

ROMANIAN LANGUAGE SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING: MALIGN NARRATIVES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

JULY - DECEMBER 2022



All images in this report are AI generated via starryai - <https://starryai.com/>

AUTHORS:

DRAGOȘ GHIMPE / DRAGOȘ TÎRNOVEANU
FOUNDERS 45NORTH

In the context of the unprovoked February 24 Russian aggression against Ukraine and the subsequent escalation of disinformation in the social media and online space, 45north, in partnership with the International Republican Institute's Beacon Project, analyzed Romanian language social media data from Facebook, Twitter and Telegram for the last six months of 2022. This report includes our key summary, principal findings and methodology.

Methodology

The objective of our monitoring is to try to better identify and understand how hostile narratives, especially of Russian origin, percolate the Romanian language social media space (Romania and Moldova) in the context of the unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine. In order to make sense of the chaotic and heterogeneous social media space and its entanglement with malign narratives, we selected three narratives that we think are the most consequential in the broader public perception of the war. These three narratives are classified as anti-NATO/anti-US, appeasement, and energy security.

A short description of each selected narrative:

- **Anti-NATO/Anti-US:** content that demonizes NATO and the US, particularly in their respective roles in the EuroAtlantic security architecture
- **Appeasement:** narratives that promote peace in conditions favoring Russia and in the detriment of the sovereignty of Ukraine, especially formulas that promote territorial compromises that deprive Ukraine of agency
- **Energy security:** refers to narratives that reiterate Russian energy blackmail talking points, such as stoking panic over energy prices or the effects of winter.

In order to search the three social media platforms, we developed a set of syntaxes associated with these narratives. By syntax we mean a set of keywords arranged together with simple logical operators such as “OR”, “AND”. Applying a syntax to queries on social media platforms should result in Romanian language posts that refer to the war in Ukraine and subsequent topics.

We have searched Facebook, Twitter and Telegram for Romanian language posts and sorted them by number of interactions (the definition for interactions for each platform are [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)), in order to see the most viral posts in descending order. Having sorted the results, we gained a better picture of the individuals and organizations that talked about the war in Ukraine on these platforms, in the last six months of 2022.

We opened, read and analyzed **the first 100 relevant posts by number of interactions** for each social media platform. By “relevant” we mean posts that are relevant in the broader context of the war in Ukraine and the three selected narratives.

Each relevant post was assigned four tags: Relevant (YES/NO), Source Standards (Quality/Questionable/Fake Conspiracy/Unknown/Tabloid/Political Bias), Stance (oppose/neutral/support) and Country (country indicative, eg. RO, MD). Through this classification we gained insight about the Romanian language social media conversation regarding the war in Ukraine and how much Russian malign narratives permeate it.

More details regarding the methodology can be found in the Methodology – Explicative Notes section of this report.



KEY SUMMARY

In our report for the first six months of 2022, we used research conducted by IRES (February - August 2022) to compare the general sentiment of Romanians towards the war in Ukraine with our findings about the conversation on social media. For this report we used the one year of war poll by IRES (February 2022 - February 2023) to do the same comparison with the social media data available to us for the second part of 2022.

According to the IRES poll, in February 2023, 36% of the respondents said that they do not want Romania to support Ukraine in their war efforts, while 62% were in support. No new data was shared about how Romanians positioned themselves towards Russia justification for war, but as it was pointed out in the previous poll, in August 2022, 31% of Romanians thought that the invasion was somehow justified. The two distinct questions may be correlated and it may show an increase in Romanian sentiment leaning towards Russia, after a full year of war in Ukraine.

Regarding the capabilities of NATO being able to defend a member state in case of a Russian aggression, the positive responses went up from 75% in August 2022, to 80% in February 2023 and the negative responses went down, from 22% to 17%, during these six months, hence trust in the Alliance is on the rise. It is clear that a majority of Romanians still support NATO and Ukraine but the numbers in the IRES poll may be interpreted as a decline in support, something we see in our results for the second part of 2022 as well.

Television stations are even more favored by Romanians as a source for news about the war, with an increase to 87%, from 83% in August 2022, while there is a decrease in the number of respondents who preferred social media as their source of information, 23% in February 2023 and 27% just six months prior. This trend may be a factor behind the considerable drop in the number of interactions that we have seen in the second half of the year for all three narratives.

Facebook, unsurprisingly, remains the most used social media platform, with orders of magnitude more interactions gathered than Twitter and Telegram. As with the previous report, we mention this obvious finding because it means that the structural particularities of Facebook as a social media platform must be understood and taken into account in any monitoring research.

