# **POLICE FORCE REPORT ON DISINFORMATION** OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC IN 2021





## Hoaxes and Scams - Police force of the Slovak Republic (Hoaxy a podvody - Polícia SR)

#### www.facebook.com/hoaxpz



\* The official communication channel of the Police Force focused on debunking disinformation and online fraud prevention

\* The most followed page on Slovakia focused on misinformation with over 122,000 followers

\* Direct contact with the general public through private messages

# **Key narratives**

Communication and Prevention Department of the Presidium of the Police Force (hereinafter referred to as the "Department") kept on monitoring disinformation throughout the calendar year 2021 and debunked a total of **189 hoaxes** on its specialized site, **151** of which were solely related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the second year in a row remains the Covid-19 disease the main disinformation topic in the Slovak Republic. Diversity of widespread hoaxes related to this topic is higher compared to last year. Disinformation affected all areas that were directly or indirectly related to the ongoing pandemic. Intensity of widespread hoaxes corresponded to the curve from 2020 – online space disinformation was found mainly throughout the spring and autumn, i.e. during second and third pandemic wave. Calmer period came throughout the summer months.

Most common disinformation narratives from year 2021 were related to the following topics:

- 🔆 Vaccination is harmful, ineffective, unnecessary and/or health/life threatening
- Fake deaths as a vaccination consequence (misuse of deaths of specific individuals)
- Medics are killing the patients (e.g. on pulmonary ventilation)
- Situation is not that serious, state institutions are over-exaggerating
- Situation abroad is much better (withholding information about the number of vaccinated people abroad)
- The pandemic is a secret plan by the powerful to rule/destroy humanity

Other specific disinformation topics are listed at the end of this report.

One of the main sources of received information related to the widespread disinformation were the fans and followers of the site "Hoaxy a podvody – Polícia SR" (Hoaxes and Scams – Police Force of the Slovak Republic), who remained in regular contact with the site administrators and by modern means turned to the Police Force with trust. The Department was able to process more than 9,000 private messages received from citizens this way. In addition to tips on widespread disinformation or on online fraud attempts, there were often received messages with questions about the credibility of the news spread or about the security of various online competitions. **The Police Force was able to educate public on the topic of disinformation and save thousands of euros from online fraudsters by pointing out some early warning signs thanks to the direct response from the <b>Police Force to citizens**.

A special communication tactic of the creators and disinformation disseminators was the phrase "Hoax today, truth tomorrow" (Dnes hoax, zajtra pravda), which in the arity of use surpassed the term "Nullity" (nulitný) that was most commonly spread in 2020. The phrase "Hoax today, truth tomorrow" has become a tool for retrospective hoax creation. For example, individuals reported that the Police Force has labeled vaccine-passports as a Hoax in the past, which, after the Covid-Passes were officially introduced, was supposed to prove that the Police Force was misleading the public before. However, nothing like this happened and the Police Force never released any statements about disinformation related to the vaccination passports. A separate information campaign focused on retrospective creation of hoaxes was made based on this.

The Police Force also debunked disinformation, which were primarily related to other countries, but with their action became ar among Slovak internet users as well. In this context, the activity of the Police Force was appreciated by foreign institutions, for example by a hospital in Slovenia or by the Red Cross in Austria. These examples showed the importance of the international fight against disinformation and the need to establish effective tools on the individual national institutions level outside of Slovakia as well.

Since the legislative framework that would provide possibilities for law enforcement agencies to combat primary creators of disinformation, not disseminators who sincerely believed mentioned disinformation, is not yet entrenched in the conditions of the Slovak Republic, the main tool to fight disinformation remains **effective communication** based on **strategic communication** of state institutions and politically exposed persons adhering to the principles of **clarity, transparency** and **quick response** to development of the situation.

