



**REPORT  
OF THE POLICE FORCE  
ON DISINFORMATION  
IN SLOVAKIA IN 2022**



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## STATISTICAL OVERVIEW - FACEBOOK PAGE “HOAXES AND SCAMS - POLICE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC”

Number of statuses posted: **1 429**

Number of statuses related to the war in Ukraine: **875**

Number of explained pieces of disinformation regarding the war in Ukraine: **145**

Number of explained pieces of disinformation related to the Covid-19 virus: **41**

Number of other pieces of disinformation explained: **73**

Number of statuses related to online scams: **82**

Number of other statuses: **213**

Number of videos posted: **59**

**3 704 803**  
VISITORS

Unique number of visitors: **3 704 803**

Number of followers: **143 277** (year-on-year net increase: + 15 322)

Number of all interactions: **1 543 471**

Number of comments: **348 585**

Number of private messages received: **13 000-14 000**  
(estimate based on a daily average of 35-40)

**143 277**  
FOLLOWERS

Funds invested in social media advertising: 0 eur

### Number of statuses posted by month:

January **57** | February **92** | March **155** | April **119** | May **115** | June **98**

July **87** | August **157** | September **95** | October **156** | November **136** | December **110**

**1 543 471**  
INTERACTIONS

**348 585**  
COMMENTS

## Introduction

The Police Force started to develop the preventive and educational activities in the field of combating disinformation in 2017 through its only Facebook page at that time under the name “Police of the Slovak Republic”. The Department of Communication and Prevention of the Presidium of the Police Force (“the Department”) took over the supervision of the police activity on social networks.

The scale of the overall issue with a continuous increase in the number of false or manipulated information on the Internet contributed in 2018 to the creation of a separate information channel “Hoaxes and Scams - Police of the Slovak Republic”, which over time has become the main communicator in the field of internal security of the Slovak Republic (“SR”) focused on external communication in relation to the public.

Thanks to the number of its followers and other statistical indicators, the website has long been the most followed in the SR in the fight against disinformation and is regularly awarded by domestic and foreign partners, as well as in professional surveys and competitions.

In 2018-2020, standard narratives and manipulations dominated the disinformation scene. These included topics such as migrants, child abduction, alternative forms of healing, the Moon landing, and so on.

In the period 2020-2022, the SR experienced its first serious security threat in the form of widespread disinformation related to the coronavirus pandemic. For the first time in the history of the SR, disinformation had an impact on the deaths of the country’s citizens.

In the annual report on disinformation in the SR for 2021, the Police Force for the first time analyzed in detail the development of disinformation and manipulation, gave concrete examples and added expectations and recommendations for the future. One of them concerned all areas concerning the relations between the Russian Federation (“RF”) and Ukraine in the aftermath of a possible military conflict. Already at the end of 2021, the Department warned of “devastating disinformation that could have consequences for the entire Central European region”.

After the start of the war between the RF and Ukraine, a hybrid warfare - an imaginary war in a virtual environment - began to take place not only in the Central European region. The Slovak internet began to be flooded with disinformation, manipulations, information operations or just information to a degree never seen before. In the case of pandemic disinformation, there were deaths of individuals, but in the case of hybrid warfare, the security of all the inhabitants of the SR and the future of the country’s democratic system came under threat.

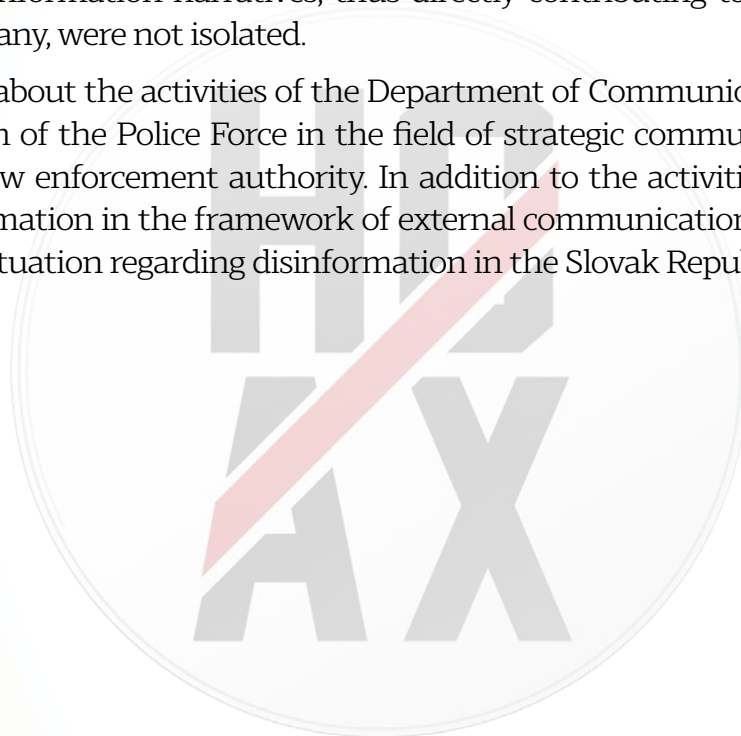
Based on the above factors, the Police Force has not underestimated the impact of hybrid warfare and has appropriately addressed it through its visible and invisible activities. Despite this, there was a transformation of an already radicalized part of the population from pandemic themes to war themes, which was confirmed by the conclusions of several surveys of various institutions. A parallel world has begun to emerge in the online environ-

ment, in which support for an aggressive incursion by a foreign country has come to play a greater role than the integrity of one's own state.

Meta's Facebook was the dominant source of disinformation for the Slovak market in 2023. Some publishing channels on the social network Telegram saw an increase in followers, but were nowhere near the numbers on Facebook in terms of number of followers, content reach and interaction. On Instagram, the police monitored sporadic, unorganized expressions that did not attract the attention of the wider population.

The Police Force repeatedly drew the public's attention to the paradox of influential disinformation creators continuing to operate on Facebook, owned by one of America's largest private companies. The trend among the disinformation scene has long been open hatred of anything associated with the United States of America ("USA"). In the case of the creation and dissemination of disinformation and pro-Kremlin propaganda, they saw no obstacle in their own values. Yet cases where the same sources invested thousands of euros in sponsoring their disinformation narratives, thus directly contributing to the financing of the American company, were not isolated.

This report is about the activities of the Department of Communication and Prevention of the Presidium of the Police Force in the field of strategic communication. The Department is not a law enforcement authority. In addition to the activities of the Police Force against disinformation in the framework of external communication, the report also aims to present the situation regarding disinformation in the Slovak Republic for the year 2022.



## 1 Pre-war period

In January 2022, disinformation related to the coronavirus pandemic receded, and for the first time a calmer period emerged in the Internet environment. At the beginning of February, a fundamental change took place. On the basis of some significant communication intervention, the topic of signing and ratification of the “Defense Cooperation Agreement between the Slovak Republic and the USA” came to the attention of the disinformation media and manipulation channels. Until then, the aforementioned Agreement was on the periphery of interest and was little misinterpreted. This was a standard international agreement, but the presence of the “US” factor played a major role.

In addition to disinformation, threats against specific individuals began to appear in the virtual environment, which were also carried over to a certain group of citizens in the real world. The main aim of the disinformation campaign was to present the ratification of the Agreement as a surrender of the country to the USA. The most expressive disinformation was about the planned invasion of Slovakia by US troops, the import of nuclear weapons or the occupation of military bases.

In connection with the Agreement, disinformation related to the topic of troop movements of foreign armies regarding joint exercises with the Armed Forces of the SR and other activities resulting from international treaties began to appear more intensively. The topic of troop movements in the perception of the disinformation scene as evidence of the invasion of foreign armies into the territory of the SR was nothing unusual. Combined with the Agreement, it took on a new dimension and had the potential to reach a wider audience.

The Police Force tried to reduce the consequences of the disinformation misuse of the topic of troop transfers by proactively informing about the planned transfers in cooperation with the Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic.



Police proactively communicated troop movements of foreign armies through the territory of the Slovak Republic.

Despite the transparent information from the aforementioned institutions, the narrative of the occupation of the SR by foreign troops was spread. In one case, information was shared from a satirical website that talked about how the U.S. Army was stuck in snow drifts in the Orava region. Some of the readers believed this information and spread it further.

The day before the beginning of the war, the Police Force drew attention to the disinformation spread under the account named "Juraj Krajčík", which in its content and scope provided valuable insights for the investigation of the authors of the disinformation, but also of the tragic act committed a few months later.

**Juraj Krajčík**  
21 February at 02:12 · 🌐

Zdravím Priatelía.  
Dnes by som sa chcel s Vami podeliť o môj včerajší (20.2.2022) osobný zážitok. Zážitok, ktorý som zažil spolu s mojou ženou a deťmi v aute cestou z chalupy domov, do BA. Približne o 21:30 hod. sme v protismere na konci R1, smer TT, spozorovali množstvo policajných aut s modro - červenými majákmi. Najskôr sme si najivne mysleli, že však čo, naši papaláši idú na výjazdové rokovanie mimo BA. No, mylilí sme sa. Keď sme sa minuli s policajným kordónom, začali sme mŕňať desiatky a desiatky kusov americkej vojenskej kolesovej techniky. Zaplachtené kamióny a rôzne bojové vozidlá. Priatelía, ostali sme s rodinou ako obarení a tlak mi určite stúpol na "200/140". Neuveriteľné. No to ešte nebolo všetko! Príbeh pokračuje ďalej. Následne, keď sme o pár km zišli pred TT z R1 na D1, smer BA sme po pár chvíli spozorovali v protismere ďalšie policajné autá s majákmi a za nimi ďalšiu min. 1 km dlhú kolónu US vojenskej techniky. Priatelía bolo mi a je mi zle. Títo americký zmrdi, sa sem - do našej krajiny, zakrádajú po tme ako potkani a šváby. A čo je najtragickejšie? Zakrádajú sa sem za asistencie polície SR. Zakrádajú sa sem na základe podpísania zradcovskej "obrannej" zmluvy so SŠA vládou SR a následne NR SR. Podpisu - oficiálneho pozvania americkej armády od vlastizradcov, momentálne a bohužiaľ pôsobiacich vo vláde a v slovenskom parlamente na zvrchované územie SR, bez akéhokoľvek mandátu na tento úkon od občanov SR!!! Je mi z toho do plaču a na zvracanie 🤢🤢🤢🤢🤢. A čo na to povedať na záver? Len toľko, že dnes večer sa mi bude s mojou ženou a deťmi určite "kludnejšie/bezpečnejšie" zaspávať. Že by paraela s rokom 1968?! Priatelía, a ako sa bude od zajtra a po ďalšie dni zaspávať Vám?!!!  
Foto: Google.

Ps: Keďže bola tma a fotiť z auta, za týchto svetelných podmienok a za jazdy by bolo zbytočné a aj nebezpečné, použil som relevantné fotky od "renovovaných" serverov, ktoré oslavne písali o vstupe amerických okupačných vojsk na naše územie už minulý týždeň. Tí aspoň použili fotky originalnej americkej vojenskej techniky.

Ps2: Pozrite si tiež veľavravné screenshoty zo stránky MO SR o nespočetných prejazdoch vojenskej techniky za posledný mesiac cez naše územie. Už Vám to, dáva zmysel? Už Vám je to jasné, prečo bola táto "obraná" zmluva so SŠA schválená tak šialenou kozmickou rýchlosťou a následne tiež supersonickým spôsobom podpísania rezidentkou z kozieho paláca?!!!  
A už len posledná otázka k týmto posledným fotičkám z dielne MO SR. Prečo sú tam fotky z presunu našej vojenskej techniky a nie reálne fotky presunu americkej techniky na naše zvrchované územie?!!!!!!!!

