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COMMUNICATING DEFENCE IN SLOVAKIA AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC: MAPPING ACTORS AND NARRATIVES ONLINE

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Introduction

This research study aims to identify the most successful communicators across the Slovak information space and Czech information space on defence-related themes and to provide a detailed analysis of their communication, with a special focus on geopolitical sentiment, topics and narratives.

The present work seeks to answer the following research questions:

- Who are the most successful communicators in Slovak information space and Czech information space on topics related to defence?
- What narratives can be identified in their communication about defence-related themes?
- What geopolitical sentiments can be identified in their communication?

The report aims to provide readers with a better understanding of how defence is communicated in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Due to the close historical, cultural, linguistic and political relations between both nations, important similarities and differences can be described. The authors expect that the StratCom communities in both countries, including the Slovak and Czech Ministries of Defence and Armed Forces, may find this report useful and actionable as they work and collaborate. From a broader NATO perspective, the report should help address a knowledge

gap regarding a crucial but infrequently discussed section of NATO's Eastern flank.

The report is structured as follows. First, we provide a detailed description of the methodology to explain the framework of the study. The second part of our report begins with a discussion on the actors and the topology of the information space. In the third section, we look at the most widely used defence-related narratives in both countries. Fourth, we discuss the geopolitical sentiment for some relevant geopolitical entities, including NATO and the West. Lastly, we discuss recommendations for STRATCOM specialists.



Executive summary

Slovakia has a much larger number of anti-Western actors communicating defence themes than the Czech Republic. There is a significantly higher penetration of anti-Western and pro-Russian narratives in Slovakia than in the Czech Republic.

Slovak anti-Western actors are the best-performing group in our study. They consistently gain significantly more reactions, shares and comments than pro-Western actors in Slovakia or any actor in the Czech Republic.

The Czech information space is predominantly negative towards Russia, the Slovak towards the West. Most posts in the Slovak infosphere were anti-Western in their geopolitical sentiment. The Czech infosphere was different in that most posts with negative sentiment were about Russia.

The Slovak infosphere is much more clustered than the Czech infosphere. This is because of the stronger anti-Western leaning of Slovakia and because Slovak actors are more effective in communicating defence themes than their Czech counterparts.

NATO was a significantly bigger topic in Slovakia than in the Czech Republic. While in the Slovak dataset there were almost 600 posts concerning NATO, there were less than 400 in the Czech Republic. But both

countries had slightly prevailing negative geopolitical sentiment towards NATO.

Following Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the war dominated public discourse for most of 2022. Consequently, the majority of the content collected for this research concerned the war in Ukraine. Other prominent defence-related topics included military cooperation (training and weapons deliveries) and NATO, but even these topics were most often mentioned in the context of the war in Ukraine.

A notable portion of social media discourse strategically used narratives to persuade the audience that by helping Ukraine, their nations are being dragged into the conflict. Supplying weapons and generally aiding Ukraine was portrayed as a slippery slope towards war with Russia. These narratives were consistently employed since the beginning of the war as a call for appeasement with Russia.

Support for Ukraine translated into support for Ukrainian refugees. There was a visible disconnect between the pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian actors and their approach towards Ukrainian refugees. The former generally talked about the necessity of integrating Ukrainian displaced by war. The latter spread the narratives about the refugees as threatening the status quo.



Whataboutism was a widely spread STRATCOM tactic (and narrative) about the war in Ukraine in Slovakia. Whataboutism was used approximately twice as much in Slovakia than in the Czech Republic. It was also one of the main narratives used by anti-Western actors to direct blame on NATO.

Political actors were dominant in Slovakia while mainstream media dominated in the Czech Republic. This is perhaps the reason why the Czech Republic was not as firmly anti-Western and pro-Russian.

Politicians are the most effective communicators of defence-related topics in both countries. Politicians on both sides of the anti/pro-Western divide gained the most interactions. This is despite mainstream media having a larger share of content in the Czech Republic.

The Czech Republic has a larger share of pro-Western influencers. While in Slovakia, pro-Western influencers were virtually non-existent (in terms of posts), these actors were a sizeable portion in the Czech Republic.



Methodology

This report uses qualitative and quantitative approaches to assess the communication about defence themes and topics on social media in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It relies on proprietary software developed by Gerulata Technologies to collect data from Facebook, Telegram and YouTube. Our dataset spans 12 months: from August 1, 2021, to July 30, 2022. We queried the social media with a set of defence-related keywords and annotated the content by actor, topic and geopolitical sentiment (for details see Annex 1). The dataset includes 10,404 individual posts (including text, pictures and videos; divided into Slovak language content (5213 posts) and Czech language content (5191 posts)). The data was ordered by the number of interactions in descending order. This approach helped us to sort the content by its virality and audience engagement, and allowed us to filter only the most relevant posts.

There were 73 unique actors in the Slovak language dataset and 159 actors in the Czech language. The difference in the number of actors had two main causes. Firstly, the Czech Republic is a more populous country, which means the information environment is relatively more expansive, with more possible actors. The second reason mainly concerns the specificity of the Slovak Facebook environment. In the Slovak infosphere, a few outliers communicate defence-related themes significantly more often and are notably better at gaining interactions. However, this does not mean that defence would be a less prominent topic in the Czech Republic, but rather that the Slovak information environment is dominated by fewer actors with a considerable following who – perhaps more than in the Czech Republic – use Facebook as their primary communication tool.

Most of the data for our analysis comes from Facebook. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, Facebook is the social medium with the highest number of active daily users in these countries. This means Facebook, as the most popular social medium, allowed actors to gain a higher number of interactions. Secondly, the way we sorted our dataset somewhat favours Facebook. The posts we chose for this analysis had the highest number of interactions. This metric is counted as the sum of all reactions, shares and comments (views are excluded). While other platforms do use reactions or comments, they are relatively less prominent than Facebook in Slovakia or the Czech Republic.

The period we looked at was set for a year and covers social media discourse both before and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The war has



been the most critical security development in the wider European region over the last decade, and we wanted to be able to analyse data both before and after such a strategic shift so that we could compare them with each other and measure the impact of the war on the defence and security discourse.

All data were collected by the Gerulata Juno monitoring system developed by Gerulata Technologies. The system allows for the monitoring of various information sources, such as Telegram, Facebook, YouTube or media news feeds. Gerulata Juno allowed us to use modern AI models for language understanding and other advanced data-analysis techniques to improve our analysis capabilities. An additional result is the network graph which was possible to create with Gerulata's proprietary data and expertise. Furthermore, data annotation, filtering and visualisation were done through the platform.

Annotation

A team of experienced annotators processed and annotated the entire dataset (10,404 posts). To ensure consistency and validity of the annotation process, annotators went through a training workshop conducted by senior analysts from Gerulata Technologies. After the annotation process, we performed quality control of the annotated data to find and correct inconsistencies.

The annotation process allowed us to filter out irrelevant content that used defence-

related vocabulary (e.g., "personal attack") but was otherwise not relevant to the scope of our report. As a result, our analysis uses relevant defence and security-related content only (7,575 posts).

The annotation process was designed to answer three questions: Who are the relevant actors? What is the geopolitical sentiment of defence-related social media discourse? And what are the dominant topics communicated in respective discourses? Answering these questions allowed us to capture three main categories - actors, geopolitical sentiment, and narratives.

Actors

A category specifically designed to quantify the types of actors communicating defence themes. This category was divided into seven sub-categories: 1) Political actor, 2) Influencer, 3) Institution, 4) Civil society actor, 5) Mainstream medium, 6) Alternative medium, 7) Other.

Geopolitical sentiment

This category aimed to answer how a given post communicates in terms of geopolitical sentiment. From the content perspective, there were six pre-defined geopolitical entities 1) the Czech Republic, 2) Slovakia, 3) NATO, 4) the West, 5) Ukraine, and 6) Russia. If any of these geopolitical entities were explicitly mentioned, we also evaluated the content's sentiment on a positive-neutral-negative scale.



” Using the annotated data, the authors conducted a quantitative analysis to assess the most effective actors communicating defence and security themes. We used the cumulative number of interactions as a measure of effectiveness. We primarily looked at the actors with the most interactions as it helps filter the actors with highest engagement.

For Slovakia and the Czech Republic, positive sentiment was understood as sentiment agreeing with and/or supporting the current officially declared foreign defence policy or geopolitical anchoring of these countries. The Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic 2021 defines Slovakia as an independent, sovereign, democratic state that abides by universal values of freedom, plurality, human rights, justice, human dignity, solidarity and the free market. Being a member of NATO and EU is described as a pillar of Slovakia’s security and an expression of its civilisational values and geopolitical orientation. These positions are echoed in Defence and Military Strategies and aligned with the Constitution of the Slovak Republic.

The Security Strategy of the Czech Republic (2015) and the Concept of the Czech Republic’s Policy in the EU (2015) are documents that both express a clear pro-Western orientation. The aim is to deepen cooperation and maintain unity in Western international institutions such as the EU and NATO. The Foreign Policy Concept of the Czech Republic from 2015 defines three global objectives of the Czech Republic:

1) security, 2) prosperity and sustainable development, and 3) human dignity, including human rights. An important feature is the clear pro-Western orientation and active participation in the EU, NATO, UN, OSCE and other multilateral structures.

Topic

This category was designed to capture broader defence-related themes. We divided the topic category into relevant and irrelevant content. We considered any post, video or image explicitly related to defence and/or security as a relevant topic.

This category aimed to investigate what the predominant defence-related topics were in Czech and Slovak discourses. Some of the categories were broader than others. We designed the topic categories to be mutually combinable to derive specific meanings. For instance, the combination of the tags “war in Ukraine” and “other wars” usually indicates content that uses some kind of “whataboutism”, especially if it is combined with negative geopolitical sentiment about the West.



Relevant topics were considered to be the following: 1) Armed Forces, 2) Military Operations, missions or deployments, 3) Hybrid threats, 4) NATO, 5) Defence spending, 6) Military cooperation and military equipment, 7) NATO battlegroup, 8) War in Ukraine, 9) Wars other than Ukraine, 10) Weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), 11) Other.

Analyses

Actor analysis

Using the annotated data, the authors conducted a quantitative analysis to assess the most effective actors communicating defence and security themes. We used the cumulative number of interactions as a measure of effectiveness. We primarily looked at the actors with the most interactions as it helps filter the actors with highest engagement. The actors in our report have a consistently high audience reach.

Network analysis

A map of the Czech and Slovak infosphere was created using our datasets and Gerulata Technologies' proprietary data. Actors present in the annotated dataset were selected as seed nodes¹. These nodes were connected² to other nodes through Gerulata's data on social media interactions and mentions.

Other nodes in the network are smaller and unicolour, and were not present in our

annotated dataset. They were necessary for the precision improvement of the clustering algorithm. The size of the nodes (from our annotated data) depends on the number of interactions. This means the larger the size, the more interactions the actor has gained.

Connections (edges) were created by various types of association. They included upstream and downstream shares, tagged and untagged mentions, and other types of relationships. The higher the number of connections, the more closely different actors were grouped together in the graph.

Narrative analysis

We conducted qualitative research concerning the dominant narratives. We used our annotated data to select the most popular narratives relating to the pre-defined defence-related categories. Popularity and effectiveness were judged by the relative number of interactions the post acquired. Some categories included a significantly larger number of different narratives. Consequently, it was outside the scope of the report to capture all the narratives in each category.

Narrative analysis is a cluster of methods used to interpret text and visual items with a storied form. In this report, we interrogated what the story captured in the social media content was. As not all social media posts included an identifiable narrative, we focused only on the posts that had a story to tell.



Geopolitical sentiment analysis

Data annotation also allowed us to create a complex overview of the geopolitical sentiment communicated in defence and security contexts. This enabled us to visualise and assess to what extent the war in Ukraine influenced the prevailing geopolitical sentiment in the dominant defence-related discourse. The annotation allows us to also analyse and determine what geopolitical sentiment was communicated by the most influential actors and how they compare to each other.

Manual annotation was used for geopolitical sentiment analysis due to the complexity of the dataset. Simple NLP sentiment analysis would only indicate the emotion of the post, without further contextual cues. A more complex machine learning model would still need labelled training data, and would likely not reach the accuracy of manual annotations – particularly with the relatively complex categories of geopolitical sentiment in our design.

Wider applicability

While our approach focuses on defence-related themes, it is easily adjustable to other sectors, such as health or migration. Different topics can be analysed similarly to our approach. All that is required is that the keyword search and modifying tag categories are altered to be more relevant for the themes in question.

Limitations

Our approach has several limitations. Firstly, it is not easily scalable. It relies heavily on manual annotation, which is time intensive and requires trained annotators. Even the annotated data is not exceptionally reliable without subsequent quality control.

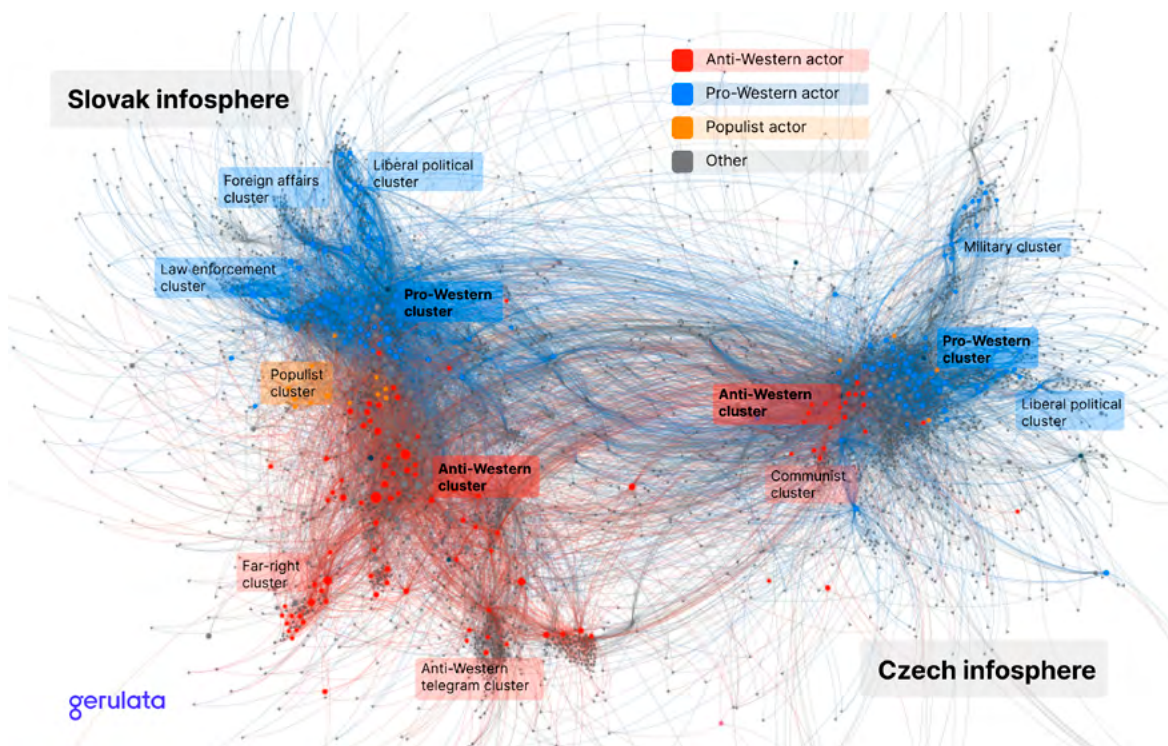
Secondly, while we believe the number of interactions is the best possible indicator for sorting the data, it has some inherent limitations. It is correlated with the number of followers and, as such, prioritises more successful social media actors and not necessarily the most relevant ones (in defence and security). We tried to adjust for this limitation by dividing the key actors into specific groups. However, these groups were not equal in the number of actors, and consequently, some relevant actors may have fallen out of the scope of this report.



The actors

One of the main goals of this report is to map and categorise actors communicating defence themes. The research team devised three complementary approaches to comprehensively map and compare these actors:

- 1** Visualising the topology of actors and the clusters they formed. This helped illustrate the complexity of the information space in two-dimensional space.
- 2** Looking at the leading pro-Western and anti-Western actors in both countries and some of their most employed narratives. This gives an insight into the comparative performance of the actors on both sides of the ideological divide.
- 3** Looking at and briefly describing specific, individual actors. This can give StratCom professionals an insight into particular actors and their role in influencing the discourse.



