

## ANTI-WESTERN NARRATIVES IN UKRAINE AND ROMANIA (COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS)<sup>1</sup>

**Marin Gherman**

Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava  
ORCID: 0009-0000-1196-1542

**Liubov Melnychuk**

Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University  
ORCID: 0000-0002-6380-5610

**Antonina Shuliak**

Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University  
ORCID: 0000-0002-5234-0758

DOI: 10.36169/2227-6068.2024.02.00008

**Abstract.** *The article analyses the main anti-Western narratives in Ukraine and Romania, the principal author of which is the Russian Federation. Based on the methods of comparison and discourse analysis, the study describes the main most toxic and dangerous narratives (propaganda, disinformation, fakes) for democracy and information security in two neighboring countries, one of which is an EU member and the other one is defending itself from a full-scale Russian invasion. Anti-Western information campaigns took place constantly in Ukraine and Romania between 24 February 2022 and 24 February 2024. In Romania, anti-Western narratives aimed at reducing support for Ukraine during the war and mobilizing society for a possible exit from the EU or NATO. In Ukraine, war propaganda methods focused on sowing panic and accusing the West of fomenting the military conflict. Despite the different styles of information presentation, the anti-Western narratives in both countries are essentially the same. The authors found similarities between the anti-Western narratives spread in each country. (the transformation of both countries into Western colonies, the loss of their sovereignty, NATO/US/EU's fault for the war, the ineffectiveness of sanctions, the invincibility of the Russian army, etc.) by analyzing politicians' speeches, media discourse, messages on social media and Telegram channels.*

**Keywords:** *anti-Western narratives, Ukraine, Romania, Russian Federation, propaganda, disinformation*

**Submitted:** 12 July 2024; **accepted:** 3 November 2024

---

<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgements. We are indebted to every soldier of the Armed Forces of Ukraine who is defending Ukraine from the aggression of the enemy Russia! We are particularly grateful to the governments of all countries in the world. We would like to thank each individual for their support; without their help, this work would never have been possible, and they did not leave Ukrainians alone in the war and supported us in the difficult struggle! We pay tribute to everyone who died for Ukraine's independence during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine!

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has become the most important foreign policy factor for all of Ukraine's Western neighbors. Cyber-attacks, information offensives, the promotion of propaganda narratives, and fake news all accompanied military operations on the territory of Ukraine. Among the most toxic and dangerous narratives for democracy and stability in Eastern European societies are anti-Western (anti-European, anti-American) information campaigns. Such narratives have been spreading in Ukraine, as well as in the EU, long before February 24, 2022, when Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a full-scale invasion, calling it a 'special operation' (Леженекова 2022).

In 2013, Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, reflected on unconventional, non-military methods of warfare in his article *The Value of Science in Foresight* (Герасимов 2013). The article is a fundamental conceptual document that justifies Russia's hybrid war against the West. The Russian general writes that information warfare opens up wide "asymmetric opportunities" to reduce the enemy's combat potential. He analyzes various unconventional methods of confrontation shifting towards the widespread use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other measures that affect the protest potential of the population. The Russian general highlights:

All this is complemented by military measures of a covert nature, in particular, the implementation of measures of information confrontation. (Герасимов 2013)

The article emphasizes Russia's constant war against its opponents, and the media is considered an element of permanent influence or an unconventional weapon.

In this context, the Gerasimov Doctrine was the basis for the Russian-Ukrainian war unleashed in 2014 (the annexation of the Crimean peninsula and hostilities in eastern Ukraine). Russia directed false narratives not only against Kyiv but also against the West to weaken it. In the book *"Hybrid War. Survive and Win"*, Ukrainian political scientist Yevhen Mahda analyses the information and psychological aspects of hybrid warfare as a form of weakening Ukraine and the West through Russian propaganda (Магда 2015). The scholar draws attention to the fact that political leaders of the Russian Federation and state media representatives studied the audience's reaction and information flows in Western countries to influence the internal political process effectively. At the same time, Romanian media expert Marian Voicu points out the fact that anti-Western narratives were promoted through various channels in 2014–2018, not only in Ukraine but also in Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, and Germany. According to the author, Russia's narratives have a limited number of themes and approaches, influencing the mass consciousness through a multi-level system of Russian government media, bots, trolls, and fake social media pages (Voicu 2022: 343). The author proposed using the "metanarrative" concept, which he views as "a linguistic system that allows analyzing the structure and symbols of fake news". (Voicu 2022: 12)

It is worth mentioning a number of studies revealing the essence of Russian propaganda and its indirect impact on European societies. Joanna Szostek examines the symbolic competition between the "pro-Western and anti-Russian" narratives promoted

by Kyiv and the “pro-Russian and anti-Western” narratives projected by Moscow (Szostek 2017). Andreas Kappeler studies the narratives of the political class in the Russian Federation through the prism of the politics of history and imperial heritage in Russian-Ukrainian relations. Kappeler characterizes these relations as a narrative asymmetry represented by Russia's hegemony over Ukraine (Kappeler 2014). Eva Claessen, a researcher at The Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies, studies the evolution of Russia's anti-Western narratives after Kyiv chose European integration as a foreign policy vector (Claessen 2021). We have to consider studies on disinformation in Ukraine (Gherman 2023; Mahda 2015), Romania (Soare 2023; Rachieru 2022), the EU, and the US (Boulègue and Polyakova 2021). However, these studies lack comparative analyses. As a group of researchers led by Jan Zilinsky, a professor at the Technical University of Munich, notes despite numerous works in this field there is a “dearth of comparative evidence in the study of disinformation” (Zilinsky et al. 2024: 14).

**Relevance of the topic.** Due to the escalation of conflicts in “vulnerable” regions around the world, the system of international relations is obviously undergoing significant transformations. Under such circumstances, regional cooperation can significantly affect the content and dynamics of interstate relations and, ultimately, geopolitical trends and patterns. Regional collaboration is crucial for Ukraine's current challenging geopolitical and historical environment.

First, Ukraine needs the support of as many countries as possible against the backdrop of Russia's full-scale invasion. Cooperation with neighboring Romania is becoming an essential aspect of ensuring the security and development of the region, as well as Ukraine's integration into Western European political, economic, and security associations.

Secondly, Romania is actively involved in decision-making in European and Euro-Atlantic institutions, influencing the states' integration processes on the European continent and ensuring stability in Central and Eastern Europe. Understanding and supporting its historical experience in the context of Ukraine's path to European integration is very important. Romania has demonstrated unwavering support for Ukraine since 2014, when Russia launched a hybrid war against Kyiv and during the full-scale invasion in February 2022. Such support continues to this day.

Thirdly, anti-Western rhetoric presents in the information space of both Ukraine and Romania and is one of the key narratives in the information component of Russian state policy. It is worth noting that massive anti-Western propaganda is constantly updating and improving the methods of spreading anti-Western narratives and changing their forms. In particular, the targeted formation of the image of Ukraine as a “state dependent on the West” or that countries that help Ukraine are at risk of being drawn into war.

Fourth, the narratives of anti-Western rhetoric are being filled with narratives in both Ukraine and Romania at a very rapid pace due to the expansion of communication tools and forms of presenting anti-Western narratives in the Ukrainian and Romanian information spaces. Neighboring states should take concerted action to combat Russian propaganda, which is an integral part of Russian state policy.

Information war is essential to Russia's foreign policy toward the West due to historical experience and the Kremlin's strategic goals. Since Soviet times, ideological struggle actively used propaganda and disinformation. Russia has adopted such experience, adapting it to modern conditions, particularly in the digital era when information spreads rapidly and globally. Opportunities to influence the masses have become more accessible with the development of the Internet, social media, and targeted advertising technologies.

One of the key techniques of the Russian information war is to intensify interstate conflicts that have arisen throughout the shared history. Russia is constantly trying to weaken the unity of societies by provoking confrontation between different groups and destabilizing democratic systems. Romania is one of the most vulnerable states to Russian information warfare. Romania's complicated history of relations with Ukraine, its geopolitical location, and internal socio-economic and ethnic factors can be factors used to split society.

**The research methodology.** In this research we use both general scientific methods and special methods of political science. It is important that the paper analyses a wide range of problems and phenomena, for which we used the appropriate conceptual tools. We tried to conduct a classic comparison that focused on analyzing Ukrainian and Romanian sources (media, social media pages, and Telegram channels).