👍👎 **Matúš Pýrlik** · 565 ďalších

Komentáre: 163 · Zdieľania: 68

The day before the start of the real war, narratives about the threat of an invasion of the territory of Slovakia by US troops dominated the Slovak information space. Screenshot context: the father of the family described the horrors the family was experiencing while watching the troops moving into the territory of the Slovak Republic, hinting at the beginning of the war from the US side.



The aim of these narratives was to distract attention from what was happening on the Russian-Ukrainian border. For the general public, obvious indications that the RF would attack Ukraine could be seen a few days before the real start of the war, when the intensity and activity of disinformation accounts was increasing. In particular, there was the dissemination of “evidence” of increasing tensions on the part of the citizens of Ukraine, or false reports of shelling of territories that were already occupied by Russian troops at that time.

One of the topics was a video of the alleged evacuation of the inhabitants of the then-occupied eastern Ukraine to the territory of the RF. The metadata of the released video revealed that it was filmed on a much earlier day than presented by the Russian media. Setting it in a different time period only supported the subconscious Russian propaganda about the need to intervene as soon as possible.

Weeks and days before the war began, alongside the Agreement and the invasion of the territory of the SR by the US troops, the strong thesis “Never against Russia, Russia will never start a war” appeared in the information environment. This narrative appeared in both virtual and real environments, where it sometimes took the form of public gatherings to express support for the peaceful interests of the RF and condemn “hostile” countries.

Public events, published articles or interviews with representatives of the RF in the SR indicated that these persons from among the citizens of the SR had no knowledge of the upcoming war, otherwise they would probably have refrained from their actions or would not have spent the short period after the beginning of the war in silence out of real shock and surprise.

Days to hours before the RF troops entered the territory of Ukraine, the Slovak disinformation scene continued to adhere to the slogan “Never against Russia”, warned against the occupation of the US troops and downplayed the leaked

## 2 War as the main narrative

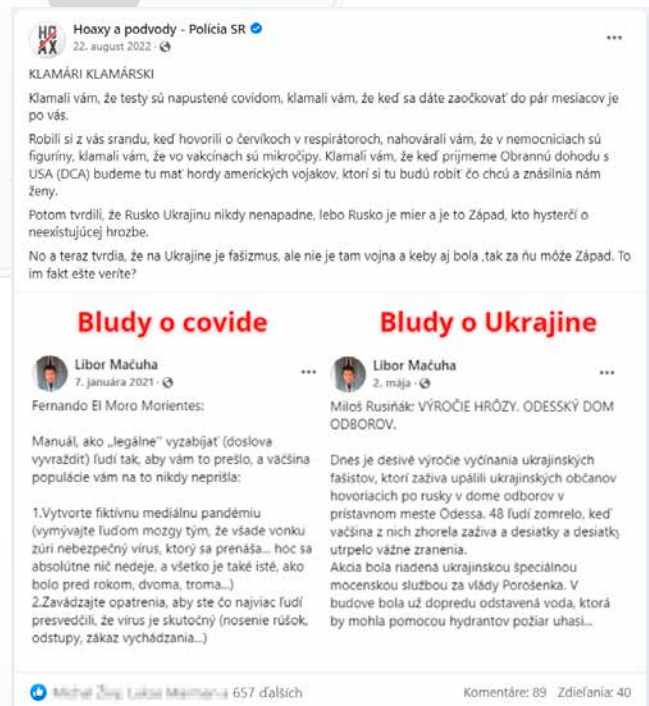
After the invasion of the territory of Ukraine by the RF troops on 24 February 2022, the topic of war became a dominant part of the disinformation influences in the SR. The switch from other disinformation narratives to everything related to the military conflict did not happen overnight in a matter of hours, but over a period of days to weeks. This slowing effect was due to several influences:

- ▶ prominent importers of pro-Kremlin propaganda or dominant authors of any other disinformation were taken by surprise by the beginning of the war, as only a few days before they had convinced the public that the RF would not invade Ukraine
- ▶ in the same shock remained the followers of disinformation, i.e. for example the subscribers of individual disinformation channels, who could not explain the beginning of the war on the part of the RF and marginalized this fact for the first days of the war
- ▶ both the prominent importers and the dominant disseminators of their narratives were left to wait for pro-Kremlin propaganda to take hold, both in relation to the RF's own population and, above all, abroad (as soon as disinformation narratives began to flow out of the RF, local players began to translate them, or reinterpret and adapt them for the citizens of the SR).

Shortly before the start of the war in Ukraine, the Police Force proactively warned the public against the gradual transformation of social networking groups from pandemic topics to military topics. The trend of “experts-disinformants” transforming from the Covid-19 virus to military conflict was subsequently manifested in many concrete examples over the following months. Not only individual players, but also sites, groups and web platforms gradually started to dedicate their content in an exclusive way to the interests of the RF.



Shortly before the war, the police captured the transformation of disinformants from the pandemic area to everything related to the military conflict.



Specific examples have shown that prominent disinformation accounts have begun to focus primarily on the war. Police also showed several examples.

The creators of pro-Kremlin propaganda have set several main goals in relation to the SR:

- ▶ gaining support for the RF at the expense of support for Ukraine
- ▶ organizing virtual and real actions against support for Ukraine
- ▶ questioning and even attacking the state authorities of the SR and the international communities
- ▶ creating information chaos in virtual space
- ▶ questioning the democratic system of the SR
- ▶ increasing the influence of the RF on the SR in the long term

The Police Force dealt with the topic of the war in Ukraine most intensively during the first month of the conflict, when it informed the public about the current events on the Slovak-Ukrainian border, about the activities of the Police Force experts deployed directly on the territory of Ukraine, but also about the slowly emerging disinformation narratives and the increase in pro-Kremlin propaganda. The Police published 5-10 statuses a day on the topic of the military conflict alone. There was no shortage of useful advice for citizens and refugees alike in the Ukrainian language, with the aim of providing the most transparent reporting possible. It included the fates of specific refugees, which were meant to bring them closer to the Slovak public as human, real beings who lost everything as a result of the war. One of the stories was about a 10-year-old boy, Hasan, who walked about 1,000 km to Slovakia on his own. His fate was reported by the biggest foreign media that came to Slovakia because of him.

For a more user-friendly orientation, the police published updated summaries of sources of disinformation and propaganda on social networks, which they divided into sections according to the level of danger of influencing the public, taking into account the potential impact of the content and the number of interactions. As a result of this move by the police, Meta, as well as the sources themselves, deleted specific published statuses or entire publishing channels. However, most of the disinformation and especially propaganda sources remained continued to be accessible, which was a consequence of the lack of capacity in Meta for the SR region.

A special topic was an overview of internationally adopted sanctions against the RF, which was created in cooperation with the National Security Analytical Centre (“NBAC”). Its role was to show the countries’ alliance towards the condemnation of the actions of the RF.

Pro-Kremlin propaganda based on disinformation and manipulation was translated into Slovak because of the language barrier. A key role was played by its importers, who picked it up on original Russian news sources. Subsequently, it was sorted, translated, but mainly adapted to the culture and knowledge of the citizens of the SR. The motives of these entities were related to their economic gain, political goals, as well as their own beliefs. These were not only anonymized sites or newsgroups, but also individual accounts hiding behind fictitious names. In some cases, their activity in the number of published statuses reached several dozen published statuses per day. Even among the accounts of fictitious persons there were real people who, out of their own conviction, spent hours every day on social networks in order to bring pro-Kremlin propaganda to their fellow citizens.

## 2.1 Refugees from Ukraine

During the first days of the military conflict, the Police Force focused intensively on the issue of those who had left Ukraine. There were indications that, despite the initial wave of solidarity and willingness to help, these sentiments in society may have transformed into outright hatred and the spreading of disinformation about the community. The wave of solidarity replaced by harsh disinformation has occurred in the conditions of the SR in the past, namely in the case of the development of the coronavirus pandemic - while the first wave of the pandemic was marked by solidarity and understanding, the following months brought the spread of disinformation and hatred in both virtual and real space.

For the aforementioned reasons, members of the Police Force from the communication units worked intensively directly on the eastern border with Ukraine during the first month of the war. This resulted in the first successful intervention against a disinformation operation that politically exposed persons were trying to instigate at the border. In the videos disseminated by them, there was a narrative according to which the war in Ukraine was abused by third-country residents who used the relaxed border regime to migrate illegally to the territory of the SR or to other EU Member States. They were supposed to be people from African and Arab countries.

The Police Force proactively communicated this issue in a variety of ways. One of them was the regular publication of the number of persons who crossed the Slovak-Ukrainian border, including their nationalities. It was a campaign with the working title "Slovakia saves the whole world". Based on the statistics, it was noticeable that this was not a mass illegal migration of third-country citizens, but in fact the SR was mainly rescuing citizens of Ukraine, citizens of EU Member States, as well as citizens of the RF who were also fleeing the war. Secondly, the Police Force published video interviews with third-country nationals explaining why they lived in Ukraine (studies, employment, international family, etc.) and what their future plans were. Another separate video and photo reports from the repatriation flights, organized by the embassies of the individual countries, became an imaginary end to the whole process. These included flights to India and Africa, for example. Thanks to this approach, the disinformation operation regarding the misuse of the flow of refugees of different nationalities did not come to the attention of the population to a greater extent.

In a minimal number of cases, there were personal confrontations between disinformation creators and refugees. These often ended with unwanted results, as the creators of the videos heard information about the real Russian aggression directly from the citizens of Ukraine, which did not fit into their strategic communication. The Police Force has warned the public against such harassing behavior and urged them to report it to 158.

On the subject of refugees and thus increased migration, the Police Force pointed to one of the many disinformation paradoxes. While the disinformation scene in recent years has focused on disinformation about illegal migration and the planned flooding of the SR with Muslims, the largest influx of migrants was actually the responsibility of the RF, which expelled the Ukrainians from their homes and forced them to stay on Slovak territory. The creators of disinformation deliberately concealed this relationship of action and effect.

On the one hand, a part of the society looked at the refugees from Ukraine as a security, unwelcome threat, but on the other hand, they admiringly spread information about extremist Muslims linked within Ramzan Kadyrov's Chechen group. On social networks, they were sometimes even adored and invited to the territory of the SR, where they were supposed to "fix things" with the enemies of the RF. This was a group of extremist Muslims characterized by murdering their enemies, suppressing basic human rights and oppressing the female part of the population. A certain level of bizarreness was reached by the information campaign, according to which Kadyrov said that he was going to come to Slovakia with his army. In this case, it was disinformation directly in relation to the Chechen leader. The insertion of Slovak opinions and ideas was also a trend with President Putin, when in several cases his statements and entire speeches that he never said but that the domestic disinformation scene would have liked him to say were posted online.

In the following months, the Police Force did not register an increased number of disinformation attacks against the refugees. These were standard, expected manifestations that remained largely isolated. Like, for example, the narrative about why the Ukrainians came to the territory of the SR, given that there is no fighting on the entire territory of Ukraine. There was no increase in hatred that would carry over into the real world. In this regard, the police proactively warned the public that such a large number of refugees may include persons who would take advantage of the hospitality of Slovak citizens. In such cases, it will be necessary to look at failures through the prism of individuals and not the nation as a whole. As part of this informative campaign, the police reminded the public of the failures of legally convicted Slovak criminals who, despite committing crimes abroad, did not cause any country to turn its back on the entire Slovak nation.

