ONLINE MONITORING PROPAGANDA AND DISINFORMATION IN ROMANIA

WAR IN UKRAINE

OVERVIEW
AUG 25 - NOV 7, 2022

INTERNAL CONTEXT

• General Directorate of Internal Protection of the Ministry of Internal Affairs reported 5,700 cyber security alerts directed at the Ministry. Most of the attacks exploited the subject of military aggression in Ukraine, with attackers attempting to obtain pecuniary benefits, compromising the access credentials of users, or temporarily disabling some IT services or resources.

• Romania strongly condemns the annexation of Ukrainian territories by Russia Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs publicly recalls the fact that "no territorial acquisition" based on the violation of international law can be recognized and reaffirms its "firm" support for the sovereignty of Ukraine, as well as for the territorial integrity of this state within its internationally recognized borders, according to a press release from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) sent to AGERPRES.

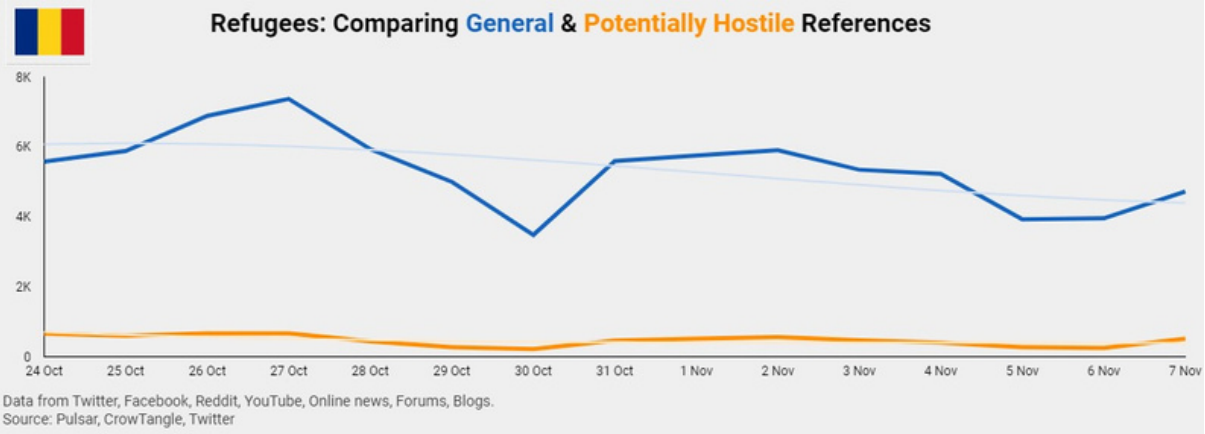
The declaration was also stated by Romania's president, Klaus Iohannis, and members of the current government, marking a clear position against Russian aggression. October: • Nadija Afanasieva, director of the Ukrainian Institute for International Policies, an independent think-tank in Ukraine, said that elements of Russian propaganda are visible in Romania, as in many EU countries, including on television, without being contradicted by independent experts.

An example cited by the Ukrainian expert is the fact that many Europeans believe that the current energy crisis was caused by Ukraine rather than as a result of Russian aggression. • Far-right party AUR managed to bring together some 3,000 participants to its anti-government protest organized in Bucharest on October 2, Hotnews. ro reported.

The rally was intended to express public discontent with the rising cost of living and was heavily promoted online by AUR representatives. 01-07 November: • The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania rejects the assertions expressed by the President of the Russian Federation in the speech given on the occasion of National Unity Day, which falsely induce the idea that Romania has territorial claims against Ukraine.

• According to an Avangarde poll about the war in Ukraine, -Romanians have a high degree of uncertainty regarding their position towards Ukraine entering the EU and NATO. This hesitancy, however, doesn't translate into a lack of empathy for Ukraine, but rather into a fear of escalating the conflict by fast-forwarding Ukraine's integration process.

Anti-Refugee:



Key findings: Anti-Refugee sentiment in Romania is generally low despite targeted efforts from far-right politicians and political influencers to spike outrage on specific events. At the beginning of the war, the anti-refugee messages were linked with Transcarpathia and called out historical discriminatory treatment received by Romanians in Ukraine.