Based on this study's structure, the paper's authors paid special attention to binary analysis and a comparison method. The binary analysis is limited to comparing two states carefully selected according to the problem and subject matter of the study. M. Dogan and D. Pélassy distinguish two variants (types) of binary analysis: implicit and explicit. An example of an implicit binary comparison is the study of objects in relation to which the researcher is "other", i.e., a representative of other cultural habits, other citizenship, and value orientations (Dogan & Pélassy 1990: 126). That is, the researcher evaluates phenomena and processes and compares them based on his or her own subjective perceptions and attitudes. The very dialectic of the process of such comparison contributes to strengthening our understanding of ourselves, our own culture, and our own society. We get to know our country better, especially its potential, when we start analyzing and comparing other countries. In many cases, this method can also contribute to a deeper understanding (or even the creation of new) general theoretical positions. M. Dogan and D. Pélassy suggest applying the method of binary comparison to states that have similar contextual features of political processes, even if the purpose of the analysis is to identify differences that exist between them in one or more specific areas (Dogan & Pélassy 1990: 127). As we have already noted, as the simplest form of comparison, the binary strategy is a good tool for broad theoretical generalizations.

One of the methodological principles we apply is the principle of scientific modeling and theory building known as Occam's Razor (the principle of simplicity). Occam's Razor is a principle of logic attributed to the medieval scholastic philosopher William of Ockham. The principle states that one should not make more assumptions than the minimum required. We compared the anti-Western narratives in Ukraine and Romania in the simplest and most accessible way possible, because according to the stated

principle, the simplest model should be chosen from a set of available equivalent models of any issue, phenomenon or process. We have also adopted the principle of induction in the humanities (logical induction), which is based on formal logical inference that makes it possible to draw a general conclusion based on the analysis of individual facts. Obviously, given the comparative nature of this research paper, we have taken into account R. Macridis's requirements for comparison in terms of analysis at the abstract level in the context of providing means for testing hypotheses (Macridis 1967: 42).

We have also used modern methods of political communication (Gosselin 1995), combined with elements of linguistic analysis (Toolan 2001). Such methods complement the classical approaches of political science and allow us to take into account the peculiarities of information and hybrid wars using anti-Western narratives as a weapon. In the study, we understand narratives as similar information flows (messages) that aim to manipulate mass consciousness and shape sentiments against the West in the context of the war in Ukraine.

## **2. ANTI-WESTERN NARRATIVES IN UKRAINE**

The violent, illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula located within the Ukrainian administrative units, namely the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol from Ukraine and their unilateral, illegal incorporation into the Russian Federation as subjects of the Federation the “Republic of Crimea” and the “city of federal significance Sevastopol” was proclaimed by the Russian Federation on March 18, 2014. It became the starting point for the outbreak of the military conflict in eastern Ukraine in the same year and enabled its escalation into a full-scale war. All the events determined the necessity and profitability of constantly filling the information space of Ukraine and neighboring countries, including Romania, with anti-Western rhetoric as an effective tool of the Russian propaganda machine.

The constant presence of information flows from the Russian Federation in Ukraine provides an opportunity to form a negative image of its geopolitical opponents, the US/EU, and justify a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, or even more so to create its own positive image based on fake unconfirmed historical facts aimed at an anti-Western audience. Russia is constantly trying to impose its own stereotypes on the history of Ukraine in its propaganda TV shows. For example, the name “Ukraine” is allegedly derived from the word “outskirts” or, as we often hear the Russian dictator say, “Lenin invented Ukraine”. One of the main “pillars” on which Russia is trying to maintain its propaganda policy is the claim to the heritage of Kyivan Rus' and the emphasis on the fact that Ukraine is a stateless nation. There is a widespread myth about Batu Khan's conquest of Kyivan Rus' and the relocation of the center from Kyiv to Moscow. However, at that time, it was the center of the Golden Horde, and it was obvious that Slavs were not allowed to enter it. During the Soviet era, Soviet historiography interpreted all events as if the medieval history of Kyiv ended after 1240, but in fact the Grand Duchy of Kyiv existed for almost 200 years, until 1471, after which it became a voivodeship. The last Grand Duke of Kyiv was Semen Olelkovych, whose power extended to Kyiv, the modern Right Bank, the Sivershchyna, and the Left Bank up to the Samara River. Moreover, the principality had

its own army, minted its own coinage, and the residence of the Grand Duke was in the Kyiv Castle (Вікарчук 2022).

According to the Bulgarian scholar Tsvetan Todorov, whose research covers a wide range of sciences such as sociology, political science, philosophy, and history, in everyday life, “people think, perceive, and make moral choices according to narrative structures” (Todorov, 1977: 45), so everything Ukrainians see and hear directly affects the formation of public opinion and position. Researchers explain that the vulnerability of Ukrainians to anti-Western rhetoric originated from the constant disappointment of Ukrainians in improving their quality of life, the lack of an effective fight against corruption, and the lack of effective implementation of further reforms on the path to the EU. Russian propaganda constantly used the confusing and lengthy process of Ukraine’s European integration and the mistakes made by officials on the way to European institutions to discredit Ukraine’s European integration course. It persistently offers a much more “promising” alternative: mutually beneficial cooperation between Ukraine and Russia. The outbreak of war in Ukraine finally “dispelled the dreams” of Ukrainians about Ukraine’s integration prospects in the coming years.

To spread anti-Western narratives effectively and powerfully, Russia uses all available tools, including audio-visual media, online media, and social networks that have flooded the world in the twenty-first century. We have divided the sources of anti-Western rhetoric into the following groups: 1) classical media (periodicals, television, radio); 2) Russian and pro-Russian politicians, embassy officials, public figures, opinion leaders; 3) employees of scientific/educational institutions and institutions with anti-Western views; 4) pro-Russian journalists and bloggers; 5) online media, which regularly updates the information and quickly disseminates news to large groups of people; 6) social networks (X (Twitter), Telegram, Facebook); 7) online platforms (YouTube, TikTok). All the above-mentioned information agents and resources simultaneously transmit information to large, small, accurate, conditional, official, unofficial, and reference groups.

So let’s take a look at the anti-Western narratives relayed by the Russian propaganda machine that threaten the information security of Ukraine and Romania in action.

**Russia is liberating Ukraine.** On the morning of February 24, 2022, Russia’s large-scale aggression against Ukraine began. Moscow was counting on a quick and lightning-fast victory. According to the Kremlin’s beliefs, the “legitimate” President Viktor Yanukovich was to enter Kyiv in triumph, thus presenting the occupation as an act of liberation of Ukraine forced by Russia. Russia presented these events as simply a part of a “special operation” to restore order but not the occupation. Accordingly, Russia interpreted the seizure of Ukrainian territories as the “restoration of historical justice” (Сливенко 2023b). Russia claimed that it was locals of the southeastern regions of Ukraine who were planning a “voluntary” referendum on joining the Russian Federation and, in Odesa, a public trial of “criminals who organized the Odesa Khatyn.” Russia seems to be aiming to free Ukraine from nationalists and Banderites who abuse the Russian-speaking population and are the cause of Ukraine’s troubles. Moreover, the West guides their actions. Russia is conducting “denazification” for the benefit of the entire Ukrainian

people (Самигін 2022). Russia interprets everything as if it is not seizing what is not its own, but reclaiming what it has lost. However, it is quite obvious that the term “restoration of historical justice” refers to the real occupation of Ukrainian territories (Сливенко 2023b) and the abduction of Ukrainian children.

In his interviews, Russian President Vladimir Putin repeatedly spreads anti-Western narratives and justifies the war he started against Ukraine. He accuses the United States of “letting the genie out of the bottle” and being the only ones to blame for the war and tries to shift the responsibility from himself to other countries. His statements also aim to create an image of the United States as a failure that has failed to cope with global challenges. (Лукашевська 2024).

As a result, the Kremlin is simply trying to justify and legitimize in the eyes of the entire international community and Russians its “bloody” seizure of Ukrainian territories, their annexation, the holding of pseudo-referendums, and the “liberation” of Ukraine”.

**The West uses Ukraine as a puppet.** Russian propagandists claim that Ukraine is a state that is formally sovereign and independent, but someone governed it “from outside”. They claim that Western/EU countries have “own interests” in developing the Eastern European region, so they made all political decisions regarding Ukraine’s internal agenda. Moscow is trying to prove the “collective West” governs Ukraine, the “collective West” poses a direct threat to the sovereignty of other countries. Administrators of propaganda telegram channels resort to rhetoric that European and American officials have “ambitious interests” to turn Ukraine into their colony and call the West “imperial” (Сливенко 2023a).