The animosity caused by the effects of the manipulation operations, rather than towards the refugees, manifested itself in relation to Ukraine as such, or took the form of support for the RF and celebration of the achievements of its army. These expressions of sympathy occurred despite continued threats, whether from senior Kremlin officials or the hosts and guests of disinformation shows from Russia's national media. The police regularly drew attention to these threats in order to give the Slovak public a picture of the context in which the SR and other countries in the RF are being discussed.

## **2.2 Initial support for the Russian Federation**

Neither the open threats nor the inclusion of the SR on the list of hostile states diminished the sympathy of a part of the Slovak public towards the RF, which in some places explicitly called on the Russian army to come to the territory of the SR and "restore order". This was not changed even by the publicly available information about the blocking of social networks on Russian territory that enjoy popularity among Slovak users, or the news about the Russian court punishment of the disseminator of disinformation about the Covid-19 virus, or the information about the new 15-year sentence for spreading disinformation in the RF. These were all factors that would greatly frustrate the supporters of disinformation in the context of the SR. On the other hand, the police did not record a migration wave of Slovak citizens to the RF; on the contrary, according to the information of the Ministry of

Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, up to 200 persons of Slovak origin were permanently residing on the territory of this country. The largest representation of Slovak immigrants was in the USA (more than 1 million).

After the initial shock of the real start of the war, the disinformation scene activated and began to produce disinformation and manipulation narratives on a daily basis, which was symptomatic throughout the rest of 2022. In the opening weeks there has been celebration on its part of the Russian Federation's initial, at times isolated and even fictitious, successes, with at least one major attempt to spread the narrative that nothing is happening in Kiev and that the war is a fabrication.

Predictions of an early end to the war in favor of the RF were evident in the Internet space, which over the following months turned into threatening predictions that the RF would continue to be able to attack in order to fulfill the goal of an early end to the war. The fact that this was open speculation about the country's aggression against other Slavic nations, which according to disinformants it treated amicably, was another of the many paradoxes.

Citizens' attention was diverted in all directions by the flood of disinformation, so there was often confusion in their reactions. Pro-Kremlin propaganda recalled various historical conflicts in order to obfuscate current events. In other cases, it offered plenty of disinformation as justification for the Russian Federation's right to invade Ukraine. The fact that the war with Ukraine was for a long time until the last moments described as disinformation by Kremlin officials remained in the background.

As a result of the above-mentioned confusion, public speeches were made by a part of society which, while openly denouncing the war and demanding its early end, added that it would still end in a few days with the victory of the RF. In other examples, there was outrage over the victims of the war, especially in the cases of specific child victims, but in any criticism, the RF and its responsibility were never mentioned in the disinformation scene. The theme of pity for the victims of the war eventually disappeared from that community altogether.

## **2.3 Disinformation from the front**

Current events on the war fronts of both sides have become a special category suitable for the dissemination of disinformation. The complexity and intricacy of the military conflict did not allow the Police Force to explain to a greater extent potential disinformation concerning, for example, false reports about the achievements of the RF army, as any such verification of information was almost impossible at the time. The Police pointed to the military achievements of the Ukrainian army on the basis of a number of credible sources, in which cases there was often confirmation directly from the official authorities of the RF. On the other hand, the Slovak disinformation scene absorbed a lot of disinformation on the topic of attacks on civilian targets. While the Russian side avoided attacks on civilians, according to propaganda, Ukraine was supposed to do so on a daily basis. In one particular case, there was an interesting development in the explanation of events - after initial reports of an attack on a civilian target, first the Ukrainians were blamed for it, later it was the Russian army, but according to the disinformation scene, they were justified in doing so.

In connection with the events on the war front, the Police Force noted several patterns of behavior among the citizens of the SR. In the first case, these were celebrations of the achievements of the Russian army, which were not officially verified at the time, sometimes even outright celebrations of the deaths of Ukrainian soldiers or civilians. Otherwise, the tactic of silence was followed - if there were obvious failures on the Russian side, the major proxy channels of the RF in Slovakia ignored these events and in most cases suppressed their activities for a few days. The third pattern of behavior was the reactions of a certain part of the population to the verified successes of the Ukrainian army. These were not without derisive or even aggressive posts describing any advance of Ukrainian troops as disinformation, or pointing to the alleged crimes of the Ukrainians in the past, including during the Second World War, in order to divert attention.



**The narrative of the immediate destruction of the missile site has spread among Slovak Facebook users system from Slovakia. In places, this misinformation was celebrated.**

The supply of aid to Ukraine from the SR has become an important special chapter. In the case of the S-300 missile system, its transfer to Ukrainian territory was divulged by a highly politically exposed person, posing a direct security threat to the individuals involved in the operation. Later, the Police recorded false reports of how quickly the system was destroyed, with expressions of joy coming from the citizens of the SR.

A separate topic was the propaganda videos of welcoming the Russian army troops in Ukraine, which were also massively disseminated in the Slovak disinformation environment. This included, for example, the distribution of sweets in places where civilians were killed or the reconstruction of the city of Mariupol. This kind of subliminal RF propaganda had only one goal - to cover up real events in specific Ukrainian cities.

Downplaying the failures of the RF or the successes of Ukraine was one of the basic disinformation theses in the calendar year 2022. RF proxy channels, so-called fan groups (motivated by economic reasons and a rise in popularity), individuals (motivated by the number

of likes) and politically exposed persons (their own interests) have all played a significant role in its dissemination.

Disinformation propaganda tried to cover up the war crimes of the RF, especially the executions of civilians in the town of Bucha. Slovak social network users were also struck by the hoax about “moving corpses” in Bucha, which were supposed to be proof that the whole situation was staged. The timely intervention of the Police Force with clear analysis stopped the narrative from spreading further in time.



The video was supposed to be evidence of moving corpses in Bucha. The police promptly explained it and prevented the narrative from spreading.



Despite the intervention of the police, the hoax about what was happening in Bucha was the most spread the most in Slovakia, in the region of Central Europe.

Diversity has also affected the form and tools used in the creation of disinformation. This included, for example, the use of photo editing software, publishing videos without captions, where the status caption and its textual content were inconsistent with the video, the use of captions inconsistent with the content of the video, or the use of doubles.

Quoting self-proclaimed experts with controversial, sometimes even criminal, pasts has become a separate category. Prominent disinformation channels began resorting to the tactic of publishing only quotes from other people, precisely the category of the aforementioned “experts”, at the end of the calendar year 2022. These accounts took this step due to concerns about being blocked by Meta. There is a difference between posting disinformation as such and a status that “merely quotes” someone else’s opinion. There was also concern about blocking among standard debaters, who preferred only liking posts with mocking emoticons rather than writing disinformation comments. Grinning emoticons became a natural part of statuses reporting on child victims of the war in Ukraine.

Another peculiarity was the modern phenomenon of “whataboutism” (what about us), the role of which was to point to the needs of one’s own country as an attempt to stop aid to Ukraine. Disinformation and manipulations were published on this topic to exaggerate negatively about the quality of life in the SR and other related aspects. This video has become one of the most viral on the topic of the RF in Slovakia for 2022.

## 2.4 Activities in a real environment

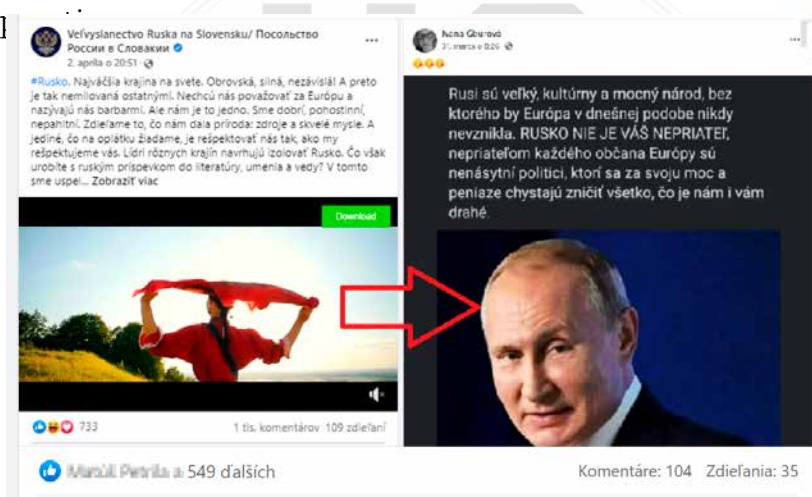
The Police considered the largest influence operations to be events that took place in



the real world. These included, for example, various meetings organized for the purpose of paying tribute to persons associated with the RF or the USSR, training camps for children and youth, charity events and the like. All the events were linked by an undertone of growing sympathy towards the RF and their financial background was opaque.

One of the fundamental switches of the pro-Kremlin propaganda into the real world was the speech of the RF Ambassador to Slovakia Igor Bratchikov in Zvolen on the occasion of the celebrations of the Slovak National Uprising. The public appearance of a representative of a foreign power came at a time when the SR had already been listed twice as a hostile state by his home country.

As for the RF Embassy in Bratislava, it continued to play the role of an importer of pro-Kremlin disinformation to Slovakia. Some of the disinformation shared was deleted or there were interventions by Meta. Despite the continuous posting of pro-Kremlin propaganda on the Embassy's Facebook page, there was no increase in interactions with individual statuses, nor did their readership reach high levels. The Embassy's role in this regard was to maintain its position as an inspirer for domestic channels, some of which were able to repost/copy content supplied by the Russian Embassy in short succession, raising suspicions of mutual, coordinated coop



The influence of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Slovakia was visible in many examples when it brought pro-Russian propaganda to the domestic audience.

Regarding disinformation activities in the real world, the Police did not observe a significant increase in the number of public events in support of the RF, which was in stark contrast to the pro-Kremlin propaganda on social networks and the activity of some Slovak entities. On the contrary, there were several public events in support of Ukraine, including by persons of Russian nationality living in Slovakia, with the Police Force stressing that not all of its citizens can be held responsible for the crimes of the RF. In the same tone were the statements of the Police about the damaged monuments and graves of the soldiers of the USSR and other friendly countries, which had nothing to do with the current events. A video of an event in support of the RF, in which a citizen of the RF living in Slovakia spoke, resonated through the public space. He surprised the attendees by openly criticizing the quality of life in the RF and the government of his home country.

## 2.5 Peace as a victory for the Russian Federation

As the months passed, there were changes in the content of pro-Kremlin propaganda, but also in the behavior of a part of the disinformation scene. The thesis of a quick, three-day “special operation” has long been forgotten. The false peace theory has come to the fore. These were speeches according to which every rational person wishes for peace in Ukraine. However, such claims were complemented by considerations, or patterns of behavior, according to which their authors actually wished for peace in favor of the RF, i.e. its victory and Ukraine’s defeat. Ukraine has begun to be accused of prolonging the war by defending itself, and it had better surrender, because one way or another it will suffer final defeat. President Zelensky was accused of sending people to their deaths. The facts about the determination of the Ukrainian people, but also that any other country would logically defend itself against an invasion by another state, were deliberately left unsaid.

The Police noted a massively circulated claim that the war would have ended by now if Western countries had not supported Ukraine. On the one hand, it was a logical expression of the consequences, but on the other hand, it brought us closer to the world of the mindset of the manipulators who were trying to artificially persuade the public to exert pressure on Ukraine, which was only unnecessarily resisting.

The fact that these were only false calls for peace was evidenced by specific situations when, based on official sources, there were significant defeats of the RF army or damage to the Kerch Bridge in Crimea, intended for the key supply of troops. Instead of looking forward to the imminent end of the war, the disinformation scene either remained silent for several days or repeatedly criticized the Ukrainians as to why they were defending and attacking when they were going to lose anyway. Her defense has also been likened to the idiom “cruising for a bruising”. Another fact, according to which most of the weapons were supplied to Ukraine willy-nilly by the Russian army, also remained hidden.

