



**MANIPULATING
THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE
DISINFORMATION
AND PROPAGANDA**

[a Compendium of Analysis
and Fact-checking]

METAMORPHOSIS 

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Foreword

The compendium, “Manipulating the public discourse: Disinformation and Propaganda,” is an essential compilation for those seeking to understand and navigate the complex landscape of disinformation that has proliferated in recent years. It brings together a diverse array of texts, fact-checking articles, in-depth analyses, and reviews covering 2023. The year was marked by significant global and regional challenges, including geopolitical shifts, the war in Ukraine.

In North Macedonia and the region, disinformation has frequently been employed as a tool to undermine democratic processes. This publication addresses a spectrum of topics where disinformation and misinformation have been particularly extensive. It delves into how geopolitical narratives, the impacts of the war in Ukraine, pandemic-related misinformation, and skewed representations of family values and the European Union have been manipulated to sway public opinion and distort reality.

The contents of this publication serve not only as a public record of these events but also as a resource for anyone interested in understanding the tactics and implications of disinformation. It is a fragment of the great work undertaken by my colleagues at Metamorphosis Foundation, particularly at Truthmeter.mk, who have dedicated themselves to the tireless pursuit of truth. Their efforts in fact-checking and critical analysis are crucial in combatting the harmful effects of disinformation.

As we move forward, disinformation campaigns will persist, adapting and evolving in an ever-changing digital landscape. 2024 is being called the “year of elections,” with over half the world’s population in approximately 65 countries, including North Macedonia, participating in voting. With these elections comes an increased risk that malign actors will use technology to disrupt democracy, leveraging everything from disinformation to deepfakes. At Metamorphosis Foundation, our determination to diminish their impact, however, remains firm. We strongly believe that in the fight against disinformation, every individual has a role to play. Through critical thinking, shared knowledge, truth, and a commitment to factual accuracy, we can collectively counter the tide of misinformation.

This publication is a modest yet significant contribution in this direction, offering insights and truths about various topics and events that have shaped public discourse. It invites readers to engage, question, and contribute to a broader understanding, reinforcing the importance of truth in our society.

Bardhyl Jashari
Executive Director
Metamorphosis Foundation

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Introduction

The explosive development of information and communication technologies (ICT) during the late 20th century and the early 21st century, fueled by a big increase in the free movement of people, goods, and capital, has brought tremendous benefits to countries around the world and significantly improved the lives of people all over the planet. For instance, for every 10 percent of the population that starts using a mobile phone in a country, the gross domestic product (GDP) immediately increases by 0.5-2 percent (2000-17), and this effect increases by an additional 25 percent when it comes to the use of broadband mobile internet and 4G technology¹. This GDP growth is the result of increased productivity consequent to the use of mobile phones.

Furthermore, the number of people who climbed out of extreme poverty from 1990 to 2015 decreased from 40 to only 10 percent in 25 years². For comparison, it took 170 years (1820-1990) for this percentage to decrease from 93 to 40 percent.

Between 2005 and 2014, international Internet traffic grew from 4.7 thousand gigabytes to 211.3 thousand gigabytes, that is, by 45 times³. And this technological revolution that we are going through is by no means finished, but in many aspects it is constantly intensifying, providing, for example, many people with fast access to the Internet with the current installation of thousands of satellites in low Earth orbit. We are also witnessing an explosion of tools powered by artificial intelligence, a new revolutionary branch of ICT, which is in its infancy, but is moving forward at the speed of light. So, for example, the costs for training AI models, which is essential to its operation, decreased 200 times between 2017 and 2021 - from over \$1,000 to under \$5⁴. All these achievements are impressive, of course, and will become even more impressive. However, like any new technology, ICT technology, in addition to being used for good, can also be misused, that is, to help negative human traits, such as selfishness, greed, envy, deceitfulness, vengefulness, violence, hate speech, rise to the surface more easily, but also to strengthen the undemocratic and authoritarian political regimes that did not rise to power through democratic elections and whose goal is not to look after the welfare of their citizens, but to stay in power as long as possible.

One of the ways in which the Internet and, more specifically, social media are misused is the provision of disinformation and propaganda by both state and non-state actors, as well as by individuals. Disinformation and propaganda had their grand entrance into the public around 2014, with the armed clashes in eastern Ukraine's Donbas region, its occupation, and later annexation of Crimea when the Kremlin regime launched and conducted comprehensive propaganda and disinformation campaigns wherever possible. All for the sole purpose of justifying the violence of pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine, carried out with Russian weapons, as well as the occupation (and later annexation) of Crimea, carried out by Russian armed forces in unmarked uniforms.

¹ <https://data.gsmaintelligence.com/api-web/v2/research-file-download?id=54165922&file=121120-working-paper.pdf>

² <https://www.facebook.com/vladimir.petreski.56/posts/pfbid02xBE4Vg9y7S3GWDq6Q9GpsjY7syGKQy6TXN2kpgv1wn84EdVY-3asBCfQgufoebaDpl>

³ [https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.mckinsey.com%2F-%2Fmedia%2FMckinsey%2FBusiness%2520Functions%2FMckinsey%2520Digital%2FOur%2520Insights%2FDigital%2520globalization%2520The%2520new%2520era-%2520of%2520global%2520flows%2FGlobalDataFlow5.ashx%3Fmw%3D900%26fbclid%3DlwAR2pStteDJDHIHJ6zIff-9lY46COzOD9v_hszMjhHjUSGIwm15orHugW3W98&h=AT2WuY5Kav5ev3DI9QkEZTpXjcfzwoa5TIgekpkDtydHh2nr7QM-3jU3iL-1Pj3pFPa98EfyXOPxGoOoq3eXv-UuC-8Q3l-8aj8hZyWBGucG-12gEKuxEsQzYWC08lfXtoQ&_tn=-UK-R&c\[0\]=AT-2G2a2mqpBmnzLWGO9zZntPPUrrwVYplRvfMl81lqFB6zqUt9tGxoobvFdaGraLTSyFBG0Q5txL6Glysfk-GYTM6U-2SISulcVTX-MGTp-RitP3FMXeEEHqTZok_gDou1FsDtpDS2djKEvxph3y0TLKENZYCVuhpHRLtyliSwMU5Awo](https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.mckinsey.com%2F-%2Fmedia%2FMckinsey%2FBusiness%2520Functions%2FMckinsey%2520Digital%2FOur%2520Insights%2FDigital%2520globalization%2520The%2520new%2520era-%2520of%2520global%2520flows%2FGlobalDataFlow5.ashx%3Fmw%3D900%26fbclid%3DlwAR2pStteDJDHIHJ6zIff-9lY46COzOD9v_hszMjhHjUSGIwm15orHugW3W98&h=AT2WuY5Kav5ev3DI9QkEZTpXjcfzwoa5TIgekpkDtydHh2nr7QM-3jU3iL-1Pj3pFPa98EfyXOPxGoOoq3eXv-UuC-8Q3l-8aj8hZyWBGucG-12gEKuxEsQzYWC08lfXtoQ&_tn=-UK-R&c[0]=AT-2G2a2mqpBmnzLWGO9zZntPPUrrwVYplRvfMl81lqFB6zqUt9tGxoobvFdaGraLTSyFBG0Q5txL6Glysfk-GYTM6U-2SISulcVTX-MGTp-RitP3FMXeEEHqTZok_gDou1FsDtpDS2djKEvxph3y0TLKENZYCVuhpHRLtyliSwMU5Awo)

⁴ https://www.reddit.com/r/dataisbeautiful/comments/114frna/oc_the_cost_of_training_ai_on_imagenet_has/

The problem with disinformation heated up even more during, but also after the end of the pre-election campaign of the 2016 US presidential elections, when the Kremlin reactivated its propaganda weapons spearheaded by the Internet Research Agency (IRA), an institution run by the late Yevgeny Prigozhin, leader of the notorious private defense company Wagner, which, in addition to numerous atrocities in Africa and on the Ukrainian fronts, was also responsible for numerous disinformation campaigns around the world from their unmarked office building in St. Petersburg. There, numerous English-speaking employees were tasked with sharing 120 comments per hour during daily 10-hour shifts, polluting the internet with disinformation, threats, character assassinations, provocations, manipulations, and what-not against anyone who stood in their way of protecting the interests of the Kremlin regime.

At that time, the well-known websites from Veles “got their 15 minutes of fame” for spreading their own disinformation in English for the purposes of the US pre-election information market, only to find out later that such group also existed in Kumanovo, founded and supported even by senior ranks in The Macedonian Army. Moreover, the company Oxford Analytica gained “international fame”, a company which was found to have stolen personal data from over 90 million American voters, who were then served messages from the campaign of the then-Republican presidential candidate.

The Veles disinformation actors ended their “career” even before the 2018 US Congress elections. The Kremlin’s propaganda, on the other hand, continued to misinform, finding even more specific disinformation and a variety of secondary communication channels, as the largest social media revealed their profiles and pages, constantly removing them as inauthentic actors, that is, as accounts with a false identity which is not allowed according to the established standards of communities established by social media. The cat-and-mouse game lasted until the next elections, more precisely until January 6th, 2021, when supporters of the defeated President Donald Trump forcibly entered the Congress building, committing violence against the police in Washington along the way.

A year later, however, the Russian Federation’s unprovoked aggression against Ukraine happened, and the Kremlin regime’s propaganda priorities changed, moving towards justification of the aggression, trying to portray NATO as the aggressor, and pushing the story that the Ukrainians, who are fighting for the survival of their nation, are puppets of the West. And such “self-purifying” disinformation, which is an attempt to sell the narrative of the “innocent Kremlin” continues to this day.

In the meantime, we went through the COVID-19 pandemic, which was full of disinformation about the virus itself, but also about vaccines, which are meant to help the body cope with it more easily. The pandemic happened at the exact time when the anti-vaxxer “movement” was taking off in our country. By generating this fear of the unknown, it allowed an explosion of conspiracy theories related to the pandemic, and then to the vaccines. After the pandemic, disinformation of this kind returned even more fervently, encouraged by the undeserved attention during the pandemic, spreading “traditional” disinformation through attacks on all vaccines, but on a much more fertile ground enabled by the pandemic, to an audience that is much more sensitized and receptive to such disinformation due to increased levels of fear and insecurity.

A significant part of the disinformation in the country comes from the outside, with the Kremlin’s propaganda playing a prominent role in facilitating and encouraging such importation, which persistently and constantly creates new disinformation for international use, and expands it in various ways, which is why they often end up here. Sometimes this is done through domestic media outlets, and if no friendly media can be found, then through their supporters on social media, where such supporters may be aware of the origin of the disinformation (believe the narratives of Kremlin and are ready to spread their disinformation), who do it for some benefit (political, material, social, etc.) and those who do it unconsciously, i.e. not knowing that it is disinformation that is a part of a foreign disinformation campaign (“useful idiots” in the terminology of the Soviet revolutionary communist leader, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin). If, on the other hand, it is about content that must be quickly distributed and multiplied, it is not unusual for the Kremlin to use the

official profiles of senior diplomats and/or diplomatic offices in the target countries of that campaign to spread its disinformation. The Kremlin has already been trying this in several countries across Europe for a decade now. States come under attack when an internal or external crisis takes place that needs to be deepened, or when they conclude agreements that do not suit the Kremlin. In North Macedonia, such cases are the Macedonian-Bulgarian dispute, where one cannot miss the opportunity to further fuel that dispute the moment it gets heated, which was the case when the country became a member of the NATO alliance, during which, at first, efforts were made to prevent this, and after that tactic failed, the goal of the disinformation campaign shifted to spreading fear of membership and highlighting fabricated negative aspects of it.

But in the last two years, the most important topic of the disinformation efforts of the Kremlin, both in the whole world and in North Macedonia was and is the one connected with the aggression against Ukraine. The propaganda efforts of the Kremlin, often connected with direct action, which turns information into hybrid warfare through the abuse of economic relations, finances, criminal activities, abuse of religion, creation of internal, regional and international division and clashes, with the aim of spreading uncertainty and fear, occupy a significant place in the Kremlin's overall efforts off the battlefield. The high level of disinformation shows the significance of this disinformation surge, which is why two chapters of this publication are dedicated to the war in Ukraine, one of which is exclusively about the Kremlin's efforts to defame the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as well as a separate chapter specifically for the reporting and analysis of the Kremlin's information warfare in and around the country.

And finally, disinformation based on conspiracy theories must not be overlooked. There is almost no political topic or topic that has to do with politics even in the slightest, which is of interest to those persons or networks that create disinformation, and among that disinformation, there are none whose background does not allude to, hint at or openly speak about the existence of some conspiracy theory, that is, in the background of which there is no claim or indication of any group of powerful people who pull the strings in the background, while the majority of ordinary citizens are labeled as puppets, and where those alleged "victims" are required to break the alleged chains and join the disinformers. Such disinformation has a deep and long "tradition". Some conspiracies eventually turn out to be true, which in turn makes it difficult to deal with those based on disinformation.

In any case, the disinformation landscape of the Macedonian public discourse has a rich range of topics, origins, and reasons for its diversity, which makes it extremely difficult to counter. It contains a wide variety of "players", who are often disguised and who take far-reaching and complex measures to hide their identity in order to be able to create and distribute their lies for as long as possible. But we mustn't let any of that prevent us from fighting against them within the framework of the game rules - the Constitution and the laws and, above all, the guarantee of the right to freedom of expression, which is established in Article 16 of the Macedonian Constitution and about which there are no compromises, no negotiations. Although the playing field is tilted to the side of those who manipulate or ignore the truth, there is always a way to expose the lies. This publication is about exactly that - what are we the most misinformed about and to shed light on how the battle for the truth is being fought.

Chapter 1: Attacks on the West from all fronts

Harmful foreign influences, authoritarian propaganda above all, have been spreading disinformation against Western democracies for a whole decade, trying to undermine the foundations on which they rest: individual rights and freedoms, the rule of law, free and democratic elections, etc. For this purpose, every possible method is used to emphasize, deepen and intensify disagreements within these societies, and if possible, to create new ones. However, this type of propaganda is not only aimed at Western democracies – there's a necessity to show the population how bad things are in their own countries in the European Union, how agriculture is destroyed there, that people are forced to eat insects to preserve the environment, that the family is sacrificed for the needs of the LGBTQI+ community and other endless lies, which suit authoritarian rulers and their cliques in order to stay in power as long as possible and suppress democratic waves in their own countries.

Right-wing groups defend family values with disinformation

The Christian democracy ideology is intensively spreading its roots in the Macedonian post-COVID society, at a time when fertile ground was created for anti-vaxxer movements and spreading disinformation about the consequences of COVID-19 vaccines. The range of disinformation included various conspiracy theories, as well as warnings about “importing dangerous Western values” to destroy our traditional family values. In this context, narratives are being pushed that children are collateral damage in the government’s intention to legalize same-sex marriages through legal changes, as well as that the LGBTQI+ community, as a minority, is imposing its will on the majority. These anti-gender groups, represented through some civil associations, informal groups, initiatives, and right-wing political parties, are not an authentic Macedonian movement, but rather a part of the network of conservative, and even radical movements in the world, which, by means of disinformation, directly aim to destroy the democratic processes in societies

Author: Vesna Kolovska, 27 October 2023



Photo: [Gerd Altmann Pixabay](#)

The Amendments to two laws – the [Law on Civil Registry](#) and the [Law on Gender Equality](#) have caused an avalanche of disinformation and confusion in Macedonian society. Social media has become a widely used tool to make completely unfounded claims that the legislative changes “threaten girls’ safety because legal gender reassignment with just a notarization would allow men with criminal backgrounds to infiltrate women’s intimate spaces (hospital rooms, nursing homes, baths, public toilets, sports locker rooms, etc.) and would cause a dramatic increase in the rate of sexual assaults.”

Multiple civil society organizations, informal groups, initiatives, religious organizations, and right-wing political parties united in the [Child Protection Coalition](#) are spreading fear and panic, reporting stories from around the world that testify to alleged violent and unconscious gender change in children and young people. Some of these allegations have been checked and verified as disinformation by domestic and foreign fact-checkers.

The theory is that giving rights to transgender people and the LGBTIQ+ community poses a threat to children and families, while the introduction of sexual education in schools pushes the idea that “there are [countless sexes/genders](#) (not just male and female) and that they can change.”

The Christian democracy ideology is also deeply infiltrating Macedonian post-Covid society, at a time when fertile ground was created for anti-vaxxer movements, fueled by stories about the consequences of vaccines.

The movement gained strength with the adherence of public figures, priests, doctors, and politicians.

What do the legal changes actually prescribe?

The Minister of Labor and Social Policy, **Jovanka Trenchevska**, said that the two documents are unfortunately combined both in perception and in the legal procedure, which further sensitizes the public.

[The Bill to amend the Law on Civil Registry](#) allows any citizen older than 18, who is not married, to have the right to change their gender and obtain legal recognition with just a notary document. That person will be able to change their gender marking in the Civil Registries, thus the state will recognize their true gender, which is not the case at the moment. This pertains to several dozen transgender people. Since 2017, 14 trans persons have successfully finalized the procedures for legal recognition of their gender.

Describing the importance of legal recognition of gender, the seven MAs (**Maja Morachanin, Snezhana Kaleska, Sanela Shkrijel, Daniela Nikolova, Monika Zajkova, Maja Kostadinova and Ljatife Shikovska**), who are the proponents of the amendments to the Law on Civil Registry, refer to the international standards for human rights, which recognize the human right to gender identity. Respecting gender identity, including the right to legal gender recognition by the state, is part of the right to a private life, which is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia and international Conventions on human rights.

Trans people have a gender identity that does not correspond to the gender entered in the birth record. Hence, there is a need to adopt legal provisions that will prescribe the procedure through which trans people will be able to exercise the right to legal gender recognition. Legal gender recognition is a process in which an individual can change their gender marking in the Civil Registry, through which the state recognizes their true gender, it is written in the [draft Amendments](#).

Proponents call for the right of trans people to receive documents that reflect their gender identity, which is crucial for them to be able to function properly in society and be protected from a range of human rights violations. These include protection against discrimination in employment, education, health, social protection, access to goods and services from the private or public sector, as well as protection from physical and verbal attacks.

After being initially withdrawn in June 2023, the Amendments [have re-entered](#) parliamentary procedure.

[The draft Amendments to the Law on Gender Equality](#) define, among other things, **that “gender identity”**:

Refers to each person’s unique internal experience of their gender, which may or may not coincide with the sex assigned to them at birth, as well as the individual’s perception of their body and various gender expressions, such as name, attire, speech, manners, and more.

The draft Amendments also define that “a gender-diverse person”:

Is any person who does not identify with the binary identities of female or male, and encompasses transgender, transsexual, intersex, and non-binary persons.

The members of the anti-gender movements came out in public with the views that gender identity is something new, imposed on us, but the fact is that the term has been used since [1995](#), with the adoption of the Beijing Convention, and later implemented through several laws and documents. In our country, the latest such document is the [Gender Equality Strategy 2022 – 2027](#), adopted in July 2022 and applied from local to central level.

Legal amendments on gender equality have been withdrawn for completion and have not yet entered parliamentary procedure.

Homophobia and hate speech aimed at diversity

In our country’s reality, these two legal amendments became equivalent to Serbia’s organization of “Europride” – the 2021 Belgrade Pride Parade, when the Serbian capital was chosen to host the largest international Pride Parade in Europe.

That was the unifying moment for the right-wing and Christian-conservative movements, that made them even stronger. The unified movement failed in its attempt to stop the Pride Parade in the streets of Belgrade, but it secured votes for the parties that were part of this coalition, which supported and shared conservative views. [The coalition NADA](#), which was formed in 2021, managed to win 15 seats in the Serbian Parliament with 250 members in the next year’s Parliamentary Elections. With 23 seats, this right-wing coalition of Eurosceptics, made up of 4 political parties, is represented in the Assembly of Vojvodina and the local Assemblies in Belgrade and Novi Sad. Their ideology is national conservatism and militarism – they advocate the introduction of a monarchy. Their motto is “Let’s live a normal life!”

One particularly illustrative narrative is that of the group [“Against the New World Order”](#), done through the publication of stories, news, conspiracy theories, and testimonies against vaccines and transgender people, with pronounced homophobia and hate speech against minority groups.

Let’s open our eyes and fight this evil, realize the harsh truth, and forever take off the rose-tinted glasses – is the motto of the activity. ([“Against the New World Order”](#))

In one of the [posts](#), the author shares a photograph of the state of the city that fell in the spring in Serbia with the conclusion:

Apparently, someone has decided to play God and created icicles in the shape of a human eye. Is CERN playing with humanity?

Just as in Serbia, these groups are united in Bulgaria in the [March for the Family](#) which is an annual event to “protect and affirm in society marriage only between a man and a woman, and the traditional Bulgarian family composed of a mother, a father, and children”. Among other activities, they [initiated a petition](#) “against homosexual propaganda and activities for limiting public campaigns advertising LGBTQI+ organizations in Bulgaria.”

The Icon of these movements is [Matt Walsh](#), a conservative political blogger, who was named transphobe of the year by [The New Republic](#) in 2022. Walsh demonized the [Boston Children’s Hospital](#) with false claims about its gender-affirmation care program. The hospital, as the media [reported](#), received a [bomb threat](#) days after it [reported a “large number”](#) of harassing messages and phone calls threatening its staff.

Several Orthodox organizations, movements, and informative websites, as well as Facebook groups, are in close cooperation. Coalitions in the region are almost identical in composition – registered civil society organizations, civil movements and initiatives, Facebook groups and political parties, well-known anti-vaxxers, and religious groups – all united around the world-famous organizations [Family Watch International](#) and [Alliance Defending Freedom](#).

These are right-wing Christian organizations that advocate for the banning of abortion, gay marriage, the right of trans people to change their gender/gender marking on documents, etc.

Narratives from the Russian disinformation kitchen

Analyzing these movements, Serbian sociologist and university professor **Aleksej Kishjuhas** sees the fusion of these civil movements with orthodox groups in, as he writes, “values, or narratives that were invented very recently, and in Vladimir Putin’s Russia, i.e. in his factories for disinformation and fake news.

In 2013, Russia adopted a law with the following title: “Law on the Protection of Children from Information Advocating the Denial of Traditional Family Values,” which criminalizes the human rights and culture of LGBTQI+ people. In this regard, Putin himself (falsely) claimed that the West is abolishing the concepts of “mother and father” and replacing them with “parent 1 and 2” (Have we heard of this disinformation, and why have we?). Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov claimed (also falsely) that students in the West were taught that Jesus of Nazareth was bisexual. In other words, the mandatory defense and protection of traditional family values is just a clever name for – propaganda warfare against the West and Western freedoms. Putin’s Russia presents itself globally as a stronghold of traditional values and patriarchal gender roles, that is, as a counterpoint to the moral decadence of America and Western Europe. And that’s why Russian flags or flags with Putin’s face on them are carried around at the rallies around Belgrade, *Kishjuhas wrote in a column for the newspaper “Danas”.*

Disinformation flows the same way. The West and the EU are destroying the family and our traditional values. One disinformation spreading in the region claims that European countries allow gender reassignment of children as young as 8 years old. Fact-checking by [Truthmeter](#) found that there is no country in Europe where [gender reassignment surgeries](#) are allowed at the age of 8. The age for such operation without the need for parental consent is 18, and in two countries over 16, where parental consent is required.

Another piece of disinformation says that 16-year-olds in Scotland can change their gender every three months if they want to. [This is not true](#). When applying for gender reassignment surgery, an oath is given that the person intends to remain in the acquired gender for the rest of their life.

In an attempt to show just how low liberal European values go, a picture intended for sexual education has been published on social media claiming that in Germany children are taught about sex from a young age.

During the [debunking](#), it was determined that the picture book is not a textbook used in the official curriculum in Germany but is educational in nature and is intended for parents, guardians, and educators as a manual for sexual education.

In the series of articles broadcasted from the region, it is falsely claimed even in our country that Europeans [will eat insects](#), even if it is against their will; that the EU has an agenda [to destroy agriculture and the livestock fund](#) by 2030; that Germany [is exiting](#) the EU, which is a failed project, and is returning the Deutschmark as a currency.