KEY SUMMARY

We saw a very significant drop in the total number of interactions gathered by each narrative. This drop is probably due to a combination of factors but probably the most obvious and important is war fatigue. As conflict broke out in February 2022, the shock of a major land war in Europe in the twenty-first century and the suffering of millions of innocent Ukrainians gathered enormous global interest, especially from countries neighboring Ukraine. As the topic gradually degraded in importance in the news cycle, this may explain the drop in the total number of interactions gathered. Again, war fatigue is not the only possible factor that determined this drop, especially when looking at the data from the IRES poll that says that the number of Romanians who claim to follow recent developments in the war in Ukraine has risen to 66% in February 2023 from 60% of respondents in August 2022. This means that there must be other factors at play, perhaps the fact that malign actors focused on narratives different from the ones that we have studied in our research.

The biggest percentage drop was associated with the Appeasement narrative (62,1%, from 1,271,404 to 482,468 interactions). This very high percentage drop for the Appeasement narrative is difficult to explain in the context of the relatively high percentage of Romanians (36%) that do not want to help Ukraine's war effort, according to the IRES poll. The Anti-NATO/Anti-US narrative saw a 32,5% drop (from 1,926,633 to 1,303,463), while the number of total interactions gathered by the Energy Security narrative registered a 11,6% decrease (from 1,150,882 to 1,018,219). The fact that Energy Security had the lowest decrease for the number interactions compared to the first half of 2022 may be explained by the fact that Russia has cut off gas supplies to Europe in September and the discussion on the effects this may have on Europe gathered steam in anticipation of the 2022 winter.

The Anti-NATO/Anti-US narrative gathered the most interactions, as in the first half of 2022. As mentioned in the previous report, the scope of this narrative is broader than for the other two, which can explain the higher number of interactions, with some overlap of posts between the narratives.

The key takeaway from the first six months of 2022, that videos tend to be prevalent in the case of Facebook posts, especially posts marked as "oppose", still stands. 58,8% of posts labeled as "oppose" are native video/ live video for the Energy security narrative (with 69,5% of oppose interactions for this narrative), 63,8% of the ones for Anti-NATO/ Anti-US narrative (with 70,7% of all oppose interactions for this narrative) and 31,8% for the Appeasement narrative (with 40,7% of all oppose interactions for this narrative). This juxtaposition of the number of video posts labeled as "oppose" with the number of interactions they gathered clearly shows how effective this type of content is. This trend will probably only increase in the future, raising challenges about how AI use by malign actors will change the paradigm and how inbuilt safety mechanisms from social media companies (Facebook, Youtube, etc.) will cope with a surge in the quality and quantity of this type of content.

KEY SUMMARY

The observation that Facebook posts marked as “oppose” tend to “make more noise” (noise being defined as the ratio between the percentage of interactions and the number of posts >1) in terms of engagement remains true for two of the three narratives (Energy security and Anti-NATO/ Anti-US):

- Energy security: 44 posts with 46,3% of interactions (previously 29 posts with 38% of the interactions for the first six months of 2022)
- Anti-NATO/ Anti-US: 47 posts with 57,8% of all interactions (previously 47 posts with 50% of interactions for the first six months of 2022)
- Appeasement: 32 posts with 25,2% of interactions (previously 21 posts with 30,8% of total interactions for the first six months of 2022).

The opposite can be said about the support posts for all three narratives, with the ratio being < 1. The appeasement narrative is different in part because of the definition of “neutral” that we have explained in the beginning of the narrative.

The Republic of Moldova remains a high-volume source of posts and interactions on Facebook in the second half of 2022. With a total of only 14% of Romania’s population, Moldova has the following numbers for the three narratives:

- Energy security: 55 posts with 51,5% of all interactions, of which 40,6% are oppose
- Anti-NATO/ Anti-US: 11 posts and 13,2% of all interactions, of which 46,2% are oppose
- Appeasement: 39 posts with 54,9% of all interactions, of which 1,2% are oppose

It remains clear that Moldova should be taken into account in future research, as it registered a huge increase compared to the first half of the year. The number of interactions from Moldova on Facebook in the first half of the year ranged from 5% (for the Anti-NATO narrative), to 19% (for Energy security), and 23,8% (for Appeasement). This increase may be explained, at least for one of the narratives, by the fact that energy security is a much more vulnerable pressure point for Chişinău, than for Bucharest.

Also, Moldova’s complicated relationship with Russia, as well as its geographic position clearly have an effect on the level of interest of the population regarding the war. The strong cultural and geopolitical link between Romania and Chişinău also generates a strong interest in Romanian society for events happening in Moldova. According to the IRES poll cited above, 83% of Romanians strongly or partially believe that Moldova should be part of the European Union. The notoriety of Maia Sandu, the President of Moldova, also has an impact in the total number of posts and interactions coming from Romania’s neighboring state.

