1	Ukraine attacks Donbass	Aggressive	Pro-Kremlin	10.0%
2	Donbass will not return to Ukraine	Aggressive	Pro-Kremlin	5.0%
3	Current frontline aggression	Victimhood	Mainstream	8.6%
4	Instability of "DNR/LNR" or Crimea	Victimhood	Mainstream	7.6%
5	Pro-Russian revanchism against Ukraine ¹²⁰	Victimhood	Mainstream	0.2%
Romania				
1	Unification of Romania and Moldova	Aggressive	Shared	27.3%
2	Hungarian revisionism in Szekler Land	Victimhood	Shared	11.3%
3	Hungary to annex RO territories	Victimhood	Shared	8.7%
4	Military superiority against HU revisionism	Victimhood	Shared	6.7%
5	Russian aggression against Romania	Victimhood	Shared	5.3%
Hungary				
1	Territorial revisionism against neighbours	Aggressive	Far-right	2.2%
2	Territorial revisionism related to Trianon	Aggressive	Pro-Kremlin	3.3%
3	Crimea is part of Russia	Aggressive	Pro-Kremlin	2.2%
Serbia				
1	Putin & Trump decide Kosovo land-swap	Aggressive	Shared	10.8%
2	Kosovo is like Crimea and part of Serbia	Aggressive	Shared	7.8%
3	Kosovo is a result of Western aggression	Victimhood	Shared	9.3%

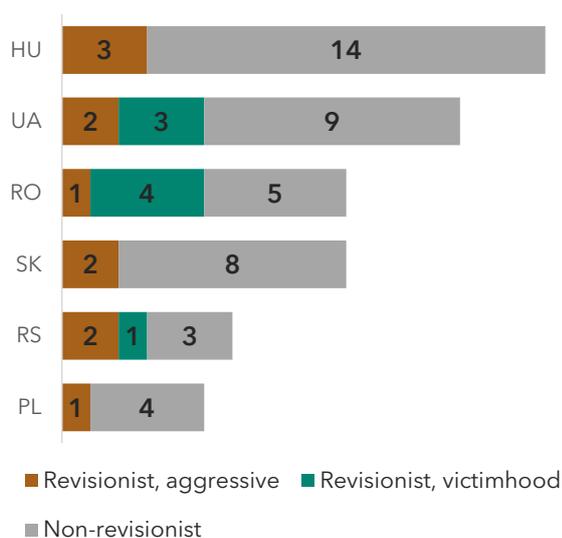
Aggressive and victimhood revisionist narratives in each country by discourse type and percentage share

REVISIONIST NARRATIVES

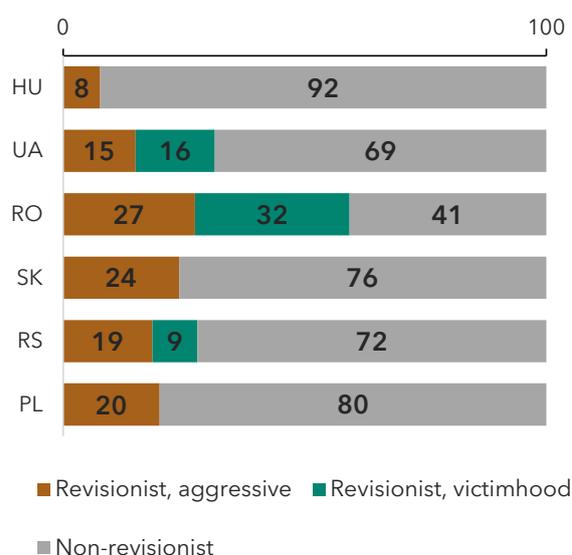
Narrative/ Country	Name	Type	Discourse	% in sample
Slovakia				
1	Crimea has always been Russian	Aggressive	Shared	23.0%
2	Zakarpattia may join Hungary	Aggressive	Pro-Kremlin	1.0%
Poland				
1	Lviv should be Polish again	Aggressive	Shared	20.0%

Aggressive and victimhood revisionist narratives in each country by discourse type and percentage share

Among all countries, Hungary had the most (17) narratives that directly or indirectly relate to the issue of Trianon and revisionism, and 3 directly reflecting on territorial revisionism - for the full list of narratives, please see Annex 4. Hungary had the highest number (3) of “aggressive” territorial revisionist narratives related to Trianon in fringe discourses against neighbouring states or supporting the Russian positions, for example on Crimea, as displayed in the Number of narratives chart below.³¹



neighbours over commemorative issues. **Still, the impact of Hungarian revisionist narratives alone on the Hungarian media space is currently limited by both by the fringe nature of discourses and their low prevalence in the sample, amounting to just around 8% of all the messages, as seen on the Proportion of narratives chart.**



Unsurprisingly, out of the 14 Ukrainian narratives, the 3 mainstream “victimhood” revisionist ones presented a defence against Russian aggression by dealing with the “situation on the frontlines,” instability in the “separatist republics of NDR or LNR,” and domestic pro-Russian “revanchism” that seeks to return Ukraine to the Kremlin’s sphere of influence by abandoning the Western integration of the country. The two aggressive revisionist narratives disseminated by pro-Kremlin media mutually reinforce each other by claiming that the Donbass region will not return under the control of Ukraine due to its proto-states’ (“Donetsk People’s Republic,” “Luhansk People’s Republic”)

successes, and the ongoing Ukrainian “military aggression” against the region. These pro-Russian revisionist narratives also proved to be quite effectively disseminated, with the highest shares in the sample with 10 and 5 percent, respectively. Their impact could be, however, counterbalanced by all the other narratives about Russian influence in Ukraine or Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia.

In Serbia, 2 out of 3 territorial narratives represented aggressive forms of revisionism. The strongest one with a 10,8% share in the sample stipulated that a backroom-deal between President Putin and President Trump would bring about some form of internationally accepted land swap/border change between Kosovo and Serbia. The other narrative draws a parallel between Crimea and Kosovo and other Russia-supported territorial conflicts, such as one claiming that “Nagorno-Kharabakh is Armenia,”³² to argue that Kosovo is as much Serbian as Crimea is Russian rooted in history, culture and religion. Since these narratives were spread by Russian officials, most recently by a Crimean Delegation to Serbia headed by Deputy Chief of the Foreign Affairs Committee Natalya Poklonskaya, the “Iron Lady,”³³ the Kremlin was directly reassuring the Serbian public of Russian support for a future realignment of borders. The third Serbian defensive narrative accused the West of aggression against both Serbian-Russian ties and Russia’s overall influence in the Balkans. The case for aggressive revisionism was even further bolstered by all the other accompanying narratives addressing the Russian-Serbian alliance or anti-Western sentiments.

Among the other countries without an active territorial conflict, there were only 3 revisionist narratives, which amount to less than 25% of their samples. In Slovakia, the pan-Slavic narrative about Crimea belonging to Russia, the legitimization of the Crimean annexation has been shared across all media. At the same time, only 1% of the articles in pro-Kremlin media advocated for the territorial autonomy or secession of Zakarpattia to Hungary. The strong prevalence of the “Crimea has always been Russian” narrative with its 23% share in the sample was against the backdrop of mutually-reinforcing anti-Western/Eurosceptic narratives targeting the EU, NATO or the United States, which further legitimised the Russian aggression and delegitimised a sovereign Ukraine and the Revolution of Dignity.

Fringe pro-Kremlin disinformation, therefore, was directly targeting the anti-Western sentiment of the Slovak population, known for being the most conspiracy-prone society in Central-Eastern Europe.³⁴

The lone Polish revisionist narrative about the Western Ukrainian city of Lviv and the area surrounding it re-joining Poland was mostly put forward by Polish far-right and pro-Kremlin media

on the premise of the 1918-1919 war, and historical ties between Lviv and Poland. However, the narrative’s 20% share in the sample coupled with other narratives addressing anti-Ukrainian sentiments, atrocities of World War II presented a very hostile perception of a democratic Ukraine.

The odd one out in the list of countries was Romania for two main reasons. **Although, the country has no ongoing territorial dispute and it is quite resilient to Russian disinformation campaigns overall,³⁵ its leading narrative (27% of the sample) addressed the unification of Romania and Moldova.** Moreover, 4 additional narratives dealt with defensive revisionism against Hungary or Russia. The high popularity of the unification narrative – advocated most forcefully by pro-Kremlin and/or nationalist, anti-liberal media – can be explained by the strong historical and present-day connections between the Romanian society and the majority ethnic Romanian population of Moldova.³⁶ All the other victimhood narratives, however, reflect on mostly suspected Hungarian territorial revisionism on the part of Hungary or the Hungarian minority living in Romania, which would question “nationalistic, ethno-centrist narratives, exaggerating the unique role that the Romanian population have played in achieving the Great Unification,” as our Romanian partner, Rufin Zamfir from Global Focus put it.

DISINFORMATION TRENDS AND STRATEGIES

In order to reveal the Kremlin's and pro-Kremlin actors' strategies regarding revisionist narratives and disinformation in each country and on a regional level, we need to take into account four aspects of the communication process: (1) the different disinformation strategies applied in each country; (2) the kinds of pro-Kremlin political actors and affili-

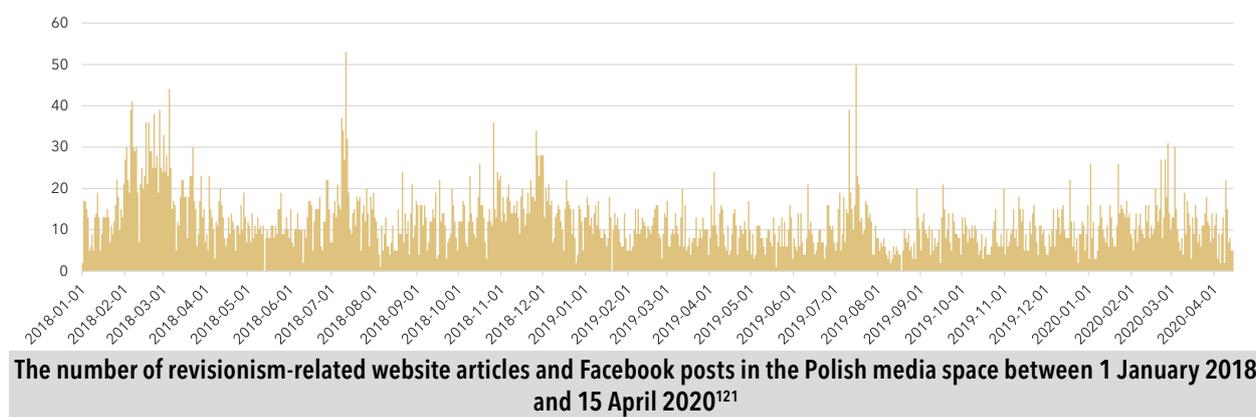
ated media that are involved in the dissemination of revisionist messages; (3) different media trends keeping revisionist narratives afloat and relevant; and, finally, (4) the way messages are disseminated in social media and through networks of pro-Kremlin outlets.³⁷

TRENDS OF REVISIONIST MESSAGES

Based on the geopolitical stance of local political and media elites and the trends of revisionism-related messages, as seen on the diagrams below, we can analyse the main modus operandi of pro-Kremlin communication in each country.

