

PUBLIC DISCOURSE IN THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOUR STATES OF UKRAINE CONCERNING THE RUSSIAN INVASION

ПУБЛІЧНИЙ ДИСКУРС В ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИХ КРАЇНАХ-СУСІДАХ ЩОДО РОСІЙСЬКОГО ВТОРГАННЯ В УКРАЇНУ

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Abstract. *The war significantly affected Ukraine's, European and the world's political, security, economic, and social resilience and caused regular increases in information aimed at creating perceptions of a pseudo-escalation of the situation, strengthening panic ideas and national discontent. The public discourses in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Poland, and Hungary are characterized by different views on the Russian invasion of Ukraine: discreet, mostly neutral discussions take place in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania; discussions involving all communication channels are observed in Poland; mainly destructive criticism promoted by users on social media is noted in Hungary. The paper examines the thematic lines of discussions and their sentiments with an emphasis on the negative attitudes; the context of formed narratives; the interests of authors who write on the researched subject; the platforms and countries where discussions take place and their focus. In general, two trends could be distinguished in the creation of negative narratives about the war against Ukraine: the first is aimed at creating ideas of public despair towards the possibilities of social protection, and the second trend focuses on drawing parallels between historical and actual events with the addition of false historical facts.*

Keywords: war, invasion, refugees, sanctions, EU, Ukraine, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania.

Анотація. *Війна суттєво вплинула на політичну, безпекову, економічну та соціальну стійкість України, Європи та світу і призвела до зростання інформації, спрямованої на створення уявлень про псевдоескалацію ситуації, посилення панічних ідей та національного невдоволення. Публічний дискурс Чехії, Словаччини, Румунії, Польщі та Угорщини характеризується різними поглядами на російське вторгнення в Україну: стримані, переважно нейтральні, дискусії відбуваються в Чехії, Словаччині та Румунії; активні обговорення з використанням всіх доступних каналів комунікації спостерігаються у Польщі; переважно деструктивна критика, яку поширюють користувачі в соціальних мережах, відзначається в Угорщині. У статті досліджено тематичні лінії дискусій та їх контекст з акцентом на формуванні негативних наративів; інтереси авторів, які пишуть на досліджувану тему; платформи та країни, де відбуваються дискусії, та їх фокус. Загалом можна виділити дві тенденції формування негативних наративів про війну проти України: перша спрямована на поширення ідей суспільного відчаю щодо можливостей отримання соціального захисту, а друга спрямована на проведення паралелей між історичними та реальними подіями, до яких додаються неправдиві історичні факти.*

Ключові слова: війна, вторгнення, біженці, санкції, ЄС, Україна, Польща, Чехія, Словаччина, Угорщина, Румунія.

Introduction. To examine the perception of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania have been chosen because these states' political,

economic, security and social stability depends on the predictability of military actions in Ukraine. The challenges of continuous military escalation, sanctions against Russia, energy dependence and migration flows are changing the balance of power in Europe and the world, as well as affecting the internal political and security situations of the European neighbour states of Ukraine.

In this context, the study of circulating information in the media space, the detection of conflict conversations and the identification of the media platforms or sources for spreading abusive speech are the main factors in overcoming political and security destabilization at the European and global levels. Under war circumstances, it's meaningful to have a resistant society that has the ability to think clearly and rationally, understand the logical connection between ideas, and balance out within political and economic instability.

Overview of Previous Research Findings. After the beginning of the war against Ukraine, there was a critical increase in disinformation in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania, which cannot be compared with the disinformation about the Covid-19 pandemic. The ideas of enmity, panicked rumours, people's expert opinions, and false religious attitudes have flooded the European and global media space, distorting any positive developments. The online space has become a battlefield that is difficult to enforce legal regulation.

Under such circumstances, government or public initiatives to combat disinformation should have broad support. Considering this, several important initiatives have been identified within the EU and Ukraine to overcome the outlined issues. In March 2022, GLOBSEC, a global think-tank from Slovakia, presented a report on how the population in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia felt about the Russian invasion of Ukraine. According to the main findings of the study, the war has strengthened solidarity and brought a sense of relief that the countries are no longer between different spheres of influence; the states have demonstrated robust and rising support for the West and the Western governance model; the public has identified Russia as an aggressor and a threat to regional and global security. Among problem areas, the experts highlighted that the widespread pro-Kremlin propaganda remains unchallenged for years; the distorted views of some public groups towards events in Ukraine combined with potential economic challenges could leave them as targets for populist and autocratic leaders; some political elites may exploit public fear and frustration for their political benefit [*GLOBSEC: 2022*].

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism investigated the transformation of the digital media landscape in 2022. Experts [*Newman et al.: 2022*] examined the connection between journalism and the public, a declining interest in news, a rise in news avoidance, audience polarization and access to information. As a part of the countries' reports, the following results have been presented regarding development of the national media space:

- in the Czech Republic, the intensification of the search for new business models and digital innovations in media and journalism has been observed, despite a rebound in the national media sectors and a partial decrease in news media trust [*Štětka: 2022a*].

- in Slovakia, the government tried to implement the legislative programme to increase media ownership transparency and combat disinformation and online abuse. At the same time, Slovaks have abandoned television as a news source, demonstrating low trust in the media [*Chlebcová Hečková, Smith: 2022*].

- in Romania, media legitimacy and credibility were affected due to the prevention of the publication of public interest stories, the use of political propaganda in media, the creation of a media blacklist, and the temporary management of public broadcasters [*Radu: 2022*].

- in Poland, the war against Ukraine and the refugee challenges have led to a growth in news consumption across TV and digital channels, which was preceded by a decrease in news interest and an increase in government pressure on independent media [*Makarenko: 2022*].

- in Hungary, a grip on the media is an essential factor in the evolution of the national media space, where many central outlets are under either direct or indirect government influence, and only some independent media remain, particularly online [*Bognar: 2022*].

The non-governmental organizations from Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine, namely the Civic Resilience Initiative, Kosciuszko Institute and Detector Media, presented a joint report highlighting the challenges emanating from Russian disinformation and propaganda activities in the Lublin Triangle countries. Researchers note that all countries show significant signs of resilience to Russian

propaganda, despite the presence of differences in the main narratives and the use of various measures to combat disinformation [MFA: 2022].

After the military actions against Ukraine started on February 24th, the qualitative and quantitative levels of disinformation about the events increased in the EU and the world. To counter the avalanche of disinformation, the European Digital Media Observatory prepares regular reviews highlighting the main disinformation trends related to the war against Ukraine [EDMO: 2022a]. Since December 2022, six new hubs have been launched as a part of the European Digital Media Observatory, strengthening the European system's fight against disinformation: the Central European Digital Media Observatory (cedmohub.eu) has covered Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland with a coordinating institution at Charles University; the Bulgarian-Romanian Observatory of Digital Media has established in Bulgaria and Romania through the partnership of Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski and Globsec; the Hungarian Hub against Disinformation has been created in Hungary with a coordinating institution in Political Capital [EDMO: 2022b].

The study presented in the following parts allows an understanding of the transformation of public discourse in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and the world for 2022, revealing the created national and global narratives about the war against Ukraine, as well as outlining the prospects for solving the problems of false data dissemination at the European and international levels.