Graph 1: Visualisation of infosphere by geopolitical affinity



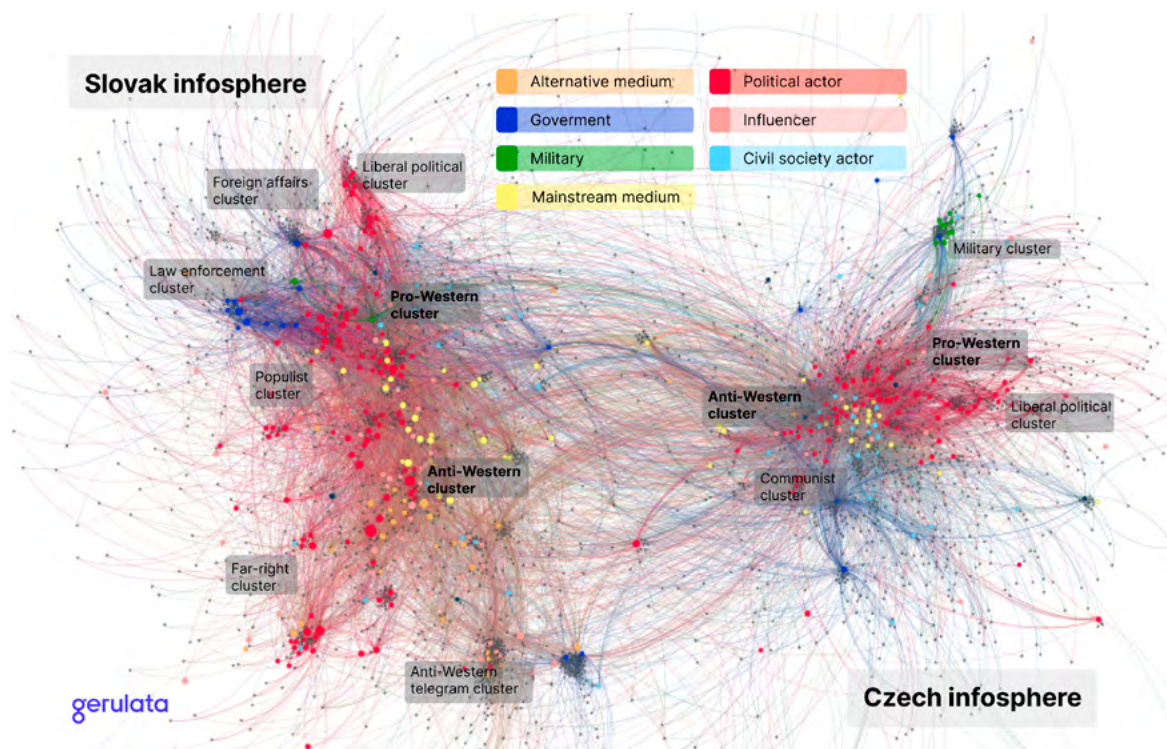
Topology of defence-related actors

The network graphs below give a visual representation of the virtual environment. Starkly evident is the interconnectedness of the two infospheres. They share many connections, yet they are clearly distinct.

The graph above visualises the broad geopolitical affinity of the actors. One can assume that all the graph's small grey nodes would be the same colour as the larger nodes around them (they are not because we wanted to visibly exclude them from our annotated data). While the Czech dataset seems predominantly pro-Western, the Slovak infosphere has much larger, even dominant, anti-Western clusters.

The spread of the Slovak infosphere is also much wider, and the Czech infosphere is visibly less clustered. This is due to the specificity of the two infospheres. There are two main reasons. Firstly, our data suggest that actors in Slovakia are better at engaging their audiences. This is likely because Facebook in Slovakia is used more effectively for (predominantly anti-Western) strategic communication of various actors. A focused strategic communication on particular topics can improve the gravity necessary for clustering.

The second reason is a predominant pro-Western leaning of the Czech infosphere compared to Slovakia. As a result, the Czech infosphere is more unified, with weaker



Graph 2: Visualisation of infosphere by actor



” While the Czech dataset seems predominantly pro-Western, the Slovak infosphere has much larger, even dominant, anti-Western clusters. The spread of the Slovak infosphere is also much wider, and the Czech infosphere is visibly less clustered.

anti-Western forces helping create a more unified cluster.

An interesting feature of the Slovak infosphere is an entire anti-Western Telegram cluster (the bottom-most label). It is strongly connected to the Slovak anti-Western actors cluster. The graph and our data indicate that in Slovakia, Telegram is only used by anti-Western actors, such as Luboš Blaha, who was banned by Facebook for breaking the rules and regulations. In this way, Telegram is a safe haven without reasonable oversight.

Above is a visualisation of the infosphere, with the actor category determining node colour. Each coloured node represents one actor in our dataset. There are, again, interesting differences between the two infospheres.

In Slovakia, the alternative media tend to gravitate towards anti-Western political actors, with government actors on the opposite side of the infosphere. Meanwhile, in the Czech Republic, mainstream media

and alternative media are closer to the large pro-Western cluster.

Interestingly, the military actors form a distinct cluster in the Czech Republic but not in Slovakia. This might be because there are more military actors in the Czech Republic, and they are more clearly aligned in their communication.

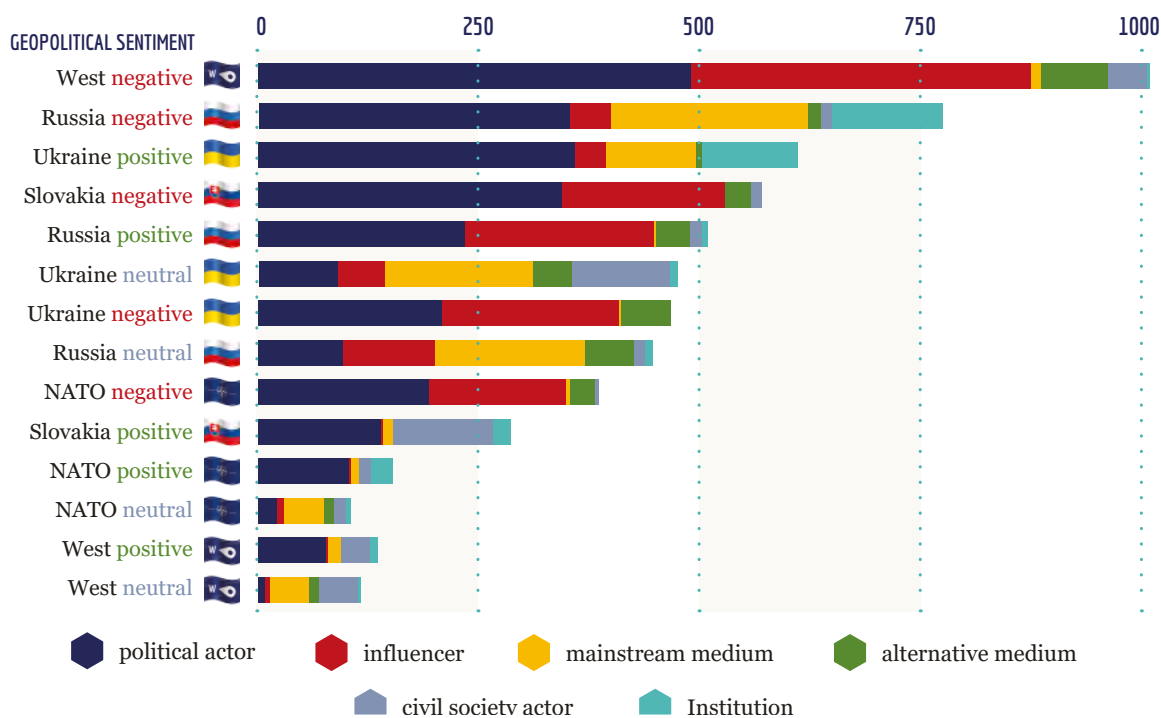
Actors and their geopolitical sentiment

The Slovak online information space is highly polarized. Messaging with neutral geopolitical sentiment is rather rare. The environment is contested between actors providing strong communication with a negative geopolitical sentiment about the West (often also pro-Russian) and actors delivering communication with a negative geopolitical sentiment about Russia (often also pro-Ukraine and pro-West). While both sides are led by political actors, influencers are highly significant only in cases when their communication is negative towards the West, Ukraine, or Slovakia, or supportive



Actors posting with geopolitical sentiment in Slovakia

Actors posting with geopolitical sentiment in Slovakia



Graph 3: Actors posting with geopolitical sentiment in Slovakia

of Russia. Influencers with pro-West/NATO/Ukraine narratives are much less successful with their communication.

Government institutions communicate primarily with a pro-Western geopolitical sentiment. Mainstream media as a group of actors are frequently communicating with neutral geopolitical sentiments, even if pro-Ukraine and Russia negative sentiments were most present in their communication. Alternative media are a less prominent part of a camp that is negative about the West/Ukraine/Slovakia. This observation fits in well with the broader trend of political

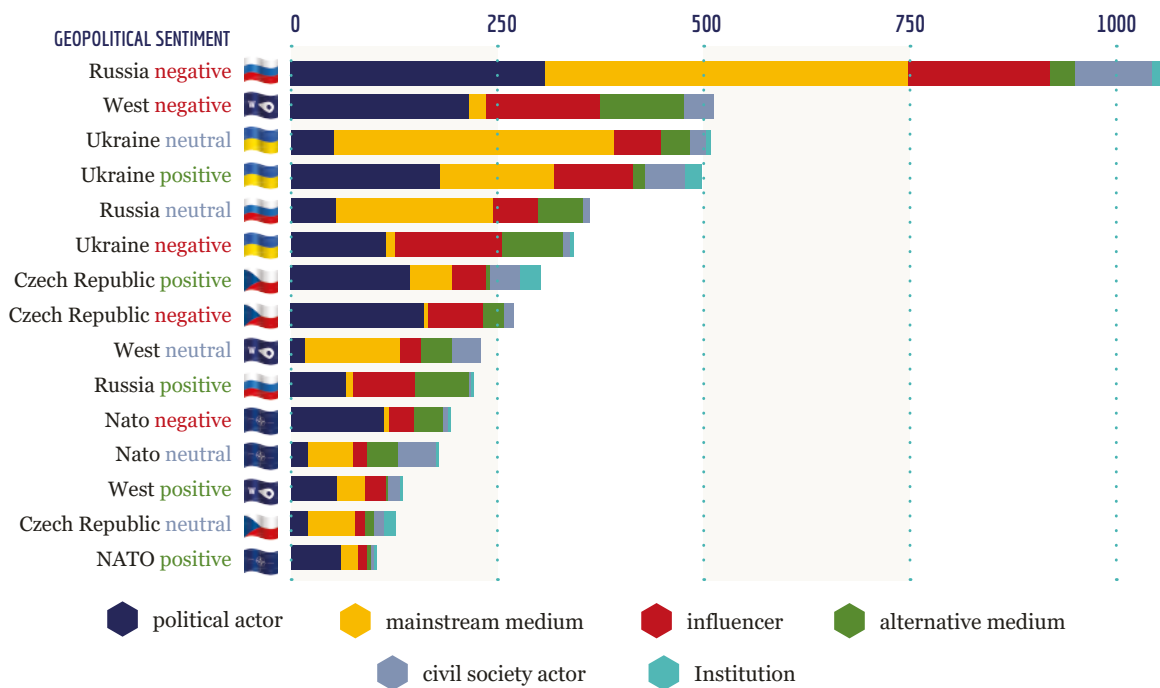
actors actively dominating the Slovak disinformation ecosystem.

Negative sentiment towards Russia prevails considerably in the Czech information space. It is mainly shared by political actors and mainstream media, followed by influencers. Even though political actors display a predominantly anti-Russian sentiment, they also show the greatest degree of communication polarisation on the axis between Russia and the West. Compared to Slovakia, however, the degree of polarisation is noticeably lower overall. The mainstream media, in particular,



Actors posting with geopolitical sentiment in Czech Republic

Number of posts with geopolitical sentiment by actor



Graph 4: Actors posting with geopolitical sentiment in Czech Republic

contribute a significant proportion of the content with a neutral sentiment. However, a certain degree of polarisation is evident in the case of influencers, with mainly positive or negative sentiment towards Ukraine, the West and Russia. Alternative media's content shows sentiment set against the West, against Ukraine and in favour of Russia. This only underscores the long-term trajectory of activity, which is comparable to the alternative scene in Slovakia.

Institutions play a relatively small role, but they primarily communicate positive views towards the Czech Republic and Ukraine,

and negative views towards Russia. This is similar to civil society actors which, compared to Slovakia, do not show such a propensity for positive communication of their own state's actions. As already mentioned, they are more vocal with negative sentiments towards Russia.

Similarities and differences

The results of the annotated data show that in the case of both countries, the communication of defence and security issues is dominated mainly by political actors and mainstream media.³ Simultaneously,



these are proving to be politically rewarding topics. This is particularly the case in Slovakia, where the results demonstrate that communication of defence and security position issues towards the Slovak public is largely personalised and carried out by politicians. This may endanger Western-oriented foreign policy due to the partisan, ideological or personal motives of individual politicians.

The situation is similar in the Czech Republic, albeit on a smaller scale. However, the Czech Republic's information space is dominated by the mainstream media. Outside of political actors and mainstream media, other actors are at relatively comparable levels in both countries, especially in the case of influencers. The importance of the media space in communicating defence and security issues is also demonstrated by the presence of the alternative media. However, the Czech alternative scene lags behind in the success rate of communication, attracting approximately one-sixth of the interactions gained by the Slovak alternative media.

The difference between the two countries is also evident when considering the communication by state and public institutions. Again, Czech institutions lag behind Slovak ones in communicating defence and security topics. In terms of the total amount of content, it is about one-fifth. The difference is even more noticeable in terms of interactions achieved. In Slovakia, institutions gained 10 times as many

interactions. In the Czech Republic, state and public institutions ranked last in the actor categories, with less than 63 thousand interactions. In Slovakia, civil society actors were the least effective communicators of defence and security topics.

The difference can also be seen in the communication presence of foreign states. In the case of the Czech Republic, the Embassy of Ukraine in Prague dominated when compared to other institutions – especially after the beginning of the war in Ukraine. This differs from Slovakia, where the activities of the Russian Embassy page were extensive. The Russian embassy has long been operating beyond its expected diplomatic activities, playing an active role in spreading disinformation narratives and utilizing historical revisionism in Slovakia.

On the contrary, in the Slovak information space, civil society actors lagged behind in the amount of content when compared to the Czech Republic. However, despite this, they achieved comparable amounts of interactions.

Both countries follow the same pattern regarding how successful different categories of actors are at communicating defence and security topics. The key finding is, as indicated by the overall amount of interactions, that defence and security issues are generally much more popular and effectively communicated by the actors in Slovakia. For specific statistics, see Annex 3 and Annex 4.



While the amounts of interactions achieved by political actors and mainstream media are comparable in the Czech Republic, in Slovakia, political actors communicate up to approximately four times more effectively than the media, with almost 8.8 million interactions compared with less than two million interactions. This confirms the assertion about the political personalisation of defence and security issues in Slovakia made in the opening of this chapter. In both countries, influencers and alternative media follow in the ranking of interactions gained.

Who are the actors?



Slovakia

The Slovak discourse on defence and security is dominated by political actors. Not only the current coalition and

opposition politicians but also MEPs and extra-parliamentary politicians are represented in the ranking of the most effective communicators. President Zuzana Čaputová also features highly in rankings.

Slovakia's top communicators include politicians with both pro-Western and pro-Russian attitudes. The two most active and effective political actors, **Luboš Blaha** and **Eduard Chmelár**, represent the pro-Russian camp. They are also a good example of the aforementioned limitation of the dataset, as they touched on the security and defence issues secondarily, mostly within their messaging regarding the war in Ukraine.⁴ However, at the turn of the year, Mr Blaha and Mr Chmelár formed a large part of the communication regarding the adoption of the DCA, towards which they were critical and hostile.

#	Name	Posts	Interactions	Followers	Dominant narratives
1	Luboš Blaha	296	3,919,019	174,917	DCA, aid to Ukraine prolongs the war, aggressive NATO/US, NATO troops in Slovakia, Yugoslavia
2	Eduard Chmelár	268	1,464,845	62,249	DCA, S-300, aggressive NATO/US, NATO troops in Slovakia, Yugoslavia
3	Milan Uhrík • Republika	67	901,074	148,031	DCA, S-300, aid to Ukraine prolongs the war, aggressive NATO/US
4	Ereport	151	554,332	55,694	DCA, aid to Ukraine prolongs the war,
5	Armáda Ruskej Federácie	171	465,331	54,514	biological weapons/laboratories, promotion of Russian military equipment, Ukrainian soldiers as cowards



” Slovak Minister of Defence Jaroslav Nad’ has been the most productive communicator in the category of pro-Western political actors. In contrast to Mr Blaha and Mr Chmelár, who ranked first and second in this, the issues of security and defence are Mr Nad’'s primary topics.