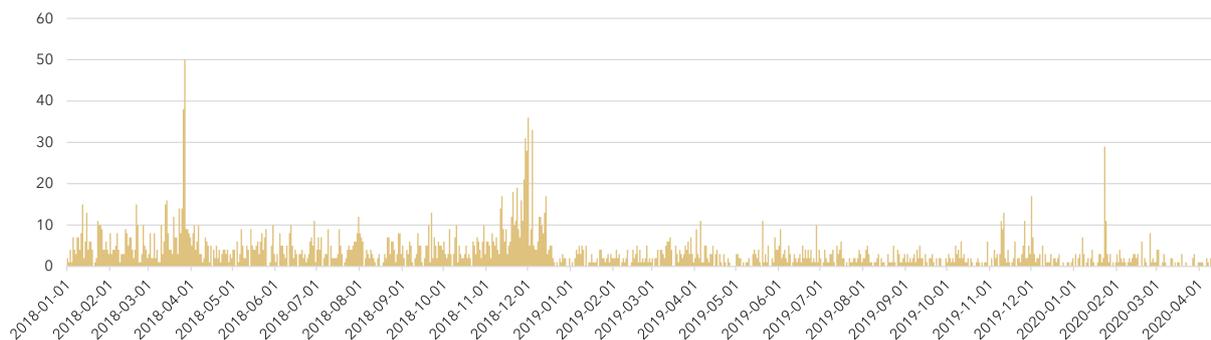
The resilience of Polish mainstream media, politics and society to direct Russian influence, disinformation campaigns means that pro-Russian disinformation about Ukraine can only be fed to and through fringe far-right groups and media, such as the All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska), the National-

Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo Radykalny) or the Kresy.pl portal.³⁸ An analysis of Polish trends revealed that revisionist narratives were mainly fuelled by bilateral tensions between Poland and Ukraine concerning the June 2018 amendment of the IPN (National Institute of Remembrance) law addressing crimes against "Polish citizens" committed by "Ukrainian nationalists," which was criticized by Ukraine, and the anniversaries of the Volhynian Massacre in July each year (2018 was the 75th anniversary of the Massacre) – **as seen on the chart below.**



Similarly, Romanian society and the political elite is very antagonistic towards Moscow or its disinformation campaigns on historical grounds. However, leading Romanian politicians' divisive opinions on the union between Moldova and Romania³⁹ or the Hungarian minority are being exploited by anti-West and/or pro-Kremlin media, for example, Justitiarul⁴⁰ or Sputnik Romania-Moldova.⁴¹ Fringe narratives of revisionism were enabled by

Romanian news trends reflecting the heated debate on a bill adopted by the Romanian Parliament on Szekler Land autonomy in 2018⁴² or a Moldovan parliamentary delegation visit to Bucharest on the 100th anniversary of the Great Union in December of the same year.⁴³ A 2019 news peak was driven by a diplomatic brawl over the yearly celebrations of the Great Unification in December, prompting the Russian Ambassador to Bucharest to accuse the

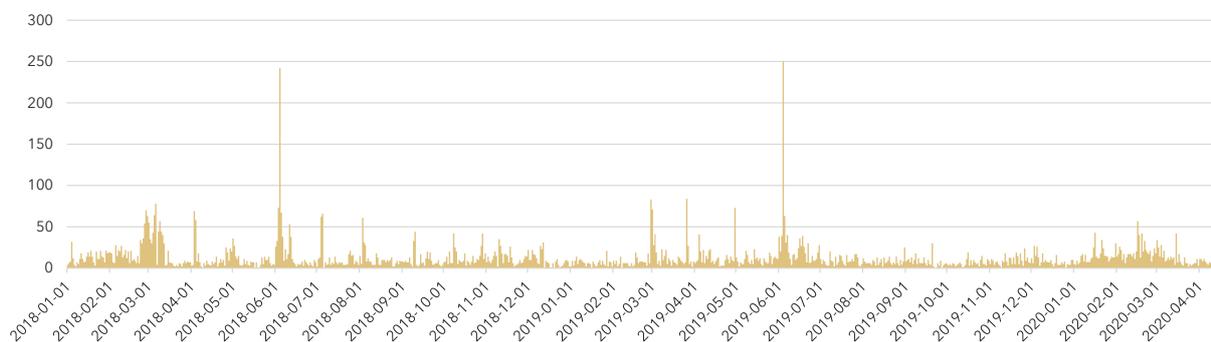


The number of revisionism-related website articles and Facebook posts in the Romanian media space between 1 January 2018 and 15 April 2020

custodian of the Romanian Crown of supporting “NATO’s aggressive posture in the Black Sea region” – **as seen on the chart above.**⁴⁴

In Hungary, revisionism is put forward by pro-Kremlin far-right, paramilitary movements, such as the openly revisionist Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement (Hatvannégyszáz Vármegye Ifjúsági Mozgalom, HVIM),⁴⁵ or the neo-Nazi Army of Outlaws (Betyársereg), and Hungarian-speaking

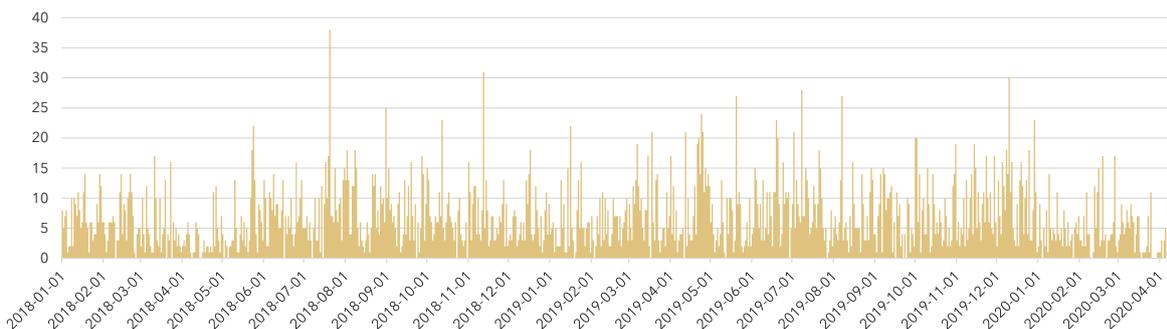
fringe pro-Kremlin media. They tried to capitalise on trend-setting political issues such as the yearly commemoration of the Treaty of Trianon (the Day of National Togetherness) in the June of 2018, 2019 and 2020; or the Hungarian-Ukrainian diplomatic conflicts over the 2017 Ukrainian law limiting the use of minority languages in the Ukrainian education system in February 2020 – **as seen on the chart below.**⁴⁶



The number of revisionism-related website articles and Facebook posts in the Hungarian media space between 1 January 2018 and 15 April 2020

Among “pan-Slavic” countries, Slovakia is also vulnerable to Russian narratives and disinformation campaigns through its fringe political actors or media. In Slovakia, the mainstream political and media elite’s Euro-Atlantic stance is dented by the population’s pan-Slavic sentiments,⁴⁷ the low support expressed towards NATO and a general distrust towards mainstream media. As a consequence, 60% of Slovaks believe in a secret elite and anti-NATO conspiracies published on fringe outlets⁴⁸ – according to Globsec surveys.⁴⁹ Revisionist narratives entering mostly through fringe actors,⁵⁰ such as the paramilitary Slovak Conscripts (Slovenskí branci) or far-left MP Ľuboš Blaha, as well as far-right MP Marián Kotleba, are usually driven by general

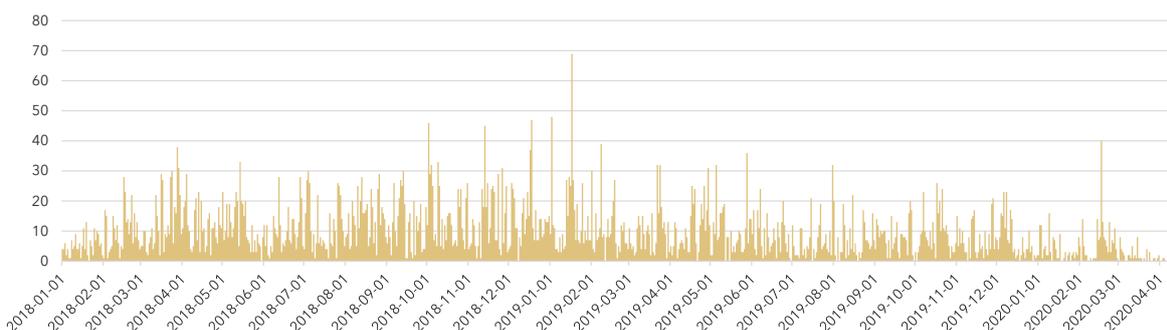
news about the sanctions regime against Russia, the status of Crimea or the war in Eastern-Ukraine (the “separatist” Donetsk and Luhansk “People’s Republics”) or the Kerch Strait incident – as represented by the November 2018 news peak **on the chart below.** The role of Slovak pro-Russian fringe media, such as Hlavné spravy, Zem a Vek, Slobodný vysielač, Infovojna, in the dissemination of pro-Russian narratives is crucial, since they report much more about Russia in general than the mainstream Slovak media. They produce a steady stream of relevant news, depicted by the frequent peaks on the chart below, which makes fringe media the “go-to” source regarding news about Russia or the Kremlin.



The number of revisionism-related website articles and Facebook posts in the Slovak media space between 1 January 2018 and 15 April 2020

On the contrary, Serbia can be considered a clear-cut pro-Russian country, where pro-Kremlin stances, attitudes transcend different political and media affiliations. Therefore, Serbian media tend to produce a variety of different pro-Russian narratives around the same political or geopolitical issues along party-lines. News peaks, **as seen on the chart below**, were generated by Kosovan police arresting a high-level Serbian official in March

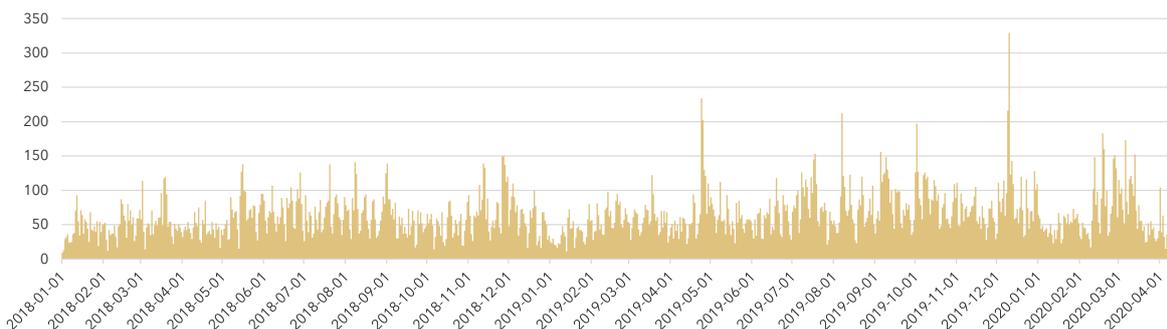
2018,⁵¹ the official visit of President Putin to Serbia in January 2019, and various statements of Russian diplomats regarding the status of Kosovo or Crimea. As a result, revisionist narratives are common and widespread in the Serbian media space, so the real question is how the Kremlin might exploit the issue of Kosovo to exert maximum leverage over Serbian politics and, by extension, the Balkans.



The number of revisionism-related website articles and Facebook posts in the Serbian media space between 1 January 2018 and 15 April 2020

Ukraine as the “ground zero” of revisionist narratives is in a unique position among the countries under revision. Russian outlets or Russian narratives have been seemingly driven away from the Ukrainian media space since 2014. Thus, news about Russian revisionism is driven by war atrocities and the occupation of Ukrainian territories on the Eastern front on an everyday basis. The difference is in the reporting of Ukrainian or pro-Kremlin

outlets, since they characterise the same incidents as further territorial aggression or some sort of a “freedom-fight” against Ukrainian nationalism. So, **the chart below indicates** peaks that reflect on the presidential election in May 2019, the prisoner exchange between Ukraine and the “separatists” in December 2019, or fights erupting on the Eastern front in February 2020.



The number of revisionism-related website articles and Facebook posts in the Ukrainian media space between 1 January 2018 and 15 April 2020

REVISIONIST NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

The different societal, political and media mechanism of Russia-related communication and power projection in the six countries reveal three regional communication strategies through which revisionist or revisionism-related narratives can be disseminated.⁵² These are:

1. **Bilateral inter-ethnic exploitation** in Hungary, Romania and Poland;
2. **Pan-Slavic solidarity** in Slovakia and Serbia
3. **Retelling the story of territorial aggression** in Ukraine

The three basic types of revisionist strategies are further supported by three types of supplementing political and narrative strategies:

1. **Reinforcing ethnic stereotypes**, for example, in Poland against Ukrainian guest-workers allegedly taking advantage of the Polish welfare system.
2. **Geopolitical “polarisation,”** which highlights differences between a decaying, amoral West and a religious, tradition-following East, for example, in Slovakia, Hungary, Romania.
3. **“Positive” conspiracy theories** about, for example, President Trump and President Putin working out backroom deals to solve regional conflicts, revisionist claims over territories in Hungary or Serbia.

We have analysed specific disinformation campaigns or active measures to understand how each strategy plays out in specific cases, while social media and network analysis of fringe pages was conducted to reveal a more general dissemination pattern of fringe and/or pro-Kremlin media in each country and on a regional level.

Strategy 1: Bilateral inter-ethnic exploitation

The first strategy of bilateral inter-ethnic exploitation applied in Hungary, Romania and Poland further escalated bilateral diplomatic conflicts between EU and NATO member states via disinformation campaigns executed by far-right groups and pro-Kremlin media. The strategy could be exemplified through multiple active meas-

ures and disinformation campaigns in Hungary, Romania and Poland.