This is the narrative we follow at home. Following the example of some Western democracies, panic spread in Skopje that students at a school in the municipality of Aerodrom were tasked to dress up as the opposite sex and that in this way some kind of agenda for “Gender Swap Days” or “Gender Bender Days” is being implemented in schools in Macedonia, introduced “to break down old traditional norms”. The Municipality of Aerodrom denied such information, noting that [it was](#) an activity proposed by the students. However, they point out that after considering the proposals by the school management and consulting the competent services in the municipality, a decision was made to modify the planned activities and to accept only those that are suitable for the educational process.

Another piece of [disinformation](#) claimed that children would learn sexual education in kindergarten. The Ministry of Education and Science and HERA [denied](#) such information for Truthmeter. The proposed Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE) curriculum is only for students in 9th grade, and for the time being, it is being implemented in only four primary schools.

Fears of gender-redefining society have created unnatural alliances and set the scene for conspiracy theories and fearmongering. The first municipalities where the terminology in the municipal documents changed from “gender equality” to “rights between men and women” are Strumica, Novo Selo, and Gevgelija, and at the end of July 2023, the municipalities of Dojran and Vasilevo joined. The Ohrid Municipality Council [made](#) an identical decision without previous discussion.

Progressive civil movements warn that these narratives, followed by a surge of disinformation among right-wing movements, lead to the loss of already achieved rights. Public debates about the role of women encourage redefining her role, her right to abortion, and her right to a job and salary, which is contrary to everything the patriarchy represents.

Disinformation and unsanctioned hate speech lay the foundations for violence, which can also be seen in particularly harmful social media narratives whose authors are the same groups that support the rigorous traditional norms.

Inflaming the Imported Ideological Confrontations Augmented by Flood of Disinformation

“Culture wars” or ideological conflicts between the left and the right-wing became a dominant topic in US political discourse. Both sides are trying to present their truth and viewpoint as the only right option, while “those others” are the strike of evil wanting to destroy humankind. These imported culture wars, with all of their intolerance for the opponent, arrived in our country

Author: Naum Lokoski, 28 July 2023



Photo: Meta.mk

With time, this incited rhetoric from social networks and American university campuses became part of mainstream politics, especially when former US President **Donald Trump** went into politics. In an attempt to attract a new group of voters – that previously was on the margins – Trump initiated the division rhetoric in his speeches that only intensified the process of dissemination of conspiracy theories of extreme groups targeting wider audiences. The right-wing group “Qanon” from 2017, by means of disinformation and fabrications, tried to present some kind of a plot against Trump from satanist and cannibal groups [involved in child trafficking](#). Frequently, these “[Satanists](#)”, “[cannibals](#)”, “pedophiles” etc., were top politicians of the opponents from the democrats or powerful American businesspersons known worldwide.

With such rhetoric, the “culture wars” of the ideological battle between the left and the right, were transformed into a disinformation offensive by the extreme right-wing representative sacrificing the truth. Internet and social networks helped the fast dissemination of these narratives beyond the USA. Subsequently, these disinformation and conspiracy theories directed against the policies of liberal Western countries were planted in many countries, including North Macedonia. The right-wing “soldiers” in this “culture war” regularly attack abortion rights, and the rights of the LGBTI+ community, spread disinformation against **Bill Gates**, **Klaus Schwab**, the World Economic Forum, and Western leaders, advocate against the benefits of 5G technology in telecommunication... The biggest damage was surely inflicted during the COVID-19 pandemic when they were the most vocal opponents against mask-wearing and vaccines, indirectly causing the death of thousands of people. What all these characters, authors, and distributors of disinformation and theories have in common is that they all always offer authoritarian leaders who, according to them, are fighting for traditional values as an alternative to liberal Western values.



Photo: Screenshot of the FB post

“Culture war” particularities

Almost coordinated, such narratives are spread in North Macedonia by a group of social network users who, mainly, are translating and repeating the same disinformation and conspiracy theory pieces, attacking liberal values in the attempt to, allegedly, protect traditional values and children.

Most disseminated narratives are those about abortion and the [conspiracy theories related to the vaccines against COVID-19](#) causing miscarriage or that some of the biggest Western brands contained aborted fetus cells.

Abortion is criticized for the purpose of safeguarding traditional family values and in line with the plot that the “world elite wants the Earth depopulated”. Frequently, these narratives flirt with politics (the abortion rules from the time of **Nikola Gruevski**). Religion or religious communities (MOC-OA and IRC) are involved in a similar context. In the last ten years, the narratives against abortion in North Macedonia are repetitive, distorting acquired rights and medical facts into the “[right to death](#)” or murder. In an attempt to create panic and front against abortion, popular disseminators of such conspiracy theories connected this medical process with the vaccines against COVID-19. Apart from the false claims that the vaccines contained aluminum and mercury, [conspiracy theory believers went as far](#) as claiming that vaccines contained tissue of aborted male fetuses. Conspiracy believers even shared videos and content created by right-wing American circles that claimed that the [cells of the kidneys of aborted fetuses](#) were used in the products of “Pepsi”, Kraft”, “Nestle” and Campbell”.

To date, Truthmeter has published several times that [COVID-19 vaccines do not contain aborted fetuses](#), monkey kidneys or chicken embryos, as well as about the fact that they [do not change your DNA](#).



Photo: pixabay.com

Resistance towards sexual education as part of the conspiracy theories

The attacks against Comprehensive sexual education and [the claims](#) that it promotes pedophilia come from the same place. Qanon followers are trying to establish a link between [some kind of Deep state and pedophile network](#) i.e., into international child trafficking. According to Qanon – which has national supporters and “soldiers” – the former American President Trump is a child savior who stopped this trafficking. Once the [“Pizzagate” affair](#) from 2016 subsided and the case with the accused American financial magnate Jeffrey Epstein ended when he committed suicide in his cell in New York Penitentiary, Qanon took over the narrative about the connection between the American liberal, political, Hollywood and business-elite with pedophilia and satanism, while [Trump is presented](#) as the Great Savior of children from the claws of evil.

These conspiracy theory believers in North Macedonia equate pedophilia with [Comprehensive sexual education](#), which is untrue, slanderous and is part of the long-term propaganda that some circles, opponents of sexual education, have been promoting for months. Such positions are amplified with disinformation that US academicians deem that pedophilia is a sexual orientation and should be accepted as such by society, as well as that in our country “pilot-pedophilia” was promoted with Comprehensive sexual education.

Such opinions [were denied by HERA](#), but also by official documents like [the pilot curriculum of sexual education](#). Pedophilia is often used in the context of LGBTI+ rights since these theoreticians are trying to present LGBTI+ people as “outcasts” from normal society i.e., as “sick”, fabrication of the West, and an attempt to put them within the agenda that [supposedly is violating their values](#).

Such a narrative is [often used by authoritarian leaders](#) and political figures in Europe and the USA. They try to win votes with inflammatory rhetoric and often times that is copied in our country by [spreading disinformation](#).

From all the examples of debate mirrored in our society and social discourse, most impressive are those that constitute direct attacks on personalities and politicians from the Western world who are representatives of liberal Western values.

Biden – a traitor!

One example is the American President Joe Biden. Once he came into power, Trump supporters initiated a disinformation campaign against him [portraying him as a traitor](#) who was incapable of performing the function of president. [Edited](#) videos and [cuts from videos](#) and statements are frequently shared presenting Biden as the evil opponent of traditional values as they have conceptualized them. Disinformation went so far that even the claim [that Biden was killed](#) and substituted by [an actor](#) or [a clone](#) was shared. The attacks on Biden as the leader of the USA is considered as an attack on the liberal West and they are directed towards destroying liberal values and an attempt to offer an authoritarian option to the democratic West. The manipulations related to Biden and the USA are quite often adjusted to the “domestic market” thereby [creating disinformation](#) of local or regional nature.

These so-called “culture wars” of the right-wing are completely mirrored in the country and imported from abroad, but the goal is identical – to attack liberal values and to try to turn public opinion against the West. Often, the appeal for respect of somewhat [traditional family values](#) is accompanied by the promotion of authoritarian leaders such as **Putin, Trump, Erdogan, Orban...**



Official portrait of President Joe Biden,
Photo: whitehouse.gov, CC BY 3.0

Authoritarianism and “Macedonian national feeling”

Glorifying these leaders, especially Russian President **Vladimir Putin** frequently moves in the direction of developing close relations between North Macedonia and Russia to protect and promote [Macedonian national feeling](#). Such narratives are enriched with disinformation about the Western civilization and the liberal market leading to the death and destruction of the “indigenous European population”, while Russia is presented as the “last bastion of traditional values” in Europe.

What appears to be a constant note throughout the entire “culture war” based on disinformation, fake news, and conspiracy theories is that Russia – quite frequently – is introduced by the traditionalists and the supporters of the radical right-wing policies in Western countries. For a long time televisions funded by the Russian State such as “RT” and “Sputnik” were broadcast in Western liberal countries, while [the propaganda spread](#) aimed at undermining the confidence in Western systems frequently shared by right-wing groups. Recently, [France revealed](#) a sizeable Russian campaign that was targeted at subverting the support of the West for Ukraine, as reported by the French state agency Viginum, whose purpose is to intercept foreign digital interference. The war in Ukraine significantly intensified [these disinformation and fake news pieces](#) that are spreading to the West, especially on the Balkans, but originate from “the Russian kitchen”.



Photo: Screenshot from the Kremlin.ru video of the Victory Parade in Moscow, 09.05.2022



Photo: vlada.mk

The risk of “marginals” becoming “mainstream” is not small

The import of such “culture wars” in North Macedonia, accompanied by a series of disinformation, fake news and manipulation is a risk for democracy that additionally widens the societal gap. For the time being, these debates remain on the margins since they do not originate from the problems of society, but are imported for other interests. The fact, however, that next year both Presidential and Parliamentary elections are due in the country, and the fact that most of them appear on social networks as well as the fact that a large portion of young people [obtain their information on political events on social networks](#) increases the risk of those currently treated as “marginals” becoming an important moment during the pre-election campaign. That may lead to additional polarization and division of society, including conflicts between parties instead of a political competition.

In the struggle for votes, when extreme rhetoric dominates in both the left and right campuses, the parties frequently flirt with these groups of citizens so they start to use more extreme speech and propose extreme policies of the political spectrum. We saw this practice last year – before, during and after the acceptance of the so-called [French proposal](#) – for opening accession talks with the EU, when the opposition parties, helped by the unskillful government in terms of transparency, tried to mobilize support by using disinformation and spins, including rhetoric that incites nationalistic feelings that can bring about inter-ethnic conflicts.

It Is not true that the EU Is fighting to strip Hungarian parents of their parental rights

European institutions are not against the protection of children from pedophilia and sexual abuse, but against the fact that the controversial [Child Protection Law](#) in Hungary discriminates against the LGBTQI+ community. The EU is not fighting to strip Hungarian parents of their rights and is not falsely accusing the Hungarian government of enacting discriminatory, homophobic laws, as the post claims. The law is considered discriminatory and homophobic not only by the EU but also by a large number of [associations](#), including [Amnesty International](#). The law [prohibits](#) sharing information with minors that promotes homosexuality, and gender reassignment and limits the representation of LGBTQI+ groups in the media

Author: [Truthmeter's Team](#), 28 April 2023

A [post](#) on social [media](#) claims that the EU intends to revoke parental rights in Hungary after the Hungarian government passed a law banning propaganda related to pedophilia. Here's what the post says:

The EU has vowed to punish Hungary and strip mothers and fathers of their parental rights after the Hungarian government passed a law banning pedophile propaganda from being taught in schools.

Hungary's Child Protection Law has led to legal proceedings against the country, and many left-wing EU countries have joined the protest against the adoption of this Law to protect children from the state sexualizing them.

The EU Commission, the governing body that launched the legal proceedings, said the Hungarian law violates EU law, fundamental rights, and EU values.

The EU is fighting to strip Hungarian parents of their rights, while falsely accusing the Hungarian government of passing discriminatory, homophobic laws. The new law introduced various measures against child abuse and pedophiles in Hungary, including a ban on institutions that promote transgenderism and homosexuality among children under the age of 18.

Are these the new EU values?

Do the agitators of Macedonia's EU accession want those values for their children or only for our children?

And how can they?

The EU has an alternative.

[The Child Protection Law](#), which is mentioned in the post we are reviewing, is a controversial Hungarian law against which fifteen countries from the European Union stood, but what the post states – that “*the EU promised to strip mothers and fathers of their parental rights*”, is not true. That is *disinformation*.

A total of 15 EU member-states have joined the lawsuit against the Law, which has been widely criticized as an anti-LGBTQI+ law. Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Austria, Ireland, Denmark, Malta, Spain, Sweden, Finland, Slovenia, France, Germany, and Greece, together with the European Parliament, will act as third parties in the lawsuit filed last year by the European Commission.

We stand firm in our commitment to an inclusive society and equality for all, [stated](#) the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belgium, which is leading the legal case against this controversial law.

This specific Law was approved in June 2021 and contains a provision that prohibits or severely limits the representation of homosexuality and gender reassignment in media, as well as in educational materials intended for audiences under the age of 18. This caused political resistance, several [countries signed joint letters](#) and the Prime ministers openly expressed their disagreement with their colleague **Viktor Orban**.

According to the legal text, the Law officially aims to strengthen the protection of children from sex offenders and pedophiles. But the European Commission, which oversees whether national laws are compatible with EU legislation, asked Hungary to explain why the ban on LGBTQI+ content was necessary to achieve the Law's main aims against pedophilia. Then, the EU initiated a legal procedure against Hungary, assessing that this Law violates fundamental human rights.

This Hungarian Law is shameful. This law openly discriminates against people based on their sexual orientation and goes against the EU's fundamental values of human dignity and equality, [stated](#) European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in 2021.

After Hungary refused to withdraw the Law, the [Commission filed a lawsuit in July 2022](#) in the European Court of Justice, which has the power to overturn national legislation. However, Budapest refused to back down, citing a 2022 Referendum that failed to achieve a quorum (sufficient number of valid votes.)

Not one part of the European institutions' remarks on the content of the Law mentions the false information that is being distributed by the post we are reviewing that "*The EU is fighting to take away the rights of Hungarian parents*". Parents will continue to have all rights over their children, according to the national legislation of Hungary. However, the European institutions remark that the protection of children from pedophilia and sexual abuse is wrongly associated with the demonization of the LGBTQI+ community.

The protection of children is an absolute priority for the EU and its member states. However, the Law contains provisions that are not justifiable based on the promotion of this fundamental interest or are disproportionate to achieving the desired goal, [according to](#) the European Commission.

The EC states that the Law violates the following EU regulations: [the Audiovisual Media Services Directive](#), [the E-Commerce Directive](#) (the Law prohibits services in which different sexual orientations are presented to minors, even when these services originate from other member states), Freedom of establishment and freedom to [provide services Directive](#), as well as other Directives.

This indicates that European institutions are not against the protection of children from sexual abuse, but against the fact that the controversial Law discriminates against the LGBTQI+ community. The EU is not fighting to strip Hungarian parents of their rights and is not falsely accusing the Hungarian government of enacting discriminatory, homophobic laws, as the post claims. That the law is discriminatory and homophobic is considered not only by the EU but also by a large number of [associations](#), including Amnesty International, as can be seen from [their announcement](#).

EU values are transparently [stated](#) and include inclusion, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and non-discrimination. Those are the values that EU members stand for. The [EC believes](#) that the Law introduces restrictive rules that refer to electronic commercial services and information services, educational activities, the classification of audiovisual content and marketing, and that it contradicts the Declaration of Human Rights. The law [prohibits](#) sharing information with minors that promotes homosexuality and gender reassignment, and limits the representation of LGBTQI+ groups in the media by banning daytime media content on television and prohibiting companies from running solidarity campaigns with the LGBTQI+ community.

Due to all of the facts stated above, we rate the post we are reviewing as untrue. It is not true that the EU has promised to strip mothers and fathers of their parental rights.

It is a lie that you have to eat insects to avoid dying if you are pro-EU

No one is forcing EU citizens to eat insects to avoid dying, as the post claims. In its analysis of fake news related to edible insects, [Edmo.eu](#) identifies three main disinformation narratives, including the one that states that EU citizens will eat insects, even if it is against their will. Narratives about insects as food imposed in the EU can be classified as narratives of the “great reset” or the “food reset”

Author: [Truthmeter's Team](#), 21 September 2023



■ If you are pro-EU, you will eat insects to avoid dying, says a [post](#) on social media.

This claim is not supported by any background information or explanation, nor does it offer any facts. The announcement is accompanied by a video of a speaker in the European Parliament, who speaks in Croatian against EU policy on agriculture in various EU member states.

[EU's decision](#) from January 2023 to approve some insect-derived products for human consumption has sparked a wave of disinformation across the Union. In many Member states, fake news about insects hidden in food or about insects that are dangerous for human consumption has appeared. In some Eastern European countries, Russian propaganda has used this disinformation to establish a connection to an existing narrative that exaggerates the negative consequences of the war in Ukraine and the sanctions on the European way of life.

In its analysis of fake news related to edible insects, [Edmo.eu](#) identifies three main disinformation narratives, including that EU citizens will eat insects, even if it is against their will.

The request by a private company was studied in the EU for 4 years before being approved

The European Commission adopted a [regulation](#) that approves the use of *Acheta domesticus* (house cricket) powder on the market, as a novel food from January 3, 2023. According to the document published on the link, on July 24, 2019, the company Cricket One Co. (the applicant) applied to the European Commission for the authorization of this powder on the EU market as a novel food. The powder is made from house cricket and intended to be used in whole grain bread, crackers, and buns, in cereal bars, dry baking mixes, biscuits, pasta products with and without filling, sauces, processed potato products, pizza, soups and concentrates for soup, beer-like drinks, in chocolate and other products intended for the general population.

On March 23, 2022, the European Commission adopted a scientific opinion on the safety of the powder. The scientific opinion states that house cricket powder is safe if used under prescribed conditions and in prescribed levels and amounts.

Therefore, the scientific opinion provides a sufficient basis to conclude that house cricket powder, when used in whole wheat bread, cereal bars, baking mixes, biscuits, pasta, sauces, processed potato products, pizza, soup concentrates, beer-like beverages, chocolate, etc., meets the conditions for its placement on the market per European regulations, [the document says](#)

Moreover, for the next 5 years, only one manufacturer will have the exclusive right to use this powder in their products. The exclusive right is also [stated](#).

The company that applied for the use of house cricket powder in the European market in its products is called Cricket One, and it is a [cricket protein and edible insect manufacturer, with an office](#) in Vietnam. The company was established in 2017.

Although the placing on the market of the mentioned product is indeed approved, its purchase or consumption is not an obligation or a requisite for the citizens of the European Union.

The document for the approval of this product was published on January 3, 2023, in the official journal of the European Union, under the title: [“Permission to place *Acheta domesticus* \(house cricket\) partially defatted powder on the European market as a novel food.”](#)

In the [document](#) (p. 5), it is written that the designation of the novel food on the labels should be “*Acheta domesticus* (house cricket) partially defatted powder”. The label of food items containing partially defatted house cricket powder should explicitly state that this ingredient may cause an allergic reaction for consumers who have a known allergy to dust mites, crustaceans, and mollusks. Such information should appear next to the list of ingredients. Consequently, all consumers have the right and access to the information on the contents of the food they buy.

So the labeling will be indicated next to the list of ingredients for consumers to be informed whether insect repellent has been added.

A spokesperson for the European Commission confirmed to Euronews via email that the food will have to be labeled.

Mandatory food information must be available on the packaging. The indication of allergens is also mandatory and must be provided to consumers, [he told](#) Euronews.

Accordingly, the citizens will decide for themselves whether they want to buy the product or not. They will not be forced to do so.

Fake news based on the ‘food reset’ narrative

Narratives about insects being food imposed in the EU can be classified as narratives of the “great reset” or the “food reset”. Colleagues from the Romanian fact-checking portal [Veridica](#) linked this type of disinformation about insects being forced as food to the “food reset” narrative. Although the product of defatted house cricket powder has been released on the European market, the citizens of the EU are not forced to consume it. In addition, products containing house cricket powder will be labeled.

The use of Insects as an alternative source of protein is not a novelty, and insects are regularly eaten in many parts of the world. A recent study made a synthesis and showed that about 2,000 insect species are eaten in more than 100 countries around the world, writes Veridika. Edible insects, especially crickets, are part of the traditional diet of several countries in Asia, such as China, Japan, Taiwan, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand, but also in Equatorial Africa and even Mexico. Crickets are consumed in different forms and on different occasions. Their preparation usually involves frying or steaming as a main course or a snack.

From everything stated above, we can conclude that, as a dietary supplement, house cricket powder is not mandatory for consumption in EU member states. Products containing house cricket powder will be labeled, and citizens will decide whether to buy that product or not. No one is forcing EU citizens to eat insects to avoid dying, as the post claims.

In its analysis of fake news related to edible insects, [Edmo.eu](#) identifies three main disinformation narratives including the one that EU citizens will eat insects, even if it is against their will. The use of insects as an alternative source of protein is not a novelty, and insects are regularly eaten in many parts of the world. Narratives about insects as an imposed food in the European Union can be classified as narratives of the “great reset” or the “food reset”. Because of this, we evaluate the post that we are analyzing as *untrue*.

Nowhere in Europe are 8-year-old children allowed to do whatever they want with their bodies

There is no such country in Europe where **sex reassignment surgeries** are allowed at the age of 8. The minimum age for such an operation without parental consent is 18 in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, France, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Austria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden, and 15 in Slovenia. In the United Kingdom, the minimum age is 16, 17 in Scotland, and 18 in England and Wales. In Croatia, performing gender reassignment surgery is allowed earlier than 18 years of age, but only with parental consent

Author: [Truthmeter's Team](#), 30 August 2023

I EU values – an 8-year-old child has the right to do what they want with their body. Hellooo? Don't you see where these Satanists are leading you?

The European Commission has a [Strategy](#) for protecting children's rights. The Strategy, however, does not regulate the right of an 8-year-old child to do what they want with their body, as [claimed](#) in the [post](#) above. The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child has been developed for and with children. Children should have access to child-friendly information in order to become aware of their rights and what the EU plans to do for them. That is why this Strategy is presented in a special, child-friendly format and can be found at the [following link](#).



Photo: pixabay.com

As can be seen from the Strategy, [it focuses](#) on inclusive quality education, protection from violence, refugee children assistance, enabling health care for all children, and legislation that will satisfy the needs of children, by protecting them from poverty and providing them with quality food and adequate housing.

In Europe, 18.3 percent of the population is made up of children. Of them, 22.2 percent are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. One-half of the world's children are victims of violence. In 2020, one-third of all asylum seekers in EU member states [were children](#).

Furthermore, 33 percent of girls and 20 percent of boys in the EU encountered disturbing content online at least once a month in 2020. Based on these facts, the European Commission has prepared this Strategy with which efforts are made to respond to the most burning issues so that children can grow up happier and safer.

As for [sex reassignment surgery](#) (also known as gender confirmation surgery), which is the process of matching one's physical appearance and genitalia to one's gender identity, there is no country in Europe where it is allowed at the age of 8.

In [13 of the 28 EU member states](#), the general rules for surgery apply. In this context, the age for such an operation without the need for parental consent is 18 in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, France, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Austria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden, and 15 in Slovenia. All in all, 20 Member states allow this type of surgery only for adults. In Croatia, it is allowed to perform such an operation on persons younger than 18, [but only with parental consent](#). In the United Kingdom, the minimum age limit is 16, in Scotland 17, in England and Wales 18 years old.

[There is no such country in the EU](#) where a child at the age of 8 can give consent for sexual intercourse with an adult. In all countries, it is treated as a crime of pedophilia and is punishable by rigorous prison sentences.

[The Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) is a UN Convention and an important agreement between countries committed to protecting the rights of the child. The Convention explains who children are, their rights, as well as the government's responsibility towards them. All rights are related, equally important, and cannot be taken away from children. Rights included in the Convention are the right to be registered in the Civil Registry immediately after birth, the right to not be separated from their parents unless it is in their best interest and decided by a court, the right to freedom of expression and opinions, right to religion, etc. Many rights are covered in the Convention on the Rights of the Child as it is a large document and you can find it [here](#).