This narrative hasn't gained much traction, in part because the Chernitzki (Ukrainian) or Cernauti (Romanian) oblast where there is a high concentration of Romanians were very active in seeking support and hosting refugees from Ukraine. However, messaging on the perceived favorable treatment of Ukrainians over Romanian citizens has gained more traction.

With 23% of the population living in relative poverty, the temporary benefits available to refugees such as rent support, healthcare, and schooling have driven the narrative that Ukrainians are being better treated the Romanian citizens. Between Oct 24 – Nov 07, significant anti-refugee messaging attempting to promote problems with Ukrainian integration in society has been promoted online.

For example, a public Facebook group named after the former leader of the Social Democratic Party who was convicted of corruption, Liviu Dragnea (29.5k+ members) creates alarmist content foreseeing an integration conflict. Additional messaging is that Europe and Romania have done their part and the humanitarian mission should end so the needs of citizens can be prioritized. These are often supported by claims that other European countries, like Germany, have changed their mind regarding Ukrainian refugees as well and towns are kicking refugees out.

Assessed Audience: Supporters of Far-Right and Nationalist Parties, Anti-Vax Followers

Risk Assessment: Medium Potential

Impact: Pro-Russian sentiment is low and not a significant driver of hostile narratives, however, anti-refugee narratives have still gained traction due to the economic downturn which is being exploited by far-right and nationalist parties. Inflation, the energy crisis, and domestic political issues have the potential to derail support for refugees. The hostile narrative that gains the largest audiences seek to associate helping Ukrainians with taking funds from poor Romanians (especially children and elderly from rural areas). The far-right AUR party and other populist politicians have been particularly successful in exploiting this messaging. There is a risk this might create a lack of interest from mainstream parties of the democratic center to support refugees integration programs from fear of public backlash and paying a political price

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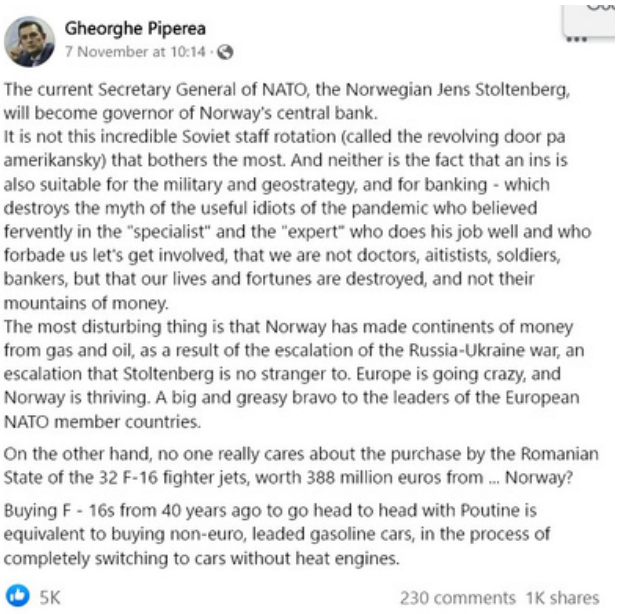
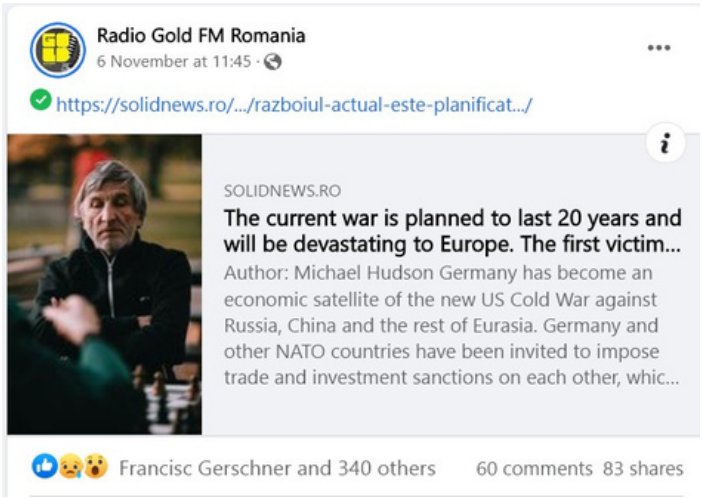
Key findings: Between Oct 24 – Nov 07, the anti-sanctions narrative created content speculating around the consequences the war in Ukraine will have on the quality of life in the Black Sea Region. The war and the conflict with Russia is justified more and more as planned by the West in anti-Western narratives, using the current economic situation and the price increases as proof of the sacrifice Eastern Europe has to make. On comparison, the hypocrisy of Western countries that have hidden deals with Russia remains a popular topic. The Romanian government is blamed for letting its citizens suffer from an increase in prices and costs in general.