#	Name	Posts	Interactions	Followers	Dominant narratives
6	Robert Fico	18	372,525	192,103	DCA, S-300
7	Milan Mazurek • Republika	26	351,199	175,190	DCA, NATO troops in Slovakia, aid to Ukraine prolongs the war, anti-migrant rhetoric
8	Informácie bez cenzúry	106	301,959	69,634	aggressive NATO/US, aid to Ukraine prolongs the war
9	Anna Belousovová	68	250,082	20,365	biological weapons/laboratories, aid to Ukraine prolongs the war, S-300, aggressive NATO/US, Yugoslavia, DCA
10	Tomáš Taraba - predseda ŽIVOT NS	53	211,228	57,803	DCA, aid to Ukraine prolongs the war, anti-migrant rhetoric

Table 1: Top 10 anti-Western actors in Slovakia

Minister of Defence **Jaroslav Nad’** has been the most productive communicator in the category of pro-Western political actors. Also, he produced the third-highest volume of defence-related content among all politicians. In contrast to Mr Blaha and Mr Chmelár, who ranked first and second in this, the issues of security

and defence are Mr Nad’'s primary topics. Mr Nad’ exemplifies a visible political personalisation of communication, as his effectiveness far exceeds that of individual government departments. However, the Defence Minister’s communication remains less effective than that of the top anti-Western actors.



#	Name	Content	Interactions	Followers	Dominant narratives
1	Zuzana Čaputová	74	696,461	363,113	NATO unity, support for Ukraine, S-300, DCA
2	Natália Blahová	6	421,662	32,258	support for Ukraine
3	Polícia Slovenskej republiky	60	237,652	373,858	support for Ukraine, refugees
4	Hoaxy a podvody - Polícia SR	126	227,183	119,252	support for Ukraine, alerting to Russian propaganda, refugees
5	Jaro Naď - minister obrany SR, OĽANO	89	192,057	54,974	DCA, S-300, support for Ukraine, NATO unity, NATO troops in Slovakia, US partnership
6	Eduard Heger - predseda vlády SR	62	148,915	51,828	DCA, S-300, support for Ukraine, NATO unity, US partnership
7	Andrej Stančík	55	101,461	25,793	support for Ukraine, DCA, S-300
8	Peter Pellegrini	15	78,413	314,182	supporting Ukraine means ignoring the needs of citizens
9	Ivan Korčok	35	68,577	24,466	DCA, S-300, support for Ukraine, NATO unity
10	Michal Šimečka • Progresívne Slovensko	23	54,286	31,700	S-300, support for Ukraine, NATO unity

Table 2: Top 10 pro-Western actors in Slovakia

These findings underscore a long-standing situation in which the **alternative media ecosystem**, active and often all too willing to adopt pro-Kremlin narratives, plays an undesirable role as an opinion-former on critical topics. The media space reflects how Slovak society is polarised between

the mainstream and the alternative. Despite twice as much mainstream media content being produced by the Slovak mainstream media, it appears that alternative media are on average more successful in communicating security and defence issues.



The **public broadcaster RTVS** is absent in the ranking of the most influential actors, which confirms the institution's long-term weak position in the media space.

Regarding **influencers**, the results show the presence of, essentially, fringe actors. Welcome examples of actors communicating positive or humorously styled narratives can be seen.

"Alternative" influencers dominate rankings in both volume and effectiveness of communication. The page **Army of the Russian Federation** has been identified by the Slovak police as a tool of pro-Kremlin propaganda. With the exception of the satirical, pro-Western and massively popular website **Zomri**, it appears that alternative influencers also dominate in the number of followers.

Slovak **government institutions** have begun to actively assume the role of communicators but the implementation of effective strategic communications still only garners weak political support. Still, most of the ministries are at the beginning of their journey in terms of strategic communication. Legislative and institutional developments should be viewed positively.⁵ Data shows that the most effective communication of security and defence is led by the **Police of the Slovak Republic**, including its second page Hoaxy a podvody - Polícia SR (Hoaxes and scams - Police of the Slovak Republic) which focuses on responding to and refuting disinformation.

In the case of civil society actors, except for **Mladí proti fašizmu**, we find that their communication of defence and security issues is fairly weak on social media in Slovakia.

 *Czech Republic*

In the Czech Republic, while mainstream media is the most active actor in communicating defence and security issues, political actors are more effective in their communications. Despite the efforts of current Czech **Prime Minister Petr Fiala**, the communication of security and defence is mainly in the hands of politicians with an anti-West orientation. In general, politicians from both ends of the political spectrum lead in communication effectiveness. In particular, the **SPD** political movement stands high in the rankings. Looking at the ratio of the amount of content to the number of interactions received, the most effective communicator is MEP **Kateřina Konečná** from the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia.

The most active mainstream media actor is the **public broadcaster ČT24**. Compared to Slovakia, this is a clear success story for the Czech Republic, where the public broadcaster continuously and successfully communicates defence and security issues. The main difference between both nations lies in the continuity, support, regulation and the resulting quality of the media.⁶



#	Name	Content	Interactions	Followers	Dominant narratives
1	Tomio Okamura - SPD	75	382,322	290,015	Self-dependent Czech Republic, government takes better care of refugees than "our people", withdraw from NATO and the EU, This is not our war
2	MUDr. Ivan David	64	216,112	47,701	Self-dependent Czech Republic, government takes better care of refugees than "our people", withdraw from NATO and the EU, This is not our war
3	Kateřina Konečná	7	108,149	39,222	Self-dependent Czech Republic, government takes better care of refugees than "our people", withdraw from NATO and the EU, This is not our war
4	Jana Zwyrtk Hamplová fanpage	16	82,286	59,786	Self-dependent Czech Republic, government takes better care of refugees than "our people", withdraw from NATO and the EU, This is not our war
5	Sputnik Česká republika	127	74,902	67,113	withdraw from NATO and the EU, energy crisis is the West's fault
6	Karla Maříková	31	51,185	29,464	Self-dependent Czech Republic, government takes better care of refugees than "our people", withdraw from NATO and the EU, This is not our war
7	Aby bylo jasno	3	49,473	6,886	Ukraine is a corrupt country, weapons we send them end up on black market, self-dependent Czech Republic, government takes better care of refugees than "our people",
8	Jindřich Rajchl	15	47,704	21,801	Self-dependent Czech Republic, government takes better care of refugees than "our people", withdraw from NATO and the EU, This is not our war
9	Aliance národních sil	65	38,794	12,549	Government takes better care of refugees than "our people", Czech Republic is being dragged into a conflict that doesn't concern it, "Ukrainisation" of the Czech Republic
10	Radim Fiala - SPD	47	32,592	39,157	Self-dependent Czech Republic, government takes better care of refugees than "our people", withdraw from NATO and the EU, This is not our war

Table 3: Top 10 anti-Western actors in the Czech Republic



To a large extent, **alternative media** play a minor role in the Czech space (both in volume and effectiveness of communication), but the presence of the Czech localized branch of the Russian state-controlled media **Sputnik** is notable due to the largest number of posts and interactions it achieved. Also present are conspiracy portals that share platforms and audiences with Slovakia - **Svobodný vysílač** and **Infovojna**.

Regarding **influencers**, the role of an active and effective communicator is played by the **Visegradský Jezdec** page, which is headed by the activist Karel Paták. Its activities aim to fill the information space with factual information in both a preventive and reactive approach. However, this category also includes problematic actors with tendencies to promote disinformation or be nationalistic, who gained more popularity after the Covid-19 pandemic.

#	Name	Content	Interactions	Followers	Dominant narratives
1	Visegradský jezdec	130	149,605	67,348	Sanctions work, we need to help Ukraine, Ukrainian refugees are welcomed, energy crisis is caused by Russia, democracy, freedom, Russia committing crimes against humanity
2	Petr Fiala	34	93,811	80,111	Sanctions work, we need to help Ukraine, Ukrainian refugees are welcomed, energy crisis is caused by Russia, democracy, freedom, Russia committing crimes against humanity
3	Generál Pavel	18	44,445	41,222	Sanctions work, we need to help Ukraine, energy crisis is caused by Russia, democracy, freedom
4	Zdeněk Hřib - primátor Prahy	6	36,917	67,477	Sanctions work, we need to help Ukraine as much as we can, Ukrainian refugees are welcomed, energy crisis is caused by Russia, democracy, freedom, Russia committing crimes against humanity
5	ODS - Občanská demokratická strana	57	34,181	68,783	Sanctions work, we need to help Ukraine, Ukrainian refugees are welcomed, energy crisis is caused by Russia
6	Embassy of Ukraine in Prague / Velvyslanectví Ukrajiny v Praze	13	34,090	27,997	Sanctions work, crisis is caused by Russia, democracy, freedom, Russia committing crimes against humanity, Ukraine is grateful for all the help with the UA army and Ukrainian refugees



#	Name	Content	Interactions	Followers	Dominant narratives
7	TOP 09	31	30,783	122,321	Sanctions against Russia work, we need to help Ukraine, Ukrainian refugees are welcomed, energy crisis is caused by Russia
8	Tomáš Sedláček	7	29,811	96,828	Energy crisis, economic consequences of the war, sanctions against Russia, Russian economy
9	Miroslava Němcová	5	28,617	55,539	Sanctions work, we need to help Ukraine as much as we can, Ukrainian refugees are welcomed, energy crisis is caused by Russia not the West, democracy, freedom, Russia committing crimes against humanity
10	Česká pirátská strana	14	28,035	159,424	Sanctions work, we need to help Ukraine, Ukrainian refugees are welcomed, energy crisis is caused by Russia, democracy, freedom, Russia committing crimes against humanity

Table 4: Top 10 pro-Western actors in the Czech Republic

Similarly to Slovakia, Czech **civil society** actors and institutions have garnered the lowest share in communicating security and defence. The internet group Čeští elfové (**Czech Elves**) successfully fights against disinformation and Russian propaganda in the Czech information space.

In the case of **government communications**, there is the active communication of the Embassy of Ukraine, which gained particular momentum after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. A stable and high-quality communicator on defence and

security issues is the **Army of the Czech Republic**. The activity of the Army's central outlets is interestingly complemented by the volume of individual military units. This is especially notable when compared with Slovakia, where similar units have almost no presence.

The communication of strategic issues by Czech **ministries** is not afforded enough attention and takes a low priority. With the exception of the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**, ministries seem to struggle with communication of strategic issues.



The narratives

In both Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the war in Ukraine was the most widely discussed topic. The second most popular theme concerned military exercises and defence equipment. NATO as an Alliance came third. Our narrative analysis centred around topics identified in the analysed content. Analysts sought repeated patterns of messaging, interpretative framing, usage of symbols, figurative speech, and fragments of storytelling. The five most frequently identified topics were selected for further narrative analysis in both countries.

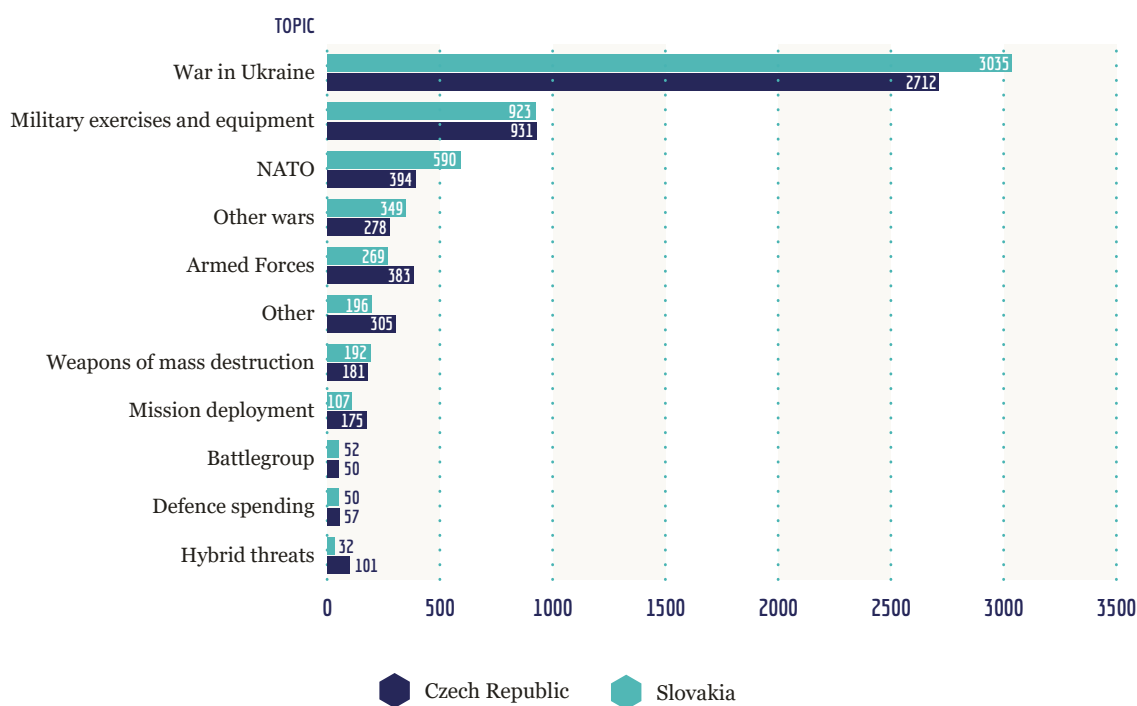
War in Ukraine



Slovakia

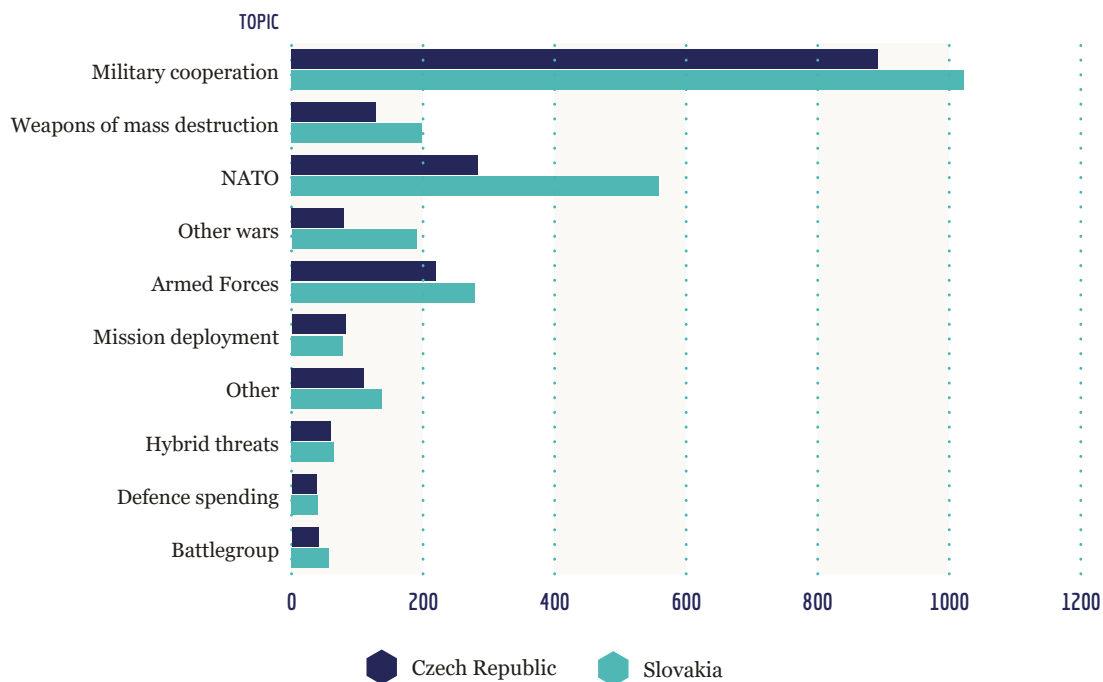
The most successful narratives regarding the war in Ukraine came from political actors. Critics of the unified Western

response, mostly opposition parties and the extreme right, took their time after the war started on 24 February, but in late March and early April, they launched a barrage of propaganda that depicted Ukraine and its leader as reasons why the war had become a problem for Europe and its security. These



Graph 5: Prevalence of topics





Graph 6: Content combined with the “war in Ukraine” topic

narratives were not only trying to demoralise Slovaks and their will to help Ukraine, but also to create a false dichotomy that the war is, in fact, not a conflict where Russia is the aggressor and Ukraine the victim, but this is a geopolitical war between Russia and USA, with Ukraine acting as a stage and proxy for this conflict.