Arson attack against the Hungarian minority in Ukraine

Since the Rada adopted a much-debated education law in September 2017 that limited the use of minority language in public schools, the Hungarian government protested the decision by blocking the Ukraine-NATO Commission meetings to defend the rights of Hungarian minority living in Transcarpathia/Zakarpattia Oblast.⁵³ The bilateral spat quickly turned ugly, as both governments took diplomatic steps against each other, which provided the Kremlin with an opportunity to add fuel to the fire and launch active measures to further escalate the tensions between the two countries. In February 2018, the Hungarian minority’s cultural centre located in Uzhhorod (Ungvár in Hungarian) was set on fire by Polish extremists of the far-right Falanga Movement with ties to pro-Russian “separatists” in Eastern Ukraine. Despite the action having been quickly revealed by the Ukrainian and Polish intelligence agencies to have been organised by Russian intelligence services, it reached its intended goal when Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó summoned the Ukrainian ambassador for not defending the Hungarian minority against Ukrainian nationalism.⁵⁴ As our Hungarian expert, András Rác at GDAP has put it:

“The arson attack in Uzhhorod was targeting Ukraine plain and simple. If the Hungarian (diplomatic) outrage slows down the NATO accession process (of Ukraine), it is a perfect outcome. It was a carefully orchestrated operation: a German, pro-Russian figure named Emanuel Ochsenreiter used Polish far-right extremists from Falanga to execute the action on Ukrainian soil. It was a high-level action, which involved reconnaissance, planning of point of entries. Hungarians were instrumental, not the target of this action. It is a quite nice collateral damage if Romanians and Slovaks become unnerved as well.”

Based on the successfully active measure, the Kremlin and pro-Kremlin media carried out a disinformation campaign, quoting the Hungarian reaction as a proof of Ukraine’s continuous violation of minority human rights, which retroactively legit-

imizes Russia's annexation of Crimea and proves that Ukraine is ill-fitted to join the West.⁵⁵ **The disinformation campaign that ensued, consequently, successfully discredited the Ukrainian government in at least three countries (Ukraine, Hungary, Poland) and in the West by creating a variant of the "Ukrainian nationalists or fascists attack ethnic minorities" disinformation narrative. Domestic Hungarian revisionist narratives calling for the defence of minority Hungarians were then transformed into the Kremlin's "victimhood" narrative as part of an active measure.**

The Uz valley incident in Romania

Another international incident in 2019 started out as a simple inter-ethnic conflict between representatives of the Hungarian minority, a minority-led Romanian municipality and a Romanian majority-led municipality over the status and commemorative use of an international war cemetery of World War One in the Valley of Uz (Valea Uzului). While Romanian and Hungarian nationalists and diplomacies clashed over the issue, and the Hungarian foreign ministry summoned the Romanian ambassador in protest once again,⁵⁶ pro-Russian communication quickly hijacked the conversation in both countries. Gábor Stier, a Hungarian pro-Kremlin journalist claimed on his personal blog that the "script was presumably written by players of big politics", and "everything was aligned to spark (...) a new ethnical clash like the one of the black March of 1990" – a clear reference to a bloody clash between Hungarians and Romanians in the '90s.⁵⁷ Other Hungarian pro-Kremlin fringe media, the anti-Semitic Kuruc.info relativized the "heroic death" of Romanian soldiers of WWI,⁵⁸ and demanded the suspension of any collaboration with Romania within NATO,⁵⁹ while the Hungarian version of Newsfront controlled by the Kremlin wrote that the "attack against Hungarians reminds us of the darkest years of the 20th Century."⁶⁰ These are the same media that floated the idea that Trianon "could spark an ethnic war (News Front),"⁶¹ Hungarians or Szeklers should get back "lost territories" following the "example of the Crimean peninsula,"⁶² or that President Trump would return Transylvania to Hungary based on an alleged "backroom deal" reached at the 2018 G7 summit.⁶³

"Crimea is Russian, because everybody there speaks Russian. Which means obviously that Szeklerland is Hungarian, because everybody there speaks Hungarian, Upper Hungary (in Slovakia)⁶⁴ is Hungarian, because everybody there speaks Hungarian, similarly to part of Vojvodina (in Serbia), where the majority speaks Hungarian," stated the conspiracy site A Világ Titkai in 2018, 2019 and 2020, gathering more than 47000 interactions on Facebook according to Crowdtangle.⁶⁵

In Romania, fringe and nationalist media also seized the opportunity to fan the flames of ethnic tensions by reiterating stereotypes of the Hungarian minority from alleged lack of interest in behaving like Romanian citizens, to accusations of acting on a revisionist agenda.⁶⁶ In Moldova, the Russian mouthpiece sputnik.md covered the conflict in multiple articles in coordination with some of the far-right organisers of the protests on the ground.⁶⁷

The disinformation campaign of pro-Kremlin or anti-West outlets in both countries successfully escalated the incident in three countries (Romania, Moldova, Hungary) by targeting mostly the Romanian and Hungarian general public through fringe pro-Kremlin actors and media. While elements of the conflicts on the ground (protests, counter-protests, desecration of graves) were real, domestic revisionist narratives on both sides were activated by pro-Kremlin actors to fuel wild conspiracy theories.

Provocations in Huta Pieniacka

We could witness similar disinformation campaigns related to the commemorations Huta Pieniacka, where Polish villagers were massacred by paramilitary Ukrainian and German military units under the orders of German officers in World War II.⁶⁸ Both the 2017 and 2018 official commemorations were disturbed by pre-planned actions of "Ukrainian nationalists." The commemorative cross statue was partially destroyed in 2017 during Ukraine's Orthodox Christmas,⁶⁹ and the 74th anniversary prayer was disturbed by Ukrainian "activists" shouting "Bandera is our hero" slogans.⁷⁰ According to Coda Story,⁷¹ the timing of the first attack bore the signs of pro-Russian perpetrators, as it was followed by another act of vandalism against a monument dedicated to thousands of Poles mur-

dered by the Soviet secret police. **In both cases, far-right and pro-Kremlin portals could escalate inter-ethnic tensions in the two countries by pointing to attacks of Ukrainian “neo-Nazis,”⁷² and, Ukraine’s inability to adhere to European values and norms.⁷³ The Kremlin utilised its neo-Nazi victimhood narrative to evoke domestic territorial revisionist narratives among the Polish far-right.**

Strategy 2: Pan-Slavic solidarity

Besides the historical, cultural, political relationships between Russian and Slovakia, as well as Serbia, **pan-Slavic sentiments are strengthened through specific narratives and active measures that echo some form of solidarity between Slavic nations in geopolitical issues.**

Night Wolves’ headquarters

A paramilitary and nationalist Russian group of bikers called the “Night Wolves” set up their “European headquarters” in the small Slovak village of Dolna Krupa, 70 kilometres from Bratislava on the invitation of a far-right figure, Jozef Hambalek, in 2018.⁷⁴ Although, many deemed the groups’ presence as a parody of the official stance of the Slovak government on the Ukraine-Russia conflict, the Night Wolves’ “base” can be viewed as another active measure to legitimise Russian revisionism. For one, the group was actively involved in the occupation of Crimea, its leader, the “surgeon” Alexander Zaldostanov was awarded the Russian Medal of Honour by President Putin in 2013. They also established close connections with pro-Kremlin paramilitary groups, such as the Slovenskí Branci (the Slovak Conscripts or Recruits), which took part in paramilitary training with the Wolves on the site and considers NATO a “terrorist organisation.”⁷⁵ The activity of the Russian group in Slovakia does not only strengthen the relations between Russian and Slovak nationalists, it is also a tool of propaganda. Andrei Bobrovsky, the co-founder of Night Wolves Europe told Euronews that the headquarter “was planned as a patriotic museum” of the WWII and the Soviet era, and as a venue hosting programs for Slovak families, children – in protest of contemporary “European politics.”⁷⁶ **Consequently, revisionist narratives are disseminated through a strong, pan-Slavic far-right subculture, where**

actors with direct knowledge of or experience with the Crimean annexation disseminated anti-Western and pro-revisionist narratives. The Kremlin’s disinformation campaign is making pan-Slavism look like a cool “counter-culture” in a “festive setting” against the Euro-Atlantic establishment and order.

“Secret plans” for Kosovo

Coordinated disinformation campaign are unnecessary for the Kremlin to make its voice heard in Serbia, according to our local researchers, Nikola Burazer and Nikola Cuckić from the European Western Balkans organisation. Still, two specific types of disinformation are spread by both Serbian media and Russian officials to highlight the role of Russia in the Serbian-Kosovar conflict. **The first one concerns the parallels between Kosovo and Crimea or even Nagorno-Kharabakh⁷⁷ to present the unity between these territories and their motherland based on national identity and Orthodox solidarity.** This narrative was driven by the visit of Ms. Poklonskaya, deputy chairman of the State Duma Committee on Foreign Affairs, to the far-right The Oath Keepers Party (Zavetnici) in December 2019,⁷⁸ also reinforced by former Russian Ambassador to Belgrade Alexander Chepurin (2012-2019).⁷⁹ The other narrative is a conspiracy theory about a secret “grand bargain” between President Trump and President Putin to divide Kosovo up along ethnic lines, which would also acknowledge the status of Crimea as part of Russia. Revisionist narratives, once again, provide the Russian administration with an upper hand in Serbian diplomatic negotiations. Various versions of this rhetoric were widely disseminated during Putin-Trump meetings⁸⁰ or bilateral meetings of President Vučić with high-ranking US officials.⁸¹ **The false parallel gives rise to a paradox legitimisation of territorial revisionism, which claims that the “illegality” of the Kosovar secessionism justifies the “legality” of Russian revisionism and annexation.**

Strategy 3: Retelling the story of territorial aggression

Ukraine as the “epicentre” of Russia-related territorial revisionism is experiencing a “soft” or “hard” reinterpretation of the military aggression committed by Russia. Outlets with a pro-Russian agenda adopted three media strategies. They either operate as (1) “junk sites,” mixing news-like items with celebrity, tabloid content, or (2) as “patriotic” outlets, (3) or they are openly revisionist and thereby banned from the Ukrainian media space. The main line of reinterpretation concerns the Russian military aggression labelled as “separatism,” Ukrainian “civil war” or self-proclaimed “democratic republics.” The “separatist” term widely used by Western news agencies proves the success of the Russian disinformation campaigns, since it hides Russia’s hybrid war against Ukraine on the premise of “self-determination,” the defence of ethnic minorities. While historical Russian territorial destabilization narratives are mainly focusing on WWII, current narratives stress that Crimea or Donbass “has always been Russian” or “Ukrainians are actually Russians” in order to deconstruct Ukrainian national identity based on societal (linguistic, religious etc.) divisions, as our Ukrainian researchers put it.⁸²

DISSEMINATION STRATEGIES

In each country, big data and statistical analysis were conducted to reveal the more general conditions from a social media and network perspective

that are necessary to successfully carry out disinformation campaigns mentioned above.

SOCIAL MEDIA

To reveal successful dissemination strategies in social media (Facebook), we compared top performing fringe Facebook pages' and posts' statistical data.⁸³ Our analysis focused on far-right and pro-Kremlin pages only because these are the main venues of pro-Kremlin, revisionist narratives in all the countries under review, except for Serbia and Ukraine. Based on the analysis of the 5 top performing far-right and 5 pro-Kremlin pages in terms of the number of average reactions per posts, differences and similarities were identified in page characteristics contributing to the successful dissemination of revisionist historical grievances.

By comparing the top fringe sites in these countries, we can define the five key prerequisites for the successful dissemination of revisionist narratives on social media. Three of these are "organisational" or "editorial" platform/channel-specific conditions:

1. A significant number of followers, between 10,000 and 500,000;
2. Active and engaged group of followers in the form of political movements, parties capable of offline and online mobilisation;
3. Frequent and regular posting and cross-posting of content on and between these pages to keep their audiences engaged.

Another two are about linguistic or narrative features of these pages:

4. Symbolic and attractive language evoking national pride, ethnocentrism, and utilising national/historical symbols;
5. Conspiracy theories as "alternative" interpretations of historical events that are both reinterpreting historical grievances to channel the contemporary feelings of people and undermine "official," fact-based information shared by authorities or experts. Basically, all the above-mentioned narratives were articulated as conspiracy theories or part of a more general conspiracy theory.