According to the disinformants, the defense of Ukraine and its military successes contributed to the risk of the start of World War III. According to them, Ukraine and the Western states were responsible for this. If Ukraine surrendered, there would be no similar risk. The same authors of the manipulations deliberately omitted the fact that the connection between World War III and the use of nuclear weapons was used only by the leaders of the RF - even in the form of open threats.

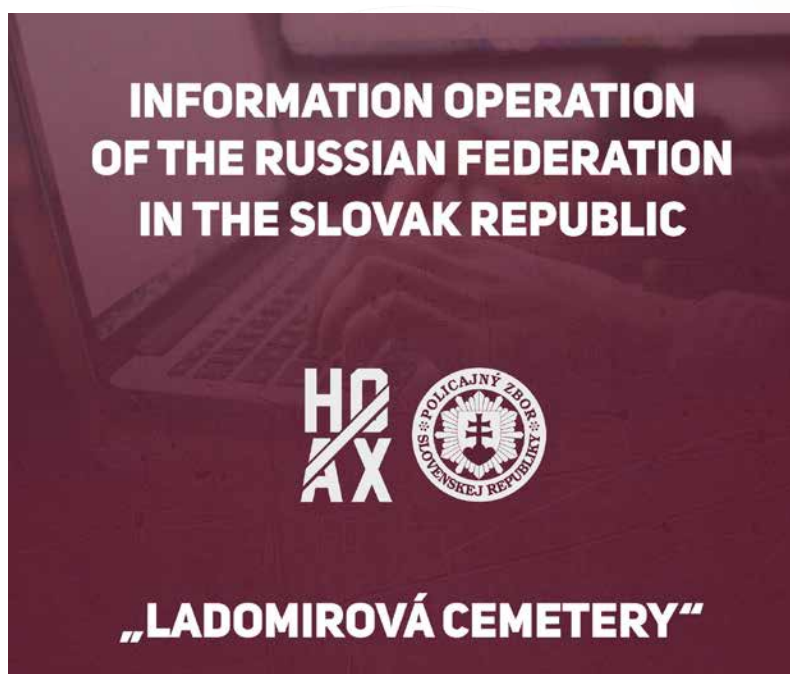
By the end of 2022, narratives related to the necessity of cooperation with the RF, the threat to gas and oil supplies, energy price hikes, and the scarcity of raw materials and the imminent catastrophe for European states began to come to the fore. At times it was disinformation and manipulation that had nothing to do with reality and served only to create support for the RF and its position in the military conflict.

For example, Russian propaganda has released at least two videos predicting an ice age for Europeans, or that with food and energy shortages, households will have to consume their pets, namely hamsters. It was nothing more than a method of spreading fear, creating panic and maintaining nervousness among a section of the population more prone to succumbing to disinformation and propaganda. As it is known, none of these catastrophic scenarios occurred, although Russian domestic media reported them as reality in other reports.

In the context of fear of a cold winter with a shortage of gas for heating, the Police Force pointed out another disinformation paradox. While at the time of the pandemic the followers of the disinformation talked about their superior immunity, because of which they did not need to wear masks or vaccinations, in the context of the Russian propaganda there were sometimes even panicky expressions of fear of possible freezing in the winter season of 2022/23. This particular example also proved that the instrument of fear is the most powerful element of the creators of disinformation and propaganda.

## 2.6 Information operation Ladomirová

The biggest professional success of the Department of Communication and Prevention of the Presidium of the Police Force in the field of strategic communication was the discovery of the Ladomirová information operation. Detailed information on its course has been provided in a separate report, so only a brief overview follows.



Police have elaborated on the subject of the information operation in Ladomirova a separate publication in Slovak and English.

- ▶ in September 2022, the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Slovakia published information about the destroyed cemetery of Russian soldiers from World War I in the village of Ladomirová in the east of Slovakia (it was later revealed that the cemetery was a cemetery of soldiers of many nationalities)
- ▶ it was one of the basic disinformation, recurrent theses, the role of which was to cover up the actual events in Ukraine (the discovery of mass graves in Izium)
- ▶ the above scenario has been identified in Slovakia as sensitive in relation to a certain part of the population (the theme of grave-damaging, “revenge” for current events on the heroes of the past)
- ▶ the Department found the following day that the cemetery was not damaged

- ▶ the then mayor of the municipality removed the concrete parts of the graves due to their poor condition and to provide a simpler landscaping system, the graves themselves were not damaged
- ▶ the mayor asked the ambassador of the RF for personal meetings in order to finance the beautification of the cemetery, but the ambassador refused
- ▶ instead, the Russian ambassador met the former mayor (legally convicted of economic crimes) and his wife, who was running in the local elections at the time, at the cemetery
- ▶ the same disinformation was published on the same day by an exposed person, who has still not deleted it from his publicly accessible social network account
- ▶ because of the published disinformation, the mayor of the municipality was threatened with physical attacks, the Police Force therefore provided him with protection
- ▶ after the publication of the Police's explanatory status, the RF Embassy responded with an offensive status in cooperation with its proxy channels, but deleted its status after a short time
- ▶ as part of the external line of communication, the Police Force reminded the public over the following days what was the point of the whole information operation and published statuses about the current events in Ukraine and the crimes in Iziurm
- ▶ within other statuses, the Police informed which domestic and foreign media presented the disinformation as fact (including a report on Russia's largest television station, which published a photo of a bulldozer from a Spanish advertising portal with a description that this particular machine had destroyed the entire cemetery)

The theme of support for disinformation and pro-Kremlin propaganda by politically exposed persons also appeared in some other cases. In one of them, for example, information was spread that a citizen of Ukraine had harassed a member of the Police Force with his arrogant behavior and had recorded the entire incident on video. The Police Force found out that he was a citizen of Georgia and the whole incident had nothing to do with Ukraine. After a public explanation of this disinformation by the Police Force, the author did not edit or delete the published disinformation about the nationality of the arrogant person. Its role was to undermine support for the refugees - to portray them as an ungrateful, arrogant people who are not averse to acting arrogantly towards authority.

The aforementioned active participation of politically exposed persons in disinformation and manipulation processes constituted a security threat and contributed significantly to falsely influencing a vulnerable segment of the population, which considered the aforementioned sources to be inherently credible from the point of view of their social status.

## 2.7 Examples of specific disinformation

In relation to the war in Ukraine, the Police Force has recorded hundreds of narratives disseminated, 145 of which have been addressed in relation to external communication. These included, for example, the following disinformation (explanations are provided where necessary from the context of the disinformation):

- ▶ an audio recording in Slovak about how young Slovak citizens are mobilized shortly after the start of the war to be sent to Ukraine
- ▶ SMS messages regarding the ongoing mobilization of the citizens of the SR
- ▶ giving the impression on the first day of the war that US troops were fighting in Ukraine
- ▶ dissemination of video sequences from the making of films, documentaries and their presentation as proof that the war is not real and is the work of filmmakers
- ▶ Ukraine detains Indian citizens in Kharkiv
- ▶ the RF army uncovered secret and extraordinary weapons of the Ukrainians, there were secret bio labs in Ukraine (as a justification for why the war had to be started)
- ▶ unveiled plan of an underground bio lab in Mariupol (it was actually a base from a computer game)
- ▶ the Ukrainian army is murdering its own citizens, using phosphorus and dirty bombs
- ▶ Ukrainians have created bioagents
- ▶ in an Austrian TV report, a body bag moved and thus the reporters are exaggerating about the victims in Ukraine (this was a report from a few years ago about a protest by climate activists who packed themselves in body bags and one of them moved; in 2021, the disinformants said this was evidence of pandemic-related fake corpses moving)
- ▶ ungrateful Ukrainian refugees threw the donated food into a garbage bin (it was waste from the neighboring grocery store)
- ▶ presentation of refugees as dangerous criminals
- ▶ refugees will trigger a new wave of coronavirus pandemic (disinformation paradox: disinformation readers didn't believe the Covid-19 threat in the past, now they worked with it)
- ▶ a similar paradox was the initial pointing out that the refugees did not have respirators and therefore posed a health threat to the citizens of the SR
- ▶ the Ukrainians brought various diseases to Slovakia
- ▶ false testimonies of Ukrainian refugees who were evacuated to the RF
- ▶ the mess in the train carriage was caused by the Ukrainians (in fact it was caused by football fans from a few years ago)
- ▶ refugees in Slovakia receive high allowances and benefits at the expense of Slovak citizens
- ▶ President Zelensky wearing a jersey with a Nazi symbol (photo montage)

- ▶ accusing Ukrainians of crimes within the SR that they did not commit
- ▶ at the hospital in Bojnice, nurses were dismissed in order to make vacancies available for refugees
- ▶ fake SMS message misusing the name of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic informing about a note from the RF according to which the integrity of the territory of the SR is not guaranteed
- ▶ the United Nations refused to investigate war crimes in Bucha (the UN help Ukraine to cover up crimes)
- ▶ development of the sinking of the warship Moskva (at first nothing happened, later hit admitted, finally admission of its sinking)
- ▶ a Kiev police official is a neo-Nazi
- ▶ video of the transfer of dead Polish soldiers set in the context of fallen soldiers in Ukraine (it was the return of Polish soldiers killed in Afghanistan a few years ago and was meant to support Russian propaganda about how soldiers of countries supporting Ukraine were dying)
- ▶ on a price tag in the grocery there is the flag of Ukraine and not Slovakia (it was the result of lack of toner)
- ▶ the newly appointed Italian government's opposition to aid to Ukraine
- ▶ President Zelensky is the author of the book "Mein Kampf" in Ukrainian
- ▶ German TV showed Crimea on a map as part of the RF
- ▶ President Zelensky hides and records all speeches in front of a green screen (these were sequences from a separate campaign)
- ▶ publishing photos of President Putin with leaders of other countries from the past, inserting them into the present as proof that the RF is not isolated
- ▶ FBI and CIA offices in Crimea
- ▶ President Zelensky ordered an attack on a nuclear power plant
- ▶ Ukraine does not exist, has not registered its borders, and can therefore be attacked under the UN Charter
- ▶ misuse of the joint intervention of the NAKA and the Hungarian police in the case of illegal arming (disinformants talked about the connection of illegal arms supplies to Ukraine)
- ▶ a cashier from Ukraine with a swastika tattooed on her arm in the Czech Republic (she was a citizen of the Czech Republic, the case happened in the past)
- ▶ a Ukrainian helicopter deliberately burns crops
- ▶ the RF army arrested foreign generals who worked for the Ukrainian army
- ▶ fake assault of a Czech citizen by the Ukrainians

- ▶ Ukrainians created a living swastika (this was a shot from the Russian Federation and showed the number 55)
- ▶ Europe has been cut off from Russian gas because of President Zelensky
- ▶ Covid-19 virus was created in Ukrainian laboratories
- ▶ Ukrainians were arrested during the NAKA raid in Bratislava in the case of drug trafficking
- ▶ Ukrainians burned Russians in Odessa in 2014
- ▶ Polish Prime Minister pays tribute to the memorial of Stepan Bandera (photo montage)
- ▶ sending medicines to Ukraine is to be blamed for the lack of medicines (disinformation paradox: the same persons spread the thesis that arms could not be sent to Ukraine, but only medicines, but later it was already a problem, even though the lack of medicines had no connection with Ukraine)
- ▶ mass protests by Slovaks against the Slovak Republic's aid to Ukraine (these were photos from the 2018 anti-corruption protests)
- ▶ a Ukrainian man is responsible for assaulting a Slovak woman (emphasizing his origin, although it is a fact that he has lived in Slovakia for a long time and has nothing to do with refugees)
- ▶ in Italy, climate activists were restricting traffic, according to the disinformation scene, they were angry Ukrainian refugees
- ▶ the Police Force has chosen yellow and blue stickers for its official vehicles because of Ukraine
- ▶ Ukraine increased transit fees to Slovakia for oil imports
- ▶ fake crimes by Ukrainians against Russians (e.g. fake hanging of victims)
- ▶ end of free movement of refugees in Germany (they will have to sell cars from a certain value)
- ▶ Prime Minister Heger was not in Ukraine, it is a photo montage
- ▶ considering the flag of the city of Košice to be Ukrainian because it is also yellow-blue (hence the police campaign to point out where the yellow-blue color combination is all around us)
- ▶ Ukraine provoked Russia to war, was a threat to it
- ▶ President Zelensky is addicted to drugs (many photo montages, the role of a double)
- ▶ President Zelensky's daughter crying because she hates him (in the video there was a woman from the RF crying because her husband didn't buy her a new phone)
- ▶ the planned dropping of an atomic bomb by the US on Russia
- ▶ Putin's new gold-backed currency
- ▶ the tents erected near the hospitals were not because of a possible increase in the number of infected, but for the wounded, because the war was about to start

## 2.8 Examples of specific disinformation techniques and methods

In order to understand the process of creating pro-Kremlin propaganda, here are some specific examples of when the import of narratives into the environment of the SR was revealed.