Not all popular narratives were critical. Some of the most successful narratives showed the power of solidarity and humanism that arose amid the crisis. Images of Slovak soldiers on borders who comforted, fleeing Ukrainian children were not only touching, but also went viral and acquired large numbers of interactions. However, this was present

only in the first weeks after the invasion. Some of the other viral content regarding the war in Ukraine tried to depict soldiers of Ukraine as cowards who are fleeing the war and are unwilling to fight.

Positive content came from President Zuzana Čaputová, who communicated the need to support Ukraine not only in words and promises, but in concrete action. One piece of content that stood out was a video where the President addressed Russian soldiers in fluent Russian, asking to end this terrible war. This content went viral in Slovakia, but was also subsequently reshared and disseminated internationally as a strong message and symbol.



Another very successful narrative came from President Čaputová, who addressed MPs in the Ukrainian parliament. He reminded them, and the international audience, that Slovaks and Czechs were victims of a similar invasion, back in 1968. (Source: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=423331926307649>)

Anti-system and far-right politicians picked up on the pro-Russian narrative that called to stop sending weapons and other means of defence to Ukraine, arguing that it was prolonging the war. This narrative is an example of how these actors helped not only Russian propaganda, but were deliberately creating a demoralising atmosphere that sought to diminish critical support of Ukraine from western countries.

Critics from the political right and anti-system were successful in communicating the narrative that Slovakia will be a victim of an energy crisis created by a war that it has nothing to do with and that consequently, Slovakia should change its position regarding Russian sanctions and its overall support of Ukraine, which in their logic, elongates the war.



In the Czech information space, Russian aggression towards Ukraine was most often framed in terms of weapons deliveries sent to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. This is mainly because the Czech Republic is one of the countries that actively support

Ukraine, with massive supplies of weapons or financial resources intended for the purchase of military equipment (for more information, see the sub-chapter discussing military equipment).

All topics related to Russian aggression against Ukraine are highly politicized in the Czech Republic. The entire topic of the war in Ukraine is thus marked by a political struggle in which the government tries to justify and explain its steps to help Ukraine, and the opposition tries to argue against it.

Given that there were up to 400,000 Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic, they became the subject of one of the most frequently spread narratives. These are posts in which the politicians of the ruling parties (e.g. Minister of Interior Vít Rakušan or Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament Markéta Pekarová Adamová) explain to Czech citizens how to help Ukrainian refugees and how the government is helping them. Meanwhile, political actors who are both traditionally nationalist and pro-Russian (such as Tomio Okamura or Ivan David) are very active, claiming that the government cares more about Ukrainian refugees than its citizens. Tomio Okamura for example wrote: "In the SPD's view, support for refugees from Ukraine should be adequate, only for as long as necessary, and refugees should return as soon as the situation permits and work to rebuild their country. A significant part of the refugees comes from areas where there is no fighting. The citizens



of the Czech Republic are not responsible for the economic disruption and corruption-riddled situation in Ukraine, which occurred even before the war.” These assertions are often linked to disinformation. In doing so, these political actors try to undermine the morale of Czech citizens, whose support for helping Ukrainian refugees reached up to 97% immediately after the invasion.

For example, one of the most widespread disinformation narratives regarding the refugee wave suggested that large amounts of refugees from Africa and the Middle East were “secretly” heading to the Czech Republic, alongside the Ukrainian refugees. Hate speech was also prominent, suggesting that Ukrainian refugees do not need any help because they arrive in expensive cars, etc.

The [post with the most interactions](#) was shared on the Facebook profile of the news channel of Czech public television ČT24. It was a famous video made by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky three days into the war, on February 26, in which he refuted Russian disinformation that he had fled Ukraine and also called on the Russian army to lay down its arms.

NATO



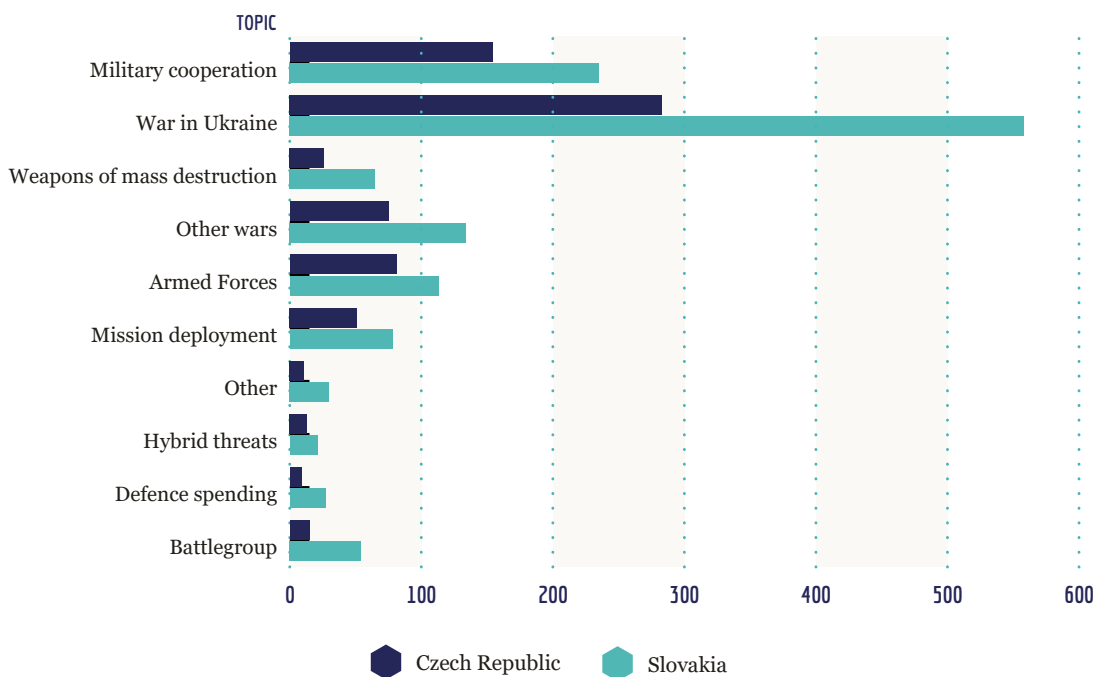
The most successful narratives about NATO in Slovak information space were produced

by political actors and were predominantly framed with negative geopolitical sentiment towards the Alliance. Often, we could observe using NATO as synonymous with the US, as the Alliance is being described as a mere tool for American interests and policies. It was, therefore, often difficult to distinguish between criticism of the US and criticism of NATO.

The most frequent negative narratives were connected to the Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) between the governments of Slovakia and the United States, or the Russia-Ukraine war. In both cases, the Alliance, its representatives and actions (typically enlargement, nuclear weapons deployment or direct military presence at NATO - Russia borders) were described as provocative or threatening towards Russia. Narratives delegitimizing the moral right to criticise Russia’s aggression were built by comparing with NATO operations in Yugoslavia (often including pan-Slavic claims) and Iraq (interestingly, Afghanistan or Libya were only mentioned a few times). Fear-inducing narratives were dominantly represented by content suggesting that NATO will drag Slovakia into war with Russia (often mentioning the possibility of nuclear war). The most viral content originated from opposition representatives or influencers with previous political careers or ambitions.

Successful positive narratives were built on two principles. First, they depicted the Alliance as a guarantee of freedom, sovereignty and security for Slovakia.





Graph 7: Content combined with the “NATO” topic

Second, they depicted the decisive unity and coherence of the Alliance’s reaction to growing Russian aggressiveness. These two principles appeared to be effectively self-reinforcing. The most viral positive content originated from the President and government officials, specifically the prime minister, the defence minister and the foreign minister.

 *Czech Republic*

The Alliance was often discussed in the Czech information space, even before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Specifically, this was in connection with the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan. There were a lot of purely informational posts

from media actors that neutrally reported on what was happening and included the overall context of the war in Afghanistan, in which NATO played a role. Nevertheless, a more pronounced narrative, pushed mainly by the opposition SPD party (Strana přímé demokracie - Direct Democracy Party), depicted NATO as “a dead organisation that has dragged the Czech Republic into a conflict that does not concern it”.

Regarding Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, NATO was generally described in a relatively balanced way, although the opposition parties again tried to shape the narrative negatively. Members of the SPD party have often written about the need to withdraw from NATO, suggesting it is

trying to drag the Czech Republic into a war against Russia. In this context, a narrative about the massacre in the Ukrainian city of Bucha was spread which claimed that the event was actually manufactured by the Ukrainians themselves, allegedly to serve as a pretext for NATO's entry into the war against Russia. Moreover, some political actors and alternative media also spread a narrative justifying Russia's invasion of Ukraine by suggesting that Russia felt threatened by the Alliance.

On the other hand, NATO also garnered positive commentary. This was mainly due to political actors from the ruling parties, who portrayed NATO as an organisation that enables Czechs to feel safe. At the same time, media actors neutrally reported about the addition of Finland and Sweden to the Alliance.

Military equipment and other defence cooperation

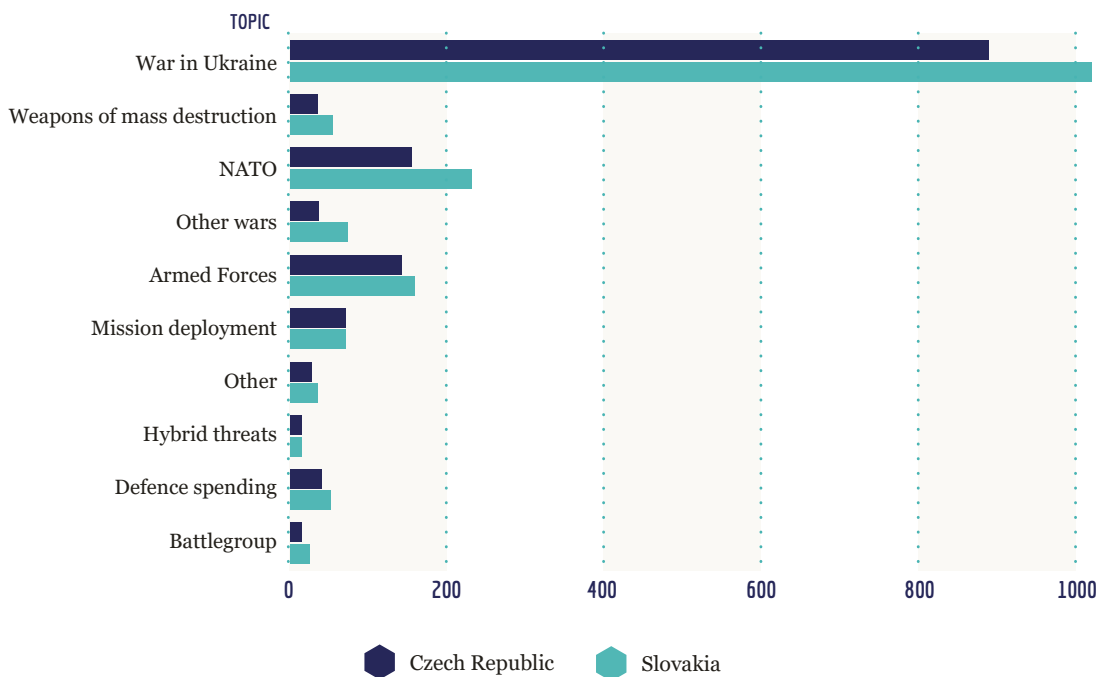


The majority of content in this category addressed the DCA between Slovakia and United States in the Slovak dataset. The DCA was, between November and February, the issue with the highest virality and physical mobilisation power, which translated into several street protests. Narratives tied to the DCA portrayed the Slovak government and president as traitors and obedient servants of the US (exploiting anti-Americanism

present in Slovak society); impunity of American soldiers even in cases of heavy crimes (exploiting a sense of injustice); depicting the DCA as the end of sovereignty and de facto occupation, and as paving the way to war with Russia (fearmongering). False claims about the potential deployment of nuclear weapons on Slovak territory were often used, which would make Slovakia a legitimate target for Russia (fearmongering with a nuclear threat).

Another cluster of negative narratives concerned Slovak military help to Ukraine, especially the delivery of weapon systems and ammunition. The primary target of criticism was President Zelensky, who was routinely depicted as an irresponsible, inexperienced politician, warmonger, puppet of external forces (NATO/US) or drug abuser. Military help to Ukraine was attacked from four distinct positions. First, there was a social bread-vs-guns critique which condemned the government for spending money on weapons instead of pressing domestic issues (such as the health sector, education or rising costs of living). Second, there was a moral critique of arms deliveries prolonging the war and human suffering (often connected with calls for seeking diplomatic solutions), which relates to the third position, which gives the example of the "Hungarian neutral position" as a reasonable middle ground policy (in contrast with military support depicted as taking part in the war). The fourth position can be well illustrated by the delivery of the Slovak S300 air defence system, which was





Graph 8: Content combined with the “military cooperation” topic

depicted as an irresponsible and dangerous decision that reduces Slovak defence capabilities.

Positive narratives about military equipment and defence collaborations were minimal and generated much lower interaction rates than negative stories. Most of the positive messaging was related to the help provided to Ukraine. The most salient case is a video created by the Slovak prime minister, who stated that Slovakia gave Ukraine its S-300 anti-aircraft systems and explained what this means for Slovakia and Ukraine (Source of video: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=652582392472538>). A few other positive examples were related to NATO efforts to support its Eastern flank members. Another resonant topic was

that of quick allied help with air defence and the establishment of a multinational battlegroup.

 *Czech Republic*

As with the war in Ukraine, the topic of military equipment has been politicised in the Czech Republic and used in a political campaign before the regional elections in October 2022.

Manipulative narratives were used to persuade Czechs that helping Ukraine is essentially dragging their nation into conflict. Members of opposition parties claimed that the government was trying to drag the Czech Republic into war by supplying weapons to the Ukrainian army



and funding the purchase of military equipment from other countries.

These are also the posts that got the most interactions on social media. Among the top 10 most engaged with posts relating to Military equipment, only one discussed arms supplies in a positive way (posted by a news media actor). The rest were negative posts that spread the narrative that the Czech Republic was being drawn into the war. Most of these posts came from the opposition parties. The rest were posted by an influencer known for spreading disinformation, and by “alternative media” outlets, which also typically spread disinformation and pro-Russian narratives (including the Czech version of Sputnik).

Around mid-May, a narrative casting doubt that the supplied weapons are being used by the Ukrainian army to defend against Russian aggression began to emerge. This manipulative narrative portrays Ukraine as a corrupt country where organised crime flourishes, claiming that most of the supplied weapons end up on the black market.

However, neutral or positive posts on the topic were also identified. One example was a widely spread post by the Ukrainian Embassy in the Czech Republic which established a transparent account where people could send money intended for the purchase of military equipment. Also, the government representatives disseminated a narrative explaining that the more weapons

the public sends to Ukraine, the faster the war will end, which would have a more positive outcome for the Czech Republic.