## Disinformation as a security threat

Intensity, cadency, massive reach of disinformation, organizational abilities of their creators, effective utilization of social networks that are unable to oversee content security and new communication methods made out of disinformation a **major security threat** for Slovak Republic. Not only was the impact of disinformation influence visible on the vaccination rate of citizens, but it led to verbal and physical attacks against the ordinary representatives of state institutions (paramedics, police officers, hygienists, vaccination teams, etc.). Verbal and physical attacks were caused by the frustration of disinformation disseminators and recipients as their actions became the subject of an investigation by the executive police services.



Creators of disinformation called for continuation on personal attacks and intentionally provoked hateful public mood, which often led to death threats addressed to specific individuals. Although there was no direct threat, the Department drew attention to the disinformation potential of having **serious consequences for the health and lives** of specific individuals as well as on the work of the public institutions. Mass disinformation already had similar consequences abroad.

The number of **dead people caused by disinformation** in 2021 cannot be measured precisely. According to information received by the Department, patients infected by Covid-19 virus were in severe medical conditions confessing that they believed widespread disinformation. In one of the cases an extreme point was reached when, prior to the use of pulmonary ventilation on him, an unvaccinated critically ill patient threatened healthcare professionals that he did not want to get vaccinated and died a few days later.

### Goals and motives of creators and disseminators of disinformation

The debunked disinformation for citizens of the Slovak Republic and the general public can be found on official communication channel of the Police Force on Facebook under the name "Hoaxy a podvody – Polícia SR" (Hoaxes and Scams – Police Force of the Slovak Republic)" (www.facebook.com/hoaxpz). Specialized website was founded in 2018 and is currently followed by 122,000 social network users, which is 20,000 increase compared with last year. For a long period of time this website has been the most followed site about disinformation in Slovakia and a similar project does not yet exist within state institutions and Europe Police Forces.

Main goal of primary disinformation creators was to **cause chaos in society and undermine trust in the state**, which was directly related to spread of hatred and mistrust of state institutions. Disinformation has become a hybrid tool in a **form of attack on the Slovak Republic interests as well as the security of its citizens.** People behind the creation and widespread of the disinformation chain pursued their own interests that could take **political** or **economic form**. It is possible that their actions were trying to support the **foreign policy interests** of state powers abroad.

Foreign state powers tried to spread their narratives through their own or befriended media, or fictitious independent activists, often communicating in different way within their own state (e.g. talking about the danger of vaccination abroad, but recommending vaccination to people in their own country).

The disinformation was also created by several nationwide well-known personalities for economic reasons, such as personalities from healthcare environment, music industry or foodservice industry, whose main goal was **to gain arity**, which was connected to the **increase of their own financial income**. Ultimately, these people did not have to believe in the content of widespread disinformation to knowingly abuse the naivety of large audience for their financial gain.

Specific group became user accounts that seemed like accounts of individual activists, but were in fact a well-thought-out communication tool used by groups of people or organizations. Pretending by several concentrated groups to be one individual account of a particular person is one of the communication tactics of disinformation creators, as the public is more attracted by the specific person who acts independently than by anonymous group. Actions of fake activists were presenting themselves in real life as well, when they were pretending to be independent organizers of public gatherings and other variety of different public events. In fact, there was presence of strong indications that their actions were funded by various groups that had above mentioned interests. Useful tool for mass dissemination of the created hoaxes were common social networks users, who, based on their own convictions and due to absence of professional education and critical thinking, further disseminated them, thus creating a pyramid effect. Common social network users were praised for their online activities by groups of ation with similar mindset, which **satisfied their psychological needs** and thus they continued their behavior.

Information withdrawn from the Department together with the results of inspections carried out by members of the Police Force in the places of residence of hoax distributors served as the evidence of the ignorance of shared disinformation. Visited people denied authorship of the social media posts, or, on the bigger scale, they were saying that they had no knowledge of the information shared, or that they had heard it from an unknown person and only shared it on their profile. The possible criminal liability of mentioned people was examined at the individual regional directorates of the Police Force.