The Convention states that children have the right to protection from all types of exploitation, even from types of exploitation not mentioned in the Convention. According to [the Convention](#), governments must ensure that children are not abducted or taken to other countries to be exploited. Children have the right to be protected from labor that is harmful or dangerous to their education, health, or development. Governments must protect children from violence or neglect by their caregivers.

Article 34 of the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of the Child states that governments must protect children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, including protection from people who force children into having sex for money, or inappropriately photograph or record them. That is why child pornography is punishable and a criminal offense throughout Europe.

If we look at the Convention for the Protection of the Rights of the Child and its [Articles](#), which are the most important aspects the European Directives and laws focus on, it is evident that everything in the document is in the best interest of children, their comprehensive development, and that various aspects were considered, including the most vulnerable children and those who have healthy families. According to the Convention, a child is any individual under the age of 18. The focus is on the provision of health care, the right to education, protection from violence, the right to a home, protection from any kind of exploitation, etc.

The domestic legislation, as well as the EU member states legislation, protects the rights of the child, i.e. their safety, right to education, health care, protection from violence, right to a safe home, etc. Due to all the above facts, we consider that it is not true that 8-year-old children have the right to do what they want with their bodies and that these are European values.

Chapter 2: Information warfare against Ukraine

The unprovoked aggression against Ukraine must somehow be justified. Therefore, it is necessary to activate the second segment of this invasion – information warfare. That is exactly why the Kremlin has decided to renew existing narratives and create new ones against Ukraine and the country's allies, and launch a new disinformation offensive, something that is rather familiar to the Kremlin rulers. Such offensives have been practiced against Ukraine since 2014 when it was necessary to justify the separationist violence and control taking of Donbas, the eastern part of Ukraine that borders Russia, as well as the occupation, and the subsequent annexation of Crimea.

With the beginning of the full invasion, however, the need for disinformation on a global level intensified even more, with the main goal being to justify the aggression and shift the blame for it to someone else. So began the disinformation about the alleged bio laboratories for the production of chemical weapons in Ukraine, the allegations that the USA is waging war in Ukraine to the last Ukrainian, and fabrications about an alleged attack by Ukraine on breakaway regions that was prevented by the invasion. And so Ukraine began to experience a disinformation invasion in addition to the armed one.

Five Manipulative Anti-NATO Narratives about the War in Ukraine

A series of anti-NATO narratives related to the Russian military aggression of Ukraine exist online in order to create justification for the aggression by blaming the Alliance for the military actions. Arguments for five such narratives distorting the truth and related to the responsibility of the Russian aggression of Ukraine, including the role of NATO in Europe and wider in the world, are analyzed here

Author: **Miroslava Simonovska**, 06 March 2023



Photo: nato.int

1. NATO is a threat to world peace

NATO is a defense alliance whose purpose is to protect its member states. Every country that joins NATO undertakes to uphold its principles and policies. This includes the commitment that “NATO does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to Russia”, [as reaffirmed](#) at the Brussels Summit.

NATO enlargement is not directed against Russia. Every sovereign nation has the right to choose its own security arrangements. After the end of the Cold War, Russia committed to building an inclusive European security architecture, through the establishment of OSCE, the creation of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and other institutions.

As [specified](#) on NATO’s website, NATO did not invade Georgia; NATO did not invade Ukraine. Russia did.

NATO has reached out to Russia consistently and publicly over the past 30 years. We worked together on issues ranging from counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism to submarine rescue and civil emergency planning even during periods of NATO enlargement. However, in 2014, in response to Russia’s aggressive actions against Ukraine, NATO suspended practical cooperation with Russia. We do not seek confrontation, but we can’t ignore Russia breaking international rules, undermining our stability and security, [says NATO](#).

In response to Russia’s use of military force against Ukraine, NATO deployed four multinational battlegroups to the Baltic States and Poland in 2016.

Before Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea, there were no Allied troops in the Eastern part of the Alliance. In response to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, NATO has significantly reinforced its deterrence and defence posture, including with four new battlegroups in the Eastern part of the Alliance. At the NATO Summit in Madrid, Allies agreed that Russia is the most significant and direct threat to their security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. Allies also agreed to further strengthen NATO’s posture. However, Allies remain willing to keep open channels of communication with Moscow to manage and mitigate risks, prevent escalation and increase transparency, states the [website of the Alliance](#) listing the facts about the NATO-Russia relations.

NATO was founded in 1949 after the Second World War. The purpose of its establishment was to secure peace in Europe and promote cooperation between the member states and to preserve their freedom, all within the context of opposing the threat coming from the Soviet Union at the time. The Founding Act of NATO obligates the allies to democracy, individual freedoms and rule of law, as well as peaceful conflict resolution. In addition, the foundation of the collective defence concept was planted meaning that the attack of one ally is treated as an attack of all allies. Since the establishment of NATO up to date, world peace has never been threatened as it is today, ever since Russia attacked Ukraine.



Photo: en.wikipedia.org

2. NATO mercilessly bombed Serbia and Syria

The United States, France and the United Kingdom [informed the Allies on their joint military action](#) on 14th April. They briefed that a significant body of information indicated that the Syrian regime was responsible for the attack against civilians in Douma on 7 April and that their military action was limited to the Syrian regime facilities enabling the production and employment of chemical weapons. The three Allies [emphasized](#) that there was no practical alternative to the use of force.

Allies expressed their full support for this action intended to degrade the Syrian regime's chemical weapons capability and deter further chemical weapon attacks against the people of Syria. Chemical weapons cannot be used with impunity or become normalized. They are an immediate danger to the Syrian people and to NATO's collective security.

Allies strongly condemn the repeated use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and called for those responsible to be held to account. Allies also called on the Syrian regime and its backers to allow rapid, sustained and unhindered humanitarian access. Despite sustained diplomatic efforts, the Syrian regime's repeated use of chemical weapons against civilians has contributed to appalling human suffering since the start of the conflict in 2011. The use of such weapons is in flagrant violation of international standards and non-proliferation norms, multiple UN Security Council Resolutions and the Chemical Weapons Convention, which Syria ratified in 2013. NATO considers any use of chemical weapons by State or non-State actors to be a threat to international peace and security, specifies [the statement of the North-Atlantic Council](#) on the actions undertaken against the use of chemical weapons in Syria at the time.

The former Yugoslavia did not break up because of NATO. The Alliance did not use military force to change borders in the former Yugoslavia. From 1992 to 1995, NATO conducted several military operations in Bosnia, activities mandated by the United Nations Security Council, of which Russia was a member.

Russia did not oppose NATO's operation in Libya in 2011. NATO's operation in Kosovo in 1999 followed over a year of intense diplomatic efforts by the UN and the Contact Group, of which Russia was a member, to end the conflict. The UN Security Council repeatedly branded the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and the mounting number of refugees as a threat to international peace and security. NATO's mission helped to end large-scale and sustained violations of human rights and the killing of civilians, [notes NATO's website](#).

Serbian government [estimates](#) that at least 2,500 people died and 12,500 were injured during the NATO campaign in 1999, although the exact death toll remains unclear. According [to the data published by Humanitarian Law Centre](#), 756 people died during the air strikes. It [has been confirmed](#) that 8,101 civilians have died since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine up to 26 February 2023, out of which 488 are children. The number of the injured is 13,479 persons. The actual numbers might be higher, but not even close to so many casualties coming from NATO's actions compared to [the air strikes of Russia in Ukraine](#).

3. NATO is an aggressor organization

NATO has never annexed someone else's territory, unlike Russia which has occupied parts of Georgia, Moldova, [and Ukraine](#) since 1993.

NATO is a defensive alliance. Ukraine's decision to join NATO is individual. Russia cannot intervene or veto this sovereign process. Russia aims to confuse and exhaust the public to not be able to distinguish between facts and fiction. Russian campaigns aim to increase geopolitical tensions between Moscow and the West and to portray NATO as the enemy.

Ukraine [is quite precise](#) that military aggression is just one element of the Russian hybrid warfare against Ukraine. The other elements are propaganda based on lies and falsifications, trade and economic pressure, energy blockade, terror and intimidation of Ukrainian citizens, cyber-attacks, strong denial of the very fact of war against Ukraine despite the large scope of irrefutable evidence, use of pro-Russian forces and satellite states in its own interest and blaming the other side for its crimes.

In 2019, [the website of the Ukrainian Foreign Affairs Ministry](#) published that the Russian aggression against Ukraine has led to large humanitarian disasters, with 9,940 people killed and up to 23,455 wounded. This number includes 80 children killed as a result of a terrorist attack on 17th July 2014. Approximately 1,584,000 from Donbas and Crimea are internally displaced persons, having been forced to leave their homes.

NATO condemns [in the strongest possible terms](#) Russia's brutal and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine – which is an independent, peaceful and democratic country and a close NATO partner. NATO and Allies continue to provide Ukraine with unprecedented levels of support, helping to uphold its fundamental right to self-defense.

Since Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea thereby destabilizing Eastern Ukraine in 2014, NATO adopted a strong posture for fully supporting Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. The Allies condemn and will never recognize the illegal and illegitimate annexed Crimea, [states NATO's website](#).

NATO also condemns Russia's illegal attempts to annex four regions of Ukraine – Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson in September 2022, which is the largest attempted annexation of European territory by force since the Second World War.

The sham referenda in these regions were engineered in Moscow and imposed on Ukraine. They have no legitimacy and NATO will not recognize them. These lands are Ukraine and will always be Ukraine. The overwhelming vote in the United Nations General Assembly condemning Russia's attempted annexations sent a clear and strong message that Russia is isolated and that the world stands with Ukraine, [NATO stated](#).

4. Via NATO, the West wants to turn the whole world into slaves of its interests and economy

The economic policy of the West in terms of globalization, brought about enormous progress and economic growth throughout the World. The number of people living in extreme poverty has drastically decreased. That is an indicator that enslaving is not the name of the game. If one wants to enslave someone economically, then economic development would not be an option at all.

Russian aggression in Ukraine triggered [a massive shock to global economy](#), especially to energy and food markets, pushing up prices. Compared with other economic regions, the Euro area has been particularly vulnerable to the economic consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This is mainly because the Euro area depends very strongly on energy imports from Russia, while Russia and Ukraine together played a large role in the export of foodstuffs before the Russian invasion.

Last April (2022), the World Trade Organization [warned](#) that the invasion of Ukraine – apart from causing extensive human suffering – [damaged the global economy](#), which will hit the poorest countries the most.

5. The war in Ukraine is resistance against NATO's military advancement

There is no military advancement of NATO, especially not in and around Ukraine. NATO is not at war with Russia and is not seeking confrontation with Russia. What NATO does is support Ukraine in its right to self-defence, as enshrined in the UN Charter. NATO undertakes strictly defensive measures to increase the presence of NATO troops in the Eastern part of the Alliance.

This ensures that there is no room for misunderstanding in Moscow about readiness to protect and defend all Allies. Our core task is to keep our thirty nations safe. We have a responsibility to ensure the conflict does not escalate and spread beyond Ukraine because that would be even more devastating and more dangerous... Our exercises are not directed towards Russia or any other country, [according to NATO's website](#).

This myth also ignores geography. Only 6 percent of Russia's land borders touch NATO countries. Russia has land borders with 14 countries. Only five of them are NATO members. Outside NATO territory, the Alliance only has a military presence in Kosovo and Iraq. NATO's non-combat mission in Iraq contributes to the fight against terrorism and is carried out at the request of the Iraqi government, with full respect for Iraq's sovereignty. In contrast, Russia has military bases and soldiers in three countries – Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine – without the consent of their governments. Moreover, Russia's war against Ukraine [has shattered peace in Europe](#), undermining international security and stability.

America Didn't Promise Russia that NATO Will Not Enlarge

There is no treaty signed by the US, Europe, and Russia specifying that NATO will not enlarge. The idea of NATO expansion beyond Germany was not on the agenda in 1989, because the Warsaw Pact still existed. Mikhail Gorbachev confirmed it in [an interview in 2014](#)

Author: [Truthmeter's Team](#), 04 September 2023



Bush-Gorbachev, Helsinki 1990.

Photo: Susan Biddle, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

We are fact-checking [a post](#) on the social network Facebook (screenshot [here](#)) stating the following:

Jeffrey Sachs on the crisis in Ukraine. The USA established the basis for a special operation long before Putin was elected.

“30 years ago, the US President promised Mikhail Gorbachev that NATO will not move a bit towards the East... Unfortunately, in the early 90s, NATO enlargement plans with Ukraine itself were already made. My opinion is that this was the biggest mistake made by the United States”, stated the American economist and professor at Columbia University, Jeffrey Sachs on his YouTube channel. Sachs admitted that such an action undermined the trust between Washington and Moscow and that it was the reason for the conflict in Ukraine. “All this started long before Putin’s presidency. The basis was America’s belief in the unipolar concept of the world. This belief was wrong, dangerous, and provocative”.

Contrary to the contents of the post we are fact-checking, NATO on its website officially qualified this as *not true* or a *myth*.

According to [NATO’s website](#), there is no agreement in which NATO promises Russia that it would not enlarge after the Cold War. NATO’s door has been open to new members since it was founded in 1949 – and that has never changed.

This Open Door Policy is enshrined in Article 10 of NATO’s founding Treaty, which says that any other European country in a position to further the principles of the Treaty and to contribute to the security of NATO can apply for membership. Decisions on membership are taken by consensus among all allies.

There is no treaty signed by the US, Europe, and Russia specifying that NATO will not enlarge. The idea of NATO expansion beyond Germany was not on the agenda in 1989, because the Warsaw Pact still existed. Mikhail Gorbachev confirmed this in [an interview](#) in 2014.

The topic of NATO expansion was not discussed at all and it wasn’t brought up in those years. I say this with full responsibility. Not a single Eastern European country raised the issue, not even after the Warsaw Pact ceased to exist in 1991. Western leaders didn’t bring it up either, says Gorbachev, [NATO’s website specifies](#).

Declassified transcripts from the White House also confirm that in 1997, **Bill Clinton** constantly rejected the proposal of **Boris Yeltsin** for a gentlemen’s agreement that none of the former Soviet republics would join NATO.

I cannot commit on behalf of NATO, and I will not put myself in a position to veto NATO expansion with respect to any other country, not to mention to allow someone else to do so. NATO works with consensus, [Clinton said](#).

An article published in the Harvard University paper [specifies that Robert Zoellick](#), an US diplomat who helped negotiate the end of the Cold War, says **Vladimir Putin's** claims about Ukraine are part of a disinformation campaign. When President **George Bush** sat down with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to negotiate the peaceful end of the Cold War, Robert Zoellick was in the room where it happened. During the 1990 Summit, Zoellick says that President Gorbachev accepted the idea of German unification within NATO based on the principle that every country should freely choose its own alliances.

I was in those meetings and Gorbachev said there was no promise not to enlarge NATO, [recalls Zoellick](#).

Soviet Foreign Affairs Minister, **Eduard Shevarnadze**, later President of Georgia, concurred, [he says](#).

He added that the Treaty on Germany's unification does not include a restriction to NATO enlargement. Those facts have undermined one of Russian President **Vladimir Putin's** justifications for invading Ukraine – that the United States had agreed that former Warsaw Pact nations would never become part of the North Atlantic security alliance.

The reality was that in 1990 most people, and certainly the Soviets, weren't focusing on whether the Eastern European countries would become part of NATO. Knowing Soviet and Russian diplomacy, Moscow would have demanded assurances in writing if it believed the US had made such a promise. And even in 1996, when President Bill Clinton welcomed former Warsaw Pact nations to join NATO, "one of the German diplomats involved told me that as they discussed the enlargement with the Russians, no Russian raised the argument that there had been a promise not to enlarge", [Zoellick says](#).

According to him, the motive for the decision of the Russian President to attack Ukraine is that Putin does not see Ukraine as an independent and sovereign country.

He believes that everybody in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine are, in fact, Russians living in a Greater Russia. And I think that at age 69, Putin feels that this is a question not only of Russian history, but his place in Russian history, [specifies Zoellick](#).

Zoellick [adds](#) that when Putin's earlier attacks on the Crimea and country's eastern regions failed to halt Ukraine's drift towards the West, the Russian leader believed he had no other choice but to invade.

That's his motivation. And I think we need to be aware that he's going to double down. The resilience and resolve of the Ukrainian people to resist has been a surprise to him and everybody else. I don't think he's going to ultimately be successful, [Zoellick adds](#).

[Fact-checkers from Politifact](#) claim that no legal agreement prohibits NATO from expanding eastward.

Due to all of the above-noted facts, we assess that *it is not true* that the US President promised Mikhail Gorbachev 30 years ago that NATO would not enlarge.

Kremlin's False Narrative: "NATO Is Fighting Russia to the Last Ukrainian" Continues

NATO neither started the military invasion, nor does it have troops in Ukraine. Russia attacked Ukraine in February 2022 and Ukraine, as an independent country, has the right to defend itself and use available means of assistance from its friends. NATO is sending military aid to Ukraine without being a party to the war. The post manipulates that Ukraine is a puppet in the hands of NATO, although it is clear that the war could stop immediately if Russia were to retreat from Ukrainian territory

Author: [Truthmeter's Team](#), 07 June 2023

We are fact-checking [a post](#) published on the social media Facebook (screenshot [here](#)) that says:

NATO can fight Russia in Ukraine to the last Ukrainian in the country, or it could stop supplying Ukraine with weapons that would lead to a rapid collapse and capitulation. It is up to NATO for how long the war will last, not up to Zelenskyy!

It is not true at all that it is up to NATO for how long the war will last, because NATO is not a party to the war.

NATO condemns in the strongest possible terms Russia's brutal and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine – which is an independent, peaceful and democratic country and a close NATO partner. NATO and Allies continue to support Ukraine with unprecedented levels of support, helping to uphold its fundamental right to self-defense, [specifies NATO's website](#).

Ukraine is not a NATO Member-State, but a partner-country. That means that it works closely with NATO, but is not covered by the security guarantee of the Alliance's founding treaty.

On [NATO's website](#), several myths spread by Kremlin propaganda sources [have been debunked](#). The first one is exactly that stated in the post we are fact-checking – [that NATO "is at war with Russia in Ukraine" at the expense of Ukrainian victims](#).

NATO is not at war with Russia and we do not seek confrontation with Russia. What NATO does, supports Ukraine in its right to self-defense, as stated in the United Nations Charter. Over the past month, we have taken purely defensive measures to increase the presence of NATO troops in the eastern part of the Alliance. This ensures there is no room for misunderstanding in Moscow about our willingness to protect and defend our allies. Our primary task is to keep our 30 nations safe. Our responsibility is to ensure that the conflict does not escalate and spread beyond Ukraine, because that would be even more devastating and even more dangerous, [states NATO's website](#).

In addition, NATO is a defense alliance whose purpose is to protect its members. NATO's official policy is that "[NATO does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to the Russian Federation](#)".

NATO did not invade Georgia, NATO did not invade Ukraine. Russia did. NATO has reached out to Russia consistently and publicly over the past 30 years. We worked together on issues ranging from counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism to submarine rescue and civil emergency planning – even during periods of NATO enlargement. However, in 2014, in response to Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine, NATO suspended practical cooperation with Russia. We do not seek confrontation, but we cannot ignore Russia breaking international rules, undermine our stability and security, [states NATO's website](#).

In response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, [NATO has significantly reinforced](#) its deterrence and defence posture, including with four new battle groups in the Eastern part of the Alliance. At the NATO Summit in Madrid, Allies agreed that Russia is the most significant and direct threat to their security and to peace and stability of the Euro-Atlantic areas. Allies also agreed to further strengthen NATO's posture. However, NATO helps coordinate Ukrainian aid requests and supports Allies deliver humanitarian aid. Article 5 (security guarantee) and the collective defense promise, reassures the Allies that they can send weapons to Ukraine without compromising their own security.

Individual NATO member-states send weapons, ammunition and many types of light and heavy military equipment, drones and tanks. To date, [NATO Allies have secured billions of euros worth](#) of military equipment to Ukraine. The Allies also train Ukrainian troops to use this equipment. All of this makes a difference on the battlefield every day, thereby helping Ukraine uphold its right to self-defence, which is enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

Since the beginning of Russia's aggressive military invasion of Ukraine, on several occasions, Kremlin has made propaganda attempts to twists theses and impose series of justifications for its attacks. Contrary to the stated, the post we are fact-checking indicates that Russia was the one that [invaded Ukraine](#) in February 2022 and therefore, Ukraine, as an independent state with territorial integrity and sovereignty, has the right to defend itself and use all available means of assistance from its friends. If it does not do that, then it would face even bigger territorial claims from Russia.

The post actually claims that "NATO is fighting Russia in Ukraine" which is disinformation. NATO neither started the military invasion (Russia did), nor does it have troops in Ukraine. NATO, however, is sending military aid to Ukraine without being a party to the war. By claiming that "the stop of military aid" would lead to a rapid collapse and capitulation and claiming that "it is up to NATO how long the war will last, not to Zelenskyy", an attempt is made to manipulate Ukraine and depict it as a puppet in the hands of NATO thereby undermining its independence and sovereignty, including its democratic processes and decision-making – to defend itself from occupation and territorial claims. The war would be able to stop at once provided Russia retreats from Ukrainian territory.

Due to all the facts noted above, we assess the fact-checked post as *untrue*.

It Is Not True that Western Elite had been Preparing the War in Ukraine for a Long Time

Back in December 2021, Western leaders called upon Russia to calm the tensions and promised to support Ukraine in case of any kind of threat from Moscow. On 24 February 2022, Russia – not the Western elites – performed complete military invasion in Ukraine and started a war of terrifying consequences for the whole world, but mostly for Ukraine, which was forced to defend itself as a sovereign and democratic country from the attacks of foreign military forces within its own borders

Author: [Truthmeter's Team](#), 07 June 2023

We are fact-checking [a post](#) published on the social network Facebook (screenshot [here](#)) claiming that:

Western elites are getting ready to enjoy the final escalation of the previous long-term preparations of the war – “Brother against Brother”. How long are we going to be disunited, Stupid Slavic Tribes!?

On 24 February 2022, it was Russia – not the Western elites – that performed complete military invasion of Ukraine, i.e., started a war with terrifying consequences for the whole world, but mostly for Ukraine, that was forced to defend itself as a sovereign and democratic country from the attacks of foreign military forces within its own borders. The manner in which [Russia is trying to justify its military aggression in Ukraine](#) is diverse, but the facts point out that Moscow is [trying to implement its imperialistic ambitions](#) in Ukraine by using its own arms and brutal tactics, including attacks on civilians. NATO is providing support to Ukraine, because Ukraine has the right to self-defense, as specified in the United Nations Charter. Individual NATO Member-States continue to secure military support to Ukraine, but that does not make the Western countries “makers” of the war prepared and performed by Russia.

Kremlin has been spreading disinformation and propaganda to serve its purpose for a long time now. All that is done is dissemination of untruths as [to justify the unprovoked, unwarranted invasion of Ukraine](#). The invasion devastated Ukrainian economy that decreased for more than 30 percent since the beginning of 2022. The level of poverty in Ukraine increased from 5.5 percent in 2021 to 25 percent in 2022. The invasion displaced 14 million people, resulting with a humanitarian disaster and World Bank is expecting serious impediments for the Ukrainian economic capacity for the upcoming years. More details about the ramifications of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine [were presented here](#).

Deutsche Welle, in one analysis, [has noted](#) that the support for Ukraine by the Western partners by means of financial aid and delivery of arms is abused by Putin as justification for his favourite claim that “Ukraine is controlled from the outside” and that is “powered up by NATO armed forces and filled with the most modern weapons”.

Worth noting is the fact that in mid 2022, when Russia was deeply into its military invasion of Ukraine, **Sergey Kiriyenko** [stated that](#) “**NATO was fighting against Russia until the last Ukrainian**”, a narrative similar to the one in the post we are fact-checking “**brother against brother**”. The truth is being twisted by applying the tactic of accusing NATO for warring against Russia by using the Ukrainians who are “Russian brothers”, when in actual fact

Russia is the one fighting Ukraine in the attempt to takeover as much as possible of its sovereign territory, thereby violating international law, and subsequently, leaving [a large number of casualties](#) of the military aggression.