In one of the interviews with the pro-Russian channel “NewsOne” and published on the Youtube channel of the popular blogger Anatoliy Sharia, the People’s Deputy, representative of the opposition party “Opposition Platform – For Life” stated that one of the biggest problems hindering the economic and social development of Ukraine is external governance. He also emphasized that during the entire period of Ukraine’s independence, attempts at external governance were made only by the European Union and the United States. The politician recalled that these attempts became especially active at the height of Euromaidan (NewsOne 2020).

**NATO member countries are involved or will be directly involved in the war.** NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is an international organization created on April 4, 1949 for the collective defense of the countries of Western Europe and North America in accordance with the principles of Article 51 of the UN Charter. According to the Washington Treaty, each member state of the Alliance bears additional responsibility and benefits from participation in the system of collective security. Article 5 provides that an armed attack on one or more NATO members will be treated as an attack on all members and that “they agree that in the event of such an attack each of them ... will render assistance to the Party or Parties attacked, and shall immediately take, individually or jointly with other Parties, such actions as may be deemed necessary, including the use of armed force, in order to restore and preserve security in the North Atlantic region”. The collective security systems

available today do not provide such unprecedented guarantees of security, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders and state sovereignty.

However, anti-Western narratives represent the principles of collective defense in a completely different way. The speeches of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergey Lavrov, who declares that the USA is waging a war against Russia, deserve special attention. The conclusions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia about “the preparation of Ukraine for the task of strategic defeat of Russia” create an image of aggressiveness and attack intentions. This is an element of disinformation and political manipulation aimed at creating for the United States the image of an enemy who is waiting for an advantageous moment to launch a devastating blow (Вонс 2023).

The most popular sub-narrative claimed that other countries would soon “become part of the war” going on in Ukraine. The posts, for example, concerned Poland, Slovakia and NATO joining the war in the future.

The narrative that “the government can drag Poland into the war” was revived after the manipulation of disinformers around the words of the Polish ambassador to France, Jan Emeryk Roszcziszewski, who said that “if Ukraine loses, Poland will have to go to war”. He meant that after the fall of Ukraine, the Baltic states and Poland will be in direct danger. As the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security figured out, Russian disinformation used this out-of-context sentence to prove that Poland was allegedly “planning to start a war” (SPRAVDI 2023).

As the “Correspondent” writes in an article with the sensational title “NATO troops in Ukraine: who is ready to fight for freedom”, statements by individual countries that they are ready to send their own troops to Ukraine are increasingly heard in Europe. But NATO is sharply against such an escalation of the conflict (Шипуля 2024).

The Telegram channel of the Russian propagandist Olga Shariy spreads anti-American propaganda about the fact that NATO troops are already in Ukraine and tries to prove it and confirm the words of Vladimir Putin with all kinds of “facts” (See Fig.1).

Russia aims such information streams at forming the opinion that NATO troops are already directly participating in military operations in Ukraine; the West will make decisions for everyone and drag NATO member states into the war.

**The West, the EU and NATO are weak and will fall apart.** The message is most popular among those who discredit the stability and strength of Western institutions. Most of the reports claimed that “NATO is weak and has no chance to stand up to the Russian military” and insisted that the US was losing its influence in the alliance and, therefore, Ukraine's joining it would do nothing for it.

One of the largest and most popular Telegram channels was “First” with 447,000 subscribers (now the number of followers decreased). At first glance, it does not stand out from the others with harsh pro-Russian publications. However, the analysis of interaction with other channels shows that it belongs to the pool supported by the Russian Federation and spreads anti-Western narratives. For example, one of the publications

talks about the US losing its influence in Africa and instead strengthening it with Russia (See Fig.2). (First 2024).

One of the popular anonymous Telegram channels that spreads pro-Kremlin anti-Western propaganda and publishes unverified information is Sheptun Ukraine War (*Шептун [whisperer]. Украина Война*), which had more than 50,000 subscribers. In their publications, there are constant messages about the failures of the West and the lack of cohesion of actions. Thus, in one of the posts, we read that US drones failed their mission in Ukraine (See Fig.3) (*Шептун* 2024).

No less interesting is the rhetoric that Putin will destroy Western democracy. In order to finally bury the EU and NATO together with all democratic institutions, Putin does not need to lead Russian tanks to Berlin and Paris.

The Kremlin's efforts in Europe increase the demand for a "strong hand" at the head of the state, so the death of Western democracy is no longer something fantastic. Historian and former political adviser Thomas Clausen expressed this opinion on the pages of the British publication "The Telegraph". Clausen emphasizes:

The key to Putin's victory is not an all-out war against NATO, but the use of non-military weapons and the undermining of democratic states. In short, Putin wins when liberal democracies lose the will to fight and that day could be catastrophically close. (Clausen 2024)

Moreover, he predicts very catastrophic events:

Putin defeats Ukraine and advances to Moldova and the Suwalki corridor, Trump withdraws the USA from NATO, and the only nuclear deterrent in Europe, France's nuclear weapons, is under the control of [pro-Russian right-wing populist Marine], Le Pen. This would leave Europe's eastern flank dangerously open. (Clausen 2024)

**Non-aligned countries choose the side of Russia, not the West.** Messages in this category of narratives centered around accusations of pushing the international community toward a "world war" by aiding Ukraine. Narratives attempted to blur Russia's responsibility for the aggression against Ukraine and to show the US as "an equally responsible party" (SPRAVDI 2023). Ten countries in Europe have chosen the status of neutral states. Still, since the beginning of the war, they have supported Ukraine politically and humanitarily and have also joined the sanctions against Moscow.

For example, Switzerland remains the oldest neutral and, in fact, the only non-aligned state in Europe with a full-fledged army. However, after the open Russian invasion of Ukraine, Switzerland condemned Moscow and joined the EU sanctions against Russia. Austria is considered neutral according to the 1955 Declaration. Still, in 1995, Austria joined the EU and, therefore, is now involved in aid to Ukraine, including military aid, although at the bilateral level, it emphasizes exclusively humanitarian support. Ireland has followed a policy of military neutrality since the Second World War and, after its end, decided not to join NATO. Ireland does not consider itself politically neutral and now clearly declares its support for Ukraine and condemns Russia. As a member of the EU since 1973, Ireland adheres to European sanctions against Moscow and, like Austria, is limited only to humanitarian aid to Ukraine on a bilateral level. Malta recorded its

neutrality and non-alignment in the 1987 constitution but joined the EU in 2004, and therefore contributes to aid to Ukraine and adheres to sanctions against Russia.

Serbia and Hungary, which have strong political ties with the Russian Federation, deserve special attention. Yes, Serbia has declared itself militarily neutral since 2007. Since 2012, Serbia has been a candidate for EU membership, but unlike most other candidate countries, it has not joined the European sanctions against Russia. Another exceptional state is Hungary. The special case of Hungary in Europe is that the Russia-friendly government of Viktor Orbán declares its de facto neutrality and, at the state level, is limited to humanitarian aid to Ukraine. However, Hungary is not a non-aligned country. It joined NATO in 1999 and has been a member of the EU since 2004 (Цюпин 2023).

**The West/NATO provoked the conflict between Ukraine and Russia.** Messages that blamed the West for the war dominated the anti-Western narratives. Such narratives underline that the West allegedly “provoked” the war and emphasized its determination to use Ukraine in its own interests. Chinese quotes disseminated, popularized, and promoted the narratives that the West and NATO allegedly “are responsible for the war in Ukraine”. They also claimed that the US is a terrorist state that attacks other countries. This sub-narrative remains popular as of April 1, 2023 (SPRAVDI 2023).

The narrative aims at finding those responsible for the start of the war in Ukraine, and of course, “NATO allegedly provoked the war in Ukraine.” It is the West that is exacerbating military conflicts and pushing for armed conflicts. Vladimir Putin expresses his dissatisfaction with the location of military systems close to the borders of Russia, as well as the further movement of NATO to the borders of the Russian Federation.

