

Ethnic Tensions in Central and Eastern Europe

January 2022

Introduction

The purpose of this research project was to study incidents that led to heightened tensions based on ethnic grounds in the Central and Eastern European region. The content of this report is based on exploratory investigations done under strict time and budget constraints and are not conclusive or able to attribute hostile state influence to these events. However, this research attempts to begin to understand the kinds of patterns and methods used by actors seeking to inflame tensions in the region as well as to identify possible motives and inform suitable responses. It presents a series of case studies that map and analyse instances of exploitation of ethnic tensions for political gain that were, at the very least, publicly engaged with by hostile state influence actors. The case studies are followed by a series of recommendations for both further research and responses in activity and policy.

Executive summary

This exploratory research illustrates a strategy of opportunistic, exploitative events, with often vague or inconclusive attribution, and alignment of media activity across not just coordinated networks but multiple stakeholders. Hostile states appear to both instigate escalation in a simmering ethnic tensions issue and exploit of vulnerabilities that arise thanks to activity in which they had no hand.

There are three state actors involved in Zakarpattia Oblast, Ukraine, an area frequently at the centre of ethnic tension and prominent in this research: Ukraine, Hungary, and Russia. Hungary and Russia are often deliberately stoking tensions and exercising malign influence, and therefore at a state level it is Ukraine that must drive progress on the issue.

The response from various branches of government to these incidents are often extreme, uncoordinated, inflammatory, undermined by comments from fringe politicians, and fall into traps left by hostile actors. A more coordinated, proportionate and considered approach may help to ease escalation in the aftermath of these incidents and should be coupled with programming that strengthens community resilience. This approach will necessitate working with the government but also civil society, particularly the media, in order to build resilience through responsible reporting practices on sensitive topics and an understanding of Kremlin-backed narratives as they develop and spread.

This approach is applicable beyond the Hungarian minority in Ukraine and Zakarpattia and should ideally be implemented with all minority ethnic groups and neighbouring states, particularly Romania and Poland as highlighted by case studies and additional research in this report.

It is important to note that, as demonstrated by the Institute for Central European Strategy (ICES) polling, there is minimal concern over the idea of annexation (akin to Crimea) and ethnic tension for locals in Zakarpattia. In Ukraine, these issues are primarily the concern of those outside

the region in question, highlighting that these sentiments are not closely tied to on-the-ground realities.

These findings demonstrate that further research is necessary in order to build a complete picture of the tactics and strategy employed by hostile states in exploiting ethnic tensions in Central and Eastern Europe; these initial insights highlight several opportunities:

A detailed evaluation of baseline sentiments toward several ethnic minorities in Ukraine will present an aggregated picture of this vulnerability across several ethnic groups that can be exploited in the same way (portraying Ukraine as a confrontational neighbour that does not respect minorities from those countries on its territory); the issue then becomes a wider security challenge, which, particularly considering the recent escalation in tensions around the Donbas, demands the attention of the Ukrainian Government and potentially NATO allies; while Budapest attempting to annex Zakarpattia is extremely unlikely, increased domestic fear of federalisation is a genuine reality, so engaging with these issues now in a preventative capacity safeguards against future crises.

This point could be further reinforced by a comparative analysis of ethnic tension-related disinformation used in the build-up to the 2014 annexation of Crimea and occupation of the Donbas and examples seen in other parts of the country. This would provide a framework for identifying potential warning signs of escalation.

Given the role of far-right paramilitary organisations in the Kremlin's influence strategy across Central and Eastern Europe, it may also be useful to consider these connections and collaborative entities such as training camps in the context of ethnic tensions, particularly in Hungary where the government has previously knowingly allowed this activity to occur unimpeded, as these relationships pose a more immediate threat to Ukraine's national security.

There are a range of other soft strategic policy initiatives that can also be considered, such as increased investment in areas with significant minority populations, direct support to minority initiatives and infrastructure, and researching and addressing minority grievances.

Cooperation between Ukrainian civil society and media and those of its neighbours with minority populations in Ukraine should also be improved, including joint reporting, information sharing and cooperation between regional authorities; however, this should not replace attempts to engage with the issue at a policymaker level as a national security concern.

Case studies:

Amplification of inflammatory statements by local Ukrainian politicians

A major local politician made inflammatory comments about the Hungarian minority in Ternopil Oblast, Ukraine, resulting in co-ordinated blowback from Budapest-supported Hungarian cultural and media networks and Kremlin-linked media in Ukraine, as well as pro-government media in

Hungary, that portrayed the comments are reflective of endemic anti-Hungarian sentiment in Ukraine.

- Mykhailo Holovko, leader of the Ternopil Oblast Council in Ukraine, made anti-Hungarian remarks during a live appearance on Ukraina 24's "This Morning" show, broadcast on 28 September 2021.^{1 2}
 - Reflecting on the then-recent gas dispute³ between Ukraine and Hungary (the Hungarian Government has recently signed a fifteen-year-long gas purchase contract with Russia's Gazprom bypassing Ukraine), Holovko called for more "pressure" [naikhaty] on Hungarians living in Ukraine to force Budapest to reconsider the deal.
 - Holovko is a member of the Ukrainian Svoboda Party and a former Ukrainian Rada deputy.⁴
- In response, President of the Hungarian Cultural Association of Zakarpattia (KMKSZ) Vasyl Brenzovych (Laszlo Brenzovics in Hungarian) asked the Ukrainian Prosecutor General to "treat this letter as a report of a criminal offence" and initiate a full investigation into Holovko's statements.
 - Brenzovych is a former Ukrainian Rada deputy from the Petro Poroshenko Bloc (now known as the European Solidarity Party). During his tenure, he was the chairperson of the Rada subcommittee on inter-ethnic relations and deputy chairperson of the group for inter-parliamentary relations with Hungary.⁵
- The incident was widely reported in the Hungarian pro-Government media as an incitement of hatred against the Hungarian diaspora living in Ukraine and was picked up by the network of organisations and media outlets supported by the Hungarian Government's Bethlen Gabor Fund and State Secretariat for National Policy in the Zakarpattia Oblast.^{6 7 8}
 - The most widely cited Hungarian-language article on the incident was published by the news portal karp.in.ua⁹ on the same day. Karp.in.ua is affiliated with or a sub-domain of the Carpathian Lens (Karpatskyi Obiektiv) website¹⁰, which is an official partner of the Hungarian minority's news portal called Karpatalja and the KMKSZ – both supported by the Hungarian Government's Prime Minister's Office - State Secretariat for National Policy (Miniszterelnokseg - Nemzetpolitikai

¹ <https://www.unian.ua/politics/golova-ternopilskoj-i-oblradi-proponuye-najihati-na-ugorciv-v-ukrajini-cherez-diji-budapeshta-video-novini-ukrajina-11562229.html>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9U2PqRlNkqM>

³ <https://www.euronews.com/2021/09/28/ukraine-anger-as-hungary-signs-gas-supply-deal-with-russia-s-gazprom>

⁴ <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/mps/info/expage/15813/9>

⁵ <https://itd.rada.gov.ua/mps/info/expage/17998/9>

⁶ <https://index.hu/kulfold/2021/09/29/karpatalja-mihajlo-holovko-ukrajna-gaz-mihajlo-holovko/>

⁷ <https://www.delmagyar.hu/orszag-vilag/2021/09/nyiltan-uszit-a-karpataljai-magyarok-ellen-a-ternopili-megyei-tanacs-elnoke>

⁸ https://gondola.hu/hirek/279027-Karpataljai_magyarok_elleni_uszito_kijelentesek.html

⁹ <http://politic.karp.in.ua/?p=30831&lang=hu>

¹⁰ <http://politika.ko.net.ua/?p=12770>

Allamtitkarsag) and/or the Bethlen Gabor Fund, the main vehicle used by the Hungarian Government to finance Hungarian diaspora communities and organisations abroad.

- Upon reading Brenzovych's 2019 property declaration, it can be seen that Carpathian Lens is a legal entity owned by Brenzovych (at least at that time).¹¹
- Brenzovych is linked to a total of six legal entities according to the declaration.
- Brenzovych is also listed on a Russian Government list of persons under Russian sanctions, dated August 2021.¹²
- As reported by Atlatszo, the Bethlen Gabor Fund is used by the Hungarian Government as an opaque alternative mechanism of funding initiatives for Hungarian diaspora communities that favours organisations ideologically aligned with the Orban administration. The government provided more than 80 billion HUF (250 million EUR) through the Bethlen Gabor Fund in 2018.¹³
- The event was reported in at least three Kremlin-backed media outlets, NewsFront Hungary¹⁴, Orosz Hirek¹⁵ and National News¹⁶, which used the statement to heighten tensions between the two countries by accusing both parties of further aggression.
- NewsFront quoted the Hungarian pro-Government portal Vadhajtasok¹⁷, with which is regularly shares content.
 - The report published by National News is in Russian and it accused the Ukrainian authorities of ethnic cleansing and the Hungarian Government of a possible military intervention to defend ethnic Hungarians abroad: "Prime Minister Viktor Orban has demonstrated that he is ready to deploy special forces to protect his citizens in the neighbouring country."
- At the same time, several anonymous Telegram channels in Ukraine, namely Tsybulya, Sheptun, and Merkantilizm, started claiming that Ukrainian nationalists have allegedly threatened the Hungarian minority in Zakarpattia via leaflets telling them to "get out of Ukraine" and also published the claims that the Hungarian authorities have redeployed forces near Ukraine.¹⁸

¹¹ https://declarations.com.ua/declaration/nacp_6c49643e-522c-48b8-95dc-94fa89383e0a

¹² <http://government.ru/docs/all/136147/>

¹³ <https://english.atlatszo.hu/2019/02/21/hungarian-government-pours-money-into-football-churches-and-schools-abroad/>

¹⁴ <https://hu.news-front.info/2021/10/07/magyarorszag-megmutatta-kesz-kulonleges-alakulatokat-bevetni-karpataljan/>

¹⁵ <https://oroszhirek.hu/2021/10/08/magyarorszag-kesz-kulonleges-alakulatokat-bevetni-karpataljan/>

¹⁶ <https://nation-news.ru/662428-vengriya-prodemonstirovala-gotovnost-vvesti-specnaz-v-zakarpate>

¹⁷ <https://www.vadhajtasok.hu/2021/09/29/nyiltan-uszit-a-karpataljai-magyarok-ellen-a-ternopil-megyei-tanacs-elnoke-a-magyar-orosz-gazszerzodes-kapcsan>

¹⁸ <https://t.me/sheptoon/15109>

- These claims were subsequently picked up by Kremlin-backed outlets, such as NewsFront¹⁹ and AntiFashist.²⁰
- Also at the same time the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) announced that it thwarted a series of terror attacks to be conducted in Zakarpattia. According to the press statement, the perpetrators were planning to conduct arson against a "consulate general of a neighbouring country" and to organize a "murder of a public figure." The perpetrator is said to be from Luhansk Oblast, recruited by the "special services of the Russian Federation", and who at the time of publication was hiding in Russia.²¹
 - As evidence, the SBU published an anonymized picture showing a passport of the suspect. The passport appears to have been issued by the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic.
- This case study demonstrates the vulnerability of the Hungarian-Ukrainian dynamics in Zakarpattia Oblast to exploitation to several audiences:
 - Mykhailo Holovko was seeking to heighten tension around the gas dispute among the Ukrainian public in order to increase pressure on the Hungarian Government;
 - The network of Hungarian media and cultural organisations in Zakarpattia characterised his statements as "hate speech" in order to provoke a heightened response from the Hungarian public, media and government on the issue;
 - The Hungarian pro-Government media uses the opportunity to heighten discourse on the broader issue of the diaspora in Zakarpattia to the Hungarian public;
 - And the Kremlin-backed media in Hungary uses the incident to villainise Ukraine to Hungarian- and Russian-speaking audiences.
- Another example of such a scenario occurred in December 2021, when a number of pro-Kremlin outlets (ranging from the fringe outlets, such as AntiMaydan and Ukraina.ru to the mainstream outlets, such as RIA Novosti) published articles with a practically identical headline: "Ukraine promises to smash the Hungarian army with the help of one brigade" [Na Ukraine poobeshchali razgromit vengerskuyu armiyu salami odnoj brigady].^{22 23}
- The report was based on a statement voiced by Ukrainian politician Pavlo Zhebrivskiy, former head of the Donetsk Military-Civil administration.²⁴ He voiced this statement amid a heated discussion on Ukraine's Channel 4.²⁵

