

## **Pseudo-science is a gateway to Russian and anti-EU disinformation**

### Key takeaways:

Pseudo-science Facebook pages and groups can act as a gateway to disinformation, with large number of followers, little to none critical approach to their content from their followers, given the nature of the content, which makes adding malign narratives, such as “evil globalists”, “miracle technologies” particularly easy, dangerous and communicable in the social media space;

By analyzing the exact time of posting and the exact content of the message of the most viral malign posts, we can get an idea of a web of connected Facebook groups and pages, as well as websites, that might work in concert to promote these malign narratives, which raises the need to further investigate these networks with more specific tools and procedures (ownership, follow the money, etc).

### Findings:

The most [popular post](#) (16610 interactions, 53,3% of total interactions) was published by Info Știri, a Facebook page and media outlet with approximately 288,000 likes and followers. The post promoted a [link](#) to a website (infoalert.ro) with “news” regarding a so-called revolutionary technology to produce biofuel from seaweed, namely presenting a Spanish based company called Bio Fuels Systems that does research in this field. There are two interesting but concerning facts about this. First, the tone of the linked article is bombastic and conspiratorial, using expressions like “the invention of the millennium”, “it will disrupt the globalist’s plans”, “the oil princes will go bankrupt”. It uses this so-called news in order to attack the Green Deal and it says that during the current energy crisis, we need to keep petrol-based cars and forget about electric cars. The info in this post/article is not used to inform an audience, but rather to inoculate distrust/dissension on the topic of Green Deal and vilify “globalists”.

Secondly, the article refers to a TF1 (French television) video that shows one Bio Fuel Systems executive talking about the process but it does not mention that the video is from 2011. The so-called new invention was even presented (in a factual manner) in [Romanian news](#) at the time (2011). Furthermore, in 2018, Le Monde [wrote](#) about the fact that this video (from 2011) from TF1 was reshared massively in France, with the same conspiratorial tone, indicating that it is a tool that can serve entities and outlets that want to attack a particular topic, such as Green Deal. Proof of this is the fact that alternative fuels, including from seaweed, is a [strategy pursued by the EU](#) in trying to combat climate change and further the Green Deal agenda, not something that runs against it.

Another finding relating to this particular article is that it was present another 14 times in the 100 analyzed posts (adding another 4098 interactions to the 16610 interactions of the initial post). The article from infoalert.ro cites another Romanian media outlet, ziuaneews.ro, which posted the [cited article](#) in May 2022. The top post is posted on July 27, with all the other posts that contained this article being posted on the same date or a day or two apart (some at minutes apart). Chronologically, from the analyzed posts, the first Facebook page that posted this article was “[Știință și Mister](#)”, a page that constantly posts pseudo-science content and frequently reshares articles from infoalert.ro, which might suggest common ownership. This page also has a strong following of 165000+ followers. The rest of the posts containing this article are from

Facebook groups, some of them also having a pseudo-science theme, such as the "[Ancient Visitors](#)" Facebook group, with 23000+ members.

All posts were also manually coded based on the overall context of the post, using a predefined structure of eight categories. Four out of eight predetermined context tags (politics, military, economy, social, information, infrastructure, health, and environment) had the following results: "environment" (33 posts), "economy" (51 posts), "social" (8 posts), "politics" (8 posts). Most posts had an environmental and economic context. However, compared to the previous month, there were more NGOs or independent entities which talked about the Green Deal and climate change with the purpose of educating the public. In contrast, the least present tags were "politics" and "social". One reason for that was the multitude of posts about the economy, which were actually written by political entities. However, since most of them were about the cohesion policy and the European funds given to Romania, they could not be coded directly as political.

Other harmful posts present in the data were mostly encouraging people to not believe in the effects of climate change, arguing that this is not an effect of human actions and, at the same time, they were mentioning the "frightening" upcoming winter when everyone will freeze because of the Green Deal policies (similar to Russian propaganda regarding the gas cuts). Other popular subjects posted by these sources were related to the statement of the European Commission's Vice-President, Mr. Timmermans, regarding the reduction of pesticides use and the false declarations made by Bistrița's (Western Romanian city) mayor, saying that his city is in the top 3 most green cities in Europe.

#### Research in numbers:

- A majority of posts (58 out of 100 analyzed posts) are from sources labeled as "safe";
- Monitored posts were generated by **81 unique** sources and resulted in **31123 interactions**
- In terms of interactions, the total number of interactions has diminished significantly from our [last monthly report](#) (31123 versus 76021);
- 88,9% (27687) of total interactions (31123) are generated from sources labeled as potentially "harmful"
- The first 7 posts in terms of number of interactions have generated 82,2% (25610) of total interactions, all of them being labeled as potentially "harmful".
- From the total of 42 posts from sources labeled as potentially "harmful", 50% (21 posts) have an economical context, most of them criticizing the Green Deal for bringing about economic problems
- From the total of 42 posts from sources labeled as potentially "harmful", 73,8% (31 posts) have a narrative of opposing the Green Deal

45North, in partnership with the International Republican Institute's Beacon Project, tracked Romanian language Facebook conversations regarding the European Green Deal using CrowdTangle. The top 100 most interacted with posts between 21 July - 21 August 2022 were examined to identify malign narratives and sources, as well as to better understand the general debate about the Green Deal legislation in the Romanian language space. This monitoring is part of a larger IRI initiative being implemented simultaneously in five EU countries.

Heading forward, we will continue to monitor the Romanian language Facebook conversations regarding the European Green Deal for malign narratives, particularly Russian narratives, with an aim to identify individual malign sources and to better understand the broader disinformation challenge that we face.