NATO [condemns](#) Russian brutal and unprovoked military aggression of Ukraine, which is an independent country. NATO and the Allies continue to support Ukraine in its undisputable right to self-defence.

Article 5 as a security guarantee enables collective defence giving the right to the Alliance to send arms to Ukraine without threatening its security. In addition, well-established structure for common standards of the Alliance and the interoperable systems enable the Alliance to send equipment with the certainty that supplies to Ukraine can be topped up with compatible equipment from the other allies. Individual NATO Member-States send arms, ammunition and a great deal of light and heavy military equipment, including anti-tank and air defence systems, drones and tanks. Up to date, NATO allies have secured equipment worth a billion Euros for Ukraine. In addition, the allies are also training Ukrainian troops to use the equipment. This helps Ukraine uphold its right to self-defence enshrined in the UN Charter, [states the website of NATO](#).

Although the fact-checked post claims that the West was planning the war for a long time, it was Russia that [in the early morning](#) of 24th February [invaded Ukraine](#) although constantly denying that it will attack.

By air, land and water, Russia launched a devastating attack on Ukraine – European democracy of 44 million people. For months, President Vladimir Putin denied that he will attack his neighbour, but soon terminated the Peace Deal by sending troops across the border to the North, East and South of Ukraine. As the number of casualties increased, he was accused for violating the peace in Europe, [published BBC at the time](#).

Towards the end of 2021, Russia started deploying a large number of troops on the borders with Ukraine although constantly denying that it will attack. After that, Putin discarded the 2015 Peace Deal for the East and recognized the oblasts controlled by the rebels as independent. Initiating the Russian invasion on 24th February, Putin accused NATO for threatening the historic future of the Nation.

Facts, on the other hand, are saying that Western leaders, back in December last year, [called upon Russia](#) to calm tensions and promised to support Ukraine in case of any kind of Moscow-related threat. US president **Joe Biden**, talked with British leader **Boris Johnson**, and with the leaders of France, Italy and Germany, agreeing to resort to all possible tools to prevent the aggression.

USA and EU expressed great concern and on several occasions tried to prevent the attack. In [the Resolution](#) adopted in December 2021 by Members of the European Parliament, they called upon Russia to withdraw its troops threatening Ukraine and stated that every aggression from Moscow will have a high economic and political price.

Members of the Parliamentary External Affairs Committee and the Security and Defence Sub-committee went on a fact-finding mission in Ukraine from 30th January to 1st February 2022.

On 22nd February, leading Members of the European Parliament [strongly condemned](#) Russian President Vladimir Putin's recognition of the non-government controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine as independent entities.

Evidently, Russia was the one that was long-time planning its invasion of Ukraine, not the West. The EU and USA condemned the invasion and called upon Putin to withdraw his troops and stop the war, but that did not happen. Then the West made it clear that it had no intention to send combat troops to Ukraine, but only weapons and field hospitals. At the same time the West directed its attention to the Russian economy, financial institutions and individuals and, in parallel, started supporting Ukraine with all that it needed to defend itself.

Due to all of the above-noted facts, we assess the post fact-checked as untrue. Western elites are not preparing to enjoy the escalation of the long-time prepared war. They have not scheduled a war, nor do they enjoy its escalation since that means lost lives and destroyed cities. Moreover, from a general Geo-strategic viewpoint, escalation is not favourable for anyone, because it can bring about war spillover in Europe. The narrative that in the war they are fighting “brother against brother” i.e., disunited and controlled Slav tribes or directed by the West to play one against the other is not applicable in a situation when a country penetrates the territory of another sovereign and democratic country and starts bombarding.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during the visit on the battlefield near the Kiev region.

Source: Website of the Presidential Cabinet of Ukraine ([President.gov.ua](https://www.president.gov.ua)),
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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during the visit on the battlefield near the Kiev region.

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Chapter 3: Zelenskyy must fall - how and why is the Ukrainian president being attacked

The Ukrainian President is the pillar of the Ukrainian resistance against the Russian invasion, both militarily, politically, and internationally. He is the person around whom all of Ukraine unites when the country needs a leader to rally around in the battle against aggression, and he is the one to whom the Ukrainian military turns after liberating a previously occupied settlement, or when it liberates a border area and reaches the Ukrainian-Russian border. In all those videos, Ukrainian soldiers address their President, informing him of the achieved success. Zelenskyy is also the person who, during the war, unites the entire political body of Ukraine and behind whom all political actors in the country stand. And, when it comes to international politics, Ukrainian allies have the greatest confidence in him and he is the main reason why the world supplies Ukraine with all kinds of aid - military, financial, and humanitarian.

Precisely because of all this, he is a central target of the Kremlin's propaganda, whose authority should be destroyed with all kinds of fabrications and untruths. And, disinformation of all kinds is mostly created about him with a single goal - to damage and then destroy his reputation, thus the will of Ukrainian allies to help Ukraine. Therefore, Zelenskyy is constantly the target of blatant lies, from accusations of corruption, of the illegality of his presidential mandate, to personal attacks, which have so far proven to be untrue.

Zelenskyy - Kremlin's Most Important Target for Disinformation

Never before has the Kremlin's propaganda machinery been concentrated on disseminating so many disinformation pieces about one person as is currently doing with Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The constant inflow of lies about the Ukrainian President, spread on a daily basis, shows that he is a thorn in the eye of Moscow's regime and the main hurdle for the failure of the "three-day invasion" passing its 500th day and whose end is nowhere to be seen on the horizon

Author: Matej Palevski, 29 July 2023

Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the authorities in Kremlin believed it would be over in three days and that Kyiv would fall, if not the first day, then definitely the second day. With such a plan, the "elite" troops of the Chechen leader **Ramzan Kadyrov** – otherwise part of the Russian National Guard – together with the other Russian troops penetrated Ukraine from the north through Belarus, hoping to take over the Ukrainian capital city by means of "blitzkrieg". The Chechen group, however, had another task apart from taking over Kyiv, assigned to them by their Kremlin bosses – to find and to kill the Ukrainian President **Volodymyr Zelenskyy**. Such a plan, as well known, did not succeed. Not only was Zelenskyy not killed, but neither was Kyiv conquered. Moreover, in the beginning of March 2022, Ukrainian military officials reported that the "elite" Chechen unit – tasked to kill Zelenskyy- was, [destroyed by the Ukrainian Armed Forces](#), just like other elite and experienced Russian military units during the failed attack on Kyiv last Winter and Spring.



Zelenskyy the Kremlin's most important disinformation target.
Volodymyr Zelensky during the visit to the Kherson and Mykolaiv regions, October 20, 2023.

Source: Website of the Presidential Cabinet of Ukraine ([President.gov.ua](https://www.president.gov.ua)),
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However, this failure to physically eliminate Zelenskyy was not the end of the Kremlin's assassination efforts; only the tactics changed. Instead of an assassination for physical liquidation, the Kremlin initiated long-term and comprehensive action to undertake character assassination of the Ukrainian President. He became a constant target of disinformation attacks and conspiracy theories that the Kremlin and its supporters perpetually produced hoping to undermine his credibility in front of the Ukrainian citizens as well as in front of its own public in Russia, but even more importantly, in front of the Western allies of Ukraine whose support is crucial when it comes to its success on the battlefield.

The attempts to discredit Zelenskyy put into use all possible actual and false details of his life. Zelenskyy before becoming the sixth president of Ukraine was a TV celebrity who performed in TV comedies and acted in comedy films and television series. This part of his CV [is skillfully abused by the Kremlin](#) for discrediting him. On the other hand, the facts about [Zelenskyy graduating law at the National Economic University in Kyiv](#) are cleverly concealed, along with the fact that later in his life he got involved in acting and established his production house "Kvartal-45".

In 2019 he announced his candidacy for the president of Ukraine, later convincingly defeating his main opponent, the President at the time, [Petro Poroshenko](#), by winning up to [75 percent of the votes](#) in the second round. At the beginning of his term, Zelenskyy took a stand against corruption and the establishment. In that period the criticism against Zelenskyy was internal and mainly directed towards his political inexperience bearing in mind the fact that he previously was not involved in politics. That criticism, however, did not resemble at all the current organized and persistent attacks initiated by the Kremlin after the invasion of Ukraine to date.

Early in the morning on 24 February 2022, just before the Russian tanks started entering Ukrainian territory, Zelenskyy addressed the citizens of Ukraine and Russia. That address, as well as his following addresses in the first days of the invasion, showed that he had leadership qualities and capacities to unite [and lead his citizens](#): "Don't panic! We are strong and ready for anything. We will defeat everyone because we are Ukraine!" With these words and a series of other addresses, he managed to prevent general panic in a country attacked from all sides by a far stronger opponent. [Andrew Roberts](#), the British reporter and historian, compared Zelenskyy with Winston Churchill, while the media described him as a ["national"](#) or ["global hero"](#).

His address was a complete contrast to [the hour-long confusing speech of](#) Vladimir Putin a day after the invasion when he recognized the separatist regions of Ukraine as independent republics, thereby presenting senseless claims of "genocide" in Eastern Ukraine and tirades on "de-Nazification" used to justify the war.

Following the attack, all diplomatic relations with Russia were terminated and a state of emergency was proclaimed on the entire territory of Ukraine. All men in the age range 18-60 years old were prohibited from traveling outside the country that needed everyone who could help.

From the very beginning of the invasion, the [Ukrainian Security Services determined](#) that Zelenskyy, together with his family, was the target of Russian aggressors. He, however, still decided to stay in Kyiv. The US administration and the President of Turkey pulled strings so that Zelenskyy can be evacuated, offering him transport to a safe haven worried that Kyiv will not resist the attack of the powerful Russian Army. Zelenskyy [responded](#):

The fight is here; I need ammunition, not a ride.

Further on, in the course of the war, Zelenskyy was [constantly present](#) in the public with daily video addresses. He visited [Bakhmut twice](#), the most fierce battlefield of more than thousand-kilometer-long front, and after the liberation of [Kherson](#) – the only regional centre that the Russians managed to occupy at the beginning of the invasion – he immediately

went there, regardless of the fact that the city was still under the threat of artillery attacks from the Russian Armed Forces located on the other side of the Dnipro River. In addition, Zelenskyy visited the wounded soldiers [in the hospitals](#), awarding orders and recognitions.

In 2022, Zelenskyy [was declared Man of the Year](#) by “Time” Magazine, and several public opinion polls of Ukraine ranked him as the best president the country had ever had. In the polls conducted at the beginning of the war, [90 percent](#) of the Ukrainians supported his opinions, including 80 percent of the respondents who lived in the Russian-speaking regions.

The attacks against Zelenskyy originating from the Kremlin and its supporters spread throughout the entire world thereby arriving in North Macedonia quite frequently. Manipulative photographs, statements taken out of context, scenes from series where he played roles, claims that he is a Nazi or someone from his immediate family, and many other things are used to manipulate the public, including claims that he restricts the rights of the people, limits their freedom, does not provide for free expression of religion or free election of representatives in legislative bodies or even unsubstantiated claims that he is corrupt, greedy, caring only for his own interest to profit and become rich from the situation in Ukraine.

Zelenskyy and Nazism-related disinformation

One of the frequent pieces of disinformation about Zelenskyy is that he is a Nazi or that he is related to the Nazis. In order to show [that Zelenskyy is Hitler](#), his photographs with the Pope are being shared followed immediately by a photograph of Hitler with some Catholic priest from 80 years ago. And that is the whole argumentation why Zelenskyy, allegedly, is a Nazi. In addition, edited photographs [with Nazi symbols](#) are added, including the use of false translation with an old video to show [that he was dining with Nazis](#).

Truth be told, Ukraine [banned the promotion and practice of Nazi ideology](#) back in 2015, along with the dissemination of Communist propaganda.

The fact that he is Jewish is also used for disinformation purposes by spreading lies that Adolf Hitler also had Jewish blood.

[Sergey Lavrov](#), Foreign Affairs Minister of Russia said the following about Zelenskyy:

If I remember correctly – I might not be right – well I think Hitler also had Jewish origin, so it means nothing. For a long time now we’ve been hearing the wise Jewish people say that the biggest anti-Semites are the Jews themselves.

Zelenskyy was born in a Jewish family, while his grandfather served in the Red Army fighting against the Nazis. Zelenskyy has lost 3 members of his family in the Second World War fighting the Nazis.

The attacks against Zelenskyy for alleged Nazism are afterwards transferred onto entire Ukraine.

We will persist in de-militarizing and de-Nazifying Ukraine and to bring to court those who committed numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including against the citizens of the Russian Federation, said Putin just before the invasion of Ukraine.

This kind of [narrative](#) is quite frequently used by Kremlin, adding that “Neo-Nazis settled in Kyiv and took the entire Ukrainian people hostage”.

In July 2021, Putin published [the article](#) „On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians” where, by means of drawing historical parallels, he blames **Vladimir Ilyich Lenin**, the leader of the Soviet socialist revolution and the first leader of the Soviet Union for the establishment of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1922, and that by doing so he

planted the "most dangerous time bomb in the Soviet system". According to him, that time bomb exploded with the dissolution of the USSR in 1991.

"Ukraine's ruling circles decided to justify their country's independence through the denial of its past"

Putin simply minds that in contemporary conditions, some circles in Ukraine today call the Soviet rule of the country "occupation" (by the way, the Soviet rule was assessed similar by the Baltic states – Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia). With that, according to Putin, radicals and Neo-Nazis "robbed the people of Ukraine" and are "ready to sell their motherland for the sake of preserving their capital".

Today, the term "Nazi" in Russia is a term used for all those who are against the current Russian government and the rule of Putin. Zelenskyy is a hurdle on the road of such rhetoric.

Disinformation for personal gains and restriction of freedom

In the area of disinformation, one can encounter infantile statements such as "Zelenskyy is stealing Easter eggs". More serious disinformation, with no arguments whatsoever, are those according to which he is abusing the financial assistance of the Allies for personal gains. To that end, a disinformation appeared about an imaginary billboard (erected in Milan) falsely claiming that it was used for fund-raising for his personal gain.

The suspicion that Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his accompanied staff are becoming wealthy illegally, which Kremlin started to spread after the invasion (as though corruption never existed previously in Ukraine), are frequently disseminated to discredit Zelenskyy himself, thereby entire Ukraine in the eyes of the international community, for the purpose of causing a rift between the West and Ukraine and discontinuation or at least a reduction of the military and all other aid that Ukraine's defence depends on. The only problem is that Russia is consistently assessed as more corrupt than Ukraine according to the Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International.

Intentional attacks about Zelenskyy banning the opposition, oppressing the Church, and refusing to hold elections are also frequent claims, including that he prosecutes Christians from Ukraine, as well as leading a religious war on another front.

On 2 December 2022, the Ukrainian Government presented a law that prohibits the operation of churches affiliated with Russia to prevent Moscow from "weakening Ukraine within". Such a decisions was not well received by Russia. The former Russian President, **Dmitry Medvedev**, described the authorities in Kyiv as "Satanists" and "enemies of God and faith".

Ukraine consists of 72 percent of Orthodox Christians, 9 percent Catholics, 2 percent Protestants and others. Ukraine has two Orthodox churches – the Independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP). What is important to note about the UOC-MP is that it supports the occupation of Ukraine.

In some of the churches of UOC-MP, during the current invasion, the Kremlin's propaganda is spread. There were even unpleasant events when a Ukrainian soldier was attacked by a member of the priesthood after which the local population, having protested in front of the church in the town of Khmelnytskyi, demanded the pro-Russian priest to be removed, and the church to be taken over by the UOC.

Concerning Zelenskyy – especially lately – disinformation is spread about him wanting to hold onto the presidential power for himself thereby not allowing elections to take place. Fabricated words on this topic are attributed to him as to present him as an undemocratic person who wants to govern without elections.

In Ukraine, however, martial law was introduced throughout the entire country as a result of the Russian invasion. The Ukrainian Constitution does not provide for organizing elections in martial law conditions. Until the war lasts, the state of emergency will also last. In such conditions, elections are not possible. Regarding this kind of disinformation, statements surfaced claiming that he restricted the participation in the democratic process by banning the opposition. Such attacks, however, have twisted context. It is true that the Ukrainian Government [suspended the operation](#) of 11 political parties, and all were relatively small and marginal parties, but that happened after the Russian invasion and the parties were pro-Russian or parties that openly supported the Russian aggression.

* * *

#UkraineFacts, fact-checking service in Ukraine, up to date (July 2023) has fact-checked the truthfulness of 3,018 statements given by Zelenskyy. Most of them are attacks of the Ukrainian President and an enormous number of them are untrue. And this number will not stop increasing. Such a persistent and comprehensive propaganda attack demands, by rule, serious infrastructure that can only be secured by a state apparatus that already has the experience in executing discrediting and spreading disinformation on a global level – state apparatus such as that of the Kremlin.

Ukrainian President is the connection tissue that unites all national defense efforts against Russian aggression on all fronts. Zelenskyy is most deserving of the high morale of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, of diplomatic, military, and financial support enjoyed by Ukraine and received from the whole democratic world, as well as of the support of his politics provided by the citizens of Ukraine. The country's efforts to defend itself from the aggression would have been completely different if Ukraine had been led by another leader. Because of that Kremlin will continue to do all that is within its power to ruin – even destroy – his credibility thereby diminishing and minimizing Ukraine's international support. That is especially true if the situation on the front continues to develop unfavorably for the Kremlin.



Zelenskyy lays fresh flowers in front of the memorial to the fallen fighters in the war with Russia at the commemoration of the Day of Defenders of Ukraine, October 1, 2023.

Source: Website of the Presidential Cabinet of Ukraine (President.gov.ua),
CC BY 4.0, public domain

Derogatory Attacks that Zelenskyy Banned the Opposition, Oppresses the Church and Refuses to Organize Elections

The post accuses Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of oppressing the media, language, and Church and that he does not want to organize elections. The truth, however, is that the Ukrainian Constitution bans organizing elections in martial law. When one claims that Zelenskyy *"has banned the opposition"*, he/she is omitting to say that the opposition is connected with Russia and that those parties are forbidden in Ukraine due to the Russian military invasion of Ukraine. In addition, a well-known fact is that in the Ukrainian Church of Moscow Patriarchate, Russian propaganda **is being spread**, activities of hostile services **are being covered** and Russian agents are being recruited

Author: [Truthmeter's Team](#), 05 July 2023

We are fact-checking a [post](#) published on the social network [Facebook](#) claiming the following:

He banned the opposition, oppressed the Church, monopolized the media, abused the language, imprisoned the journalists

Now he refuses to hold elections.

This is the freedom for which NATO bankrupted Europe; this is Zelenskyy.

When one claims that Zelenskyy has *"banned the opposition"*, he/she is omitting to say that the opposition is connected with Russia and that the reason why political parties connected and linked to Russia were forbidden in Ukraine was that Russia undertook an aggressive invasion in Ukraine with numerous casualties, including civilians. As reported by [The Guardian](#), political parties were not banned because they were oppositional, but because they were linked to Russia, which in case of a military invasion can be treated as national security or even protection. Political parties were not prohibited in peaceful conditions, but in conditions of war when national security is the primary aim of Ukraine. The National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine convened and decided to ban the political activities of these parties. Most of the parties affected were small, but one of them, the Opposition Platform for Life, **has 44 seats** in the 450-seat Ukrainian Parliament.

The activities of those politicians aimed at division or collusion will not succeed, but will receive harsh response. Therefore, the National Security and Defence Council, given the full-scale war unleashed by Russia and the political ties that a number of political structures have with this State, to suspend any activity of a number of political parties for the period of martial law, **stated Zelenskyy** in March 2022.

The Opposition Platform for Life, Ukraine's biggest opposition party, is led by **Viktor Medvedchuk**, a pro-Moscow oligarch with close ties to Russian President **Vladimir Putin**. In 2021, the Ukrainian authorities charged Medvedchuk, a longtime ally of Putin (believed to be the godfather of Medvedchuk's daughter) with treason and placed the oligarch under house arrest, a move that angered the Kremlin. Later on, Ukraine **reported** that Medvedchuk escaped house arrest three days after Russia started its invasion of Ukraine, only to be re-arrested and finally **swapped for 215 Ukrainian soldiers** imprisoned by Russia during the aggression in Ukraine.

The list of banned parties also included the Nashi (Ours) party, led by **Yevhen Murayev**, as well as several smaller parties not represented in the Parliament. Before the start of the war, British intelligence claimed that Russia was considering installing Murayev to lead a Kremlin-controlled puppet government in Kyiv, claims that Murayev strongly denied.

Due to these circumstances, one cannot claim that Zelenskyy banned the opposition because it was an opposition. These political parties were banned because they were suspected for being controlled or linked to a country that performed a military invasion in Ukraine. Their political activities will be frozen until the military invasion lasts.

The post fact-checked claims that Zelenskyy oppressed the Church. Zelenskyy, however, accused the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church, of undermining Ukrainian unity and cooperating with Moscow. Again, the military invasion performed by Russia in Ukraine is the reason why cooperation with Russia cannot be tolerated in the period of martial law conditions to protect national security.

We will continue this movement. We will not allow the terrorist state any opportunity to manipulate the spiritual life of our people, to destroy Ukrainian shrines or to steal values from them, *said* Zelenskyy.

Patriarch Kirill openly [supports the military](#) invasion of Russia in Ukraine. As previously reported, Zelenskyy is [defending Ukraine](#) from Russian propaganda in churches.



Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressing the Verkhovna Rada on the occasion of the Day of the Constitution of Ukraine - June 28, 2023

Source: Website of the Presidential Cabinet of Ukraine ([President.gov.ua](https://www.president.gov.ua)), CC BY 4.0, public domain

Professor **Viktor Yelensky** said to CNN that for more than 30 years the leadership of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate has been *"poisoning people with the idea of the Russian world"*. He defends the church searches performed by the Security Services as part of the suppression of Islamic extremism after 11th September 2001.

Spravdi, the Centre for Strategic Communication under the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine revealed that the Ukrainian Church of the Moscow Patriarchate [is spreading](#) Russian propaganda, [covering activities](#) of hostile services and recruiting Russian agents. Zelenskyy is not prosecuting Orthodox Christians in Ukraine, nor is he oppressing the Church. The [majority population of Ukraine is Orthodox](#) and Orthodox churches will be there.

Regarding the claim that Zelenskyy is monopolizing the media, one needs to mention that in 2021, upon his request, three television outlets were sanctioned: News One, Channel 112 and ZIK belonging to **Taras Kozak**, who is believed to be the front for **Viktor Medvedchuk**. The sanctions were applied in compliance with the 2014 Law that provides for Ukrainian subjects to be sanctioned if they pose a threat to Ukrainian national interests. These were the channels broadcasting Kremlin propaganda.

Mass media in Ukraine are owned by the State and corporations that rely on advertisements, subscriptions and sales. Ukrainian Constitution guarantees freedom of speech. The Ukrainian media system is in the process of transition. As specified by [BBC](#), in the beginning of the military invasion, the media in Ukraine stood on the patriot side.

BBC [stresses](#) that a large number of media exist in Ukraine, hence it could not be true that Zelenskyy is monopolizing the media.

Concerning the fact that Zelenskyy was abusing the Russian language, [fact-checkers from EUvsDisinfo](#), claim that that **is not true**:

The claim about the language rights of Russians in Ukraine being violated is false. On 25 April 2019, the Verkhovna Rada passed the law on ensuring the functioning of the Ukrainian language as a state language. Russian, as well as other languages, can be used in private communication, religious ceremonies, press, book publishing, etc. The law also allows the use of other languages in the healthcare system and law enforcement.

According to [EUvsDisinfo](#), 27 percent of the Ukrainian citizens use the Russian language in their everyday communication, the Ukrainian language is preferred by 51 percent of the Ukrainians, while 21 percent are bilingual.