¹⁹ <https://news-front.info/2021/10/04/na-zakarpate-patrioty-prizyvayut-vygonyat-s-ukrainy-vengrov/>

²⁰ <https://antifashist.com/item/madyarov-na-nozhi-proch-s-ukrainy-zakarpatskim-vengram-posypalis-ugrozy.html>

²¹ <https://ssu.gov.ua/novyny/sbu-zapobihla-serii-teraktiv-na-zakarpatti-pered-sudom-postane-ahent-spetssluzhbrf>

²²

https://antimaydan.info/2021/12/na_ukraine_poobeshali_razgromit_vengerskuu_armiu_silami_odnoj_brigady.html

²³ <https://ria.ru/20211215/vengriya-1763762151.html>

²⁴ <https://ukrreporter.com.ua/politic/pravo-nazyvatysya-patriotom-treba-vyboryuvaty-v-boyah-z-rosijskymy-okupantamy-pavlo-zhebrivskij.html>

²⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLEtoj_b33k



- A Russian portal called Reporter (Topcor.ru) subsequently published a report claiming that Ukraine is relocating its 128th Mountain Assault Brigade from eastern Ukraine to Zakarpattia, citing an unnamed source claiming that this may be linked to "yet another case of tensions in relations between Hungary and Ukraine."²⁶
 - Reporter is a website of a Russian publication called Military Review (Voyennoye Obozreniye).²⁷ The publication is based in Izhevsk, Udmurt Republic, Russia.²⁸
 - Reporter was previously mentioned in a press release of the Ukrainian Foreign Intelligence Service as a website that published disinformation pertaining to Ukraine's contract to supply An-178 aircraft to Peru.²⁹
- At the same time, Zhebrivskyi's statements have gone virtually unnoticed in the Ukrainian media, with the notable exception of pro-Kremlin blogger Anatolii Sharii, demonstrating that Zhebrivskyi's comments are not taken seriously, considered newsworthy or noticed in Ukraine and that any controversy is entirely external.³⁰
- The statements were picked up in some Hungarian-language media, namely KarpatHir³¹, Magyar Hirlap³², and PestiSracok.³³
 - It is worth mentioning that KarpatHir is an outlet reportedly based in Zakarpattia Oblast, Ukraine. A report published by 444.hu in 2016 described the portal's then-links to the Hungarian Jobbik party.³⁴
 - The portal was founded and continues to be operated by the Magyar Sziv - Magyar Szo Foundation³⁵, which in 2016 was chaired by then-Jobbik party politician Janos Bencsik, who now heads an independent party. However, the portal's contact page as seen in 2021 shows that the portal is receiving direct support from the Hungarian Government³⁶, suggesting that the portal has effectively become mainstream and that the government took control over it away from people affiliated with Jobbik.
 - The three logos seen on the page are that of the Bethlen Gabor Foundation, the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office, and of Nemzeti Egyuttmukodesi Alap (a Hungarian Government program³⁷ which states that its aims are to support civil society).

²⁶ <https://topcor.ru/23149-anneksija-zakarpatja-vsu-srochno-perebrasyvajut-boevye-podrazdelenija-iz-donbassak-granice-s-vengrijej.html>

²⁷ <https://topwar.ru/about.html>

²⁸ <https://www.rusprofile.ru/id/6994681>

²⁹ <https://szru.gov.ua/news-media/stop-fake/rosiya-ne-prypynyaie-sprob-pidrizaty-kryla--ukrainskomu-an-178>

³⁰ <https://sharij.net/eks-glava-doneczkoj-ovga-prigrozil-raskoloshmatit-vsyu-vengerskuyu-armiyu-silami-odnoj-ukrainskoj-brigady>

³¹ <https://karpathir.com/2021/12/17/magyarorszagot-fenyegeti-a-donecki-polgari-katonai-kozigazgatas-korabbielelnoke/>

³² <https://www.magyarhirlap.hu/velemeney/20211222-provokacio>

³³ <https://pestisracok.hu/magyarorszagot-is-haboruval-fenyegette-meg-egy-ukran-politikus/>

³⁴ <https://444.hu/2016/04/26/jobbik-kozeli-alapitvany-uzemelteti-a-karpathir-nevu-putyinista-hiroltalt>

³⁵ <https://www.ceginformacio.hu/cr9311858790>

³⁶ <https://karpathir.com/kapcsolat/>

³⁷ <https://emet.gov.hu/nemzeti-egyuttmukodesi-alap-33/>

- KarpatHir has been noted to spread pro-Kremlin messaging in the past, such as claims that a "split" is threatening Ukraine³⁸ or that Ukraine is facing bankruptcy³⁹ - both are frequent pro-Kremlin narratives.
- The timing of such claims is especially suspect, as they appear amid yet another buildup of Russian troops next to Ukraine.

Serbian connection to Hungary-Ukraine tensions

A far-right and Kremlin media-linked Serbian journalist was the first to share a faked video of a Ukrainian far-right group featuring at-the-time undisclosed information about upcoming Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) raids on Hungarian organisations in Zakarpattia Oblast and portray the SBU as anti-Hungarian. Kremlin-linked media and influential individuals made comments featuring comparable narratives immediately following the raids.

- On 26 November 2020, a YouTube channel called Vesna Veizovic published a video⁴⁰ in which an anonymised man threatens the Hungarian minority of Ukraine, promising "we will come for you" and "we know where your children go to school" in retaliation for alleged successionist activity (the original video has since been blocked by YouTube but references to the original video can be found in media reports.⁴¹
- Behind the man is a flag bearing the insignia of the far-right Pravyi Sektor; he claims that four days later the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) will raid several Hungarian cultural organisations linked to Hungarian separatists. Later, Pravyi Sektor denied involvement⁴² in the video, but the SBU raids did in fact occur.⁴³
- Vesna Veizovic is a Serbian journalist, editor of vasseljenska.net⁴⁴ and a contributor to the FSB-linked NewsFront Serbia.⁴⁵ Her coverage for NewsFront includes an interview with Miodrag Zarkovic, the director of a pro-Russian documentary filmed in Donetsk about the ongoing conflict⁴⁶, and gave an 85-minute interview⁴⁷ to the conspiratorial neoeurasianist YouTube channel Helmcast, which has approximately 107 thousand subscribers and has hosted events with notorious Russian far-right figurehead Aleksandr Dugin.⁴⁸
- Veizovic's channel generally uploads Serbian-language videos about Orthodox Christianity-related topics and audio recordings of writing by twentieth century Russian fascist philosophers since its creation in 2015, so this video was somewhat out of step with her usual content.⁴⁹

³⁸ <https://karpathir.com/2020/10/30/a-teljes-szethullas-fenyegeti-ukrajnat/>

³⁹ <https://karpathir.com/2020/06/02/gazdasag-akar-mar-augusztusban-terdre-kenyszerulhet-ukrajna/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqIf1kS7Ylc>

⁴¹ <https://kiszor.net/2020/11/29/fenyegeto-vidcot-kapott-a-karpataljai-magyarsag/>

⁴² <https://www.5.ua/polityka/pravyi-sektor-ta-avakov-vidreahuvaly-na-rolyk-z-pohrozamy-ukraintsiam-uhorskoho-pokhodzhennia-230792.html>

⁴³ <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2020/12/2/7117184/>

⁴⁴ <https://vasseljenska.net/teme/vesna-veizovic/>

⁴⁵ <https://srb.news-front.info/tag/vesna-veizovi/>

⁴⁶ <https://srb.news-front.info/2017/02/03/intervju-na-liniji-fronta-miodrag-zarkovi-o-situatsiji-u-donbasu/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvOKA133PnE&t=1451s>

⁴⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViA7_mhR8j4

⁴⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/user/keptrinailuzija/videos>

- After the raids, there were immediate statements made by high-profile pro-Kremlin public figures and channels connected to Viktor Medvedchuk, including the NewsOne media outlet and his Opposition Platform For Life political party's official website.⁵⁰ These comments connected the SBU raids with George Soros conspiracies, claims of Ukraine's external governance by the US, and the SBU's alleged deliberate targeting of the Hungarian minority, along with praise for the Hungarian community, cultural and political leaders in Zakarpattia.

Hungarian naturalisation oath incident:

A video was leaked depicting ethnic Hungarian Ukrainians taking naturalisation oaths for Hungarian citizenship, in contravention of Ukraine's dual citizenship laws. This provoked a severe diplomatic fallout between Hungary and Ukraine, which was in turn used in Hungarian government- and Kremlin-linked media to whip up fear of dramatic escalation, including by Miklos Kevehazy, a supposed Hungarian political expert and talking head on Russian state television with no public presence outside of Russia.

- On 19 September 2018, a video went viral in which ethnic Hungarians in Zakarpattia took a naturalization oath and received their second, Hungarian citizenship.⁵¹ Responding to the event⁵², then Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin decided to expel a Hungarian consul, Gyorgy Vass based in Berehove^{53 54}, giving way to a reciprocal response from Budapest⁵⁵ and months of bilateral diplomatic spats.
- Miklos Kevehazy, a never-before-seen "Hungarian political consultant" appeared⁵⁶ on 60 Minutes, a prime-time political talk show on Rossiya-1, one of the main Russian state-controlled television channels, making a number of statements that later became widely cited in Ukrainian media.
 - He commented on a possible Hungarian-led UN peacekeeping operation to Western Ukraine or a direct military invasion from Hungary. He also stated that if the bilateral situation escalated, Hungary might just close the gas tap to Ukraine so that people would freeze.⁵⁷
 - Exaggerations of gas shortages in Ukraine are a well-known and well-used Russian narrative used against Ukraine since the 2014 revolution.^{58 59}

⁵⁰https://zagittya.com.ua/news/zajavlenija/vlast_vengrii_projavila_muzhestvo_vystupiv_protiv_vneshnego_upravlenija_so_storony_ssha_i_sorosa.html

⁵¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_k-KjJ6Mu4&ab_channel=Konstantin

⁵² <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2018/09/21/7192781/>

⁵³ <https://www.facebook.com/pavloklimkin.ua/videos/1086403591528834/>

⁵⁴ <https://kmksz.com.ua/2018/10/05/kiderult-a-kiutasitott-beregszaszi-magyar-konzul-neve/>

⁵⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-hungary-idUSKCN1ME0V0>

⁵⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXgaAcmsqk>

⁵⁷ <https://rueconomics.ru/353264-prosto-perekroem-gaz-a-u-vas-uzhe-kholodno-ekspert-iz-vengrii-prigrozil-ukraine-zamerzaniem-i-pokhodom-do-lvova-pod-flagom-nato>

⁵⁸ <https://regnum.ru/news/economy/2183408.html>

⁵⁹ <https://russian.rt.com/business/news/928413-ukraina-gorod-gaz-severnyi-potok-2>



- These allegations were further amplified by the pro-Kremlin media, with reports from Regnum⁶⁰, and Nation News.⁶¹
- The allegations were also picked up by Ukrainian media outlets, such as Zik⁶², Obozrevatel⁶³, Glavred⁶⁴, and others. However, the observed examples have referred to Kevehazy as a "Hungarian propagandist."
- Kevehazy himself has links to other Kremlin-backed projects:
 - He has been photographed at a meeting between the pro-Kremlin party Rodina and Hungarian Jobbik MPs at the State Duma in 2014⁶⁵; in 2017, he appeared on the Russian state channel NTV claiming that the Ukrainian government deliberately targets and harasses Hungarian cultural organisations receiving grants from Budapest.⁶⁶
- He is also a regular guest on NewsFront⁶⁷ and RIA FAN⁶⁸ and is very much active on the Russian-language space as of December 2021.
- Kevehazy's comments did not reach the Hungarian media (it was not reported by NewsFront Hungary) and, given its minor reach beyond pro-Kremlin outlets and several Ukrainian ones, it seems that the primary audience for his comments was intended to be the that of Russian state media.
- In terms of Kevezahy's Hungarian footprint, there appears to be little evidence of his activities in Hungary or how he ended up commenting on Ukrainian and Hungarian affairs in pro-Kremlin media. There is no record of him being active in politics or political consultancy in Hungary.
- The strong emphasis placed on Kevehazy's Hungarian origins, and his narratives on the Hungarian minority's purported plans of autonomy, and Hungary's alleged schemes to annex Zakarpattia, constitute a potential threat to the Hungarian minority itself, and these have the potential to turn Ukrainian public opinion against local Hungarians and provoke Ukrainian extremist groups into committing physical violence against minorities. The ultimate aim of the narrative, however, is to push the Ukrainian public against not just ethnic Hungarians in the country, but also the Euro-Atlantic community as a whole.