**Topic:** A woman from the hospital in Mariupol

**Goal:** create information chaos about the hospital bombing using a specific human story

- 1.** In the first phase, pro-Kremlin propaganda claimed that the hospital was attacked by the Ukrainian army, or that it was a staged attack. They used photographs of the evacuated pregnant woman as evidence. They found out that she was a Ukrainian blogger focused on selling cosmetics. Based on this, they claimed that she was an actress and that her pregnancy was a fabrication.
- 2.** In the second sequence, there was an admission of a Russian attack, but with the addition that the hospital served as a Ukrainian base, so it was a relevant target of attack. The first such information appeared in major Russian media.
- 3.** Two lines started circulating in the online space - the actress from the hospital and the justified bombing. Both theories began to be spread by fabricated accounts from the RF, but also by accounts of real pro-Kremlin propagandists. The stage of flooding the information space has begun, especially on the social network Telegram.
- 4.** The second line involved the translation of these narratives, also into Slovak. These were prominent importers of pro-Kremlin propaganda to Slovakia, who were pursuing their personal interests with this step. The authenticity of the reports was also enhanced by their publication by the Russian embassy in a particular country.
- 5.** Disinformation narratives slowly became established in the local environment. They started to spread among real user accounts. It was affecting the broad masses, it was impossible to stop it completely, only to mitigate its effects.
- 6.** As it later emerged, the woman from the hospital was transferred to Russian territory. In fact, she was pregnant and gave birth to a child. A few weeks later, she appeared in pro-Kremlin propaganda videos describing how there were Ukrainian soldiers in the hospital. The theories that it was just an actress and that the Ukrainians destroyed the hospital themselves have been forgotten.



Topic: Date of burial of the victims in Iziium

Goal: cover up the discovery of the mass graves at Iziium by pointing out “irregularities”

1. The information operation Ladomirová was not the only tool in the process of covering up the news of the discovery of mass graves in Iziium. In the second case, pro-Kremlin propaganda focused on the date of death inscribed on the cross of one of the victims. According to the manipulators, the date on the cross was a date when the RF army was not yet in the place, so it could not have had anything to do with his death.
2. The main narrative re-emerged on the original Russian sources, from where it reached specific accounts on Telegram. From there, the importers of pro-Kremlin propaganda in Slovakia began to translate it.
3. Thanks to the timely intervention of the Police Force, the disinformation was eliminated early on and Slovak importers deleted it from their publication channels. It has been established, based on a number of open sources, that the RF army entered the town six days before the victim's death.



The police tried to explain to the public on a regular basis the process of creating hoaxes and importing them into the conditions of the SR. Text from screenshot: How the Russians are getting hoaxes into Slovakia thanks to our collaborationist.

Topic: A living-dead advisor to President Zelensky

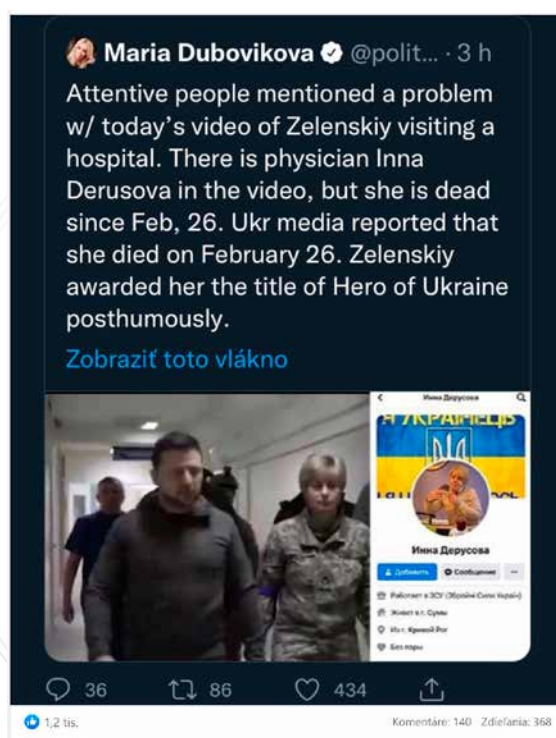
Goal: discrediting the person of President Zelensky

1. The account of a pro-Kremlin journalist, i.e. no anonymous source or government media in general, published information according to which a female soldier, who according to Ukrainian reports should have been dead long ago, appeared at President Zelensky's side.
2. The pro-Kremlin channels followed two lines with this narrative. The first was to give the impression that the “new” video of the Ukrainian president's visit to the wounded in the hospital was filmed a long time ago, before the death of the female soldier, as she was there with him. The Ukrainian government waited several weeks before releasing the video

to show that the President is not hiding. The revelation of pro-Kremlin propaganda was intended to reveal this desired effect. The second line was in charge of retaliation for the information about President Putin, in which in several different videos people with distinctly identical facial features, i.e. as if extras, appeared.

3. The aforementioned narrative began to spread by default on the social network Telegram. It also appeared in translations for the Slovak audience on Facebook.

4. The Police Force pointed out on the basis of public sources that the woman who died in the past visually resembled a female soldier of the Ukrainian army who has accompanied President Zelensky for a long time. This fact was supported by comparing photographs of the two women, but also by the publication of publicly available interviews and articles about the person of the high-ranking female soldier. The pro-Kremlin journalist withdrew her original status without apology.



**Russian propaganda exploited the dead nurse's likeness and President Zelensky's aide to further confuse the public.**

A similar example of information manipulation was recorded by the Police Force a few days before the start of the war. In pro-Kremlin media there was information that the Ukrainian army hit a Ukrainian kindergarten in the vicinity with the occupied area to provoke a military conflict, or it was supposed to be a violent accusation of the army from the RF. The disinformation quickly reached the Slovak information space. It was shared by widely followed publishing channels. The Police Force responded by publishing expert analyses according to which the impact site of the missile evoked its arrival from the side occupied by the RF army. The Police Force stressed the necessity of maintaining objectivity and not judging partial military events immediately. Despite the initial efforts of the importers of this narrative, it did not go massively viral thanks to balanced reporting by the Police Force and was either deleted or blocked from social networks.

## 2.9 The composition of some disinformation and propaganda

### Before the war

- ▶ downplaying the situation, portraying the RF as a peaceful country with no intention to attack
- ▶ pointing to the U.S. Army, to the SR/USA Agreement, alarm messages about the occupation of the SR
- ▶ organizing rallies in support of the RF and its peaceful interests

### Justifying the war

- ▶ RF had to attack because Ukraine is controlled by Nazis
- ▶ RF: the special operation is directed only against the government in Kiev
- ▶ RF: the special operation is directed against Ukraine
- ▶ RF: we have never prevented Ukraine from joining NATO
- ▶ RF: we had to attack Ukraine because NATO is a criminal group
- ▶ Donbas wants to be part of the RF
- ▶ genocide in Donbas by Ukrainians
- ▶ Ukrainians are Western Russians, Ukraine has no right to exist

### Attacks on President Zelensky

- ▶ Zelensky may be Jewish, but he is also a Nazi
- ▶ Zelensky is not a president, but just a comedian and actor
- ▶ Zelensky will cowardly flee
- ▶ Zelensky is cowardly hiding in Kiev (or elsewhere abroad)
- ▶ Zelensky is on drugs and wears the same clothes all the time

### False (non-)achievements of the RF army

- ▶ Ukrainians lie that they are resisting, everywhere they are surrendering
- ▶ the RF advance has not stopped, it is only preparing an attack
- ▶ this wasn't the attack yet, the real one is coming
- ▶ shots of destroyed equipment of the RF army are a photo montage
- ▶ on May 9 there will be a victory parade in Kiev
- ▶ the best soldiers of the RF Army are on their way

- ▶ the RF army is not backing down, the Ukrainians are running into their trap
- ▶ Ukraine doesn't have fighter planes anymore, it's a fake photo
- ▶ the data on RF losses is a hoax
- ▶ this wasn't a real attack yet, just testing the defense
- ▶ RF is fighting with all of NATO, and that's why it is not going according to plan
- ▶ it was not possible to get photos of the secret bio labs because they were destroyed by the Ukrainians

### Justifying the crimes of the RF army

- ▶ the army of the RF does not attack civilians
- ▶ the destroyed building was not a theatre, but a secret laboratory where titmice were trained to unleash biological warfare
- ▶ the RF army would never bomb a school or a hospital
- ▶ the RF army bombed the hospital, but Ukrainian soldiers were there
- ▶ the shots are not from Ukraine
- ▶ RF soldiers didn't torture anyone
- ▶ RF soldiers tortured only soldiers from the Azov Regiment
- ▶ Ukrainians killed their own citizens; they threw that missile there themselves
- ▶ the corpses in the streets are actors, for they move
- ▶ if the Ukrainians had surrendered, it might not have happened
- ▶ RF soldiers did not rape anyone, but if they did, they were female assistants of Ukrainian army soldiers
- ▶ they had to kill them because they would reveal their location
- ▶ the missile did not hit a shopping mall, but a military base
- ▶ the missile hit the shopping mall because there was no one there, but if there was, it was soldiers
- ▶ the RF army didn't kill any children, but if they did, why didn't the children leave before
- ▶ it can all be investigated, but the investigators must be Russians

### In relation to the refugees

- ▶ why are they fleeing to us when there is no fighting in their cities
- ▶ where they will eventually return to as their homes are destroyed

## 2.10 Prevention and education campaigns

In addition to explaining specific disinformation and manipulations, preventive and education campaigns, which had the potential to explain complex topics in a broader context, played an important role in the external communication of the Police Force. Often these were ongoing series that, in addition to an attractive graphic display, contained more extensive, explanatory text and links to other resources.

### **DON'T FORGET**

Pointing out the link between the spreaders of disinformation about the Covid-19 virus and the spreaders of war propaganda. For example, “a year ago they said the coronavirus was just the flu, now they say the US and NATO are to blame for the war”, “a year ago they were burning respirators, now they say the Ukrainian army is using citizens as human shields”, or “a year ago they were shouting that unvaccinated people can't possibly donate blood, now they're shouting that the Russian army isn't attacking civilians”.