KEY SUMMARY

The percentage of posts coming from Fake/Conspiracy Sources as well as Questionable ones in the second half of the year remains very high and even more so when it comes to total number of interactions. The peak is in the case of the Anti-NATO narrative, with 59% of the interactions coming from these sources. Second place is the Energy security narrative, with 40,6% of all interactions coming from these two types of sources, then the Appeasement narrative with 29,4%. Generally, the majority of posts coming from these sources are marked as “oppose”. In contrast, only 15,8%, 6% and respectively 12,9% of all engagements came from Quality sources. It is desirable to have as many Quality sources and interactions with them as possible, but **the ecosystem seems to have worsened, with even four times as many interactions from malign sources than from Quality ones.**

Political Biased sources remained very relevant in the second half of 2022 as well, with an overwhelming majority of 50,2% of all engagements for the Appeasement narrative, over 62% percent of them being neutral posts. It is important to note that Political Biased sources are politicians or political parties regardless of their political compass. We can observe a considerable increase for this type of source from the first half of 2022, from 38,5%. Maia Sandu had 28,6% (137,908) of all Facebook interactions for this narrative, most of them being neutral.

Political biased sources saw a small increase for the Energy security narrative, as well, from 31,6% to 33,4%. However, most interactions came from Questionable sources for this narrative, with an increase from 23,8% to 37,9%.

Almost half of all interactions from the Anti-NATO/ Anti-US narrative came from Questionable sources (47,1%), compared to 30,4% in the first half of the year. We see Questionable sources, which are mostly opposing Ukraine/NATO, as gaining a lot of traction in the second half, whereas Quality sources actually decreased in percentage of interactions in the second half, as mentioned above.

The broad malign themes that were present in the posts labeled as “oppose” on Facebook included **“we need to negotiate with Russia for gas” “sanctions will only backfire and don’t work”, “American/NATO troops are occupation forces in Romania”, “Romania will be dragged into war by America”,** narratives very similar to what we have seen in the first six months of 2022.

We further enforce our statement regarding Twitter, that it is not the social media platform that Romanian language speakers prefer. For example, the Appeasement narrative on Twitter only had 0.24% (1179) of all Facebook engagements (482,468) in the second half of 2022. It is a drop in the net number of interactions (1708 in the first half), but a small increase in percentage, as Twitter had only 0.13% of the staggering 1,271,404 Facebook interactions. The situation is similar with the two other narratives.

The broad malign themes that were present in the tweets labeled as “oppose” included **“NATO provokes Russia”, “America is a sinking ship”, “Americans are also corrupt”, “we should avoid a world conflagration by negotiating with Russia”, “Romania needs Russian gas”, “peace does not favor the US because of LNG and arm sales”, “supporting Ukraine encourages war, not peace”** in line mostly with the narratives we have seen in the first half of the year.



KEY SUMMARY

Another clear difference between Facebook and Twitter is that tweets from the Moldova are very low in numbers. Only two tweets came from Moldova for the Appeasement narrative and only one tweet for each of the other narratives in the first half of 2022. In the second half of the year, only two tweets from Moldova were related to Appeasement and Anti-NATO, while not a single tweet from Moldova was linked with Energy security. **Hence, while the malign posts from Moldova are relevant on Facebook, we cannot say the same thing about Twitter.** Also, the population from Moldova uses Twitter even less than Romanians, at least for the content that we analyzed.

Twitter interactions compared with Facebook and first half of the year engagements:

- Appeasement: A vast majority of interactions were neutral in the second half of the year (70,7%), similar to the 80,7% of interactions in the first half of the year. The percentage of neutral posts on Facebook is comparable with Twitter, with 64% of interactions coming from neutral posts. As mentioned in the first report, these high percentages of interactions from neutral posts have to do with the definition of “neutral” posts, as most posts or sources fall into the neutral category, if they do not specify the terms in which the peace should happen. Therefore, appeasement is a bit different from the other two narratives.
- Most interactions on Twitter were from tweets labeled as “support” for the Anti-NATO / Anti-US narrative (69,6%), while Facebook posts continued to be mostly opposed to it in the second half with 57,8% of all interactions. Compared to the interactions on Twitter from January-June, (68,9% of the interactions were in support in that period) no notable change was noticed.
- For the Energy security narrative, 76,9% of the interactions came from tweets that were labeled as support, while most of the Facebook interactions were marked as “oppose” with 46,3%. Compared with the first half of the year, interactions from tweets labeled as “support” on Twitter have increased, previously being 65,8%.

The ratio of interactions from Fake/Conspiracy sources and Quality sources is much better for Twitter than it is for Facebook, as it was the case in the first six months. 62,3% of all interactions for Appeasement came from Quality sources, mostly publications with proper journalistic standards, most of them being neutral. This is a positive shift from mostly Political Biased sources in the first half (49,3%). For Anti-NATO, 49,5% of interactions came from Unknown sources, a considerable increase from 34,8% in the first half. However, most of them were in support (64,8%). 60,7% of all Twitter interactions for Energy Security came from Unknown sources, a large increase from 35,4% in the first half, 73,5% of them being in support. Unknown sources are usually individuals who share their thoughts on social media without any direct interest in the matter, therefore it is a positive aspect that so many individuals have posted in support of these narratives.