Other wars

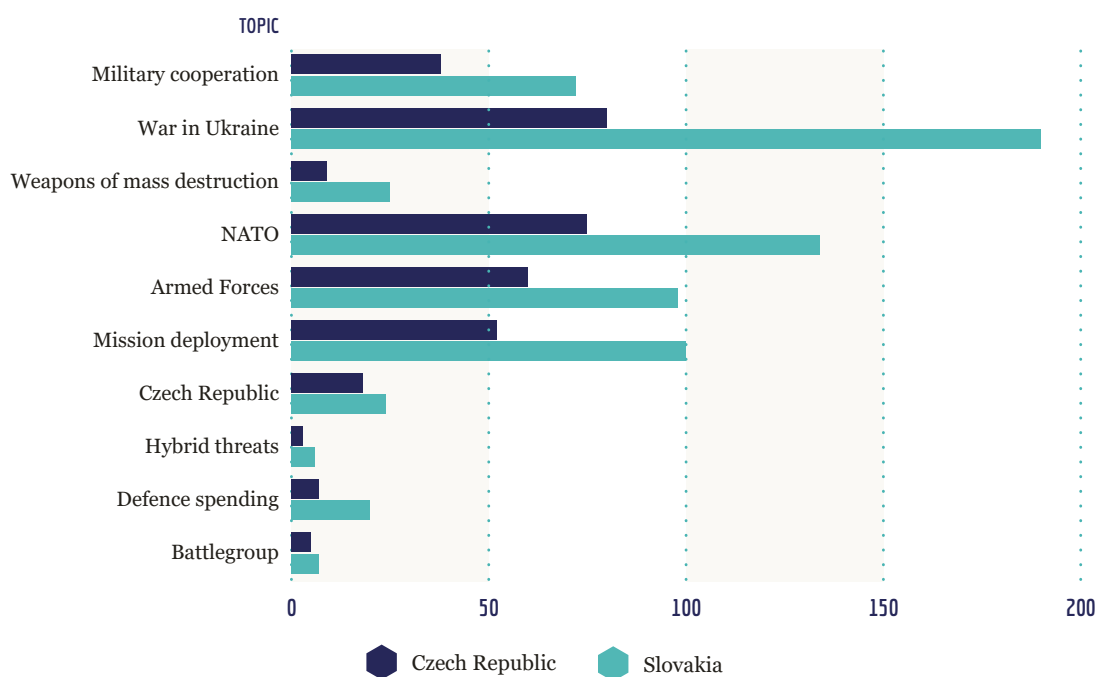


Slovakia

The topic of Other Wars was mostly used as a “whataboutism” trope to criticise the US/NATO and wars they had previously participated in. The use of this narrative was targeted to deflect and delegitimise criticism of Russia’s aggression, distracting public debate from the ongoing war and substituting with an artificial moralising discussion over great power politics. Notably, whataboutism as a tactic was seen almost two times as frequently in the Slovak dataset than in the Czech one.

Political actors and influencers created almost all other successful negative narratives in this category. One of the most present narratives was a manipulative criticism of NATO’s intervention in Yugoslavia, and more specifically, the bombardment of Belgrade (aggression of the West against Slavic brothers). Similarly employed, but less present, were cases of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. It seems rather clear that these narratives were trying to provoke anti-American geopolitical sentiments and pacifist worldviews in Slovak society. One example is Milan Uhrik, who gave a speech in the European Parliament about how the US waged wars just a week





Graph 9: Content combined with the “other wars” topic

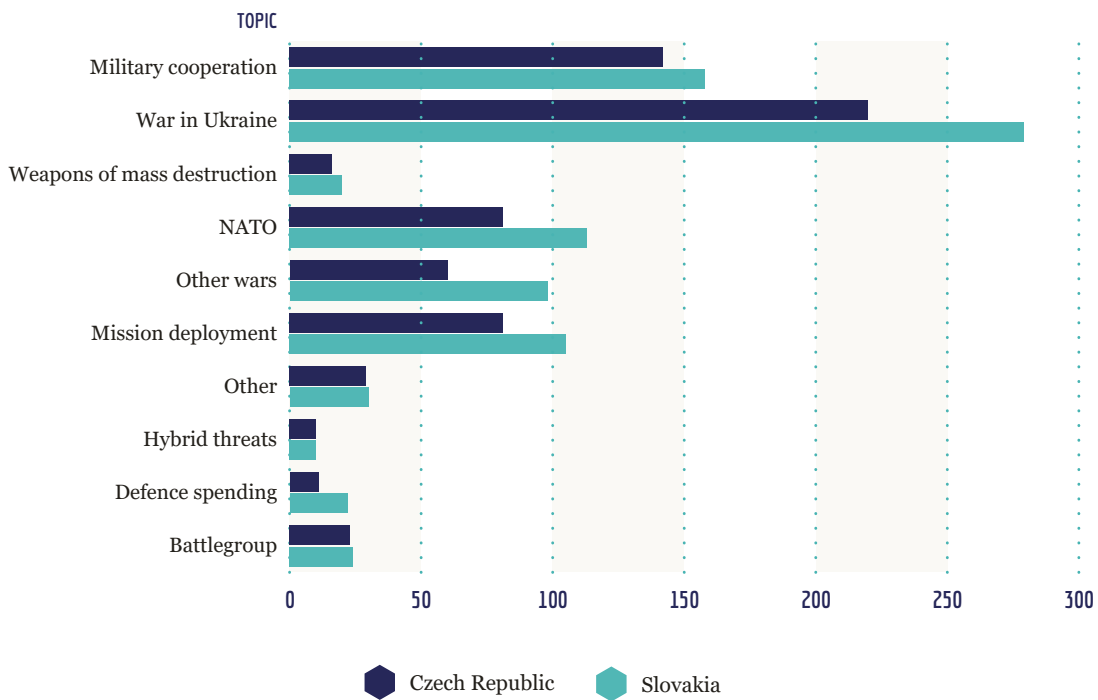
after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. (source: <https://www.facebook.com/445260620296824/posts/552985766190975>)

Armed forces



The theme Armed forces contains a combination of various narratives, some of which are related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, some to the Czech Republic being a NATO member, some to other military operations abroad in which the Czech army participated, and some to the purchase and modernisation of Czech military equipment.

The post with the most interactions related to this topic was by Miroslava Němcová who is a member of the Czech Senate (upper house of the Parliament) for ODS (Občanská demokratická strana - Civic democratic party). It was posted on the day of the invasion (February 24th 2022), and in it, she expressed her support for Ukraine. However, the post⁷ with the second highest number of interactions on this topic was published by the Facebook profile of the Czech Sputnik, which contains a video of Vladimir Putin announcing the attack on Ukraine: “Vladimir Putin announced in a special speech to the Russians that he has decided on a special military operation in the Donbass...”. The announcement itself is propaganda and tries to push the narrative



Graph 10: Content combined with the “armed forces” topic

that Russia’s actions are justifiable and have clear “liberation” motivations.

In April 2022, a story emerged that the Czech Ministry of Defence was negotiating American bases on Czech territory. The post containing this story had the third-highest amount of interactions in the dataset and was posted by an influencer who typically shares disinformation and pro-Russian attitudes. The post stated that “it is about the presence of foreign troops on the territory of the Czech Republic. Among other things, because they can be the reason for an attack on our country.” This was a clear attempt to cultivate fear in the public and create the impression that the presence of

American troops in the Czech Republic is dangerous and undesirable.

Another narrative that emerged portrayed Ukraine as a puppet of the United States, and that it will likely lose the war. In such articles, Ukraine was then accused of having itself to blame for the attack by Russia because, for example, it did not comply with the Minsk agreements.

Pro-Russian political actors and influencers strongly promoted the narrative that the Czech Republic should have a strong army, but at the same time, be self-sufficient and therefore independent of NATO or the EU. According to them, the Czech Republic



should withdraw from both organisations as soon as possible. The positive narrative by far-right and far-left parties about the purchase of modern weaponry and the government’s promise that the Czech Republic will invest 2% of GDP in defence by 2025 – in line with the NATO benchmark – was later replaced by criticism over the purchase of new equipment such as F-35 aircraft from the US or CV90 tracked infantry fighting vehicles from Sweden.

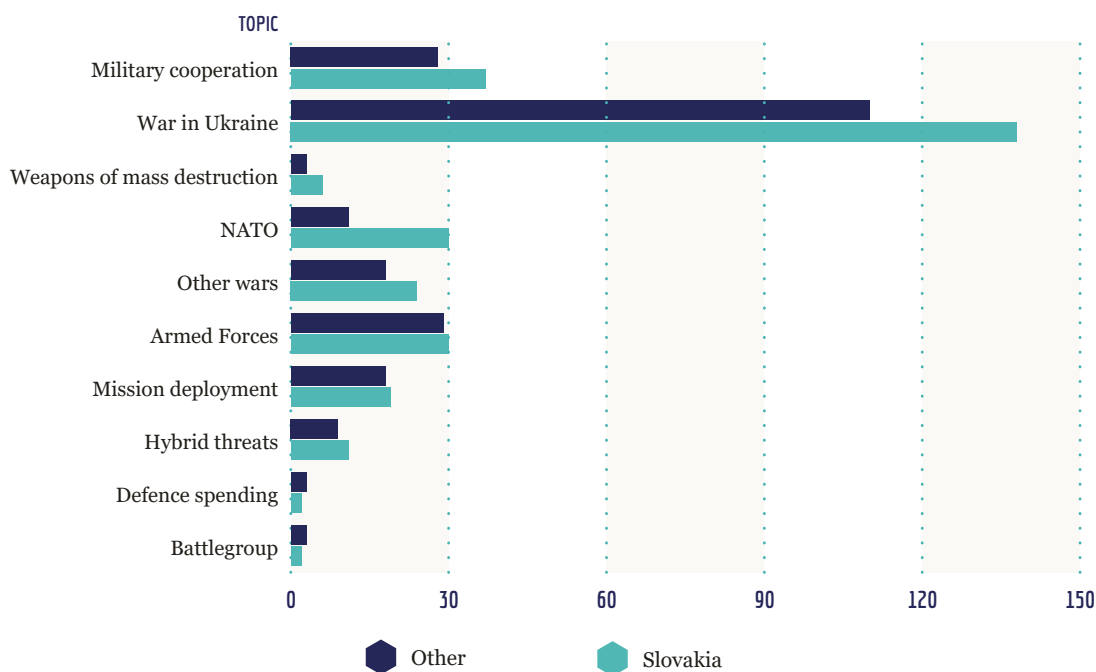
prices of goods and services were the most discussed. Political actors who belong to parties that are part of the ruling coalition dominated here. It was common for Prime Minister Petr Fiala, for example, to comment on how the government is going to solve the current energy crisis and how it wants to achieve Czech energy independence from Russia. They managed to frame this narrative in such a way that a temporary bit of discomfort is not worth sacrificing the freedom we live in.

Other relevant topics



In the case of the Czech information space, the energy crisis and the rising

Nevertheless, opposition actors actively put pressure on the government through public appearances and incited citizens to rebel against high prices. This topic has been politicised and has become one of the main



Graph 11: Content combined with the “other” topic



topics for political campaigns before the October 2022 regional elections.

Anti-migration posts appeared quite often in the second half of 2021, mainly from representatives of the SPD party. This was

related to the artificially created migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border. This narrative was present mainly because Polish soldiers were also sent to the border and, in this sense, the Czech Republic offered help to Poland.

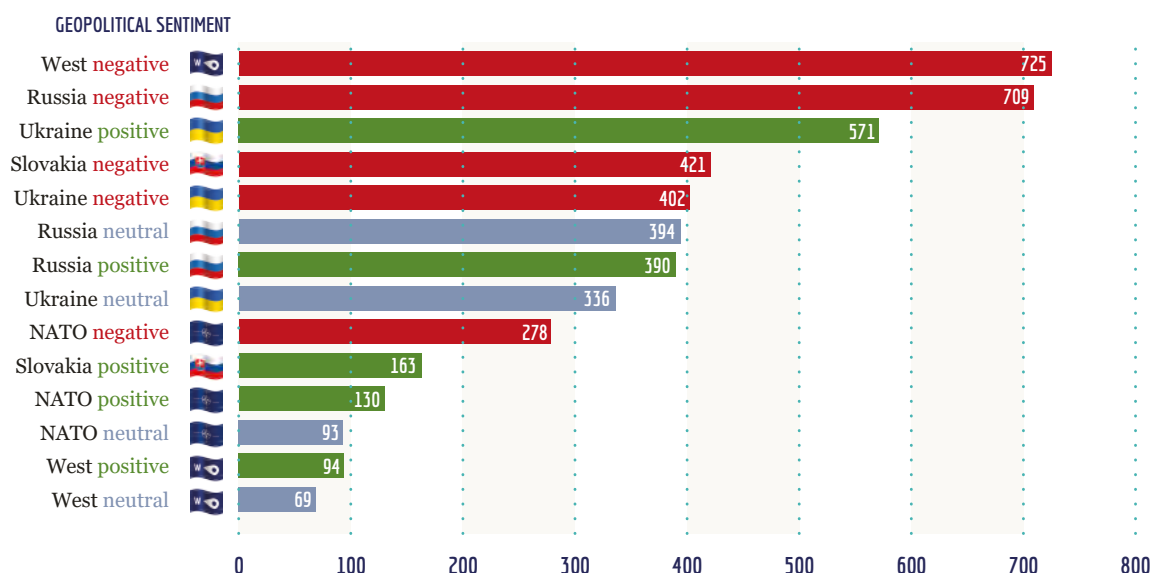


Geopolitical sentiment

The analysis focused on geopolitical sentiment showed a similarity in the appeal to positive and negative sentiment in both national datasets, with less content of neutral sentiment. Meanwhile, sentiments linked to the West, Russia and Ukraine were the most present.

The long-term anti-Western and anti-NATO orientation of the Slovak population was most strongly represented in the anti-Western geopolitical sentiment, identified in 15% of posts. A positive inclination towards the Russian Federation was found in 8% of the posts and another 8.3% contained anti-Ukrainian sentiment.

In addition to anti-Western sentiment, anti-NATO sentiment appeared in 5.8% of the content. These results are not surprising. For example, a [YouGov poll](#) from May 2022 showed that almost a third of Slovaks considered NATO as an aggressor in the war in Ukraine.⁸ The [GLOBSEC Trends 2022](#) survey mapping perceptions of the war in Ukraine in the Central and Eastern European countries showed that support for the claim that the West was responsible for the conflict was strongest in Slovakia. As many as 28% of respondents agreed with this statement, while 16% of respondents also agreed with the claim that Ukraine was to blame



Graph 12: Geopolitical sentiment in Slovakia



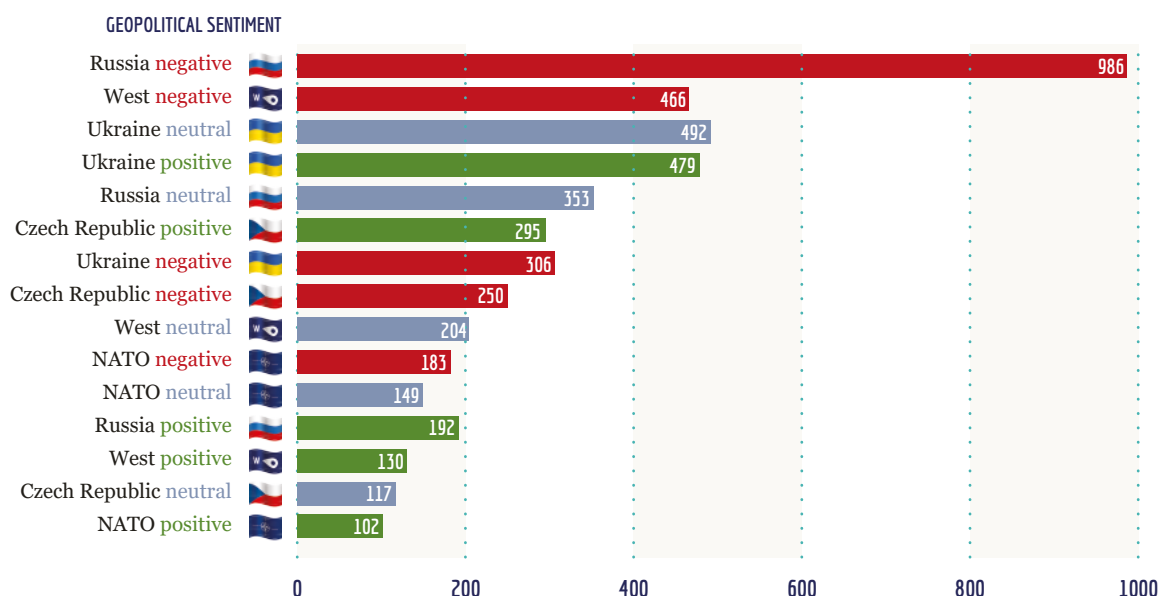
for suppressing the rights of the Russian-speaking population on its territory.⁹

Actors in both countries are inclined to negatively communicate topics rather than to sell the narratives positively. This particularly affects the West and Russia. However, positive sentiment has been displayed mostly in relation to Ukraine. There is also a difference in sentiment towards one's own country. While positive sentiment narrowly prevails in the Czech Republic, negative sentiment dominates in Slovakia.

In general, negative or positive geopolitical sentiment was significantly more prevalent within the content examined, while posts with a neutral charge were less frequently identified. In Slovakia, a substantial part of the posts (14.7%) showed anti-Russian

geopolitical sentiment, while 11.8% of the content demonstrated support for Ukraine.