Methodology. The study is aimed at identifying the thematic lines of discussions and their sentiments with an emphasis on the negative attitudes; observing the context of formed narratives; revealing the interests of authors who write on the researched subject; determining the platforms and countries where discussions take place and their focus. The Ukrainian platform YouScan was used to conduct monitoring. The main advantage of YouScan [YouScan: 2022] is a social media monitoring and analytics AI-powered that allows us to track mentions, find important insights, respond to user issues, and analyse the public perception of activities. Among the significant functions of YouScan could be noted: monitoring of social networks, blogs, forums, review sites, messengers, as well as online media; sorting data by sentiments, geographical distribution, demographics features, and sources; forming a word cloud and visual insights to identify the focus of discussions.

The main themes 'War in Ukraine', 'EU sanctions against Russia' and 'Refugees from Ukraine' have been chosen for investigating public opinion in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania for the last year (November 2021 – November 2022). The selected period allows us to determine the topics of discussion and the peculiarities of public opinion formation before and during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The representative data sample of messages is 7 000 news in Poland, 3 570 in the Czech Republic, 3 082 in Slovakia, 2 409 in Hungary, and 2 230 in Romania. The sample has been formed by the platform YouScan based on the given search queries.

The queries in YouScan have been formed in Polish, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, and Romanian languages. As a result, public opinion in five European countries was investigated in three thematic directions – 'War in Ukraine', 'EU sanctions against Russia' and 'Refugees from Ukraine'. The following search queries were generated in these areas: 1. the topic 'War in Ukraine' – 'war in Ukraine', 'Russian invasion of Ukraine', 'war with Russia', 'military aid to Ukraine' and 'weapons for Ukraine'; 2. the topic 'EU sanctions against Russia' – 'EU sanctions against Russia', 'European energy security' and 'EU crisis'; 3. the topic 'Refugees from Ukraine' – 'refugees from Ukraine', 'displaced Ukrainians', 'humanitarian aid for Ukraine' and 'support for Ukraine'.

The above-mentioned online tool allows us to determine public discourse tendencies, understand the transformation of conversations, and analyse how ideas circulate in the media space of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. The platform [YouScan: 2022] contributes to easing the acquisition of statistical data and information that could be compared with other statistics at different periods. Absolute numbers, ratios and average indicators allow for regional and international comparisons.

Global public discourse on the Russian invasion. Online media platforms are being actively used at the level of government institutions to engage in dialogue with external and internal audiences. The transformation of media space in wartime led not only to an increase in the activity of government accounts but also to the expansion of interaction with the audience that received the opportunity to learn about foreign and domestic policy initiatives in real-time. Political and public actors began to

actively discuss the current political and security issues or explain to society the peculiarities of international cooperation with various players. At the same time, the active use of video content has become popular among Ukrainian, European and world leaders, as well as public activists, expanding interaction and audience engagement.

The study of global trends showed that over 5 million of authors mentioned the topic ‘War in Ukraine’ more than 7 million times in one month (October 2022). ‘Weapons for Ukraine’ has become a popular subtopic of world discussions and posts, to which 56 % of information is devoted. About 30 % of authors have debated about ‘EU sanctions against Russia’ and ‘European energy crisis’, and 14 % – about ‘Ukrainian refugees’ and ‘Humanitarian aid to Ukraine’. Global trends in mentions of all topics except ‘Humanitarian aid to Ukraine’ have an indicator of increasing negative sentiment.

The general portrait of authors who write on all topics is a mom or dad who loves art and music and engages in politics and/or law. The authors’ additional interests, covering all topics, include delight in business, entrepreneurship, history, media, science, and writing. Authors who communicate about all topics except ‘European energy crisis’ are also interested in engineering, military and family. Users who describe the topic ‘European energy crisis’ have interests in analytics, games, innovations, sustainability, and technology.

The geographical core of public discussions is concentrated in the USA, the UK, India, Canada, Australia, France, Germany, and Ukraine. The main discourse in the American media space is devoted to the subtopics ‘Weapons for Ukraine’ and ‘European energy crisis’. It should be noted that discussions about the possibility of supplying weapons to Ukraine have covered more than half of all debates in the media space of the mentioned countries. The subtopic ‘EU sanctions against Russia’ prevailed in France and Germany. The European energy crisis has been actively discussed in India, Germany, and the UK. Information about Ukrainian refugees and humanitarian aid to Ukraine has become a part of the public discourse in the UK, Ukraine, France, Canada, and Germany.

In general, Twitter and YouTube became the main platforms for spreading information about the Russian invasion, however, Telegram, Reddit, and Facebook significantly lost ground to the mentioned media. All platforms work as social news aggregates that focus on a few public-facing discussions – ‘Weapons for Ukraine’ and ‘Ukrainian refugees’ on Twitter and Reddit, ‘Weapons for Ukraine’ and ‘European energy crisis’ on YouTube and Telegram, ‘Ukrainian refugees’ on Facebook (see Figure 1).

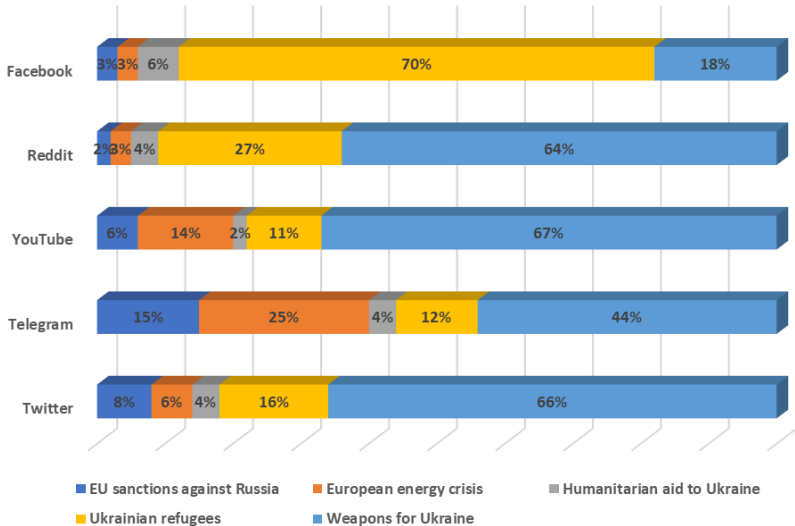


Figure 1. Global resources where topics are mentioned

Source: compiled by author based on YouScan.

We should note that video content outperforms other content types in understanding and remembering various events, especially if public has the opportunity to view short eyewitness clips of military actions. The war increased disinformation trends when the spread of fakes is disguised as ‘objectivity of opinion’. Authors of fakes like to present information impartially, ‘clarifying’ the positions of all parties. As a result, freedom of expression and media ethics became hostages of the

situation. When pseudo-objectivity becomes a manipulation tool that harms the state interests, contributes to the death of people, and increases panic.

In addition, people who feel fear for their own lives and relatives started going to a church more often and watching religious video content. Religion has also become a tool of manipulation, creating feelings of enmity, because some heads of religious institutions spread evaluative narratives about the war, at the same time, selfish interests prevail over critical thinking, forming a distorted attitude of believers to the situation.