KEY SUMMARY

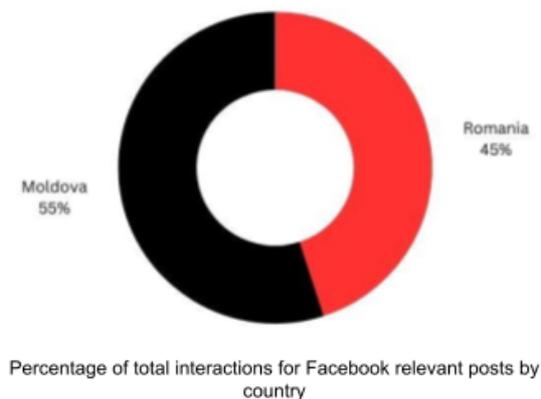
Telegram continued to host some of the most malign narratives, with very aggressive fake news, varying from conspiracy theories, portraying Western figures in a devilish way and insisting that **NATO, the US and the EU have started the Ukrainian war**. As mentioned in the methodology, the results are skewed towards malign posts, as we searched many preselected channels that were known for spreading disinformation and this also limited the number of posts to less than 100.

A considerably larger number of posts was generated in the second half of the year with a higher number of interactions. In the first half of the year, there were **194,676 views from 49 posts**, whereas in the second half, there were **198 posts with 398,905 views**. The number of posts is around four times larger than the first half, whereas the number of views is roughly two times larger. Out of the 198 total posts, only 30 of them were neutral, while 168 were marked as “oppose”.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - APPEASEMENT

From the outset, we need to clarify the thought process of labeling the stance of the posts for this narrative. Neutral posts were considered those that promoted the idea of peace, without disclosing the means in which this peace may happen or did not have a clear opinion on the approach. Posts marked as being in support were those that made a clear distinction between the aggressor and the victim and which were not willing to make any territorial compromises for Ukraine, while the ones marked as oppose were those that promoted peace usually under any conditions possible and that promoted negotiations with the Russian side so that the occupied regions of Ukraine would remain in their possession.

- **Total number of interactions for Facebook: 482,468 (for the first 100 relevant posts)**
- Facebook posts: Support (16%) - with 10,3% of interactions / Neutral (52%) with 64,5% of interactions / Oppose (32%) with 25,2% of interactions
- **Total number of interactions for Twitter: 1179 (for the first 100 relevant tweets)**
- Twitter posts Support (15%) with 12,6% of interactions / Neutral (52%) with 70,7% of interactions / Oppose (33%) with 16,8% of interactions



- Number of posts from Romania on Facebook: 60 posts with 44,4% of interactions of which 10,8% are of support, 34% neutral and 55,2% oppose;
- Number of posts from Romania on Twitter: 98 with 98,6% of interactions of which 12,6% are of support, 71,7% neutral and 15,7% oppose
- Number of posts from Moldova on Facebook: 39 with 54,9% of interactions of which 10,1% are in support, 88,8% neutral and 1,2% oppose.
- Number of posts from Moldova on Twitter: 2 with 1,4% of interactions of which 5,9% are in support and 94,1% oppose.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - APPEASEMENT

- On Facebook 6,8% (32,791) of total interactions came from Fake/Conspiracy sources (of which all oppose Ukraine), 50,2% (242,085) of interactions came from Political Biased sources (of which 14,7% are of support 66,2% are neutral and 19,1% oppose), 12,9% (62,216) of interactions came from Quality sources (of which 3,8% were in support and 96,2% neutral), 22,6% (109,321) of total interactions came from Questionable sources (of which a single post was neutral, but had 65,7% of the interactions and one that was opposing the narrative, with 34,3%) and 7,5% (36,055) from Unknown sources (of which 32,7% are of support, 53,6% neutral and 13,7% oppose).
- On Twitter 10,1% (119) of total interactions came from Fake/Conspiracy sources (of which all opposed Ukraine), 0,4% (5) of total interactions came from Politically Biased sources (of which all are of support), 62,3% (735) of total interactions came from Quality sources (all neutral), 3,8% (45) of total interactions came from Questionable sources (all are oppose), 23,3% (275) of total interactions came from Unknown sources (of which 52% are of support, 35,6% neutral and 12,4% oppose).
- The total number of interactions registered by the top 100 relevant posts is much lower in the July-December 2022 period, compared to the first half of 2022. **On Facebook, there were 1,271,404 interactions in the first half the year, compared to 482,468 in the second half of the year, which represents more than a two-thirds drop in interactions (62%).** This can be explained by the fact that the general public has lost interest in the topic as the conflict continued and other subjects have gained attention in the media.
- The conversation on Facebook mostly followed the same pattern, with the highest number of posts (52%) and interactions (64,5%) being neutral. Even though the number of posts has decreased compared to the first half (62% in January-June), the percentage of interactions has slightly increased (52% in January-June).
- **On Twitter, the number is also considerably smaller, with only 1179 interactions, compared to the 1708 interactions in the first half of 2022.**
- **39 posts on Facebook came from the Republic of Moldova with more than half of the total interactions registered by the analyzed posts (54,9%, 264,874).** This fact is related to the high number of posts by the president of Moldova, Maia Sandu, but also other important political figures from Moldova, such as former President Igor Dodon or ex-Prime-Minister Natalia Gavrilița.



PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - APPEASEMENT

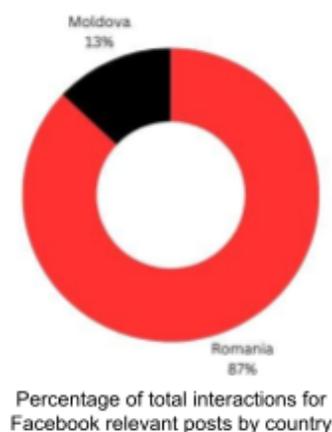
- **On Facebook, the Political Bias sources comprised more than half of all interactions, with 50,2% (242,085), but when we filter by Moldovan-based Political bias sources, we can see that these sum up to 33% (159,612) of the total number of interactions.** Maia Sandu alone has 28,6% (137,908) of all interactions, with all her posts being neutral, except for one of support. The President of Moldova maintains the same discourse that encourages peace, while trying not to provoke the Russians. Her only post labeled as support is the one related to her speech in front of the United Nations, in which she states more clearly the need to not make concessions towards Russia.
- **All Fake/Conspiracy sources came from Romania, both on Facebook and on Twitter.**
- **The conversation on Twitter was still dominated in the second half by neutral posts with 70,7% (833) of all interactions from 52 posts.** Most of these posts are from Quality sources, 88,2% (735), the rest of them being Unknown (11,8%). Similar to the first half, the posts on Twitter were shares of articles by respectable publications that also share their content on Twitter, without it being their first platform for disseminating information.
- **The post with the most interactions on Facebook (14,9% of all interactions) was a neutral one, from Moldova, the source being 10tv.ro, which distributed a fragment of a Russian TV talk show in which the Russian analysts state that the war in Ukraine cannot be won and peace negotiations should start,** while a Russian general talks about the impossibility of ending the war. The position of the publication is clearly pro-Ukraine, but also they often share anti-EU content.
- **On Twitter, the post with the most interactions gathered is from Știrile TVR (The Romanian State Television). The post is neutral and it speaks about the Romanians in Cernăuți that are fighting for peace.** The post gathered 12,2% (144) of all Twitter

TELEGRAM - APPEASEMENT

- Total number of views for Telegram: 63,320
- The syntax used for the query generated only 30 posts that dealt with the general topic of peace in the context of the war in Ukraine.
- All the analyzed posts were from Romania of which 23 were opposing Ukraine, while 7 of them were neutral.
- The syntax generated 2 distinct sources, one being Fake/Conspiracy and the other one being Questionable.
- The Fake/ Conspiracy source generated 82,3% (52,120) of all interactions, all being oppose, while the Questionable source generated 17,7% (11,200) of all interactions, all of them being neutral. The Questionable source was “sputnecenzurat”, which distributes war-related content in a rather neutral manner, although the declarations by Russian officials cited on the channel seem to be more numerous than those of NATO/ US/ EU leaders.
- Iosefina Pascal, a controversial TV and radio journalist from Romania has 30,3% of all views with just 4 posts. She is known for her anti-pandemic, anti-masks, anti-vaccination, anti-5G takes, as well as organizing protests regarding these topics. Her top post talks about the preparations of war in Moldova and how Maia Sandu is incapable of maintaining peace in the country.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - ANTI-NATO / ANTI-U.S.

- **Total number of interactions for Facebook: 1,303,463 (for the first 100 relevant posts).**
- Facebook posts: Support (42%) - with 33,7% of interactions / Neutral (11%) with 8,4% of interactions / Oppose (47%) with 57,8% of interactions
- **Total number of interactions for Twitter: 6781 (for the first 100 relevant tweets).**
- Twitter posts Support (63%) with 69,6% of interactions / Neutral (12%) with 16,4% of interactions / Oppose (25%) with 13,9% of interactions



- Number of posts from Romania on Facebook: 89 with 86,7% of interactions of which 31,4% are of support, 9% neutral and 59,5% oppose;
- Number of posts from Romania on Twitter: 92 with 94% of interactions of which 71% are of support, 15,8% neutral and 13,1% oppose
- Number of posts from Moldova on Facebook: 11 with 13,2% of interactions of which 49,2% are of support, 4,4% neutral and 46,2% oppose.
- Number of posts from Moldova on Twitter: 2 with 0,9% of interactions of which all are neutral.
- On Facebook 11,9% (155,131) of total interactions came from Fake/Conspiracy sources (of which all oppose Ukraine), 10,9% (142,510) of interactions came from Political Biased sources (of which 37,5% are of support and 62,4% oppose), 15,8% (206,797) of interactions came from Quality sources (of which 76,6% were in support and 23,3% neutral), 47,1% (614,622) of total interactions came from Questionable sources (of which 23,7% were in support, 8,7% neutral, 67,4% oppose) and 14,1% (184,403) from Unknown sources (of which 44,4% are of support, 4,1% neutral and 51,3% oppose).