To assess revision-related posts' performances, a comparison of top performing fringe posts was conducted in terms of the total number of interactions. **As seen on the interactions table below,** "relevant" or revisionism-related Facebook posts tend to outperform "irrelevant" or non-related posts in terms of the average number of reactions in the Hungarian, Hungarian minority, Polish, Slovak or Ukrainian fringe media of far-right or pro-Kremlin Facebook pages.⁸⁴

	Average of Reactions	Average of Comments	Average of Shares	N of Documents
Hungarian Fringe Media				
Irrelevant posts	115.8	16.0	50.6	262,110
Relevant posts	137.1	14.2	88.3	408
Hungarian Minority Media				
Irrelevant posts	24.4	3.8	9.2	339,964
Relevant posts	50.7	5.2	19.8	262

The average number of total reactions, comments or shares produced by revisionism-related or unrelated Facebook posts found on far-right or pro-Kremlin pages in the six countries

	Average of Reactions	Average of Comments	Average of Shares	N of Documents
Polish Fringe Media				
Irrelevant posts	54.2	21.8	22.6	310,712
Relevant posts	65.9	14.7	32.8	406
Romanian Fringe Media				
Irrelevant posts	32.7	10.1	17.6	267,078
Relevant posts	16.6	2.8	11.7	43
Serbian Fringe Media				
Irrelevant posts	38.8	6.7	9.4	291,248
Relevant posts	36.3	10.3	12.2	80
Slovakian Fringe Media				
Irrelevant posts	59.0	15.4	34.2	117,879
Relevant posts	62.5	11.7	34.7	114
Ukrainian Fringe Media				
Irrelevant posts	46.2	9.5	17.3	28,589
Relevant posts	174.9	18.3	127.0	161

The average number of total reactions, comments or shares produced by revisionism-related or unrelated Facebook posts found on far-right or pro-Kremlin pages in the six countries

The difference between revisionism-related posts' and unrelated ones' dissemination can be explained by the previous results of the narrative analysis. Revisionist narratives tend to be articulated through discourses about national identity and inter-ethnic conflicts that make these messages especially engaging for far-right or pro-Kremlin audiences, who are represented and organised by parties, paramili-

tary groups especially prone to violence and hate speech by default. In the case of Romania and Serbia, the revisionism-related messages underperformed compared to the "irrelevant" ones, because revisionist narratives were shared across all types of media, so fringe pages' impact on the political discourse paled as compared to mainstream outlets' efforts.

FRINGE WEBPAGE NETWORKS

To understand the online dissemination strategies of pro-Kremlin media specifically, big data researchers of the team, Júlia Koltai PhD and Árpád Knapp from the Eötvös Loránd Science University, created a network of pro-Kremlin and third-party homepages. Graphs were generated using hyperlinks embedded into revisionism-related articles gathered through the SentiOne platform in each country - for the detailed graphs please see Annex 3.⁸⁵ We decided to use hyperlinks as building blocks of our

networks, since links are either directing interested audiences to other relevant pro-Kremlin media, or they serve as references to third-party sources to authenticate their articles.

Researchers analysed three types of networks in their respective countries: a complete network with all the nodes; a "clean" network displaying the most important connections only; and a network of the pro-Kremlin pages in each country, without third party references.^{86 87}

A central-hub model of dissemination

The analysis of networks between pro-Kremlin homepages and third-party pages revealed a central-hub dissemination model in Serbia, Romania, Hungary and Poland, while Slovak and Ukrainian fringe networks were organised by double sub-networks.

In the Serbian network between pro-Kremlin and third-party pages, the central-hub proved to be Sputnik Serbia⁸⁸ with the largest number of connections or “edges” to other homepages - **for a detailed Serbian network please see Annex 3. Thus, the Serbian dissemination network relied on a primary outlet of the Kremlin to disseminate revisionist messages.** At the same time, they were also **referencing Serbian pro-Western or liberal portals**, such as Standard,⁸⁹ Vidovdan,⁹⁰ Srbin info,⁹¹ in order to either point out values, attitudes they are opposed to or to support their content with more balanced, fact-based reporting.

The Romanian pro-Kremlin homepages also used this kind of legitimisation to “maximise their footprint” by inserting hyper-linked references to as many other sites as possible, no matter their orientation or content. They were trying to make the impression that their messages are a product of “serious journalism.” The network of Romanian sites is centred around a “anti-corruption” page, justitiarul.ro,⁹² while, their message-construction is reliant on strong bonds between nationalistic, anti-Western media in terms of content cross-posting between these pages, such as flux24⁹³, capital.ro,⁹⁴ active-news.ro.⁹⁵ **The network strategy serving bilateral inter-ethnic escalation in a country hostile to Russian disinformation or influence is, therefore, more dependent on a domestic network of anti-Western or pro-Kremlin pages.**

Among the top pages of the Hungarian network, we can find one of the most prominent far-right and pro-Kremlin portals, such as Kuruc.info banned by Facebook for online hate speech, and clear-cut pro-Kremlin homepages, conspiracy sites either operated by the Kremlin’s affiliates,⁹⁶ such as the FSB-financed, Hungarian-speaking version of the News Front,⁹⁷ or by pro-Kremlin journalists, such as the Moszkvater (Moscow square) founded by Gábor Stier,⁹⁸ a frequent guest of the Club Valdai

organised by pro-Kremlin intellectuals since 2004.⁹⁹ **The Hungarian graph is clearly organised by conspiracy websites, mostly by alternativhinek.com.**¹⁰⁰ Some of the clickbait, pro-Kremlin homepages, such as the biggest Hungarian clickbait and conspiracy site Minden Egyben blog with over 700 thousand followers on Facebook,¹⁰¹ display almost no connection to other media. This feature of the graph can be attributed to both the non-transparent nature of these pages’ operational background in Hungary,¹⁰² as well as their murky financing.¹⁰³ **The lack of links to the Kremlin’s well-known mouthpieces reveals the same network strategy based on mostly domestic far-right and pro-Kremlin media in a country that has no sizeable Russian diaspora or any meaningful historical, cultural or linguistic ties to Russia at all.**

Nodes in the Polish network most often referenced the “central-hub” of the revisionist kresy.pl, while the webpage itself connected to the highest number of third-party outlets in the network, many of them prestigious ones, like the New York Times, or Deutsche Welle. **Thereby, the Polish network strategy of bilateral inter-ethnic escalation is utilising a domestic filter-function, which disseminates and validates revisionist narratives through a central pro-Kremlin domestic hub that is serving as a bridge or filter between domestic pro-Kremlin pages and third-party pages in a media environment hostile to Russian influence.**

A double network model of dissemination

In the Ukrainian network, there could be no single “centre-hub” identified. **Instead, the pro-Kremlin pages themselves established two distinct sub-graphs in terms of their status, connectedness and content-production in the Ukrainian media space - for a graph of the detailed Ukrainian network please see Annex 3.** Openly pro-Kremlin homepages, such as rusvesna.su or alternatio.org, were banned by Ukrainian authorities for their clear-cut pro-Kremlin rhetoric. Thus, they resorted to a “circumventing” dissemination strategy that either relied on connecting to other hard-line pro-Kremlin homepages or social media platforms on Twitter or Facebook to reach their Ukrainian target audience. A second set of pro-Kremlin outlets, such as gordon.ua or strana.ua, would try to present themselves as

“mainstream media” by employing some standard of classic journalism, producing soft pro-Kremlin messages and connecting to recognized Ukrainian and international media as well, such as Reuters, BBC. The common denominator of both sets of websites is their extensive use of official Russian news agencies such as TASS, RIA Novosti and RBC for reference.

The Slovak network of homepages was organised by the connections of the flagship pro-Russian disinformation daily,¹⁰⁴ the nationalist Hlavné správy and the leftist Dav Dva in terms of the readership,¹⁰⁵ volume of content produced and the high number of connections. When it comes to content-dissemination and messages-construction, both hubs validated and constructed their messages via direct links to Russian media sources. Hlavné správy connected to Pravda.ru,¹⁰⁶ Moskovskij Komsomolec,¹⁰⁷ Russkaya Vesna,¹⁰⁸ Ekonomika Segodnya,¹⁰⁹ PolitPuzzle,¹¹⁰ and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, while Dva Dva expressed connections to well-known sources of pro-separatist propaganda, such as Ruskaya Vesna (Russian spring),¹¹¹ or influential figures from the pro-Russian milieu (for example, Lukáš Perný¹¹² or Artur Bekmatov).¹¹³ **The strategy of pan-Slavic solidarity in Slovakia is, therefore, served by a network of direct Russian or “separatist” mouthpieces, both providing direct content and validation for revisionist articles present on Slovak fringe sites.**

Pro-Kremlin echo-chambers

We have separately analysed the interconnectivity of the pro-Kremlin sites in each country to see whether they are able to form a cohesive network and execute coordinated disinformation campaigns.

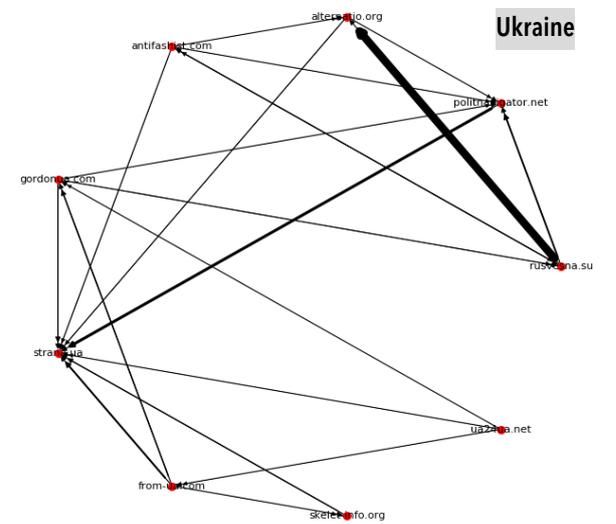
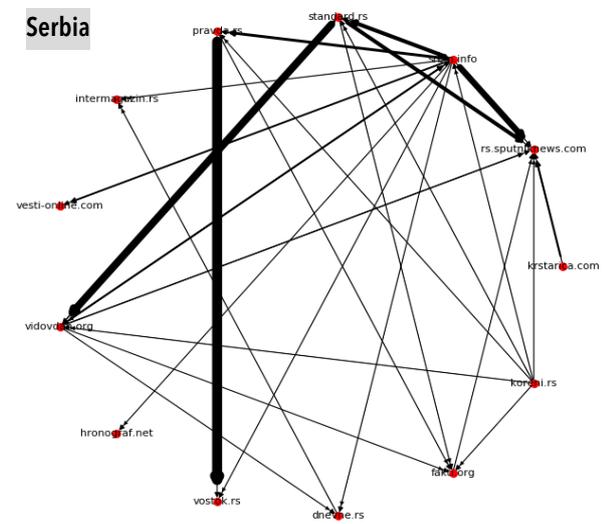
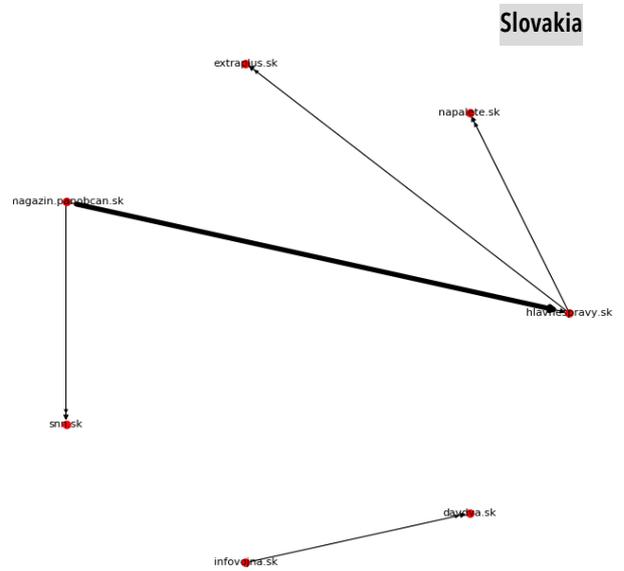
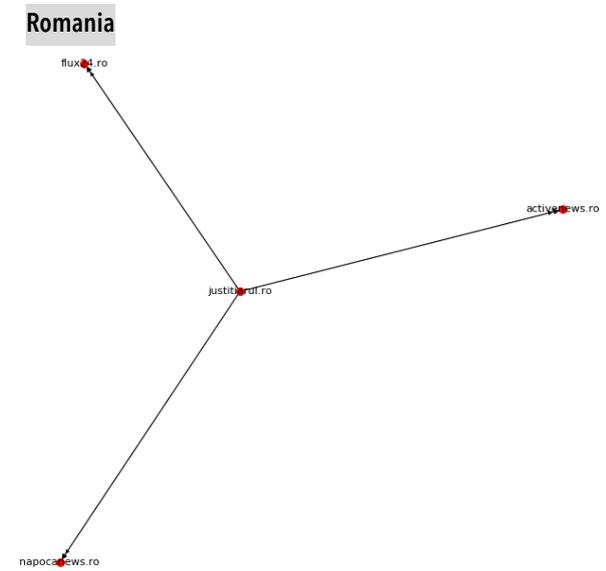
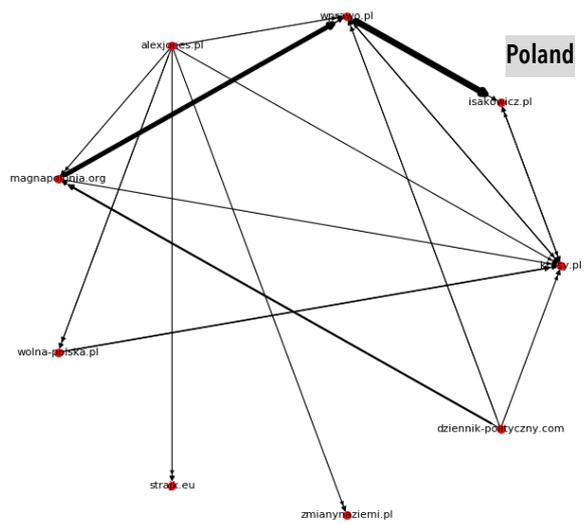
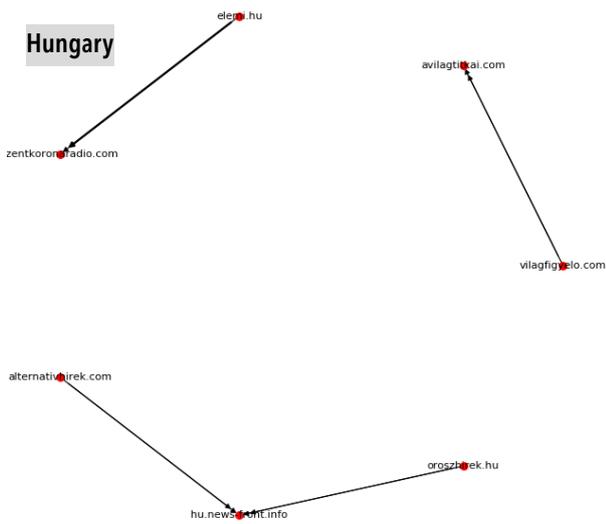
In three out of six countries, we could map a tight and dense Ukrainian, Serbian and Polish network of pro-Kremlin outlets, as seen on the network diagrams below. Their interconnectedness reinforced our previous observations about the role specific hubs or “central-hubs” play in the organisations of these networks, while these network’s “visibility” can be attributed to the country-specific media environments. In Poland, the homepages are embedded into a domestic far-