The prevalence of disinformation and incompetent dissemination of data have led to the dominance of permissiveness on social media that requires not only regular technical support services for accounts but also a strict law concerning administrative and criminal liability for disseminating false data. Nevertheless, the activity within the information space in wartime should be done carefully to minimize the negative consequences and ensure maximum results from information and outreach activities, so development of global public discourse depends on an unbalanced misinformation media space.

The media space is dominated by negative sentiments regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in particular, there is only one positive post for every two negative posts in the subtopics ‘Weapons for Ukraine’, ‘EU sanctions against Russia’, and ‘Ukrainian refugees’ (see Figure 2).

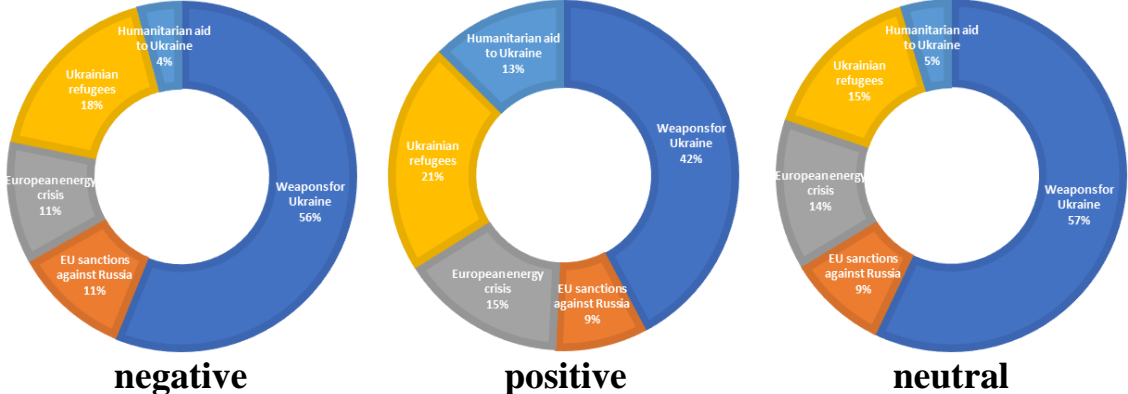


Figure 2. Global sentiments about the Russian invasion of Ukraine

Source: compiled by author based on YouScan.

The context of global negative references to the ‘War in Ukraine’ consists of exaggerating the tragedy of the situation, spreading panic ideas, using news about actual events with the addition of false events, and forming eloquent political headlines that do not correspond to reality. For example, videos with the following content are shot: US troops officially on the ground in Ukraine, Iran may attack Saudi Arabia within 48 hours, North Korea thinks the USA is ready to invade, Putin unofficially declares war on the UK (NATO) over Liz Truss iPhone row, climate chaos and diesel shortages. The video materials are posted on the official platform of the online store (canadianpreparedness.com) that sells goods for extreme tourists. The audience engagement of one such video is 355,707 views and 4,832 comments with thanks for ‘true stories’. Dissemination of information in such a manner could be considered false advertising of goods and services, as well as misinformation or manipulation.

In general, two trends could be distinguished in the creation of negative narratives mentioning the ‘War in Ukraine’: the first is aimed at forming ideas of public despair towards the possibilities of social protection, the second trend focuses on drawing parallels between historical and actual events with the addition of false historical facts.

Within the first trend, there is excessive emotional use of slogans of fighting for justice, assisting the oppressed, protecting the environment or strengthening social protection. There is a substitution of socially important concepts by actions that deepen the overhead-mentioned problems and do not contribute to their solution. In the global information space, we can observe the process of transforming the incredible and invisible into the ‘tangible and believable’, aimed at a radical

rethinking of the future. Pseudo-fighters for fairness unjustifiably manipulate the rights to freedom of speech, religion, or choice, replacing the positive context of such rights and disguising them with ideas that lead to the rise of enmity, discrimination, or genocide.

The second trend is the mixing of actual and historical events/characters with the addition of 'true' ideas that are transformed into 'believable' sentiments with heightened emotional colouration. The public may lose the connection between reality and pseudo-truth that gives rise to disbelief in objective information.

The context of global negative mentions of the 'Weapons for Ukraine' is the use of weapons not for their intended purpose, the sale of provided weapons, the US combat operations in Ukraine, the initiation of the Third World or Nuclear war by the United States through the support of Ukraine, and the provision of weapons by Ukraine to Russia.

Pseudo-experts and pseudo-pacifists who present an 'alternative and true' vision of the situation are used for creating negative and false messages. As a result of the formation of public distrust of government decisions and the presence of confirmed facts, any anti-government information spreads quickly and is immediately recognized as 'true', although it may be otherwise. Consequently, calls for peace, the non-proliferation of weapons or the reduction of their production with an emphasis on complicated economic situations will always have support in a society that cannot always understand the purpose of using such slogans.

The context of global negative mentions of the 'EU sanctions against Russia' is public protests against European sanctions imposed on Russia, Europeans do not want to freeze together with Ukraine, European disastrous economic policies, Ukrainian President Zelenskyy's war, a war provoked by the USA, the EU, and NATO. The spread of such negative ideas occurs through the publication of short messages on social media that supposedly show the authority of thousands of opinions, but the content of the posts is the same, translated into different languages and repeated regularly. In this way, public opinion is manipulated, ideas of hatred are instilled, and governmental, supranational, or international decisions are discredited.

The context of global negative mentions of the 'European energy crisis' is related to the depletion of strategic petroleum reserves, food shortages, natural disasters, runaway inflation/stagflation, record consumer debt, increased Chinese aggression towards Taiwan, and record oil company profits. Compared with the previous negative narratives, it should be noted that the manipulation of data in economics and energy is almost impossible to detect by non-professionals. The use of professional terms makes it difficult to understand the context of the message, and the lack of necessary knowledge leads to the perception of economic and energy data as a pre-existing truth. 'Authoritative' people, agencies, or news portals are used to spread information and complicate the refutation of false data.

The context of global negative mentions of 'Ukrainian refugees' and the 'Humanitarian aid to Ukraine' is giving preference to Ukrainian refugees over refugees from other countries, spreading neo-Nazism ideas, increasing Ukrainian refugees due to the infrastructure destruction, challenging life of Ukrainians in Europe, and plundering the US aid.

As for negative references to 'Ukrainian refugees' and 'Humanitarian aid to Ukraine', personal stories are used to describe the situation that may be true, a combination of true and false data, or specially invented to discredit Ukrainians and humanitarian aid, provided within the EU, the USA and Ukraine. The high emotional colouration of such messages complicates the level of critical perception of information.

The war led to the political, security, economic and social destabilization of Ukraine, the EU, the USA, and the whole world, however, there is a regular increase in information aimed at forming perceptions of a pseudo-escalation of the situation, growing panic and national enmity, or strengthening crisis where it is not foreseen. It should be noted that any war leads to adverse economic and social consequences. However, extreme situations may arise due to the immediacy, permissiveness, and lack of control of the spread of disinformation when the population in a state of panic could unconsciously harm the state's political, economic and security stability through own actions. Such behaviour in one country causes a chain reaction in other countries, covering regions around the world.