Propagandists quote Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, who said at a meeting of the Russian Defense Board that the Ukrainian military is allegedly fighting in the interests of a war between the United States and Russia. They said that almost half a million soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine died during the full-scale invasion. He also emphasized that during the counteroffensive, the Ukrainian military allegedly failed to achieve the goals set for them by “NATO instructors”, and in this way were able to dispel the myth of the superiority of Western weapons (Baranovska 2024).

In 2021, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused the United States of trying to provoke a war in Ukraine in order to impose sanctions against Russia. In particular, he said: “I do not rule out that there is such a desire to fuel militaristic sentiments, make a “little war”, then blame us, introduce new sanctions to suppress our competitiveness”. Lavrov said that the US is pumping Ukraine with weapons and bragging that it delivered \$2.5 billion worth of weapons to Ukrainians (BBC News Ukraine 2021). Thus, a year before the full-scale invasion, Russia was already talking about war and blaming the West.

**Western countries and their institutions ignore the will of their citizens.** Anti-Western narratives introduced the rhetoric into the information circulation to discredit the activities of NATO and the EU and manipulate public opinion based on allegedly violating the rights of EU and US citizens. This should provoke outrage and cause protests

in the US and EU member states. Moreover, some messages talked about the fact that “Western politicians take care of Ukraine at the expense of their own citizens”.

There have been widespread reports that Ukrainians are profiting from aid provided by the governments of their host countries, portraying Ukrainian refugees as exploiting the war for their own gain and abusing their position. The narratives repeatedly discussed the ingratitude of Ukrainians to the citizens of the host states.

Instead, on the second day of the war, Putin directly called the Ukrainian population and the army to an armed rebellion:

Take power into your own hands! It seems that it is easier for us to come to an agreement with you than with this bunch of drug addicts and neo-Nazis who settled in Kyiv and took the entire Ukrainian people hostage. (AFP News Agency 2022)

He showed that he “cares” about the rights of Ukrainians.

Even two years before the full-scale invasion, there were messages discrediting the government's actions to improve the lives of Ukrainians and the work of Ukrainians themselves, and, after all, it was about the fact that Ukraine ranked 93<sup>rd</sup> out of 100 in the rating of food costs compiled by the US Department of Agriculture. They claim that on average, Ukrainians spend 42% of their income on food, only citizens of Uganda, Kazakhstan, Angola, Bangladesh and Nigeria spend more on food (*Trukha Ukraine* 2020).

**The war in Ukraine is beneficial to the West and they will fight to the last Ukrainian.** The thesis builds on earlier pro-Kremlin narratives about the immediate need for peace talks and insists that while Russia seeks “peace”, “the West is ready to continue the war in Ukraine” (SPRAVDI 2023).

When it became clear that the blitzkrieg against Ukraine had failed, the propaganda changed to a new order: they said that the West had prepared the Armed Forces well, and the cadre soldiers were also Nazis. There were many more Nazis than expected. Propaganda tries to accuse the USA of complicity in the killing of civilians through the supply of weapons to Ukraine. For example, for Kyiv, Donbas is a foreign territory, and therefore, “Ukrainian militants” is a term that is increasingly replacing “nationalists” who fight without looking back at the harm to civilians because they hate them (Самигін 2022).

The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, was also often quoted. He believes that NATO is “pulling its troops into Ukraine” under the guise of training centers, alliance bases are being created on the territory of the country, and in training camps, NATO “purposefully teaches to work with Belarus.” He added that he discussed this situation with Putin and “agreed that they will take some action”. Obviously, Russian missiles will be installed on the border with Ukraine (*See Fig.4*) (*Инцидент UA* 2021).

Subsequently, in August 2022, during a speech at the 10th Moscow Conference on International Security, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that the United States was trying to “prolong the conflict in Ukraine”. According to Putin, the USA and its vassals rudely interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign states and try to force independent

states to submit to their will by threats, blackmail and pressure. He noted that the collective West needs conflicts to maintain its hegemony, and that is why they

decided the fate of the Ukrainian people as cannon fodder, implemented the “anti-Russia” project, pumped up and continued to pump up the Kyiv regime with weapons. (Собенко 2022)

The information space full of “Russian truth” that Russia supposedly wants “peace” and Western “warmongers perpetuate suffering and conflict” by constantly sending weapons to Ukraine. The idea of providing aid to Ukraine is portrayed as “futile” and only perpetuates the war, leading to further suffering (*SPRAVDI* 2023).

**There are Western biological weapons laboratories in Ukraine / The war in Ukraine is part of a global conspiracy.** A surprise was the long-running plot about the existence of biolaboratories and biological weapons in Ukraine under the patronage of the Americans. The narratives accused the son of the US president of financing the laboratories to attract attention and to get weight to this sensation. There is the old story of 2020 when the pro-Russian politician and oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk raised an information wave about “15 US military biolaboratories in Ukraine”, which, as it turns out, was done with an eye on its future deployment.

The story of the “secret weapon of mass destruction” is clearly in line with Russian propaganda about so-called “precedents”. It seems that the West recklessly creates bad precedents, so don't complain about Russia, which is simply taking an example. Previously, the Kremlin juggled the “Kosovo precedent” to explain its creation and recognition of a number of separatist pseudo-republics.

The addressees of fairy tales about “biothreats” are poorly educated and superstitious Russian masses – the environment from which the participants of the “special operation” are mainly recruited. Such people can be scared of TVs (without being ashamed and without worrying about the reputation) with a specially created “genetic weapon against the Slavs, which was supposed to be carried by birds” (Самигін 2022).

He spares no effort in propagandizing and spreading theories about a world conspiracy. The narratives describes the war in Ukraine as part of a “transnational banking conspiracy” and “a major source of income for the West”, which profits from war-related industries. The conspiracy also promotes the idea that the alleged “the world's elites use the war as a distraction and a testing ground to continue a secret monetary program in an attempt to ban cash and create virtual money to enslave the people”.

In addition, other narratives claim that the war in Ukraine is a “conspiracy” and was allegedly “planned for years by the West”. The purpose of these messages is to blame the West for the war in Ukraine and portray Russia as the victim of a transnational, evil conspiracy that provoked the violent war.

Some news sources tend to claim that “the whole war is staged”, ignoring the fact that these two narratives are at odds with each other (*SPRAVDI* 2023).

**Sanctions hurt the West more than Russia.** Moscow constantly tries to downplay the impact of sanctions on its economy, although researchers say that the Russian

economy is suffering huge losses due to Western sanctions. In international topics, Russia promoted the topic that the economic crisis in the USA and various European countries is a consequence of the conflict with the Russian Federation. Therefore, it is enough to establish “pragmatic” relations so that the crisis disappears. The export of Ukrainian grain has become another global narrative where Russia wants to demonstrate its peacefulness, constructiveness and desire to feed humanity (Самигін 2022). For example, Russia spread the images from protests in Munich against high as “proof” that ordinary Westerners were suffering more because of anti-Russian sanctions.

The misinformers said that some countries in Eastern and Central Europe are banning the import of Ukrainian grain, calling on the Moldovan government to do the same in order to save the local economy and follow the example of governments that do not want to support Ukraine at their own expense. Moreover, they say that “many countries have banned the import of Ukrainian grain because it threatens people and their health” (*SPRAVDI* 2023).

Messages about the strength and stability of the Russian economy are constantly coming from the mouth of the President of the Russian Federation, who claims that the USA, the EU and the allied countries of Ukraine persistently tried to harm Russia with the help of large-scale sanctions, but Russia found new buyers for its oil, which was sold at significantly reduced prices. Russia learned to evade the \$60 per barrel oil price cap imposed by the G7 countries as global oil prices began to rise again (Коваленко 2023). However, the effect of the sanctions is obvious, because as of May 2024, the Russian ruble has collapsed to a new figure.

### 3. ANTI-WESTERN NARRATIVES IN ROMANIA

In the context of Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, anti-Western and anti-American narratives in the media space and social networks in Romania have increased significantly. According to the observations of Romanian media expert Marian Voicu, the key false narrative in the Romanian media space after Romania's accession to the EU in 2007 was the narrative of the country's transformation into a poor, underdeveloped colony of the West (Voicu 2018: 228). After the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, the emergence of the war in Donbas, and the Russian Federation's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, this anti-Western narrative has become a topic of active public and even political debate.