⁶⁰ <https://regnum.ru/news/2494065.html>

⁶¹ <https://nation-news.ru/401613-esli-budet-sovsem-tugo-otklyuchim-gaz-ekspert-iz-budapeshta-rasskazal-ob-otvete-na-vypady-kieva>

⁶² https://zikua.news/news/2018/10/06/ugorskyy_propagandyst_prygrozyv_ukraini_na_rostv_1421249

⁶³ <https://news.obozrevatel.com/abroad/dojdem-do-lvova-propagandist-vengrii-prigrozil-ukraine-na-rostv.htm>

⁶⁴ <https://glavred.info/world/10016273-vengerskiy-propagandist-prigrozil-ukraine-armiya-vengrii-mozhet-doyti-do-lvova.html>

⁶⁵ <https://rodina.ru/novosti/ZHuravlyov-Amerika-vtyagivaet-ne-tolko-Rossiyu-no-i-vsyu-Evropu-v-bolshuyu-voynu?fbclid=IwAR3RQ4nBnutL1CRMMsMIE8unQmtO70jzebGIcip8CHA-usjFrY3d4Ghffn0>

⁶⁶ <https://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1941303/>

⁶⁷ [https://news-](https://news-front.info/?s=%D0%9C%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%BB%D0%BE%D1%88+%D0%9A%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B8)

[front.info/?s=%D0%9C%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%BB%D0%BE%D1%88+%D0%9A%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B8](https://news-front.info/?s=%D0%9C%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%BB%D0%BE%D1%88+%D0%9A%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B8)

⁶⁸

<https://riafan.ru/search?q=%D0%9C%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%BB%D0%BE%D1%88+%D0%9A%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B8>



- Potentially of additional interest is the YouTube account that first shared the viral naturalisation video in question – "Konstantin".⁶⁹
 - It has posted only three videos across its four active years: a short clip of Aleksandr Zakharchenko in 2017 (322 views), the passport video (271k views) in 2018, and a video detailing the "Story of Russian Agent Stanislav Krasnov" in 2021 (1,220 views).
 - The videos of Zakhachenko and Krasnov present an anti-Russian stance in the context of the Donbas war. The Hungarian passport video may further the idea of this account wanting to promote a Ukrainian nationalist agenda, but the small number of videos spread out over so long stands out as in need of further investigation where possible. Whether the source is a pro-Kremlin or Ukrainian nationalist agitator, it is clearly seeking to heighten perceptions of Hungarians undermining of Ukrainian stability and unity, to inflame tensions between the communities and to provoke a high level spat between governments.
- This is again a possible example either of Kremlin-linked instigation of an escalation in a simmering ethnic tensions issue, or of Kremlin exploitation of vulnerabilities thanks to activity in which it had no hand. The answer to this is likely found in the true intentions of the initial poster of the video in questions, something into which we may never have insight, but at face value would suggest the latter option.
- Either way, the identification of Miklos Kevehazy as a so-called Ukraine expert on Russian state media is reason additional research in order to identify the extent of his deployment and any connections he has to networks in Hungary or Ukraine.

Orthodox Easter 2021

Anti-Hungarian banners, written in broken Ukrainian and reported by the SBU to have been installed by Kremlin-paid individuals from Luhansk, appeared in Berehove, Zakarpattia Oblast, Ukraine, on Orthodox Easter, 2021. Several similar anonymous attempts to incite anti-Hungarian hatred, or create a fear of it, had been recorded in the preceding months.

- On 2 May 2021, Orthodox Easter Sunday, anti-Hungarian banners appeared in Berehove, Ukraine. According to the poster, Hungarians were given one week to "leave Ukrainian land", otherwise they would be "poisoned like rats".⁷⁰
- According to the Ukrainian Security Service, three people, two of them from Luhansk, were sent to several locations in the Zakarpattia Oblast city on orders from Russia-linked actors and paid a sum equivalent to \$500.⁷¹

⁶⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCi8K4yprnSvpQqKZkyXP7Ew>

⁷⁰

http://podiji.karpat.in.ua/?p=46326&fbclid=IwAR3QIMJFFKeQzqWLTlm3C9VTgYsfxo95ME6_hU3FDiV58MDIVVM_8MjGCqA&lang=hu

⁷¹ <https://ssu.gov.ua/novyny/sbu-vykryla-zlochyntsyv-yaki-poshyriuvaly-antyyuhorski-lystivky-na-zakarpatti>

- During the investigation, the Ukrainian authorities also seized several Russian symbols and "other material evidence of illegal activity", but provided no clarification or further evidence for the claim of Kremlin influence behind the activity.
- Pro-government Hungarian media picked up on the events, with reporting in Pesti Sracok⁷², Madiner⁷³, and Origo⁷⁴, as well as some government-supported Hungarian media in Zakarpattia.
- Independent Hungarian media, such as Telex⁷⁵, Nepszava⁷⁶, and 24.hu⁷⁷ also reported on the event.
- On several occasions in the past, Hungarians in Zakarpattia and their organisations, as well as Hungarian diplomatic missions in the region, have received threatening messages.
- Other examples of anti-Hungarian graffiti have previously appeared, for example, in Pyiterfolvo in December 2020⁷⁸ and in Siurte in February 2021⁷⁹ (both towns in Zakarpattia).
 - The incidents happened after the Ukrainian Security Service had opened criminal proceedings on charges of treason and other charges against local representatives of the Zakarpattian settlement of Siurte for singing the Hungarian national anthem at the inaugural session of the local council.⁸⁰ The criminal proceedings started another diplomatic back and forth between Hungary and Ukraine.
- On 20 August 2020, a Hungarian national holiday, several Hungarian organisations received a threatening letter saying: *"We will start sabotaging and launching attacks on your towns, villages and schools until the ideology of creating a Hungarian district is abolished."*^{81 82}
 - The threats appear to have been aimed at intimidating and antagonizing the Hungarian minority in Zakarpattia before the Ukrainian local elections in late October of that year. Recipients of the letter included cultural, political, religious, and charitable organisations supported by the Bethlen Gabor Fund, the Consulate General of Hungary in Berehove and Uzhhorod and the Municipal Council of Vynohradiv, a town in Zakarpattia with a significant history as a majority Hungarian town with a still substantial Hungarian minority today.

⁷² <https://pestisracok.hu/magyarellenes-plakatok-jelentek-meg-beregszaszon/>

⁷³ https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20210503_kulfold_beregszasz_magyarelleneseg_plakat

⁷⁴ <https://www.origo.hu/nagyvilag/20210503-magyarellenes-falragaszok-jelentek-meg-a-karpataljai-beregszaszon.html>

⁷⁵ <https://telex.hu/kulfold/2021/05/03/beregszasz-magyarellenes-falragasz-ortodox-husvet>

⁷⁶ https://nepszava.hu/3119179_megmergezik-a-magyarokat-akar-a-patkanyokat-orosz-megbizo-fenyegetett-karpataljan

⁷⁷ <https://24.hu/kulfold/2021/05/09/orosz-megrendeles-ukrajna-provokacio-beregszasz-magyarok/>

⁷⁸ <https://karpatalja.ma/karpatalja/kozelet/eljovunk-ertetek-magyarellenes-graffiti-peterfalvan/>

⁷⁹ <https://karpatalja.ma/karpatalja/kozelet/provokaciokra-imaval-valaszoltak-szurteben/>

⁸⁰ <https://ukranews.com/ua/news/744285-gimn-ugorshhyny-na-zakarpatti-sbu-vidkrylo-spravu-pro-derzhradu>

⁸¹ <https://karpatalja.ma/karpatalja/kozelet/fenyegeto-uzenet-a-nemzeti-unnepen/>

⁸² <https://karpatalja.ma/karpatalja/kozelet/el-ukrajnabol-magyar-kutyak-ujabb-fenyegetest-kapott-a-karpataljai-magyarsag/>

- In late January 2021, several Hungarian organisations, official bodies, and the Hungarian Embassy in Kyiv received letters signed by "Ukrainian patriots", in which unknown persons wrote that "if your Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto goes to Ukraine, we will act. (...) If your minister comes to Ukraine, get ready for a great bloodshed, Hungarian blood will be shed."^{83 84}
- There have clearly been one or several campaigns targeting Hungarian organisations in Ukraine of various kinds with graffiti, banners, and letters. Further investigation is needed to establish whether these campaigns are connected or just similar. While the Ukrainian Security Service has stated to have evidence that the perpetrators of the 2 May 2021 incident were paid by Russian actors, it has not yet publicised the evidence. Once again, this activity successfully provoked reactions from the Ukrainian Government and Hungarian media that escalated discourse around the issue.

Uz Valley cemetery in Romania

A cemetery in Romania that is home to soldiers of multiple nationalities spanning across the two world wars has been the centre of alleged disputes between the Romanian majority and Hungarian minority. Accusations of desecration against the Hungarians were co-opted by local far-right and ultranationalist groups, resulting in rallies in support of Romania's territorial integrity, allegedly under threat, the organisers of which appeared to collaborate with Sputnik's coverage of the final protest.

- The Uz Valley International Fallen Heroes cemetery, which is a final resting place of soldiers of multiple nationalities spanning across the two world wars has become a focal point in an episode of ethnic tensions between Hungarians and Romanians in 2018 and 2019.
- The cemetery is located on the border between the Hungarian minority-dominated Harghita County and the Romanian-dominated Bacau County. The incident appears to have been sparked in 2018 by a decision of the local authorities from Romanian-dominated city of Darmanesti, Bacau, to carry out illegal restoration work on the cemetery, to reportedly exaggerate the number of Romanian soldiers buried there.⁸⁵
 - The exact number of Romanian soldiers buried in the cemetery is uncertain. According to the Romanian National Office for the Commemoration of Heroes (ONCE), an archival record from 1928 states that out of a total of 1,197 graves, only 11 belong to Romanian soldiers.⁸⁶ A record from 1988 contains a sum of Romanian soldiers buried at two separate cemeteries, and that figure stands at 148, which sometimes appears cited in news reports.