National public discourse in the European neighbours of Ukraine concerning the Russian invasion. The national public space of Ukraine’s neighbouring countries regarding assessments of the Russian attack could be divided into several categories: discreet, mostly neutral discussions take place in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania; discussions involving all communication channels are observed in Poland, which spread both constructive criticism and negative messages of a manipulative nature; mainly destructive criticism promoted by users on social media is noted in Hungary. Since social media allows the creation of information content beyond reliable control, which is used by unscrupulous actors to achieve their goals (see Figure 3).

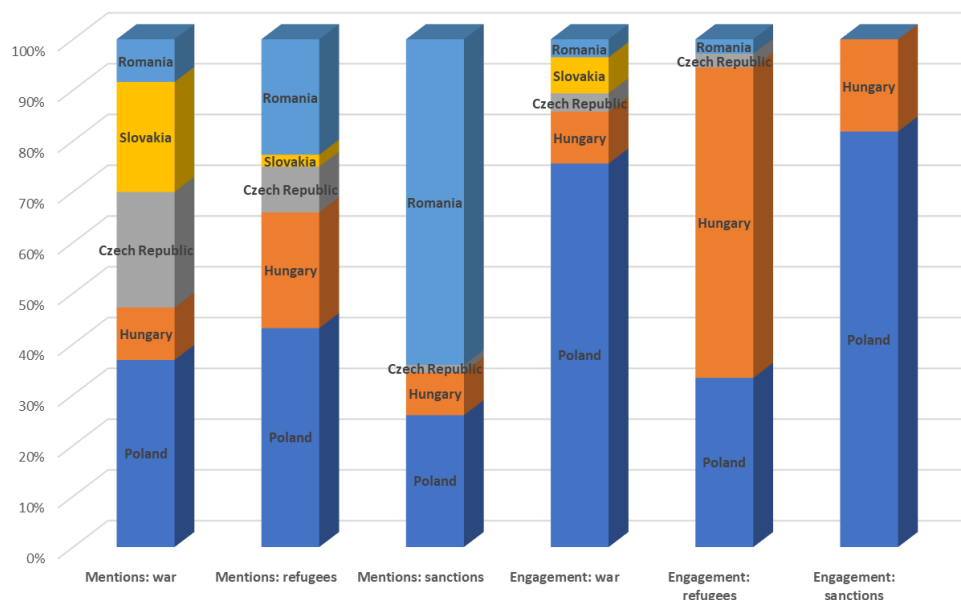


Figure 3. Share of conversations in the public discourse of Ukraine’s European neighbours concerning the Russian invasion

Source: compiled by author based on YouScan.

Experts note that the transformation of public space and strengthening of political elites’ influence on the national media is observed in the EU, particularly in Hungary and Poland, where it has been part of democratic standards’ erosion. In both states, they mark the lack of independence of media regulators, the transformation of public media into government propaganda outlets, the capture of private media, the state’s disproportionate funding of government-supporting private media and the creation of obstacles for private media independent of government [Wójcik: 2022a].

The restraint of public space in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Developing democratic standards and freedoms allows us to characterize the Czech Republic and Slovakia as consolidated democracies [Sybera: 2022; Učeň: 2022] in which political rights and civil liberties are generally respected [Czech Republic: 2022; Slovakia: 2022]. However, political disputes, illiberal rhetoric and the influence of powerful business entities impede the progress of legislative activity and adequate protection of the Czech media space. Significant challenges for Slovakia’s democratic institutions remain entrenched discrimination and growing hostility towards migrants and refugees, as well as political corruption. These national challenges form the media space of countries and determine their foreign policy goals and European orientations.

Regarding the investigated issues, the public discourse of the Czech Republic is focused on the topic of war in Ukraine (88 % of messages) and aid to Ukrainian refugees (11 %). Around 1 % of posts are devoted to the EU sanctions against Russia. Audience engagement is heterogeneous, in particular, 86 % of users are involved in the exchange of opinions about the war in Ukraine, and 14 % are about Ukrainian refugees, while fewer participants are concerned about economic and energy issues related to the Russian invasion, and messages have a news nature.

The media space of Slovakia covers the two topics ‘war in Ukraine’ (97 % of messages) and ‘Ukrainian refugees’ (3 %) with an absolute predominance of messages about the war, which are informative and neutral. The subject of the implementation of EU sanctions against Russia is

mentioned in the context of reports about the war, but the emphasis is on the sanction policy, in contradistinction to Poland, the Czech Republic and Romania, where the focus is on European energy security. Audience involvement is low, and users primarily exchange opinions about the war against Ukraine. The tonality of the media space regarding military events in Ukraine is homogeneous and neutral.

In the Czech Republic, the central point of public discourse is the mention of words that relate to the war in Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees. If news is devoted to the topic of war, then 85 % of messages mention the phrase ‘válka na Ukrajině’ (war in Ukraine), 6 % – ‘ruský útok na Ukrajinu’ (Russian attack on Ukraine), 6 % – ‘zbraně pro Ukrajinu’ (weapons for Ukraine), 3 % – ‘válka s Ruskem’ (war with Russia). If posts are dedicated to refugees, 57 % of messages use the word combination ‘Ukrajínští uprchlíci’ (Ukrainian refugees), 32 % – ‘podpora Ukrajine’ (support for Ukraine), 11 % – ‘humanitární pomoc Ukrajině’ (humanitarian aid to Ukraine). As for economic and energy issues that have arisen in Europe and the Czech Republic, 53 % of messages are about ‘evropská energetická bezpečnost’ (European energy security), 36 % – ‘sankce EU proti Ruské federaci’ (EU sanctions against Russia), and 11 % – ‘krize v EU’ (crisis in the EU). The media coverage of the war in Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees is usually neutral and homogeneous. There are no active debates regarding Ukrainian refugees or EU sanctions against Russia, while the discussion of topics is exclusively related to military actions in Ukraine.

The thematic focus of the Slovak public discourse regarding the Russian invasion is concentrated on the mention of the following phrases – 31 % of posts use the words ‘vojna s Ruskom’ (war with Russia), 26 % – ‘ruský útok na Ukrajinu’ (Russian attack on Ukraine), 14 % – ‘Ukrajinskí utečenci’ (Ukrainian refugees), 11 % – ‘zbrane pre Ukrajinu’ (weapons for Ukraine), 10 % – ‘sankcie EÚ voči Ruskej federácii’ (EU sanctions against Russia), 6 % – ‘podpora Ukrajine’ (support for Ukraine), and 2 % – ‘európska energetická bezpečnosť’ (European energy security).

Among the Czech authors who communicate about the war and Ukrainian refugees, there are predominantly younger and older men interested in business, law, politics, and media. Women over 18 are also actively involved in the discussion. A typical portrait of Slovak authors is composed of middle-aged and older men, as well as younger and older women interested in business, media, and fashion. Middle-aged men actively discuss the topic ‘Ukrainian refugees’.