Another key false narrative propagated during this period is the state's loss of national sovereignty. Research conducted in the context of the war in Ukraine, as a factor affecting social and political life in Romania, shows that the narratives about the loss of sovereignty due to the fault of the West and the transformation of the country into a colony are an electoral tool of extremist forces, which aims to mobilize society (Soare 2023). This research section will analyze the main anti-Western narratives in the Romanian media space and social networks in 2022–2023.

**Romania is a “poor colony of the West”.** According to this anti-Western narrative, after joining the EU, Romanians became very poor, factories closed, and large American

or European corporations used the country. The international actors aim to destroy not only the country's economy but also to impoverish Romanian society spiritually. The narrative, which has been spreading in the Romanian media space since the 90s of the last century, has its roots in the anti-capitalist propaganda of the communist regime of Nicolae Ceausescu EU or NATO. The narrative is used mainly for electoral purposes and to justify Russia's actions in the Eastern European geopolitical space (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, etc.).

According to a report by experts Funky Citizens, who studied anti-Western narratives in Romania as part of NATO-backed research projects in 2021, overtly pro-Russian narratives lack support among the general public, but "more subtle informational interventions" target other international actors, such as the EU or NATO, proved to be influential on the territory of Romania. It is worth mentioning the narrative that Western countries have a negative influence on Romanian culture and traditions. The narratives in the media emphasized that Romania is an Orthodox country, like Russia, while the West serves foreign civilizational interests. With the help of this narrative, Russia is trying to alienate the Romanian public from Western countries. Even pro-European citizens can fall victim to anti-Western propaganda, according to the scholarly treatise Funky Citizens (Funky Citizens 2021: 7). In addition, with the growth of populist tendencies in the EU, Russian propaganda finds more and more support even among its traditional opponents, using opportunism, Euroscepticism or nationalism.

**Romania lost its sovereignty in favor of the USA or the EU.** According to this narrative, various secret security services, with the help of Western public or political projects, control Romanians. Brussels, Washington, and Western investment groups ruled the country. They are deliberately destroying the remnants of Romania's national sovereignty. In the run-up to Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, fringe political leaders and pro-Russian media circulated a narrative of EU pressure on the Romanian leadership to relinquish national sovereignty voluntarily. According to the disinformation spread by Senator Diana Șoșoacă and the Sputnik news site, the West forced Romania to renounce the Constitution and its sovereignty. The false interpretation of the headline constructs the narrative. It attributes someone else's words to a statement by the director of the European Commission's representation in Bucharest. On December 21, 2021, the Court of the European Union issued a decision confirming the principle of supremacy of European law over national law. Romanian courts can issue decisions that violate the position of the Constitutional Court if they conflict with European law (Gomboș 2022: 229).

Internal European debates about the decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union have actively used various media and politicians to spread the narrative of the country's loss of sovereignty. Diana Șoșoacă, one of Romania's most controversial politicians, is often quoted by the pro-Kremlin news site Sputnik, which named her the 2021 politician and announced that the senator intends to run for president of Romania. Until 2022, this site, which also had a Romanian version, regularly used anti-Western themes, quoting fringe political or public figures.

**Romania will be forced to enter the war with Russia.** According to this narrative, Romania will be forced to go to war with Russia after becoming a colony of the EU and the USA. This will happen under the pressure of the West or because of the personal ambitions of the president, the ruling coalition in the parliament, which receives direct instructions from Brussels, or because of the state policy imposed by the “American masters of the country”. This narrative arose before the start of the war in Ukraine and spread in various forms in the public space. In 2022-2024, the narrative interprets the decision to increase Romania's defense capabilities not as a form of response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine but as preparation for an “inevitable war”. The narrative spread the approach about the need to sign a peace treaty between Ukraine and Russia and to change the logic of war to the logic of negotiations for the “peaceful settlement of the Ukrainian issue”. In March 2023, extremist and populist political forces in Romania accused the president of trying to drag the country into war. Narratives circulating on social media at the time (Lasca 2023) suggested that the Romanian Parliament had voted to enter the country into a war against Russia and that personnel from the Romanian Armed Forces and the Ministry of the Interior would be sent outside the country without the consent and knowledge of the people. Narratives also noted that by the order of President Klaus Iohannis, the war would definitely come to the territory of Romania. In fact, the speech of the president and the presentation of information related to the armed forces at the joint session of the two chambers of the Romanian legislature is only a formal procedure that takes place every year.

In the period studied by us, calls could be found in the Romanian media space for the need to conduct NATO military operations against Ukraine and not against Russia. The senator mentioned above, Diana Țoșoacă, known for her anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western position, said that Ukraine attacked Romania with sea mines, so NATO should start a war against Kyiv. In fact, the mine she was talking about, which reached the shores of Romania in 2023, was from the Second World War. The mines that Ukraine has placed near its shores have to protect its own territory. The paradox of this false narrative is obvious. On the one hand, Russian propaganda accuses the West of dragging Romania into the war, and on the other hand, calls on NATO to launch a full-scale war against Ukraine (Manu 2023).

**The West is weaker than Russia, and the world learned the truth about the war in Ukraine.** According to this anti-Western narrative, Russia cannot be defeated militarily, and the West is losing its position in the world. Therefore, Ukraine should no longer be supported in this war. Various media outlets in Romania wrote at the end of 2023 that the world began to understand the truth about the war in Ukraine, and popular support for Kyiv had significantly decreased in the EU (Constantinescu 2023). The narrative uses the notion of “war fatigue” felt by the Western world, generalizing the individual opinions of certain journalists and reinforcing the Kremlin's propaganda messages. Even though the Russian invasion is strongly condemned both officially and by the general population of Romania, the narrative aims to convince society that no one supports Kyiv anymore, so Romania should abandon this policy. It is worth noting that sometimes false narratives in Romania are based on quotes from Ukrainian pro-Kremlin media. “Active News” writes:

According to the sources referred to by the Ukrainian publication “Strana”, as a rule, Belgium and other countries of Eastern Europe also spoke out against the EU’s aid to Ukraine in a well-informed manner. Will Romania be among them? (Constantinescu 2023)

Anti-Western narratives from Ukraine entered the Romanian media space to manipulate public opinion. Narratives presented the negotiation processes within the framework of EU political structures to the Romanian public as disputes regarding the rejection of the course of support for Ukraine.

**Romania must adhere to an isolationist policy.** According to this narrative, Bucharest must return to old methods of political and economic governance and free itself from EU and US control. To recover economically, according to this narrative, Romanians are urged to stop buying Western goods, not to work for foreign corporations, and not to participate in democratic process. The call for freedom from the “yoke of foreigners” is actually a call for rejecting democracy. “Active News” writes in February 2023:

You voted for your representatives, you should listen to them! But they are already spoiled by your conquerors! They do not represent your interests, but the interests of foreigners. Nothing good can be expected from them. (Side 2023)

According to this narrative, Romania’s natural resources and assets have been confiscated by foreigners and Romanians can reclaim them if their country becomes economically isolated from the West. Romanians have to stop buying Western products, while there is no mention of severing relations with Russia or countries from other continents in this article. In fact, the states that chose isolationism in the last century have disastrous consequences. Narratives present information biasedly and take quotes from various politicians’ statements out of context.

**The West is deliberately bringing Romania and Moldova closer together in order to provoke Russia.** According to this narrative, the rapprochement between Romania and the Republic of Moldova is a hybrid Western attack on Russia and Russian interests in the region. Pro-Russian social networks and Telegram channels spread messages about Russia’s historical right to determine the politics of the Republic of Moldova According to the Telegram channel “Triunghiul basarabean”:

They want to gather together as many lands as possible with a Romanian-speaking population. Western corporations coordinated this national project and directed it against the vital interests of Russia. The achievement of Romania’s national interests is presented to the followers of this ideology as something possible only in the conditions of a significantly weakened Russia. (*Triunghiul basarabean* 2023)

There is no evidence to support the narrative that the West is encouraging the idea of a merger between the two countries as part of a plan against Russia. In fact, by launching this narrative, Moscow only wants to justify its own revisionist actions, which resulted, among other things, in the two autonomous entities in Moldova (Transnistria and Gagauzia, which retain an uncertain status). In addition, this thesis is a continuation of the metanarrative, according to which Russia is a victim of “Western expansion”, being forced to wage war on the territory of Ukraine. The political reality differs significantly

from these narratives: while Russia is waging a hybrid war against Chisinau, Romania was the first state to recognize the independence of the Republic of Moldova, its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Romania also actively supports Moldova's European integration aspirations (Marina 2024) and also helps Ukraine to strengthen its defense capabilities in the context of the Russian invasion.

