

Green Deal: more politics, less policy

Key takeaways:

- There is a significant rise in the popularity of politics-related posts shared by sources labeled as harmful. The general overview of analysis in September demonstrates increased activity and popularity of Romanian entities and political parties which oppose the Green Deal and the European Union while making references to far-right extremism and pseudo-science.
- Questioning scientific methods, while promoting spiritual and religious grounds are the dominant topics promoted by these parties, whose popularity is increasing as they lay the groundwork for the 2024 Romanian elections.

Findings:

The most popular [post](#) (15,626 interactions), published by [Gândește România](#) and written by the Romanian lawyer Gheorghe Piperea, is mainly about the political implications of the pandemic and COVID-19 vaccines. The overall narrative criticizes the domestic and international ruling political elite. He outlines a discussion between two representatives of Moderna Inc and Pfizer-BioNTech and Romanian MEP Cristian Terheș, who is currently part of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group and the Romanian Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party (PNȚCD). Mr. Terheș has a complex political background known for cycling through different Romanian parties and his status as substitute member of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic. Since May 2020, when he joined the above-mentioned political groups, he made numerous interventions in the European Parliament and publicly expressed his skepticism regarding COVID-19 vaccines, scientific analyses and criticized the social restrictions during the pandemic. For this reason, he and Gheorghe Piperea share similar views that question the efficiency of science and promote distrust in the democratic institutions.

Mr. Piperea's post portrays the political elites, technocrats and scientists as the "true viruses", because, he believes, they incited the population to panic, pushed the medical companies to hurry with the vaccine without having enough proof and secretly made decisions that affected civilians. Furthermore, the text is intentionally written in an informal style with many spelling errors (possibly to avoid Facebook algorithms that detect COVID-19 related disinformation) blurring the line between formal attacks and mockery.

The relevance of this article for our analysis lays in the last part, where Mr. Piperea addresses the following rhetorical question: "How can we still trust them, when they tell us that energy 'sobriety', the transition to eating insects, the Green Deal and war propaganda are for our own safety?" Therefore, he vilifies actions supported by the European Union and democratic institutions, pandering to a big (and growing) group of supporters who are looking at these issues through the same lenses and not differentiating the topics one by one.

This text was shared on Facebook by [Gândește România](#) and [Mr. Piperea](#), both of them ranking in top 2 relevant posts during the August-September monitoring period. Furthermore, they were

shared multiple times by other accounts (identified as harmful sources), which promote pseudoscience and religion. Therefore, the post had a total of 21,813 total interactions.

Equally important, the third most relevant [post](#) for this period was also written by Mr. Piperea. The narrative follows the same eurosceptic lines and opposes Green Deal measures. He accuses the elites leading the European Union for the current energy, food and “geopolitical” crises, outlining, again, the European policies without explaining their contexts. He interprets and rephrases them in order to induce panic and raise hatred against the European Union. He is presenting all the measures taken to combat these crises as something wrong, in the name of defaming the European Union, without any space to debate the reasons the EU has enacted those policies.

57 posts portrayed similar narratives: 32 opposing the Green Deal and 25 opposing the European Union. Therefore, the findings show a majority of eurosceptical narratives in the period August-September, which is an interesting result considering the current rise in the popularity of the Socialist Democratic Party (PSD) and the conservative and extreme right-wing party The Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR). According to the Avangarde [poll](#) published in August 2022, AUR is third in political parties popularity (after PSD and PNL) and George Simion, the president of the party, is on the fourth place in the list of trustworthy political personalities (after the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Mr. Marcel Ciolacu, Prime Minister Nicolae Ciuca and President Klaus Iohannis).

The overall analysis of these 57 posts condemns the current Romanian ruling class (liberal-democrats) for causing all the current crises and poorly handling the economy. Even if PSD is also part of the current government, its political actions are not much criticized. Since the party tries to raise its popularity in the context of the 2024 elections, it does not promote its current collaboration with the liberal-democrats.

Other posts are directly blaming the European Union and the Green Deal for the price increase and the poor living conditions next winter. Representatives from PSD and AUR wrote the most relevant posts for our analysis, claiming that they could have handled the pandemic and the energy crises better. They criticize the “progressives” for following European Union’s principles and Green Deal policy, while giving examples such as China and Russia which are not making any green efforts that “restrict” the population, increase the prices or influence the natural development of the planet. This is the main narrative used in their posts, one of the most popular being written by [Lilian Scripnic](#) (member of AUR). At the same time, they are encouraging the population to revolt and fight the government for not resolving these crises. “Totalitarian regime” and “Dictatorship” are the labels used by the opposition to describe the current political environment, because they consider the population is no longer free.

On the other hand, the posts supporting the European Union and Green Deal are mainly posted by Romanian liberal-democrats and the European Union’s offices in Romania, which outline the latest developments in the Romanian green transition. Equally significant are the NGOs or the local newspapers, which organize various social events (theater plays, conferences, workshops) in order to educate the population regarding the effects of climate change and the importance of the Green Deal.

Research in numbers:

- A majority of posts (60 out of 100 analyzed posts) are from sources labeled as “harmful”;
- Monitored posts were generated by **85 unique** sources and resulted in **40247 interactions**;
- In terms of interactions, the total number of interactions has increased from our **last monthly report** (40247 versus 31123);
- 80,81% (32524) of total interactions (40247) are generated from sources labeled as potentially “harmful”;
- From the top 10 posts in terms of number of interactions, 7 were labeled as potentially harmful and generated 74,08% (29819) of total interactions, all of them being labeled as potentially “harmful”;
- From the total of 60 posts shared by sources labeled as potentially “harmful”, 31,66% (19 posts) have a political context, most of them criticizing the government and the European Union for causing the current crisis and not being able to handle world problems, and 28,33% (17 posts) have an economic context, complaining about the price increase in the energy and food sectors;
- From the total of 60 posts from sources labeled as potentially “harmful”, 53,33% (32 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 August - 21 September 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.