The geographical core of Czech public discussions about the war in Ukraine is concentrated in the Czech Republic (94 %), Slovakia (2 %), Germany (2 %), and the USA (2 %). At the same time, the impact of sanctions on Czech energy security is primarily discussed in the Czech Republic, and the topic ‘Ukrainian refugees’ concerns the Czech Republic (98 %) and the USA (2 %). The geographical core of Slovak public discussions about the war is concentrated in Slovakia (97 %) and the Czech Republic (3 %), and the topic ‘Ukrainian refugees’ is covered only in Slovakia.

The national media space of the Czech Republic is homogeneous concerning the use of different resource types: 95 % of mass media content, 4 % of social media posts, and 1 % of blog texts are devoted to military themes and Ukrainian refugees; the EU sanctions and energy security are mainly discussed in the Czech mass media. Overall, the main media platforms that write about the war in Ukraine are maaxi.cz (63 %), denik.cz (7 %), parlamentnilisty.cz (6 %), echo24.cz (5 %), ceskenoviny.cz (4 %), cnn.iprima.cz, zpravy.aktualne.cz, e15.cz (3 % each), podcasty.seznam.cz, extra.cz, idnes.cz (2 % each). Regarding Ukrainian refugees, 77 % of content is prepared by maaxi.cz, 6 % by reflex.cz, 4 % by echo24.cz, 3 % by ceskenoviny.cz, 2 % by denik.cz and novinky.cz. The EU sanctions against Russia and energy security issues are discussed on the opinion platform of former Czech Prime Minister Jiří Paroubek (vasevec.parlamentnilisty.cz) and the online portal on economy and finance (kurzy.cz).

The leading Czech media has fewer publications about the war in Ukraine than media aggregators, which collect information from many Czech sources and distribute news mirrors, increasing the significance of specific ideas. There are positive and negative consequences of a similar algorithm for structuring information on the Internet. The advantages include time-saving when searching for the necessary data and maintaining awareness of issues of interest. The disadvantages could be the spread of inaccurate information as an information avalanche, false advertising, and user confusion, who may not know whether they are reading the original text or a copy on another online portal.

In the public media space of Slovakia, 91 % of the content in media, 7 % on social networks and 2 % in blogs and forums are dedicated to military topics and Ukrainian refugees. The main media platforms that write about the war in Ukraine are pravda.sk (57 %), sme.sk (12 %), youtube.com (8 %), netky.sk (6 %), dennikstandard.sk, topky.sk (4 % each), aktuality.sk (3 %), economics.sk, webnoviny.sk, and teraz.sk (2 % each). Regarding Ukrainian refugees, 52 % of content is prepared by pravda.sk, 16 % by sme.sk, 11 % by dennikstandard.sk, 5 % by topky.sk, 3 % by cas.sk, 4 % by info.sk, 4 % by webnoviny.sk, 2 % by dnes24.sk, and 2 % by hlavnespravysk. In contrast to the Czech Republic, news about the war in Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees is published by the leading Slovak media, which cover the issues in the context of politics, economy, finance, and social life.

Since the beginning of the war against Ukraine, the Czech and Slovak government institutions have made more efforts to overcome disinformation, propaganda, and hoaxes in the national media space. The Czech Association of leading internet providers blocked eight main disinformation websites (CZ.NIC, 2022), three of which resumed their activity by mid-December 2022. Thus, in the Czech media space, there is a constant struggle against spreading pro-Russian propaganda and disinformation. In addition, there is no law on disinformation in the state, so the National Cyber Defence Centre or the Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats operated by the Ministry of Interior work selectively and do not have sufficient legal authority to combat all manifestations of propaganda and disinformation [Štětka: 2022b; Gosling: 2022a]. The lack of clear legislative measures led to the possibility of using outdated tools of manipulation that prompted 70 thousand of people to take to the streets in September. Protesters argued that sanctions against Russia and support for Ukrainian refugees prevented the government from providing more assistance during the energy and inflation crisis [Gosling: 2022b]. However, the situation also contributed to the launch of new media initiatives supporting Ukrainians, including a new station 'Radio Ukrajina' by the Media Bohemia group, online streaming of the Ukrainian public service radio on Czech Radio or a simultaneous interpretation of news into Ukrainian on Czech Television [Štětka: 2022b].

It should be noted that the Slovak media space has a better level of legislative regulations. The Act on Cybersecurity (National Council, 2018) allows the National security authority to block sources of malicious content or serious disinformation, and the dissemination of disinformation could be prosecuted under the Criminal Code of Slovakia [National Council: 2022]. In addition, the action plan proposed by the Ministry of Defence for the coordinated countering of hybrid threats for 2022-2024 was approved by the Slovak government [Ministry of Defence: 2022]. The government attempts to eliminate hate speech on social media or block websites that spread Russian propaganda [Slovak Spectator: 2022]. However, the blocked websites remain visible outside the national media space, and various emojis or word combinations allow users to bypass online censorship.

Balancing public space of Romania. Romania is a semi-consolidated democracy [Badulescu: 2022] that continues to demonstrate the freedom of political rights and civil liberties. Democratic transformations are hindered by entrenched political interests pushing back against civic and institutional anti-corruption efforts, discrimination against minorities and control over media [Romania: 2022].

Romania's media space is divided almost equally between informing citizens about the Russian attack (52 % of messages) and Ukrainian refugees (44 %), while 4 % of posts are devoted to the topic of EU sanctions policy. However, audience engagement is heterogeneous, in particular, 86 % of users are involved in the exchange of opinions about the war, and 14 % are about Ukrainian refugees. Compared to the Czech Republic and Poland, discussions about European energy challenges are more active in Romania. The media tone regarding events related to Ukraine is homogeneous and neutral.

A feature of the Romanian media space is dominated by the phrase 'war with Russia', while other states focus on the words 'war in Ukraine'. In particular, if media messages are devoted to military topics, 39 % of messages mention the phrase 'războiul cu Rusia' (war with Russia), 24 % – 'războiul în Ucraina' (war in Ukraine), 15 % – 'atacul Rusiei asupra Ucrainei' (Russia's attack on Ukraine), 16 % – 'invazia rusă a Ucrainei' (Russian invasion of Ukraine), 6 % – 'ajutorul militar pentru Ucraina' (military aid to Ukraine). If news is devoted to refugees, 60 % of messages use the word combination 'refugiați din Ucraina' (refugees from Ukraine) and 40 % – 'sprijin pentru Ucraina' (support for Ukraine). As for European energy issues, 92 % of posts concern 'securitatea

energetică a Europei' (Europe's energy security), 7 % – 'sanctiunile UE împotriva Federației Ruse' (EU sanctions against Russia), and 1 % 'criza UE' (EU crisis).

The authors participating in the discussion of war and Ukrainian refugees are middle-aged and older men and middle-aged women who show interest in public activism, acting and art, while middle-aged men actively discuss the topic 'Ukrainian refugees'. The geographical core of public discourse about all topics is concentrated in Romania (98 %) and the USA (2 %).