### **RUSSIAN MYTHS AND LEGENDS**

Explaining the established components of pro-Kremlin propaganda aimed at the logical “justification” and “inevitability” of military conflict. For example, the Banderites in Ukraine, the fascists in the government, the genocide in eastern Ukraine, the Azov Regiment, etc.

### **KREMLIN NOTES**

Pointing out the strategic thinking of the authors of pro-Kremlin propaganda in relation to the citizens of the SR. For example, “Slovaks, take care of yourselves, you have enough problems and poor people at home, don't worry about our occupation of Ukraine”, “Slovaks, take care of yourselves and don't send weapons to Ukraine”, “Slovaks, be neutral, if you don't get involved now, you are in no danger” or “Divide the Slovaks and destroy their solidarity, spread photos and fabricated stories about arrogant Ukrainians who don't value anything”.

### **YES...**

Stories of the impact of Russian aggression against Ukrainian citizens. The campaign was created as a response to the spreading envy among a part of the Slovak population. For example, “Yes, we allowed to be shot at because we want Slovak allowances”, “Yes, I had my hand cut off and my father killed to get a free sweater”, “Yes, we lost everything at home because I look forward to Slovak allowances, which Slovaks envy me”, or “Yes, I allowed to be shot at to get something for free in Slovakia”.

## **PUTIN'S WAR OF OCCUPATION IS ALSO AGAINST THE SLOVAKS**

Pointing out the consequences of the war in relation to the SR and showing responsibility for these consequences towards the country that started it. For example, there were topics such as rising oil, energy and food prices and the threat to Slovakia's heavy industry.

## **VIDEO SERIES WITH DANIEL MILO**

Introduction of basic terms related to disinformation and war in Ukraine in cooperation with Daniel Milo, Director of Centre on Countering Hybrid Threat, Ministry of the Interior of the SR.

## **THE SHAMELESS LIES OF PUTIN'S TROLLS**

Repeatedly pointing to standard disinformation narratives defending the right of the RF to attack Ukraine. For example, "we attacked because NATO threatened us", "there was a genocide of the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine", etc.

## **DO WE REALLY HAVE ANYTHING TO ENVY RUSSIA?/CHILLING FACTS ABOUT RUSSIA**

Sharing basic and publicly available facts about the RF in contrast to pro-Kremlin propaganda that distorts the real view of the country abroad. For example, high murder and suicide rates, lower life expectancy, lower wages and pensions, etc. These were two separate campaigns published at different times.

## **OPERATION ANTHROPOID**

Commemoration of the anniversary of Operation Anthropoid, whose main actors were the citizens of Czechoslovakia - Ján Kubiš and Jozef Gabčík. In the context of the present, contemporary events and their development were compared with current events in Ukraine and the mindset of disinformants. The content of the campaign included ideas pointing to pro-Kremlin propaganda. Some of the disinformants under its influence claimed that defending Ukraine would not bring peace, thus indirectly calling for its imminent defeat. They talked about helping Ukraine as adding fuel to the fire. The campaign included claims such as "Heydrich: I don't understand why they attacked me. Didn't they want peace?", "Hitler: It's a pity I'm not alive today, because some Slovaks would like nobody to attack me" etc.

## **VICTIMS OF PUTIN'S WAR**

Publishing the stories of specific civilian victims killed or injured by the Russian war in Ukraine.

## **THE POT CALLING THE CATTLE BLACK**

Pointing out the paradox of the highest representatives of the Kremlin regime - while they were behind the biggest propaganda in the 21st century against Western countries, in many cases their descendants studied and lived in Western European countries. In this context, another campaign under the working title “Children of Russian oligarchs in the rotten West” continued.

## **1968**

An intensive campaign in cooperation with the Nation’s Memory Institute reminded the public of the events of 1968 and in some parts set it in the present. The campaign was also launched in the wake of attempts to manipulate the past of the common state with the Czech Republic, when an attempt was made to push the disinformation narrative that the occupation by Warsaw Pact troops had brought positive consequences for the country. In the context of this campaign, the Police proactively reported on a spreading narrative in Russian sources that sought to shift responsibility for the occupation to Ukraine, as the then leader of the USSR was born on what is now Ukrainian territory. This narrative ultimately failed in Slovak conditions, as the disinformation scene fragmented into two camps - one that welcomed the occupation and one that criticized it. The campaign also included a comparison between the occupation by the USSR and the “occupation” by the U.S. Army, which, according to the disinformation scene, is supposed to be taking place now.

## **KHL AND POLITICS**

Pointing out the connection between the KHL and politics, the abuse of sport by the RF, but also the position on the participation of Slovak hockey players in this league.

## **SNP**

Commemoration of the anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising in the context of current events. Pointing to the heroism of the insurgents who did not hesitate to defend their country. Reporting on the supply of weapons from abroad to the insurgents. Linking the past and the present through disinformation manipulations along the lines of “Why did the insurgents prolong the war and add fuel to the fire of a stronger opponent?” or “If Facebook were around in 1944, some Slovaks would have accused the SNP generals of adding fuel to the fire”.

## **8 MAY**

Commemorating the victory over fascism and communicating the message that the soldiers of the USSR at the time were in no way responsible for the actions of the leaders of the RF and its army.

## **PUTIN'S GAME AGAINST EUROPE**

A reminder of the economic war in Ukraine towards other countries in Europe, but also to set the record straight on what the conflict in Ukraine can and cannot be blamed for.

## **HOW THE EUROPEAN UNION AND RUSSIA ARE HELPING US**

Comparing the benefits of partnerships with the EU and the RF. The campaign was created in response to the continuous disinformation operations against the EU, which aim to maintain tensions among the population and eventually to withdraw countries from the international communities.

## **CHAMPIONSHIP OF SLOVAK HOAXERS**

Summarizing Slovak disinformation concerning the refugees staying in the territory of the SR. For example, "Ukrainians will steal our jobs", "luxury Ukrainian cars as proof that they do not deserve our help", "high benefits for Ukrainians", etc.

## **INTERCEPTED**

Highlighting the process of creating pro-Kremlin disinformation based on the knowledge gained in the field, including summarizing traditional disinformation related to the war in Ukraine.

## **USA AND USSR**

Pointing out US aid to the USSR during World War II. The point was made that at that time the current disinformation scene would probably not have been bothered by the supply of weapons by the US Army. A reference to the current criticism of aid to Ukraine by Western states.

## **HOAX OF THE YEAR**

The second annual poll in which the public voted on social media to choose the hoax of 2022. By recapping the biggest hoaxes, the police acted educationally.



### 3 Other disinformation and education and prevention campaigns

The topic of disinformation related to the Covid-19 viral disease began to fade from the information space in early 2022. After the beginning of the war in Ukraine, it disappeared almost completely, with sporadic manifestations mainly in individual cases. Together with the arrival of a new, suitable topic for the creation of disinformation, the decline in its incidence was also caused by the gradual relaxation of special measures at home and abroad.

An interesting finding was the attempts to link a new theme (war) to the Covid-19 virus. One of the first statuses after the start of the war talked about the threat that the refugees were supposed to pose in connection with the emergence of a new pandemic. This narrative did not take hold in the online space for long, as one of the pillars of disinformation was looking at Covid-19 as something that was not dangerous.

In calendar year 2022, the Police Force explained to the public 41 specific hoaxes related to Covid-19. These were, for example, the most commonly disseminated narratives:

- ▶ the German government has confirmed that the more vaccinated, the more infected
- ▶ healthcare workers were bribed to report high numbers of infected
- ▶ the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic annulled all special measures
- ▶ misuse of a photograph of a dead Syrian child killed in a bombing as proof that vaccinations kill
- ▶ doctors killed their patients by vaccination
- ▶ vaccination changes DNA
- ▶ increase in the incidence of newborns with developmental defects in Bojnice Hospital
- ▶ only the vaccinated are admitted to hospitals
- ▶ misuse of past demonstrations from abroad and placing them in the context of the present as evidence of the fight against vaccination and special regulations
- ▶ planned vaccinations for children in schools

The death of Vladimír Krčméry, the first person to be vaccinated in the SR at the end of 2020, has become a special topic in connection with Covid-19. According to initial media reports, he was supposed to have died of bilateral pneumonia, but the family later said it was a heart attack. Shortly after the media coverage of this tragic news, the Police Force proactively warned the public of planned attempts to exploit the death of the infectious disease specialist as evidence of the dangers of the Covid-19 vaccination. Similar activities have been recorded in the past in several cases of deaths of well-known personalities, such as actor Milan Lasica, anchorman Július Viršík and singer Miroslav Žbirka.

In the end, the proactive approach did not miss the mark, as the hoaxes did spread, but to a much lesser extent than they might have done in the period before the outbreak of the

war in Ukraine. There was also a disinformation paradox on this topic: when Vladimír Krčméry was the first person in the SR to be vaccinated, the disinformation scene described the syringe as a placebo, or as something that did not inject anything into the infectious disease specialist's body. On the contrary, after his death, the same scene already admitted the fact of the act of vaccination in order to argue that his death was due to vaccination.

The Police Force actively engaged in other communication activities of other state institutions in relation to Covid-19, or re-sharing their content, helping to increase reach among social media audiences.

The other 73 cases were explanatory statuses on other topics. For example:

- ▶ abuse of past demonstrations from abroad, their insertion into the present, their abuse to support part of the views of the disinformation community
- ▶ construction of an American base at Sliač
- ▶ misuse of troop movements of other states as evidence of occupation of the SR
- ▶ occupation of the Záhorie region by American soldiers
- ▶ imminent nuclear attack at Sliač due to the presence of US troops/base
- ▶ a new epidemic "Marburg" is under preparation
- ▶ forced vaccination of schoolchildren against monkeypox
- ▶ forced vaccination in schools in general
- ▶ theft of a missile guidance system from the military airfield at Sliač
- ▶ catastrophic scenarios to induce fear (food shortages, extreme winters, no petrol, etc.)
- ▶ planned shutdown of ATMs, summoning people for mass cash withdrawals
- ▶ manipulation of municipal elections
- ▶ chemtrails - spraying people with powder (in one case, ironically, it was an RF army plane, so this particular example didn't catch on)
- ▶ the driver who caused the accident on Zochova Street was driving and refueling again
- ▶ Ursula von den Leyen is the granddaughter of a Nazi
- ▶ Queen Elizabeth II died earlier
- ▶ Queen Elizabeth II was a lizard
- ▶ an edited photograph of a young Queen Elizabeth II giving a Nazi salute
- ▶ Bill Gates' plans, signing a secret contract, building secret laboratories in Slovakia
- ▶ deliberate setting of wildfires as an argument for global warming
- ▶ fake child abductions
- ▶ mess in the streets after a protest by climate activists in the Netherlands
- ▶ theories about the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in the USA

- ▶ alternative cancer treatments
- ▶ health complications of American singer Justin Bieber as a result of vaccination
- ▶ (negative) change in the social system for members of the Police Force
- ▶ Greece has left the European Union
- ▶ chips in ID cards are used to track people
- ▶ poor gas quality according to the color of the combustion on the stove

At the end of the calendar year 2022, the disinformation campaign related to the increase in illegal migration and the establishment of a temporary tent city in Kúty peaked and subsided at the same time. Police Force members brought audiovisual materials from the tent city focused on the stories of specific migrants, proactively informed about the whole process of their stay on the territory of the SR and stressed to the public that according to the information received, they do not pose any security threat. Nevertheless, the Kúty camp has become a tool for the organization of a protest on its site by politically exposed persons and extremists. There were no major conflicts. The camp was eventually closed due to the low number of cases of illegal migration. In addition to external communication activities, the Police Force carried out standard activities in relation to emergency controls at the border crossing points with Hungary and strengthened surveillance capacities also at the Hungarian-Serbian border.

