



Report on disinformation in Slovakia in 2024



#STOPFAKENEWS

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STATISTICAL OVERVIEW – HOAXY A PODVODY

Disinformation naratives: **206**

Online frauds: **49**

Facebook

Published posts: **693**

Number of followers: **29,720**

Total content views: **4.1 mil.**

Absolute reach: **950,000**

Absolute interactions: **371,000**

Absolute video views: **1.1 mil.**

Instagram

Published posts: **721**

Number of followers: **24,376**

Total content views: **4 mil.**

Total reach: **612,000**

Total interactions: **153,000**

YouTube

Number of subscribers: **1,155**

Number of views: **32,716**

LinkedIn

Number of followers: **1,277**



AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Unlike previous editions of this yearly report, I as the author, deemed it necessary to add a few sentences in the form of a preface. The reader of its current edition may get the impression of frustration, depression or even capitulation. These emotions aren't surprising when, based on the chaotic communication of state institutions, peace becomes war and war becomes peace. When proud patriotism is replaced by the pulled-back tail of collaborators of the Putin regime. When lifelong, apolitical experts become outcasts due to the rise of not only uneducated, but also primitive and aggressive individuals spreading hatred, hiding behind the currently meaningless phrase "Everyone is entitled to their own opinion".

The fight against hoaxes will never end. Hoaxes and everything related to them are as old as humanity itself. We'll never get rid of them. Our task will be to keep them caged like a tamed animal. To get them under control. In the history of humanity, this was sometimes more successful, at other times less so. Today, we're at a stage where we're feeling cornered and rightfully so. In many countries around the world, political leaders who rose to power due to the spread of hoaxes and thanks to democratic elections have contributed to this. This is just one of the many paradoxes of their world.

Today, even the world's richest people, namely those who operate social media, aren't far behind, bending their opinions to suit whoever's in power with one goal in mind – to generate the biggest possible profits no matter the cost. The situation seems unsolvable...

Democracy has many flaws. Sometimes, it can't defend itself because it plays fair too much. Sometimes, it needs to be cornered, beaten and humiliated in order to get back on its feet. It's a process, which is repeated in many, many countries around the world. The fact that we got to this point isn't exceptional. Whatever happened, happened. We need to face reality, not run away or give up. To act as previous generations did in the past – they refused to give up in much more difficult moments in history.

I believe that this report will not only serve as a memento of our time, a source of negative emotions, but also as source material for further scientific research and, paradoxically, a source of energy for those who haven't yet given up on Slovakia. So that they can tell themselves how they can gain strength to turn what is written in this yearbook into a bitter memory of the past once and for all. So that the future will be entirely different.

I believe that the day will soon come when we'll rebuild Slovakia's strategic communication with everything that goes with it. It won't just be about state employees, but about all courageous citizens who've never been able to give up.

Do you believe in it, too?

1 INTRODUCTION

2024 was the first year the Slovak Republic as a state lacked effective tools to combat disinformation. This happened for the first time since 2017, when the first personnel capacities in the field of strategic communication were built within the framework of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. The current situation came to be as a result political decision following the parliamentary elections in 2023. Over the course of the following months, the vast majority of state analysts across various institutions either left or were forced to leave their positions.

From the public's perspective, this was a key event in state administration – there was an absence of proactive (preventive), reactive, as well as educational activities of competent authorities. The state was unable to defend traditional democratic principles and values. There wasn't any prevention of the creation and dissemination of fake news threatening the health and life of the population or the constitutional establishment of the Slovak Republic. The public wasn't provided with any educational materials to build and strengthen resilience against ever-present Russian propaganda. In many cases, official social media accounts of state institutions lost any strategic justification and became part of meaningless phrases and efforts to build PR images.

The influence of pro-Kremlin propaganda had free rein in the country, which was translated into specific actions not only by politically exposed individuals, but also by the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Slovakia and other entities serving Moscow's interests. In opposition to these elements were independent media and civil society. Both groups became targeted by attacks by politically exposed individuals, the so-called alternative media or other individuals and various proxy channels.

The acceptance of so-called alternative media promoted by the highest authorities contributed to the fatal breakdown of the perception of the impact of hybrid threats in both general and specific ways – in the eyes of the public, all of this led to the creation of an unsolvable tangle of information chaos, when even basic concepts were losing their meaning and became questionable.

A remarkable development had occurred in the case of the Slovak disinformation scene. While it often defended the then political opposition, or rather attacked the then governing coalition exclusively prior to the 2023 elections, the situation reversed following the success of the opposition parties after the elections. Disinformation sites and individual actors became spreaders of pro-government narratives, or came to the aid of political parties or individuals in times of crisis – they served to divert attention, opened meaningless, polarizing topics or spread falsehoods.

Said changes in behaviour are illustrated by specific examples when the Slovak disinformation scene spread strong narratives in the past, but after a certain amount of time and the change in the political situation, it didn't return to them – it pretended as if they had never existed.

These were, for example, the following narratives:

- **Troop movement:** With some individual exceptions, disinformers didn't react to the movement of NATO member states troop across the territory of the Slovak Republic. They didn't spread panic about the occupation of Slovakia, nor the beginning of war by the US.
- **Radiation exercise:** Disinformers didn't react to the radiation exercise approved by the government. In the past, it would've been obvious that such a publicly available government document would become a tool for spreading panic along the line of "Slovakia is preparing for a nuclear war that Ukraine will be responsible for."
- **Defence Cooperation Agreement with the US:** There was almost no comment on the Defence Cooperation Agreement with the US, which became the subject of massive manipulations in early 2022. At that time, politically exposed persons promised a referendum on its cancellation and had billboards installed near the homes of their counterparts who approved the agreement in parliament, calling them traitors. Nothing similar happened in 2024. Within the landscape of the so-called alternative media, questions about the moment politically exposed persons would finally deal with "those traitors" were raised, yet further development of such debates was suppressed without a logical conclusion.
- **Mobilization of Slovaks for war:** In 2024, no one remember this alarming news and no one recalled it as a hoax that massively scared tens of thousands of Slovak men, who signed an official form refusing emergency service because of it. The disinformation scene didn't even return to the hoax about the "destruction" of the cemetery in Ladomirová, which caused the then mayor to develop health problems persisting to this day. In 2024, this case was finally closed by the prosecutor's office – it didn't happen.

Social media operators didn't take any steps to at least partially calm the situation. Ineffective interventions against dangerous individuals spreading life-threatening conspiracies were transformed into incomprehensible steps against those who fought hoaxes. In particular, the image of a responsible social network built up over the years by Facebook burst like a bubble in early 2025 with Mark Zuckerberg's unprecedented attack on independent fact-checkers. He and his other colleagues from the social media business sent a clear signal to the world – all of their previously

The Project Hoaxy a podvody is publishing the Report on disinformation for the second time in a row. This isn't an overview capturing the complex development of hybrid threats and disinformation within the Slovak information space – such material would be insufficient in terms of scope and methodology. The yearbook presents a view of the disinformation scene as captured by the project's analysts during their activities. Its already considerable scope indicates how complex the situation in Slovakia in terms of disinformation really is.

The Project Hoaxy a podvody began its activities on January 23, 2024. In its early days, it was labelled a hybrid threat by a state authority, because it could allegedly impersonate an official state communication channel. It was nothing more than a lie and abuse of the position of said state authority, which distributed such a report. On the contrary, the Project Hoaxy a podvody clearly communicated that it was a civic project, any erroneous connections to state agencies were considered as damaging to its reputation by its founders with regard to the current situation in state institutions.

The first month of the project saw a successful public fundraising campaign via the Donio.sk platform, through which it received over thirty thousand euros for its activities. The subsequent success in domestic and foreign grants ensured opportunities for a wide scope of operation, so that project activities could be carried out not only in the virtual, but also in the real world as well. For the volunteers working on the project, the project itself didn't become a source of income, as these were activities carried out in addition to their regular employment.

The growing scope of the project's activities, hand in hand with rising statistical indicator on social media equal to those from the times of the existence of strategic communication within the Police Force, represented the best motivation for continuing the never-ending fight against hoaxes and replacing what state authorities had given up on.

This yearbook is also partly dedicated to the calculation of the project's activities and was written with the aim of becoming a permanent part of history as a thank you to the active civil society and to all those who regularly or irregularly participated in the project's operation in 2024.

2 RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA

In 2024, the hybrid influence of the Russian Federation in Slovakia was unquestionable. Unlike the previous period, the spread of Russian propaganda wasn't limited by any boundaries in the form of effective strategic communication or the natural defence capabilities of state institutions.

On one hand, standard as well as new fake news were spread throughout the information space, while on the other, pro-Kremlin propaganda continuously operated in line with its standard goals:

- to provoke resistance from Slovak citizens towards Western allies and international communities (European Union and NATO),
- to expand the number of Slovak supporters of the Russian side in the war unleashed by the Russian Federation,
- to provoke disgust and negative emotions towards Ukraine, its official representatives and citizens/displaced persons.

Based on this, we can conclude that the long-term goals of the influence of Russian propaganda were to stop support for Ukraine and to change the orientation of the Slovak Republic towards the Russian Federation.

The state's failure to defend itself against the influence of Russian propaganda contributed to information chaos and the strengthening of the position of a foreign state power among its own citizens. High-ranking state officials took unprecedented steps, with their statements and specific actions being in line with pro-Kremlin propaganda and the interests of the Russian Federation. In the absence of state strategic communication, a part of society was confused and misled, which ultimately could've contributed to its conviction in form of them leaning towards the side of the Russian Federation.

