

Green Deal: Another Front for Malign Actors

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In the past six months 45North monitored Green Deal related disinformation narratives spread across Romanian language Facebook (read our previous reports here: [June](#); [July](#); [August](#); [September](#)). With the support of the International Republican Institute's Beacon Project, using data pulled from Crowdtangle, we looked at the top 100 most interacted with Facebook posts published between April 2022 to September 2022. that referenced Green Deal policies. With each month we gained more insight on how malign actors use the Green Deal as a proxy to attack the EU, scientific facts and the transatlantic relationship.

Key takeaways

- **Posts that contain malign narratives are 'louder'**. Each month, a majority (sometimes a vast majority) of the total interactions with the posts that we've looked at are associated with potentially harmful sources.
- **Most often, Green Deal attacks are mixed with other attacks on the EU, US, "globalists", "elites"**. The Green Deal is just another front for malign actors to attack more fundamental targets, such as the transatlantic bond between the US and Europe.
- **The Green Deal is an excellent marker to identify new potentially harmful disinformation sources**. During our research, we identified many new sources with a large number of followers that spread a wide range of disinformation narratives

- **Green Deal malign narratives were useful to identify a pro-AUR (Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor, a currently quite popular Romanian far-right party) media ecosystem.** We identified at least 3 websites that were founded in the last 2-3 years, with no transparency regarding ownership, that constantly promote malign narratives that are in line with the party's talking points.
- **The two most common malign narratives** associated with the Green Deal were **“Green Deal policies equate to communism/nationalization”**, especially with respect to farming and the agricultural sector, and **“Green Deal policies will lead to economic disaster”**, especially in the context of the energy crisis.
- **Facebook pages and groups with other profiles (mostly pseudo-science, astrology or ultraorthodox Christianity) can and do act as a platform to spread malign narratives.**

One of the most frequent potentially harmful sources that registered the most interactions is [Gheorghe Piperea](#), a class action lawyer with a large online following (155 thousand). While Mr. Piperea didn't express explicit public support for AUR or a desire to formally join the party, his name was on a [list of potential presidential candidates](#) presented by George Simion, the current president of the party. His posts are usually a mix of different narratives, including criticizing Green Deal policies on lack of economic merit, as well as for a lack of utility based on diminishing the threat of climate change but usually in a mix of other malign narratives such as ineffectiveness of vaccines, or **“Plandemic”**, with constant attacks on the EU. Besides the large number of interactions registered by his posts, an ecosystem of other Facebook pages, groups and websites constantly reshare them, adding a significant number of interactions to Mr. Piperea's total reach. Multiple websites (eg. [4media.info](#), [60m.ro](#)) constantly criticize all Romanian parties, except AUR, whose statements are supported in almost all cases. These websites have little transparency, with no information on their social media channels or their websites regarding ownership and funding. Mr. Piperea's posts, as well as other posts from sources labeled as potentially “harmful”, resonate on Facebook more than benign factual posts discussing Green Deal policies. These posts generated the highest number of interactions out of the total 100 monthly analyzed posts. This may have had multiple factors, such as Facebook's algorithm that promotes divisiveness to gain interactions, money invested in increasing the reach of the Facebook pages themselves (not necessarily the posts).

A common narrative compared Green Deal policies with communism and nationalization. This fits in the broader narrative that the EU is “the new Soviet Union” and so-called sexo-marxists are the new bolsheviks, a narrative that has the potential to gain traction in Romania because of its communist past. Especially vulnerable to this narrative are rural communities where Green Deal policies are portrayed in such a way that their implementation will supposedly lead to the destruction of the conservative way of life, it erodes tradition and, most importantly, it implies that the state and the EU are moving in tandem to nationalize farmlands and farms following some nefarious agenda. When vilified, the Green Deal is usually associated with the evils of globalization and the EU.

A somewhat surprising finding is that a number of Facebook pages, groups and websites that deal with pseudoscience topics, such as astrology, ancient aliens, prophecies, etc., are also promoting malign disinformation narratives, with explicit support for Russia, constantly attacking the Green Deal, outright denying climate change and science and always attacking the EU and the US. The question is why these Facebook pages and websites (with a large number of followers, such as Știință și Mister with 165,000+ followers) promoting malign narratives. Lacking transparency ownership transparency these websites and Facebook pages it is a hard question to answer. Furthermore, if people that follow these pages already have a low critical threshold regarding the quality of content adding malign disinformation narratives, Green Deal-related or of a broader scope, becomes easier.

Most of the analyzed posts were written in an economic context, most coming from politicians or political party pages. A significant number of posts also had a strong political undertone, with politicians using the Green Deal for political gain, either promoting its benefits or attacking its merits, depending which political base they gravitate towards. Very few posts addressed Green Deal policies in an infrastructure context, with long-term policies focusing on major changes with big infrastructure projects, possibly because they have less political traction and usefulness in the short-term.

Recommendations

- **Increase the regulation of online transparency in two directions:** (1) **ownership of website domains** - it should be mandatory to mention to whom is the domain registered in Terms & Conditions, not the registrar, but the owner itself, either an individual or organization; (2) **political funds** (especially, but not limited to, public funds made available to political parties) **paid to media publications**

- (in this case online media and social media) should be made public with detailed information (value, payment date, scope, etc.). From a legislative point of view, this means fully adopting and implementing regulations stipulated in the European Media Freedom Act.
- **More robust communication strategy** - if posts containing malign narratives are “louder” , meaning that they gather a much higher number of interactions than the average, they need to be matched by interactions from posts coming from official sources (eg. the EU Commission Facebook page in Romania). The posts (and the overall online communication strategy) need to reach a broader audience, for example people in rural communities that may be a target of narratives such as “Green Deal brings about nationalization”, not just an urban audience. These posts should be disseminated in specific Facebook groups that have large memberships and reach, depending on the topic of the post, with language calibrated for the audience it targets.
- **Support change from within the media ecosystem itself.** A heavy hand from state agencies in regulating media content is never a good idea. [especially in societies that are. However, the media and press ecosystem in Romania is degrading; a solution may be supporting the system to repair itself from within. There is a need for more funding investigative journalists who can go deeper to find out who is behind the Facebook pages and communities that spread disinformation, as well as CSOs that monitor and track these pages and websites and debunk their malign narratives.

Going forward, it is almost certain that Green Deal policies will be subject to more intensive disinformation attacks in conjunction with the probable intensification of the Russian generated energy crisis in Europe. We expect to see the potentially harmful sources that we have identified so far to increase the volume of content that they produce, probably insisting on what will be a hard winter in Europe, high energy prices and economic downturn. While solid leadership from Brussels and Bucharest (in Romania’s case) is the fundamental building block of any solution that carries us forward through this winter and through the energy transition itself, we underline the need to clearly and robustly communicate at all levels, in specific targeted language of the needs and benefits of implementing the Green Deal at national and EU level.

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