right subculture, which needs no obscurity. The Polish network is clearly part of coordinated disinformation campaigns targeting Ukrainian-Polish relations, according to our Polish researcher Olgierd Syczewski from Emerging Futures Institute. Nikola Burazer and Nikola Cuckić from European Western Balkans, however, do not think the Serbian network itself is used in coordinated campaigns, instead, it forms a sort of “echo-chamber” of pro-Russian narratives, facilitated by the central-hub of Sputnik Serbia. The cohesiveness of the Ukrainian network can be explained by their direct contact/coordination by the Kremlin, which started right after the invasion of Crimea in 2014, according to our researchers, Oleksandra Tsekhanovska and Daryna Koryagina from the Ukraine Crisis Media Center.

The Slovak network is somewhere in the middle with its semi-structured graph. The “visibility” of the Slovak network is reinforced by the pro-Kremlin fringe media environment, where journalists, owners and far-right actors, groups are knowingly and proudly participating in the pan-Slavic and pro-Russian media ecosystem.

In Romania and Hungary, we could not detect a meaningful and/or coherent network of pro-Kremlin pages. The lack of visible networks can be explained by two features of these countries’ media spaces. Firstly, the hostility of the Romanian elite, media to the Kremlin created an unfavourable media environment for pro-Kremlin outlets. Instead, anti-liberal and nationalistic outlets started disseminating some pro-Kremlin narratives. In Hungary, the pro-Kremlin network of homepages has been gradually created by overtaking or turning geopolitically reorienting far-right sites founded by Hungarian extremist politicians, groups. Thus, Hungarian pro-Kremlin sites have mostly remained anonymous to hide their editorial motivations and ownership/editorial structures.

DISSEMINATION STRATEGIES



Networks of pro-Kremlin websites in the six countries under review

SOCIETAL RESILIENCE

Based on the three disinformation strategies identified, we can locate the most vulnerable elements of the local communication infrastructures, target groups that enable the Kremlin's disinformation campaigns to make use of local revisionist narratives.

Vulnerabilities related to bilateral inter-ethnic exploitation

The first strategy of bilateral inter-ethnic exploitation relied on mostly fringe audiences and pro-Kremlin sites that escalated bilateral tensions between countries, and fuelled and re-framed aggressive or victimhood domestic narratives.

- Firstly, social polarisation between countries, majorities or minorities was used to legitimise aggressive Polish or Hungarian revisionist claims by re-framing Hungarian or Polish revisionism as a "just case" of a pro-Russian victimhood narrative.¹¹⁴
- Secondly, in terms of the number of domestic revisionist narratives and their share among fringe and mainstream media, Romania expresses the greatest vulnerability to bilateral inter-ethnic exploitation.

Vulnerabilities related to pan-Slavic solidarity

The second strategy of pan-Slavic solidarity benefits from a general positive attitude towards Russia or the Kremlin in the general populace, and strong relations between specific groups and Russian stakeholders.

- Firstly, the vulnerability of pan-Slavic solidarity stems from domestic societal polarisation present in these countries. In Slovakia far-left or far-right Eurosceptic or anti-American, anti-NATO groups are more open towards pro-Russian narratives, while different revisionist narratives were tailored to pro-government or anti-government electorates in Serbia. A close-knit network or "echo-chamber" of pro-Kremlin pages further enabled the successful dissemination of revisionist narratives in these societies.

- Secondly, the Kremlin was most successful in spreading its revisionist narratives about Crimea and Kosovo among the elderly and people with elementary education, who either harbour Soviet-nostalgia or anti-Western sentiments situated in lower levels of social stratification.

Vulnerabilities related to retelling the story of territorial aggression

In Ukraine, the success of revisionist narrative depended on three key aspects: the societal polarisation present in Ukrainian society based on religion, language, ethnicity; the institutional setting of the media space organised around oligarchs; and the disinformation strategies applied by pro-Kremlin media outlets.

- Firstly, when it comes to domestic narratives, most of the Ukrainian narratives are about victimhood and make the Ukrainian audiences to a certain degree resilient to direct Russian manipulation.
- Secondly, a common Russian disinformation tactic, however, takes these victimhood narratives about nationality, religion or war atrocities and uses them as proof for Ukraine's or Ukrainians' inherent anti-Russian attitude or nature, which, in turn, legitimises Russian revisionism and military aggression in the East.

ANNEX 1: RESEARCH METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The following research methods were used to prepare this study.

- Desktop research to collect the necessary information related to territorial revisionist politics, political ideas, media activity in each country to narrow down our research foci, and create three lists containing mainstream, far right, and pro-Kremlin media, respectively, for monitoring purposes.
- In-depth interviews with experts of scientific life, politics and the media to move beyond an exclusive reliance on open-source information, and to acquire a deeper understanding of the background of certain actors and events.
- Monitoring of revisionism-related homepage articles and Facebook messages on mainstream news media, and fringe pro-Kremlin and far-right media using the SentiOne online platform's research function that gathered data in the given timeframe based on country-specific sets of keywords selected by our researchers in each country under review.¹¹⁵ As a result, we ended up with "relevant" messages in the forms of homepage articles or Facebook posts related to revisionist ideas, territory-related information, disinformation, conspiracy theories, and all the "irrelevant" messages produced by the media outlets on our three initial lists.
- Time trends of online articles' and Facebook posts' dissemination were analysed with the help of the SentiOne platform's data visualization tools to understand the main events, actors, media, etc. driving the mainstream or fringe media discourses.
- To identify, map, and categorise the most prevalent revisionist narratives present in each country, we took a random, representative sample of website articles of at least 500 per country. The recurring, representative topics of articles were categorised into the main types of narratives present in each country.¹¹⁶
- To understand what conditions or prerequisites make revisionist or territory-related narratives, conspiracy theories successful in social media, we compared the most successful fringe (far-right or pro-Kremlin) Facebook pages', posts' statistical performance to each-other in terms of the number of interactions (based on the number of reactions, comments, shares).
- The research utilized a "big data approach" to comprehend how pro-Kremlin networks of homepages in each country disseminated revisionism or territory-related messages through hyperlinks embedded in articles in order to direct their audience to other revisionist sites or construct an impactful message by referencing third party sources on numerous occasions.

Media data gathered was analysed using four distinct research methodologies.

ANNEX 2: OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF NARRATIVE CATEGORIES

Operational definitions of “narratives” and “revisionism”

The analysis and mapping of revisionist disinformation campaigns required us to operationalize “revisionism” and “narratives” for the research as follows.

Based on the review of literature, we defined “revisionist messaging” as a tool or strategy of the Kremlin’s disinformation campaigns to change the geopolitical status quo through a set of “revisionist narratives” by re-defining the “congruence between nations and territorially defined states.”¹¹⁷

A “narrative” was defined as a specific structure of (real or imaginary) events or occurrences linked by causality in a storytelling, which can be articulated in oral, written, visual etc. forms of communication.

A “revisionist narrative” questions the status of a sovereign territory by legitimizing or de-legitimizing state authority over a piece of land through a specific argumentation or rhetoric. Revisionist narratives can be categorised as “aggressive” or “victimhood” types of narratives. “Aggressive” territorial narratives express a wish or demand for territorial change, revision of borders favouring a certain state or country, while “victimhood” narratives express fear of a possible change of the sovereign status of a given territory.

Disinformation campaigns

We applied a two-tier approach to understand how pro-Kremlin disinformation campaigns utilise or weaponize revisionist narratives.

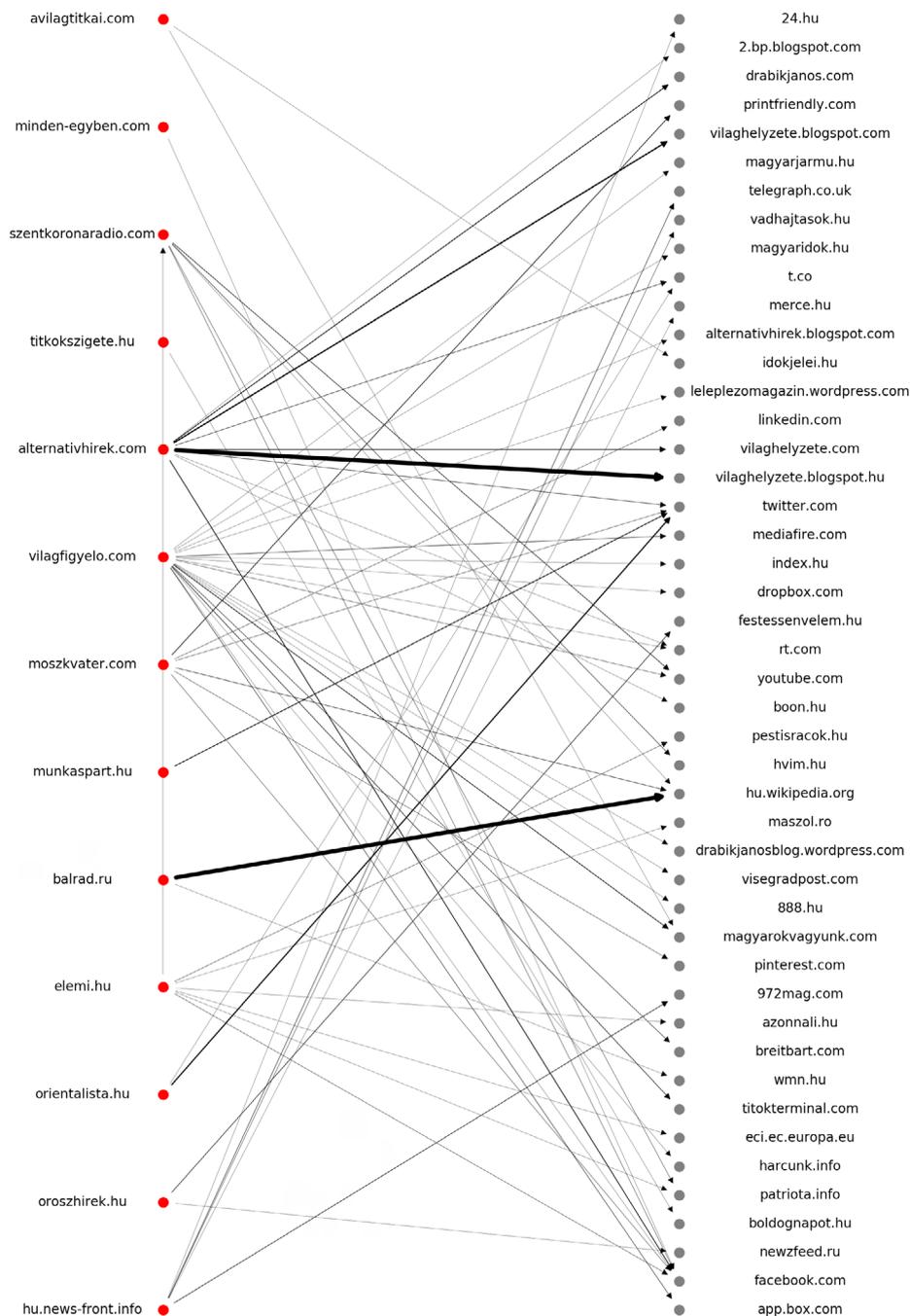
On a domestic level, we identified domestic aggressive or victimhood revisionist narratives in each country. On a regional level, we identified and analysed communication of the Kremlin’s, pro-Kremlin’s media that made use of domestic revisionist narratives by turning them into pieces of new Russian disinformation narratives or disinformation campaigns.