⁸³ <https://telex.hu/kulfold/2021/01/27/ukrajna-karpatalja-beregszasz-ungvar-fenyeges-szijasarto>

⁸⁴ <http://podiji.karpat.in.ua/?p=36559&lang=hu>

⁸⁵ <https://transylvanianow.com/uz-valley-the-anatomy-of-a-conflict-part-ii/>

⁸⁶ <https://once.mapn.ro/pages/view/175>

- The reportedly illegal placement of 52 cement crosses by the Darmanesti local authorities led first to a contention with the authorities in Sanmartin, Harghita, that further escalated into an open conflict fuelled by both Romanian and Hungarian extremists.
 - The first spark happened on 16 May 2019, when the newly placed crosses of Romanian soldiers were covered in plastic garbage bags by a group of unknown individuals. A Romanian media investigation reported that the act was committed by a group of ethnic Hungarians, who were voicing their dissatisfaction with the perceived inaction on the side of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR). One of the participants expressed regret over not translating the manifesto of the action into Romanian in time and denied that the action meant to desecrate graves.⁸⁷
 - However, the act was reported as a provocation by both Romanian⁸⁸ and Hungarian language⁸⁹ media, and the tensions escalated on social media from harsh rhetoric (on both sides) to a "call to arms" (on the Romanian side).
 - One of the potential causes of the incident is that the crosses were reportedly placed over the graves of soldiers of other nationalities, and not simply Romanians, which led Hunor Kelemen, leader of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania, file a complaint with the Bacau Country prefect⁹⁰ and to ask Romanian Prime Minister Dancila to intervene on the matter.⁹¹
- As a consequence of the garbage bag incident, the local authorities of Sanmartin decided to close the cemetery to the public until the legal status of the works done by Darmanesti authorities is settled. But, on 5 June they have decided to open it during the visit by the Hungarian Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjen⁹², and close it down again for Romanian visitors who announced their intentions to participate in a commemoration ceremony on National Heroes' Day the following day.
- During that holiday on 6 June, a group of angry Romanian nationalists and far-right sympathisers organised a march to the cemetery where they confronted a group of ethnic Hungarians who tried to stop them from entering the premises. Taking advantage of the apathy manifested by the Gendarmerie forces, and by the disproportion of numbers in relation to the Hungarians trying to "defend" the cemetery, Romanians forced their way in.⁹³

⁸⁷ <https://pressone.ro/o-serie-de-evenimente-nefericite-cum-au-ajuns-la-violenta-romanii-si-maghiarii-in-valea-uzului>

⁸⁸ <https://a1.ro/news/social/ungurii-au-acoperit-cu-saci-de-gunoi-crucile-eroilor-romani-din-cimitirul-valea-uzului-sunt-amplasate-ilegal-id867230.html>

⁸⁹ <https://szekelyhon.ro/aktualis/uzvolgye-provokacioval-valaszolt-a-provokaciora-a-roman-fel-osszetuzes-lett-a-vege#>

⁹⁰ <https://www.cotidianul.ro/udmr-cere-interventia-autoritatilor-in-cazul-cimitirului-valea-uzului/>

⁹¹ <https://www.mediafax.ro/social/cimitirul-eroilor-de-pe-valea-uzului-pentru-care-udmr-ceruse-interventia-premierului-dancila-tine-de-judetul-bacau-anuntul-autoritatilor-18117931>

⁹² <https://hungarytoday.hu/semjen-visit-uzvolgye-military-cemetery-romania-dead/>

⁹³ <https://www.cancan.ro/adevarul-despre-evenimentele-de-la-cimitirul-international-al-eroilor-din-valea-uzului-20002825>

- Apart from the destruction of the entrance gates⁹⁴, the incident ended up with surprisingly few violent incidents and no victims, but with a full display of hate rhetoric against the Hungarian minority. Once again, all stereotypes regarding Hungarian minority – from the alleged lack of interest in acting like Romanian citizens, to accusations of acting on a revisionist agenda originating in Budapest – were repackaged and delivered to an audience of far-right and ultra-religious elements.
- The outcome was marked as a victory against Hungarians' alleged attempts to undermine Romania's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and the Uz Valley became a symbol for ultra-nationalists and far-right supporters.
 - Far right and nationalist media, such as Activenews.ro⁹⁵, rostonline.ro⁹⁶, and buciumul.ro⁹⁷ were the most active outlets most active ones extensively covering the incidents and publishing opinion articles on the matter.
 - Far right and nationalist social media accounts and public pages were perhaps the most active in blowing out of proportion the "subversive" actions of the Hungarian minority representatives, and then "the epic victory" of "true Romanians" against revisionist Hungarians.
- Key figures involved in organising and participating in the 6 June rally include:
 - Fratia Ortodoxa "Sfantul Mare Mucenic Gheorghe, purtatorul de biruinta"⁹⁸ (the Orthodox Brotherhood of St. George, the Great Martyr, the Bearer of Glory), a far-right, ultra-Orthodox organisation led by Ciprian Grajdeanu.⁹⁹
 - It is a religious NGO, aiming to unite those individuals "who have the love of God, Nation and Country" as their core values. The entity claims¹⁰⁰ its origins in the teachings of the Orthodox monk Iustin Parvu, a former member of the fascist interbellum party Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail¹⁰¹ (the Legion of the Archangel Michael, later renamed Partidul Total pentru Tara – Everything for the Country party).
 - The organisation has a strong informal connection^{102 103} with AUR party, constantly promoting their political agenda and its leaders.

⁹⁴ <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-23189994-atmosfera-foarte-tensionata-cimitirul-din-valea-uzului-imbranceli-jandarmii-care-separa-grupurile-romani-maghiari.htm>

⁹⁵ <https://www.activenews.ro/stiri-mass-media/Dovada-ca-la-Valea-Uzului-romanii-nu-au-rupt-nicio-cruce-a-maghiarilor.-Demontarea-unei-calomnii-VIDEO-156343>

⁹⁶ <https://www.rostonline.ro/2019/06/evenimentele-de-la-valea-uzului-un-avertisment-pentru-statul-roman/>

⁹⁷ <https://www.buciumul.ro/?s=valea+uzului>

⁹⁸ <https://www.mediafax.ro/stirile-zilei/valea-uzului-locul-in-care-romanii-si-ungurii-umar-la-umar-au-dezgropat-conflictul-video-18162093>

⁹⁹ <https://mesageruldecovasna.ro/proiectul-romani-pentru-romani-solidaritate-cu-romanii-din-judetele-covasna-harghita-si-mures-16/>

¹⁰⁰ <https://fratiaortodoxa.org/>

¹⁰¹ <https://www.zf.ro/business-international/cum-au-ajuns-zelea-codreanu-si-parintele-iustin-parvu-ideologii-miscarilor-rasiale-din-statele-unite-16696049>

¹⁰² <https://newsweek.ro/politica/partidul-aur-si-george-simion-susutnuti-de-grupul-fratia-ortodoxa-care-are-70-mii-de-adepti>

¹⁰³ <https://www.facebook.com/jnepiisfantulugheorghe/posts/4746665598706365>



- Claudiu Tarziu, co-leader of AUR known for his far-right discourse and convictions¹⁰⁴, published a very positive interview with the leader of the Legion Ciprian Grajdeanu.¹⁰⁵ Tarziu's spouse is nee Grajdeanu¹⁰⁶, but it is not clear if the matching surname is anything more than a coincidence.
 - George Simion¹⁰⁷, the co-leader of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), a far-right political group that became a parliamentary party in 2020.
 - Amfilohie Branza¹⁰⁸, an Orthodox priest known for his far-right beliefs.¹⁰⁹
 - Branza, just like Grajdeanu, is a disciple of Iustin Parvu.¹¹⁰
 - The far-right group Asociatia Calea Neamului (The Path of the Nation Association), and its leader Mihai Tarnoveanu.¹¹¹
 - Mihai Tarnoveanu and Asociatia Calea Neamului are known for their far-right agenda.
 - Tarnoveanu is known for organising a number of public manifestations together with Ciprian Grajdeanu and Amfilohie Branza.¹¹²
 - Interestingly, Tarnoveanu expressed negative opinions¹¹³ with regard to AUR and particularly George Simion.
 - A far-right faction¹¹⁴ of the "Peluza Catalin Hildan"¹¹⁵, a group of far-right football hooligans supporting Dinamo Bucharest.
- Although there is little evidence to suggest a coordinated media campaign or malign influence, the interest shown to the event by the Russian state-controlled outlet Sputnik is worth exploring in greater detail.
- The 6 June incident was covered live by sputnik.md, signalling at least some coordination with some of the organisers. The coverage mimicked the ultra-nationalist, anti-Hungarian tone of the Romanian far-right. The initial article¹¹⁶ gathered more than 30 thousand visits, a high score for the Romanian language branch of the Russian-owned media outlet.

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/claudiu-tarziu-lider-partid-aur-3315204>

¹⁰⁵ <https://claudiutarziu.ro/dan-ciprian-grajdeanu-dragostea-inlatura-orice-bariera/>

¹⁰⁶ <https://ro.linkedin.com/in/adela-ioana-t%C3%A2rziu-gr%C4%83jdeanu-205817111>

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/george.simion.unire/videos/06-iunie-valea-uzului/594972394342589/>

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.g4media.ro/steagurile-noii-drepte-la-ceremonia-de-ziua-eroilor-din-cimitirul-valea-uzului.html>

¹⁰⁹ <https://r3media.ro/pr-amfilohie-predica-electrizanta-nu-cumva-sa-ne-mai-prinda-pastile-cu-bisericile-goale-valuri-valuri-sa-veniti-inviere-fara-popor-si-preot-si-fara-impartasanie-sa-nu-mai-existe/>

¹¹⁰

https://www.deinteres.ro/news/parintele_amfilohie_branza_despre_parintele_justin_parvu_ne_a_schimbat_traistoria_de_viata_cu_180_de_grade/2014-09-27-195

¹¹¹ <https://www.g4media.ro/un-controversat-militant-nationalist-care-a-participat-la-evenimentele-din-valea-uzului-vrea-sa-organizeze-un-mars-pentru-a-celebra-o-suta-de-ani-de-la-intrarea-armatei-romane-in-budapesta.html>

¹¹² <http://www.trezirealarealitate.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/1-decembrie-2017-la-Tg.-Secuiesc-parintele-Amfilohie-Branza-Dan-Ciprian-Grajdeanu-si-Mihai-Tarnoveanu.jpg>

¹¹³ <https://www.napocanews.ro/2021/02/mihai-tarnoveanu-despre-unitate-cat-de-periculoasa-poate-fi-o-unitate-artificiala.html>

¹¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/Bucure%C8%99tiul-Bam-Bam-Bam-688120875385523>

¹¹⁵ <https://www.maszol.ro/index.php/tarsadalom/113419-uzvolgyi-temet-foglalas-azonositottuk-es-megmutatjuk-a-junius-6-ai-ostrom-kivitelez-it>

¹¹⁶ <https://ro.sputnik.md/20190606/LIVE-Scandal-in-Valea-Uzului----patriotii-romani-au-rupt-lacatul-si-au-intrat-cu-forta-26270250.html>

- However, the success appears to have been short lived, as other articles related to the incident and released in the following days gathered less than 2,000 visits.¹¹⁷ An article published by sputnik.md a week later only managed to gather less than 500 visits.¹¹⁸

Samuel von Brukenthal statue in Sibiu, Romania

A statue of a former Austro-Hungarian governor of Sibiu, Romania, was erected and then promptly protested and desecrated because the statue of an ethnic German was claimed to be a symbol of "foreign rulers" who "murdered Romanians". The outcry was quickly co-opted by local far-right organisation that spun the message into a broadly anti-ethnic minority narrative.