Within the category of other hoaxes, the Police Force presented the following preventive-educative campaigns:

### **DID YOU KNOW THAT.../WHEN YOU RUN OUT OF ARGUMENTS**

Two separate campaigns aimed at presenting the work of the Police Force against disinformation. Presenting the history of this activity dating back to 2017, highlighting the status of officialdom, justifying the legality of the fight against disinformation, etc.

### **HISTORICAL HOAXES**

A look at disinformation from history as evidence of its presence in human history, i.e. it is not a modern 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon.

### **MESSAGE OF 17 NOVEMBER/CONSTITUTION DAY**

Commemoration of two important festive days in the history of the SR with their setting in the present, when they are the target of abuse by the creators of disinformation.

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL WINDOW**

Video series with Vladimíra Kurincová Čavojová from Slovak Academy of Sciences regarding the explanation of the psychological background of the impact and effectiveness of disinformation.

## **HAVE YOU HEARD...**

Presentation of fictional dialogues between disinformants on the basis of acquired knowledge in the internet space. Pointing out the importance of verifying the original source of information and avoiding belief in anything.

## **AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN SLOVAKIA**

Sharing photographs of US soldiers serving in international engagements in Slovakia in order to show their real activities and to counter disinformation about the occupation of Slovakia by the US Army.

## **EUROPEAN UNION AND NATO**

Campaigns aimed at supporting the above-mentioned organizations and explaining to the public what they mean for the SR and what benefits they bring. Other campaigns explained the self-sufficiency of the EU and its independence from the RF.

## **AND YOU, WHERE WERE YOU...**

Pointing out the historical conflicts of the past with the question of where their contemporary readers were then. It was a warning about the manipulative tactics of disinformants, who often distract attention from the main topic by recalling events from the past (e.g. “What right do you have to criticize the war in Ukraine. Did you criticize the Iraq war in the same way, where the Americans were?”).

## **TODAY A HOAX, TOMORROW THE TRUTH**

Using the disinformation formulation that all hoaxes will one day become true. The Police Force turned the formulation around for its own, more rational use. For example, if a driver thinks that nothing will happen to them after consuming alcohol, this may be a hoax because they will actually cause an accident.

## 4 Terrorist attack on Zámocká Street in Bratislava

The Department of Communication and Prevention of the Presidium of the Police Force was actively involved in obtaining information regarding the actor of the terrorist attack and double murder on Zámocká Street in Bratislava. It communicated the relevant information in real time to the participating Police Force units.

In the area of external communication, the Department proactively reported on developments from the crime scene, with an emphasis on immediately informing the public about the tracking of the shooter in order to calm the situation in the capital.

Shortly after the act, the shooter's father appeared on a disinformation radio show, where he made several cautious attempts to manipulate the information space, or rather to obfuscate it, to create chaos and uncertainty. The purpose of this conduct was primarily an emotional escape by the parent from responsibility for the actions of his son and his upbringing. Secondly, the disinformation community pursued its own self-interest, namely denying the terrorist act itself and diminishing the dignity of the victims as members of the LGBTQI+ community.

Another group of disinformation talked about some kind of conspiracy or planning of murder by the state authorities of the SR. In some cases, their aim was to create a platform for promoting the rights of people from the LGBTQI+ community. These were standard disinformation tools that are applied to most tragic, unexpected events. They are often followed by shock, fear and dismay among the public, which is why disinformation tools are used against them as a way of escaping from a complex, difficult reality.

For several months after the tragic attack, the shooter's father was largely the only major source of manipulation. Through his social media postings, he tried to feed the public with alternative views defending his own son despite strong evidence. On the one hand, defending one's own offspring is natural; on the other hand, in this context, it must be taken in light of the father's previous public appearances - regularly sharing disinformation and manipulations, actively participating in protests against the LGBTQI+ community, posting a photo of a firearm with an implied threat, and so on.

In addition to disinformation about this act, threats against members of the minority community dominated the Slovak information space to a very high degree. They were accompanied by approvals of the criminal offense. Both categories of content were monitored by the Department and forwarded to other Police Force units for further use.

As part of its external line of communication, the Department repeatedly declared zero tolerance for hate speech throughout 2022, which it highlighted by publishing a cover photo emphasizing the protection of all citizens of the SR, which was a dominant element of its social media for several months. The Police Force also covered its logo on the social network with a colorful ribbon for a few days as a symbol of compassion for the community, which has long been the target of threats and attacks. This move by the Police Force became the target of further threats, which were referred to the responsible departments.

## 5 Methods of explaining disinformation and manipulations

The Police Force continued with its chosen strategy regarding the explanation of disinformation as in 2017-2021. An important role continued to be played by active citizens who sent tips to the Police about the disinformation being spread via private messages on the social networks Facebook and Instagram. The constant contact with the public in the form of modern communication showed the trust in the Police as an institution on the part of the citizens who turned to it.

Social networks as a source of potential disinformation clearly dominated to the detriment of others. The Department of Communication and Prevention of the Presidium of the Police Force also searched for disinformation in a proactive way by monitoring social networks and other sources.

After receiving or finding potential disinformation, the process of sorting and effective focusing of the time pool on that disinformation that was disseminated in a mass way, had the potential to spread more widely or posed a threat to the security of the citizens of the SR with potential impacts on their life, health and property followed.

In the case of disinformation directly related to the activities and units of the Police Force, expert opinions were obtained from the units concerned, which were published in an explanatory status. If the Police explained disinformation regarding topics that are methodologically linked to other institutions, they approached their communication departments, other contact persons or experts from the private sector. Thanks to cooperation across central government, especially with the security services, the findings were quickly verified and any explanatory statuses were made public.

In explaining the disinformation, the Police Force focused on publicly available accounts, took snapshots of specific statuses, and then shared them, along with an explanatory analysis and a www link to a publicly available source, on its official social media accounts. In these cases, the content was publicly available, including user account names.

The Department maintained the above tactics in view of the strategic successes achieved in 2017-2021, when public warnings of publicly available and disseminated misleading content with impact on the security of citizens of the SR caused that such content was often ultimately deleted by its primary disseminators, thus eliminating the spread of disinformation or manipulation. A similar effect was achieved on a regular basis; in other cases, the Department reported problematic content to social network operators in an official manner.

If the Department evaluated the disseminated content as illegal, it was sent to the Cybercrime Department of the National Centre for Special Types of Crime of the Presidium of the Police Force, the National Crime Agency or to specific regional directorates of the Police Force for further use. Other security forces and state bodies participating in the strategic communication of the SR were also informed in real time about serious findings.

On 26 February 2022, the Police Force published a press release of the National Crime Agency in connection with criminal liability, in which it informed about the offense of dangerous threats and Article 417 of the Criminal Code regarding incitement to war. In this case, an open threat was recorded in a public way by a highly exposed political person to the Department.

In its activities, the Department followed modern communication trends in order to adapt institutionalized communication to society's expectations, which resulted in a continuous increase in the reach and readership of published products - even without the use of funds to sponsor statuses.

In addition to standard explanatory analyses of specific disinformation, the Department produced several series of educational and preventive campaigns with an emphasis on proactiveness in strategic communication and exposing the effects of foreign propaganda. External communication included warnings about specific disinformation accounts, so-called trolls and hate speech.

The use of so-called meme images became part of the communication strategy of the Police Force, through which irony, humor and real events were combined on the basis of simple explanations of specific disinformation tools. Historian and political scientist Timothy Snyder explained for the Czech Radio the significance of the use of humor specifically in relation to the military conflict as follows:

“In a way, all Russian propaganda depends on the assumption that Russia is a superpower. It all depends on taking them seriously. And if we openly laugh at them, we also destabilize them. Because they know deep down that what they do cannot be taken seriously. They know that their speeches at the UN cannot be taken seriously. Their late-night TV shows can't be taken seriously. And when you laugh about it, you remind them what they know - that it's all just a game.”

Despite its considerable popularity among followers of the Police Force's social networks, the use of memes, humor and irony was the target of criticism and even crude attacks from the disinformation scene - they were aware of the success and potential of such a form of communication, which was unique from the point of view of a state body. In one case, one of the most prominent pro-Kremlin propagandists in his Telegram social network group with more than one million followers took umbrage at a meme image posted, while the same tone was used in a status picture broadcast on RT news television.

## 6 Online scams

In the area of external communication activities, the Department of Communication and Prevention of the Presidium of the Police Force continued its preventive and educational activities also against online scams. It published warnings about new trends and informative campaigns on a dedicated page “Hoaxes and Scams - Police of the Slovak Republic”. In 2023, the Department reported online scams in 82 separate statuses in this way.

Based on the number of reports from the public, the number of online scams was increasing significantly. On certain days, the proportion of private messages from citizens regarding online scams far outweighed the messages regarding tips on disinformation being spread.

The challenge for the Police Force was to create an interactive campaign in which the general public would be actively involved and which it would disseminate among itself. The solution came in the form of the “Catch your scammer” campaign, the point of which was to forward a specific, mocking image created by the Police. Citizens welcomed such a campaign and sent back to the Police images of communications with scammers trying to scam them in the virtual world. The scammers received a picture with a taunting text in place of credit card details. That campaign generated the most massive public response to date and continued in 2023. Thanks to its humorous, unconventional element, it became widely known among the citizens of the SR and was ultimately successful in its main message - “don’t get ripped off”.

In the context of online scams, the Police Force relied on proactive public involvement in similar campaigns, as in many cases the scammers are located in countries with which cooperation in investigating this type of activity is complicated. In the case of completed online scams, the Department directed citizens to specific departments for filing criminal complaints.

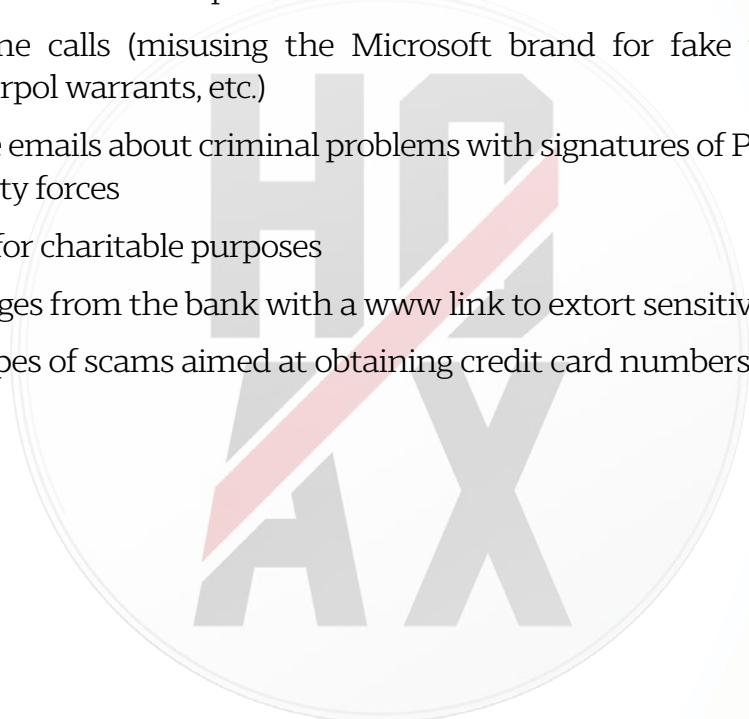
The public also contacted the Police Force on a daily basis with questions about specific pages on social networks or on the Internet in general, or about specific offers of bazaar portals. Where possible, the Police promptly warned citizens of possible online scams. This amounted to several thousand cases per year, which contributed significantly to reducing the potential damage and the number of victims of the crime of fraud.