Thus, disinformation related to revisionist narratives could be observed on two levels as well. Domestic revisionist narratives could either contain home-born disinformation, such as Romanian narratives about a “hidden plot” of Hungarian secessionism, or they could be inserted into the Kremlin’s new disinformation meta-narratives, such as a meta-narrative about President Putin and President Trump striking a deal to “award” Transylvania to Hungary.

ANNEX 3: HYPERLINK NETWORKS OF PRO-KREMLIN WEBSITES

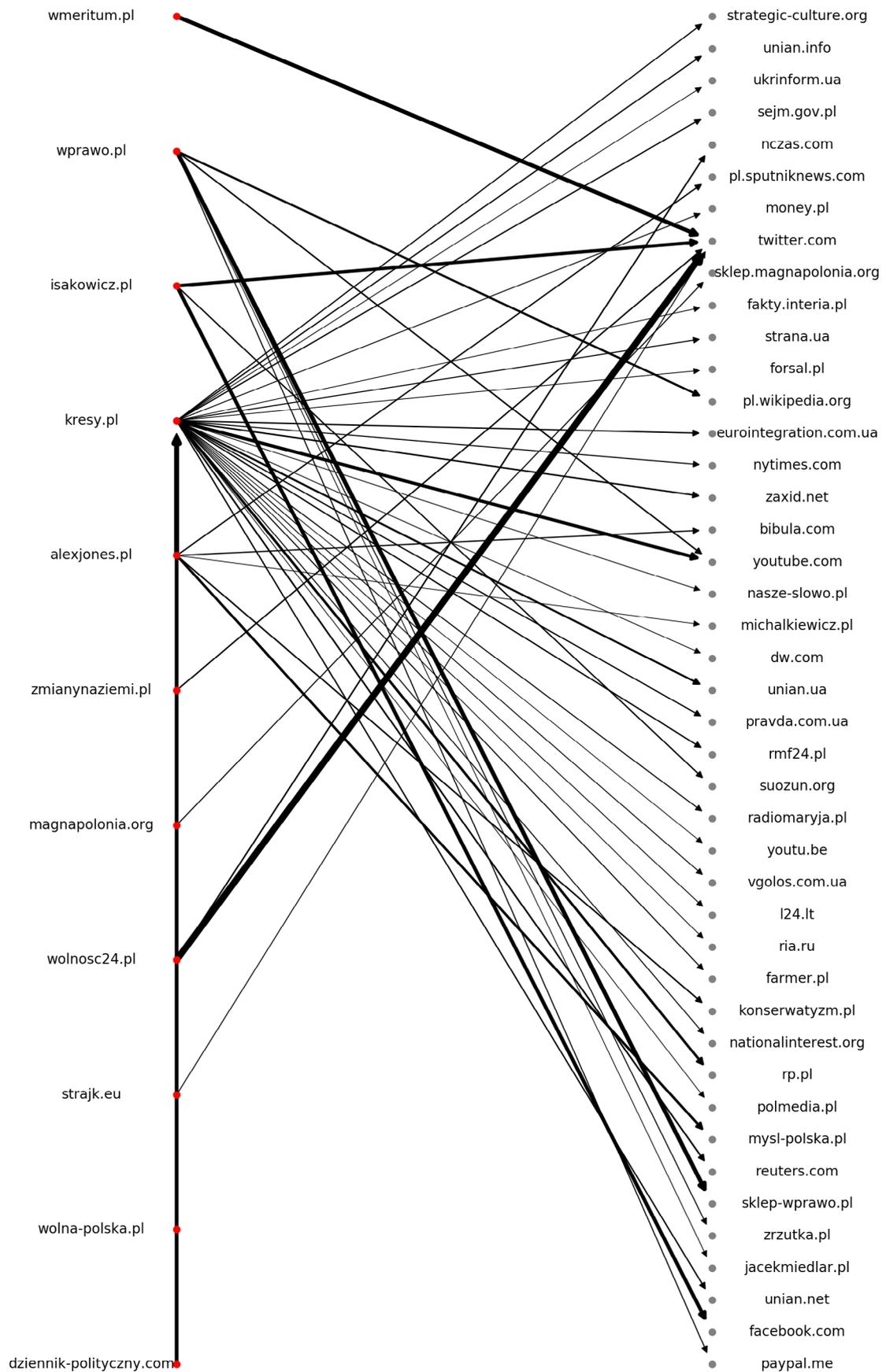
All the graphs below display a "clean" network of websites constituted by only the strongest bonds between pro-Kremlin websites and their target third-party sites. Some links and websites were omitted to provide a clearer picture of the primary structure of the network graphs. The network was generated using hyperlinks embedded into

the revisionism-related messages produced by pro-Kremlin outlets in each of the countries under review. As a result, we can see the original or "seed" pro-Kremlin websites creating all the messages on the left side and their third-party target websites referenced in those messages on the right side of each graph.