In contrast to the results in Slovakia, content from the Czech Republic most notably shows anti-Russian geopolitical sentiment, as it appeared in approximately one-fifth of cases. Surveys of relevant agencies and institutions show that anti-Russian and pro-Western geopolitical sentiment has persisted within the Czech population since the spring. According to an April 2022 [STEM analysis](#) of Czech public geopolitical sentiment, Russian aggression in Ukraine has brought about a strong feeling of threat in the public. At the same time, the war has caused a record-low level of support for the Russian Federation which has, conversely, reinforced the importance of NATO membership. The STEM Institute reports that spring 2022



Graph 13: Geopolitical sentiment in Czech Republic



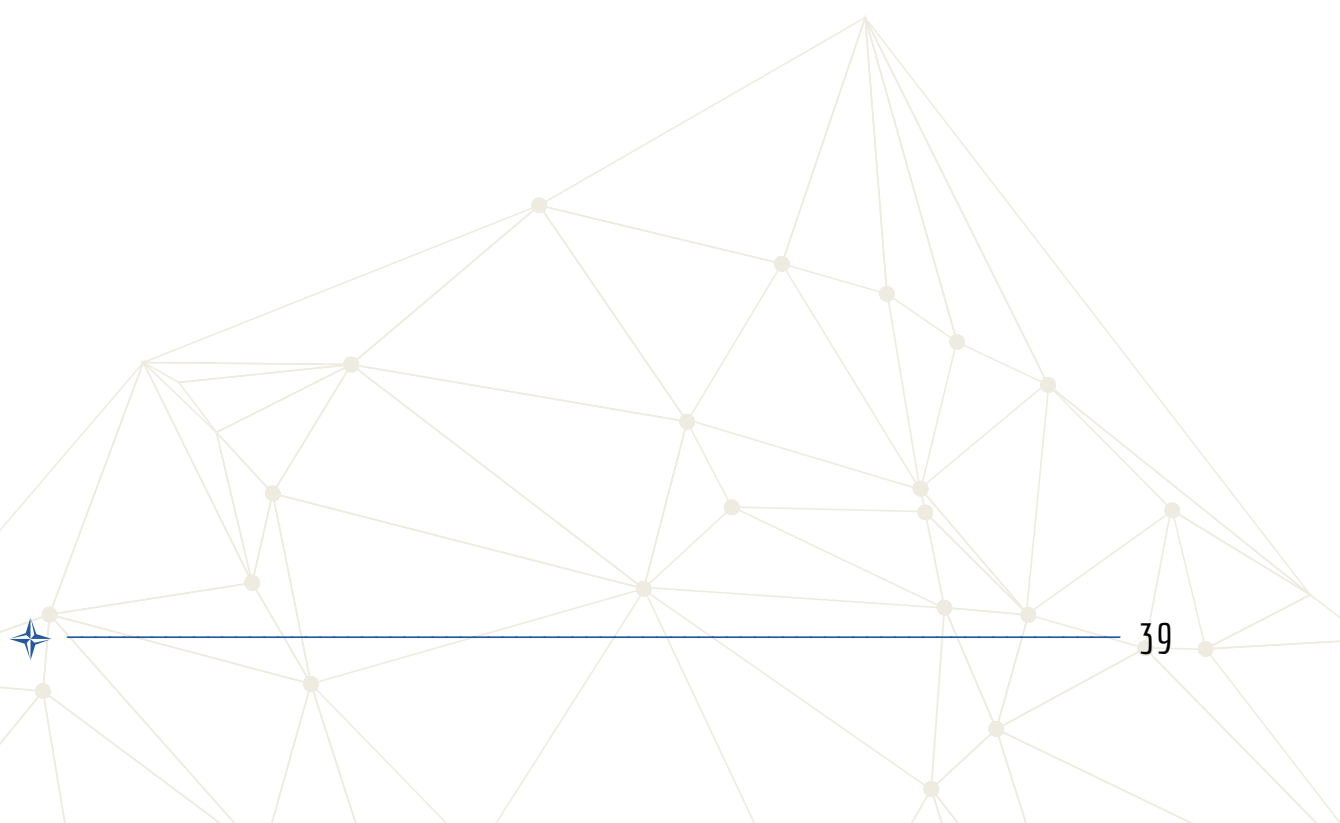
brought the highest level of support for NATO membership since 1994, with up to 78% of respondents expressing their approval of the Czech Republic's membership. A similar perception also prevailed towards the EU, which the citizens want to purchase military equipment and strengthen its defence capabilities. In addition, STEM also demonstrated strong solidarity with Ukraine as, at the time, up to 64% of Czech citizens approved of receiving and helping refugees from Ukraine.

There is a need to highlight relevant topics which have been a prominent feature of communication ahead of the Czech regional elections in October 2022. These include, in particular, anti-migration rhetoric and the energy crisis.

In May 2022, the Czech Centre for Public Opinion Research [pointed](#) to the relatively high interest of Czech society in topics related to the migration of Ukrainians. According to the Centre's data, about

two-thirds of the population (66%) [were interested](#) in the topic. According to a later [comparison](#) of data from STEM in June 2022, solidarity towards refugees in the Czech Republic has gradually faded, mainly due to increasing fears of economic decline. According to a Kantar CZ [survey](#) conducted between August and September 2022, 43% of respondents preferred the Czech Republic to cut itself off from Russian energy, even if it led to subsequent price increases. 49% of respondents, however, said that they would favour continuing negotiations with Russia in the case of energy supplies, which indicates a significant polarisation of society on the topic.

Sadly, for both countries, the data showed low interest in topics related to the neighbouring country. In Slovak posts, geopolitical sentiment focused on the Czech Republic appeared only in a negligible number of posts. The same trend applies to Czech content, which only marginally focused on the Slovak Republic.



Recommended strategies

Successful StratCom efforts should not be limited to communications only. This chapter outlines the key elements that the authors recommend to be included in the strategies underpinning the work of Czech and Slovak governments and public communicators. While these recommendations cover only communications, policies on education, media transparency, social network regulation and other relevant areas are also crucially important.

Engaging with neutral actors

In a contested and polarized information space, truly neutral communication in terms of geopolitical sentiment is rare to find. In this research, it was most often mainstream media actors, that were communicating defence-related themes with a neutral geopolitical sentiment. Mainstream media have arguably the most robust “offline” (television, radio broadcast, press) distribution infrastructure capable of reaching broad audiences. These qualities make them a good channel for reinforcing the government’s communication with the public. Both countries would benefit from a greater presence of government representatives in mainstream media. Officials ranging from military personnel to civilian experts and diplomats, including former officials, should be able to offer impartial expertise and moderate views, projecting the competence and authority of state administration. Putting communications mainly or exclusively into the hands of elected political representatives not only leaves important potential untapped but

may undermine messaging by leaving it to political actors who often have very low levels of public trust. Once identified, public communicators should undergo specialized training and be given trust by their superiors. The NATO Strategic Communication Centre of Excellence is well suited to offer opportunities and facilitate the building of necessary capabilities.

To get the most out of cooperation with neutral actors, StratCom communicators must increase their capacity to produce their own quality content. Live streams, videos, infographics and other visuals tend to be popular on social networks. Moreover, such communication products are easily shareable, even across different platforms. Government StratCom should actively offer and disseminate its products in the form of multimedia packages, to leverage the neutral actors’ communications infrastructure.

Engaging with pro-Western actors

Engage, share, and support. Positively biased actors are natural allies for public communicators. Successful strategy



” Engage, share, and support. Positively biased actors are natural allies for public communicators. Successful strategy starts with the identification of these actors and establishing connections with them. There should be pre-established channels for internal communication with other institutions allowing for effective coordination, information sharing or creating joint campaigns.

starts with the identification of these actors and establishing connections with them. There should be preestablished channels for internal communication with other institutions allowing for effective coordination, information sharing or creating joint campaigns. Civil society actors are usually connecting small, specific audiences with a high level of interest in their topics. Clubs of military history, transparency watchdogs, veterans associations, gun owners groups or think tanks can serve several roles, from providing a useful source of communications products to acting as a trusted messenger or even advocating within their communities.

Political actors tend to load their communication heavily in terms of sentiment. Defence is usually communicated in broader international or geopolitical contexts as actors often connect their messaging with a broader political agenda. Narrow defence issues, such as acquisitions, military exercises or high-level summits, are rarely strong enough to resonate with a broader audience

who have no special interest in defence. Government StratCom should therefore seek out those political actors whose worldviews are aligned with democratic values and national interests as expressed in official policy documents. Fusing values-based narratives with routine communication is the key to good strategic communication; it strengthens the position of the messenger and the message itself.

The presence of a NATO Multinational Battlegroup in Slovakia represents an opportunity for close cooperation between Slovaks and Czechs on the StratCom agenda. The Czech Republic was selected as a leading nation, partly due to its historical, socio-cultural and linguistic closeness to Slovakia. While overall communication efforts supporting the presence of the Battlegroup are embedded in a broader NATO StratCom framework, the window of opportunity should be seized to tailor supporting communication to the specifics of the Slovak social and information environment.



Engaging with anti-Western actors

Options for engagement with negatively biased actors are limited. The main tactics are pre-bunking, debunking, and naming and shaming. A crucial precondition for doing these effectively is timely (re)actions based on strong situational awareness. Another important enabler is creating freedom of action for communicators to act and react without formal top-down approval from superiors. These processes are usually rigid and slow and often lead to a situation when a window of opportunity for effective communication is closed long before approvals are given. Implementing these tactics requires a communication-centred and risk-accepting organisational culture, which is rather rare in public administration.

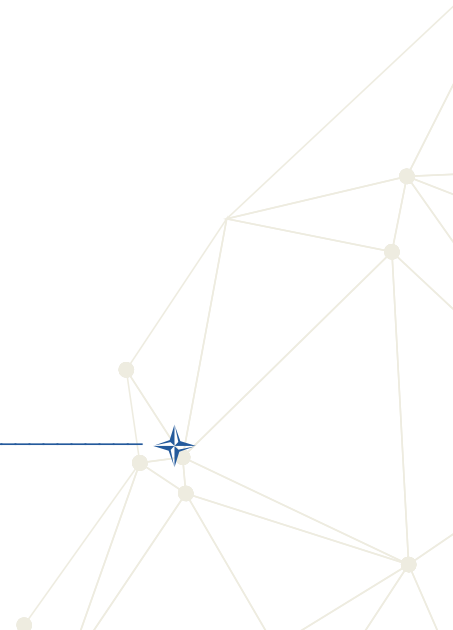
Desktop exercises and simulations of various communication scenarios across institutions can be effective tools for building the necessary trust among stakeholders. If such techniques are not established inside the organisations involved, they should not hesitate to seek the support of international

partners, including the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence or the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats.

As narratives are usually repetitive, it should be possible to establish a database of debunks, proven fake news or hoaxes. Pre-prepared snippets of messaging can shorten reaction times effectively.

StratCom professionals do not need to do all communication by themselves. If possible, they should use messages and products of like-minded actors, who are natural allies. The coordinated action of government communicators should be a good standard, but occasionally they may also want to leverage products from influencers and civil society actors.

Whatever the source of information, great attention should be paid to the principle that all government communication, including reshared content, must remain correct and factual. Trust is the cornerstone of credible StratCom work.



Annex 1: Keywords

The research team prepared a comprehensive stack of keywords to ensure all posts and other content items will be included in the dataset. The keywords are identical for both languages.

defence OR army OR "armed forces" OR air force OR "land forces" OR NATO OR 'security alliance' OR 'ministry of defence' OR 'secretary of defence' OR 'defence spending' OR '2% pledge' OR 'foreign missions' OR operations OR war OR (NATO AND (bases OR soldiers OR troops OR troops)) OR (Military AND(presence OR aid OR space OR strategy OR modernisation OR armament OR equipment OR training OR commander OR space)) OR allies OR Alliance OR "North Atlantic Alliance" OR "air defence" OR tanks OR missiles OR battlegroup OR "military exercise" OR regiment OR brigade OR headquarters OR "defence cooperation" OR war OR 'military assistance' OR 'peacekeeping assistance' OR 'war in Ukraine' OR soldiers OR 'military operation' OR 'peacekeeping operation' OR 'special operation' OR invasion OR aggression OR offensive OR counter-offensive OR demilitarisation OR weapons OR arsenal OR missiles OR warheads OR attack OR bombardment



Annex 2:

Topic tags definitions

Actors

- *Political actor* - individuals/ parties/ movements active in politics/ candidates for public office at the local/ regional/ national/ EU level.
- *Mainstream media* - traditional media print/ TV/ radio/ online news, including news agencies.
- *Alternative media* - or pseudo-media. Media that have their own website where they publish news articles, but do not belong to an established media house or are explicitly opposed to “mainstream news”.
- *Institution* - official regional/national/ international organisations. Typical examples: government/ministries/ diplomatic representations/armed forces/NATO-EU-UN representatives etc.
- *Civil society actor* - non-governmental organisations, civic associations/ societies/ associations/ activist groups. Typical examples: human rights organisations, think tanks, veterans associations, military history clubs, etc.
- *Influencer* - Individuals and collective

entities operating anonymously/using a pseudonym or brand/ own name regularly/ systematically entering the public space online/offline actively commenting on current events. Typical examples: meme pages, personal profiles of journalists, public intellectuals, ex-politicians, etc.

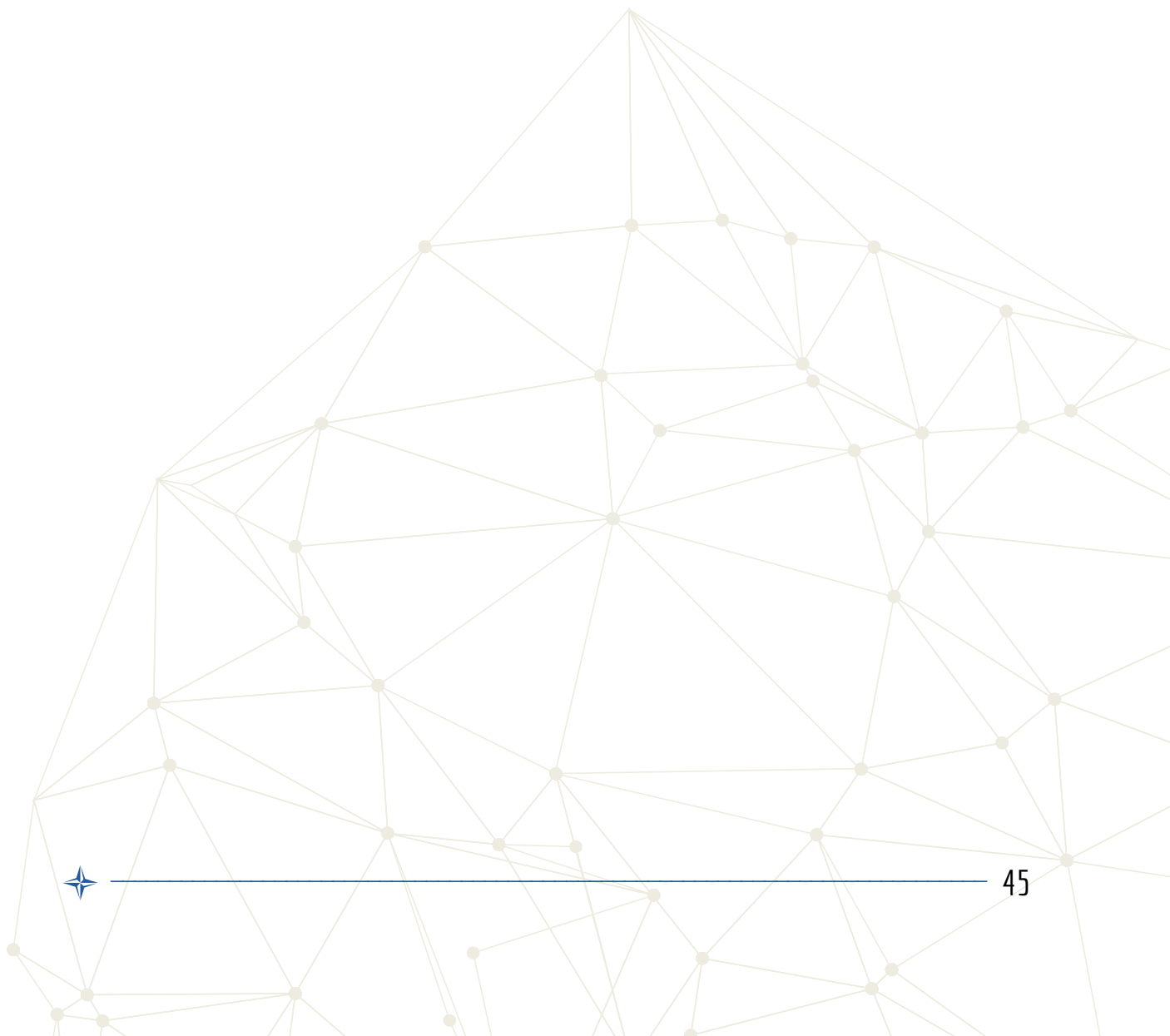
- *Other* - an entity for which none of the above described types fits.