The national media space of Romania is almost uniform regarding the use of different resource types – 91 % of content in mass media, 5 % – on social networks, and 4 % – in blogs is devoted to military topics, Ukrainian refugees, and European energy security. So, the main media platforms that write about the war are replicaonline.ro (30 %), libertatea.ro (17 %), g4media.ro (10 %), evz.ro, gazetarul.ro, youtube.com (7 % each), stiri.tvr.ro, cancan.ro (6 % each), romaniatv.net, mediafax.ro (5 % each). Regarding Ukrainian refugees, 35 % of content is prepared by the platform libertatea.ro, 18 % by replicaonline.ro, 9 % by stirileprotv.ro, 8 % by stiri.tvr.ro, 8 % by g4media.ro, 5 % by youtube.com, 5 % by facebook.com, 5 % by ziarelive.ro, 4 % by gandul.ro, 3 % by gazetarul.ro. The European energy security issues are dedicated to 38 % messages on libertatea.ro, 11 % on agerpres.ro, 9 % on g4media.ro, 6 % on bizlawyer.ro, bursa.ro, caleaeuropeana.ro, capital.ro, gazetarul.ro, and mae.ro.

Romania has a balancing experience in overcoming disinformation. In 2020, the Romanian government passed several decrees (Holdiș, 2020) that allowed blocking resources indicted of spreading false information about the pandemic. However, public activists accused the authorities of violating freedom of expression and access to information. Experts [*Toma, Popescu and Bodea: 2022; Rubica: 2022*] also confirm that the lack of reliable data on disinformation, disproportionate information of poor quality and misleading commentary are the main problem of national media space. As a result, the European Commission supported the establishment of six new hubs in the European Digital Media Observatory, strengthening the fight against disinformation. In December 2022, the Bulgarian-Romanian observatory of digital media [*EDMO: 2022b*] started its activity as a regional centre for combating disinformation in Bulgaria and Romania.

The controversy of public space Poland. Poland's semi-consolidated democracy is developing under the impact of nationalist and discriminatory rhetoric, and an increase in political influence on state institutions damages national democratic progress [*Wójcik: 2022b; Poland: 2022*]. Experts assess the media's political independence and market plurality in Poland as having a high risk of being controlled and restrained by the political elites. However, a significant number of private media, including media conglomerates and local media, are independent of the government [*Wójcik: 2022a*].

The public media space of Poland covers all the studied topics, demonstrating the highest activity of discussions compared to the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary. It was found that 72 % of messages about Ukraine are devoted to military topics, 27 % are related to Ukrainian refugees, and 1 % are dedicated to EU sanctions, regional and national energy security. Audience engagement is different, in particular, 91 % of users are involved in the exchange of opinions about the war in Ukraine, and 9 % are about Ukrainian refugees, while in the discussion of economic and energy issues related to the attack of Russia, the number of participants is not high, and the messages have mainly news nature.

The thematic orientation of the public discourse is focused on the mention of phrases related to the war in Ukraine and the attack of Russia, therefore, in the context of humanitarian cooperation, words about support for Ukraine are most often mentioned. In particular, if messages are about military topics, then 63 % of messages mention the phrase 'wojna w Ukrainie' (war in Ukraine), 16 % – 'inwazja Rosji na Ukrainę' (Russian invasion of Ukraine), 15 % – 'atak Rosji na Ukrainę' (Russia's attack on Ukraine), 3 % 'wojna z Rosją' (war with Russia), and 3 % 'broń dla Ukrainy' (weapons for Ukraine). If media messages are devoted to refugees, 64 % of messages use the word combination 'wsparcie dla Ukrainy' (support for Ukraine), 32 % – 'uchodźcy z Ukrainy' (refugees from Ukraine), and 4 % 'pomoc humanitarna dla Ukrainy' (humanitarian aid for Ukraine). As for the economic and energy issues that have arisen in Europe and Poland, 58 % of news concern 'bezpieczeństwo energetyczne Europy' (Europe's energy security), 31 % – 'sankcje UE wobec Federacji Rosyjskiej' (EU sanctions against Russia), and 11 % – 'kryzys w UE' (EU crisis).

Even though messages about the war, Ukrainian refugees, EU sanctions and European energy issues are primarily neutral and informative, 11,5 % of negative news about the war and 4,9 % about Ukrainian refugees are aimed at discrediting Polish-Ukrainian relations, misrepresenting facts, and distorting the surrounding reality. Unscrupulous media and experts mix facts from the political life of Ukraine, Poland, other European countries, and the USA, as well as official statements of political leaders, adding implausible reflections. For the first dissemination of implausible ideas, non-thematic sites of touristic, practical, or religious orientation are mainly used. Pseudo-experts record their video considerations and create the illusion of ‘disclosing secrets’. For several weeks, unscrupulous media and media aggregators have been spreading ‘expert-analysis texts or videos’. At the same time, algorithms for the promotion of information on social media and search engines are focused on the analysis of quantitative characteristics of user interaction with text, video, or picture and can automatically contribute to the promotion of false information during searches or according to users’ interests. In this way, a stable dissemination of information in a circle is created when each additional interaction with text, video, pictures, or comments leads to the transition of data to a higher degree of popularization and coverage of the audience.

The danger of spreading false data under war and peace leads to various consequences. In peacetime, false information deepens the discredit of politicians and state leaders, as well as could cause political and economic crises that further exacerbate social issues. The degree of false information influence during a war increases, leading to an expansion of civilian and military casualties, destruction of cities, territories, and infrastructure, as well as global security, economic and political disorientation.

The general portrait of authors who discuss the war, Ukrainian refugees, EU sanctions and European energy security is formed by middle-aged and older men, showing an interest in history and technology, although older women also actively participate in the discussion of the war in Ukraine. The geographical core of public discourse about the war in Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees is concentrated in Poland (92 %), the USA (7 %) and Germany (1 %). At the same time, the impact of sanctions on Polish energy security is primarily discussed in Poland.

Mass media and social networks have become the main platforms for the publication of information about the investigated subject. Among social media, YouTube is the main source for posting news about the war in Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees, while topics related to EU sanctions and energy security are more actively discussed on Facebook. Polish online platforms, where discussions are concentrated, influence the formation of national and international public opinion, and also act as a constant news source. Compared to the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania, Poland’s public space is diverse concerning using resource types: 83 % of content in mass media is devoted to the war and Ukrainian refugees, 10 % is in blogs, 6 % is on social networks, 1 % is in forums; EU sanctions and energy security are mainly given attention in the mass media (94 %) and social networks (6 %). Accordingly, the media platforms that write about the war in Ukraine are wiadomosci.onet.pl (20 %), rp.pl (16 %), rmf24.pl (10 %), wydarzenia.interia.pl (9 %), wiadomosci.wp.pl (8 %), polskieradio24.pl (8 %), newsweek.pl (8 %), youtube.com (7 %), polsatnews.pl (7 %), and wnp.pl (7 %). Regarding Ukrainian refugees, 31 % of news is prepared by niezalezna.pl, 14 % by wiadomosci.onet.pl, 12 % by rmf24.pl, 11 % by polskieradio24.pl, 9 % by wnp.pl, 5 % by youtube.com, 4 % by pl.bfn.today, 4 % by rp.pl, 4 % by newsweek.pl, 3 % by pap.pl, and 3 % by fakt.pl. The EU sanctions against Russia and energy security issue are discussed at polskieradio24.pl (18 % news), dlahandlu.pl, humanmag.pl (14 % each), dziennikzachodni.pl, facebook.com, gospodarkapodkarpacka.pl, klubjagiellonski.pl, rmf24.pl (9 % each), biznesalert.pl (5 %), and biegowelove.pl (4 %).