- On 11 September 2021, a statue of Samuel von Brukenthal, a former Austro-Hungarian governor of Transylvania, was unveiled in Sibiu the presence of Romania's president Klaus Iohannis (himself an ethnic German and former mayor of Sibiu).
- On 18 September 2021, around 200 people gathered to protest the statue as a symbol of "foreign rulers" who "murdered Romanians" (an unsubstantiated allegation of von Brukenthal's role in suppressing the 1784 Romanian serf uprising).
- Mihai Tarnoveanu, one of the protest organisers, equated the statue with the imposition of foreign will on Romanian territory and with "the cession of historical sovereignty" of Romania. The fact that President Iohannis skipped the official National Anthem Day celebrations but made a speech at the statue unveiling was cited as evidence for his (and his ethnicity's) lack of respect for Romanian values.
- The statue was subsequently desecrated on several occasions with paint and nationalistic/xenophobic banners regularly hung around it.
- Although the protests were organised against the statue of a prominent German ethnic, the chants and slogans were referring in a derogatory way to all ethnic minorities present in Romania. A specific target of the protests was Romanian president Klaus Iohannis, whose German ethnicity was instrumentalised as "a barrier to being a good Romanian".
- The protests received coverage from a number of nationalist, anti-minority and Kremlin-backed media outlets and individuals.
 - Calea Neamului¹¹⁹ is the ultra-nationalist organisation led by Mihai Tarnoveanu, a far-right civic activist and protest organiser.¹²⁰
 - Diana Sosoaca, an anti-liberal populist politician with open sympathies toward Russia. She participated in a Russia's National Day reception at the Russian Embassy in Bucharest on June 2021.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ <https://ro.sputnik.md/incidente-valea-uzului-cimitir/>

¹¹⁸ <https://ro.sputnik.md/analytics/20190613/26386388/Scandalul-Valea-Uzului-Cimitirul-profanat-de-autoritatile-locale-cu-bani-din-Ungaria.html>

¹¹⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/asociatiacaleaneamului/posts/1293108231120032>

¹²⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/Mihai-T%C3%A2rnoveanu-101082589056366>

¹²¹ <https://www.aktual24.ro/sosoaca-invitata-de-onoare-la-ambasada-rusiei-de-ziua-nationala-a-rusiei-ea-si-a-cerut-scuze-rusiei-in-calitate-de-senator-al-romaniei-in-luna-aprilie/>

- Lumina Lina Sibiu¹²², a religious organisation run by Catalin Dumitrean, a priest from Sibiu known for his anti-liberal and ultra-conservative views.¹²³
- Sputnik.md, which published a series of articles on the protest criticising both the statue and President Iohannis.¹²⁴
- Activenews, the primary far-right media outlet in Romania, extensively covered the protests and published several highly critical pieces about the statue.
 - The sites owner, Mihai Somanescu, has described it as providing "indigenous" views to promote the "Christian, Judeo-Christian values of European and Romanian civilization".¹²⁵ It has been extensively criticised for spreading disinformation and stoking ethnic tensions.¹²⁶
- While there is no evidence of a particularly extensive coordinated campaign capitalising on the statue's unveiling, this example highlights the vulnerability of local populations in Romania to being exploited by anti-minority and nationalist organisations and individuals.

Further research - Poland

- In December 2020, Political Capital published research detailing the historical and territorial revisionist narratives used to create tensions between Poland and Ukraine, particularly with regards to the Volhynia Killings, Lviv, and Western Galicia.¹²⁷
- An intensification of tensions around these topics was observed between January 2018 and April 2020 as governments and ruling parties in both countries sought to appeal to far right and nationalist groups in upcoming elections, creating a space for Kremlin influence operations to exacerbate divisions.
- In Poland, these extremist groups were directly targeted with strong anti-Ukrainian narratives, whereas in Ukraine the target audiences were spread more broadly across society and through both fringe and mainstream sources.
- Discourses influenced by Kremlin information operations often centred around national and official commemorations, such as the 75th anniversary of the Volhynia Killings in which Ukrainian troops executed between 40,000¹²⁸ and 60,000¹²⁹ Polish civilians during the Second World War.

¹²² <https://www.facebook.com/LuminaLinaSibiu/videos/574296870284742>

¹²³ <https://www.activenews.ro/stiri/Parintele-Catalin-Dumitrean-din-Sibiu-Am-auzit-ca-duminica-sunt-proteste-anti-vaccinare-obligatorie-Ma-rog-Maicii-Domnului-sa-i-intareasca-pe-cei-ce-au-cuvant-liber-165599>

¹²⁴ <https://ro.sputnik.md/20210912/iohannis-acuzat-ca-jigneste-profund-intreaga-natie-romana-sfidand-o-si-umilind-o-44684690.html>

¹²⁵ <https://www.rferl.org/a/romania-nationalists-xenophobic-parable-bear-poaching/31248097.html>

¹²⁶ <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/fenomenul-fake-news-ce-spun-autorii-site-urilor-considerate-mincinoase-in-romania-685968>

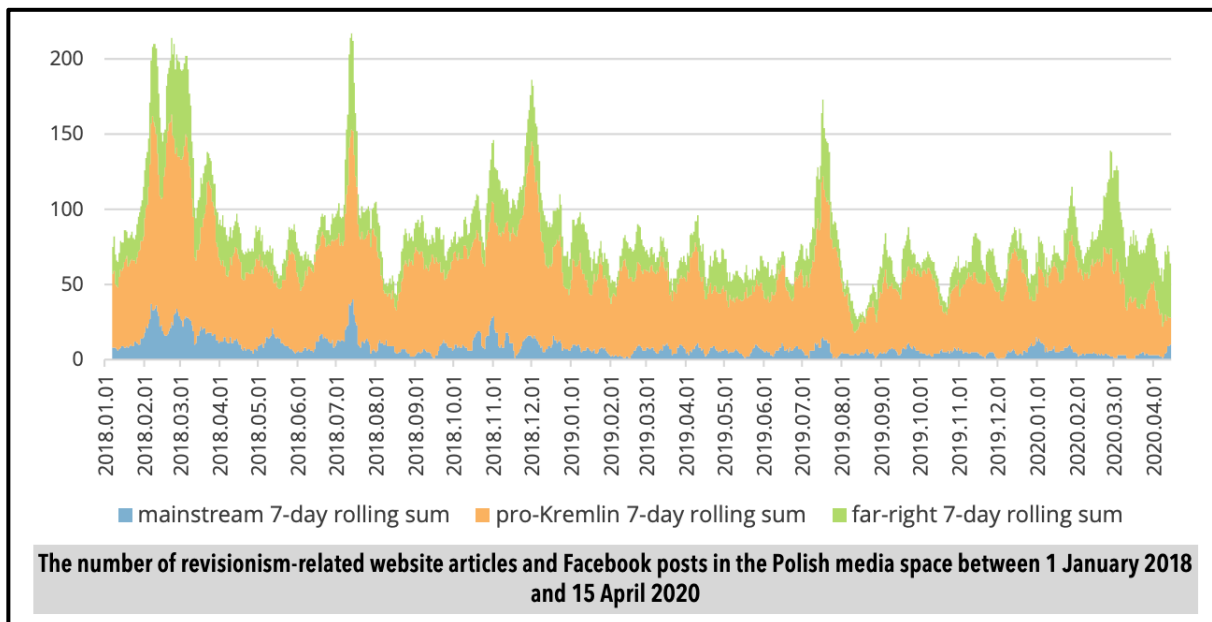
¹²⁷ https://www.politicalcapital.hu/breaking_europe/research_results.php?article_read=1&article_id=2644

¹²⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-23267472>

¹²⁹ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/clash-of-victimhood-1943-volhynian-massacre-in-polish-and-ukrainian-culture/>



- Events such as this provide a perfect opportunity to exploit painful national memories and conflicts in order to ramp up tensions today.
- Disinformation in Poland was often full of hate speech and claims that Ukraine is anti-Polish, a failed state, and under external control. It often came via supposedly "independent" or "patriotic" media, and the Kremlin's anti-NATO, EU and US agenda is echoed in the positions of Polish far-right organisations and paramilitaries, despite the often anti-Russia position simultaneously held by these entities.
- Ethnic tension exploitation strategies were not only utilising a distorted Polish national identity rooted in historical and territorial revisionism and a dismissal of Polish membership in Western structures, but also employed a tight network of fringe Polish-language sites with strong connections to the Polish far-right subculture and only a few to official Kremlin mouthpieces.
 - A clear example of this contradictory dynamic is Bartosz Bekier. Bekier is the editor-in-chief of the pro-Kremlin neoeurasianist media outlets Xportal, which has referred to NATO as a terrorist organisation, while also leading the far-right organisation Falagna, which had members participate in the Anakonda-16 NATO training exercise.¹³⁰
- This targeting of influence actors that emphasise and centre their Polishness with narratives that portray that Polishness as under siege or dismissed echoes patterns seen in Kremlin influence operations' engagement with Hungarian minority issues in Ukraine.
- The below chart from Political Capital's study demonstrates that Kremlin, far-right and mainstream media coverage of revisionism-related topics peak almost simultaneously:¹³¹



¹³⁰ https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_summary_analysis_EN_20170428.pdf

¹³¹ https://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/zinc_revisionism_country_report_pl.pdf

- A sample of 307 articles was taken from all media types across this period, of which 46% promoted the narrative that Ukraine is anti-Polish or glorifies the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, a civil-military group that attacked Polish settlements during the Second World War; 20% claimed that Lviv is Polish, 14% referenced the Volhynia Killings, 12% to Ukraine's opposition to the 2018 amendments to the law on the Institute of National Remembrance, and 8% to Ukraine as a failed state, with the final example largely seen on far-right or pro-Kremlin channels.
- This activity demonstrates that the Kremlin is able to exercise malign influence through local national or cultural organisations, even when the positions held by those entities would initially appear to be in conflict with typical pro-Kremlin policies, by exploiting existing tensions or pressure points among the population.

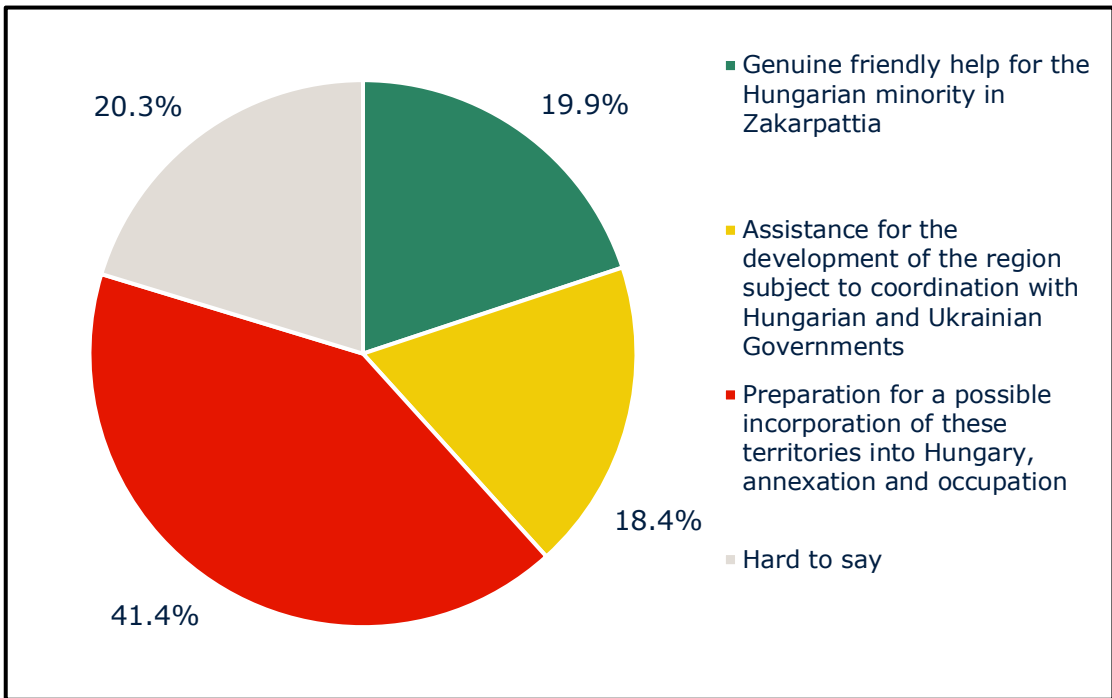
ICES Opinion Polling in Ukraine

- The Institute for Central European Strategy commissioned an opinion poll across the government-controlled territory of Ukraine that ran from 22 October to 12 November 2021 and evaluated attitudes regarding Ukraine as part of Central Europe.¹³²
- One of the questions asked for people's opinions on Hungarian policy toward the Hungarian minority in Zakarpattia Oblast, namely "funding schools, teachers, issuing grants to entrepreneurs."¹³³ The results were:

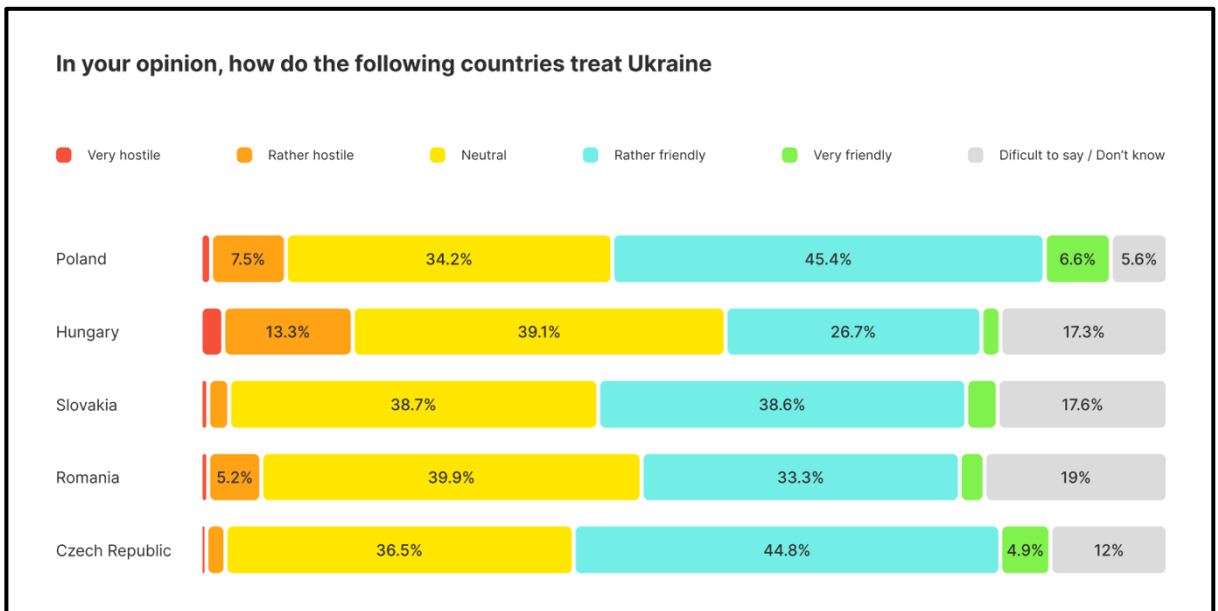
Chart 1: Ukraine-wide survey on opinions of Hungarian policies toward the Hungarian minority in Zakarpattia (2021)

¹³² <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FGgPkMzbordof4VYYbRVQJiJO3xSz3mY/view>

¹³³ <https://infopost.media/yak-rosiya-znovu-vygaduye-zagrozu-vijskovogo-zitknennya-mizh-ukrayinoyu-ta-ugorshhynoyu/>



- The data highlights Ukraine-wide views on the dynamic with Hungary and the Hungarian minority in Zakarpattia, with markedly higher perception that Hungary treats Ukraine with hostility than other comparable countries and 41.4% of respondents believing that the Hungarian Government’s policies supporting the Hungarian minority in Zakarpattia are preparation for possible occupation or annexation.

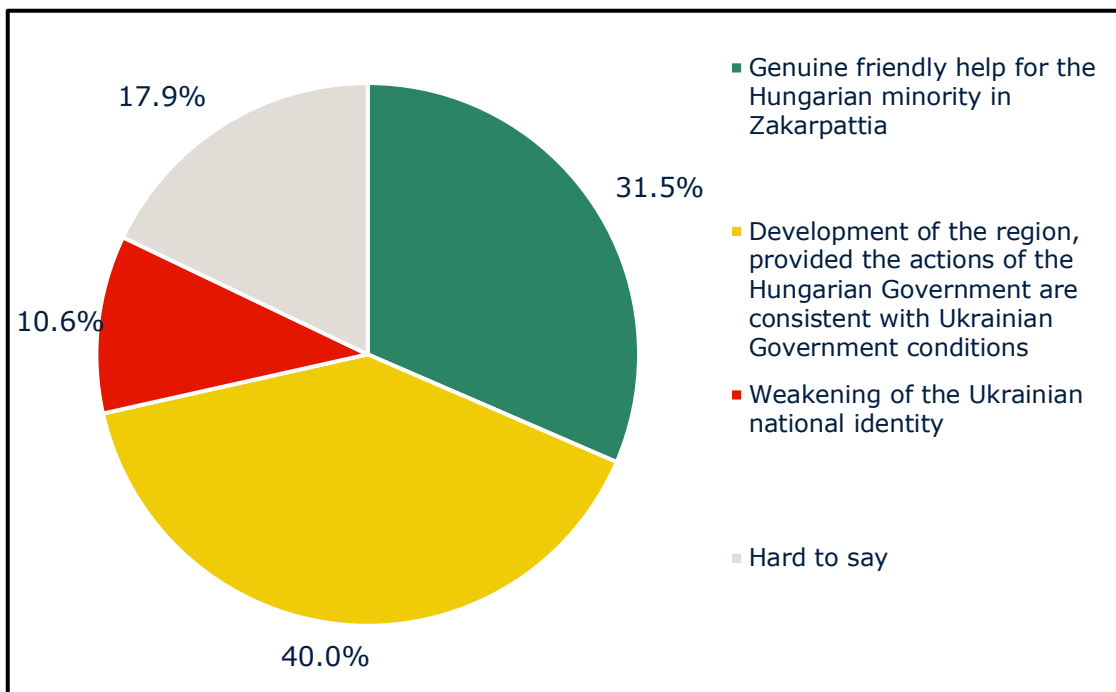


- ICES argues that such fears on the part of Ukrainian residents are irrational, due to the fact that Hungary is a NATO member state and Ukraine aspires to be one. As stated in an official NATO text called "Study of NATO Enlargement" dated September 1995, any prospective

members at the time were expected to demonstrate "a commitment to and respect for OSCE norms and principles, including the resolution of ethnic disputes, external territorial disputes including irredentist claims or internal jurisdictional disputes by peaceful means."¹³⁴ At the same time, any hypothetical attack of Ukraine against a NATO member state is likely to lead to Hungary triggering Article 5, which would mean that Ukraine would be up against its allies.

- ICES also cites a different 2020 survey (also conducted by them in Zakarpattia Oblast), which indicates that the residents of Zakarpattia itself do not see any threats to the region from Hungary.

Chart 2: Zakarpattia-only survey on opinions of Hungarian policies toward the Hungarian minority in Zakarpattia (2020)



Conclusions

- While further research is necessary in order to build a complete picture of the tactics and strategy employed by hostile states in exploiting ethnic tensions in Central and Eastern Europe, the research conducted so far illustrates a strategy of opportunistic, exploitative events, with often vague or inconclusive attribution, and alignment of media activity across not just coordinated networks but multiple stakeholders, primarily Russia and Hungary.

¹³⁴ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm

- There are three state actors involved in Zakarpattia Oblast, Ukraine, the area most frequently examined in this research: Ukraine, Hungary, and Russia. Hungary and Russia are often deliberately stoking tensions and exercising malign influence, and therefore it is Ukrainian institutions, which rarely deliberately raise tensions, that can most productively be worked with and for which the behaviour can most effectively be addressed.
- The response from various branches of government to these incidents are often extreme, uncoordinated, inflammatory, undermined by comments from fringe politicians, and falling into traps left by hostile actors.
- A more coordinated, proportionate and considered approach may help to ease escalation in the aftermath of these incidents and should be coupled with strengthened community resilience. This approach will necessitate working with the government but also civil society, particularly the media, in order to build resilience through responsible reporting practices on sensitive topics and an understanding of Kremlin-backed narratives as they develop and spread.
- This approach is applicable beyond the Hungarian minority in Ukraine and Zakarpattia and should be implemented with all minority ethnic groups and neighbouring states, particularly Romania, as highlighted by case studies above, and Poland, as demonstrated by Political Capital's additional research.
- Institute for Central European Strategy's (ICES) polling demonstrates that there is minimal concern over the idea of annexation and ethnic tension for locals in Zakarpattia. In Ukraine, these issues are primarily the concern of those outside the region in question, highlighting that these sentiments are not closely tied to on-the-ground realities.

Next Steps

- These findings demonstrate that further research is necessary in order to build a complete picture of the tactics and strategy employed by hostile states in exploiting ethnic tensions in Central and Eastern Europe; these initial insights highlight several opportunities.
- We could evaluate baseline sentiments toward several ethnic minorities in Ukraine in more detail, in order to establish vulnerabilities that can be exploited in the local attitudes. By aggregating these vulnerabilities across several ethnic groups that can be exploited in the same way (portraying Ukraine as a confrontational neighbour that does not respect minorities from those countries on its territory) the issue becomes a security challenge, particularly considering the recent escalation in tensions around the Donbas, which demands the attention of the Ukrainian Government and potentially NATO allies; while Budapest attempting to annex Zakarpattia is extremely unlikely, increased domestic fear of federalisation is a genuine reality and so engaging with these issues now in a preventative capacity safeguards against future crises.
- This point could be further reinforced by a comparative analysis of ethnic tension-related disinformation used in the build-up to the 2014 annexation of Crimea and occupation of the



Donbas, and examples seen in other parts of the country. This would provide a framework for identifying potential warning signs of escalation.

- Given the role of far-right paramilitary organisations in the Kremlin's influence strategy across Central and Eastern Europe, it may also be useful to consider these connections and collaborative entities such as training camps in the context of ethnic tensions, particularly in Hungary where the government has previously knowingly allowed this activity to occur unimpeded, as these relationships pose a more immediate threat to Ukraine's national security.
- There are a range of other soft strategic policy initiatives that can also be considered, such as increased investment in areas with significant minority populations, direct support to minority initiatives and infrastructure, and researching and addressing minority grievances.
- Cooperation between Ukrainian civil society and media and those of its neighbours with minority populations in Ukraine should also be improved, including joint reporting, information sharing and cooperation between regional authorities; however, this should not replace attempts to engage with the issue at a policymaker level as a national security concern.

Annex: "Germanization" of Kaliningrad

Introduction

- A similar case of exploitation of a perceived threat from neighbouring countries can be seen in Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast since at least 2016.
- There has been an active campaign conducted by pro-Kremlin and Russian state media against the perceived "germanization" of the region, allegedly conducted by German-supported NGO's, local intelligentsia, and even Germany itself. The campaign does not seem to target Russian Germans as an ethnic minority, but rather the perceived expressions of "germanization," such as German language signage on businesses on the streets of Kaliningrad or expressing support for opposition politicians will real or manufactured German links or sympathies.
- As of 2021 the issue appears to be still present and extends beyond threats originating allegedly from Germany, but also from Poland, Lithuania, and the West more broadly. The Russian authorities at first viewed such reporting as nonsense, but by 2021 the matter appears to have reached the attention of the Russian Foreign Ministry, with minister Sergey Lavrov seemingly accepting reports of this perceived threat to the region as true.