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - ANTI-NATO / ANTI-U.S.

- On Twitter 6,2% (427) of total interactions came from Fake/Conspiracy sources (of which all opposed Ukraine), 3,9% (269) of total interactions came from Politically Biased sources (of which 100% are of support), 22,4% (1522) of total interactions came from Quality sources (of which 95,2% are of support, 4,7% neutral), 17,7% (1203) of total interactions came from Questionable sources (of which 68,7% are of support and 31,2% oppose), 49,5% (3360) of total interactions came from Unknown sources (of which 64,8% are of support, 31% neutral) and 4,1% oppose).
- **More than half of the total interactions gathered by the analyzed posts were from posts opposing NATO/US.** This trend worsened when compared with the first half of 2022 (57,8% of total interactions from posts opposing NATO/US in July-December 2022 vs 50% for January-June 2022). This is a very high percentage for a NATO country, in the context of a general European and transatlantic consensus regarding the war in Ukraine.
- **As with the first half of 2022, a majority (59%) of interactions gathered by the analyzed posts came from Fake/Conspiracy and Questionable sources.** Quality sources decreased to 15,8% of total interactions (from 16,1%), heavily outperformed by sources with lower publishing standards and/or straight conspiracy spreaders.
- **The total number of interactions on Facebook decreased by 623,170 when compared to the first six months of 2022,** which might be an indicator of war fatigue and a general downward trend in interest for everything related to the war.
- **The Facebook posts with most interactions (71191) is from Anchetatorii.ro, a website and Facebook page that was founded in December 2020.** The post is focused on attacking Romania's current president, Klaus Iohannis, and former president Traian Băsescu, for allegedly using their influence to give control of a state-owned stock company to Mark Gittenstein, a former American ambassador to Romania and Franklin Templeton, a US-based investment firm. This baseless claim that was first made in 2017 in the context of political upheaval, is being reshuffled by this website in July 2022. The website focuses on so-called investigations against politicians but only aimed at the establishment parties (PSD, PNL, UDMR) and the progressives (USR), with the notable exception of AUR (Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor). In this video post, the author says that "Americans are thieves as dangerous as the invading Russian army". There is no information on the website regarding the editorial team or the ownership.
- **From Moldova, Sinteza.org is the Facebook page/website that gathered the most interactions (46412 from 2 posts) from posts labeled as oppose.** The posts focused on demonizing Maia Sandu for her association with America by using video footage of protesters expressing their anger for the economic situation in Moldova.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - ANTI-NATO / ANTI-U.S.

- **Twitter total interactions also dropped significantly when compared to the first half of 2022, down from 9755 interactions to 6781.** In contrast with Facebook, for Twitter, the number of interactions for posts labeled as support slightly grew (from 68,9% to 69,6%), while interactions from posts labeled as oppose slightly decreased (from 16,5% to 13,9%).
- **Particular narratives that are promoted on Twitter range from American military decline, Romania is an American colony, NATO is in a war with Russia.** As with other narratives in this report, most of the posts labeled as oppose come from private individuals, not public figures.

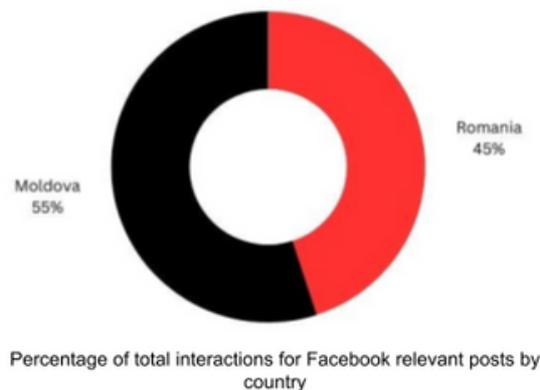


TELEGRAM - ANTI-NATO / ANTI - U.S.