One of the main pillars of the Kremlin's narratives are its long-term efforts of downplaying the course of Russia's war in Ukraine. The very first hoax that the Project Hoaxy a podvody debunked was the claim made by a politically exposed person that **"there's no war in Kyiv"**. As a counterargument, a statistical overview of the war's impact on the Ukrainian capital to date was published (more than 400 drone strikes, 69 people killed, including 7 children, 294 injured, 939 air raid alarms).

The fact that the first debunked hoax concerned false claims made by a high-ranking politically exposed person predicted **the trend of Russian propaganda** in Slovakia

during the following months of 2024 – its carriers were senior state official and influential personalities, who, through their communication activities, as well as their **strategic passivity**, significantly helped spread the interests of a foreign state power in Slovakia.

The systematic aim to influence based on disinformation in form of regularly published photos and video depicting **everyday life in Ukraine** had the same belittling basis. The selected communication strategy aimed to provide “evidence” that Ukrainians lived normally, there’s no war threatening them and everything else is just the result of “Western propaganda” – and, ultimately, this is a good enough reason to stop helping Ukraine. The authors of such purposefully composed posts deliberately omitted a basic logical fact – that war usually doesn’t take place on one hundred percent of the territory of a given state, especially if it’s as large as Ukraine.

For the same purpose – that everything’s fine in Ukraine – manipulators exploited a smaller version of the Pohoda music festival, which took place in Kyiv.

A significant scope of Russian propaganda concerned the **justification of the necessity of military intervention in Ukraine**. Not only disinformation source, but also authorities and politically exposed persons spread disinformation narratives that have been debunked “ages” ago. *“Ukraine itself is to blame for the war because of the actions of neo-Nazis in 2014,”* was an oft-repeated lie, as was the manipulated description of the background of the **Trade Unions House fire in Odesa**. A photograph of fighter jets, which allegedly formed a swastika formation over Ukraine, was supposed to serve as evidence of neo-Nazi sentiments in Ukrainian society. The photograph was a work of manipulation – the original shot only showed a single fighter jet.

The swastika was present in a photo of a boy who was supposed to have it tattooed or drawn on his stomach. A Czech disinformation profile added the following to the photo: *“You probably all know who this is? Only those with yellow-blue borscht in their little heads will be confused.”* This kind of statement appeared often in the case of Russian propaganda – hoax authors didn’t need to explicitly state keywords such as Ukraine or Ukrainians, it was enough to use other constructs as well and the content recipients knew very well what the hoax creator was trying to tell them. In the case of the boy with the swastika, it was a photo from a Russian school.

The Embassy of the Russian Federation in Bratislava regularly participated in defending Russia’s right to wage war in Ukraine. In 2024, its employees had a free field of action – **state agencies didn’t respond in any way to even their most blatant lies**, which were multiplied and spread further into Slovak society through associated accounts, organizations, alternative media or proxy channels. The embassy published more hoaxes via its Telegram channel, only a part of them made it to Facebook, which illustrated their approach and tactics to operating on social media.

The Russian embassy also defended the war in this way: *“The Russian side is aware of the reports, according to which, in the interests of Western pharmaceutical companies, babies may have been used in experiments conducted by Kiev in a hospital in Mariupol, said information is being verified.”*

A significant pillar of pro-Kremlin propaganda was the **continuous use of negative or even hateful sentiments towards Ukrainians**, or toward displaced persons living on Slovak territory.

A notable work made by manipulators was a video by an American TV channel about the events of the ongoing European Football Championship. According to the reporter, Slovak flags were supposed to be banned from the stadium during the match between Slovakia and Ukraine. The video seemed convincing and began to spread throughout the Slovak disinformation space. Based on its analysis and the search for the original report, it was found that this was a deepfake video and a hoax, which was also confirmed by the Slovak Football Association through information obtained from the tournament venue.

The football championship also featured false information about Romanian fans chanting Putin’s name (the video was actually from 2021 and the fans were actually cursing Putin), as well as a photo of the same fans holding the flag of one of the occupied parts of Ukraine in support of Russia (photomontage).

Flags also played a role in the post of the disinformation account “Pravda zvíťazí” (“Truth will prevail”). According to the text, there were only Ukrainian flags in Valčianská dolina (Valčianská Valley) and Slovak flags were missing. Based on public sources, it was determined that it was an international event, the world rescue dog championship, where several flags of foreign participants were displayed.

Russian propaganda tried to blame the terrorist attack in Moscow on Ukrainians, which sparked a paradoxical dispute – being on the opposing side were radical Islamists, who had to fight to be able to claim responsibility for this (from their point of view) “heroic act”. In another foreign incident, a Ukrainian citizen was said to be responsible for a cargo ship accident in the US.

In the case of events in the Slovak Republic, the rule was to blame Ukrainians for more or less serious acts:

- The truck driver who caused an accident resulting in the death of two Slovak firefighters is Ukrainian.
- The wife of the man who attempted to assassinate Prime Minister Fico is Ukrainian.

- A Ukrainian woman didn't get a ticket for illegal parking, a Slovak woman did.
- A Ukrainian man planned to assassinate President Pellegrini.
- Ukrainians brought whooping cough to Slovakia (or it was released from a laboratory).
- Displaced Ukrainians are tunnelling the Slovak healthcare system (all Slovak insurance companies denied this).

Said hoaxes didn't mean that displaced Ukrainians didn't commit crimes or moral failures. Just like during the time strategic communication existed within the framework of the Police Force, as part of the activities of the Project Hoaxy a podvody, the general public was reminded not to blame an entire national or any other group for the failures of individuals. Examples of Slovak citizens who committed murders abroad, yet their compatriots weren't blamed or stigmatized for their failures, were used to convey this message.

One of the strongest hoaxes of Russian propaganda, according to which Ukrainians were selling children "for organs", supposedly proven by pictures of a price list, was spreading on social media in 2024 as well. **Based on an analysis by the Project Hoaxy a podvody, the "arrival" of this hoax into the Slovak information space was traced:**

1. In December 2023, a manipulated video appeared on the YouTube channel of a Belarussian state media outlet.
2. On February 23, 2024, it was published in a Czech disinformation group on Telegram.
3. Two and a half hours later, an anonymous account sent it to two Slovak closed groups on Telegram that use names related to a parliamentary political party (and to another prominent group as well).
4. The video, or parts of it, were subsequently distributed to other Slovak Telegram channels (SPRÁVY z DOMOVA a ZO SVETA [NEWS from HOME and FROM THE WORLD], PRAVDA A VÍŤAZSTVO SPOLOČNE [TRUTH AND VICTORY TOGETHER], AKWSK).
5. Information from the video was published by the Armadnymagazin.com website (Armymagazine.com), which was blocked by the National Security Bureau shortly after the beginning of the Russian war.
6. The hoax began to spread massively in Slovak channels and groups outside Telegram.

In the case of disinformation attacks on Ukrainians, their most prominent target resonated. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as the leader of the opposing side, has been a legitimate target of fake news ever since the beginning of the Russian war. In

addition to easily debunkable and constantly repeated fake news about his **luxury life-style and assets**, a strong narrative of him no longer being the legitimate president of Ukraine was constantly being promoted on social media. Why? Because his term had expired and presidential elections had not been called in Ukraine. The authors of this hoax ignored the Ukrainian constitution, which prohibits any elections during martial law. The same law applies in Slovakia.

In connection with the Ukrainian president, the following narratives were also created:

- He bought a luxurious mansion from King Charles III.
- He bought a hotel and casino in Cyprus.
- Olena Zelenska bought a Bugatti and is selling Ukrainian children to paedophiles in the West.

An equally important goal of pro-Kremlin propaganda was to permanently maintain fear among citizens of states militarily supporting Ukraine, including Slovakia.

Compared to the past, there was **less disinformation** in the Slovak information space abusing the movement of military equipment across Slovak territory. In one specific case, footage captured by a Slovak citizen found its way into Russian information sources. The authors of such materials usually spoke about Slovakia being drawn into war or directly about the imminent threat of World War III. **The aforementioned case provides evidence how regular citizens became information sources for Kremlin propagandists.**

Former diplomat Iveta M., a long-time disinformation creator, criticized the Ministry of Defence's media campaign in support of Slovakia's NATO membership. In her case, she also used narratives about Slovakia being drawn into war, however similar expressions were isolated compared to the past and didn't receive massive amplification by influential domestic disinformation sources.

The strongest public reaction was caused by the statements of a highly politically exposed person, according to whom the French president had promoted the idea of deploying soldiers from European countries to fight in Ukraine at an international forum. This was an unprecedented disclosure of content of confidential discussion by an exposed person in line with the needs and goals of Russian propaganda. The Kremlin promoted similar narratives via the head of the Foreign Intelligence Service, Sergei Naryshkin. He publicly declared that he had information about a French plan to send two thousand soldiers to fight in Ukraine. He associated the hoax with the threat that French troops would be a "legitimate, priority target" for the Russians.