Regarding the claim in the post that Zelenskyy refused to hold elections, this is disinformation because the [Ukrainian Constitution](#) does not provide for elections in a period of martial law conditions!

Martial law was declared in February 2022 since Russia attacked Ukraine. Therefore, it is not Zelenskyy that does not allow holding elections in a period of martial law conditions, but the [Ukrainian Constitution](#).

The part of the post specifying that NATO bankrupted Europe for such freedom is expressed irony. NATO, however, is not in direct military conflict with Russia, [but simply defending the right of Ukraine to defend itself from military aggression](#). Therefore, NATO's actions are defensive, and protective, designed not to provoke, but to prevent conflict. The Alliance is responsible for making sure that the war does not escalate beyond Ukraine, which would be even more disastrous and dangerous.

Due to all the above-noted facts, the fact-checked post is assessed as *untrue*.



Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressing the Verkhovna Rada on the occasion of the Day of the Constitution of Ukraine - June 28, 2023

Source: Website of the Presidential Cabinet of Ukraine ([President.gov.ua](https://www.president.gov.ua)),
CC BY 4.0, public domain

It Is Not True that Ukrainian Media Doctored Recordings of Zelenskyy's UN Address

The post claiming that Ukrainian media with manipulation of a video wanted to present greater attendance of Zelenskyy's address at the UN is not true. More precisely, the original video of the Ukrainian media was doctored by a well-known Russian propagandist

Author: [Truthmeter's Team](#), 02 October 2023

We are fact-checking [a post](#) on the social network Facebook (screenshot [here](#)) sharing a video from the address of Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in the UN, claiming the following:

21.09.2023 Ukrainian media edited Zelenskyy's address at the UN so that it would look like there was greater audience. They forgot to fix Zelenskyy himself sitting in the audience. See it at 0:14.

When one watches the video, it can be easily seen that it shows Zelenskyy talking, but at the 14th second, while he is still talking, one can also see him sitting in the audience.

It is disinformation that Ukrainian media wanted to present, by doctoring the video, greater attendance of Zelenskyy's address at the UN than the real number and that they were "caught", by publishing inserts of Zelenskyy himself sitting in the audience during his address. The Ukrainian media have denied this and there is an entire history of how the disinformation came about and spread as part of the Russian propaganda.

More specifically, one of the Ukrainian media, whose logo was also used in the post with the video fact-checked, published a [rebuttal with the headline](#): "Announcement by Edini Novini about the marathon of fake information about the changes in the live broadcast of the address of the President of Ukraine at the UN".



The President of Ukraine during his address at the 78th Session of United Nations General Assembly, 19 September 2023

Source: (UN Photo/Mark Garten)

Manipulation by the pro-Russian propagandist Anatoly Shariy

The rebuttal states that on 21st September pro-Russian sources started to spread false information about alleged changes in the address of Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the UN.

The Edini Novini team replied that this information was false and appealed to journalist associations and authors of digital content to stand up against this Russian fake narrative. The source of the fake video was the pro-Russian propagandist **Anatoly Shariy** who published the altered video on his Telegram channel. Russian sites NTV, Reporter, Channel 1, Federal Press and other similar sources published the same video, thereby distorting the truth in their notorious style. Unfortunately, the dissemination of this disinformation was supported by some Ukrainian and European sources as well, including news agencies, Telegram channels, and individuals. All interested parties can assure themselves that the information and the video itself is untrue. Another indicator of the false video is the inconsistency of the visual markers. “Marathon channels use additional graphic elements, such as Geo-header, that do not exist on the fake video. In addition, during the broadcast, the President’s address was simultaneously translated by another presenter, something that can be easily checked”, [claims Media 1 plus 1](#).

The fake video used in the fragment of Zelenskyy’s address is published on the YouTube channel of [TSN](#), however, the specific video fragment does not contain another recording of the hall except the President’s address from the floor.

Please bear in mind that the original video does not have the graphic logo of 1+1 Marathon, which was added in the upper right corner by the authors of the fake video, states the rebuttal. This is not the first time Russian or pro-Russian sources to used branding of popular Ukrainian television channels to manipulate the audience. The editors of Edini Novini are demanding an inquiry of the reasons for spreading fake news in the Ukrainian information area and draw their attention to the lack of fact-checking in some Ukrainian media, Telegram channels and individuals. It is important for the authors of such posts to publicly acknowledge their failure and inform their readers that the published information was false, adds [the announcement of Media 1 plus 1](#).

The Massive Communication Institute published that propagandists were falsely claiming that the video from Zelenskyy’s address was altered in the live broadcast of Ukrainian media. Due to all of the above-noted facts we assess the fact-checked post as untrue.



Volodymyr Zelenskyy during his visit to Kherson and Mykolaiv regions, October 20, 2023.

Source: Website of the Presidential Cabinet of Ukraine ([President.gov.ua](#)), CC BY 4.0, public domain



Volodymyr Zelenskyy during his visit to the Vatican and Italy met Pope Francis, May 13, 2023
Source: Website of the Presidential Cabinet of Ukraine ([President.gov.ua](https://www.president.gov.ua)), CC BY 4.0, public domain

History Doesn't Repeat Itself In This Case, as Zelenskyy Is Not Hitler

It is not the first time to see narratives on social networks about Ukraine being fascist and Nazi country, that Nazism (Neo-Nazism) is being glorified there and that Zelenskyy himself is a Nazi. All this is done to justify the Russian aggression on a sovereign country going on for more than a year

Author: [Truthmeter's Team](#), 20 May 2023

We are fact-checking [a post on Facebook](#) (screenshot [here](#)) comparing the Nazi leader of Germany, **Adolf Hitler**, with the President of Ukraine, **Volodymyr Zelenskyy**, and emphasizing that “history repeats itself”.

The post is sharing two photographs. [One](#) dates back to 1933, showing Adolf Hitler greeting **Alberto Vassallo di Torregrossa**, the Apostolic Nuncio to Bavaria on the occasion of the Day of German Art in Munich.

[The second](#) photograph is of the recent meeting between Zelenskyy and Pope Francis.

Claiming that history repeats itself and drawing a parallel between Zelenskyy and Hitler is a classical spin in Russian propagandists' spirit.

Conspiracy theorists and Russian propagandists are constantly trying to portray the Ukrainian President as a Neo Nazi and Nazi supporter, although Zelenskyy is a Jew and three his grandfather's brothers were killed in the [Holocaust](#).

On one occasion, commenting on these accusations, [Zelenskyy stated](#) that Moscow “**following the same concept of Goebbels and they are using the same methodology**” in an attempt to justify the war against Ukraine.

It is not the first time to see narratives on social networks about Ukraine being a fascist and Nazi country, that Nazism (Neo-Nazism) is being glorified there and that Zelenskyy himself is a Nazi. All this is done to justify the Russian aggression on a sovereign country going on for more than a year.

Truthmeter covered this topic when Zelenskyy – manipulatively and without any ground – [was compared](#) with Hitler. Also, [a photograph](#) was being shared, in which, allegedly, he is holding a football shirt with a swastika. AFP fact-checkers proved that the photograph shared was digitally altered and that the image of Zelenskyy was an edited photo.

A photograph that looked as if taken at a wedding with the newlyweds simulating a Nazi salute, with the Ukrainian flag in the background, [was also shared](#). But the fact-check of the photograph has shown that the photograph with wedding guests simulating a Nazi salute was not taken in Ukraine, but in Russia.

The “Neo-Nazi” narrative [was initiated](#) at the end of February 2022 by Russian President **Vladimir Putin**, who said that the Ukrainian leadership consists of Neo-Nazis. Starting his “special operation” in Ukraine, Putin, inter alia, found justification in the act of “denazification” of this country.

Using the term “denazification” in connection with Ukraine is completely wrong, [deems](#) the political scientist **Andreas Umland** from the Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies (SCEEUS). He stresses the fact that the current Ukrainian President is a Jew who won against a non-Jew candidate on the last elections.

Umland reminds that extreme right-wing forces are present in Ukraine, but they are weak compared to those in other European countries.

On the last elections, the extreme right wing United Front won only 2,15 percent of the votes, Umland [points out](#).

A military unit with an extreme right-wing background, active in the beginning of the conflict in Donbas, was also criticized. That group, however – according to Umland – was integrated within the current units of the National Guard. Experts conclude that the extreme right-wing groups in Ukraine are of minor significance.

As a reminder, Ukraine [banned the promotion of Nazism](#) back in 2015.

Hence, the conclusion is that there is no connection between Zelenskyy and Hitler and under no circumstances can he be compared with the German Nazi leader. Such comparisons are part of the Russian propaganda imposed by the leadership of Russia to justify the military aggression against Ukraine. Therefore, we assess the post fact-checked as *a manipulation that abuses the context* in which the shared photographs were taken, for the purpose of sending out a wrong and false message.

Chapter 4: Anti-vaxxers - from COVID-19 to fighting the entire health system

The COVID-19 pandemic came at the right time to bolster the anti-vaxxer “cause.” Very unfortunate. Before the start of the pandemic, anti-vaxxers were not just a nascent group or individuals, but already started to build their image on social media, although still on the margins, and even more so on the margins of society. But spurred on by foreign anti-vaxxers, the existing pseudo-scientific literature, and influenced by various conspiracy theories about the alleged disgorgement of pharmaceutical companies from vaccines, they were at the right place at the right time. Even before the pandemic, letters with pseudo-legal content were sent to principals and teachers in schools across the country that contained threats of lawsuits if children were systematically sent for vaccinations, containing long lists of legal consequences to scare the educational staff into taking no action in that direction.

The pandemic, on the other hand, strengthened this “movement” even more, encouraged by closed anti-vaxxer groups on social media, where like-minded people fueled each other’s anti-vaccine views so that the “constructed” views could then come to light, i.e. before all those users who wanted to hear such views. But it was now in an atmosphere of fear of the unknown and after all sorts of conspiracy theories spread across the internet, scaring the public that vaccines were invented to make billions and wipe out most of humanity. All this has contributed to the surge of disinformation against vaccines, but also to the heating up of the battle against them.

Anti-vaccine disinformation resurrects forgotten diseases

Anti-vaccine disinformation has undermined immunization and has severely damaged public health. Data regarding children's immunization is concerning – the recommended coverage of over 95 percent has not been achieved for any vaccine in the country. Disinformation narratives continue to play with the health of citizens, there are stories that vaccines cause “turbo cancer”, even in people who are not vaccinated at all. Truthmeter notes a tendency of demonizing the vaccinated, all to scare the unvaccinated and discourage them from protecting their health through immunization

Author: Miroslava Simonovska, 26 October 2023



Photo: Myriams-Fotos Pixabay

Each year, fall is a symbol of an increasing number of upper respiratory infections. Cases of colds, flu, and COVID-19 are filling the outpatient clinics of family doctors. The Ministry of Health began to call on the risk groups of citizens to be vaccinated against seasonal flu and procured a satisfactory number of doses - 60 thousand, which are intended for the risk groups of citizens: persons older than 65, chronically ill persons, health workers, pregnant women, as well as children between 6 months to 5 years old.

During 2022, no vaccination-related deaths were registered in the Republic of North Macedonia, nor more serious life-threatening conditions related to vaccine application, [reports](#) the Institute of Public Health.

All reports of side effects related to vaccines from the regular vaccine schedule were related to side effects that the vaccine manufacturers had predicted. It is an extremely small number of cases and all ended with a positive outcome.

In 2022, according to information that Truthmeter received from the Institute of Public Health, there were 17 reports of post-vaccination complications of the BSG, HEP, rotavirus vaccine, and MMR vaccine. In seven cases, for which information about the outcome has been received, the treatment resulted in healing without consequences of the unwanted reactions.

Table 1.

Number of post-vaccination complication reports by type of vaccine (N=12), 2022 (on Form No. 3)

Vaccination	Number of reports	Revaccination	Number of reports
BGC	1	DTaP-IPV (Tetraxim)	3
Hep/HiB/DTP/IPV (Hexaxim)	1	/	
Rotateq	3	/	
MMR Vaxpro	4	/	

Number of reports of vaccine adverse reactions (N=12) through the National Center for Pharmacovigilance of MALMED

Vaccination	Number of reports	Revaccination	Number of reports
Hep/HiB/DTP/IPV (Hexaxim)	2	/	
Rotateq	1	/	
MMR Vaxpro	2	/	

Skopje Health Center told Truthmeter that despite the low interest that citizens show in COVID-19 vaccines during this period, they have COVID-19 vaccines available at the vaccination point in the Bit Pazar Polyclinic. While interest in vaccination against COVID in the country is declining, disinformation about these vaccines continues to be shared on the Internet with undiminished intensity.

Lies about COVID-vaccine diseases

The fact that majority of the citizens in the country did not submit to this disinformation and got vaccinated with one, two, or three doses, gave a new idea to the anti-vaxxers: They started inventing diseases from which the vaccinated allegedly started to suffer. This has been the focus of anti-vaccine disinformation in the country for the past six months. The prerequisites for this disinformation were created by the fact that there were already citizens who received the COVID-19 vaccine.

Fear and panic were spread based on irrationality and unsubstantiated claims to demotivate other citizens from following suit and protecting themselves. Such were the claims that a large number of citizens worldwide got so-called “turbo cancer” from the COVID-19 vaccines. This term does not exist in medicine, but has been used in disinformation narratives to describe the symptoms of a rapidly progressing cancer.

In one of the [examples](#) of disinformation on this topic, it was claimed that the cancer that developed in a family member who was not vaccinated against COVID-19 was a consequence of the vaccination of the rest of the family. With such sweeping statements, an attempt was made to instill fear and panic among a large part of the vaccinated citizens in the country. It is an unethical and dangerous practice for public health to play with the feelings of families with cancer patients, based on non-medical manipulations.

It is known worldwide that the COVID-19 pandemic left most oncology departments and clinics without diagnostic appointments, which contributed to an increased number of cancer patients in the years following the end of the pandemic. Additionally, data from the World Health Organization [indicates](#) that the number of cancer patients is expected to increase in the following decades.

Large-scale [studies have shown](#) that cancer patients [are at a high risk](#) of complications from COVID-19, which is why vaccination was recommended for them.

Truthometer has noted that in the past six months, vaccinated citizens in the country have been the target of disinformation. They are used as both a trump card and a target, all to discourage the unvaccinated from getting immunized. How? By spreading lies that the COVID-19 vaccine has harmed the health of the persons who received it.

The basic disinformation was that the COVID-19 vaccines caused AIDS in those who received them. In order to push such lies, official state institutions were abused through malicious interpretation of their analysis and statistics. [For instance](#), information was shared that “the Canadian government announced that 74 percent of Canadians vaccinated with three doses of COVID-19 vaccines now have vaccine-induced AIDS.” To push this malicious fabrication, anti-vaxxers in the country invented non-existent medical conditions for “this AIDS”, which they called “VAIDS”. By completely misrepresenting how vaccines and the immune system work, panic spread that the vaccinated get AIDS and cancer, and as we can see from the following example, it went a step further, and extremely malicious [irrationalities](#) were shared, such as that unvaccinated family members get cancer from the vaccinated ones.

In the 2021 [analyses](#), in which Truthometer tracked vaccine disinformation, it was evident that precisely those falsehoods claiming that vaccines cause all kinds of disease and death were widely spread. Cancer was among those diseases that were falsely attributed to the vaccine. The Ministry of Health states on its vaccine facts and myths page that COVID-19 vaccines [cannot](#) cause cancer.

Disinformation that vaccines cause miscarriage

In the past six months, we have seen disinformation targeting women and their reproductive rights. So, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) was misused [to falsely claim that](#) it had issued a warning that COVID-19 vaccines cause miscarriage. This could not be further from the truth. [The EMA encourages](#) pregnant women to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and has not stated that vaccines cause infertility in women.

The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention [claims](#) that scientists have not discovered an increased risk of miscarriage among women who received the mRNA vaccine in early pregnancy or before becoming pregnant. An analysis from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention from August 2021 examined 2,500 pregnant women who received an mRNA vaccine before the twentieth week of pregnancy. The researchers discovered a miscarriage rate of 13 percent, which is similar to the [expected miscarriage rate](#) among the general population.

It is interesting to note that even before the COVID-19 vaccinations started in North Macedonia, anti-vaxxers spread disinformation that vaccines caused infertility. Even at times when there were no clinical studies on the subject, this disinformation was served to users on social media. Now, unlike then, clinical studies show that vaccines do not cause infertility or problems with the fetus.

The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention says that those who want to become pregnant in the future [can get](#) vaccinated because vaccines do not cause infertility. They do not contain a live virus and can neither infect the mother, nor the baby with COVID-19.

Australia's Government also [officially claims](#) that COVID-19 vaccines do not cause sterility.

Disinformation about children and the regular immunization schedule

Two movements are constantly “fighting” each other about children’s immunization, i.e. the regular immunization schedule. On one side we have medical professionals and science, and on the other side we have anti-vaxxers who abuse misrepresented or retracted and unreviewed studies by the medical community to claim that unvaccinated children are healthier than the vaccinated. This can negatively affect immunization trends in the country, given that the parent decides whether the child gets vaccinated. Thus, if the parent falls under the influence of fabrications and half-baked information, then collective immunity in the country is endangered, precisely when it comes to diseases that were considered eradicated and under control thanks to vaccines. In the past six months, we have noticed the [narrative](#) that vaccinated children fall ill and develop complications, unlike unvaccinated ones. Such disinformation spread around the country in a sensitive period when the recommended [coverage of over 95 percent](#) has not been achieved for any vaccine, which creates the risk of the emergence of already forgotten diseases. The facts show that many diseases are kept under control in countries with high vaccination coverage.

Disinformation about children’s immunization and its alleged harm is based on an unfortunate study supported by anti-vaccine organizations, which has methodological weaknesses, a non-representative sample, and a study based on subjective perceptions, not mathematical and statistically precise methods. During the distribution of disinformation about children’s immunization, the [lie](#) that vaccinated children have a greater chance of developing autism by 4.2 times was also distributed. Contrary to such claims, studies with a representative [sample of 650,000 children](#) do not show an association between vaccines and autism.

Alexandra Grozdanova, Ph.D., national immunization coordinator, recently stated that when a measles epidemic occurred in the country in 2019, due to the insufficient coverage of vaccinated children and the consequential decline in collective immunity, the state had to undertake a series of activities and measures. Among these was the immunization of 42,000 children under the age of 14 with the MMR vaccine. None of them developed autism.

When coverage is reduced, the risk of measles outbreaks is extremely high, *said* Dr. Grozdanova.

Thanks to immunization, no new measles epidemics occurred during this period.

It is extremely important to explain to parents that this vaccine has been received for decades, *she underlined*, stressing that immunization is the right decision to protect children from the disease.

The American Academy of Pediatrics prepared a list of studies relevant to vaccine safety.

Lies that demonize medical professionals who promote immunization

There is no avoiding the fact that since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, there has been an anti-vaxxer camp on social media that opposes evidence-based medicine, doctors, nurses, members of official medical agencies, etc. In the past six months, to dissuade citizens from getting vaccinated, it was also stated that those medical professionals who promoted vaccines would be tried for crimes against humanity. It is pure fiction. No one will be tried for crimes against humanity, neither for the COVID-19 vaccine, nor any other vaccine. The vaccine is received with the patient's consent signed before vaccination, which lists the possible side effects, which are mostly mild and pass quickly.

The demonization of medical science embodied in medical professionals is a tactic to mislead the masses into thinking that they are contributing to the detriment of humanity. This creates the danger of confusion and fragile trust in health authorities, in doctors and results in rejection of their recommendations, which can cost lives.

It is important to note that North Macedonia follows the recommendations of the WHO, the FDA, and the EMA, and accepts vaccines that are approved by the world's relevant medical organizations.

It is up to the individual whether to get vaccinated against COVID-19 or not. However, there is a mandatory immunization schedule for children that is regulated by the Law on the Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases. Targeting parents with disinformation about vaccines, which reduces vaccination coverage, is a serious risk to the public health of the entire population.

WHO data shows that 2 to 3 million children's lives are saved worldwide with immunization each year. Thanks to immunization, many infectious diseases, that represented a significant health problem in the past because they caused high mortality in children and adults or caused complications and disability, have been eliminated or brought under control and reduced to individual cases today.

Undoubtedly, immunization is one of the greatest achievements in the history of medicine and the safest, most efficient, and most economically justified preventive measure, which directly contributes to the reduction of the comorbidity and mortality of infectious diseases.

Therefore, when making decisions about vaccinating children, parents should be exposed to [evidence-based medicine](#), instead of being targeted with half-baked information and disinformation that are the enemies of public health. Of course, in the battle for accurate information, the main barrier and shield against disinformation is the media, most of which are mostly inclined towards evidence-based medicine.

The EMA has not issued a warning that COVID-19 vaccines cause miscarriages

The EMA stated it had found evidence showing heavy menstrual bleeding could occur after COVID-19 vaccination, concluding there was a “reasonable possibility” the vaccines could cause it, but never recommended that mRNA vaccines were linked to pregnancy complications, i.e. with fertility or abortion

Author: [Truthmeter's Team](#), 09 June 2023

Disinformation that coronavirus vaccines negatively affect female fertility and cause abortion, which was spread during the COVID-19 pandemic, still circulates on social media. So, this [post](#) on [Facebook](#) claims that the European Union has issued an emergency warning that COVID-19 vaccines are harmful to pregnant women and their fetuses. This is not true.

All women who have been vaccinated with the mRNA vaccine and have problems with infertility, spontaneous abortions...go to Crpnatit, Filipche, Petlichkovski, Mehmedovic, Karadzovski, the journalists...and all those who convinced you to get vaccinated, why don't you go ask them some questions!!!, says the post that we are analyzing.

The post also shares an [article](#) that references a text published by the portal [The Exposé](#), which has been spreading [disinformation](#) narratives throughout the pandemic.

Among other things, the article states:

As reported by [expose-news.com](#), on October 28, 2022, the EMA published new guidelines stating that “heavy menstrual bleeding should be added as an adverse effect of the product with unknown frequency for mRNA vaccines against COVID-19 Comirnaty (Pfizer) and Spikevax (Moderna). The EMA says heavy menstrual bleeding can be defined as “bleeding characterized by increased volume and/or duration that interferes with a person’s physical, social, emotional and material quality of life,” says the [article](#).



Photo: Cindy Parks Pixabay

Contrary to this post which claims that the EMA “admitted” that the vaccine negatively affects female fertility, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) encourages pregnant women to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and has not said that vaccines cause female infertility.

The claim made in the post, and in the article shared, is based on [guidelines](#) from the EMA’s Pharmacovigilance Risk Assessment Committee (PRAC), issued in October 2022, which [recommend](#) updating the possible side effects listed in the product information for Moderna-BioNTech and Pfizer’s COVID vaccines based on reports of heavy menstrual periods during clinical trials, in the real world and medical literature.

The EMA then stated that it had [found](#) evidence to show that heavy menstrual bleeding can occur after COVID-19 vaccination, concluding that there was a “reasonable possibility” that the vaccines could cause it.

However, the EMA spokesperson said that claims that the EMA advises pregnant women not to receive COVID-19 vaccines because they would cause infertility are false and a misinterpretation of the Committee’s decision, [Reuters](#) reports.

The meeting in October 2022, which led to the decision of EMA’s Committee, concluded that “*there is no evidence to suggest that the menstrual disturbances experienced by some people have any effect on reproduction and fertility*”.

On the contrary, the EMA encourages pregnant women to get [vaccinated](#).

Victoria Male, a specialist in Immunology and Pregnancy and Senior Lecturer at Imperial College in London, [said](#) heavy periods after vaccination were not associated with reduced fertility, and that evidence showed these menstrual changes were temporary.

A [study](#), referred to by the Mail and published online in April 2023, compared menstrual flow in vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals, showing that approximately 4 percent of people experience a heavier period immediately after vaccination, with periods returning to normal the following month.

The Collegium of the University Clinic for Gynecology and Obstetrics Skopje, the Committee for Safe Motherhood of RNM, and the Association of Perinatal Medicine of RNM issued recommendations regarding COVID-19 vaccines during pregnancy. The recommendations that [Truthmeter has published](#) are based on studies from globally relevant medical institutes that are based on research that includes a serious number of respondents from this category of the female population.