### Examples of online scams in 2022:

- ▶ taking control of a friend’s Facebook account and sending out a www link to their real friends (possibly infecting the computer with a virus, possibly linking to a form to enter the Facebook password and stealing it)
- ▶ e-mails/SMS messages regarding the payment of a seemingly low fee for a parcel delivered by Slovak Post or private suppliers (in reality, a high amount would be paid for a non-existent parcel)
- ▶ responding to real advertisements posted, sending a fictitious courier to pick up goods as an excuse to enter a card number in the pre-payment (WhatsApp platform)



- ▶ blackmail e-mails (e.g. We've seen you watching pornographic material, pay us)
- ▶ e-mails about large winnings or inheritances
- ▶ approaching single women, especially middle-aged and older women, by scammers posing as US soldiers/medics to create a fake long-distance relationship and extort money
- ▶ men being approached by attractive female profiles, being lured onto a webcam, having their private parts exposed, blackmailing them about sending such pictures to their Facebook friends
- ▶ fraudulent sites that misuse the names of private companies, organize fraudulent contests, you only need to comment on posts
- ▶ abuse of famous personalities' names for fraudulent competitions as a guarantee of their realness
- ▶ abuse of sites that look like news sites, presenting glorifying articles about fraudulent competitions, abuse of famous personalities in this combination
- ▶ fraudulent phone calls (misusing the Microsoft brand for fake technical support, threatening Interpol warrants, etc.)
- ▶ sending out fake emails about criminal problems with signatures of Police Force officials and other security forces
- ▶ fake collections for charitable purposes
- ▶ fake SMS messages from the bank with a www link to extort sensitive data
- ▶ various other types of scams aimed at obtaining credit card numbers



The campaign against online fraudsters has become one of the most successful in recent years.

## 7 Other activities

The Department of Communication and Prevention of the Presidium of the Police Force reflected the current situation in the field of combating disinformation in the entire scope of its activities. During the calendar year 2022, it was strengthened in terms of staffing and technical capacity, with representatives participating in regular working groups, consultations and expert conferences, and being repeatedly appreciated for their work. Their work, even in 2022, has been the target of threats and efforts to suppress it.

### Threats

The Police Force recorded the first threats or attempts to curtail its counter-disinformation activities in 2021 in the context of the most massive dissemination of false news regarding the Covid-19 viral disease. The intensity of the threats increased in the calendar year 2022 after the start of the war in Ukraine, and there was also a shift in their form.

While during the “Covid period” the Police Force registered individual threats from standard accounts or long-time disinformation disseminators, last year they were joined by politically exposed persons along with former high-ranking Police Force officials, some of whom, paradoxically, were behind the decision to launch the Police’s fight against disinformation in the past. These persons appeared in disinformation media, where they presented their opinions and impressions as fact without verifying the information. In one case, a direct threat was recorded against a specific person who, according to a highly politically exposed person, should face a 20-year prison sentence for extortion in connection with the performance of his job.

The threats were most often online - they appeared in the form of statuses, comments, or on various social networks, online television or radio broadcasts. A minimal number of threats were delivered in the form of messages sent directly to the Police Force’s social networks.

Specific persons who have never worked for the Police Force have repeatedly been the subject of threats. Despite repeated warnings to this effect by the Police, as well as by the persons concerned, this disinformation continued to persist in the online space, which only confirmed the lack of information in the disinformation scene in this area. Its representatives have long been active in identifying the identities of the Police Force’s officers engaged in the fight against disinformation in order to create public pressure and room for maneuver for threats against their persons. The same efforts have long been evident on the part of various interest groups that have long been active in the disinformation environment.

In at least one case, similar efforts to create pressure were transferred from the virtual to the real world, when one of the former employees of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic attempted to locate his former colleague directly at the address of his residence, providing the information obtained, together with photographs, to an internationally wanted person for further use.

Other activities and attempts, which it is not appropriate to comment on from a tactical point of view, were also part of activities with a similar aim - to influence or stop the activities of the Police Force against disinformation.

Traditional disinformation tools in relation to the Police Force and its fight against disinformation have become claims that the Police do not have an official Facebook page or are distancing themselves from it, that the post of administrator is held by a single person or a non-profit organization, and so on. For these reasons, as part of preventive activities, the Police communicated two separate campaigns aimed at introducing their activities more closely on social networks.

## **Awards**

The Department has been regularly recognized for its work by domestic and international partners. In the case of prizes awarded in competitions or surveys, the Department had two significant successes. In the first case, it was awarded “Unique PR Achievement” in the PROKOP 2021 survey, which is the most prestigious event for PR, marketing and advertising in Slovakia. The jury of experts decided to award a similar prize for the first time. Considering the composition of the awarded projects from among the largest companies in the field of communication, it was an extraordinary success for a state authority. The second one was the top three position in the regular poll “Official Act of the Year 2021”.

## **Instagram**

As part of the fight against disinformation and propaganda, in 2022 the Department also started to operate on the social network Instagram under the name “Hoaxes and Scams - Police of the Slovak Republic”. The content produced for Facebook was not copied word-for-word on Instagram, but was tailored to its nature and the expectations of its users. The launch of the Instagram activity came with the aim of reaching out to the younger generation that is moving to it from Facebook. By the end of 2022, the number of fans reached almost 9,000.

## **Professional meetings and more**

Representatives of the Department participated in dozens of working groups and consultations with domestic and foreign counterparts in 2022. In particular, meetings within other Slovak state institutions on a regular weekly basis have become a welcome source of mutual coordination and inspiration in the field of countering disinformation. In the case of foreign partners, this involved not only presentations of the activities of the Department, but also the acquisition of useful knowledge from the observations of foreign components for further use.

Foreign trips by representatives of the Department played a significant role in 2022. Within the international exercise in Riga, Latvia, the Slovak team composed of representatives of the Department, the Centre on Countering Hybrid Threat and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic took the first place. This was an exercise focused on the ability to respond to information operations in real time. It was organized by the Helsinki-based European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE).

The Department was represented in the largest Slovak delegation to date at the Second Dialogue Session in Washington, D.C., USA. During the trip abroad, part of the delegation had meetings with representatives of major American social network operators, as well as local institutions and other projects. As part of a working meeting at the State Department, a case study of the Ladomirová information operation was presented to local forces.

The Department also participated in the CEDMO conference in Prague, aimed at finding common European solutions to information chaos. The activities of the Police Force were highly appreciated by the international experts present during the conference. The working visit also included meetings with government counterparts.

Representatives of the Department and the Centre on Countering Hybrid Threat were selected by the European Commission/TAIEX as trainers for the project “Expert Mission on European practices on countering disinformation while promoting human rights” in Sierra Leone, Africa. On the spot, they presented the activities of the Slovak authorities against disinformation to the participants and shared with them examples of good practice. As part of the programme, representatives of the Slovak Republic also had working meetings with the Delegation of the European Union in Freetown.

Other activities of the Department included participation in several professional conferences and training courses, mainly in the framework of cooperation with the UK and US authorities.

The Department has intensified its contact with the Media Services Board as the main point of contact for Meta, the company that operates the social networking site Facebook. The Department contacted Meta representatives directly in the event of an emergency. A concerted effort was made by state authorities to eliminate dangerous content or content that violates the terms of use of social networks. In addition to Facebook, the Department also began targeting individual Google products, as well as the YouTube video platform, for which it obtained access to specialized reporting forms from the operators in question.

## 8 Conclusion

In 2022, the Police Force devoted its best efforts to combat disinformation and manipulation, especially coming from the RF. The activities of the Police Force in this area had to be perceived on two levels.

The first one involved intensive external communication aimed at the general public with an emphasis on preventive and educational activities. It included building and fulfilling the objectives of strategic communication, proactive and transparent information sharing, monitoring of the information space, cooperation with security forces and other activities aimed at protecting the security of the citizens of the SR. Not only the statistical indicators achieved and repeated successes at home and abroad, but also the concrete activities and historical commitment in the field of communication have led to the surpassing of the objectives set.

On the second level, the Police Force paid attention to the disinformation and manipulations disseminated on the criminal level by the units operating with the status of law enforcement authorities. In these cases, the Police were strictly governed by the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure.

The disinformation situation in the SR has been critical since 2020 and will continue to worsen. The primary importers of disinformation, influencers and politically exposed persons will continue to create information chaos and perpetuate a permanent sense of insecurity, discontent and aggression. Motivation to continue their actions will limit the possibilities of their criminal liability by law enforcement authorities. Unregulated social networks and their significantly understaffed capacity for the Central European region will contribute to their success. Legislation adopted at the level of the European Union (e.g. the DSA) could improve the situation regarding the enforceability of the actions of not only social network operators.

Prominent disinformants will continue to take advantage of the fact that the SR is one of the countries in the EU where the largest number of people tend to believe any kind of disinformation and where the largest number of people are reluctant to help those who have left Ukraine.

Also in the calendar year 2023, the topic of the war in Ukraine will dominate the disinformation scene. Its decline will depend only on Ukraine's potential successes. Even if there is an overall victory, Slovak disinformants will be ready for the delivery of a new supporting theme, as the Covid-19 period and the war in Ukraine have shown them that the mass dissemination of disinformation about a supporting area can bring them the fulfillment of personal, political or economic goals at a relatively low human and financial cost.

In a prediction closer to reality, the conflict will continue without one side or the other surrendering. In the event of continued military setbacks by the RF, the Slovak audience will continue to be massively influenced by pro-Kremlin propaganda, which will use either its direct collaborators or enthusiasts of manipulation to import its narratives in order to fulfill its own goals and ambitions.

Disinformation will contribute significantly to the radicalization of a section of society. There is a real threat that persons publishing regular threats hiding behind the anonymity of social networks will be motivated to take their actions out of the virtual reality and into the real world. The first successful terrorist attack in the history of the SR will be a further motivation for them. The rise of extremism, terrorism and radicalization is an expected trend in the countries of our foreign partners, and therefore there is no reason not to assume that sooner or later the same tendencies will come to Slovakia.

In the long term, it will be interesting to follow the development of disinformation and information operations coming from Hungary or spreading among the Hungarian minority in the SR. One of the side topics currently being experimented is the possible secession of southern Slovakia and its annexation to Hungary.

If early parliamentary elections are held in the calendar year 2023, an absolute increase in information manipulation and disinformation can be expected as the date approaches. Information operations after the announcement of the election results may become a novelty for the SR. In the event of discontent from a certain part of the political spectrum, the results of the elections could be called into question, which could escalate into organized riots and attacks on state institutions along the lines of the USA in January 2021.

The greatest threat to the security of Slovak citizens and democracy in 2023 will be posed by influential, high-profile interest groups and individuals, including politically exposed persons. This group of authorities will use the respect they have gained from a certain section of the public to spread manipulations, create chaos and promote their own interests.

On the basis of publicly available statements of some politically exposed persons, it is possible to believe that in the event of an increase in their influence within the state bodies of the SR, the activities of the security bodies in the field of combating disinformation will disappear, or will be suppressed to the maximum extent possible.

## We thank for cooperation



GOVERNMENT OFFICE  
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC



MINISTRY  
OF INTERIOR  
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC



MINISTRY  
OF DEFENCE  
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC



MINISTRY  
OF FOREIGN  
AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS  
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC



CENTER FOR COUNTERING  
DISINFORMATION



GLOBSEC  
IDEAS SHAPING THE WORLD

Slovenská  
akadémia  
vied



...and, last but not least, to the participating Police Force units, independent experts, embassies, foreign partners and third sector for providing input for analyses related to disinformation and scams.