The constant maintenance of fear by Russian propaganda or domestic actors created absurd situations. On one hand, it was possible to observe the efforts of the disinformation scene to strengthen “sovereign patriotism”, attacks against the “enslavement of national identities” by the West and international communities, but on the other hand, this disinformation scene regularly disseminated self-proclaimed analyses about the involvement of individual states in the war with Russia, about possible consequences from Russia’s and so on. Ultimately, signals were systematically sent this way so that the country in question would not oppose Russia, that it would abandon Western structures, or even that it would passively submit to the influence of the Kremlin regime. The creators of such structured communication often overlooked real threats from the representatives of the Russian Federation, and on the contrary, created their own exaggerated analyses aimed at maintaining fear within society. **An unwritten rule applied – to exaggerate, fabricate, manipulate or ridicule to actions of the West, while simultaneously concealing, overlooking and downplaying the actions of the Russian Federation.**

If pro-Kremlin sources did not threaten, they were substituted by Slovak propagandists and manipulators. This led to **absurd situations**, when words were put even into the mouth of President Putin that he never said. His false statement was supposed to be a reaction to the permission of the US for Ukraine to use long-range missiles: *“The document has been signed. Dmitry Medvedev is at the nuclear forces’ headquarters. Everyone is at their stations. And don’t forget, we will go to heaven as martyrs and they will simply die,”* the video manipulated using deepfake technology stated.

A striking pattern of behaviour on the part of the spreaders of this false claim was their inability to condemn it. **The manipulators didn’t criticize what President Putin supposedly said, they always twisted the narrative in favour of the Russian Federation – spreading fear, criticizing Western powers, as well as suggesting the need to surrender in favour of Russia, which was laughable in contrast with their long-established image as proud patriots.**

Almost every event during the Russian war in Ukraine became a target of pro-Kremlin propaganda. One case in point: the Russian attack on a children’s hospital in Kyiv, which killed twenty-seven civilians. The Russian Embassy in Bratislava spoke of an attack on military, not civilian targets. The very audacity of their claim, i.e. a kind of denial of basic facts, gave courage and argumentative ammunition to supporters of the Kremlin regime in Slovakia. If the embassy directly dared to claim something similar, there must’ve been some truth to it, many could argue, including a member of the Slovak Parliament, who publicly questioned the attack.

A bit more elaborate were the images of a man in white clothes being covered in fake blood by a police officer. It was allegedly a doctor from the Ukrainian hospital, performing a propaganda play. In reality, it wasn’t the same person, which was confirmed by an analysis of the actual footage from the hospital and the video of the “police officer and doctor”.

The same narratives obtained from Russian-friendly foreign sources were brought by the Slovak disinformation profile Libor Mačuha, one of the most active disinformation channels since the pandemic, against which neither Meta nor the state can/will intervene in any way.

A special chapter was the topic of the public fundraising campaign Ammunition for Ukraine (Munícia pre Ukrajinu), in which the Slovak public raised more than four million euros, setting a record in terms of fundraising activities in Slovakia. The campaign became the target of pro-Russian disinformation attacks. According to prominent disinformation sources, the fundraiser was supposedly a crime under § 419 (participation in combat activities organized by an armed group on the territory of another state). A criminal complaint was also filed, which was later rejected by the police. Another hoax brought information about the misuse of money for corrupt behaviour of representatives of the Ukrainian regime. Not only those listed, but all narratives related to the fundraiser were meant to discourage or scare citizens from providing support to Ukraine.

There was remarkable activity on **proxy channels** supporting the Russian Federation or **individual accounts**, which supplied the internet with massive pro-Kremlin propaganda how supporting the fundraiser meant supporting the killing of children. Such cynically formulated statements intentionally concealed the fact that the war itself, including the killing of children, was provoked by the Russian Federation, whose soldiers not only killed children, but kidnapped and raped them as well. For example, these narratives were spread by the profile Janka Pfirmán, formerly known as Jana Porubská, Xenia Kopecká, Džejna Kopecká or Slovanský výbor (Slavic Committee) associated with Tomáš Špaček.

An imaginary counterpart was a public fundraiser initiated by the mayor of the village of Smilno in eastern Slovakia. Vladimír Baran raised more than 50,000 euros meant for Russians from the Kursk Oblast. He handed the symbolic check over to Russian representative together with former ttMP Anton Korba in Moscow. A photo from this act circulated on social media and attracted the attention of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, since both Slovaks wore military uniforms. The Slovak military distanced itself from the misuse of uniforms. **This was a rare public statement directed against Russian propaganda by a Slovak state authority in 2024.**

Another example of public reaction was the position of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, which denied the report of the Russian news agency TASS that

“the Slovak Republic would participate in a conference in Minsk and that it had expressed interest in joining the framework of the Eurasian security architecture”. The quoted reaction didn't appear on the main communication channels of the foreign ministry, which was another hallmark of the state's new “strategic communication” – if individual institutions or its representatives didn't remain silent about the influence of Russian propaganda in Slovakia, then they published their positions or statements on less popular social networks, or only made marginal statements to the media.

Additional hoaxes in favour of Russian propaganda:

- During the German reunification, the USSR was supposedly given guarantees that Ukraine would never join NATO (M. Gorbachev denied this in 2014).
- President Zelenskyy is planning an attack on the children's institute in Kyiv and will blame it on Russia.
- A German factory went bankrupt because of anti-Russian sanctions.
- Ukrainians have their own euro, their accession to the European Union was kept secret from us.
- Russians bombed Czech officers in Ukraine.
- Writer J. K. Rowling bought an apartment in Moscow.
- The US embassy warned its citizens not to travel to the Summer Olympics in Paris, because it's dangerous (a hoax created by Russians).
- Members of the Kyiv Symphony Orchestra fled from Zelenskyy to France.
- A knife-wielding attacker in Australia was eliminated by a random Russian passerby (the passerby was actually French).
- Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala has a cousin in Ukraine – a businessman, which is why Czechia's helping Ukraine.
- The Russian army detained a French soldier fighting in Ukraine.
- Meta blocked the Facebook page Brat za brata (Brother for brother) due to pressure from the European Union (the page was restored within hours, the European Union had nothing to do with it).
- A video of soldiers with commentary on how Ukrainians are facing certain death (it was Belarussians).
- Mice are to blame for the Orsk Dam collapse
- The aim of the Russian attack was to destroy Ukrainian paedophiles.
- Moldova asked to join Russia.
- The French president sent a foreign legion to Ukraine.
- NATO entered the war with Russia, the first “peacekeeping” troops are heading

to Ukraine.

- A Russian “investigative commission” accused Western countries, without any evidence, of financing terrorism in Russia via private companies in Ukraine.
- The Katyn massacre was caused by Germans.
- Ukrainian soldiers burned an effigy of Donald Trump.
- Dominik Hašek was a member of the Czechoslovak State Security (ŠtB).
- Russia is a rich country whose inhabitants don't suffer from poverty.
- Moldovans will be mobilized for war should the pro-Western presidential candidate win.

In addition to reactive activities in form of analyses and debunking of Russian hoaxes, the Project Hoaxy a podvody also focused on prevention – proactive activities. Its common denominator was to bring a realistic perspective on the intentions of the Putin regime and the lives of ordinary resident of the Russian Federation.

For example, when TV presented Vladimir Solovyov said that Ukraine couldn't exist and openly spoke about conflict with the West for decades to come. Dmitry Medvedev, the former Russian president, predicted how Russia will conquer Kyiv and Odessa. In contrast, on the very same day, Foreign Minister Lavrov's statement was published via the social media account of the Russian Embassy in Slovakia, according to which Russia wanted peace. **Contradictory statements and blatant goals of the “special military operation” provided the best insight into the purpose of pro-Kremlin propaganda operation – to create total chaos, which could also be characterized as “Russian nuclear peace”.**

Threats made by representatives of the Russian regime were countered by strong, patriotic, pro-Western and sovereign statements by representatives of third countries, such as the resolute position of the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski. Unfortunately, a similar method wasn't used by Slovak political authorities.

By translating and subtitling videos from third-party sources depicting real life in Russia, the ubiquitous Russian propaganda was naturally confronted with reality. Whether it was basic statistics comparing life in the East and West, the despair of widows of mass-mobilized Russian soldiers, or even soldiers themselves complaining about the conditions at the front, such authentic materials were a valuable part of building resilience against lies produced even by highly politically exposed Slovak sources.

As part of bringing an authentic perspective, there was information about a brochure for Russian soldiers, which depicted Ukrainians as animals. Equally important was the constant reminder of the current consequences of the Russian war in Ukraine – the latest footage in form of photos and videos of attacks on civilian targets served as the best evidence.



3 HYBRID THREATS

In 2024, the influence and scope of hybrid threats in the Slovak Republic rose in two ways – on the part of external groups and on the side of domestic actors.

The most significant activities of external groups had the form of attacks on the operation of selected institutions. This was, for example, the systematic reporting of the placement of explosive devices in schools, which, most notably at the start of the 2024/25 school year, significantly impacted the course of the educational process across Slovakia. Similar attacks affected schools in the Czech Republic as well. The local intelligence service openly spoke about the source of the attacks being from the Russian Federation, while Slovak authorities refrained from similar statements.