According to these recommendations, COVID-19 vaccination is recommended in pregnancy, just like in the rest of the population. Vaccination is the best way to protect against the harmful effects of COVID-19 during pregnancy, both for the mother and her baby, including premature birth and the newborn’s stay in the intensive care unit.

And, the Commission for the Protection of the Population from Infectious Diseases [recommended](#) that pregnant women be vaccinated and return to work. Also, the Public Health Institute has [officially recommended](#) on its website that pregnant women be vaccinated.

[Truthmeter](#) has previously debunked news that claimed that the COVID-19 vaccine was harmful to pregnant women.

From everything stated above, we can conclude that the EMA did not issue a warning that COVID-19 vaccines are harmful to pregnant women and that they cause miscarriage. In fact, the EMA encourages pregnant women to get vaccinated.

Based on that, we rate the post as *untrue*.

The Canadian government has failed to acknowledge that 74 % of triple-vaccinated people now have “VAIDS”

Some people falsely claim that VAIDS is a weakening of the immune system due to COVID-19 vaccines, similarly to people with untreated HIV or AIDS who have severely compromised immune systems. Official Canadian data does not link the disease to vaccination at all, nor do they measure the level of immunity developed by vaccination. The argument cited in the Facebook post, allegedly based on Canadian government data, comes from the anti-vaxxer website The Exposé, which relies on an interpretation of data that is wildly inaccurate. Several world fact-checkers have already written that VAIDS, i.e. the immunodeficiency syndrome acquired with the COVID vaccine, is not a real syndrome

Author: [Truthmeter's Team](#), 09 October 2023

On social media, disinformation is used to spread panic that immunity is drastically lowering because of COVID-19 vaccines and that a huge number of those who have been vaccinated manifest an AIDS-like condition. In the same context, a [post on Facebook](#) claims that data from the Canadian government shows that 74 percent of people triple-vaccinated against COVID-19 developed AIDS. This is not true. At no point do these documents link disease to vaccination, nor measure the level of immunity acquired by vaccines.

Official data released by the Canadian government shows that 74% of triple-vaccinated Canadians now have Vaccine Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (VAIDS). Yes, it's AIDS caused by the vaccine, *the post says*.

It is incorrect that reports from the Canadian Government show that 74 percent of people who took three doses of the COVID-19 vaccine lost their immunity and developed VAIDS, that is, they now have AIDS, as reported on social media. The documents cited in the disinformation do not mention AIDS as a consequence of the COVID-19 immunization.



Photo: MasterTux Pixabay

VAIDS is not a real medical condition, but disinformation about VAIDS is becoming widespread on social media. Some people **falsely claim** that VAIDS is a weakening of immune function due to COVID-19 vaccines, similar to people with untreated HIV or AIDS who have severely compromised immune systems.

Several world fact-checkers have already written that VAIDS, i.e. the syndrome of immunodeficiency acquired with the COVID-19 vaccine, **is not a real syndrome**.

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome or “AIDS” is a chronic condition that interferes with the body’s ability to fight infections and diseases. It is caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). But claims of vaccine-induced AIDS or “VAIDS” by online users **are unfounded**.

There is no such thing as “vaccine-induced Immunodeficiency syndrome”. It’s not a real syndrome, Donna Farber, Head of the Department of Surgical Sciences and professor of Microbiology and Immunology at Columbia University, told Reuters.

She explains why vaccines do not cause immunodeficiency.

They don’t deplete any immune cells, rather, they stimulate immune cells to activate, divide, and produce molecules as antibodies and soluble factors to recognize a pathogen and cleanse the body of it, Farber adds.

With billions of people around the world already vaccinated against COVID-19, **Dr. Grant McFadden**, director of the Biodesign Center for Immunotherapy, Vaccines and Virotherapy at Arizona State University, believes that if there was such a thing as VAIDS, it would have been discovered by now.

There is no counterpart to AIDS caused by the vaccine, McFadden told *The Associated Press*

The **search** through legitimate biomedical literature found no mention of vaccine-acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.

There is no such thing as VAIDS, says Dr. Matthew Lawrence, a pediatric infectious disease specialist and researcher at the University of Maryland, in an email to *USA Today*.

The argument cited in the Facebook post, allegedly based on Canadian Government data, comes from the anti-vaxxer website **The Exposé**, which relies on a wildly inaccurate interpretation of data.

In its article, the portal **misuses the data** on which it bases its central claim. It does so by conflating data on “vaccine effectiveness,” which inherently declines over time, with something the publication calls “immune system performance,” which suggests it represents the body’s overall immune system, even though this isn’t presented in the Canadian data.

The protection provided by the vaccine declines over time, but to associate this with a complete reduction in a person’s overall immune system is an abuse of the data. As the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) said in an email to fact-checking portal Lead Stories, the Exposé article “*clearly misrepresents how vaccines and the immune system work*”:

It is important to clarify that a person does not get AIDS because of a weakening of his immune system, but because of an infection with the **HIV virus**, which occurs through direct contact with the blood, semen, or vaginal fluids of an infected person. HIV infection causes an individual to gradually lose cellular immunity, making them susceptible to other diseases.

According to all facts stated, we conclude that the claim about the Canadian government admitting that 74 percent of the triple-vaccinated people now have “VAIDS” or AIDS, is not true.

Nanotechnology, the 5G network and graphene oxide have nothing to do with vaccines

The post presents a series of conspiracy theories and unconfirmed facts about vaccines and their composition. Vaccines do not contain graphene oxide, nor graphene oxide or any nanotechnology that will genetically modify humans to be controlled by 5G technology

Author: [Truthmeter's Team](#), 22 August 2023

The well-known anti-vaccine conspiracy theories that were especially relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic, when numerous untruths about the coronavirus vaccines, continue to spread on social media. In this [post](#) on [Facebook](#), several lies are presented about the composition of COVID-19 vaccines and their effect:

I think that the majority have no clue about what is going on and most of you think it's funny!!!
It's not funny at all, they changed the biological electromagnetic field of your body!!!
You're turning into a transceiver and spread around synthetic coated lipid "proteins" (containing nanographene)
YOU ARE NOW A GENETICALLY MODIFIED BEING!!! I think that you can no longer be considered a human being, but a human whip.
You no longer have a natural electromagnetic field around you, you no longer produce it!
Now you are just a CONDUCTOR for the system (network) they have set up all around...
The 5G network is a weapon and military technology that they have deployed to connect you to...
You are the ones spreading the infection now!
So, stay away from them unvaccinated ones!!!
If you don't believe it, and you have an electromagnetic field meter, feel free to bring it closer to the place where you received the "VACCINE" 📡!!!
You no longer have your natural electromagnetic field around you, now everything is synthetic (artificial)...., says the post we are reviewing, among other things.



Photo: [Gerd Altmann Pixabay](#)

The conspiracy theory that the COVID-19 pandemic was engineered to vaccinate people with genetically modified vaccines, which aim to chip them and then control them via the 5G network, is [nothing new](#) and [Truthmeter](#) has [written](#) many articles on this topic.

Claims that COVID-19 vaccines, which were made with mRNA technology, contain GMOs and nanotechnology are false. In COVID-19 vaccines, there is no mRNA transhumanist nanotechnology.

mRNA technology dates back to the 1990s, but it was incorporated into widely used vaccines for the first time during the pandemic. In the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, the mRNA is contained in a “lipid capsule,” or more precisely, a coating of fat, which is described as a nanoparticle. The prefix “nano” only means that it is small, not that it is nanotechnology.

The mRNA, ribonucleic acid, is a DNA-like molecule that carries encoded genetic material to the cell. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines use mRNA to carry genetic information about the coronavirus to the cells, teaching the immune system to identify and fight the COVID-19 infection.

Although the term “nano” is used to imply that nanotechnology is used to modify your RNA, this is completely false. The mRNA in the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines has no effect on human DNA or RNA and does not become an integral and permanent part of the cell, [says Cindy Prince](#), an Epidemiology professor at the University of Florida.

And, the USA Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [officially confirms](#) that the COVID-19 vaccine does not interact with our DNA in any way.

The mRNA never enters the nucleus of the cell where the genetic material is stored. The cell breaks it down and gets rid of the mRNA immediately after using the instructions.

UNICEF also claims that COVID-19 vaccines cannot change human DNA.

Vaccines called mRNA do not change or interact with your DNA in any way. mRNA vaccines instruct our cells to make a protein that triggers an immune response and then dissolves immediately. This builds immunity against the virus that causes COVID-19. That way, the mRNA (i.e. the instructions) from the vaccine doesn't enter the cell's nucleus at all, where our DNA is located, [says the UNICEF website](#).

Immunologists [call](#) the claims of microscopic elements that are assembled in the body of the vaccinated a pure fantasy and nonsense.

Keith Chappell, a professor at the University of Queensland, [says](#) that the claim of nanotechnology in vaccines is ridiculous.

mRNA vaccines contain nanoparticles, but they consist of lipids and cholesterol molecules. These are similar to microscopic dots of fat that carry the vaccine into the cells. These are definitely not electronic components and this makes no sense, [he said](#).

The 5G network mentioned in the post [has nothing to do](#) with vaccines. The conspiracy theory that the 5G network and some non-existent microchips in vaccines are a combined effort to control the population – where they go, what they do, what they buy, and even the idea that the non-existent chips will control the thought process of the vaccinated individual is just a ridiculous conspiracy theory, unsupported by facts, unfounded in reality. 5G technology in communications and immunization in healthcare are not related.

It was confirmed in early 2020 that the 5G network has no connection and no impact on the coronavirus. Almost all relevant institutions have come out with reports that there is no evidence that this network has an impact on the immune system and that it is harmful to human health.

In February 2020, [the World Health Organization \(WHO\) announced](#) that no impact of this network on public health had been detected.

And after much research, no adverse health effects caused by exposure to wireless technology have been observed so far, the WHO explained.

As for the claim that there is graphene oxide in COVID-19 vaccines, written in the post we are analyzing, it is also not true.

[Truthmeter](#) has also written on this topic several times.

Graphene oxide is a material that forms with the oxidation of graphene. Graphene is a single layer of graphite (the soft substance found in the tip of pencils). Graphene oxide has potential uses in electronics, optics, chemistry, energy storage, and biology, according to an [article](#) published in the *Frontiers of Physics Journal*, in January 2019.

The Associated Press [reported](#) that while there had been research into whether graphene oxide had been used in some vaccines (in amounts that would not be toxic to humans), the material was not listed as an ingredient in the Pfizer vaccine or any other vaccine.

It's not listed as an ingredient and there's no way it's there, said *Allen Myerson*, Professor of Chemical Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Even on [the official immunization website in the country](#), where the ingredients of all vaccines administered in North Macedonia are listed, it is stated that there is no graphene oxide in their composition.

From all this, we can conclude that the post presents a series of conspiracy theories and unconfirmed facts regarding vaccines and their composition. The vaccines do not contain graphene oxide, nor graphene oxide or any nanotechnology that will genetically modify humans to be controlled by 5G technology. Accordingly, we rate the post as untrue.

Chapter 5: Exploiting conspiracy theories

What is a conspiracy theory? Or a theory of conspiracy? To put it simply, it is a claim that says that two or more people (even organizations, institutions, or states), secretly, away from the eyes of the whole world, have created a conspiracy against a third party to achieve some personal goals, mostly related to money and power. All this to the detriment of someone else, most often to the detriment of the poor or ordinary people, or worst-case scenario, to the detriment of all of humanity. Of course, some conspiracy theories are real. Not all of them are the result of disinformation. Some conspiracy theories, on the other hand, also have positive goals. But that is not the goal of the ones circulating on social media, spreading fear, insecurity, feelings of helplessness, etc. HAARP, a high-frequency network claimed to be responsible for global warming, the European Commission, which is accused of wanting to destroy agriculture and make us all eat insects, vaccine manufacturers, who invent vaccines to kill us or to set things up so that only a billion people would be left on the planet (the “golden billion”), “chemtrails” – chemicals released from airplanes to poison innocent people on the ground, not to mention conspiracy theories behind which are allegedly rich individuals like Bill Gates, who is accused of anything and everything - from making vaccines to alter the genetic makeup of humanity, to wanting to eclipse the Sun, etc. Imagination plays a significant role when it comes to conspiracy theories, so it takes just as much imagination to combat them.

How conspiracy theories fuel the global disinformation epidemic

Although some conspiracy theories seem harmless, many of them have real-life consequences. Conspiracy theories like QAnon, 5G, HAARP, chemtrails, and the like incite fear, have the potential to impair public trust in science, undermine trust in institutions, and can disrupt public policy. It is crucial to be careful and critically evaluate the information we come across, seeking reliable sources and relying on expert consensus. By understanding the foundations of these conspiracy theories and the facts they debunk, we can foster a society that values evidence-based critical thinking

Author: **Simona Atanasova**, 25 October 2023



Photo by [Markus Winkler](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Disinformation fuelled by conspiracy theories poses a significant threat to society, democracy, and public health. The digital age has created fertile ground for narratives full of falsehoods, disinformation, and conspiracy theories to spread like wildfire.

Conspiracy theories are the grounds from which much disinformation is drawn and shaped. These theories often revolve around the belief that a group of individuals or organizations are secretly manipulating global events for their own benefit.

Although some conspiracy theories seem harmless, many of them have real-life consequences. They can lead to distrust in institutions, crises in public health, and even violence. These theories often blur the lines between fact and fiction.

In this analysis, we elaborate on examples of disinformation and its connection to the most common conspiracy theories, including QAnon, 5G, HAARP, the “infamous” Bill Gates, and others.

QAnon: The Deep State Conspiracy

QAnon is one of the most alarming conspiracy theories to gain attention in recent years. The theory is that a secret society of Satan-worshipping, child-trafficking elites controls the world. Followers of QAnon believe that former President **Donald Trump** fought against these dark forces, often referred to as the “Deep State.”

QAnon proponents also promote the **adrenochrome** theory and claim that President Trump is waging a secret war against Satan-worshipping elite paedophiles in the government, business, and the media. This conspiracy theory claims that “Deep State” politicians and the Hollywood elite are involved in a large child abduction ring that collects the chemical compound **adrenochrome** from sexually abused children subjected to satanic rituals. No scientific study, clinical trial, or official health agency has linked **adrenochrome** to rejuvenation. **There is no evidence** that this substance is used for rejuvenation, nor that it has a hallucinogenic effect. Although the existence of a practice of extracting adrenochrome from children has never been proven with evidence, the narrative does not stop circulating on social media.

Chemtrails

One of the most enduring and widespread conspiracy theories revolves around **chemtrails**, the white trails left by airplanes, which are often claimed to be chemical or biological agents deliberately sprayed by way of aircraft. Proponents suggest that these trails are part of secret Government programs to control the weather, poison the population, or even manipulate human behaviour. Even the **heat wave during the summer** was associated with the so-called “airplane spraying”.

The truth is that the white trails that airplanes leave behind **are created** when water vapor and tiny particles of burned airplane jet fuel freeze into ice crystals. At low air humidity, the crystals just disintegrate. At higher humidity, they persist and eventually create a visible trail over large areas of the sky. Not all planes leave white trails – it’s estimated that this only happens on about 18 percent of flights. The air must be cold enough for the water to freeze, which is why they usually only occur above certain altitudes – usually above 6 km in height.

To prove that this conspiracy theory is false and deceiving people, Forbes published a **study** in which 76 chemists and scientists from the University of Irvine, California, confirmed that they had never found evidence of large-scale chemical spraying programs from airplanes with the goal of harming the health of the citizens and to affect the atmosphere.

Denying climate change

[Climate change denial](#) is a persistent conspiracy theory that casts doubt on the scientific community's consensus regarding climate change and its dire consequences.

The spread of disinformation and conspiracy theories surrounding climate change is hindering global efforts to address one of the most burning issues of our time. Baseless claims are spreading, stating that [climate change is a hoax](#) or part of a grand plan to control the world.

In reality, a large body of [scientific research](#) supports the idea that human activities, primarily the burning of fossil fuels, contribute significantly to global warming. In addition, most of the leading scientific organizations around the world have issued public statements supporting this position. As much as [97 percent of climate scientists](#) worldwide agree that climate change is real and driven by human activity. In the scientific world, it is a consensus.

5G

The 5G conspiracy theory claims that the introduction of fifth-generation wireless technology is harmful to human health and a potential surveillance tool for governments. Posts are being shared, claiming that 5G is a [weapon of mass destruction](#), but the scientific community is adamant that 5G technology will be used to improve communications in military communications, but not as a weapon of mass destruction. Experts say it is pointless to spread frightening rumors that 5G is being used as a weapon by the military.

Posts are also being shared on *Facebook* claiming that 5G antennas [are being disguised as cacti](#), confirming that they are harmful. But the truth is that the camouflage of these antennas is done primarily for aesthetic appearance and better radio frequency, so as not to suffer damage from weather conditions that could cause interruptions in the transmission of radio waves.

A social media post also appeared saying that Russian President **Vladimir Putin** has banned [5G towers](#) and that Russia will destroy them. However, no credible evidence has been offered to support this claim. On the contrary, according to information published on the websites of [the Russian government](#) and the Russian Ministry of Digital Development, Communication and Mass Media, there are active programs in the country to increase the coverage of the 5G network.

A fabrication was also shared that [5G could activate pathogens](#) found in COVID-19 vaccines and cause diseases in the bodies of those vaccinated. In February of 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) also [announced](#) that no impact of this network on public health had been detected. The [5G mobile network](#) does not affect viruses or bacteria and cannot spread diseases.

5G technology operates within established safety guidelines, and numerous studies have found no conclusive evidence linking it to adverse health effects. Claims of 5G towers allegedly causing COVID-19 or being used for mind control have been widely debunked.

HAARP and weather control

The High-frequency Active Auroral Research Program ([HAARP](#)) is a joint project of various partners: the industry, the US Department of Defense, and numerous Universities across the United States. Scientists built a laboratory in Gakona, Alaska, and installed 180 high-frequency antennas, which can jointly emit 3,600 kilowatts of radio waves at frequencies from 2.8 to 10 megahertz (high-frequency range), which allows particularly sensitive instruments to measure the physical processes taking place in that belt.

However, for conspiracy theorists, it is a secret government project aiming to control the weather, cause natural disasters, and manipulate minds.

Some conspiracy theorists have accused [HAARP of causing climate change](#), as well as earthquakes and hurricanes. It was also claimed that the [storm](#) in our country at the beginning of August, as well as the [fierce storm](#) that hit Slovenia in July, were the result of HAARP. These claims are not supported by scientific evidence and have been widely debunked. As we have already mentioned, climate change is real. The claims that it is a result of HAARP and that the antennas can affect climate change, that they cause earthquakes or changes in people's moods are not true.

Radio transmissions from HAARP cause only [small effects in the ionosphere](#) that last for a just a few seconds. There is no evidence that HAARP can cause natural disasters or affect human movements and thoughts.

Bill Gates and Klaus Schwab – targets of conspiracy theories

Two prominent figures who have been the subject of numerous baseless conspiracy theories are **Bill Gates and Klaus Schwab**.

Bill Gates, the co-founder of Microsoft and prominent philanthropist, has become the target of conspiracy theories that claim he uses vaccines to microchip people and control the population.

Another conspiracy theory revolves around the idea that Gates wants to [depopulate](#) the world through vaccination programs. In reality, Gates' efforts in public health are aimed at saving lives and improving living conditions in impoverished regions.

It was also falsely shared that Gates would inject the population with poisons and viruses [through mosquitoes](#), as he apparently "did" with mRNA vaccines during the COVID pandemic. Although the Gates Foundation provides funding and support for the fight against malaria, it has not funded any activities involving mosquito eradication in the United States or anywhere else in the world. The foundation has supported the biotech company [Oxitec](#), which is releasing modified mosquitoes in Florida as part of an initiative to control the disease, but a spokesman for the Company said its work in the USA is not funded by the Gates Foundation.

It was also manipulated that Gates is plotting [genocide and that he wants a global pandemic and a prison state](#). These claims derive from his column in the New York Times, but in the interview, he actually talks about the idea of forming expert teams in each state that will quickly know how to respond to the challenge if a new pandemic occurs.

Klaus Schwab, the founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum (WEF), is another person targeted by conspiracy theories. The WEF is known for its annual meetings in Davos, Switzerland, where global leaders gather to discuss pressing global issues. According to conspiracy theories, Schwab and the WEF are part of a secret global plan to establish a New World Order.

It was also claimed that [Schwab had ordered governments](#) around the world to arrest anyone who reads “fake news” and to ban independent media. Although the [WEF website](#) shares several recommendations for dealing with disinformation, Schwab has no authority, legal, or political power to “order” governments around the world on what to do. This is typical disinformation.

Then, citing a supposed book of his, he was presented as a [monster who plans to eliminate 4 billion people](#), which is also incorrect, since he is not the author of a book with that name.

It was claimed on social media that the [World Economic Forum](#) wants to ban natural conception, that is, that all babies must be grown in a laboratory. But the truth is that the World Economic Forum has no authority to ban natural conception, nor is such a nebulous goal on their agenda.

Conspiracy theories like QAnon, 5G, HAARP, chemtrails, and the like have the potential to impair public trust in science, undermine trust in institutions and public policy, incite public fear, and in some cases, lead to real harm.

It is of crucial importance to be careful and critically evaluate the information we encounter, seeking reliable sources and relying on expert consensus. By understanding the foundations of these conspiracy theories and the facts they debunk, we can foster a society that values evidence-based critical thinking.

There is no EU agenda to destroy traditional food production

The Facebook post does not include the full text; therefore, you cannot see that it is about the euthanasia of pigs in Croatia due to the extremely contagious disease African swine fever, and not about the existence of some global plan to destroy traditional food production and switch to synthetic food. There is no global conspiracy to destroy agriculture, on the contrary, the goal of the European Commission is for 25 percent of agriculture to be used for organic production in the next 10 years. By 2030, the EU must have regulatory instruments in place that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions produced by agriculture, increase agricultural production resilience, improve biodiversity in rural areas, and contribute to providing healthy food for a growing world population

Author: [Truthmeter's Team](#), 24 August 2023

We often see disinformation on social media about a global plan underway in the EU to destroy traditional food production and switch to synthetic food. Regarding this thesis that is spreading in the public, we are reviewing a [Facebook post](#), which says:

Croatia has been in the EU for 10 years, I believe.

There's your example!

In the EU, the global plan to destroy traditional food production and switch to synthetic food is underway.

In the meantime, being in a colony aspiring for the EU, look at the picture on the right.



Photo: pixabay.com

This post is supported by a screenshot of a title of an [article](#) about the euthanasia of pigs in Slavonia.

However, since the whole text has not been shared, it cannot be seen that it is about euthanasia of pigs in Croatia due to the disease African swine fever, and not due to the existence of some global plan to destroy traditional food production and transfer to synthetic food.

The Croatian newspaper's [article](#) says that after the Croatian Veterinary Institute confirmed the presence of African swine fever in two Counties, a disaster occurred on the farms within two months, i.e. 444 agricultural family farms are facing bankruptcy and are not allowed to procure and breed pigs, and the recovery of pig farming may take up to five years. According to data from the Croatian Ministry of Agriculture, African swine fever has been confirmed in three facilities in Brod-Posavina County and 441 facilities in Vukovar-Srijem County. It is added that 8,796 pigs have been killed so far, all of which were in facilities where the presence of African swine fever was determined through laboratory analysis. The disease was also confirmed in four wild boars. The fact that the disease managed to be contained to only two counties in Croatia is considered a good reaction of the competent services.

However, people are facing serious financial problems because pig farmers in these two counties are not allowed to sell pigs, pork, and pork products for almost two months unless they sell them to slaughterhouses. But this does not happen in practice, because the slaughterhouses procure the pigs from the farms that operate within their corporations.

This is becoming a huge problem. The pigs, which weighed 140 kg two months ago, are now over 200 kg, and currently no one needs them because the meat industry will not take anything heavier than 140 kg, says [Antun Golubovic](#), pig breeder from Djuric (Slavonia) and President of the Pig breeding Board of the Croatian Chamber of Agriculture (CCA).