**Romanians want their country to leave NATO and the EU.** According to this narrative, Romanian society opposes NATO and EU policies. Most Romanian citizens want their country to withdraw from these international organizations. Although contradicted by polls, various media outlets, politicians, and fringe social media pages propagate this narrative. “This is the merit of the EU, which irritated peoples and nations. It is also thanks to the decline of the American empire that forces us to help Ukraine”, reports Gold FM Radio. The article emphasizes that only leaving NATO and the EU can save Romania from becoming a colony of the West (Groza 2022).

The narrative contradicts sociological research and doesn't reflect the study of public opinion in the country. According to a poll conducted by the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy (IRES) in April 2024, 73% of Romanians believe that their country should remain in the EU. Over the past 10 years, more than half of Romanians have traveled to EU countries, and more than half have someone in their family working in a European country. In addition, every fifth Romanian has worked in an EU country in the last decade, and every 10 Romanians have someone studying in the EU in their family. 6% of the research participants claim to have received European funding during the last 10 years. 40% of Romanians consider Russia's war against Ukraine to be the main threat to the EU in the next five years (Mihăiescu 2024).

**NATO is waging war against Russia on the territory of Ukraine.** According to the narrative, the war between Russia and Ukraine that began in 2014 is effectively a war waged by NATO against Moscow. Initially, the narrative allowed Moscow to justify its actions on the territory of the former Soviet republics. When Russian forces began to suffer defeats in Ukraine in 2022, the narrative changed. A new thesis emerged that Russia is actually opposing NATO/the West, who are using Ukrainians as cannon fodder (Cristoiu 2022). The narratives accused NATO/USA of forcing Ukraine to fight against Russia to shift responsibility for the war from the aggressor to the victim (Ukraine) and its allies (NATO). In fact, Russia invaded Ukraine on several fronts, setting conditions for Kyiv that meant capitulation and renunciation of its own statehood: disarmament, change of political regime, surrender of some territories, renunciation of the right to decide the course of foreign policy, etc. During 2021, some media actively spread information about the anti-Russian policy of NATO, the EU, and the USA in the countries of Eastern Europe. The mass media and social networks presented Russia as a besieged fortress protecting the Christian faith and morality. Therefore, Russia has the right to defend itself against Western aggression on the territory of Ukraine and other states (Gherman 2022: 102).

**The West is imposing a sanitary dictatorship on the world and Romania.** According to this narrative, the COVID-19 pandemic was a figment of the West, particularly the US, and people continue to die from the effects of vaccinations. The war in Ukraine is a continuation of the West's plan to destroy humanity. These conspiracy theories emerged

in the context of the pandemic when topics such as dangerous vaccinations and the efforts of the global elite to keep humanity under control and reduce the population spread. Even though the government lifted anti-Covid restrictions and vaccination rates were negligible, false narratives related to a “sanitary dictatorship” and vaccination continued to emerge in Romania after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. According to a study by the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), Russian propaganda used the pandemic to spread anti-Western narratives about the incompetence of EU and US doctors and the use of vaccination for political purposes (Boulègue and Polyakova 2021). Some political forces in Romania appealed to the Parliament not to allow the adoption of laws that would legalize the “sanitary dictatorship” (AUR 2021). Humanity will forever remain a “prisoner” of a state of emergency imposed under the pretext of fictitious pandemics, according to a false narrative spreading in Romania.

**Sanctions negatively affect only EU countries.** According to this narrative, Russia is not concerned about the West's economic sanctions because they do not affect it negatively. Still, they cause a severe economic crisis in countries such as Romania. Economic sanctions imposed on Moscow (including limitation of oil price) do not affect the Russian economy but determine the impoverishment of the Romanian population. As Romanian researcher Ileana Rachieru noted, the sanctions narrative is aimed at a poorly educated audience and seeks to manipulate public opinion. (Rachieru 2022: 474). Although the impact of sanctions may be perceived as limited in the short term, over time, they will prove effective. In addition, all sanctions are fully in line with the obligations under international law that the EU adheres to. According to the observations of economists, although the Russian economy is doing better than expected, the sanctions are having a big impact on it. Russia's macroeconomic environment has deteriorated significantly, mainly as a result of sanctions. Signs of economic fragility are multiplying, and money invested in weapons and ammunition is simply being destroyed on the territory of Ukraine (Sullivan 2024).

We tried to conduct a comparative analysis of anti-Western narratives in Ukraine and Romania and to prove that the methods and tools of Russian propaganda are constantly updated and may sound different. Still, their goal is the same – to discredit the West (Table 1).

**Table 1. Comparison table and matching of anti-Western narratives in Ukraine and Romania**

<b>Anti-Western narratives in Ukraine</b>	<b>Anti-Western narratives in Romania</b>
Russia liberates Ukraine from the West	Romania is “the poor colony of the West”
The West uses Ukraine as a puppet	Romania lost its sovereignty in favor of the USA or the EU
NATO member countries are or will be directly involved in the war	Romania will be forced to enter the war with Russia

Non-aligned countries choose the side of Russia, not the West	Romania must follow an isolationist policy
Western countries and their institutions ignore the will of their citizens	The West is deliberately bringing Romania and Moldova closer to provoke Russia
The war in Ukraine is beneficial to the West, and they will fight to the last Ukrainian	Romanians want their country to leave NATO and the EU
There are Western biological weapons laboratories in Ukraine	The West is imposing a sanitary dictatorship on the world and Romania
The war in Ukraine is part of a global conspiracy	NATO is waging war against Russia on the territory of Ukraine
Sanctions hurt the West more than Russia	Sanctions negatively influence only the EU countries

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, anti-Western rhetoric and Russian propaganda with its key messages have penetrated both the Ukrainian information space and the information space of Romania and other European Union states. The analysis of the results of the study allows us to draw conclusions about the systematic spread of anti-Western narratives of Russian state propaganda in the information space of both Ukraine and Romania. Disinformation campaigns with anti-Western rhetoric on the part of the Russian Federation have become a real challenge for Ukraine and Romania, the two neighboring states with strong historical, cultural, and economic ties.

Ukrainian and Romanian information spaces are constantly filled with anti-Western narratives about “loss of sovereignty”, “weakness of the EU/NATO/USA”, “instability”, “foreign governance”, and “global conspiracy” against the background of positive coverage of the Russian policy. The commonality of topics and the synchronization of anti-Western messages in Ukraine and Romania allows Russia to ensure the effect of a common information space of neighboring states and contributes to the formation of a limited positive image of the Russian Federation among both Ukrainians and Romanians.

The anti-Western campaigns we analyzed are permanent in the territories of Ukraine and Romania. We discovered common themes but different tools and approaches to their dissemination. In Romania, anti-Western narratives aim to reduce the level of support for Ukraine during the war and lead to the mobilization of society for a possible exit from the EU or NATO in the future. In Ukraine, panic and accusing the West of inciting a military conflict used to sow by methods of military propaganda. Despite the different styles of presentation of information and its adaptation according to each country’s socio-political and mental context, the anti-Western narratives in both countries are identical. Starting from February 24, 2024, there have been significantly more fake narratives in the

information space of both countries, which indirectly, slowly but surely shift the emphasis from the official narrative “Russia is the aggressor” and the false narrative “The West is guilty of the war”. Most of the narratives we examined undermine and distort the sense of security in both countries.

For both Ukrainian and Romanian societies and states, the issue of countering and preventing the spread of disinformation campaigns by the Russian Federation is highly urgent. Because of the common threat, the two neighboring states must coordinate their actions to counter Russian propaganda. The Ukrainian and Romanian governments, together with international partners and public organizations of their countries, should constantly develop effective strategies and legislative mechanisms to combat Russian anti-Western propaganda.

Information war is a relatively inexpensive and effective way to destabilize Western societies (without resorting to direct aggression), which allows Russia to influence the international arena using modern information technologies, social media, and cyber tools. Russian “troll factories” and “Kremlin bots” have become tools for spreading fake news, propaganda, and disinformation.

Russia uses information war as an effective tool since it allows it to compensate for weaknesses in other areas, influence world politics, and sow discord among its opponents. Russian propaganda actively applies historical, political, and ethnic conflicts between Ukraine and Romania to manipulate and have an influence on public opinion in both countries. The Kremlin seeks to split the West, sow distrust of its neighbors, and intensify interstate conflicts, making information warfare in the context of global information interdependence a critical element of Russia’s strategy in the region and shaping its political landscape.