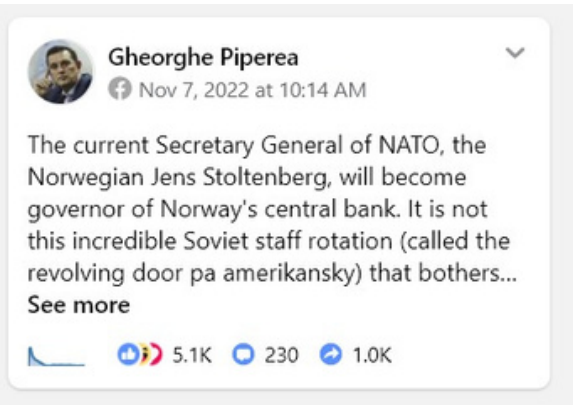


Assessed Audience: General Public

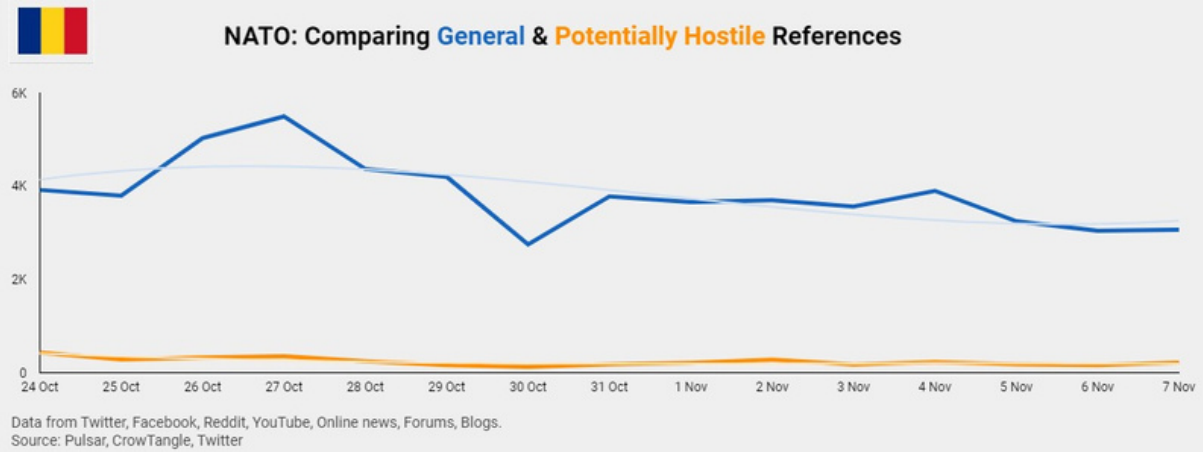
Risk assessment: High

Potential Impact: This narrative has the potential to gain more traction given the cost of living concerns of a large portion of the population as the winter season begins. As the temperature drops and gas and electricity usage increases there is likely to be a receptive audience to these narratives.

Considering the active attempts to exploit this topic by political parties it is likely there will be an increase in hostile narratives in the media space that gain significant engagement



Anti-NATO:



Key findings: During the reporting period, Oct 24 – Nov 07, references to NATO remained dominated by messaging supporting the Alliance with it clearly being seen as a guarantor of Romanian national security. the most popular narrative monitored in Romania, being considered by the majority the guarantee for our security. Anti-NATO messaging has been largely limited to political actors on the furthest fringes of the political spectrum.

A former member of the far-right AUR party, Mihai Lasca (79k+ Facebook followers), is one who regularly promotes anti-NATO content online. As a member of the Assembly of Deputies, he promotes the view that Romania should remain neutral and stay out of the conflict which is presented as being between the US and Russia. The fear of retaliation for being a member of NATO is the most heavily exploited narrative by anti-NATO content.

office@expertforum.ro
(+40) 21 211 7400
str. Semilunei 7, apt 1, București, Sector 2
Postal code 020797

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