Domestic actors were full of activity. Most commonly, it had the form of stays/trips of selected citizens in the Russian Federation. For example, these were such trips:

- **World Festival of Youth in Sochi:** The delegation of approximately 30 Slovak participants consisted mainly of young people. They spent several days in Sochi. There, they appeared in a video with their counterparts from Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia. The visitors were shown several propaganda videos and had the opportunity to attend a series of lectures and appearances by Russian representatives. One of them was a speech by former Russian president and current prime minister D. Medvedev, in which he spread Russian propaganda, attacked Ukraine and threatened Europe. According to publicly available sources, the following persons attending the festival were identified: Ján Rohár, Pavol Slota, Monika Sofyia Soročinová, Alexandra Jašurkova, Andrej Kostelník and a representative of the Brat za brata (Brother for brother) organization.
- The **Brat za brata (Brother for brother) organization**, a long-time partner of the Russian Federation in Slovakia and one of its main proxy channels, also continued to operate. It was impossible to monitor all of its trips to Moscow and other areas via public sources. One of said trips was an observation mission for the Russian presidential election. The organisation was represented by its leader Matúš Alexa, joined by Ján Brnák, Michal Radačovský and Michal Ilkanin. The European Platform for Democratic Elections put them on the list of fake election observers.
- Compared to the past, there has been an **increase in the number of individual trips** aimed at presenting the Russian Federation as a developed country unaffected by international sanctions. In a broader perspective, this was about putting pressure on international communities and gaining support in the context of the war in Ukraine provoked by Russian. For example, unsuccessful presidential

candidate Pavol Slota and former Slovak MP Anna Belousovová published videos from their trips to Russia in the aforementioned style. The videos of both domestic actors achieved a huge number of views on social media. A more professional manner of activity was characteristic of P. Slota, who, together with Michaela Gánovská, visited areas in Ukraine occupied by the Russian army, including Mariupol, which evidently indicated close cooperation with Russian authorities, which wouldn't allow ordinary people to travel to such areas.

Hybrid activities of domestic actors raised several fundamental questions: Who paid for their trips? What was their purpose? What was happening on site aside from the officially presented programme? How will their developing relationship with a foreign state power impact the security of the Slovak Republic?

The Project Hoaxy a podvody found out that relations between the Russian Federation and the Slovak Republic have been restored to the point that Slovak diplomats and other politically exposed persons began attend events organized by Russia, including those held directly on the premises of its embassy in Bratislava. The mere presence of such a group of people and the subsequent public presentation of such activities significantly formed public opinion towards accepting the actions of the Russian Federation and its scope of activities.

A concrete example of hybrid action in coordination with a disinformation media was the revelation of the systematic nature of Russian propaganda in cooperation with TVOTV.sk. The Project Hoaxy a podvody informed both the general and expert public at home and abroad about its findings via a press release, which we present in its entirety.

SPECIAL REPORT: WE'VE UNCOVERED THE ACTIVITY OF TVOTV.SK AS PART OF RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA

The analytical team of Hoaxy a podvody has been monitoring the activities of the TVOTV.sk account on Telegram for several weeks. Its findings clearly demonstrate a connection to the system of Russian propaganda.

The "news outlet" TVOTV.sk began its activities in 2021. It registered its domain at the end of 2020 and appeared on Telegram shortly after the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Its main product are semi-professional videos at the level of an internet television - it has its own graphic identity, broadcasting studio, Slovak dubbing and features interviews with politically exposed persons and official representatives of the Russian Federation. The scope of TVOTV.sk is highlighted by the fact that its employees have received media accreditation for entry into the Slovak Parliament and European Parliament.

CONTENT IN FAVOUR OF RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA

TVOTV.sk publishes videos on a regular basis. Their common denominator is often the spread of narratives in favour of Russian propaganda, such as:

- The West is preparing for war with Russia
- The freezing of EU citizens at the expense of aid to Ukraine
- Hungary is threatened by a coup and the rise of a puppet government
- Subliminal scaring with nuclear conflict
- Promotion of the BRICS organization
- Shifting the blame from Russia for the war in Ukraine

In the past, TVOTV.sk employees boasted of their personal participation at a reception of the Russian Embassy in Bratislava, taking photos directly with Ambassador Bratchikov, or interviewing the military attaché and a State Duma member. The variety of interviewed persons is wide and indicates the level of importance attributed to this project.

SYSTEMATIC CONNECTION

On June 10, 2022 a change in operation of TVOTV.sk occurred. Up until that date, the project published posts on the social network Telegram on behalf of specific persons - its editors. After this date, the account became part of systematic Russian propaganda. When we talk about propaganda, we don't just mean disinformation, but manipulation and tactical selection of news taken out of context and fitting into the visions of Russian narratives. In some cases, the text was supplemented by photos and photomontages defaming President Zelenskyy.

Since said date, TVOTV.sk began to relay news produced by the account Selský rozum (Common sense) from the Czech Republic, which publicly offered services for distributing "news" for other accounts via the account @selsky_rozum_bot. The account Selský rozum draws on original sources, which often include Russian accounts or news websites.

To date, the "family" of Telegram accounts posting the same "news" at the same time has grown to 9 international accounts we've identified so far.

These are the Telegram accounts, all of which were created after the beginning of the war in Ukraine:

- TVOTV.sk
- Selský rozum (CZ)

- Olej w Głowie (PL)
- Anto Boyle Channel 🇮🇷 (IR)
- Die Stimme der Vernunft (DE)
- Sale in Zucca (IT)
- Robuste bon sens (FR)
- Los pies en la tierra (ES)
- Józan ész (HU)

In the case of the Irish account Anto Boyle Channel 🇮🇷, the same transformation as in the case of TVOTV.sk is noticeable – in this case too, the author of the posts initially signed his name, but ever since February 17, 2024, the posts are only signed by an “editor”, publishing the same propaganda at the exact same minute as on the other nine accounts. The other seven accounts are united by the fact that they have coordinated their content since their creation, never publishing anything original. Even for a layman, it's not difficult to find content overlaps and matches between the listed accounts.

For example, on the same day and at the same minute, the following posts appeared in nine different languages:

26. 9. 2024 at 22:48: Europe and North America are losing their positions in the global economy, the main growth will come from BRICS countries and those that want to join them – Vladimir Putin.

27. 10. 2024 at 9:07: Elon Musk has hinted that he will end up in prison if Donald Trump, the Republican presidential candidate in the US, loses to Democratic rival Kamala Harris in the upcoming election.

10. 2024 at 20:16: 🤖 Former CIA analyst Johnson: Ukrainian armed forces may suddenly collapse at the front. This statement was made by former CIA analyst Larry Johnson in an interview for YouTube channel Judging Freedom. “They will try to fight on. But it will be great to see how they fail, and it will happen suddenly,” said the expert, reacting that such a scenario for the Ukrainian armed forces may unfold prior to the US presidential election in November 2024. According to Johnson, the situation for the AFU is becoming more complicated every day due to the lack of qualified and trained personnel.

27. 10. 2024 at 20:58: 🤖 Ritter: the conflict will end with the unconditional surrender of Ukraine. The fighting in Ukraine will end with the unconditional surrender of Kiev, because it isn't able to beat Russia. This statement was made by former US Marine Corps intelligence officer Scott Ritter on his account on the social network X. “You should be able to fight Russia until the victorious end. And you can't. Therefore, you are

waiting for the conflict to end in Japanese style: unconditional surrender,” said Ritter.

Said behaviour clearly fulfils the form of hybrid action and the dissemination of pro-Russian narratives, which are more or less related to the foreign policy interests of the Kremlin.

TWO IMPORTANT FACTORS

Nine pages in nine languages publish the same content at exactly the same minute, which is logical evidence of cooperation in preparing posts that precedes their publishing, or rather, evidence of a common operator (the traces lead to the Selský rozum account)..

Deväť stránok využíva štandardnú taktiku hybridného pôsobenia – zaplavovanie online priestoru rovnakými naratívmi s cieľom oslovenia čo najširšieho publika.

WHO IS BEHIND THE PROJECT

Lenka Zlatev, a trained journalist who previously worked in regional media, introduces herself as the owner of TVOTV.sk. Her husband from North Macedonia and her sister, who, according to public sources, is close to the district vice-chairman of a political party, also work at TVOTV.sk.

We cannot automatically consider the aforementioned persons as the authors of the Slovak translation of the posts as part of the systematic operation of Russian propaganda. If the content of these posts isn't translated into Slovak by them, technical access to the TVOTV.sk account has likely been transferred to a third party, which can also provide and publish propaganda in this way itself – most likely the Czech account Selský rozum. It would undoubtedly be interesting to discover who is behind its international activities, which might not be limited to the nine previously mentioned accounts.

The fact is that all 9 accounts regularly publish requests for financial support with a specific link to the Telegram payment gateway. Thus, the activities of these channels undoubtedly have an economic background as well.

4 CAPITULATION OF THE STATE

As stated in several parts of this publication, state authorities in 2024 gave up on the fight against hybrid threats, Russian propaganda and disinformation. Among state institutions, there wasn't a single one that had effective defence mechanisms and communications tools for preventive and reactive activities for the public and which would be the strategic communicator in terms of strengthening resilience against hybrid threats. **This was a consequence caused by the forced departure of dozens of state experts, some of whom had been working at their positions since 2017.**

Slovak state institutions didn't in any way respond to hybrid threats and disinformation, which were present in the Slovak information space and which continuously attacked the democratic principles of the state and undermined its sovereignty and the credibility of the institutions themselves. State institutions became isolated in terms of international cooperation – with only a handful of exceptions, their representatives weren't invited to international conferences and expert trainings. Slovakia was represented at similar events by persons from the third sector.

State representative legitimized disinformation media and disinformation narratives – these were sown in society simply by the passivity of state agencies, or by the meaninglessly promoted narrative of the “right to an opinion”, which in fact served as cover for defending the spread of lies.

One of the few positive examples was the work of the Ministry of Education, which publicly stood out against disinformation activities at schools in connection with a specific activity promoting Russian interest. The ministry didn't restrict the activities of the third sector in apolitical lecturing activities in schools.