The war in Ukraine affected the Polish media space. On one side, in February 2022, Poland’s National Broadcasting Council [*Dziadul: 2022*] removed numerous Russian channels from the register of permitted TV services. On another side, the Polish media launched news services in the Ukrainian language for Ukrainian refugees – news portal ‘Ukrayina’ by gazeta.pl (ukrayina.pl), news portal ‘Ukraina’ by Onet (ukraina.onet.pl), news service ‘Vpolshchi.pl’ by Wirtualna Polska (vpolshchi.pl) and others [*Klimkiewicz: 2022*]. Poland established a valuable space for communication, understanding, integration, and consultations between Poles and Ukrainians.

The 'disguise' of Hungary's media space. The transitional or hybrid regime in Hungary has consolidated control over the national independent institutions, including the judiciary. The surveillance of journalists and restrictions on the activity of independent and critical media have become typical management instruments of the ruling political elite [Végh: 2022; Hungary: 2022]. In Hungary, a vast majority of private media have been captured by entities close to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party, so trust in media is low [Wójcik, 2022a]. The destruction of media freedom and pluralism has led to the imbalance of the national public space and the growing popularity of social media. At the same time, the unrestricted use of social media contributed to the creation of conditions for increasing disinformation, since social media have not become a full-fledged alternative to critical media.

The public media space of Hungary is divided almost equally between informing citizens about the war in Ukraine (58 % of messages) and Ukrainian refugees (41 %), while the topic of EU sanctions policy is devoted to 1 % of posts. In comparison with other countries, when the ratio of unique authors is directly proportional to the amount of prepared content, the Hungarian media space has developed a tendency towards the predominance of authors who write about Ukrainian refugees. In particular, 60 % of authors write about refugees from Ukraine, 39 % of authors communicate about the war in Ukraine, and 1 % – about the subject of EU sanctions against Russia.

A feature of the Hungarian media space about the military events in Ukraine is other semantic accents compared to the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and Poland, in particular: anchor words from various languages are intensively used in the Hungarian media space; in the meaningful content of messages, the emphasis is on Russia and its military operations in Ukraine, the number of weapons received by Ukraine, the comparison of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees, as well as the aggravation of the crisis in the EU and the increase in threats to European energy security.

The public discourse regarding the Russian invasion focused on the mention of the following phrases: 85 % of messages used the phrase 'háború Ukrajnában' and 'war in Ukraine', 6 % – 'orosz támadás Ukrajna ellen' and 'Russian attack on Ukraine', 6 % – 'háború Oroszországgal' and 'war with Russia', 3 % – 'fegyverek Ukrajnának' (weapons for Ukraine). In the topic 'Ukrainian refugees' the emphasis is placed only on using the phrase 'ukrán menekültek' (Ukrainian refugees), and in the topic 'EU sanctions' 55 % of messages are aimed at the word usage 'Európa energiabiztonsága' (European energy security), and 45 % – 'válság az EU-ban' (crisis in the EU).

The dissemination of information about events in Ukraine is enhanced by active commenting, in particular, 65 % of comments are on the topic of Ukrainian refugees, 18 % of comments are related to EU sanctions against Russia, and 15 % of comments are about the war in Ukraine. We should note that only 35 % of the news is published about Ukrainian refugees, which users automatically popularize in search engines and news feeds on social networks by actively commenting. Moreover, 82 % of posts are devoted to the EU sanctions policy, which is also accompanied by discussions, and 85 % of posts are about the war, which has fewer comments and less popularity. Compared to other countries, the most active commenting on military events in Ukraine and related topics is in Hungary. Increasing the negative tone of comments can contribute to enhancing the meaning of a discrediting context or diminishing the essence of a neutral/positive news context. Through intensive negative commenting, it is possible to create a distorted view of information content circulated in the Hungarian media space and to impose narratives.

The tone of the Hungarian public discourse regarding the war in Ukraine is distinct from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania. In the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania, neutral and explanatory news on the Russian invasion is prevalent, with a low percentage of negative tone in Poland. In Hungary, 57,9 % of messages about the war in Ukraine have a negative tone, 10 % of news have a negative context regarding the EU sanctions policy against Russia, and 5,2 % of posts contain antagonistic reactions concerning Ukrainian refugees.

The formation of a negative media space in Hungary occurs through the creation of closed groups on social media and the use of public non-thematic channels of the tourist, practical, or artistic direction for spreading information. To prepare discrediting content, a multilingual semantic core of the page is created using search words that have a high search frequency and popularity. Such posts don't have coherent sentences, they only contain repetition of tags and keywords in several languages – English, Russian, Serbian, Ukrainian, Uyghur, Hungarian, Thai, Tajik, Hindi, Hebrew, etc.

The general portrait of authors participating in the discussion of the war in Ukraine is formed by middle-aged and older men, and older women who are interested in pets, beauty, design, travels, music, cars, and nature. SEO specialization should be highlighted among their professional orientations.

The geographical core of public discussions is concentrated in Hungary (75 %), the USA (14 %), Romania (5 %), Slovakia (2 %), Morocco (1 %), France (1 %), India (1 %), Turkey (1 %). We would like to add that 50 % of the video dedicated to the war in Ukraine, which were commented in Hungarian and in the content of which there are keywords-anchors in the Hungarian language, do not have a geographical identification with any country. Additionally, most of this news is already closed in the middle of December 2022 according to YouTube policy. At the same time, the topic 'Ukrainian refugees' is covered Hungary (94 %), Romania (2 %), Turkey (2 %), the USA (1 %) and Algeria (1 %). The impact of sanctions on Hungary's energy security is primarily discussed in Hungary (89 %) and Turkey (11 %).

Social media have become the leading online platforms for Hungary, where discussions about the war in Ukraine are concentrated, and only the EU sanctions policy is covered mainly by the mass media. 82 % of content on social networks, 11 % in mass media, 6 % in blogs, and 1 % in forums are devoted to military topics and Ukrainian refugees. The crisis in the EU and energy security are mainly paid attention by mass media (82 %) and blogs (18 %). Therefore, the media platforms that write about the war in Ukraine are youtube.com (79 %), facebook.com (10 %), disqus.com (4 %), portfolio.hu (2 %). 76 % of content on youtube.com, 12 % on facebook.com, 3 % on disqus.com, 2 % on portfolio.hu, and news.leportale.com are devoted to the topic of Ukrainian refugees. The EU crisis and energy security are discussed on 168.hu (28 % of content), disqus.com (18 %), blogaszat.hu, klubradio.hu, news.leportale.com, portfolio.hu, szeretlekmagyarorszag.hu, and ujszo.com (9 % each).