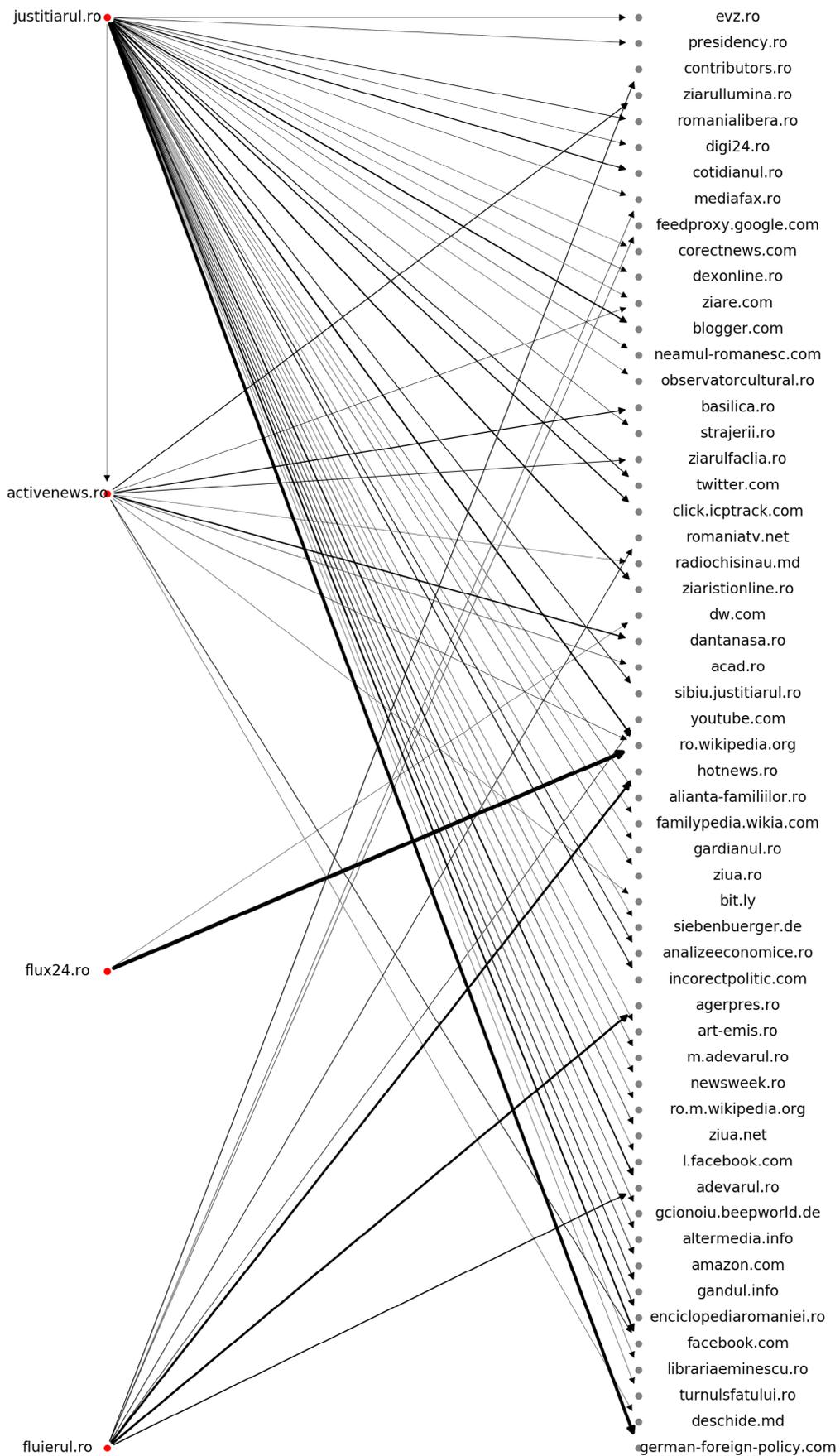


The clean network of Hungarian pro-Kremlin websites and third-party sites

ANNEX 3: HYPERLINK NETWORKS OF PRO-KREMLIN WEBSITES

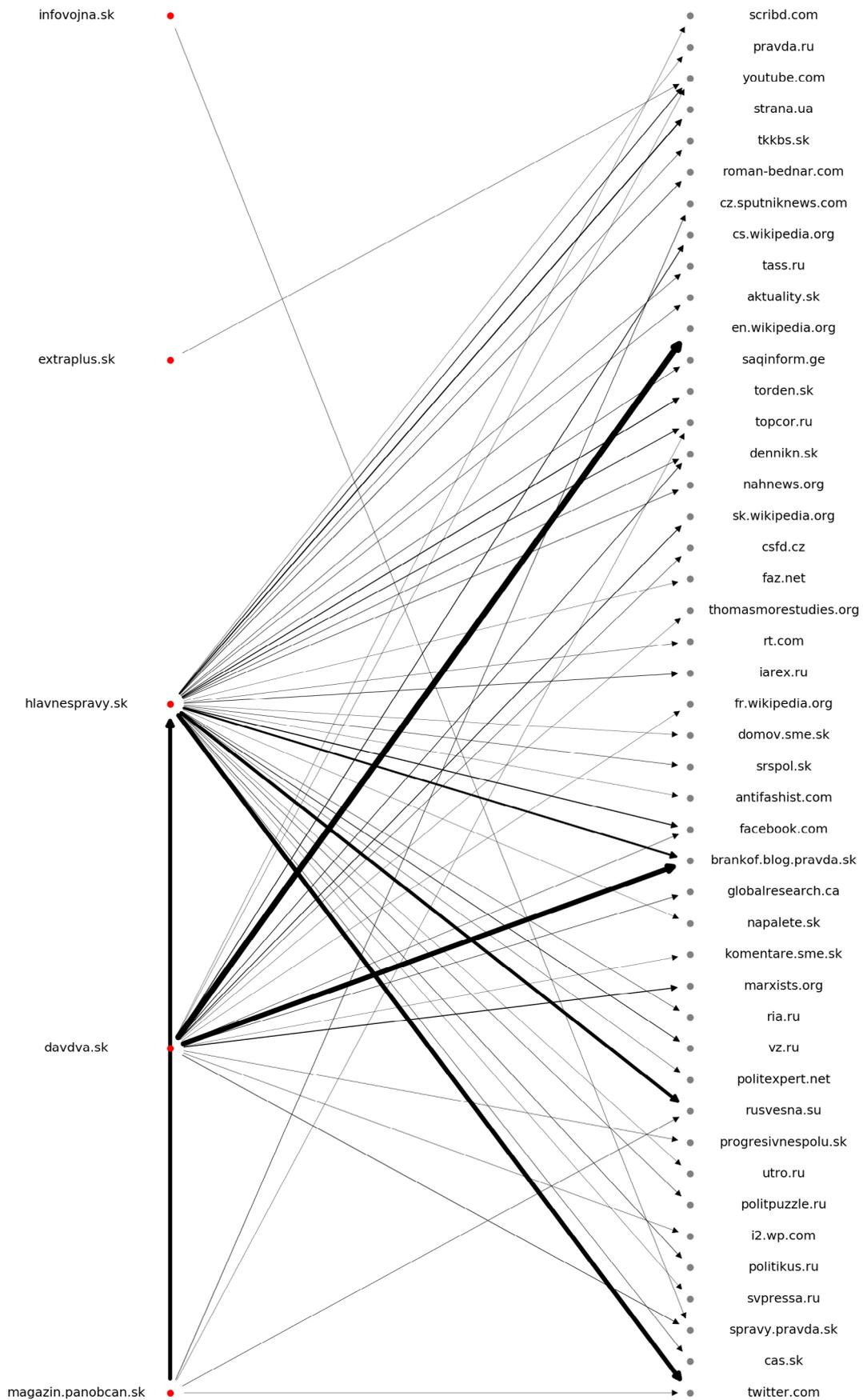


The clean network of Polish pro-Kremlin websites and third-party sites

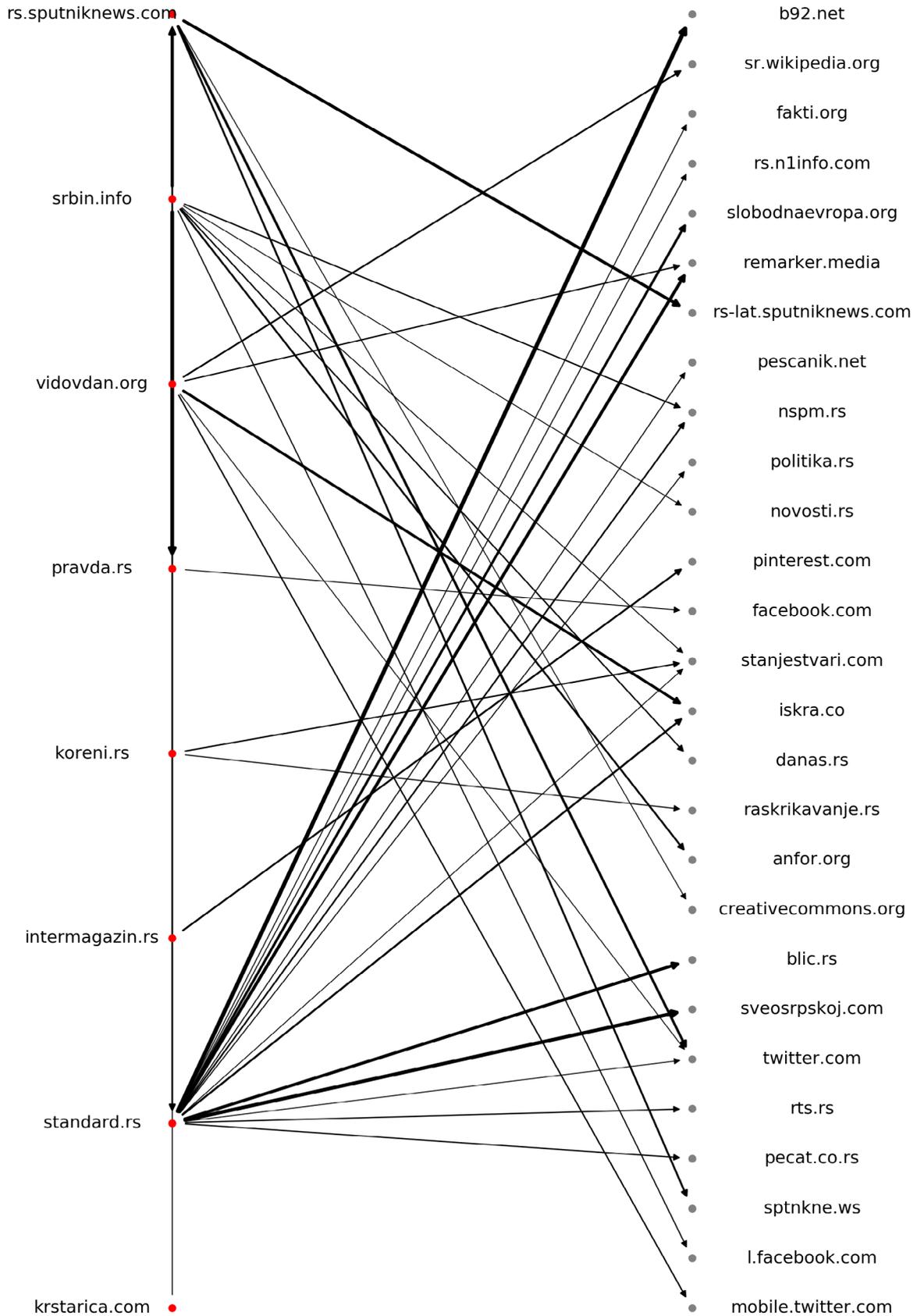


The clean network of Romanian pro-Kremlin websites and third-party sites

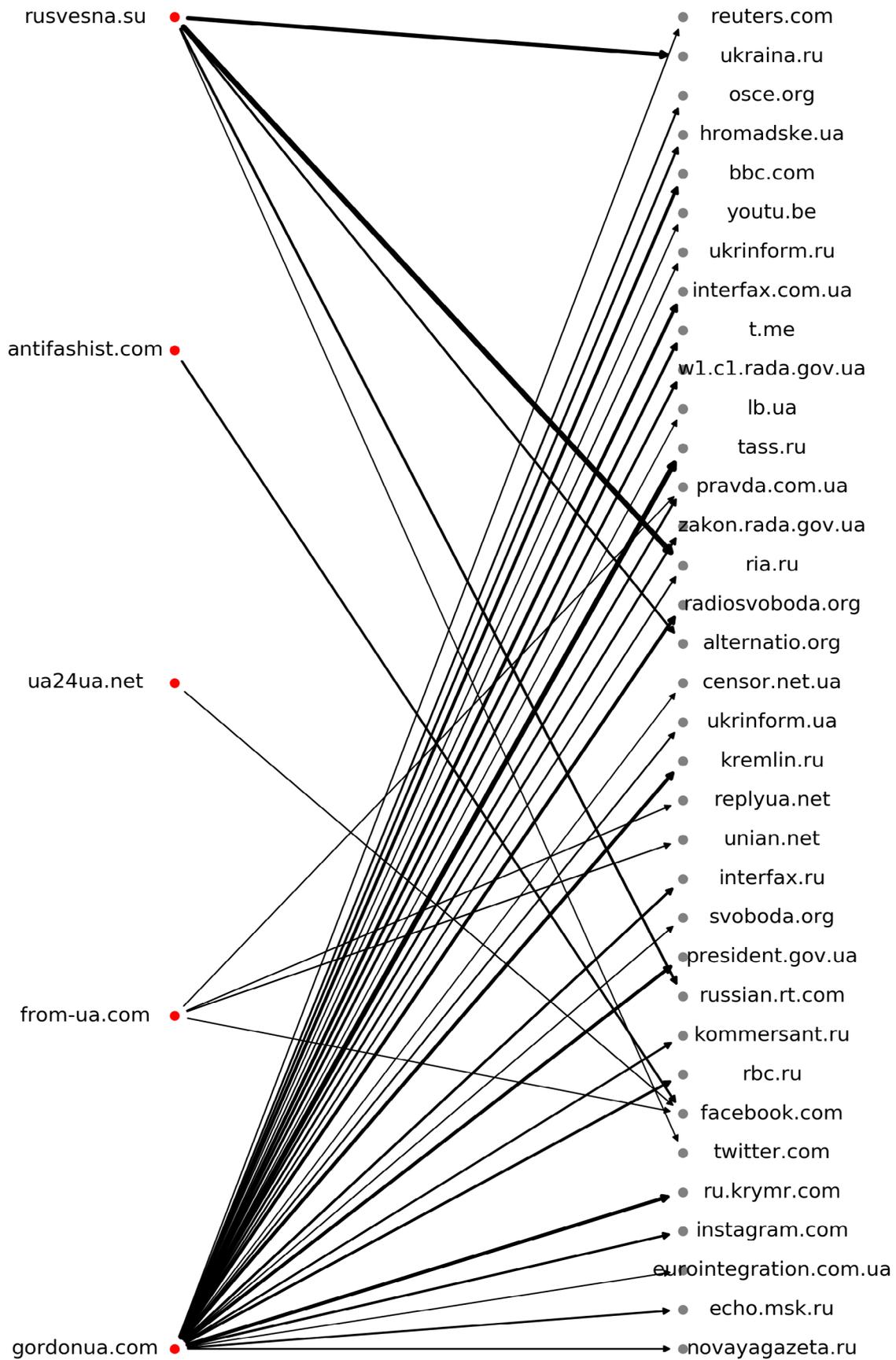
ANNEX 3: HYPERLINK NETWORKS OF PRO-KREMLIN WEBSITES



The clean network of Slovak pro-Kremlin websites and third-party sites



The clean network of Serbian pro-Kremlin websites and third-party sites



The clean network of Ukrainian pro-Kremlin websites and third-party sites

ANNEX 4: NARRATIVES

	Name	Type	Discourse	% in sample
Hungary				
1	Nation's identity in CEE	Non-revisionist	Mainstream	9.7%
2	Government and minorities	Non-revisionist	Mainstream	7.2%
3	Hungarian diaspora	Non-revisionist	Mainstream	4.2%
4	Uz-valley conflict	Non-revisionist	Mainstream	0.8%
5	Minorities discrimination	Non-revisionist	Far-right	7.5%
6	Superiority of Hungarians	Non-revisionist	Far-right	6.1%
7	Szekler autonomy	Non-revisionist	Far-right	2.2%
8	Territorial revisionism against neighbours	Aggressive	Far-right	2.2%
9	Uz-valley conflict	Non-revisionist	Far-right	1.1%
10	Our Homeland Movement and minorities	Non-revisionist	Far-right	1.1%
11	Territorial revisionism related to Trianon	Aggressive	Pro-Kremlin	3.3%
12	Crimea is part of Russia	Aggressive	Pro-Kremlin	2.2%
13	Our Homeland Movement of "real Hungarians"	Non-revisionist	Pro-Kremlin	1.7%
14	Trianon memory	Non-revisionist	Shared	22.5%
15	Day National Togetherness	Non-revisionist	Shared	14.4%
16	Inter-ethnic conflicts	Non-revisionist	Shared	11.1%
17	Minorities' autonomy	Non-revisionist	Shared	2.5%
Poland				
1	UA failed state	Non-revisionist	Far-right	8.0%
2	Ukraine anti-Polish	Non-revisionist	Shared	46.0%
3	Polish Lviv	Aggressive	Shared	20.0%
4	Volhynia killing	Non-revisionist	Shared	14.0%
5	UA opposes IPN law	Non-revisionist	Shared	12.0%
Romania				
1	Unification of RO and MD	Aggressive	Shared	27.3%
2	Great Unification achievement	Non-revisionist	Shared	18.0%
3	HU revisionism in Szekler Land	Victimhood	Shared	11.3%
4	HU annex RO territories	Victimhood	Shared	8.7%
5	HU minority hostility in RO	Non-revisionist	Shared	8.7%
6	RO military superiority	Victimhood	Shared	6.7%
7	Great Unification resentment	Non-revisionist	Shared	6.0%
8	Russian aggression against RO	Victimhood	Shared	5.3%

ANNEX 4: NARRATIVES

	Name	Type	Discourse	% in sample
9	Great Unification vs Europe	Non-revisionist	Shared	4.7%
10	HU meddle RO affairs	Non-revisionist	Shared	3.3%
Serbia				
1	Russia/Putin are allies	Non-revisionist	Shared	47.5%
2	SRB, RU historical allies	Non-revisionist	Shared	16.7%
3	Putin/Trump Kosovo land-swap	Aggressive	Shared	10.8%
4	Kosovo is Western aggression	Victimhood	Shared	9.3%
5	Russia protection in BiH/ME	Non-revisionist	Shared	8.0%
6	Kosovo is like Crimea	Aggressive	Shared	7.8%
Slovakia				
1	Ukraine responsible for war	Non-revisionist	Pro-Kremlin	7.0%
2	Velvet revolution staged	Non-revisionist	Shared	1.0%
3	Zakarpattia joins Hungary	Aggressive	Shared	1.0%
4	Crimea has been always Russian	Aggressive	Shared	23.0%
5	SK neutral/NATO imperialist	Non-revisionist	Shared	23.0%
6	Sanctions are harmful	Non-revisionist	Shared	17.0%
7	US/NATO prepares for war	Non-revisionist	Shared	8.0%
8	EU oppression	Non-revisionist	Shared	8.0%
9	EU/West decadent values	Non-revisionist	Shared	7.0%
10	Maidan was a coup	Non-revisionist	Shared	5.0%
Ukraine				
1	Interaction with Russia	Non-revisionist	Mainstream	26.0%
2	Criticism of RU policies	Non-revisionist	Mainstream	16.0%
3	Current frontline aggression	Victimhood	Mainstream	8.6%
4	Instability of "DNR/LNR," Crimea	Victimhood	Mainstream	7.6%
5	UA prisoners in RU	Non-revisionist	Mainstream	7.0%
6	Protect the "language law"	Non-revisionist	Far-right	0.6%
7	Pro-Russian revanchism	Victimhood	Far-right	0.2%
8	Russian influence in Ukraine	Non-revisionist	Far-right	0.2%
9	Defence of far-right movements	Non-revisionist	Far-right	0.2%
10	Far-right protecting UA	Non-revisionist	Far-right	0.2%
11	Ukraine is Russophobic	Non-revisionist	Pro-Kremlin	11.0%
12	Ukraine attacks Donbass	Aggressive	Pro-Kremlin	10.0%
13	Ukraine is USA pawn	Non-revisionist	Pro-Kremlin	7.4%
14	Donbass will not return to Ukraine	Aggressive	Pro-Kremlin	5.0%