It's beyond the scope of this publication to provide a detailed analysis of the inaction of specific state agencies in the area of strategic communication and hybrid threats. To illustrate this, the author cites the transformation of the successful and award-winning Facebook page “Hoaxy a podvody – Slovak Police”, which he created in 2018 as part of his work in the Police Force until his departure in December 2023.

Said page ceased operation within the framework of the police with the departure of its creator. The police didn't resume its activities and de facto ceased to take public action against hybrid threats. Organization-wise, the page was placed under the Centre for Countering Hybrid Threats within the Ministry of Interior and resumed its activities in April 2024 under the name “Hoaxy a podvody – Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic”.

In 2024, the renamed page published:

- 101 own, unshared posts
- 60 posts focused on fraud
- 19 posts explaining specific disinformation
- 9 posts focused on education in the area of hybrid threats

** this is an approximate statistical overview based on manual research*

*** the remaining number was made up by posts outside the categories above*

Compared to the past, said statistical indicator were evidence of a significant decrease in the page's activities in the area of combating hybrid threats. The majority of the content was based around the topic of online fraud and, at times, types of fraud that weren't related to the original purpose of the page's activities (e.g. car sales fraud), or the very frequent commemoration of various anniversaries and memorial days or the sharing of posts of other institutions.

When explaining specific disinformation, the page defended political decisions of the Government of the Slovak Republic. For example, the site defended the “lex atentát”, a law that was in legislative proceedings at the time. The page also defended the amendments to the criminal codes, political positions on how funding from the European Union is not in jeopardy, or plans to introduce camera systems in schools.

Particular attention was paid to hoaxes concerning specific coalition politicians – for example, in the case of information about the flooding of vehicles of the Ministry of Interior (for which the Minister of Interior was criticized) or a fictitious report about a card accident involving the Minister of Environment.

Some of the narratives mentioned above were relevant to explain to the general public, but on behalf of specific institutions or political representatives. **Such activities of a page of a state institution to combat hoaxes brought distrust and sarcastic reactions from the audience en masse.**

The page's credibility wasn't aided by posts, in which the page's administrator congratulated the President of the Slovak Republic to his election, or explanations of “hoaxes”, which were properly labelled as satirical content by their authors.

Posts announcing the government approved “covid amnesties” or statements by Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg about the alleged censorship of social media during the pandemic could be labelled as downright incomprehensible. **Said texts were in stark contrast to the previous activities of the page during the most critical moments when public health was at risk.**

The category of relevant activity of the page was in significant minority. This mainly concerned a series of posts dedicated to the assassination attempt on Prime

Minister Robert Fico, an explanation of the LGBTQ+ colouring book hoax and a warning about the activity of Russian hybrid threats in Europe with reference to a NATO report. **The last case was the only one the page addressed Russian hybrid threats, against which it didn't show any other activity.**

The page's new nature described above resulted in a decrease in followers by about 3,000 and a massive drop in interactions and content reach – on average, a few dozen people interacted with them, hundreds appeared solely as sarcastic reactions. Increased interactions were recorded in a specific case, when trolls were evidently purchased from above, which could've been an ironic activity from a third party.

In early 2024, **Peter Ihnatišin**, a former employee of the Ministry of Defence who participated in the creation of an unofficial and distorted report on a foreign business trip of state officials to Brussels in 2023, became the director of the Centre for Countering Hybrid Threats. Said report was leaked to the then opposition leader R. Fico in 2023, who repeatedly presented it as evidence of a conspiracy by state employees, who supposedly requested NATO to intervene against him and the SMER-SSD political party prior to the parliamentary elections. Quotes and the course of the trip mentioned in said document weren't based on reality and significantly damaged specific state employees.

A similar report was written by **Andrea Pobocik**, a member of the National Security Bureau at the time. Part of her report was ready by R. Fico as Prime Minister in the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic in early 2024. Shortly after that, A. Pobocik became the Director General of the State Security and Corruption Prevention Section at the Government office. Investigative journalists from the Investigative Center of Ján Kuciak discovered that A. Pobocik stood next to R. Fico during the victorious election night in 2012.

5 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The Slovak presidential election became a significant target of the activities of disinformation creators. Unlike the parliamentary elections held the year prior, there was no visible interference from foreign elements – domestic actors were able to develop and share fake news themselves. **On their part, there was a significant grouping, which transformed into a massive, unprecedented domestic manipulation.** It's worth noting that there was cooperation between disinformation producers who do not normally communicate, or even consider each other as enemies.

The course of disinformation operations during the presidential election showed substantial potential for influencing public opinion, which can be used by domestic actors in the future as well.

The Project Hoaxy a podvody is non-partisan and does not engage in politics. However, in case of the presidential election, it deemed it appropriate to monitor and debunk disinformation narratives, since the position of the President of the Slovak Republic isn't tied to any political party. For this purpose, the project created a specialized e-mail address, which was distributed to all presidential candidates, enabling them to submit disinformation that related to them. The condition was that this disinformation couldn't be related to their political statements or direct political struggle.

The most significant hoax of the presidential campaign was the claim that **the President of the Slovak Republic has the power to mobilize Slovak soldiers and citizens for military conflict.** Subsequently, this fictitious power was attributed to a specific candidate – Ivan Korčok, with the implication that should he succeed, he would send Slovaks to fight in the war in Ukraine. The spread of this hoax was expected.

Prior to the presidential election, the Project Hoaxy a podvody publicly warned about the likelihood of the creation of the same fake news that accompanied the Czech presidential election in 2022. At that time, in the case of then candidate Petr Pavel, it was mentioned that in the event of his electoral success, Czech men would be conscripted to fight in Ukraine. **Despite the fact that the passage of time showed that this was, in fact, a hoax, and despite the project's warning against its recycling in Slovakia, it was used nonetheless and became a central topic of the election's second round.**

It was the strongest disinformation narratives used by actors in form of a massive campaign depicting a mother saying goodbye to her son – a soldier leaving for the warfront. It was a photo from Ukraine, which was misused in this way to spread fake news about the non-existent power of the Slovak president. A photo of a grandmother welcoming her Russian grandson returning from the front also circulated in disinformation circles – in Slovakia, its origin was manipulated into the context of mobilization to the frontlines, implying that this would become reality should one of the candidates win.

The Project Hoaxy a podvody published a list of reasons why the spread of hoaxes was likely to increase prior to the second election round:

- Inspiration from abroad (the influence of hoaxes during the Czech election)
- Narrow difference (panic after the first round)
- No defence capability (the state gave up on the fight against hoaxes)
- Belief in hoaxes in Slovakia

The second disinformation motive for the presidential election was the traditional hoax connected to any election – the spread of news about its possible **falsification**. Such manipulative efforts multiplied after the results of the first election round, which contradicted the expectations of the disinformation scene. Specific posts analysed the course of the vote counting, through which they wanted to point out the falsification the results without (deliberately) being aware of the difference between the total number of counted votes and the vote count percentage of district commissions.

According to some sources, the technology company ESET was allegedly responsible for committing election fraud. This hoax dates back to 2019, when it was created by two-time unsuccessful presidential candidate Štefan Harabin. In late 2024, a court-issued final judgement ruled that he was required to apologize to the company for spreading fake news.

As the Project Hoaxy a podvody found out from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, ESET was not involved in any elections, nor was the company a supplier of any software that was allegedly used to manipulate the vote counting process. As part of a preventive campaign before the presidential election, the project proactively informed about everything important related to the elections, including the fact that the votes are counted manually – all information were provided by the institutions responsible.

The **ballot paper multiplication technique** was said to be related to election fraud. With regard to their security feature, this was a hoax, which was also confirmed by the Ministry of Interior. However, this wasn't enough to prevent the Union of Senior Citizens, one of the largest non-governmental organizations representing and reaching tens of thousands of senior citizens, from expressing concerns about the multiplication of ballot papers. **In terms of its influence, this was an unprecedented way of entering the electoral battle based on spreading fear and panic.**

Another element of the presidential campaign was the discrediting of one of the candidates through the work of well-known influencers. Entrepreneur Zoroslav Kollár, legally convicted of corruption in the past, was among the most exposed persons in this category. Kollár began being active on YouTube, where he published videos with a political undertone, primarily to the detriment of specific political parties and individ-

uals. As part of the presidential campaign, he became the main spreader of the hoax that candidate Ivan Korčok had been a **member of the State Security** in the past. This was a massively spread hoax with great potential to interfere in the political struggle. Several months later, Z. Kollár announced his interest in entering politics.

The discrediting campaign against Ivan Korčok was also carried out in a form that had not been used as part of a political battle in Slovakia until then. At first glance, the website **www.ivankorcok2024.sk** appeared to be the official website of the presidential candidate, but its content was discrediting and had nothing to do with reality.

The analytical team of the Project Hoaxy a podvody found out that the source code contained a trace leading to a marketing company linked to the opposing candidate's political party. The company's owner objected to these claims and filed a criminal complaint, in which the project's founder testified. Entrepreneur Igor Caka, the former sponsor of Štefan Harabin, another presidential candidate, later admitted to being the author of the fake website. Said website was sponsored by some Facebook profiles, with Meta allowing this form of promotion. The criminal prosecution was discontinued.