The social network Facebook continued to be the dominant tool for spreading disinformation in the Slovak Republic. The Department has seen an increase in the arity of other chat applications, which provide their users with a greater degree of anonymity and, in the absence of any moderation tools, guarantee the free dissemination of extremist views promoting violence. The creators of disinformation mobilized their supporters by moving from standard social networks to lesser known ones.

There was as well a couple of more or less important activities related to dissemination of disinformation in varieties of leaflets or other publications looking like they were either made by amateur individual or like a well thought of visual of some groups.

The age structure of disinformation disseminators varied as it affected seniors to a large extend as well, who are a vulnerable group when it comes to the topic of disinformation and that should be taken into an account during educational and preventive action of the Police Force and other institutions regarding this group of citizens. The support of the critical thinking development of younger generation continues to be underestimated in the field of education, which will become a key factor of possible defeat or success in fight against the growing intensity of disinformation that is increasing from one year to another.

### Fight against disinformation

The Department focused on drawing attention to the most massive and publicly shared disinformation. The chosen communication strategy proved to be the right one, as in many cases disinformation was erased by their authors, or even their user accounts were deactivated and their activities were suppressed. Working with the social network Facebook has often proved to be less effective. The inefficiency and inactivity of the Facebook employees and on the other hand the efficiency of the Department on Social Networks was recognized by the creators and disseminators of disinformation, who tried to stop the work of the Police Force in fight against disinformation or at least make it more complicated.

The Department identified efforts of private individuals, legal entities, criminally exposed individuals and politically exposed individuals to suppress the Police Force activities to debunk the disinformation on social networks. Attempts to impact the activities of the Department could have been in the form of ascertaining the identities of members of the Police Force who deal with the topic of disinformation. In this context, several names of third parties allegedly working in the police, who do not in fact cooperate with the Police Force, have appeared on social networks.

The effort to identify specific people was a part of communication strategy of the primary disinformation creators, who would run a chase campaign against specific people after obtaining such information – from the viewpoint of information manipulators, it is more important to spread disinformation and attacks against specific people, than against anonymous state institution, what was seen during mentioned attacks against medical personnel.

The Department is anticipating that widespread of disinformation regarding the **Covid-19** topic will continue. Primary creators of disinformation will continue in their efforts to cause civil unrest in society, attacks on specific individuals or institutions will escalate and the threat of direct and health endangering statements will rise.

Aside from above mentioned topic there is a possibility that misleading narratives concerned with the situation on **Belarus-Poland border** could combine with related topic of **migration** and with the conflict between **the Russian Federation and Ukraine** which could have devastating misinforming effects on the whole middle Europe region.

Most likely will the disinformation scene continue the spread of campaign against the page "Hoaxy a podvody – Polícia SR" mainly by searching through debunked hoaxes



from the past to raise questions about debunked disinformation from certain time and looking for written statements in page posts that could be put out of context in order to continue their strategy "Hoax today, truth tomorrow."

# Another activities

The Department tried to preventively influence the public and drew the attention to the most widespread disinformation by popular means, like with the poll "Hoax roka 2021" (Hoax of The Year 2021) or by banners with slogans, which were meant to point out the lack of logic in widespread hoaxes.



In 2021, representatives of the Department actively participated in national and international negotiations on cooperation in the fight against disinformation. Activity of the Department on social networks has been praised several times by domestic and foreign partners. Representatives of the Department were participating in the completion of tasks from working groups assignments and they were sharing their positive work experiences on selected professional conferences as well.

The Department welcomed efforts to develop a concept to combat hybrid threats and disinformation as well as engagement in the matter by professional civil society. The department is planning to reinforce their activity in the near future.