**Figure 1. Screenshot of the Telegram channel of the Russian propagandist Olga Shariy**

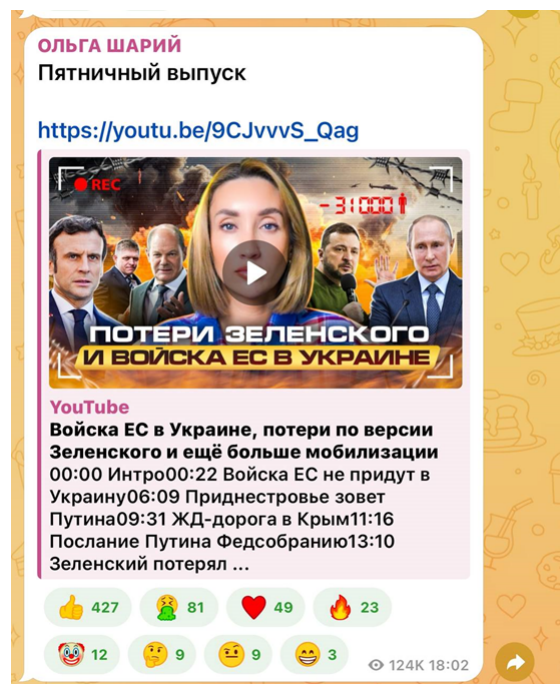


Figure 2. Screenshot of the Telegram channel “First. Новости войны” (First. News of the War)



Figure 3. Screenshot of the Telegram channel “Шептун.Украина Война”

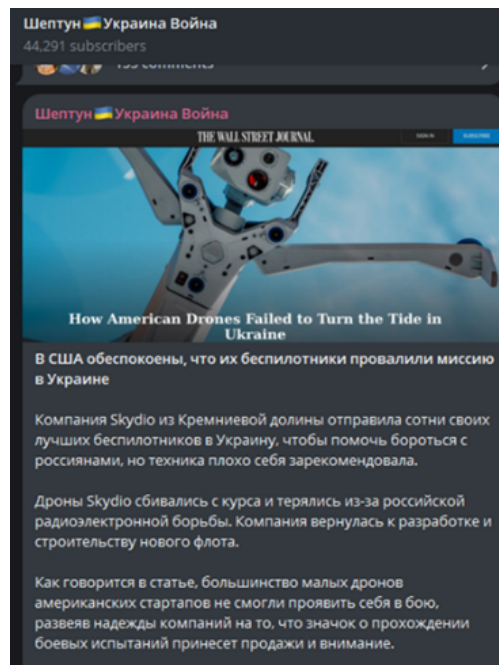


Figure 4. Screenshot of the Telegram channel Інсайдер UA



## Bibliography:

- AFP News Agency. (2022). Putin calls Ukraine government 'drug addicts and neo-Nazis'. *AFP News Agency*. Youtube. 25 February, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkos-aWbo7w> (accessed 24 May 2024).
- AUR. (2021). AUR solicită senatului României să respingă legea „dictaturii sanitare”. *AUR*, 3 June, <https://partidulaur.ro/a-u-r-solicita-senatului-romaniei-sa-respinga-legea-dictaturii-sanitare/> (accessed 6 May 2024).
- BBC News Україна. (2021). Лавров звинуватив США у провокації «війнушки» в Україні. *BBC News Україна*, 27 December, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/news-59803614> (accessed 12 May 2024).
- Boulègue, Mathieu, Polyakova, Alina. (2021). The Evolution of Russian Hybrid Warfare. *CEPA*. 29 January, <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/the-evolution-of-russian-hybrid-warfare-executive-summary> (accessed 3 May, 2024).
- Claessen, Eva. (2021). The making of a narrative: The use of geopolitical othering in Russian strategic narratives during the Ukraine crisis. *Media, War and Conflict*. 14(1): 1-18
- Clausen, Thomas. (2024) Putin's master plan for Europe is bearing fruit. *The Telegraph*, 30 May, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/05/30/europes-fascist-future-awaits-if-putin-wins-in-ukraine/> (accessed 10 June 2024).
- Constantinescu, Ștefan. (2023). Toții ochii s-au mutat pe Israel - Ajutorul UE pentru Ucraina este în aer. *Active News*. 27 October, <https://www.activenews.ro/ucraina/Totii-ochii-s-au-mutat-pe-Israel-Ajutorul-UE-pentru-Ucraina-este-in-aer-185254> (accessed 1 June 2024).
- Cristoiu, Ion. (2022). De ce-l înjură în direct Joe Biden pe Vladimir Putin? Pentru a acoperi decizia NATO de a se război cu Federația Rusă până la ultimul ucrainean. *Cristoiublog*. 29 March, <https://www.cristoiublog.ro/de-ce-l-injura-in-direct-joe-biden-pe-vladimir-putin-pentru-a-acoperi-decizia-nato-de-a-se-razboi-cu-federatia-rusa-pina-la-ultimul-ucrainean> (accessed 10 June 2024).
- Dogan, Mattei, Pélassy, Dominique. (1990) *How to Compare Nations: Strategies in Comparative Politics*. Chatham House.

- Funky Citizens. (2021). *Narațiuni anti-occidentale în România. Un raport de Funky Citiznes*. <https://funky.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Propaganda-anti-occidentala-Raport-de-Funky-Citizens.pdf> (accessed 12 June 2024).
- First. (2024). *First. Новости войны*. Telegram. [https://t.me/first\\_political](https://t.me/first_political) (accessed 15 May 2024).
- Gherman, Marin. (2022). Narațiuni ale dezinformării și fake news utilizate de Rusia până la invadarea Ucrainei. *Polis*: Vol. X. 2 (36), 99–110.
- Gherman, Marin. (2023). Evoluția propagandei de război a Rusiei împotriva Ucrainei: de la denazificare la dezucrainizare. In: *Marea Neagră, în căutarea hegemonului pierdut*. Coordon. Dorin Popescu. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană: 69–86.
- Gomboș, Cătălin. (2022). Dezinformare: UE forțează România să renunțe la Constituția și suveranitatea sa. In: *Războiul lui Putin cu lumea liberă. Propagandă, dezinformare, fake news..* Ed.: Marian Voicu, Cătălin Gomboș, București: Editura Omnium.
- Gosselin, André. (1995). La communication politique. Cartographie d'un champ de recherche et d'activités. In *Hermès*, Paris: CNRS Éditions: 3, 17–33.
- Groza, Oana-Medeea. (2022). Romoșan: nu are cine să preia azi curentul naționalist-suveranist uriaș din România. *Gold FM Radio*. 29 August, <https://radiogoldfm.ro/romosan-nu-are-cine-sa-preia-azi-curentul-nationalist-suveranist-urias-din-romania/> (accessed 7 May 2024).
- Kappeler, Andreas. (2014) Ukraine and Russia: Legacies of the Imperial past and Competing Memories. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 5 (2): 107–115.
- Lasca, Mihai. (2023). Iohannis și partidele aservite și pro Ucraina pregătesc să bage România în războiul lui Zelenski. *Facebook*, 6 March, <https://www.facebook.com/DeputatMihaiLasca/videos/167280552739494> (accessed 1 June 2024).
- Macridis, Roy C. (1967). A survey of the field of comparative government. In *Comparative Politics. A Reader*. Eckstein V. & Apter D. (eds.). London: Collier-Macmillan Limited
- Manu, Cezar. (2023). Fake news: Ucraina a atacat România cu mine. *Veridica*. 19 April, <https://www.veridica.ro/stiri-false/fake-news-ucraina-a-atacat-romania-cu-mine>
- Marina, Georgiana. (2024). Iohannis susține sprijinul pentru R. Moldova și Ucraina în procesul de aderare la UE: Chișinăul a arătat voință politică deosebită. *Digi24*, 23 January, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/iohannis-sustine-sprajinul-pentru-r-moldova-si-ucraina-in-procesul-de-aderarea-la-ue-chisinaul-a-aratat-vointa-politica-deosebita-2660489> (accessed 7 May 2024).
- Mihăiescu, Alexandru. (2024). Sondaj IRES: Peste jumătate dintre români au călătorit într-o țară din UE / Aproape trei sferturi vor ca România să rămână în Uniunea European. *G4Media*. 9 May, <https://www.g4media.ro/sondaj-ires-peste-jumatate-dintre-romani-au-calatorit-intr-o-tara-din-ue-aproape-trei-sferturi-vor-ca-romania-sa-ramana-in-uniunea-european.html> (accessed 12 May 2024).
- NewsOne. (2020). Виктор Медведчук: Внешнее управление – это самый большой бич, уничтожающий наше государство. *NewsOne*, [https://newsone.ua/news/politics/viktor\\_medvedchuk\\_vneshnee\\_upravlenie\\_eto\\_samyy\\_bolshoy\\_bich\\_unichtozhayushhiy\\_nashe\\_gosudarstvo.html](https://newsone.ua/news/politics/viktor_medvedchuk_vneshnee_upravlenie_eto_samyy_bolshoy_bich_unichtozhayushhiy_nashe_gosudarstvo.html) (accessed 2 May 2024).
- Rachieru, Ileana. (2022). România și Republica Moldova pe frontul propagandei pro-ruse în contextul războiului din Ucraina. In: *Războiul din Ucraina. Un conflict regional cu efecte globale*. Coord. Sorin Bocancea. Iași: Institutul European, 473–482.
- Side, Artin. (2023). România 2.0 – o abordare pragmatică a naționalismului. *Active News*. 9 February, <https://www.activenews.ro/opinii/Artin-Side-Romania-2.0-O-abordare-pragmatica-a-nationalismului-179524> (accessed 11 May 2024).