The following disinformation was also recorded in connection with the presidential elections:

- Anyone who votes for Korčok will receive 500 euros (the source was long-time disinformation profile Janka Pfirmán).
- The stamp on the ballot papers can only be red, if it's blue, it's fraudulent.
- One of the unsuccessful candidates from the first round expressed his support for a specific candidate who advanced to the second round.
- If a voter chooses a candidate who has withdrawn his candidacy, his vote will be assigned to another candidate.
- Only the Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic can approve a presidential candidacy.
- The president can take away the prime minister's powers (manipulation).
- Electoral votes are counted electronically.
- Voters must take their own pen to the voting booth, because those already present there can be "erased" and the vote will be overwritten.
- A photomontage depicting candidate I. Korčok, entrepreneur G. Soros and a Slovak politically exposed person.

The recorded hoaxes either concerned the electoral process or, in the case of a specific person, concerned only one candidate – Ivan Korčok. In the case of Peter Pellegrini, no disinformation narrative was widely disseminated. He repeatedly became the target of fraudulent online campaigns aimed at soliciting funds, which the public was warned about. The future president also became part of a deepfake video, the purpose of which was to ridicule the opposing candidate. Deepfake technology didn't interfere with the course of the elections in any other significant way.

Following the announcement of the results of the presidential elections, the dissemination of disinformation narratives was stopped immediately. The same scenario followed as in the case of the parliamentary elections in 2023.



6 ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION OF THE PRIME MINISTER

The most critical event of 2024 was the attempted assassination of Prime Minister Robert Fico. Considering the developments across Europe over the past decades, the exceptional nature of the situation required a sensitive approach by state authorities from the initial phase, with the aim of effective and continuous strategic communication. Even if such efforts did appear, they weren't effective and, together with other gross errors, significantly contributed to the creation of disinformation narratives.

The underlying disinformation began to question the assassination attempt itself shortly after the act. It's worth noting that the spreaders of this hoax, or those willing to at least partially admit its "truthfulness", were members of groups that wouldn't normally be the creators, spreaders or victims of disinformation.

Said paradoxical effect occurred due to several factors:

The main communicators of the Prime Minister's health condition were politicians of the government coalition. Although they may have been interested in conducting effective strategic communication, said communication was ultimately **devalued by their political affiliation with a specific political party**. Citizens who didn't vote for them were unable to accept their statements, questioned them or even opposed them. Independent personalities and experts in their field, in this case doctors – preferably in larger numbers in order to eliminate attempts to question one person, one "spokesperson" – should've been the bearers of current news. It's worth considering whether another part of society wouldn't question possible press conferences by doctors, since they were the ones who were often the targets of bullying during the pandemic.

A key moment leading to growing doubts about the assassination were information leaks. Shortly after this act, a video of the detained man sitting handcuffed on the ground, probably in the hallway of a police station, was made public. According to media reports, a member of the state security service filmed a few seconds long conversation with him (he later left his position to join another security force). In the video, the perpetrator spoke about the reasons for his actions, which were of political nature – they were directed at frustration caused by steps of the government coalition. This video was published by the criminally prosecuted Daniel Bombi via his Telegram account. The quick publication of this video suggests that Bombi got hold of the video due to his publicly demonstrable good relations with several coalition politicians. Even if the suspect's action were politically motivated, the manner of such a targeted leak of information automatically discredited them in the eyes of a part of society, for which communication from law enforcement agencies in a proper manner would've been more acceptable. The second leak concerned a photograph of the prime minister's admission note, which was unprecedented given the sensitivity of the case and his status.

The prime minister's first public appearance two months after the assassination attempt had an impact on society. His behaviour had a two-way effect on the public – from his perspective, he wanted to showcase his rapid recovery, which was hard to believe considering the extent of his reported injuries. On the other hand, his verbal speech based on negative connotations and polarisation was the imaginary culmination of ineffective strategic communication, which instead of calming the atmosphere and communication of facts caused chaos and the spread of hostility among citizens.

In connection with the assassination attempt, the Hoaxy a podvody project recorded the following disinformation narratives:

- The wife of the perpetrator is Ukrainian.
- The perpetrator is in a photo with the father of an opposition politician.
- The perpetrator is in a photo with members of an opposition political party.
- A third person deleted the perpetrator's Facebook profile (Meta denied this).
- The hospital, where the prime minister was being treated, urgently needed blood for him.
- The perpetrator was a member of the paramilitary Slovenskí branci (Slovak Conscripts) group (he only spoke at an event organized by them).

A separate issue, often exploited by hoax creators, was the background of the perpetrator. Various accounts manipulated information in a way to prove his connection to specific opposition or non-parliamentary parties based on his real participation in public rallies. His possible connection to specific parties had not been established or publicly communicated by law enforcement agencies even as of early 2025. Until then, the information obtained by the media only spoke about a single accused person – the perpetrator.

Another hoax with the adjective extremely dangerous concerned two senior citizens who were present at the scene of the attempted assassination. Facebook accounts, as well as a Hungarian TV channel, published a picture in which both pensioners were circled in – posts and a TV report spoke of them as possible accomplices or even suspects. The activities of hoax creators led to a bizarre situation, when not only innocent people, but also supporters of the prime minister, who came to greet him in person, were slowly labelled as accomplices.

Both senior citizens were at risk of physical danger from a potential “avenger” as a result of this hoax. Although Meta labelled the posts as false, it still allowed the photos of innocent people to circulate, thereby directly contributing to their potential danger, as Facebook users may or may not have been satisfied with such an explanation.

The Russian Federation didn't hesitate and began to exploit the assassination attempt to its advantage, which was in sharp contrast to the statement of Ukrainian

President V. Zelenskyy, who condemned this act without abusing it as a tool to fight against Russia.

Immediately after the attempted assassination, the head of Russian media RT and Sputnik said: “The Prime Minister of Slovakia is wounded. This is the one who said that the special military operation began as a result of the actions of Ukrainian neo-Nazis and Putin had no other choice. Well, this is how they work.”

Several days later, the state news agency RIA Novosti published an article, in which it linked the assassination attempt with the decline of the West and liberalism, talking about political terror and accusing the Americans of trying to interfere with the investigation so it could develop towards the mainstream. “The United States and its European allies are persistently trying to promote the version of a “lone criminal” dissatisfied with the declining level of democracy in Slovakia,” reported the agency.

In this regard, the Hoaxy a podvody project stated: “The bizarre thing about these statements is that they undermine the authority and independence of Slovak law enforcement agencies and try to create the impression that they are under the influence of the US. These aren't articles by Russian journalists. They credit their findings to the Press Office of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation, which underlines the hybrid origin of this information operation. Said narratives are also reaching the Slovak information space via importers of Kremlin propaganda. Based on the findings, we consider it appropriate for representatives of the Slovak Republic to comment on this topic and to condemn such public interference in their activities and the integrity of the European Union. This is how sovereign strategic communication should look like.”

As described in several parts of this yearbook, it wasn't surprising that Slovak authorities didn't comment on Russian interference in the investigation of the attempted assassination of the prime minister in any way. Equally unnoticed was the presence of a Russian TV crew in Slovakia, which could've obtained disinformation narratives from leading disinformation creators shortly after the event.

7 ADDITIONAL HOAXES

There was no decrease in hoaxes on various topics outside of the previously mentioned categories in 2024. Although fake news about the COVID-19 pandemic and related areas appeared rarely, but when they did, it resonated significantly within society thanks to the fact that **authorities became their bearers and communicators**.

For example, a politically exposed person spread claims that the blood of vaccinated people “vaccinates” the blood of unvaccinated people, to which the National Transfusion Service reacted – this was an immediate threat to blood donations and the life and health of citizens based on the claims made by an influential authority tasked with verifying the management of the pandemic. The activities of this person were focused on spreading traditional pandemic hoaxes. Other examples included the person’s claims that there was no pandemic in Slovakia and various other instances of questioning the effects of vaccines, or their presentation as dangerous for the human body based on experiments carried out on the person’s own body.

A statement of a musician, which indirectly described heroin as a safer “substance” than the COVID-19 vaccine also sparked discussion within society.

Society was also struck by an article published by a well-known news site, which reported alarming findings made by scientists about vaccine side effects “intended to scare us”. The headline was manipulative and was later changed based on an analysis by the Hoaxy a podvody project, which contacted the Danish laboratory that produced the study on which the article was based.

Pandemic narratives recorded in 2024 included the following:

- “Aliens” are growing in the body of a human following vaccination.
- Ivermectin is an effective drug for almost all types of cancer (including breast cancer).
- Paxlovid is a substitute for the COVID-19 vaccine.
- The ceremony at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London predicted the arrival of a pandemic.
- AstraZeneca withdrew vaccines from the market due to deaths.
- Fake news about deaths as a result of the COVID-19 vaccine (even when someone committed suicide, hoaxers spread that they died as a result of vaccination).
- WHO will order the start of a pandemic in Slovakia and take over the Slovak healthcare system.
- The State Institute for Drug Control is shredding documents from the time

of the pandemic to cover up crimes committed during that time.

- Vaccines contain harmful substances.
- Bill Gates made an agreement with Coca-Cola and Pepsi that their products will contain vaccine nanoparticles.
- The German government denied the existence of the pandemic.

Alongside various healthcare related disinformation, more traditional narratives that have withstood the test of time, as well as obvious hoaxes and other lies appeared. In some cases, these were produced by Russian propaganda.

A remarkable development occurred in the **case of the doctors’ strike**. Not for the first time and certainly not for the last, disinformation creators demonstrated a political service to specific politically exposed persons, when they attacked doctors and incited hatred towards them via manipulated posts, so that ultimately part of society sympathized with the decisions of politicians and not with doctors. For example, there was a massively shared post, which overestimated the salaries of Slovak doctors via manipulation and compared them with neighbouring countries.