ENDNOTES

- 1 Péter Krekó, Lóránt Győri, Edit Zgut, 'From Russia with Hate', *Political Capital*, 28 April 2017, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_summary_analysis_EN_20170428.pdf.
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- 4 1615 L. St NW, Suite 800 Washington, and DC 20036 USA 202-419-4300 | Main 202-857-8562 | Fax 202-419-4372 | Media Inquiries, 'NATO Viewed Favorably Across Member States', *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project* (blog), 10 February 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/02/09/nato-seen-favorably-across-member-states/>.
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- 8 Vivian S. Walker, 'Insights into Russia's PD Challenges', *The Foreign Service Journal*, no. October 2020, accessed 9 October 2020, http://www.afsa.org/foreign-service-journal?_zs=K3VBi1&_zl=4gr87&fbclid=IwAR3P792QVYRh_zZ1yBj3T85dNsSPkahHkS6mquv0cA232Vn0s1Saf0c8K5I.
- 9 Without going into further deliberations about "revisionism" itself, we would like to note that "political revisionism," according to the literature, is a form of geopolitical rivalry through which "emerging powers," such as Russia or China, are trying to revise the international status quo, usually through some form of a conflict. As a result of regional rivalry, the Kremlin created a string of "frozen conflicts" to reassert its power in territories such as Transnistria in Moldova, Abkhazia in Georgia or Donetsk in Ukraine by claiming territorial independence based on alleged differences or societal divisions rooted in ethnicity, language, historical origins, religion etc.
- 10 Oliver Turner and Nicola Nymalm, 'Morality and Progress: IR Narratives on International Revisionism and the Status Quo', *Journal Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, no. Volume 32-Issue 4 (2019), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09557571.2019.1623173>.
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- 17 <https://tass.com/politics/969875>
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- 19 <https://avilagtikai.com/articles/view/trump-szerint-trianon-igazsagatlan-volt-es-szekelyfold-visszacsatolhato-lenne>, <https://www.minden-egyben.com/hirek/trump-szerint-trianon-igazsagatlan>
- 20 'Vienna Awards', *Oxford Reference*, accessed 20 September 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803115719661>.
- 21 The historical dilemma of the Hungarian political elite always lied in the possible remedies to this situation, how to manage the new diasporas abroad and the relationship between Hungary and neighbouring countries hosting sizeable Hungarian minorities. Thus, the role of Trianon in the construction of the current-day Hungarian national identity has two sides. The mainstream, historically canonized political interpretation of Trianon deals with the historical event either as a national tragedy that created a physically and culturally divided nation, diaspora communities to be dealt with on a continuous foreign policy basis or as a historical fact, the consequences of which, like revisionism of the Horthy-era, need to be assessed by scientists for the pages of history books.
- 22 For more details see the Hungarian country-report titled "Trianon is not a case closed" of the regional research.

- 23 The Treaty of Paris acknowledged the unification of the Moldavian Democratic Republic, also historically known as Bessarabia, with the Kingdom of Romania in 1920. Soviet Russia, however, did not recognize the unification, since the Oblast of Moldavia and Bessarabia had been annexed by the Russian Empire in 1812, and the Soviet army made the country part of the USSR again in 1940 and 1944, respectively. Right before Moldova declared its independence and the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the Eastern part of the country made up of a Russian-speaking population declared its secession as an unrecognised but de facto independent republic of Transnistria (officially, the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic) in 1990. For more please see:
- Vladimir Socor, 'FROZEN CONFLICTS IN THE BLACK SEA-SOUTH CAUCASUS REGION', 5 June 2013, https://web.archive.org/web/20130605100210/http://www.iasps.org/eng_editor/socor_show.php?lang=&main=&type=6&article_id=356.
- 24 The medieval territories of Galicia, once ruled by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth between 1387 - 1772 until the Second Partition, followed by the Habsburg Monarchy (1772-1918) after the Third Partition of Poland, constitute today the territories of Poland and Ukraine.
- 25 The war was fought between the Second Polish Republic, the West Ukrainian People's Republic and the Ukrainian People's Republic.
- 26 The Polish side was requesting Ukraine to properly exhume and commemorate the Polish victims in Volhynia. For more, please see the Polish country-study of the research project.
- 27 For more, please see the Slovak country-study of the research project.
- 28 However, the Slovak public and political elite unanimously rejects any attempt to invalidate or question the Treaty of Trianon, for example, by the Day of National Togetherness commemoration organized by the Hungarian National Assembly. Therefore, historical revisionism related to World War One is not an issue contested in Slovakia, and we could not find any data on Trianon-related territorial revisionist discourses in Slovakia even on far-right media outlets.
- 29 The initial databases of "relevant" articles were selected based on specific pre-defined sets of search keywords typical for revisionist causes or topics in each country, which provided us adequate research results of homepage articles and Facebook posts found on the pre-defined lists of far-right, pro-Kremlin and mainstream media sources. The representative samples of relevant articles, therefore, were not only representative in terms of time- and source-distribution, they reflected the three media lists' proportions in each country as well to preserve the differences observed in fringe or mainstream media discourses for our analysis.
- 30 Each narrative was assigned to a type of discourse based on the primary, mainstream, far-right, po-Kremlin, sources of its articles. If a narrative could be attributed to at least two types of discourses, they were put into the "shared" category of narratives to highlight their widespread distribution in a country's media space.
- 31 Proactive or positive territorial discourses promote territorial revisionism against any sovereign state, while negative or defensive territorial discourses express wariness against real or perceived territorial aspirations of hostile state or non-state actors.
- 32 'Српска Десница - Објаве', accessed 7 August 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/139962420013797/posts/151232475553458>.
- 33 Српска странка Заветници на платформи Facebook Watch, accessed 7 August 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=830550580696992>.
- 34 'GLOBSEC Trends 2018 Central Europe: One Region, Different Perspectives', GLOBSEC (blog), accessed 27 April 2019, <https://www.globsec.org/publications/globsec-trends-2018-central-europe-one-region-different-perspectives/>.
- 35 For more please see the Romanian case-study of the research project.
- 36 V.A., '(SONDAJ) Procentajul Moldovenilor Care Vor Unire Cu România a Atins Un Record Istoric', Cotidianul (blog), 5 July 2020, <https://cotidianul.md/2020/07/05/sondaj-procentajul-moldovenilor-care-vor-unire-cu-romania-a-atins-un-record-istoric/>.
- 37 For our inquiry, we defined trends as the distribution of revisionism-related messages over time, that were identified and gathered through the SentiOne social media listening platform's keyword-combinations. In each country, local researchers identified specific sets of keywords, like "Trianon," "Lwow," "territory," typical of the revisionist messages (articles of Facebook posts) found on mainstream or fringe sites and Facebook pages. A communication strategy is pre-planned and targeted messaging that reaches target audiences through a set of carefully crafted messages and communication channels to attain communication goals, like changing one's (online) behaviour, opinion regarding certain subjects etc. In a similar fashion, disinformation strategies aim to influence target groups behaviour through false or manipulated information in service of usually hidden (geo)political ends.
- 38 The portal's name itself refers to the Eastern Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic (Kresy Wschodnie) in the interwar period that is now part of Western Ukraine.
- 39 One such statement involved then-president of the Social Democratic Party, Liviu Dragnea, who plainly and simply expressed his vision about the unification of Romania and the Republic of Moldova during a plenary session dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Union of Bessarabia with Romania in 2018. For more see: <https://romanalibera.ro/politica/dragnea-vreausa-ne-unim-cu-basarabia-sa-fim-o-singura-natiune-in-europa-718508>
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- 41 'Sputnik Romania-Moldova | Facebook' Accessed on 2nd of August 2020; <https://www.facebook.com/sputnikmdro/>;

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- 48 The overall trust in news is among the lowest in the 38 countries surveyed for the Digital News report. Only 33% trust news outlets overall. For more see: Reuters Institute Digital news report 2019, <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/slovakia-2019/>
- 49 Klingová, Katarína; Hajdu, Dominika; Voices of Central and Eastern Europe, GLOBSEC 2020, <https://www.globsec.org/publications/voices-of-central-and-eastern-europe/>
- 50 Grigorij Mesežnikov and Radovan Bránik, 'Hatred, Violence and Comprehensive Military Training' (Political Capital, April 2017), https://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_country_study_SK_20170428.pdf.
- 51 Kosovo police have arrested and later Marko Đurić, Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija. <https://www.serbianmonitor.com/en/marko-djuric-first-arrested-then-expelled-from-kosovo/#:~:text=Commenting%20on%20the%20arrest%20of,apparently%20supported%20by%20certain%20countries>.
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- 77 'Српска Десница - Објаве'.
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- 79 In 2014, on the conference in Belgrade named "Kosovo and Crimea - Differences and similarities", Ambassador Chepurin said that "We live in a world of double standards. Kosovo was illegally torn away from Serbia, and Crimea unified with Russia in accordance with international law."
- 80 Ahead of the Trump-Putin meetings in Helsinki on 16 July 2018 or 11 February 2018 in Paris.
- 81 The Belgrade-Pristina dialogue is led since 2011 by the European Union, with the mediation of the EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy
- 82 For more, please see the Ukrainian country-report of the research project.
- 83 The analysis of social media was limited to Facebook, since it is the only and main platform of elite or grassroots political discussions in Central-Eastern Europe.
- 84 Individual differences could be observed in each country. In Romania, for example, "relevant" posts underperformed "irrelevant" ones which had probably due to the small size of the social media sample of several dozen posts as compared to the hundreds of thousands of "irrelevant" messages.
- 85 Networks could be based only on hyperlinks found in homepage articles due to Facebook restricting access to pages' data or hyperlinks.
- 86 In all the six countries under revision, 28804 articles were scraped and used to create the fringe network of Polish, Slovak, Hungarian, Romanian, Ukrainian and Serbian pro-Kremlin pages.
- 87 The rationale behind the selection was to highlight and make visible portals with a significant number of connections, while excluding 1-2 nodes with significantly higher number of connections, usually leading to social media pages, to reveal the overall and typical structure of the revisionism-related dissemination process.
- 88 rs-lat.sputniknews.com (Latin) and rs.sputniknews.com (Cyrillic)
- 89 <https://www.standard.rs/>
- 90 <https://vidovdan.org/>
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- 102 Almost all of the pro-Kremlin homepages or Facebook pages analysed in our report are financed and operated anonymously, their ties to pro-Kremlin actors, parties, groups or journalists can be assessed only on indirect evidences and their geopolitical, political stances expressed in their contents.
- 103 Since most of the clickbait sites in Hungary or elsewhere rely heavily on Google and other legally sound ways of financing, they try to display their contents on multiple, seemingly disconnected social media accounts, homepages to multiply their revenues and avoid shutdown by big tech platforms, e.g. by Facebook, Twitter or Google.
- 104 <https://www.hlavnespravdy.sk/>
- 105 <https://davidva.sk/>
- 106 <https://www.pravda.ru/> accessed on 21 July 2020
- 107 <https://www.mk.ru/> accessed on 21 July 2020
- 108 <https://rusvesna.su/> accessed on 21 July 2020
- 109 <https://rueconomics.ru/> accessed on 21 July 2020
- 110 <https://politpuzzle.ru/> accessed on 21 July 2020
- 111 <https://rusvesna.su/> accessed on 21 July 2020
- 112 Lukáš Perný is a left wing activist, musician, social philosopher and a contributor to Zem a Vek magazine see his blog <https://lucasperny.blog.pravda.sk/>
- 113 Artur Bekmatov is a far left political activist. He ran as candidate no. 5 at the candidate list of leftwing Socialisti.sk party, which received less than 1% of votes in February 2020 elections. He is also a head of Front of leftist youth. After elections, he became leader of left wing Socialisti.sk political party <https://www.socialisti.sk/post/socialisti-sk-na-sneme-zmenili-vedenie-verejnosti-pon%C3%BAkaj%C3%BA-%C4%8Dist%C3%BA-%C4%BEavicu>
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- 119 The percentage share represents the share of messages of each narrative in the representative country-samples of website articles.
- 120 Pro-Russian revanchism is generally understood in Ukraine as efforts of political forces linked to the Kremlin to subvert European and Euro Atlantic integration and return to Russian zone of influence. The term "revanchism" is used because a substantial amount of these forces' representatives are linked to the former regime of Viktor Yanukovych.
- 121 Messages were selected based on a set of pre-defined keywords in each country under review.



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