Topics

- *Armed Forces* - anything related to the military and armed forces, general mentions of the armed forces as a whole or air force/ground forces/ special forces/reserves etc.
- *Missions or deployments* - foreign operations, missions, deployments of various types, e.g. crisis management operations etc.
- *Hybrid threats* - explicit use of the term hybrid threats/hybrid warfare/hybrid operations etc.
- *NATO* - explicit mention of NATO in all forms, e.g. NATO/ Alliance/ North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.



- *Military collaborations* - national/international exercises and various types of cooperation of armed forces with other actors. Also mentions of military equipment or technology/equipment upgrades, e.g. provision of S300 to Ukraine, purchase of IFV 8x8/equipment/armaments, etc.
- *Defence spending* - debate around defence spending and investments, e.g. 2% of GDP.
- *NATO battlegroup* - when any NATO battlegroup is mentioned, e.g. Latvia, Slovakia etc.
- *War in Ukraine* - anything related to the war in Ukraine.
- *Wars other than Ukraine* - wars and armed conflicts other than the war in Ukraine.
- *Weapons of mass destruction* - biological weapons/nuclear weapons.
- *Other* - item related to defence topics, but we don't have it as a tag.



Annex 3:

Key actors from Czech Republic grouped by actor tag and interactions

Tag name	Name	Content	Interactions ↑	Comments	Followers
alternative medium	Sputnik Česká republika	127	74,902	10,404	67,113
	Aby bylo jasno	3	49,473	1,665	6,886
	Paralelní listy	18	26,710	715	71,218
	Raptor-TV.cz	33	20,600	2,084	37,116
	Redakce NF Svědomí národa	4	12,225	403	7,156
	Absurdni svet	46	8,198	0	23,887
	ParlamentníListy.cz	15	6,713	1,214	52,413
	Slobodný vysielateľ	18	6,603	722	90,960
	Rádio Universum	4	6,538	760	36,752
	InfoVojna	12	5,059	0	41,666
Total		280	217,021	17,967	435,167
civil society actor	Čeští elfové	43	21,372	762	15,002
	Milion chviliek pro demokracii	14	20,567	1,747	369,481
	Institut Václava Klause	5	5,794	567	24,171
	ROMEA	4	5,772	1,032	40,066
	Pro Libertate - Institut práva a občanských svobod	4	5,261	278	30,753
	LIGA LIBE - Petice proti nesmyslným zákazům legálních obranných prostředků	9	3,431	214	40,482
	Diakonie ČCE	1	3,059	295	5,800
	Československá obec legionářská	13	2,573	78	12,969
	HateFree Culture	7	2,516	59	73,113
	Odchod.eu	2	2,075	409	17,465
Total		102	72,420	5,441	623,502



Tag name	Name	Content	Interactions ↕	Comments	Followers
influencer	Visegradský jezdec	130	149,605	3,161	67,348
	Jana Zwyrttek Hamplová fanpage	16	82,286	3,519	59,786
	Tomáš Sedláček	7	29,811	868	96,828
	Matouš Bulíř	41	24,646	2,812	23,486
	neČT24	142	23,353	0	10,203
	Daniel Pitek - sedlák pod Milešovkou	16	15,829	410	16,356
	Můj prezident	23	14,809	2,002	35,813
	František Kubásek	23	8,711	395	13,109
	Zomri (post in Czech language)	2	7,451	973	343,271
Eduard Stehlík	3	7,088	247	23,239	
Total		403	363,589	14,387	689,439
Institution	Embassy of Ukraine in Prague / Velvyslanectví Ukrajiny v Praze	13	34,090	3,863	42,478
	Armáda České republiky	8	12,209	181	167,325
	Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky	4	3,015	447	30,538
	Úřad vlády ČR	2	2,680	884	24,998
	U.S. Embassy Prague	5	2,379	84	35,200
	43. výsadkový pluk	4	1,989	45	28,545
	Ministerstvo obrany České republiky	5	1,825	194	23,986
	41.mechanizovaný prapor "gen. Josefa Malého"	7	1,818	38	9,462
	42.mechanizovaný prapor "Svatováclavský" Tábor	8	1,805	30	5,940
Посольство России в Чехии	1	1,062	488	5,176	
Total		57	62,872	6,254	331,170



Tag name	Name	Content	Interactions ↑	Comments	Followers
mainstream medium	ČT24	264	487,449	66,023	563,223
	Echo24.cz	170	64,530	11,467	63,944
	CNN Prima NEWS	125	64,052	19,068	117,494
	Novinky.cz	94	50,538	14,188	173,528
	iDNES.cz	94	43,252	10,628	244,012
	Zpravodajství FTV Prima	66	22,359	7,101	172,730
	Seznam Zprávy	47	22,335	4,266	126,640
	Svobodné fórum	60	21,772	3,252	71,391
	Blesk.cz	13	19,219	8,840	148,366
	Události, komentáře	8	16,725	5,525	21,565
Total		941	812,231	150,358	1,702,893
political actor	Tomio Okamura - SPD	75	382,322	38,214	290,015
	MUDr. Ivan David	64	216,112	16,291	47,701
	Kateřina Konečná	7	108,149	5,296	39,222
	Petr Fiala	34	93,811	22,378	80,111
	Karla Maříková	31	51,185	3,859	29,464
	Jindřich Rajchl	15	47,704	2,357	21,801
	Generál Pavel	18	44,445	3,968	41,222
	Aliance národních sil	65	38,794	1,770	12,549
	Zdeněk Hřib - primátor Prahy	6	36,917	12,797	67,477
	ODS - Občanská demokratická strana	57	34,181	4,728	68,783
Total		372	1,053,620	111,658	698,345



Annex 3.1:

Key actor profiles from Czech Republic

Tag name	Name	Profile
alternative medium	Sputnik Česká republika	Czech version of Sputnik that started to operate in March 2015. It also covers Slovak topics because there is no Slovak version.
	Aby bylo jasno	A show that focuses on interviews and produces videos, podcasts and written content. Jana Bobošíková - a presenter and failed politician - acts as its moderator. Hana Lipovská is listed as an analyst on the website, who was a councilor of Czech Television and then unsuccessfully ran for parliament with Lubomír Volný's Free Blok. They are close to the disinformation scene.
	Paralelní listy	Satirical Facebook page that is a parody account for Parlamentní listy which is the most read disinformation platform in Czech Republic.
	Raptor-TV.cz	TV channel that creates and spreads disinformation on various topics and pushes pro-Russian views.
	Redakce NF Svědomí národa	Conscience of the Nation is a quasi-media project that arose as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Founder and editor-in-chief Viktor Baroš claims that they give space to everyone who is "affected by government and political measures in general as a result of Covid-19."
	Absurdní svět	Czech Telegram channel that spreads disinformation and pro-Russian views.
	ParlamentníListy.cz	Disinformation platform that has more than 6 million visits per month.
	Slobodný vysielateľ	Slovak internet disinformation radio that is very popular also in Czech Republic.
	Rádio Universum	Czech disinformation radio.
InfoVojna	Slovak disinformation website and radio that is very popular also in the Czech Republic.	



Tag name	Name	Profile
civil society actor	Čeští elfové	Non-profit, not-governmental organisation that groups together volunteers who fight against disinformation and hate speech on the internet. The name was chosen in opposition to the so-called trolls.
	Milion chviliek pro demokracii	Non-profit, non-governmental organisation that was created in 2017 for the purpose of "support and cultivation of democratic culture, civic engagement and public debate in the Czech Republic." They are very critical of former Czech PM Andrej Babiš and organised a few big demonstrations against him.
	Institut Václava Klause	Study and research company founded by former PM Václav Klaus together with his sons and former presidential chancellor Jiří Weig. Nowadays it's infamously known for spreading disinformation and pro-Russian views.
	ROMEA	A non-profit organisation established to fight racism. The organisation represents the interests of the Roma ethnic minority in the Czech Republic.
	Pro Libertate - Institut práva a občanských svobod	Voluntary association founded by attorney Tomas Nielsen, which called for violations of government measures during the Covid-19 pandemic and urged its members to file criminal charges against state institutions and politicians. Pro Libertate also advocated against the purchase of arms for Ukraine.
	LIGA LIBE - Petice proti nesmyslným zákazům legálních obranných prostředků	LIGA LIBE is a civil association established on the basis of a petition against the regulation of gun ownership by the European Union in 2014. Claims to represent the interests of gun owners.
	Diakonie ČCE	Charitable organisation affiliated with the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. Second largest NGO in the Czech Republic providing social services and civic assistance.
	Československá obec legionářská	Association of veterans of the Czechoslovak foreign and domestic resistance during World War II and veterans of the current Czech Army.
	HateFree Culture	A state initiative of the Agency for Social Inclusion at the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic aimed at combating the spread of hatred against groups of people because of their ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, subculture, disability or other differences.
	Odchod.eu	Eurosceptic group advocating for Czech Republic's departure from the European Union.



Tag name	Name	Profile
influencer	Visegradský jezdec	Personal blog of Karel Paták, presenting the author's views on various issues including Czech politics, disinformation and environmentalism. The website focuses on the fight against disinformation and the spread of influence from Russia.
	Jana Zwyrtek Hamplová fanpage	Facebook fan page of former MP Jana Zwyrtek Hamplová, who was one of the leading figures spreading disinformation during the Covid pandemic. Currently, she also speaks out against supporting Ukraine.
	Tomáš Sedláček	Czech economist and university lecturer, chief macroeconomic strategist at ČSOB bank, served as an advisor to President Václav Havel.
	Matouš Bulíř	Leading figure in the nationalist First Republic movement and is an active disseminator of pro-Russian disinformation, for example about Ukraine.
	neČT24	A pro-Russian channel on Twitter and Telegram that describes itself as an alternative news outlet. It is critical of the Czech government and often spreads pro-Kremlin narratives.
	Daniel Pitek - sedlák pod Milešovkou	Facebook page of former Green Party member Daniel Pitek, who is a farmer, forester, landscape designer and chairman of the evaluation committee of the Diverse Landscapes programme and the Water/Drought Working Group of the Chamber of Deputies.
	Můj prezident	Facebook group of supporters of current President of the Czech Republic Miloš Zeman. The group frequently criticizes the government of Petr Fiala.
	František Kubásek	Kubásek runs the website and video blog Incorrect and is a prominent figure in the Czech disinformation scene.
	Zomri	Zomri is a Slovak satirical channel that, in addition to Facebook, also runs its own website and Instagram channel.
Eduard Stehlík	Eduard Stehlík is a historian, former soldier and currently Chairman of the Council of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes.	



Tag name	Name	Profile
Institution	Embassy of Ukraine in Prague / Velvyslanectví Ukrajiny v Praze	Account of Ukrainian Embassy in Prague.
	Armáda České republiky	Account of the Czech Army which has been for a long time doing one of the best strategic communications among Czech institutions.
	Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky	Account of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.
	Úřad vlády ČR	Account of the Government Office of the Czech Republic.
	U.S. Embassy Prague	Account of the American Embassy in Prague.
	43. výsadkový pluk	Facebook account of the 43rd Parachute Regiment as part of the Land Forces of the Army of the Czech Republic.
	Ministerstvo obrany České republiky	Account of Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic.
	41.mechanizovaný prapor "gen. Josefa Malého"	Account of the 41st mechanized battalion which is currently stationed in Žatec and in 2005 it was given the historical name "gen. Josef Malý".
	42.mechanizovaný prapor "Svatováclavský" Tábor	Account of the 42nd mechanized battalion "St. Wenceslas" which is part of the Land Forces of the Czech Army and is organisationally integrated into the structure of the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade.
	Посольство России в Чехии	Account of Russian Embassy in Prague



Tag name	Name	Profile
mainstream medium	ČT24	Public news channel and television station of Czech Television, which broadcasts continuously throughout the day. ČT24 also operates its own website.
	Echo24.cz	Echo24 is a news server and opinion daily, first launched in 2014. Echo24 calls itself a right-wing and liberal-conservative media outlet.
	CNN Prima NEWS	Commercial news channel that, in addition to broadcasting on television, also provides online news coverage. The owner is FTV Prima spol. s r.o.
	Novinky.cz	One of the most visited news websites on the Czech Internet. Operated as an online magazine of the daily Právo and Seznam.cz. Cooperates with the Internet television Stream.cz, which falls under Seznam.cz.
	iDNES.cz	News website operated by MAFRA, which was bought by former Prime Minister Andrej Babiš through his holding company Agrofert.
	Zpravodajství FTV Prima	Facebook page of the commercial TV station Prima, which also includes CNN Prima News.
	Seznam Zprávy	Seznam Zprávy is an internet news website operated by Seznam.cz. It also contains domestic investigative journalism, business news and opinion pieces.
	Svobodné fórum	Facebook page of the news server and opinion daily Forum 24, founded by journalist Pavel Šafr. Liberal-conservative media outlet that has long opposed former Prime Minister Andrej Babiš.
	Blesk.cz	Internet version of the daily Blesk, tabloid newspaper focused on current news, interesting and sensational stories from the Czech Republic and the world.
Události, komentáře	Analytical news programme of the public Czech Television, which is broadcast on the ČT24 channel. Has a Facebook page with the same name.	



Tag name	Name	Profile
political actor	Tomio Okamura - SPD	Chairman and MP of nationalist far-right party SPD (Strana přímé demokracie – Party of Direct Democracy). Facebook is his main communication tool.
	MUDr. Ivan David	Member of European Parliament who was elected for SPD party. He owns and operated his own disinformation website called Nová republika (New Republic). Most of his Facebook posts appear on his disinformation website and vice versa.
	Kateřina Konečná	Chairwoman of KSČM (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy – Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia). She is also an MEP for KSČM.
	Petr Fiala	Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, member of ODS (Občanská demokratická strana – Civic Democratic Party).
	Karla Maříková	MP for SPD since 2017.
	Jindřich Rajchl	Czech activist, politician, lawyer and former football official, from June 2022 chairman of the PRO party. Spoke at a number of demonstrations against coronavirus measures, and was a member of the far-right movement Trikolora.
	Generál Pavel	Czech soldier, retired Army general. In the years 2012–2015, he was the Chief of the General Staff of the Army of the Czech Republic. From 2015–2018, he served as Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, becoming the first representative of the countries of the former Warsaw Pact to take up the highest military post at NATO. On 6 September 2022, he officially announced his candidacy for the Presidency of the Czech Republic.
	Aliance národních sil	The Czech strongly conservative, anti-European party, which supports the withdrawal of the Czech Republic from NATO and the European Union, supports “traditional family” values, supports the nationalisation of strategic sectors of the national economy and natural wealth, and the abolition of church restitution. It stands against “migration planned by the European Union”, against “modern-day slavery by multinational companies and executions”, against “repeal of the Beneš decrees” and against “efforts to liquidate the Czech state”.
	Zdeněk Hřib - primátor Prahy	Member of Pirátská strana (Pirate Party). Mayor of the capital city of Prague.
	ODS - Občanská demokratická strana	Czech liberal conservative right-wing party, founded in 1991. Currently one of the ruling parties, the Czech Prime Minister is a member of this party.