- Soare, Sorina. (2023). Romanian populism and transnational political mobilization. In: *The Impacts of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine on Right-wing Populism in Europe*. (eds). Gilles Ivaldi and Emilia Zankina.. 8 March, Brussels: European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS), <https://doi.org/10.55271/rp0027> (accessed 8 May 2024).
- SPRAVDI. (2023). Які наративи російської пропаганди поширені у країнах-сусідах України? *SPRAVDI*. 15 May, <https://spravdi.gov.ua/yaki-naratyvy-rosijskoyi-propagandy-poshyreni-u-krayinah-susidah-ukrayiny/> (accessed May 1, 2024).
- Sullivan, Arthur. (2024). Ukraine war: Russia's economy beats the odds – can it last? *Deutsche Welle*. 19 February, <https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-war-russias-economy-beats-the-odds-can-it-last/a-68268264> (accessed 4 May 2024).
- Szostek, Joanna (2017). The Power and Limits of Russia's Strategic Narrative in Ukraine: The Role of Linkage. *Perspectives on Politics*, 15 (2): 379-395.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. (1977) *The Poetics of Prose*. Trans. Richard Howard. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Toolan, Michael. (2001). *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction* (2nd Edition). London: Routledge.
- Triunghiul basarabean. (2023). Despre promotorii fără prea multe minte ai românismului în Basarabia, care sunt, în același timp, fără să-și dea seama, dușmanii numărul unu ai românismului. *Triunghiul basarabean*. Telegram, 28 April, <https://t.me/triunghiulbasarabean/4908> (accessed 4 May 2024).
- Voicu, Marian. (2018). *Matrioșka mincinoșilor: fake news, manipulare, populism*. București: Humanitas
- Zilinsky, Jan, et al. (2024). Justifying an Invasion: When Is Disinformation Successful? *Political Communication*. 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2024.2352483> (accessed 29 May 2024).
- Барановська, Поліна. (2024). Україна нібито воює виключно в інтересах США. *Детектор медіа*, 23 April, <https://disinfo.detector.media/post/ukraina-nibyto-voiuie-vykliuchno-v-interesakh-ssha> (accessed 20 May 2024).
- Вікарчук, Ольга. (2022). Брехливі судження москвитів про українську історію. *АрміяInform*. 22 October, <https://armyinform.com.ua/2022/10/22/brehlyvi-sudzhennya-moskovyativ-pro-ukrayinsku-istoriyu/> (accessed 11 May 2024).
- Вонс, Ростислав. (2023). Лавров заявив, що США ведуть війну проти Росії. *Главком*, 17 September, <https://glavcom.ua/world/world-politics/lavrov-zajaviv-shcho-ssha-vedut-vijnu-proti-rosiji-956982.html> (accessed 28 May 2024).
- Герасимов, Валерий. (2013). Ценность науки в предвидении. *ВПК*. 27 February, 8(476). <https://web.archive.org/web/20130912092248/https://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632> (accessed 14 May 2024).
- Инсайдер UA. (2021) Лукашенко собирается установить российские ракеты на границе с Украиной. *Инсайдер UA*. Telegram, 13 September, <https://t.me/insiderUKR/15986> (accessed 7 May 2024).
- Коваленко, Олена. (2023) Економіка РФ виявилася набагато більш стійкою до санкцій, ніж вважали на Заході, – *NYT. Unian*. 9 October, <https://www.unian.ua/economics/finance/ekonomika-rf-viyavilasya-nabagato-bilsh-stiykoju-do-sankciy-nizh-vvazhali-na-zahodi-nyt-12419928.html> (accessed 1 June 2024).
- Лежепекова, Анастасія. (2022). Путин объявил о проведении спецоперации по защите Донбасса. *Газета.ru*, 24 February, <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2022/02/24/17336791.shtml> (accessed June 1, 2024)
- Лукашевська, Анастасія. (2024). "США самі випустили джина з пляшки": Путін знову цинічно виправдав агресію Росії. *24 Канал*, 06 March, [https://24tv.ua/putin-zayaviv-shho-ssha-vipustili-dzhina-plyashki-vipravdav-agresiyu\\_n2509305](https://24tv.ua/putin-zayaviv-shho-ssha-vipustili-dzhina-plyashki-vipravdav-agresiyu_n2509305) (accessed 6 May, 2024).
- Магда, Євген. (2015). *Гібридна війна: вжити і перемогти*. Харків: Vivat.

- Самигін, Денис. (2022). Гасла під якими 4 місяці воює фашистська Росія. *Українська правда*. 27 June, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/columns/2022/06/27/7354575/> (accessed 17 May 2024).
- Сливенко, Орест. (2023a). Як Росія розмиває реальність за допомогою новомови: “маріонеткова держава”. *Детектор Медіа*, 22 August, <https://disinfo.detector.media/post/yak-rosiia-rozmyvaie-realnist-za-dopomohoiu-novomovy-marionetkova-derzhava> (accessed 21 May 2024).
- Сливенко, Орест. (2023b). Як Росія розмиває реальність за допомогою новомови: “відновлення історичної справедливості”. *Детектор Медіа*, 29 August, <https://disinfo.detector.media/post/yak-rosiia-rozmyvaie-realnist-za-dopomohoiu-novomovy-vidnovlennia-istorychnoi-spravedlyvosti> (accessed 21 May 2024).
- Собенко, Надія. (2022). Путін звинуватив США у спробах “затягнути конфлікт в Україні”. *Суспільне Новини*, 16 August, <https://suspilne.media/271604-putin-zvinuvativ-ssa-u-sprobah-zatagnuti-konflikt-v-ukraini/> (accessed 12 May 2024).
- Труха Україна* (2020) Українці тратять почти половину доходу на еду. *Труха Україна* Telegram. 04 February, <https://t.me/truexanewsua/1885> (accessed 5 May 2024).
- Тунська, Лілія. (2024). “Катастрофа близько”, – аналітик спрогнозував, як Путін знищить західну демократію. *Vesti-UA.net*. 1 June, <https://vesti-ua.net/uk/news/politics/250810-katastrofa-blizko-analtik-sprognozuvav-yak-putn-znischit-zahdnu-demokratyu.html> (accessed 3 June 2024).
- Цюпин, Богдан. (2023). 10 країн Європи, які називають себе нейтральними. *Voice of America*. 28 August, <https://www.holosameryky.com/a/7243957.html> (accessed 28 April 2024).
- Шептун. (2024) Шептун.Украина Война. Telegram. <https://t.me/shepton> (accessed 2 May 2024).
- Шипуля, Валерія. (2024). Війська НАТО в Україні: хто готовий воювати за свободу. *Кореспондент.net*, 10 May, <https://ua.korrespondent.net/articles/4685740-viiska-nato-v-ukraini-khto-hotovy-vouivaty-za-svobodu> (accessed 19 May 2024).