Key actor – Andrey Vypolzov

- Kaliningrad-based journalist Andrey Vypolzov appears to be a key persona pertaining to various stories of "germanization" in the region.
- Vypolzov is a former chief editor of NewsBalt, a pro-Kremlin website based in Kaliningrad that closed in March 2021¹³⁵, and of the Kaliningrad office of Regnum.¹³⁶
 - Right up to NewsBalt's closure in 2021, the outlet published a notable number of articles dedicated to the perceived "germanization" of Kaliningrad. One of the last articles published on the website suggested that Kaliningrad Oblast Governor Anton Alikhanov was susceptible to German influence¹³⁷ (the article was a republication from another outlet and not authored by Vypolzov himself).
- In 2018 he appears to have moved over to EurAsia Daily, another known pro-Kremlin outlet.¹³⁸
 - Both of these outlets are known for their connections to the Russian Presidential Directorate for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and Russian intelligence services. Mikhail Khodorkovskiy's Dossier Center reported how both Regnum and EurAsia Daily were involved in the promotion of the Alliance of

¹³⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/newsbalt/posts/3761058317313757>

¹³⁶ https://web.archive.org/web/20180622032821/https://regnum.ru/analytics/author/andrey_vypolzov.html

¹³⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20210303064416/https://newsbalt.ru/reviews/2021/03/ot-koli-iz-urengoya-do-ivanova-tevtonskogo/>

¹³⁸ <https://easaily.com/ru/author/andrey-vypolzov>

Patriots party in Georgia, which was receiving support from the Presidential Directorate; the Directorate itself contains staffers from the Russian intelligence services.¹³⁹

- During his tenure as Regnum Kaliningrad chief editor, Vypolzov has written several reports expressing concern over alleged "germanization" of Kaliningrad oblast, such as German-themed souvenirs being sold on the streets¹⁴⁰ or the negative reaction of the Russian intelligentsia over refusal of Kaliningrad authorities to rebuild the Königsberg castle, which was heavily damaged during the Second World War and subsequently demolished by Soviet authorities in 1967.^{141 142}
- According to a Russian independent media portal MediaZona¹⁴³, Vypolzov used to be a liberal-minded journalist.
 - This fact is corroborated by earlier video reports seen on Vypolzov's YouTube account. A video from 2013 focused on issues with the reconstruction of the German General Consulate in Kaliningrad (alleging inappropriate practices from a company run by a son of a local official).¹⁴⁴
 - MediaZona's Oleg Zurman writes that Vypolzov's political opinions changed after the Russian annexation of Crimea. The article contains a quote from Vypolzov stating that his NewsBalt website is designed to be "one of the bullhorns in case of serious geopolitical events around Kaliningrad Oblast. Like NewsFront in the Donbas."
- MediaZona also contains a reference to how Vypolzov admitted to making up at least some elements of a story.
 - A Russian portal called Klops contains a statement from Vypolzov on how he once sought to find Russian President Putin's "mother-in-law" and how by his own account he was telling "various poppycock" to his colleagues from the BBC and CNN, who then reportedly published his account as a genuine story.¹⁴⁵
- A key ally of Vypolzov in airing claims of "germanization" is Nikolay Dolgachev, who was the head of the Kaliningrad State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (GTRK) between 2016 and 2018.^{146 147} Kaliningrad GTRK is part of the All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK). It was during his tenure that Russian television released several "expose" documentaries portraying a perceived "germanization" threat in the region.
- Vypolzov also appears to have some sort of a relationship with the GTRK.

¹³⁹ <https://dossier.center/georgia/>

¹⁴⁰ <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2270523.html>

¹⁴¹ <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2252643.html>

¹⁴² <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2326377.html>

¹⁴³ <https://zona.media/article/2020/06/02/vypolzov>

¹⁴⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9t2BRy7p_Y

¹⁴⁵ <https://special.klops.ru/story1>

¹⁴⁶ <https://zona.media/article/2020/06/02/vypolzov>

¹⁴⁷ <https://www.newkaliningrad.ru/news/community/15280621-oblizyvanie-nemetskogo-kak-kaliningradskie-smi-borolis-s-germanizatsiey.html>

- On at least one occasion his phone number was used in a Kaliningrad GTRK publication asking for viewers of a football match to get in touch to take part in an unnamed television program.¹⁴⁸
- Vypolzov either filmed footage that was eventually given to VGTRK, or he received footage filmed by VGTRK to be released on his YouTube channel; on at least one occasion a clip posted on Vypolzov's channel featured identical footage to some shown on Rossiya-1, with slight differences in lighting or colour grading and lack of Rossiya-1 branding.

Campaign against the German-Russian house

- The German-Russian house in Kaliningrad was a cultural institution established in the early 1990s.¹⁴⁹ When it was dissolved in 2017 it was headed by a Viktor Gofman.
- In the mid-2010s the institution attracted the attention of the Russian authorities due to its "foreign funding", namely RUB 1.4 million from the German Society for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) and RUB 6,500 from the Latvian consulate.¹⁵⁰
- The NGO was also accused by Russian authorities of conducting "political activity", such as:
 - Hosting former German cultural attaché Daniel Lissner in 2014 (who criticized Russian foreign policy during the event),
 - Gofman being personally politically active in the All-Russia People's Front (ONF, a pro-United Russia organization), including participating at an "anti-fascist" rally as an ONF activist, with the argument being political activism in general as the problem.
 - A magazine from 2014 which referred to the Russian annexation of Crimea as "annexation" rather than "voluntary".
 - And taking part in the placement of a model of the Koenigsberg castle in 2012 which contained a plaque mentioning a German poet Agnes Miegel, a former resident of German-era Koenigsberg (Kaliningrad), but also known for her support of the Nazi party.
- Kaliningrad nationalist group Baltic Vanguard of Russian Resistance (BARS) participated in an event hosted by the German-Russian house in 2016. According to Gofman, the NGO did not invite the group to the event.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ <https://kaliningrad.bezformata.com/listnews/gtrk-kaliningrad-predlagaet-bolelshikam/65030495/>

¹⁴⁹ <https://www.dw.com/ru/%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%86%D0%BA%D0%BE-%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9-%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BC-%D0%B2-%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B5/a-576072>

¹⁵⁰ <https://rugrad.eu/interview/940043/>

¹⁵¹ <https://rugrad.eu/interview/940043/>

- BARS are accused of seeking secession from Russia and Kaliningrad's existence as an independent EU state.¹⁵²
- These points were brought up in at least two "expose" reports, one from Kaliningrad GTRK¹⁵³, and another one aired on Rossiya-24 television.¹⁵⁴ The NGO was also included on the "foreign agents" list.
- "Kenigsberg.Vyvikh", the first example, is a "special report" aired by Kaliningrad GTRK in March 2017. It was hosted by then-head of the GTRK Nikolay Dolgachev, ally of Vypolzov. The report also focused on Aleksandr Orshulevich, described as leader of the Baltic Vanguard of Russian Resistance (BARS) nationalist group. The report mentioned that Orshulevich was a student at the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University and that he was on trial for "extremism". BARS allegedly maintained contacts with "Ukrainian nationalists."
 - According to Novyy Kaliningrad, Orshulevich is also a former activist of the Nashi pro-Kremlin movement.¹⁵⁵
 - Uwe Niemeier, a Kaliningrad-based blogger, interviewed Orshulevich and during that interview Orshulevich denied that he sees Kaliningrad as a non-Russian entity.¹⁵⁶
 - Niemeier is a former East German National People's Army (NVA) servicemember¹⁵⁷, reportedly reaching the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.¹⁵⁸
 - He is the editor of an obscure German language portal Kaliningrad Domizil, which actively promotes Kremlin narratives in German.¹⁵⁹
 - He also appears to be an associate of Vypolzov. Vypolzov recorded a video of Niemeier receiving Russian citizenship¹⁶⁰, and even took Niemeier on a visit to his family village in Kurgan Oblast¹⁶¹ (Niemeier was officially invited to visit Kurgan Oblast by State Duma deputy Aleksandr Ilyakov¹⁶²).
 - According to a news portal aimed at Russian Germans, Niemeier's interview with Orshulevich appears to have been used by the Russian Federal Security Service in a case against Orshulevich, claiming that his group wanted to make Kaliningrad Oblast join the European Union.^{163 164}

¹⁵² https://memohrc.org/en/news_old/three-persons-charged-case-baltic-vanguard-russian-resistance-bars-are-political-prisoners

¹⁵³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZgA_hj_Ve4

¹⁵⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MGBm_QyP1oo

¹⁵⁵ <https://www.newkaliningrad.ru/news/community/23614005-fsb-prot...los-delo-o-terroristicheskomo-soobshchestve-v-kaliningrade.html>

¹⁵⁶ <http://kaliningrad-domizil.ru/portal/archiv-altportal/politik-...interview-mit-dem-leiter-der-organisation-bars-in-kaliningrad/>

¹⁵⁷ <https://www.kaliningrad.kp.ru/daily/26181/3070618/>

¹⁵⁸ <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2020/11/26/v-kaliningrade-chetyryohsortnyy-nemec-stal-grazhdaninom-rossii>

¹⁵⁹ <http://kaliningrad-domizil.ru/>

¹⁶⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gnQF5HAV474>

¹⁶¹ <https://polovinnoe.ru/interaktiv/narvesti/140-priklyucheniya-nemtsa-uve-v-polovinke.html>

¹⁶² <https://ura.news/news/1052479224>

¹⁶³ <http://rd-zeitung.eu/ru/fall-bars-in-kaliningrad-und-repressionen-gegen-russlanddeutschen/>

¹⁶⁴ <https://zona.media/article/2017/12/18/bars>

- Thus the participation of BARS at the event was strongly used against the German-Russian house to discredit the organisation.
- The report also detailed the "foreign" connection to the German-Russian house, via alleged funding from a group of "German revanchists." The report contained a recorded telephone conversation between Gofman and Gisela Peitsch, head of a foundation set up to help Germans living in the territories of former East Prussia.¹⁶⁵ ¹⁶⁶ In the recording, Gofman appeared to ask Peitsch to hide documents showing Peitsch's investments into Kaliningrad. It is that connection to Peitsch that Russian television referred to as a connection to German "revanchists," claiming that Gofman received funding for the "propaganda of fascism."
- German-Russian House was repeatedly attacked by pro-Kremlin media for allegedly seeking to create memorials to "Nazi criminals" in Kaliningrad and that the activity of the organisation led to an increase in activity of "not only German diplomats, but also their American partners in NATO",¹⁶⁷ possibly seeking to heighten the perceived external threat to the region.
- The German-Russian House led by Gofman ceased to exist in 2017 and its property was taken over by a Russian German cultural centre, which was created with the help of the Russian Government.¹⁶⁸ Prior to its closure, the Kaliningrad-based German-Russian House was not part of this entity.