International communities and alliances – the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation – continued to face propaganda attacks. These frequently originated from Russian information sources and especially in the case of NATO, disinformation was spread in relation to the Russian war in Ukraine in several ways. The European Union was often the target of hoaxes from various categories, the aim of which was to portray it as an incompetent and undemocratic institution with no future, its sole mission being to issue absurd orders and prohibitions to member states.

The following narratives have also been recorded relation to the European Union:

- The European Union wants to replace national history lessons with lessons about the EU.
- The European Union forces people to eat insects.
- The European Union was founded by Nazis.
- The digital euro will replace real money.

For the second year in a row, the narrative about eating insects has been repeated, which is not based on reality – thanks to strict EU rules, its citizens can find out the composition of food without any concealment. On the contrary, scientists from the company Biolaboratory, a member of the Russian innovation centre Skolkovo, have

started producing bread with the addition of insect protein from black fly larvae, which, as in many similar cases, remained without a response from the disinformation scene.

The murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová was still the target of hoaxes. Politically exposed persons tried to sow doubts among the public about the “real” perpetrators of this act despite the existence of three legally binding convictions. This tragic case possesses extraordinary potential to transform into a full-fledged conspiracy theory, which will become the subject of regular discussion and will be artificially kept alive and relevant not only by politically exposed individuals.

An overview of additional disinformation narratives:

- Prime Minister Robert Fico announced the landing of aliens in Skalica (deepfake);
- Floods in Dubai were the result of weather manipulation;
- The aurora borealis, also visible in Slovakia in 2024, was artificially induced;
- Fake news about the origin of Saharan sand visible after rain (various domestic experiments);
- Saharan sand contains hazardous substances and is being dumped on us by Americans;
- The Beatles made an emergency landing in Czechoslovakia (urban legend);
- Spanish children read a book about Jesus with LGBTQ+ motives (satire for adults);
- Footage from Mars was recorded in Canada;
- 5G transmitters were removed in Peru because they caused diseases;
- Slovak is the most difficult language in the world;
- Coloured stripes on toothpaste indicate their level of toxicity, which was confirmed by Elon Musk (deepfake);
- Bill Gates created robotic mosquitoes and is behind the production of insect milk;
- US President Joe Biden is in a coma, or may have already died;
- People died due to a storm at the Pohoda festival in 2024;
- Mess in Spain caused by “eco-terrorists and migrants” (festival aftermath);
- Shops are selling carrots grown in Chernobyl;
- A map showing hundreds of churches in France damaged by migrants;
- Ursula von der Leyen is the granddaughter of a Nazi;
- King Charles III has died;
- Paris was flooded by Muslims praying in public (footage actually from Moscow);
- Mammography has been banned in Switzerland;

- Disinformation-hate attacks against hobby horsing;
- Insects are mixed into Kinder chocolate in Germany;
- Banks are banning customers from using cash;
- Madagascar has left the WHO;
- The Earth is flat;
- The company ESET is behind the success of a new online news television;
- Hoaxes about the 9/11 attacks.
- NATO held a secret meeting in Slovakia;
- Actors are rehearsing a new pandemic in Congo;
- The transport of military equipment damaged a bridge in Kremnička;
- The threat of a fine for the wrong type of winter tires for Slovak drivers;
- Pastries are full of chemicals;
- Efforts to introduce 72 toilets in Slovakia (the 72 genders hoax);
- The American origin of Halloween and its denigration;
- Insect fat will be in butter;
- Syrian dictator Assad died in a plane crash while fleeing the country.

8 HATE SPEECH

The most common accompanying phenomenon of the impact of disinformation is the incitement or maintenance of hatred toward specific persons or groups (sexual minorities, ethnics, by religion or occupation – journalists, doctors, scientists, or by political belief, etc.). The creators of hoaxes use this tactic to spread fear – those who are afraid are more likely to believe a hoax and be easily manipulated.

Social media have become a source of an incalculable amount of hate speech. Many of them haven't been removed. **On the contrary, Meta has repeatedly deleted posts or restricted or taken down pages, the content of which was aimed at pointing out, for example, the influence of Russian propaganda, real news from the frontlines, etc.** Entire pages have been deleted, while their counterparts have remained unpunished for years. An exemplary long-term example is the page Bádateľ (Explorer), which creates not only well-thought-out, but also obvious hoaxes on any topic. Its administrator temporarily disables the page on a regular basis and publicly boasts that he does so with the intention of avoiding punishment from Meta.

Most of the hate speech was directed at **LGBTQ+** people. The Summer Olympics in Paris attracted particular attention in a negative sense. Massive hate speech and distortion of reality related to the opening ceremony and were accompanied by AI generated photos as well.

Among specific individuals, hate speech was directed towards Algerian boxer Imane Khelif. She was ridiculed on social media and called a man. The boxing association, the leadership of which had ties to the Russian Federation, also contributed to the strengthening of belief in these hoaxes.

The hoax made by Lukáš Machala, currently a high-ranking civil servant at the Ministry of Culture, who predicted in 2023 that quotas for the mandatory participation of LGBTQ+ athletes would be introduced at the Summer Olympics, never came true. The same person has long been active against this community and has been spreading hate speech and manipulations aimed at depicting it as a threat to heterosexual families.

A report claiming well-known LGBTQ+ Slovak personalities "supposedly have AIDS" wasn't removed by Facebook. Its author complained that even though his account should've been limited for this activity, this serious and false statement was never deleted. This was one of many cases of social network's inability to protect even basic human dignity. From the perspective of their operators, the development of the fight against hate reached a point where **anyone could write anything about anyone without real consequences.**

The transformation of hatred from the virtual world to the real one occurred during a memorial event commemorating the tragic deaths of two LGBTQ+ people in 2022, who died as a result of a terrorist attack, at a grammar school in Trenčín. When disinformation sources and politically exposed individuals became aware of the event, they stirred up a level of hatred via social media, which ultimately led to the cancellation of the planned event. The memory of the two victims was commemorated by students and the public near the school building.

The attention of the media and political parties was drawn to a comment from the Government Office during the creation of a new concept, according to which **Holocaust denial shouldn't be viewed as an expression of extremism.** The office described it as human error and withdrew the comment.

Airline pilots became the targets of an attempt to spread hatred. One specific post informed about the **chemtrails** conspiracy theory as follows: "Come and catch your pilot, the one who's dumping it on you and you kids... We start today... 10.4.2024... The list of murderers will be continuously updated..."

As part of its activities in terms of explaining disinformation, the Hoaxy a podvody project focused on explaining the correlation between fake news and hate speech. In separate posts on social media, it pointed to specific examples of spreading hatred or inciting hate in society, defended individuals and specific groups with the main idea of equal rights for all residents of the Slovak Republic. As part of its real-world activities, the project was involved in a public lecture at the Pride event in Banská Bystrica, during which rainbow stickers with the project's logo were also distributed.

9 EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGNS

As part of its educational activities, the Hoaxy a podvody project published several series of educational campaigns in 2024, each of which consisted of multiple posts, through which the public was provided with basic information about the topic at hand, as well as analyses of hoaxes related to it.

HOAXES DON'T STICK WITH ME

The main campaign of the project's first year in existence was titled "Hoaxes Don't Stick with Me" and was based on cooperation with well-known personalities. The name of the campaign was identical to the one that was organized at the same time a year earlier within the framework of the Police Force and was based on the same principle – to communicate the importance of topics related to strategic communication, fake news and hatred via personalities known throughout society.

The following persons took part in the campaign without any remuneration:

- **Matej Drlička**, former director of the Slovak National Theatre
the danger of algorithms on social media
- **Filipp Sedov**, activist (Russian living in Slovakia)
Russian propaganda and its influence
- **Kristína Tormová**, actress and presenter
hatred (not only) in the online world
- **Kamila Magálová**, actress
media freedom
- **Roman Samotný**, activist
hoaxes and hatred (LGTBQ+)
- **Peter Bebjak**, director
emotions as a tool of manipulation
- **Emília Vášáryová**, actress
determination in the fight against disinformation

Said personalities were complemented by **senior citizen Anna Křemenová**, addressing her peers, who often become targets of fake news, and **Vladislav Cuper, former mayor of the village of Ladomirová**, who in 2022 became a victim of Russian propaganda caused by the disinformation about the destruction of the local cemetery created by the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Slovakia.

The form of cooperation with the protagonists consisted of filming short videos, which were presented via the project's social media accounts. The public could take part in the campaign by obtaining stickers and badges, which were distributed by members of the project team for free.

CHRISTMAS WITHOUT HOAXES

Another main campaign was titled "Christmas without hoaxes". In the first video, viewers could watch a daughter's unsuccessful attempt to make a phone call to her father. The roles were played by actress **Kristína Tormová** and her father, actor **Boris Farkaš**. The main idea of the video was to depict the atmosphere present in many Slovak families – the father got caught up reading disinformation reports on the internet and didn't answer his daughter's call.

Over the course of the following days, the project published several videos with brief references and instructions from experts. Scientist **Vladimíra Čavojová**, journalist **Vladimír Šnidl**, activist **Tomáš Kriššák** and strategic communication expert **Daniel Milo** also addressed topics such as: how to verify information, how to maintain a factual discussion, what confirmation bias is and how to communicate with victims of hoaxes.

The campaign was completed on Christmas, when the full main campaign video was released to the public – the father finally picked up his phone, apologized to his daughter for reading "the nonsense the neighbour sent him", thanked her for warning him about it and came to her house to spend Christmas.