- Total number of views for Telegram: 250133
- The syntax used for the query generated 100 relevant posts that anti-NATO/anti-US content.
- All of the analyzed posts were from Romania of which 87 were in opposition of Ukraine and 13 neutral.
- The syntax generated 8 distinct sources (1 Questionable, 7 Fake/Conspiracy).
- Posts that espouse anti-US and/or anti-NATO propaganda/disinformation have a broad range of topics that they disseminate, from NATO deciding unilaterally to expand and Vladimir Putin is only defending his country, to contesting the defensive role of America/NATO troops in Romania.
- 25% of the views were gathered by the channel wwwAurelianRO which is based on content from www.aurelian.ro a blog created by Mr. Aurelian Popa, an online marketing consultant, where he regularly posts videos of himself where he addresses a broad range of topics, especially regarding the COVID-19 vaccine (using the term “plandemic”) or the war in Ukraine. A lot of the relevant posts for this analysis, from this source, are actually quotes from Mr. Cozmin Gușă, a Romanian fringe politician with recurrent anti-US views.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - ENERGY SECURITY

- **Total number of interactions for Facebook: 1,018,219 (for the first 100 relevant posts)**
- Facebook posts: Support (44%) - with 39,6% of interactions / Neutral (12%) with 14% of interactions / Oppose (44%) with 46,3% of interactions
- **Total number of interactions for Twitter: 10137 (for the first 100 relevant tweets)**
- Twitter posts Support (60%) with 76,9% of interactions / Neutral (20%) with 17,7% of interactions / Oppose (20%) with 5,2% of interactions
- Number of posts from Romania on Facebook: 52 with 44,9% of interactions of which 25% are of support, 21,6% neutral and 53,2% oppose;



- Number of posts from Romania on Twitter: 89 with 95% of interactions of which 78,3% are of support, 16,8% neutral and 5,2% oppose
- Number of posts from Moldova on Facebook: 48 with 55% of interactions of which 51,5% are of support, 7,8% neutral and 40,6% oppose.
- Number of posts from the United States (Moldova did not have any posts so we chose the country of origin second to Romania by number of posts) on Twitter: 6 with 2,8% of interactions of which 84,1% are of support and 15,8% neutral.
- On Facebook 2,7% (28,186) of total interactions came from Fake/Conspiracy sources (of which all oppose Ukraine), 33,4% (340,649) of interactions came from Political Biased sources (of which 68,2% are of support, 4,9% neutral and 26,7% oppose), 6% (61,464) of interactions came from Quality sources (of which 89,4% were in support, 10,5% neutral), 37,9% (386,080) of total interactions came from Questionable sources (of which 5,9% were in support, 8,4% neutral, 85,6% oppose) and 19,8% (201,840) from Unknown sources (of which 46,2% are of support, 43% neutral and 10,6% oppose).

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - ENERGY SECURITY

- On Twitter 1,8% (188) of total interactions came from Politically Biased sources (of which 100% are of support), 20,2% (2049) of total interactions came from Quality sources (of which 95,9% are of support, 4% neutral), 12,6% (1279) of total interactions came from Questionable sources (of which 87,4% are of support, 9,7% neutral, 2,7% oppose), 60,7% (6158) of total interactions came from Unknown sources (of which 73,5% are of support, 25,8% neutral) and 0,6% oppose) and 4,5% (463) of total interactions came from Fake/Conspiracy sources (of which all oppose Ukraine).
- When compared to the first six months of the year, **the second half of 2022 saw a notable increase of interactions gathered by posts that opposed Ukraine (46,3% versus 38%)**, as well as a decrease of interactions gathered by posts that supported Ukraine (45,3% versus 39,6%). The total number of interactions gathered on Facebook for July-December 2022 decreased slightly compared to the first six months of 2022 (1,018,219 versus 1,150,882).
- **Twitter data actually shows better stats for the second part of the year**, with the percentage of the total interactions gathered by posts labeled as support growing from 65,8% to 76,9% and the percentage of the total interactions gathered by posts labeled as oppose decreasing from 18% to 5,2%.
- **Moldova punched well above its demographic weight compared to Romania when it came to total interactions gathered (55% versus 45%)**, opposite with what we saw in the report for the first six months of 2022 (when the percentages were 85,5% for Romania versus 13,9% for Moldova). This might be a consequence of the fact that the discussion about the supply of energy was more present in the general public and social media discourse in the second part of the year, just before the coming winter.
- **One of the most prolific sources posting content opposing Ukraine was Omniapres.md**, a Moldovan news website that gathered 116,367 interactions, a significant 24,7% of total interactions from posts opposing Ukraine. The first **post** (from October 27) alone gathered 40,644 interactions or 8,6% of the total interactions gathered by opposing posts. It's a video taken from Sputnik showing Vladimir Putin explaining, during the Valdai Club meeting, that only at his request Gazprom agreed to a commercial contract (in 2021) with Moldova on "Moldova's terms". The said negotiations were, of course, much more complex, and it implied political and geopolitical **concessions** from Chişinău in order for the gas to flow. A significant part of the content on this website, omniapres.md, is focused on criticizing Maia Sandu's government and party so it naturally adheres to many pro-Russian talking points.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS - ENERGY SECURITY