Focus on the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University

- In September 2017, Russian state television channel Rossiya-24 published a news report claiming that staff at the Immanuel Kant university in Kaliningrad, and specifically lecturer Anna Alimpiyeva, "actively support and laud the so-called non-systemic [Russian] opposition", "propagandize homosexuality", and "hint" that Kaliningrad Oblast should allegedly secede from Russia.¹⁶⁹
- The basis of this report was an anonymous letter¹⁷⁰ received by NewsBalt, Vypolzov's portal.
 - In an interview with Novaya Gazeta in 2018, Alimpiyeva, who was subsequently removed from her lecturing position at the university following this incident, states that the letter could not have been submitted by a student due to grammatical

¹⁶⁵ https://archiv.preussische-allgemeine.de/1997/1997_05_03_18.pdf

¹⁶⁶ https://www.webarchiv-server.de/pin/archiv01/51_52_01ob42.htm

¹⁶⁷ <https://www.newkaliningrad.ru/news/community/15280621-oblizyvanie-nemetskogo-kak-kaliningradskie-smi-borolis-s-germanizatsiey.html>

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.newkaliningrad.ru/news/briefs/community/15174047-v-kaliningrade-ofitsialno-otkrylsyanovyy-kulturno-delovoy-tsentr-rossiyskikh-nemtsev.html>

¹⁶⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9N_qLBcdNYc&t=2538s

¹⁷⁰ <https://web.archive.org/web/20210226151258/http://newsbalt.ru/analytics/2017/09/nuzhna-li-kaliningradcam-opeka-moskvy/>

errors and the terminology used. She also states that the letter targeted the leadership of the university and she was merely a useful target.¹⁷¹

- In a statement to MediaZona, Vypolzov reportedly said that he did not verify the veracity of the anonymous letter but decided to make it public anyway.¹⁷²

Additional examples of "germanization"

- A summary article by Novyy Kaliningrad contains additional examples of perceived "germanization," some of which include Dolgachev and Vypolzov:
 - alleged negative impact of exchange programs with Germany, citing allegations of abuse received by a Russian participant in Germany¹⁷³ or claims that youth is being recruited to work for German intelligence¹⁷⁴,
 - criticism of a poster at the Latvian consulate¹⁷⁵ depicting a medieval Latvian traditional costume featuring a pre-Nazi swastika,¹⁷⁶ which in the eyes of unnamed Second World War veterans was nevertheless seen as offensive.¹⁷⁷ This incident was tied into criticism of the German-Russian house (described above).
- An article written by Vladimir Shulgin, former lecturer at the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University known for his claims of "separatist" tendencies in Kaliningrad¹⁷⁸, claims that since the late 1980s Germany has been conducting a "new type of imperial policy" allegedly aimed at influencing the education, culture, and media in Kaliningrad Oblast. He claims that such actions are allegedly organised by the West as a whole, but that Germany does this due to its own "revanchist" intentions for the region and is trying to turn the Russians into Germans.¹⁷⁹

Reaction of Russian authorities to claims of "germanization"

- It appears that when the first notable reports on "germanization" of Kaliningrad surfaced in 2016, the Russian authorities were officially sceptical of such claims.
 - In June 2016, in response to the media reporting on the German-Russian House, the representation of the Russian Foreign Ministry in Kaliningrad viewed speculation on the topic as "provocative," added that they publish "insulting and false information" by claiming that German diplomats and the German-Russian House are conducting intelligence activities. The release went on to add: "Such

¹⁷¹ <https://novyagazeta.ru/articles/2018/10/04/78062-derevya-rubyat-donosy-letyat>

¹⁷² <https://zona.media/article/2020/06/02/vypolzov>

¹⁷³ <https://web.archive.org/web/20170426131808/https://exclav.ru/sobyitiya/oblast/otdyih-po-obmenu-v-germanii-obernulsya-koshmarom-dlya-rossiyskih-shko.html>

¹⁷⁴ <https://rugrad.eu/interview/894077/>

¹⁷⁵ https://www.latvia.eu/sites/default/files/styles/large/public/media/culture/li01_latgale_arheological_suit_12-13gs_x.jpg?itok=eZ2H_Wnd

¹⁷⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/swastika>

¹⁷⁷ <https://vesti-kaliningrad.ru/nemecko-russkij-dom-v-kaliningrade-latviya-i-nacionalisty/>

¹⁷⁸ https://www.rugrad.eu/public_news/680268/

¹⁷⁹ <https://www.apn.ru/index.php?newsid=39932>

spy-mania is incompatible with the Russian viewpoint on bilateral German-Russian relations. The Government believes that the sole aim of these 'brave' and 'patriotic' publications is cheap PR <...>." ¹⁸⁰

- In December 2016, Nikolay Tsukanov, Russian Presidential Representative in the Northwestern Federal District, stated that if "germanization" is defined as restoration of historic buildings, then it is "absolute silliness." Tsukanov instead expressed support in preserving German-era historic buildings and said that: "An unnecessary discussion is being imposed upon us. Kaliningrad residents know perfectly well that there is no 'germanization' in real life." ¹⁸¹
- In April 2017, Kaliningrad Oblast Governor Anton Alikhanov stated that claims of the region's "germanization" are made up: "no 'germanization', 'polonization' or 'martianization' is not possible here."¹⁸²
- However, in August 2021, during a visit to the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University in Kaliningrad, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated: "We know that some of our foreign partners and ideologists are attempting to implant the so-called Koenigsberg identity." Lavrov followed up with statements about the unacceptability of interference in domestic affairs via civil society institutions.¹⁸³
- The latter statement by Lavrov prompted a new wave of discussion in the media regarding the region's perceived "germanization." Articles reporting on his statements appeared in both local Kaliningrad media¹⁸⁴ and mainstream pro-Kremlin media¹⁸⁵, with the latter discussing whether the end goal is to turn "Russians into Germans."
 - Andrey Vypolzov was once again involved in coverage. His previous media activism on the subject was referred to in an Izvestiya article reporting on Lavrov's statement.¹⁸⁶
 - Vypolzov noted that the topic of "germanization" was mentioned at "such a high level for practically the first time."
 - The article claims that the problem of "koenigsbergization" of Kaliningrad "was ignored during past decades."
 - Furthermore, the article states that "Russia has always successfully dealt with the settling of various territories that originally belonged to foreign cultures," seemingly a reference to annexation and ethnic deportations.
 - The article mentions a purported threat to the region from Poland and Lithuania. Natalya Yeremina, professor at the Saint Petersburg State University, claims that

¹⁸⁰ <https://web.archive.org/web/20210605140322/https://kaliningrad.mid.ru/-/informacionnoe-soobsenie-predstavitel-stva-mid-rossii-v-kaliningrade-v-svazi-s-situacij-vokrug-nko-germanii-rabotausih-v-kaliningradskoj-oblasti/>

¹⁸¹ <https://www.kaliningrad.kp.ru/daily/26621/3639284/>

¹⁸² <https://www.newkaliningrad.ru/news/briefs/politics/13149990-alikhanov-v-kaliningradskoy-oblasti-net-ni-germanizatsii-ni-marsianizatsii.html>

¹⁸³ <https://tass.ru/politika/12151019>

¹⁸⁴ <https://www.newkaliningrad.ru/articles/opinion/23949298.html>

¹⁸⁵ <https://www.pravda.ru/districts/1631958-kaliniograd/>

¹⁸⁶ <https://iz.ru/1211228/aleksei-kotov/ugnat-v-nemetchinu-kto-stoit-za-popytkami-kenigsbergizatcii-kaliningrada>

creeping "germanization" is continuing and with support from Germany, Poland, and Lithuania.

- The threat from Lithuania is seen via an old historic Lithuanian term of Lithuania Minor, an area in the north part of former East Prussia, part of which is currently Lithuanian territory (the article refers to the historic term as "pseudo-historic").
 - There does not appear to be any credible discussions or any expectations from the Lithuanian side of it wanting to incorporate Kaliningrad Oblast. Such ideas were briefly discussed by the Soviet authorities in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War only.¹⁸⁷
- Regarding a supposed threat from Poland, the article cited the preparation of an alleged NATO "pre-emptive strike scenario" to defeat Russian forces in the region¹⁸⁸ and viewed a broader purported military threat to the region from its southern neighbour.
 - The cited report was posted in January 2021 on a website called OvertDefense.com and was widely reported on in Russian pro-Kremlin media.
- It appears that, although at first the Russian authorities did not take such reports seriously, as of 2021 these claims are being exploited by the Kremlin in order to exert influence both domestically and internationally.

Vypolzov and the Zaybert family case

- EADaily journalist Andrey Vypolzov also appears to show an interest in the perceived oppression of Russian-speakers in Germany. This can be seen through his prominent participation in a suspected information attack against the Berlin police in February 2021.¹⁸⁹
- On 9 February 2021 EADaily published an article about Berlin police taking the three children of the Zaybert (Seibert) family into child protection. The headline implied that the German police "stormed"¹⁹⁰ the apartment as retaliation for the detention of Russian opposition leader Aleksey Navalnyy after his return to Russia in January 2021 following treatment after being poisoned by a nerve agent in August 2020.¹⁹¹
- The article from EADaily appears to be the first report in the Russian media on the subject. Heightened attention from the Russian media outlets and television followed later.

¹⁸⁷ <https://www.delfi.lt/archive/c-iskauskas-kaliningradas-lietuvos-sudetyje-vilioja.d?id=71393842>

¹⁸⁸ <https://www.overtdefense.com/2021/01/22/kaliningrad-gambit-nato-preemptive-strike-scenario/>

¹⁸⁹ <https://www.bz-berlin.de/berlin/lichtenberg/berliner-polizei-wehrt-sich-gegen-russen-vorwurfe>

¹⁹⁰ <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2021/02/09/eto-vam-za-navalnogo-v-berline-policiya-vzyala-shturmom-kvartiru-rossiyan>

¹⁹¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55694598>



- Rossiya-24 aired a report the following day, 10 February, and it featured a visual reference to the story from EADaily and a video commentary from Vypolzov, who drew comparisons to Nazi Germany.¹⁹²
- A curious detail to the story is that Yuliya Zaybert, the mother of the children, sent a video reportedly showing the moment the police were in their apartment directly and specifically to EADaily. This video was the published on Vypolzov's YouTube channel: the first version was published without mentioning Navalnyy in the title¹⁹³ and received more than 700 views to date. The second version mentioned Navalnyy in the title, it was embedded in the EADaily report, and has received more than 13,000 views to date.¹⁹⁴
- Yuliya Zaybert claimed that during the incident one of the police officers said: "Getting ready to see Putin? This is for Navalnyy." Neither of the two videos posted by Vypolzov appears to contain any mention of Navalnyy other than the addition of his name in the title in the second copy only, possibly indicating that this detail has been added in afterward. The article states that the family was preparing to leave for Russia prior to the incident.
 - In a follow-up interview conducted by Vypolzov, Yuliya Zaybert claimed that the German authorities want to "germanize" her children, but she offered no explanation to her words. The interview contained very emotional language and focused on portraying the German authorities as allegedly persecuting the family for political reasons.¹⁹⁵
 - In yet another follow-up article on EADaily¹⁹⁶ and embedded video published on YouTube by Vypolzov¹⁹⁷, Yuliya Zaybert appears to appeal to Russian President Putin to ask for passage to Russia, claiming that they are "prisoners of war" in Germany and claiming that "Slavic" children are being "stolen" due to their "good genetics." In the second half of the video, Yuliya Zaybert called for Russian oppositionists to be stripped of their citizenship and for the Russian Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor) to ban all opposition media in Russia, in order to counter "enemy" influence in Russia – a very peculiar detour from their original point of the video.
- Given Andrey Vypolzov's history of falsification¹⁹⁸, and EADaily's Kremlin links, it is likely that the anti-Russian or "germanization" aspect of the story is manufactured or exaggerated, whether at Vypolzov's own initiative or as part of a broader anti-German campaign.

¹⁹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ateBgD9rM6M>

¹⁹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjo6Z1oWVqU>

¹⁹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48IaaOaQz-I>

¹⁹⁵ <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2021/02/12/nashih-detey-hotyat-nasilno-germanizirovat-intervyu-rossiyanki-iz-berlina>

¹⁹⁶ <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2021/02/17/russkaya-semya-v-berline-obratilas-k-putinu-umolyaem-pomoch-spasti-detey>

¹⁹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lc1lyuaZz8U>

¹⁹⁸ <https://special.klops.ru/story1>