Annex 4:

Key actors from Slovak Republic grouped by actor tag and interactions

Tag name	Name	Content	Interactions ↑	Comments	Followers
alternative medium	Ereport	151	554,332	76,084	55,694
	Hlavný denník	51	115,410	10,473	31,840
	nocomment.sk	28	103,818	11,825	64,901
	Slobodný vysielateľ	45	101,547	6,173	90,960
	Aktuality24.sk	18	76,442	6,786	18,841
	Veci Verejné	21	56,764	4,387	22,739
	Extra plus	33	45,642	11,059	10,283
	TV LUX	12	32,679	3,833	67,879
	Portál Kulturblog	12	28,722	3,235	61,108
	Armádnny magazín	17	26,972	1,554	6,367
Total		388	1,142,328	135,409	430,612
civil society actor	Mladí proti fašizmu	15	49,291	3,375	43,284
	Človek v ohrození	4	9,991	303	25,930
	Greenpeace Slovensko	2	8,738	4,263	42,103
	Slovenský zväz protifašistických bojovníkov - SZPB	3	3,274	278	5,110
	Demagog.SK	2	2,806	100	13,855
	Blbec.online	2	2,616	355	8,484
	OZ Klub histórie veľkej vlasteneckej vojny	1	2,590	48	3,402
	Modrý anjel - Tím terénnej krízovej intervencie	1	1,940	106	7,704
	Združenie slovenskej inteligencie	1	1,633	58	3,805
Klub vojenskej histórie Svoboda	1	1,489	153	8,672	
Total		32	84,368	9,039	154,645



Tag name	Name	Content	Interactions ↑	Comments	Followers
influencer	Armáda Ruskej Federácie	171	465,331	24,189	54,514
	Informácie bez cenzúry	106	301,959	44,137	69,634
	Hrica Lubos	12	118,325	3,840	90,060
	BRAT za BRATA	25	111,802	4,593	37,160
	Matovičov cirkus	19	100,155	5,550	59,984
	Som z dediny	35	87,292	7,232	134,327
	Monika Sofiya Soročinová	24	48,719	3,723	11,639
	Zomri	8	44,074	1,040	343,271
	Sebavedomé Slovensko	26	37,119	1,948	14,425
	Jozef Banáš	4	28,315	1,380	53,904
Total		430	1,343,091	97,632	868,918
Institution	Polícia Slovenskej republiky	60	237,652	8,423	373,858
	Hoaxy a podvody - Polícia SR	126	227,183	12,751	119,252
	Ministerstvo zahraničných vecí a európskych záležitostí SR	23	53,080	4,340	41,609
	Ozbrojené Sily SR	29	47,326	2,940	54,402
	Ministerstvo obrany Slovenskej republiky	11	31,597	5,054	46,321
	Veľvyslanectvo Ruska na Slovensku/ Посольство России в Словакии	11	15,017	1,011	68,975
	Ministerstvo zdravotníctva Slovenskej republiky	7	14,833	349	219,414
	Ministerstvo investícií, regionálneho rozvoja a informatizácie SR	1	4,058	235	10,666
	Úrad vlády Slovenskej republiky	1	3,220	745	45,501
Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave	2	2,987	28	28,611	
Total		271	636,953	35,876	1,008,609



Tag name	Name	Content	Interactions ↑	Comments	Followers
mainstream medium	Pravda	130	307,450	62,079	99,712
	TREND - Týždenník o ekonomike a podnikaní	107	265,499	30,864	84,038
	Televízia TA3	135	262,202	50,258	196,799
	Denník N	99	201,068	16,022	185,520
	Televízne noviny TV Markíza	103	194,957	33,771	339,797
	Startitup	105	190,640	32,544	229,675
	Topky.sk	90	169,449	36,499	396,090
	Plus JEDEN DEŇ	52	151,276	43,431	156,079
	Aktuality.sk	75	131,801	20,962	302,766
	Hospodárske noviny	61	105,725	17,078	132,108
Total		957	1,980,067	343,508	2,122,584
political actor	Ľuboš Blaha	296	3,919,019	163,619	174,917
	Eduard Chmelár	268	1,464,845	48,361	62,249
	Milan Uhrík • Republika	67	901,074	38,189	148,031
	Zuzana Čaputová	74	696,461	21,600	363,113
	Natália Blahová	6	421,662	3,642	32,258
	Robert Fico	18	372,525	18,675	192,103
	Milan Mazurek • Republika	26	351,199	12,335	175,190
	Anna Belousovová	68	250,082	19,498	20,365
	Tomáš Taraba - predseda ŽIVOT NS	53	211,228	12,289	57,803
	Jaro Naď - minister obrany SR, OĽANO	89	192,057	12,771	54,974
Total		965	8,780,152	350,979	1,281,003



Annex 4.1:

Key actor profiles from Slovak Republic

Tag name	Name	Profile
alternative medium	Ereport	Influential pseudo-media site run by Fedor Flašík, an ex-campaigner of Smer-SD. Ereport, with its many digital channels, mostly promotes Smer-SD and its politicians and their ideas. Borderline proxy actor.
	Hlavný denník	Disinformation platform that is very pro-Russian and anti-Western. Until the invasion of Ukraine, the platform showed open sympathy for Putin. HD was among 4 other disinformation platforms that were blocked by the Slovak government for sharing pro-Russian disinformation.
	nocomment.sk	Disinformation outlet that is very pro-Russian and anti-Western. Creates and shares biased reporting and creates a lot of space for pro-Russian propaganda on its channels.
	Slobodný vysielateľ	Conspiratorial source of often anti-Semitic and other conspiracy theories that also has an influential radio broadcasting channel.
	Aktuality24.sk	Disinformation platform with strong pro-Russian geopolitical sentiment. In the recent past the platform disseminated a viral fake video of president Zelensky and accused him of being a junkie using cocaine.
	Veci Verejné	Anti-system outlet with a lot of content retaken from Ereport or Smer-SD party. Heavily biased against liberal democracy.
	Extra plus	Online outlet with a printed version. Closely cooperated with official Russian representatives in the past. Rooted in 1990s, affiliated with HZDS and Vladimír Mečiar governments.
	TV LUX	Catholic Church-operated TV channel with other digital channels that represent conservative themes and topics. Focused on faith, Christianity and themes about religious organisations and their work in Slovakia.
	Portál Kulturblog	Alt-right channel founded by people connected to political extremists from ĽSNS (Ľudová strana – Naše Slovensko, Popular Party – Our Slovakia). Channel switched its loyalty to the new extremist party Republika. Influential source with high-end video and content production.
Armádny magazín	Portal connected to another disinformation outlet Hlavné správy. Focused on defence-related topics with huge pro-Russian bias. Often provides space for Russian propaganda.	



Tag name	Name	Profile
civil society actor	Mladí proti fašizmu	Facebook, Instagram and TikTok channel that creates memetic content popularising pro-democratic and antifascist narratives.
	Človek v ohrození	Humanitarian NGO based in Bratislava with a range of activities in Africa, Ukraine and Slovakia. Often communicates about Roma minority issues, inspires Slovaks to engage in humanitarian activities.
	Greenpeace Slovensko	One of the oldest NGOs in Slovakia. Green and environmental agenda. Often with polarising results among the Slovak population.
	Slovenský zväz protifašistických bojovníkov - SZPB	Antifascist organisation and outlet with controversial ties and loyalty to Smer SD and leftist influencers. Their magazine The Fighter often creates biased articles.
	Demagog.SK	Slovak fact-checking organisation, creates and disseminates analysis helping citizens to navigate whether politicians are lying or telling the truth.
	Blbec.online	Anonymous initiative with anti-extremism ethos. Provides interactive list of malfluencers active in the Slovak and Czech Facebook infosphere.
	OZ Klub histórie veľkej vlasteneckej vojny	NGO promoting Russian interpretation of World War II, often resharing content from Russian state-controlled media.
	Modrý anjel - Tím terénnej krízovej intervencie	NGO providing crisis intervention, posttraumatic and psychological support services. Actively working with Ukrainian refugees.
	Združenie slovenskej inteligencie	Odd source that creates and disseminates anti-system narratives. Very critical towards the current government, argues that the government is a totalitarian regime.
Klub vojenskej histórie Svoboda	Military history club promoting WWII events, commemorating heroes of the war and important fights that happened in Slovakia or in which Slovaks fought.	



Tag name	Name	Profile
influencer	Armáda Ruskej Federácie	Pro-Russian proxy Facebook page with several anonymous admins. Often praises Russia and its military. Very influential, creates a lot of content.
	Informácie bez cenzúry	Anonymous source that often creates and disseminates anti-system narratives, manipulative content and pro-Russian propaganda.
	Hrica Lubos	Slovak influencer living in Italy. Very influential but without any concrete motivation but his own anger. Often creates and shares manipulative information. Aligned with anti-system forces.
	BRAT za BRATA	Pro-Russian proxy gathering motorcycle fans. Relevance has grown after sanctions led to a weakening of the Slovak branch of Night Wolves. Very influential proxy with ties to the Russian Embassy. Executes offline activities like commemorating Soviet troops buried in Slovak cemeteries.
	Matovičov cirkus	Anonymous meme page that uses hahaganda to attack the government, with pro-Russian and anti-system alignment.
	Som z dediny	Anonymous Facebook page, claimed being "from the village" to become influential anti-system channel.
	Monika Sofiya Soročínová	Anti-Western and pro-Russian politician from Slovakia. Influential and self-promoting individual.
	Zomri	A meme page that uses humour, hahaganda and irony to influence the local public. For years this page was one of the most influential sources, remains relevant as pro-Western and pro-democratic actor.
	Sebavedomé Slovensko	Facebook and Instagram page that promotes positive pro-Western ideas and liberal patriotism.
Jozef Banáš	Influential Slovak writer, former diplomat and politician. Frequently uses conspiracy theories and manipulative methods.	



Tag name	Name	Profile
Institution	Polícia Slovenskej republiky	Official page of the Police Force of the Slovak Republic.
	Hoaxy a podvody - Polícia SR	Another communication channel of the Police Force of the Slovak Republic focused on publicly highlighting viral hoaxes, scams or frauds. Among other topics, debunks and pre-bunks pro-Russian hoaxes and disinformation.
	Ministerstvo zahraničných vecí a európskych záležitostí SR	Official page of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. Communicates important events in foreign relations, highlights international cooperation and promotes a values-based foreign policy.
	Ozbrojené Sily SR	Official account of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic which informs the public about military exercises, strengthening military capabilities, and other relevant topics.
	Ministerstvo obrany Slovenskej republiky	Official page of the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic, communicates important topics in defence and security.
	Veľvyslanectvo Ruska na Slovensku/ Посольство России в Словакии	Highly active official account of Russian Embassy in Slovakia. Spreads strongly pro-Russian content, often containing propaganda and disinformation.
	Ministerstvo zdravotníctva Slovenskej republiky	Official page of the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic. Communicates news from the Ministry as well as topics important for public health. Played a key communication role during the Covid-19 pandemic.
	Ministerstvo investícií, regionálneho rozvoja a informatizácie SR	Official page of the Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatisation of the Slovak Republic. Informs mainly about budgetary issues, promotes information society and digital agenda.
	Úrad vlády Slovenskej republiky	Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic. Communicates significant issues coming from Ministries and inter-agency process. Leads an awareness campaign about misuse of historic events by propagandists and disinformation actors.
Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave	Comenius University in Bratislava, oldest and largest university in Slovakia.	



Tag name	Name	Profile
mainstream medium	Pravda	Domestic news portal, mainstream daily with slightly leftist views. Founded in 1920, official press organ of the Communist Party during Communism.
	Trend - Týždenník o ekonomike a podnikaní	Weekly magazine focused on economy and business.
	Televízia TA3	Private television station focused on news broadcasting 24 hours a day.
	Denník N	Slovak daily newspaper and online mainstream media outlet with a liberal bias. Created in 2014 by splitting from another media, SME, generates most of its revenue from paid subscribers.
	Televízne noviny TV Markíza	The most watched private television in Slovakia focused on news and tabloid content.
	Startitup	Online media providing short news from domestic and foreign events. Positions itself as outlet focused on promoting Slovak talent and interesting startup projects.
	Topky.sk	Tabloid online media with wide range topics but focusing on show business.
	Plus JEDEN DEŇ	Tabloid online daily informing about news in show business while also reflecting important domestic and foreign affairs.
	Aktuality.sk	Mainstream online news portal. Informs about a wide range of topics, strong investigative journalism tradition.
	Hospodárske noviny	Mainstream online media focused mostly on economy and business topics.
political actor	Ľuboš Blaha	MP affiliated with political party SMER – Social Democracy (SMER – sociálna demokracia). Known for disseminating pro-Russian propaganda, disinformation, and toxic narratives using his Facebook profile. Since Meta blocked his profile, active mainly on Telegram.
	Eduard Chmelár	Non-parliamentary politician, unsuccessful presidential candidate and leftist activist. Currently a leader of the political movement Socialists (Socialisti.sk). Known for spreading pro-Russian propaganda and disinformation.
	Milan Uhrík • Republika	Slovak MEP known for his nationalistic far-right views and pro-Russian sympathies. Currently leader of political party Republic (Republika) which was founded during the current election period by splitting from the far-right ĽSNS party.



Tag name	Name	Profile
political actor	Zuzana Čaputová	President of the Slovak Republic. Emphasizes topics such as law and justice, human and minority rights or environment. She is also a frequent target of disinformers accusing her of treason because of pushing "harmful" Western values.
	Natália Blahová	Politician and former MP, excluded from Freedom and Solidarity Party (Sloboda a solidarita, SaS) after initiating dismissal of Minister of Social Affairs Ján Richter. Currently member of the non-parliamentary Democratic Party, working as a social and family counselor interested mostly in legal protection of children.
	Robert Fico	MP and leader of SMER – Social Democracy, former Prime Minister. Involved in several cases of corruption and non-transparent financing. Charged by the Prosecutor's Office with general support for an organised crime group, abuse of executive powers and breach of tax secrecy. Since moving into opposition in 2020, presents pro-Russian, anti-EU and anti-NATO views.
	Milan Mazurek - Republika	MP elected as a candidate of ĽSNS, currently a member of the far-right party Republic. Infamous for spreading extremist, racist and homophobic ideas, such as anti-Islamic and anti-Roma views. Previously convicted in court for deliberate defamation on ethnic, racial or religious grounds.
	Anna Belousovová	Former MP, politically active since 1990's. Mostly known for affiliation with the Slovak National Party. Currently spreading pro-Russian propaganda and disinformation. Her ideas are often quoted by Slovak disinformation outlets.
	Tomáš Taraba - predseda ŽIVOT NS	Non-aligned MP elected as a candidate of ĽSNS, currently leader of conservative LIFE – National Party (ŽIVOT – národná strana). Active critic of the government spreading ultra-conservative narratives.
	Jaro Naď - minister obrany SR, OĽANO	Minister of Defence of the Slovak Republic, member of OĽANO party (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities). Committed to democratic values and a pro-Western orientation, outspoken critic of pro-Russian disinformation and its purveyors.



Endnotes

- 1 Seed nodes in the graph are slightly larger and have associated colours.
- 2 Connections are also called edges.
- 3 It should be added, however, that for the creation of the dataset, the primary indicator was the number of interactions achieved (given that they also indicate the impact of the communicated content itself). The limitations of the dataset and the potential for distortion then become apparent when comparing the communication effectiveness of specific most successful actors. This is due, for example, to the fact that some actors communicate relevant security and defence topics in large numbers as secondary themes on their agenda. This appears particularly when considering the topic of the war in Ukraine. Thus, when evaluating the effectiveness of the actors who communicate defence and security topics as their primary content, they may be at a 'disadvantage' in terms of effectiveness.
- 4 The topics regarding the war in Ukraine mainly included narratives that blamed the West for its outbreak. These included false calls for peace, criticism of aid to Ukraine (whether humanitarian or military), which the actors in question saw as not only ignoring the needs of Slovak citizens, but also directly engaging in war with possible Russian retaliation.
- 5 This includes, in particular, the update and adoption of the new Defence, Security and Military Strategy of the Slovak Republic. These strategic documents clearly define the foreign policy orientation of the Slovak Republic, security threats and instruments for their tackling. On the institutional side, the establishment of the Strategic Communication Department at the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, the Strategic Communication Unit at the MFA, and the Centre for Combating Hybrid Threats at the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic should be mentioned.
- 6 For comparison, RTVS in Slovakia lags behind notably on two points - its perception by the audience and its overall share of the audience. The distinctive features of ČT are the size of its programme budget, the long-term stability and continuity of its policy, but also the offer of specific channels (especially the channel focused on news). In the case of RTVS, the problem is the lack of internal control and too much financial dependence on the state.
- 7 This post is not available to view anymore due to the ban on Russian state-sponsored media in all EU countries.
- 8 Similarly, a poll conducted in May by Slovak universities showed that many Slovaks attributed responsibility for the conflict to Ukraine itself (38% of respondents) and to NATO (35% of respondents).
- 9 According to the same survey, Slovak citizens also consider Ukraine to be a puppet of the West (23% of respondents in the survey think so) or even part of Russia (13% of respondents).