He is now practically jobless because 65 percent of his income comes from the pigs.

I have to pay taxes and benefits, but people like me might as well declare bankruptcy. The biggest problem is that I was left without breeding material, without the genetics that I worked on for 20 years, which is now lost. At this point, if the contagion stopped and someone brought me pigs, to start over, it would take me at least three to four years to be where I was by August 3rd (before the contagion n.d.), plus the one-year ban, five years in total. I am 47 years old and I will probably decide to take such a step, but older people will not, [Golubovic says](#).

Contrary to what the manipulative post on Facebook wants to show, the truth is that in Croatia, an EU member state, the Ministry of Agriculture [has announced](#) that there is African swine fever, and the [Croatian veterinary chamber](#) has appealed for compliance with the prevention and all imposed government measures to prevent the spread of the disease. It should also be noted that the [Croatian government has a Program for Compensation and Assistance](#) for households that forcibly lost their domestic animals (pigs) due to this disease.

[African swine fever](#) is a highly contagious viral disease in domestic and wild pigs of all ages. The virus is excreted through blood, tissues, secretions, and excreta from sick or dead animals. The disease is transmitted and spread directly through contact between a healthy and a sick animal, corpses of dead animals; indirectly through contaminated food

and food waste, equipment, vehicles, and clothing; and biologically by vectors - soft ticks of the genus *Ornithodoros*. This disease is not dangerous for humans, but it is highly lethal for these animals and cannot be treated.

Disease control in pigs is carried out at three levels: prevention, early detection, and rapid response. Prevention in animals can be direct or indirect. Direct prevention includes the implementation of [biosecurity measures](#) by animal breeders on farms to prevent the occurrence of the disease and to maintain the health status of animals at a satisfactory level.

The biosecurity measures of the farm are divided into external biosecurity measures, which refer to activities and measures to prevent the entry of infectious agents or disease-causing agents into the farm (bio-exclusion), and internal biosecurity measures, which include measures and activities to prevent the spread of the infectious agent or the disease on the farm where it appeared as well as the spread to other farms (biocontainment). In all pig farms, the basic principles of biosecurity should be implemented, namely: segregation or isolation, and cleaning and disinfection. On those farms where the presence of African swine fever has been determined, the pigs are euthanized with no possibility of economic exploitation.

Regarding the part of the post that says that there is a global plan underway in the EU to destroy traditional food production, many arguments show that it is false and that it is not about an agenda or a world conspiracy.

For instance, the goal of the European Commission is for 25 percent of agriculture [to be](#) used for organic production in the next 10 years.

The European Commissioner of Agriculture, **Janusz Wojciechowski**, [says](#) that organic agriculture will become a priority for the European Commission.

Organic agriculture will be a key ally in the transition towards a more sustainable food system and better protection of the organic sector. The Commission will continue to support the organic sector in the goal of 25 percent of the land being used for organic production by 2030 through appropriate policies and legal framework, [said](#) Wojciechowski.

This type of agriculture, i.e. organic production, uses natural substances and has a less harmful effect on the environment. Organic farmers use numerous renewable resources and ensure that ecological biodiversity is protected through responsible water use, for instance. Organic agriculture requires stricter protection of animals and their needs.

By 2030, the EU [must](#) have regulatory instruments in place that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions produced in agriculture, increase agricultural production resilience, improve biodiversity in rural areas, and [contribute](#) to the provision of healthy food for the growing world population.

Moreover, the EU [aims to eradicate poverty](#), ensure decent work and economic growth, responsible production and consumption.

The second photograph shared in this Facebook post shows a political message promoting the European funds for Agriculture, which [are a success](#) in the country.

Due to all facts stated above, we conclude that the post we are reviewing lacks context. There is no global plan underway in the EU to destroy traditional food production, the plans for the future are for the food to be organic, not synthetic.

Climate change is not, and cannot be HAARP's fault

As much as **97 percent of climate scientists** worldwide agree that climate change is real and driven by human activity. It is a consensus in the scientific world. **HAARP** stands for High-frequency Active Auroral Research Program, but conspiracy theorists say that HAARP is designed to produce earthquakes and other natural disasters, as well as change weather conditions. However, scientists and meteorologists say that HAARP cannot change the weather, let alone cause earthquakes

Author: **Truthmeter's Team**, 11 July 2023

Common disinformation spreading on social media is that climate change does not exist, but that the “infamous” HAARP is to blame for it. One such example is a **post** on **Facebook** which claims exactly that - that there are no natural, but only artificial changes caused by HAARP. This is not true. Climate change is a scientifically proven phenomenon, and the “infamous” HAARP is one of the most widespread conspiracy theories in the past few years, which can often be found on social networks.

CLIMATE CHANGE ???

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS NATURAL CLIMATE CHANGE, ONLY ARTIFICIAL CHANGE !!!
THAT HAARP NEEDS TO BEBE DESTROYED !!!, *says the post.*

The Facebook post, which is the subject of this review, manipulates social media users into thinking that there is no climate change, i.e. that there are no natural changes in the climate, rather that they are artificially created. According to the post, HAARP is to blame for the changes we are experiencing.



Photo: Pixabay

Climate change is real

As much as [97 percent of climate scientists](#) worldwide agree that climate change is real and driven by human activity. It is a consensus in the scientific world.

[Scientific evidence](#) shows that human activities (primarily the burning of fossil fuels) have warmed the Earth's surface and its ocean basins, which in turn continues to impact Earth's climate. Hence, according to multiple studies published in relevant scientific journals, global warming trends over the past century are extremely likely due to human activities. In addition, most of the leading scientific organizations around the world have issued statements supporting this position.

[Global warming](#) causes an increase in the average temperature of the Earth's surface. This not only increases the likelihood of heat waves and droughts, but also causes changes in our natural climate systems. These changes make extreme weather events more likely and more severe. For example, hurricanes and storms are becoming more intense, moving slower, and taking longer to subside.

This trend is part of [climate change](#), which many people consider synonymous with global warming. Scientists prefer to use the term "climate change" when describing the complex changes now affecting our planet's weather and climate systems. Climate change includes not only an increase in average temperatures, but also extreme weather events, displacement of wildlife populations and habitats, rising seas, and a set of other impacts.

On the other hand, climate change is not, and cannot be HAARP's fault.

[HAARP](#) is a High-frequency Active Auroral Research Program that is a joint project of various partners: the industry, the US Department of Defense, and numerous Universities across the United States. The scientists built a laboratory in Gakona, Alaska, and installed 180 high-frequency antennas, which can jointly emit 3,600 kilowatts of radio waves at frequencies from 2.8 to 10 megahertz (high-frequency range), which allows particularly sensitive instruments to measure the physical processes taking place in that belt.

The operations of the research facility were transferred from the US Air Force to the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, on August 11, 2015, allowing HAARP to continue investigating ionospheric phenomenology through a cooperative land-use research and development agreement.

Due to the incorporation of new technologies, the US uses these antennas in communications and especially deep parts of the seas or land. However, the claim that these antennas can affect climate change, that they cause earthquakes or mood changes in people **is not true**.

The Project's [official website](#) says it "studies the properties and behavior of the ionosphere":

The ionosphere extends about 50 to 400 miles above the Earth's surface, right at the edge of space. Together with the neutral upper atmosphere, the ionosphere forms the boundary between Earth's lower atmosphere – where we live and breathe – and the vacuum in space.

Conspiracy theorists say that HAARP is designed to cause earthquakes and other natural disasters, as well as to change weather conditions. However, scientists and meteorologists say that HAARP cannot change the weather, let alone cause earthquakes.

HAARP's radio transmissions only cause [minor effects in the ionosphere](#) that last for a few seconds. There is no evidence that HAARP can cause natural disasters or affect human movements and thoughts.

Although the conspiracy theory that “climate change does not exist” is based on disinformation and there is evidence to refute it, it is still believed by almost half of the citizens. [Research](#) conducted by the Institute of Democracy from November 2021 found that 46 percent of citizens believe that the climate is controlled by satellites and radars (HAARP), and 29 percent think climate change is a hoax.

From all the stated facts, we conclude that this claim – that climate change does not exist, that it is artificial, and that HAARP is to blame, is *disinformation*.

Disappearance of white streaks behind airplanes is not evidence of “chemtrails”

The white trails behind airplanes, which conspiracy theorists call “chemtrails,” are created when water vapor and tiny particles of burned jet fuel from airplanes freeze into ice crystals. The disappearance of the white traces behind the plane is a consequence of a change in the conditions necessary for the creation of condensation, and not proof that the plane is releasing “chemtrails” on purpose and that, at that very moment, the pilot has turned off the system. The conspiracy theory that such traces are, in fact, purposeful and planned aerial spraying with poisons and heavy metals has been repeatedly debunked. Nevertheless, we continue to see it all over social media

Author: [Truthmeter’s Team](#), 05 July 2023

As part of the widespread conspiracy theory that claims that the white trails by airplanes, known as “chemtrails”, are poisonous and dangerous, a [Facebook post](#) containing a video is under review. The video shows the white trails behind the plane stopping at one point, a moment the author uses to support his theory that toxic chemicals were being released from the plane on purpose.

The claim that the disappearance of white trails behind the plane is evidence of “planned aerial spraying” is disinformation, supporting a conspiracy theory that has been ongoing for more than 20 years. What’s happening is not the “chemtrails” system being turned, but changes in the conditions of the air, whether because of a decrease in speed, a change in the height of the plane, the transition of the plane from the troposphere to the stratosphere, or vice versa.



Photo by [Joachim Süß](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The author of the post calls on those who claim that the jet trails are condensation tracks, to present scientific arguments for this phenomenon:

XY, no XY, what are you doing experts???

White trail – first you see it, then you don't, any comments, experts???

Those who claim that the traces behind airplanes, plus Truthmeter, F*ckcheckers... are traces of the engines (from condensation) of the planes, I'm asking you to give us scientific arguments about this plane, did it break down, did its capacitor die, or did it run out of juice... huh, Truthmeter???

The theory of the existence of “chemtrails” and “planned pollination” with toxic and heavy metals is repeated over and over again, although it has been refuted many times by scientific evidence. The white trails that airplanes leave behind [are created](#) when water vapor and tiny particles of burned jet fuel on airplanes freeze into ice crystals. At low air humidity, the crystals just disintegrate. They persist in higher humidity and eventually create a visible streak over large areas of the sky.

[Their creation](#) requires three elements: water vapor, cold air, and particles on which the water vapor can condense. Water vapor is produced by the aircraft as the hydrogen in its fuel reacts with the oxygen in the air. Not all planes leave white trails – it's estimated that this only happens on about 18 percent of flights. The air must be cold enough for the water to freeze, which is why they usually only occur above certain altitudes – usually above 6 km in altitude.

The change in the conditions around the plane is precisely the reason for the sudden disappearance of the white marks behind the plane, which are highlighted in the video. If the aircraft changes altitude, passes from one layer of the atmosphere to another, or reduces speed, reducing or stopping the discharge of the remains of the burned jet fuel, then there are no conditions for the formation of white trails.

As [Truthmeter](#) has written many times before, these traces that we all see in the sky are not the result of some hidden agenda to pollute the population with poisons. After all, there are such traces of airplanes in the airspace of all countries, not only here.

[Chemtrails](#) is actually a conspiracy theory that is more than two decades old. This false and disinformation-based theory represents the belief that the common contrails produced by airplanes in the air are “chemtrails” composed of chemical or biological agents. Supporters of this theory are convinced that various governments are trying to negatively affect the climate or human health by spraying toxic chemicals in order to cause a decrease in the number of inhabitants of the planet.

Those who believe in this conspiracy theory believe that if the path of the planes is visible for a long time, it must contain some dangerous substances. According to such beliefs, the usual trail of airplanes should quickly disperse. Hence, the clouds that do not disappear must be full of additional, undetected substances, i.e. some kind of poison.

To prove that this conspiracy theory is false and deceiving people, Forbes published a [study](#) in which 76 chemists and scientists from the University of Irvine, California, said they had never come across any evidence of large-scale chemical spraying programs from aircrafts aiming to harm the health of the citizens and affect the atmosphere.

According to [this research](#), the reason aircraft contrails remain visible is because they **fly at higher altitudes than before, resulting in condensation trails that last longer**. The fact that the tracks of the planes intersect is the only proof that there is an increased air traffic frequency, which is the primary reason why some of them have to fly at higher altitudes.

From the presented data on how the white trails are created by airplanes and what conditions are needed for their creation, it is concluded that the video shared on Facebook is disinformation whose intent is to create fear, panic, and uncertainty.

Chapter 6: Harmful foreign influences and propaganda

The Internet in general, and social media in particular, have become the main lever for the spread of authoritarian propaganda and other harmful foreign influences, not only in our country, but also around the world. The ease with which one can reach a significant audience abroad, without the need for expensive travel and other expenses, is the number one choice of all those who want to incite or expand their propaganda narratives in the neighborhood, but also around the world if it is large states with global interests.

Unfortunately, in addition to the many positive consequences that the global communications network has brought about by dramatically facilitating communications in the fields of business, science, education, and more, it has given a weapon to of all those who wish to widen or deepen already existing divisions in other countries, whose policies are not in line with their interests or, more often, in line with the undemocratic and authoritarian elites in the country that spread such propaganda. At the same time, they are a powerful tool for causing fear among foreign populations, as well as provoking feelings such as rage, hopelessness, and demoralization, in other words, demoralizing them. They can even encourage aggressive and destructive behavior, spreading hate speech, calling for violence, disinformation, manipulation, slander, insults, or character assassinations against their enemies, etc.

Social Networks and Media – A Lever for Spreading Authoritarian Propaganda

Russian propaganda uses various forms of social media and channels to spread its propaganda. It is fighting a war in Ukraine, but also waging a hybrid war with many other countries. North Macedonia and the Balkans are the target of this propaganda

Author: **Goran Lefkov**, 02 May 2023

The social media are the strongest weapon of Russian propaganda. Lies, manipulations truth-twisting... that is the recipe of Putin's regime "bombarding" the democratic world. From the very beginning of the war in Ukraine, the European Union banned the Russian channels that spread Russian propaganda like "Russia Today", "Sputnik" and other TV channels and media outlets. And that was the moment Russian propaganda began to rise through communications on the social media.

Today, the main target of Russian propaganda is the social network Facebook, because unlike the traditional media, Facebook does not control such propaganda rigorously. Everything can be published, says **Goran Georgiev**, researcher at the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD) from Sofia.

Another reason for using Facebook is because Russian propaganda is more efficient there, unlike traditional media that have other content and where Russian propagandists are not so sure whether the message will reach the intended users, *Georgiev says.*

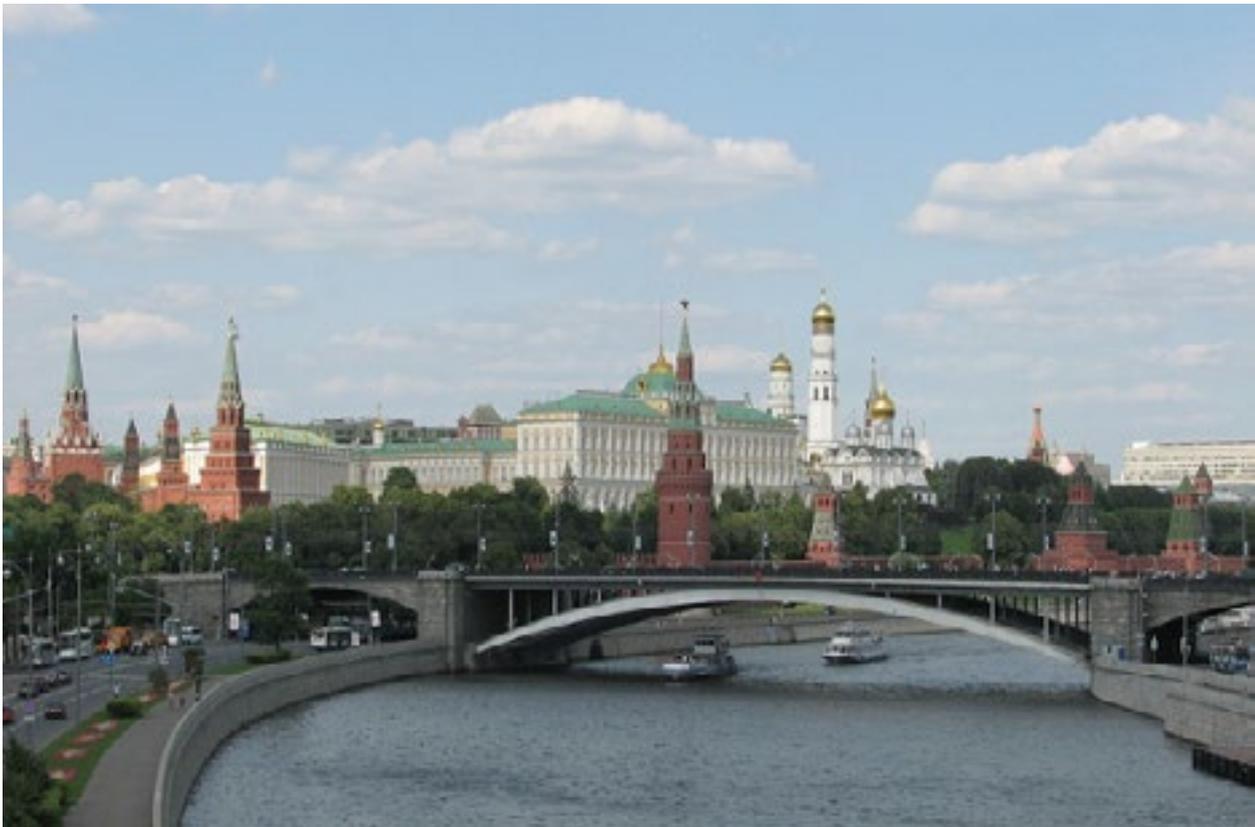


Photo: [Artur Janas](#) from [Pixabay](#)

CSD researches the activities of the Russian embassies in the Balkans, including the Russian mission in Skopje. Truthmeter already [published an article](#) on the social media activities of this embassy.

Russia and its allies do all that it takes to ensure that their views dominate in the social media.

Because of their activities, Meta – the owner of the social network Facebook – had to terminate Facebook’s Comment Moderation Agreement with the Canadian company Telus, which has clones in several Balkan countries.

A [BBC investigation](#) on the Persian-language moderation that took place in Essen, Germany, pointed out the fact that people in this company were compromised and trained by the Iranian Secret Service.

The same is true for our region. Bulgarians who worked in Telus moderated the content in both Bulgarian and Russian language on Facebook. They [blocked profiles](#) of people who criticized Russia, although the criticism did not violate Facebook’s terms of use. They deleted critical comments and let Russian disinformation spread.

Cyberspace responsive to propaganda

The decline of the traditional media, the financial crisis of the newspapers and television outlets led to a key turning point, especially through reaching young people. Although the television [with approximately 75 percent](#) is still the first medium of information in the country, important to note is that just over 50 percent of online-users also use the Internet for informing and reading news.

These trends were abused especially by totalitarian regimes, such as Russia and China, to expand their influence in the Balkan countries.

SCOOP Macedonia’s research pinpointed the fact that unlike 10 years ago, when Russian tycoons bought whole TV channels, as was the case [with Alfa TV in Bulgaria](#) by the leader of the party “Ataka” (Attack), Volen Siderov, now the trends moved online.

According to the [research of the Institute for Global Analytics](#) from Sofia, Russian influence is mostly disseminated through the Serbian portals “Sputnik” and “Informer”.

The capacity of Kremlin to penetrate information ecosystems in the countries of Southeast Europe depends on the extent of “local infrastructure” of sites and profiles supporting Kremlin policies, states the paper of the Institute for Global Analytics from Sofia, published last December.

Confirmation of this approach came from **Hristo Grozev**, one of the founders of the world-famous Bellingcat network of investigative journalists who lived in Vienna, but has now moved to a safe location with increased security due to the threat to his personal safety. This year he [published the names of people](#) in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe who were paid to spread Russian propaganda. The name of **Darko Todorovski** from Delchevo was specifically mentioned, but [Todorovski stated](#) that the analyzes were his own personal work as a PhD student in Russia.

Last June, **Lena Borislavova**, Cabinet Chief of the former Bulgarian Prime Minister **Kiril Petkov**, [stated](#) that the list of public figures, politicians, journalists and professors paid by the Russian services was long.

Cyberspace as a powerful disinformation tool

Social networks are playing a much bigger role in informing citizens. “**Slightly above 50 percent of online users use the Internet for informing and reading news**” claims [MIM's report](#). This share increases up to 85 percent among young people in the age range 15 to 29 years old.

But unlike traditional media, social networks are a very powerful tool in the hands of disinformers. Low media literacy of the citizens of North Macedonia secures fertile ground for such disinformation.

The danger of disinformation and fake news is great even for societies with much more developed democracy and media literacy. The example of the Veles-groups during the election of **Donald Trump** for President of the United States, as well as the Brexit case, showed that no one is safe nor immune to disinformation in the online space.

Several steps need to be undertaken to secure a better barrier from disinformation entering the online space.

According to **Rumena Filipova**, a researcher at the Institute for Global Analytics, the Southeast Europe region is a target of authoritarian regimes spreading disinformation.

Good quality journalistic stories that inform citizens about online dangers are necessary along with improved monitoring of media ownership and greater transparency of the origin of the capital of these owners, as well as the establishment of a strong regional network supporting investigative journalism and increasing media literacy, Filipova says.

Immediately after the aggression of Ukraine, regime structures in Moscow recruited the so-called “cyber soldiers” tasked to post comments on Telegram and YouTube justifying the aggression of Ukraine.

According to **Andrey Zakharov**, an investigative journalist from Russia, this model was already used for occupying the cyberspace.

Back in 2017, I discovered the so-called troll factories, while working at RBC. They were tasked to create disinformation aligned with Kremlin's positions and to publish it as support to the non-democratic regimes in the world. This is how a great deal of lies and disinformation was fabricated during the US election and at the time of Brexit, Zakharov says.

This year RBC announced that the regime was recruiting so-called armies of cyber-soldiers.

Danger from Serbian sites for North Macedonia

In the latest research of the BIRODI Bureau for Social Research, Serbian portals “Sputnik” and “Informer” are the main weapon of Russian propaganda in the countries of former Yugoslavia. They are also supported by Russian energy companies operating in Serbia, through commercials and financing existing Serbian media.

Although these portals and media are published in Serbia, they are also transmitted online in North Macedonia.

Almost all Macedonians understand Serbian language. The contents of the pro-Russian portals in Serbia is easily accessible for the Macedonian readers. The older generations studied Serb-Croatian language at school, and men did military service in the Yugoslav People's Army. All this makes Serbian propaganda portals a powerful tool for spreading Russian propaganda to the Macedonian population.

At the beginning of the year, [“Truthmeter” wrote](#) that North Macedonia was mentioned in “Sputnik” for topics that were aligned with positions of Russian propaganda.

In 2022, they were quite fluent, actively promoting Russian views. So, when one writes “North Macedonia” on “Informer”, more than 30 articles would appear just about the links between North Macedonia and Russia. The Macedonian government’s decision to expel 5 Russian diplomats in 2022 was used to promote the Russian side of the story. The statement given by **Ivan Stoilkovic**, a member of Macedonian Parliament from the Serbian community, that the expulsion of Russian diplomats from North Macedonia [was just like expelling Serbs](#) from Macedonia was also abused for fomenting the controversies.



One of the covers of “Informer”.
Photo: Screenshot

Very often Stoilkovic was present with statements and views in these portals. He and two other Members of Parliament from Levica (The Left) were the only ones in the Macedonian Parliament who voted against the adoption of the Declaration for Support of Ukraine.

In addition, the texts covered topics that stated that North Macedonia will face [problems with energy and food supply](#). The same narratives could be found in Russian media, [such as “Russia Today”](#).

Also present in the pro-Russian portals in Serbia were Russian officials threatening to ban the export of gas to North Macedonia and Montenegro, following the [restriction of the flight](#) of Sergey Lavrov over these countries.