Page "Hoaxy a podvody – Polícia SR" offered the public topics that are meant to alert them about large-scale online frauds. In this regard, the Department introduced preventive campaign "Nenechám sa nachytať, stop online podvodom," (I won't get caught,



stop to online frauds) in which on voluntary basis participated well-known personalities from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, such as: president of Slovak Republic Zuzana Čaputová, actor Milan Lasica, actress Zuzana Fialová, actor Maroš Kramár, actor Juraj Bača, hockey player Miroslav Šatan, comedian Ján Gordulič and director Zdeněk Troška. Last-mentioned artist became part of ongoing summer campaign "Slunce, seno, pohoda a žádné podvody" (Sun, hey and no more hoaxes – which is a reference to ar Czech movie by mentioned director), one of the campaign main topics was focused on scams that were misusing names of famous personalities, false advertisement, blackmail emails, blackmailing of the male part of ation, fake romance from "American soldiers," or fake competitions.

The Department drew attention to the most common types of online scams that were designed to steal funds from people. In this context, most common scams were misusing the brand of Slovak post office and commercial delivery companies, activities of fraudsters interested in the purchase of goods sold by real advertisements as well as fake competitions on Facebook pages.

Followers of the site contributed with their own citizen alerts through the "Civic Aid" section.

# Summary of the most frequently shared disinformation in 2021 (Covid-19):

- Mortuary freezer boxes were fake, empty
- The amount of infected/deceased is raised on purpose
- Vaccination is a secret plan to insert microchips into people
- Testing sticks are infected with Covid-19
- Testing sticks are damaging the health (like poking the brain)
- Medics are not providing any medical care, not even the urgent one
- Questioning the effectiveness and safety of vaccination in a number of ways
- Vaccination caused health problems or had fatal consequences
- Comparing current situation to the bad conditions of Jewish people during World War II
- Questioning the decrees and marking them as invalid
- False speech of the President Putin in which he questions the current situation in the world
- Health problems caused by wearing face masks / respirators
- Manipulation of statements from scientists about Covid-19

- Public appearance of people pretending to be scientists / doctors / nurses
- Covid-19 patent issued years ago
- Attacks based on disinformation against specific personalities
- Worms in antigen tests
- False reports about the actual situation in foreign countries
- Fake vaccine needles
- False scientific studies
- Donating blood can be done only by the unvaccinated, the blood of the vaccinated will be poured out
- Empty hospitals, or, on the other hand, hospitals filled only by vaccinated people
- The effect that vaccinated people have on the unvaccinated (like passing out after pe sonal contact)
- False causes of death (all of them caused by vaccination)
- False stories of non-existent people and non-existent situations
- Mannequins in hospitals
- Code on cell phone serving as evidence that people have microchip in them after vaccination
- Secret pandemic plan for years ahead
- Predetermined test positivity
- Denial of insurance benefits to the vaccinated
- Injuries related to testing
- Offering money for falsely stating the cause of death as "Covid-19"

### Summary of other mass-shared disinformation in 2021:

- Secret plan of Bill Gates to rule the world
- Fake snow (attempts to set the snow on fire)
- Health hazard of new 5G mobile network
- Manipulation of Police Force operations

- Chemtrails
- Transfer of foreign troops through the Slovak Republic territory
- · Causes of "tornado" in Morava
- Migrants, migration
- Slovak comedians Milan Lasica and Július Satinský were State Security Service agents (ŠtB)
- · American agents were present at Slovak public gatherings
- World leaders have secret gesture (including the Pope or the President of Slovak Republic)



to make population extinct disinformators facebook comprehensibility 5G covid-19 american agents ego quick reaction physicians kill migration frustration social networks vaccination attacks prevention the world's most powerful people misuse of death secret gesture death empty hospitals to make ation extinct security threat HUAX secret plan power and influence TO RULE THE WORLD health and life blood donation transparency leaflets DISINFORMATION fake activists security mannequins strategic communication **Bill Gates** fake scientists **popularity** Chemtrails threat microchipping of people financial gain fake deaths effective communication witholding critical thinking health repercussions worms in antigen tests invalidity of regulations