- **A significant number of posts on Facebook use energy sanctions and the Green Deal to attack the EU and thus, indirectly, serve Russian interests.** For example, the third **post** opposing Ukraine, by number of interactions gathered, is from Sebastian Suci, a deputy in the Romanian Parliament from the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), a far-right, nationalist party. The post is a video of a Tucker Carlson Tonight show from Fox News. The video is full of disinformation on all levels but in particular to energy security, it reiterates Russian talking points such as “Europe is going back to the Dark Ages” or the “European economies are dying without Russian gas”. It also advocates ending the war in Ukraine (in Russia’s favor) and restoring gas supply from Russia.
- While the country designation is dependent on user input and the actual location statistics may vary a lot, as explained in the methodology, **for Twitter, the second country after Romania with tweets gathering the most interactions was the United States (291 interactions, 2,8% of the total).**
- The single Twitter user that gathered most of the interactions for his tweets opposing Ukraine (almost 28% of total interactions from tweets opposing Ukraine) in his tweets adopts very clear pro-Russian positions by suggesting Russian gas is the only solution for Europe, that sanctions are meaningless because they are eluded and also cause harm to European economies and quotes Rybar as a credible source. He is a self-proclaimed conservative and if you check his tweet history, it is pretty clear he has an ultra-Orthodox stance on social issues, which may be a serious motive for his pro-Russian views.

TELEGRAM - ENERGY SECURITY

- Total number of views for Telegram: 85452
- The syntax used for the query generated only 68 posts that referred to energy security in the context of the war in Ukraine.
- All of the analyzed posts were from Romania of which 58 were in opposition of Ukraine and 10 neutral.
- The syntax generated 7 distinct sources (1 Questionable, 6 Fake/Conspiracy).
- As in the first six months analyzed in the previous report, posts opposing Ukraine reiterate Russian talking points on energy, such as putting the blame on America for using/generating the crisis to force LNG exports on Europe, questioning the need/efficiency for/of sanctions, instilling panic over winter conditions and blackouts, as well as other more conspiratorial theories.
- Again, the channel with the most views (18800) was AG_RealEducation which espoused crazy conspiracy theories such as implying a globalist, satanic cabal from the United States is artificially raising prices and cutting energy ties with Russia and that only people with chips (from the Covid-19 vaccine) can accept this.

METHODOLOGY - EXPLICATIVE NOTES

(1) The exact definition of Twitter interactions used in this report is the total number of likes, retweets and replies per post.

(2) There are two categories of keywords forming each syntax, for each narrative: general keywords and hostile keywords. General keywords are used to set the broad context for each narrative (eg. “energie”, “gaz” for the Energy Security narrative) and hostile keywords that refer to content that might be indicative of posts that espouse malign disinformation, especially of Russian origin. For a post to be considered in the results it must contain at least one general keyword and it may or may not contain hostile keywords.

(3) The Source Standards tag options are broadly defined but may be summed up as follows:

a. Quality: Media sources with a proven track record of following journalistic and publishing industry standards.

b. Political Bias: Sources that are either politicians, elected officials or consistently leaning towards a political ideology / political party.

c. Tabloid: Sources that are heavily reliant on a high number of clicks per article, based on bombastic, skewed content.

d. Questionable: Sources that repeatedly publish unverified content, often amplifying Russian malign narratives related to the war in Ukraine or trying to normalize Russian actions or the consequences of war

e. Fake/Conspiracy: Sources that are either fake and/or constantly promoting publicly debunked conspiracy theories, often on the lines of Covid being a hoax, Russian talking points, anti-LGBTQ propaganda.

f. Unknown: Sources that we do not have sufficient information at hand to discern its standards for creating and publishing content

(4) The post’s stance tag refers to how its content is positioned (support/neutral/oppose)

in relation to the official stance of Allied NATO members and Ukraine towards the war in Ukraine

(5) The data was scraped from Facebook using CrowdTangle. For Twitter we used Pulsar and for Telegram we used Python and library requests.

(6) For Telegram, we preselected the top ten Romanian language channels based on the number of subscribers as shown on <https://telemetr.io/> (data from October 2022) and also added other TG channels that were subject to previous monitoring (mostly problematic channels). Because of this selective approach, with fewer channels/accounts being monitored, Telegram related analysis was presented in this report in a distinct, separate section.

(7) The channels with the most subscribers, as per data from October 2022 from telemetr.io were: @ungureanu112 (38,8 thousand subscribers), @dumitruciorici (36,5 thousand subscribers), @veritasadevarulnecenzurat (24,9 thousand subscribers), @nasultv (22,7 thousand subscribers), @wwwaureliano (14,1 thousand subscribers), @zdgmd (13,4 thousand subscribers), @sustinatorigeorgesimion (13,4 thousand subscribers), @danmvchiticnecenzurat (13,3 thousand subscribers), @maiasandumd (12,4 thousand subscribers), @pastilarooriginal (10,7 thousand subscribers).

(8) The Country indicative is based on the location as defined by the Source, which implies that the percentages presented in this report may be significantly skewed in reality.