The Hungarian public discourse is overloaded with the spread of Russian propaganda narratives. Attempts by non-governmental organizations (the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union and the Political Capital) and European institutions (the European Digital Media Observatory and the French news agency Agence France Presse) to change the situation remain less visible against the background of uncontrolled dissemination of falsified data. The launched Hungarian-language fact-checking sites Lakmusz (lakmusz.hu) and Ténykérdés (tenykerdes.afp.com) are unable to resist the spread of politically motivated information [Bátorfy, Bleyer-Simon, Szabó, Galambosi: 2022]. The situation is further complicated by the government decision regarding the distribution of press products during a state of emergency in Hungary that has been declared in June 2022. According to Regulation 210/2022 [Magyarország Hivatalos Lapja: 2022], indirect state support for newspaper vendors could be granted for press products with official government news about an emergency. As a result, the government-aligned press can receive additional assistance in contradistinction to the government-critical media.

The public space of Hungary and Poland is characterized by more active publication of negative information about the war events in Ukraine and related topics compared to the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania. The geographically heterogeneous media space of Hungary and Poland is distinguished by numerous messages with a negative tone, and YouTube has become the central platform for their propagation. At the same time, the Hungarian media space is noted by an increase in negative assessments of the war in Ukraine and military aid to Ukraine, as well as an emphasis on the crisis in the EU. Typical features of negative messages in the Hungarian and Polish public space regarding war stories in Ukraine are the use of sensational headlines, provocative pictures, and derogatory comparisons; creation of authorities from the 'people' who possess 'secret knowledge'; misrepresentation of decision-makers; shift of accents.

The joint public discourse of all countries regarding Russian invasion is focused on mentioning stable phrases to describe the situation in Ukraine. In particular, when mentioning the topic of war, Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian media platforms most often use the phrase 'war in Ukraine', although in Poland 'Russian attack' and 'Russia's attack on Ukraine' are popular, and in Romania – 'war with Russia'. The topic of refugees from Ukraine is represented by the stable phrase 'Ukrainian refugees', which is simultaneously used by the phrase 'support for Ukraine' in Poland, the Czech Republic and Romania. Within the EU sanctions policy, attention in all countries is focused on the discussed energy

security in the context of EU sanctions against Russia, and in Hungary the emphasis is on the crisis in the EU.

Results and Conclusions. With the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the government accounts of world leaders and European neighbour states of Ukraine have become the multilingual media agencies that cover not only news but also national defence strategies, visits by high-ranking officials, and bilateral and multilateral support for Ukraine at the official and public levels. However, the public space of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary turned out to be contradictory regarding the formation of narratives about the war events in Ukraine after the Russian invasion and on the eve. It is possible to highlight trends that have formed in the context of the war, Ukrainian refugees, and EU sanctions against Russia.

- Theme 'War in Ukraine'

On the eve of the invasion (November-December 2021 and January-early February 2022), there was not much activity regarding the publication of news about the danger from Russia's side to Ukraine. It can be noted that key messages in media focused on the danger of escalation of the confrontation between the West and Russia and mentioned the weakness of Ukraine, as well as the inability to resist such security challenges. These ideas continued to be repeated even after the Russian invasion almost until the end of March 2022.

Since February 2022, the increase in the amount of news about military actions in Ukraine and the support of the international community and neighbouring countries of Ukraine has led to the strengthening of anti-Ukrainian rhetoric in the European and global media space. Thanks to the consolidation of the efforts of Ukraine and European partners, who have promoted the activities of civic organizations to detect and refute fake news, a partial transformation of the media space of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and Poland is taking place, but the public space of Hungary remains overloaded with manipulative news. Regarding changes in the media space of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland, it is possible to note the emergence of a tendency to consciously prepare news about Ukraine with unclear and indistinct content, which prompts users to subjective comparative thoughts about the events in Ukraine and the policy of the USA, Germany, the UK, and France in other regions. The majority of citizens do not have knowledge about the historical development of countries, the actual reasons of conflicts and confrontations but have general ideas about such events. However, the combination of different historical events and eras leads to the formation of an associative chain and distortion of the main meaning of the message.

- Theme 'Ukrainian refugees'

In November-December 2021, only in Poland there were publications on the topic of Ukrainian refugees, which were discussed in the context of a possible escalation of military actions by Russia. At the beginning of 2022, the activity of public discourse in Poland and Romania increased in the direction of discussions of the countries' actions that would be adopted by the national governments if Russia starts an invasion of Ukraine. While the public space of Slovakia was focused on the news about the blocking of Nord Stream II and the appropriate security and social consequences for the EU and the state. The Czech media talked about the provision of humanitarian aid to Ukraine in the context of a possible Russian invasion. Hungarian public discourse was focused on the discussion of Viktor Orbán's visit to Moscow and the 'dividends' for the state, as well as the weakness of Ukrainian policy towards national minorities.

After the invasion of Russia and the increase in the flow of Ukrainian refugees, there is an extension of thematic news in all countries with an emphasis on the provision of humanitarian aid to Ukrainians who remained in Ukraine and citizens who began to leave for safe neighbouring countries. Most of the discussions and news about Ukrainian refugees fell on Poland, Romania, and the Czech Republic, but the public space of Hungary turned out to be the most replete with negative news concerning Ukrainian refugees.

- Theme 'EU sanctions against Russia'

Discussion of the EU sanctions policy against Russia before its attack was most active in Romania and Poland, which also demonstrated sustained public interest in the topic after the start of war against Ukraine. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, narrow thematic discussions can be observed, which take place in accordance with the decision-making by the European Commission

regarding the introduction of the next sanction package. The predominance of negative discussions about the EU sanctions policy against Russia is observed only in Hungary.

Thus, the public discourse of Poland before and after the start of war against Ukraine remained more stable regarding the assessment of events in the context of war, refugees, and sanctions, i.e., there was no sharp increase in negative or positive reports about possible and current war events. In contrast to Hungary, where there has been an intensification of negative messages since February 2022, and before that more neutral assessments of events in Ukraine in the context of war, refugees and sanctions prevailed.

Discussion. At the expert level of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary, there was an underestimation of the human resource potential of Ukrainians, as well as their ability to perform tasks under any circumstance. The mental portrait of the Ukrainian nation has always been perceived through the prism of Russian disinformation and was artificially imposed on both European and global level. However, the Ukrainian army overcame the negative world assessment of its ability to defend the state and maintain control over the capital Kyiv. In general, the spread of discrediting or false news about Russian attack in the national space is related to the role of each country in the process of influencing decision-making regarding the provision of political, economic, military, or social assistance to Ukraine, as well as the specifics of activities of the ruling political elite of each country. The further development of public discourse will be formed under the focus of attention of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and partially Hungary on overcoming national barriers to create an open and transparent media space, devoid of propaganda and disinformation.

Solving the issue of spreading disinformation is very difficult since the technological development of society allows creating and dispersing of any information without any restrictions. Only measures at the global level, which would not turn into a fight against freedom of speech, will be able to reduce the level of disinformation but not overcome it completely. In the short term, there will be technological updates regarding the identification of authors and their blocking for the dissemination of discrediting information, the modernization of the legislation of EU countries concerning prosecution for the dissemination of fake announcements and hate speech, the increase in centres engaged in fact-checking and refutation of false data, deepening of knowledge in media literacy, the standards' transformation of ethical conduct of journalists and their responsibility for spreading fake news. In the long term, the mentioned processes should become a global trend of ethical conduct with information.

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