Media influences of Turkey and China in North Macedonia

Turkey is traditionally present among the Muslims of the Balkans and spreads its influence through Turkish National Television Anadolu Agency, present in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and in parts of Albania. Acting as an intermediary between the warring parties, the Turkish position on the war in Ukraine is disseminated through these media.

Regarding Muslim propaganda, in addition to the Turkish organizations and channels on social networks, several non-governmental organizations and channels spreading propaganda of extreme Islam in North Macedonia can be identified, mostly among Muslim Albanians and Macedonians.

Chinese propaganda penetrated aggressively North Macedonia through investments in infrastructure projects, but also activities implemented [through the Chinese University](#) based in Budapest. In “Sunday Briefing” one can see that they have very similar views and approaches as the Russian propaganda.

Even though this propaganda is new, it still started quite aggressively. A more direct channel for Chinese information campaigns is Facebook. Namely, the pages of the Chinese Embassy in Skopje and the Confucius Institute have been present on Facebook almost since its establishment in 2013 although with fewer posts in the beginning compared to today.

Innovative forms of spreading malignant influence

The latest thing performed by the Russian embassies on Facebook is a technique known as black propaganda. This is a psychological warfare technique.

These are posts coordinated by the Russian secret services. How does it work? They publish a screenshot of a website known to us as a portal that publishes Russian disinformation. In the text of that screenshot, they will post content such as the following:

This website was created by the West. They say it belongs to the Russian services, but that is not the case. This makes Russian authorities look like the bad guys, says Georgiev.

Frequent source of disinformation in North Macedonia can be the same Twitter profile of the Russian Ambassador in Skopje, **Sergey Bazdnikin**. This directly indicates that the official Russian administration is involved in the disinformation war.

All available methods and models are used – from posts on social networks, to organization of events promoting the “Russian truth”. These tendencies are reiterated in almost every country.

In Bulgaria they organized events and even abused children for their propaganda. The most recent example was in Varna, (where the support for Vuzrazhdane – the largest pro-Russian party in Bulgari). Namely, [an event was organized](#) where the Russian Ambassador **Eleonora Mitrofanova** was supposed to give a speech. Students were told that their absence from school would be treated as unexcused. The plan was to share this event on social networks, and Mitrofanova’s speech was supposed to contain Russian propaganda.

One of the latest research on this topic [is that of Metamorphosis conducted in the period from November 2021 to April 2022](#). The conclusion derived is that disinformation began to spread rapidly as soon as the war broke out in Ukraine, on 24th February 2022. In the same token, “*the largest number of disinformation articles originated from social networks – as many as 152 of the analyzed stock were personal posts from Facebook and only eight were media articles.*” In addition, disinformation was mostly based on media articles in national or foreign media (as many as 76 of all disinformation articles), followed by posts on social networks (38 posts out of which 19 on “Facebook” and 14 on “Twitter”). To a lesser extent, disinformation was also based on YouTube posts (16), websites (13), as well as other sources.

Scribbled Traffic Signs on Miladinovci-Stip Motorway with Russian propaganda symbols; No-one Responsible

The Public Enterprise for State Roads appeals to the public reminding about the danger of applying graffiti to traffic signals and road equipment. Such acts change the meaning of signalization, leaving drivers uninformed about road conditions, which in turn can lead to traffic accidents with serious consequences and casualties

Author: [Truthmeter's Team](#), 15 June 2023

A dozen traffic signs and equipment on the Miladinovci-Stip motorway have been scribbled all over with pro-Russian propaganda symbols. The symbol “Z”, that [glorifies Russian military invasion](#) of Ukraine and found written on Russian military vehicles used to invade Ukraine along with “Brotherly Russia” type slogans, have recently been spray-painted on the traffic signs on the motorway, at the stretch from the “Preod” toll-pay near Sveti Nikola to the entrance in Stip.

Few days ago, Meta.mk noticed the act of vandalism, which in addition to spreading foreign propaganda in the country in a very cheap fashion, presents real danger to traffic safety, because the traffic signs should serve to inform drivers operating their vehicles.



The symbol of the Russian occupation of Ukraine written all over traffic signs on the Miladinovci-Stip motorway;
Photo: Meta.mk

In a statement given to Meta.mk, the Public Enterprise for State Roads made a public appeal warning about the danger of applying graffiti to traffic signals and road equipment. They explained that such an act changes the content of signaling, leaving the drivers uninformed about the road conditions, which in turn can lead to traffic accidents with serious consequences and casualties.

Even though drivers are charged a toll for using the Miladinovci-Stip motorway, the Public Enterprise for State Roads claims that the responsibility for maintenance of traffic signs is not within its competence.

“The Public Enterprise for State Roads subcontracts the maintenance of the state roads to the Public Enterprise for Maintenance and Protection of Main and Regional Roads (Macedonia-road)”, said the Public Enterprise for State Roads.

As part of the Agreement between the two public enterprises, the Maintenance and Protection of State Roads Programme for 2023 includes the provision of inspection and duty service for detecting irregularities on the road and then, by means of rendering services to specific stretches, remediates – as in this case – the removal of graffiti from the traffic signs.

Applying graffiti on road signs, regardless of the content, or the level of damage inflicted, is illegal in accordance with the Law on Road Traffic Safety. The Public Enterprise for State Roads does not have the authority nor the opportunity to detect the perpetrators of such illegal actions”, answered the State Road Public Enterprise.

Yesterday, Meta.mk also sent questions to the Public Enterprise for Protection and Maintenance of Main and Regional Roads – Macedonia-road, but until the publication of this article no reply was received to the question whether vandalism with the traffic signs was noticed, what actions will be undertaken to remove such graffiti from the traffic signs and whether the enterprise had discovered perpetrators of such an act of vandalism.

Serbian Minister of Defense with dangerous propaganda towards North Macedonia and Montenegro

In his inflammatory propaganda towards North Macedonia and Montenegro, Vučević says that he believes that there is great international support for the creation of Great Albania, stressing that it is not only an issue for Serbia, but also for its neighboring countries

Author: **Bojan Blazhevski**, 21 August 2023



Photo: Serbian Ministry of Defense

North Macedonia and Montenegro have wronged Serbia by recognizing the independence of Kosovo, stressing that the act represented an open interference in the internal affairs of a country, said the Serbian Minister of Defense and President of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party, Milosh Vučević, [reports the Montenegrin newspaper Pobjeda](#).

“You have made a mistake, and it will come back to bite you, just like everyone who promoted Kosovo and Metohija as an independent state. You have opened Pandora’s box. Your bureaucratic answers that Kosovo is *sui generis*, that it is a special case, are ridiculous. Neither Albin Kurti nor Tirana believe you,” Vučević told the Serbian Pink TV.

In his inflammatory propaganda towards North Macedonia and Montenegro, Vučević says that he believes that there is great international support for the creation of Great Albania, stressing that it is not only an issue for Serbia, but also for its neighbors.

“Do our North Macedonian friends sleep soundly? Do you? They think that they have solved their problems because they are NATO members... This is the mantra of both Montenegro and North Macedonia. They think that by becoming members of that collective security – the NATO Alliance, they have solved all their problems and that nothing can happen to them anymore. They have to look back in history, to understand the circumstances a little bit and what’s happening in their backyard. We do not want to lead their politics, that is their business. However, we can ascertain that 25 percent of the Albanians have 50 percent of the power in North Macedonia. If it’s ‘OK’ for the Macedonians, it’s ‘OK’ for us too. Obviously, you will have a policy in which they won’t recognize Macedonia as their own country,” says Vučević in a statement with which he interferes in the internal issues of North Macedonia.

Vučević assesses that there is an all-Albanian consensus for national unification and that “naive Serbs think that this cannot happen and that the borders won’t change”.

“The mantra that there are no changes to the borders has always been valid, but they have changed. I would not be able to sleep soundly, but that is a question for Skopje, and let Podgorica think carefully about what it will do. I see that the biggest question for them currently is whether the Serbian parties, or the Serbian party, or the coalition, should be allowed to come to power with some small ministries, conditionally speaking. In North Macedonia, 25 percent of the Albanians have 50 percent of the Government, and in Montenegro, 30 percent of the Serbs cannot have two ministries or not even one. They say we are interfering in internal affairs. “You interfere in our internal affairs - you recognized Kosovo, is there a worse, more indecent, and open interference in internal affairs,” said Serbian Defense Minister Vučević.

Incendiary propaganda from Serbia about the constitutional changes: “Are Macedonians becoming a minority in their own country?”

The propaganda launched by Radio Television Serbia was also broadcasted by the Serbian newspaper “Politika”, adding its own provocative title to the online edition - “North Macedonia tailored by the Bulgarians and Albanians”

Author: **Goshe Nikolov**, 27 August 2023

“Are Macedonians becoming a minority in their own country, although according to the last census, they number more than 58 percent?”. With this sentence, the Serbian State Television RTS (Radio Television of Serbia) begins the propaganda text against the constitutional amendments that are still in process in the Macedonian Assembly and which are a condition for the start of negotiations for the country’s EU accession.



Belgrade, Serbia /
Photo by [Nikola Aleksic](#) on [Unsplash](#)

In its journalistic report, the Serbian public service writes that “the numbers are not in accordance with the demands of minority communities as well as with the actions of certain ethnic groups”, fueling the reader’s further experience with the case when during the Tetovo visit of Kosovo’s Prime Minister, Albin Kurti, the flag of “Great Albania” was displayed.

“Recently in Tetovo, you could not see the flag of North Macedonia, but of Great Albania,” writes the RTS reporter.

The propaganda started by Radio Television Serbia was continued by the Serbian newspaper “Politika”, adding its own provocative title to the online edition - “North Macedonia tailored by the Bulgarians and Albanians”.

These two Serbian media write that “the identity of the Macedonians was first disputed by the Greeks, which was resolved by the Prespa agreement, and now the Bulgarians are also doing it.”

According to RTS, Bulgaria is standing on North Macedonia’s way toward the EU, demanding that Bulgarians as a national minority be included in the preamble.

“Politika”, on the other hand, ends the text by saying that North Macedonia Authorities have already made concessions to the Albanians, when in 2019 the Albanian language, in addition to Macedonian, became official throughout the country.

RTS and “Politika” dwell on Kurti’s visit to North Macedonia earlier this month, writing that “in Tetovo, which is considered the capital of the Albanians in North Macedonia, a gathering was recently held without any insignia of the host country, instead, the flags of Albania and Great Albania were displayed”.

Meta.mk already wrote that after this case, almost coordinately, one after the other, Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic tried to [interfere in Macedonia’s internal and external political relations](#) with their statements.

First of all, the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Albin Kurti, during his unofficial visit to the country on August 11 from Tetovo, said that Macedonia should stay as close as possible to Kosovo, Albania, and Bulgaria, and as far as possible from Serbia and the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic did not need more than two days to respond to the calls of Kurti from Tetovo. In his interview with Serbian Pink TV, the Serbian president stated that Kurti’s visit to Tetovo was a scandal above scandals and that there, as he says, “the idea of Great Albania was promoted”.

This interview with Vucic made headlines in the Serbian media, including the public service RTS and the daily newspaper “Politika.”

The Serbian Minister of Defense and President of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party, Milos Vucevic, made a dangerous propaganda statement about Macedonia, as well as Montenegro when he stated that these two countries [had wronged](#) Serbia by recognizing the independence of Kosovo.

Such inflammatory propaganda prompted [reactions](#) from senior government officials in Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania, while Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic [urged](#) Serbian officials to be “more careful” not to say anything that could be used “by others”.

Counterspin: Levica Spins that Macedonia is Involved in Repression of the Serbs in Kosovo

Responding to the government's decision to send 31 members of ARM to Kosovo for a period of six months, Levica is spinning that KFOR is a suppressive force that frequently uses excessive force against the Serbs and that with this decision of the government, the country becomes a party in such repression. It also claims that more than 90 percent of the Macedonian population condemns the decision and that the mission is not part of the UN's framework. All these claims are spins of Levica, that, by the way, has a legitimate right to require ARM not to participate in NATO missions, since the party's policies are clear – anti-NATO orientation

Author: Teofil Blazhevski, 12 July 2023

The political party Levica demanded from the Macedonian government to withdraw the ARM soldiers participating in NATO's peacekeeping mission in Kosovo – KFOR, and that the country in the future should participate only in peacekeeping missions under the auspices of the United Nations (UN). In the exposition of these demands, however, some spinning elements can be detected:



Photo: Screenshot from a video

Spin: In the last few months we have been witnessing the manner in which the authorities from Prishtina, led by Albin Kurti, have been inciting instability in the North of K&M by applying repressive policies and executing classical violence on the peaceful Serbian population in K&M.

Repressing the population that has been trying to protect its fundamental human rights in the North of Kosovo and Metohija would have been hardly possible if it were not for the imperialistic tool of KFOR. Namely, **on many occasions, KFOR representatives have applied excessive force to crush the protesters who were legitimately fighting for their rights suppressed by the repressive authorities**, taking the side of the stronger and the armed against the ordinary people...

Last week, the government of SDS and DUI adopted a Decision to send 31 representatives of the Macedonian Army to participate in KFOR operations in K&M for a period of 6 months! **With such a decision, the puppet government continues to directly repress the Serb population in Kosovo and Metohija – repression implemented in correlations and under the command of our “strategic partners”.**

Levica, **as well as more than ninety percent of the Macedonian population**, condemns such a move by the Government...

[Source: [Antropol – Levica’s Reaction](#), 10.07.2023]

Counterspin: Levica, quite legitimately and in compliance with its party policies of a clearly anti-NATO positioned party, has the right to advocate and demand the country not to send any more ARM representatives in NATO missions, but when specifying the rationale for such a demand, Levica is communicating with the public by twisting the truth i.e. by spinning.

Levica response to the government’s decision to send 31 ARM representatives on a six-month mission within the framework of KFOR communicates incomplete information and spins the truth regarding the alleged repression practiced by KFOR and the participation or role of the soldiers from North Macedonia within KFOR itself and in relations to the public opinion in the country.



Photo: Screenshot from part of the response published in Antropol and other media

Everyone who even remotely follows the events related to Kosovo, knows that prior to the violent clashes in several municipalities in the North of Kosovo inhabited by mainly Serb population – above all, in the Municipality Zvečan – NATO forces within the framework of KFOR almost never applied repressive measures as part of their mission in Kosovo, that, above all, is a peaceful mission and should ensure peaceful political resolution of misunderstandings between Prishtina and Belgrade.

Second, showing up on the spot following the protests of the Serb population in four municipalities was to prevent an even greater escalation because they assumed the role of protectors of municipal buildings thereby creating somewhat of a by-pass or replacement for Kosovo Police Forces who were sent in large numbers to guard the new Albanian mayors [after the elections on 23.04.2023 that were massively boycotted by the Serbs](#). (The reasons for the boycott are questionable, but [what is not questionable is that with only a 3-4 percent turnout in four municipalities](#), the new Albanian mayors will not have the legitimacy to govern the municipality since that local government will not be representative of the political will of most of the voters or the majority of the population).

Thirdly, the local Serbian population protesting against the inauguration of the new Albanian mayors and municipal councils by means of a decision made by the Government of Kurti for “implementing the legal state on the entire territory” dated 26.05.2023 was not at all subtly expressed on the protests from 29.05.2023. Containers and vehicles were overturned and set on fire, Molotov cocktails, tiles and stones were thrown, including firearms according to the official data also provided by KFOR. On the other side, two persons – Serbs – were transported to the Clinical Hospital in Kosovska Mitrovica with gunshot wounds, but no conclusion has been made yet about who shot at whom on 29th May during the first violent clashes in Municipality Zvečan or whether, after the shooting, [violent clashes had occurred](#). As a matter of fact, that day KFOR, “[was first rescuing](#)” the members of Kosovo Special Forces (ROSU), who were blocked and surrounded by protesters, and then civilians thereby maybe preventing an even bigger radicalization or more casualties.

The fierce nature of the Serb protesters – apart from the videos and photographs of foreign agencies – can be seen in [KFOR’s press release published on 30th May](#), specifying that the total number of KFOR peace-keepers wounded during the unprovoked violence in the municipality of Zvečan went up to 30 soldiers.

11 soldiers from the Italian contingent and 19 soldiers from the Hungarian contingent sustained multiple injuries, including fractures and burns from improvised explosive incendiary devices (“Molotov cocktails” – our note). Three Hungarian soldiers were wounded by the use of firearms. Their injuries are not life-threatening.

The same announcement informs that NATO decided to increase its presence in the four municipalities after newly elected mayors tried to take office to prevent violence and protect lives on both sides, but that “**they were attacked by increasingly aggressive crowds. KFOR always operates with firmness and restraint, within strict Rules of Engagement. In this case, it responded to the unprovoked attacks of a violent and dangerous crowd, whilst carrying out its UN mandate in an impartial manner**”, states [the press release of KFOR command](#).



Vehicles on fire in Zvečan. **Photo:** Screenshot

ARM soldiers and officers are not involved in suppressing demonstrations

Fourthly, when Levica claims that the Macedonian Government, de facto, is involved in the repressions of Serb population in Kosovo through the ARM soldiers within KFOR, no details are elaborated about the deployed soldiers and officers and the kind of tasks performed.

According to the [official Ministry of Defense of North Macedonia's data](#), the ARM soldiers are deployed in securing the Regional KFOR Command in Pec as well as within the framework of participation in the Command in Prishtina:

In October 2020, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted a decision on sending 44 representatives of the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia (2-staff officers in the KFOR Headquarters in Pristina, 1 staff non-commissioned officer and 1 security platoon within KFOR Regional Command – West in Pec) for participation in the NATO operation “KFOR” in the Republic of Kosovo. The first contingent of Macedonian peace-keepers within NATO operation “KFOR” in the Republic of Kosovo was sent on 01.11.2020. The contingent was deployed within the framework of the Italian contingent. Since April 2021, the contribution within NATO’s operation “KFOR” has increased by 21 representatives or a total of 65 representatives, states the website of the MD.

However, further reading reveals that previous involvement of Macedonia’s participation within the framework of KFOR was in 2005 with the establishment of the Coordination Centre of ARM General Staff for “cooperation with the host country”, thereby KFOR – logistically supported by North Macedonia when units of the mission are on the territory of the country – is just added onto the other missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Lebanon.

All this means that neither physically, nor figuratively, ARM, the Government or any other body took part in the repressions in Kosovo.

KFOR is under the jurisdiction of the UN

As a reminder, the request to participate only in missions led by the UN – as stressed in Levica’s response – is contradictory. Namely, KFOR is also a mission led by the United Nations:

Under the jurisdiction of the United Nations (Resolution 1244), NATO is leading the support of the peace operation in Kosovo from 12th June 1999, within the framework of extended international efforts for peace-building and stability in the area.

The tasks of the mission are: *to contribute to a safe and secure environment; support and coordinate the international humanitarian effort and civil presence; support the development of stable, democratic, multi-ethnic and peaceful Kosovo, and support the development of the Kosovo Security Forces*, [specifies KFOR's website](#), while more details can be found [on this NATO-link](#).

And, finally, when Levica is saying that “**more than ninety percent of the Macedonian population condemns such a move of the Government...**”, is also spinning, because the only thing certain is that Levica condemns the move. As regards the extent and whether at all the citizens condemn the move, a detailed research has not been performed or at least some kind of a simple public opinion poll, therefore the numbers are only in the field of speculation.

Due to all of the above-noted arguments, the assessment is that Levica’s response subject of this analysis is a *spin*.

The Russian Embassy in Skopje – Main Diplomatic Internet Spammer in North Macedonia

The Russian Embassy in Skopje is a record-breaker when it comes to the number of Facebook posts. The country is of top regional interest of Kremlin – only Romania has more posts. The hybrid war in North Macedonia by the Russian Secret Services is a reality

Author: **Goran Lefkov**, 15 March 2023

In the last two years, the Russian Embassy in Skopje has published a high average of 5 posts per day on its Facebook page. This is shown by the research of the Centre for the Study of Democracy from Sofia that has been monitoring the posts of several embassies on the Balkans in the last two years.

This significant number of posts of the Russian Embassy in Skopje is multiple times higher than the number of pages [published by the Macedonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), that uploads 3 posts per week in average (a total of 5 in March so far and a total of 12 posts in February 2023), approximately 40 percent of the total number of posts [published on the Facebook page of the Macedonian Government](#) that disseminates approximately 12 posts per day (March 2023) in average.

According to **Goran Georgiev**, researcher in the Centre for the Study of Democracy in Sofia, the activities of the Russian Embassy cannot be compared with those of the others.

Research data was collected by means of monitoring with the help of specialized software for extracting data from online media, social network profiles of politicians, public figures and diplomats, online communication channels of diplomatic representations from the Balkan region, says *Georgiev*.

He stresses that North Macedonia is one of the central countries of Russian propaganda.



Photo: meta.mk

According to the number of posts published on the social network Facebook, the diplomatic representations of the European Union such as France, Germany, United Kingdom and the USA in North Macedonia have published around 7,500 posts in 2021 and in 2022. More than 50 percent of these posts are from Russian diplomatic representations in the country.

Table 1. Number of posts of diplomatic missions in N. Macedonia in 2021 and 2022 on social networks	
Diplomatic mission	Number of posts in 2021 and 2024
Russia	3.943
USA	1.296
European Union	873
United Kingdome	832
France	263
Germany	263
Total	7.470

Source: Center for the Study of Democracy, Sofia

From all the countries of former Yugoslavia, the largest number of posts was published in our country, while more posts have been published only in Romania from the entire Balkans. There, from a total of 10,500 posts, Russian diplomatic representations have published 7,100 posts.

Table 2. Number of posts in the Balkans	
Country	The number of published posts by the Russian diplomatic representative offices in the region in 2021 and 2022
Romania	7.193
N. Macedonia	3.943
Monte Negro	1.827
Greece	1.689
Bulgaria	1.572
Albania	902
Bosnia and Herzegovina	511
Serbia	270
Croatia	90

Source: Center for the Study of Democracy, Sofia

This is highly relevant since over 90 percent of the traffic achieved on the social networks in South-East Europe takes place on Facebook.

According to the number of interactions of the post-users of diplomatic representations, such as “like”, “comment” and “share”, the Facebook page of the Russian Embassy in North Macedonia is also at the top of the Balkans according to the number of population.

Since 2014 we are in a hybrid war with Russia. The Balkans were, especially, the target of this war. The quantity of published disinformation started to rapidly grow with the beginning of the war in Donbas in 2014. The Russian State created and controlled many websites. We have information pointing out that specific websites in Bulgaria were created by the Russian State i.e., the Russian Secret Services, says Georgiev.

He also added that the tactics of Russian propaganda have changed as well.

Russia has no need to invest in our traditional media. Through social network groups, Russia accomplishes its goals, says *Georgiev*.

Analyst **Xhelal Neziri** has been researching Russian propaganda in North Macedonia and in the Balkans for quite some time. According to him, the influence of Russian propaganda is obvious.

Since 2016, when the efforts to resolve the name dispute with Greece intensified, Russia increased its diplomatic staff in the country. Obviously, Moscow was not in favour of resolving the dispute with Greece because that opened the doors for NATO membership of the country. Until 2018, Russian influence in the country was present in the form of “soft power”, through the centres for culture, investments, education etc. After the adoption of the Prespa Agreement that same year, thereby finally resolving the issue with Greece and lifting the veto for NATO-membership, Russia embarked upon a hybrid war against our country. At the time, even the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, announced that North Macedonia became a legitimate Russian target with its NATO-membership, says *Neziri*.

Neziri believes that Putin’s regime is utilizing all possible tools to sustain and strengthen pro-Russian sentiment in the country. Such support is useful to Moscow so that it can direct the citizens of North Macedonia towards its own agenda, to build a dominant pro-Russian position about on the current security and geopolitical issues thereby stirring them towards a specific political party or option that is either pro-Russian or its political performance is compatible with the Russian agenda of the region.

He also adds that since North Macedonia became a NATO-member in March 2020, it has become constant target of hybrid war which will probably remain the case in the upcoming period. The reason for this is the fact that as the latest NATO-member, the country is seen as the “Achilles heel” of the Alliance.