The goal of publishing the full version of the video was to emphasize the importance of communication within families, which can eliminate the impact of hoaxes on its members.

TWO YEARS OF WAR IN UKRAINE

A reminder of the course of the war and Russian crimes in Ukraine via numerical statistics and the most famous hoaxes that hit the Slovak information space during that period.

THE EU – MYTHS VS. FACTS

Explanation of the most common and persistent hoaxes attacking the European Union (undemocratic association, Brussels dictate, fictitious regulations, etc.).

20 YEARS IN NATO

On the occasion of the anniversary of the Slovak Republic's accession to NATO, the campaign included a calculation of the advantages and benefits of membership.

HOAXES ABOUT RTVS

Explanation of the most frequently spread fake news about the Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS, STVR today) at the time, especially by politically exposed and influential people. The campaign was created in cooperation with RTVS (uneconomical management, expensive external services, biased reporting without audience trust, no support for domestic production).

RUSSIAN NUCLEAR PEACE

A series of videos reminiscent of the threats made by representatives and collaborators of the Russian regime, who regularly threatened the entire world with nuclear war. A broader part of the campaign were videos capturing real life in Russia without censorship and the effects of propaganda on local residents. The aim of the campaign was to point out real events in the Russian Federation.

1968

A campaign focused on the anniversary of the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops. One part of the campaign had the form of a special podcast with historian **Tomáš Klubert** and actress **Táňa Pauhofová**, who appeared in a period film about this event – Vlny (Waves). In the next part, the communication focused on explaining persistent disinformation – Russians came to Czechoslovakia to suppress fascism, Ukrainians are responsible for the occupation, Russians came legitimately at the invitation of the government or narratives approving the occupation as fraternal aid. The campaign was complemented by people's recollection of these events and the replay of the period broadcast of the Czechoslovak Radio.

A disinformation post in which the author appreciates the arrival of Russian troops on the territory of Czechoslovakia in 1968.



HOAXES OF OUR GRANNIES

A campaign about traditional, folk hoaxes that have been shared among Slovak families for decades, pointing out that in some cases, the information may be real, but its bases have been manipulated. The hoaxes were analysed by doctor Milan Kulkovský, as they most often concerned the area of health.

THE TRUE FACE OF SOCIALISM

In Slovak society, sentiment towards the past regime persists, which is transformed into fake news. In cooperation with historians and relevant historical sources, the project explained the falsehood of these claims: under socialism, everyone was equal, relations were better, food was of better quality, etc. Proven realities were cited as counterexamples, such as the monster trials against enemies of the regime, the impossibility of traveling, or the nationalization of property.

ANNIVERSARIES AND QUOTES

Anniversaries of significant domestic and foreign events were a suiting opportunity to recall their significance. The principle of strategic communication in terms of anniversaries was to explain historical events in the context of the contemporary world, or even to use them to defend against hybrid threats. The goal of commemorating anniversaries was to point out the paradoxes of the present, build patriotism based on inspiration from ancestors, and increase resistance in propaganda.

In 2024, the Hoaxy a podvody project commemorated, among others, the following anniversaries: US aid to the USSR during World War II, occupation by Warsaw Pact troops, the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, the introduction of the Jewish Code in the Slovak State, the invasion of Poland by the USSR, and so on.

Quotes from historical figures had the same tasks in terms of strategic communication, in addition to which they represented a more effective method of communication due to the fact that they were carried out by specific personalities.

HOAX OF THE YEAR 2023

An interactive campaign aimed at highlighting the most exposed and massive disinformation from 2023 using public participating in the form of voting. The winner of the poll was the prediction that Slovak men would be mobilized for the war in Ukraine in September 2023.

10 PODCASTS

In 2024, the Hoaxy a podvody project began producing podcasts in both audio and audiovisual formats. The shows were hosted by **Jana Krescanko Dibáková**, a long-time TV presenter.

The main goal of the podcasts was to provide an innovative, modern and interesting environment for discussion on specific topics. The added value was the participation of respected experts and well-known personalities, who, unlike anonymous posts on social media, provided signs of credibility, expertise and directness.

In 2024, the Hoaxy a podvody project published the following podcasts, ranging in length from 40 to 60 minutes:

1. **Occupation 1968** – A discussion on the anniversary of the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops. The aim of the discussion was to point out the ever-spreading hoaxes about this historical event. The guests were historian **T. Klubert** and actress **T. Pauhofová**.
2. **Velvet Revolution** – A discussion on the occasion of the anniversary of the Velvet Revolution of November 17, 1989. Its goal was to point out the spreading hoaxes about this event, as well as to strengthen natural patriotism. The guest was one of its main representatives – sociologist **Fedor Gál**.
3. **Pandemic** – A discussion about pandemic hoaxes that persisted in Slovak society even in 2024. The guests were pathophysiologist and molecular biologist **Peter Celec** and infectologist **Peter Sabaka**, who became the victim of hate speech and fake news during the pandemic.
4. **Hoaxes in the family** – A discussion about why disinformation is so successful in Slovakia and how Slovaks should deal with it within familial relations. The guests were scientist **Vladimíra Kurincová Čavojová** and psychologist **Miron Zelina**.
5. **Russian war in Ukraine** – A discussion with Slovak priest **Peter Krenický**, who's been working in Ukraine for more than three decades, focused on his personal experience after the offset of the Russian war. D. Púchovský also talked about how the priest was tortured by Russian soldiers, as well as about how to maintain hope in difficult times.

Part of the collaboration with J. Krescanko Dibáková was the publication of a livestream with D. Púchovský, during which they discussed current trends in the field of disinformation and answered viewer questions.

Another joint product were eight parts of the Hoax of the Week section, which consisted of maximum 90-second videos published on a weekly basis about a recent, currently spreading hoax.

Podcasts were taken over and transcribed into articles on the SME.sk website, where J. Krescanko Dibáková works as the host of the discussion show Aréna.

11 FRAUDS AND SCAMS

As part of the Hoaxy a podvody project, the public was warned about the ongoing impact of fraud in the online environment, with emphasis on their occurrence on social media. On average, project followers were warned about scammers once a week.

The stable, continuous operation of scammers is evidence of the limited capabilities of law enforcement agencies, which are most often limited by the geographical distance of the perpetrators and technological obstacles covering the traces of the perpetrators of such actions. Therefore, it's still necessary to pay attention to prevention and education in form of clear lines of communication, strategic communication and sharing of specific cases (modus operandi).

In terms of the nature of fraudulent activities, in the majority of cases, **well-established methods and practices were used**. Their common denominator was obtaining money from victims, most often in the form of revealing sensitive debit and credit card information.

Examples of fraudulent activities online:

- Fake SMS messages on behalf of courier companies or the Slovak Post announcing an incoming package/delivery. These messages contained a fraudulent hyperlink. Such messages were also sent to people who were actually expecting a package; therefore, countermeasures should include checking for a data leak on real orders;
- Fake e-mails from potential buyers reacting to specific adverts and request sensitive card data;
- Misuse of institutions, authorities and influencers to promote attractive investment schemes. Among the victims of deepfake technology were the National Bank of Slovakia, doctors and politicians;
- Cases of fake American soldiers contacting lonely women;
- Fake e-mails misusing the Financial Administration of the Slovak Republic regarding tax refunds;
- Fake competitions for exaggerated and unrealistic prizes on behalf of small fraudulent pages, which sponsored their posts – without any intervention from Meta;
- Compensation in the amount of 2.5 million dollars from the UN;
- The operation of fake Chinese bankers providing profitable business opportunities;
- Fake e-mails misusing Netflix and urging to update personal data;

- Misuse of the Ticketportal company regarding the sale of tickets to tempting events via phone calls and e-mails;
- Fake letters signed by the police president accusing the recipient of criminal activity (drugs, paedophilia);
- A fake message from Facebook friends urging to immediately check the link sent by them, which supposedly contain a photo of the recipient;
- A fake online casino, for the promotion of which foreign influencers Mr. Beast was misused;
- Encouragement to pay for fictitious goods via gift card, for example for the Steam platform;
- In case of real technical issues with Facebook, providing fake and fraudulent technical support, for example via the social network X;
- Unfair practice: demanding payment for registration fees from new entrepreneurs;
- Unfair practice: selling overprice vignettes;
- Fake messages with a fraudulent link warning about the expiration vignettes;
- Providing fraudulent online loans;
- Suspiciously cheap products – an iPhone for the price of two euros, or a “mystery box” from Sephora for a similar price;
- Offering assistance to victims of online fraud – assistance is offered by fraudsters;
- Extremely profitable and unrealistic investments in cryptocurrencies;
- Fake messages from children to parents (I've lost my phone and I need money quickly);
- Fake job offers via Facebook and LinkedIn (the company Alza was misused this way);
- Fake travel agencies (they may also have fake websites), or excessively unrealistic competitions for holiday stays.

Two types of scams required special attention:

The first were fake e-mails sent on behalf of various companies, for example the Slovak Philharmonic, via law firms (also pretending to be real). The e-mail informed the victim that they had violated copyright. This could've been a successful scam in that many people are active on social media, posting photos and videos – and can easily become scared that they have unknowingly violated copyright, for which they have to pay under the threat of lawsuits.

The second were posts, which called on the public to help in the search for missing children. These also included real cases. As soon as such posts reached a high level of sharing, its author rewrote it in a form aimed at collecting money from people – it no longer had anything to do with the original content about missing children. Potential victims thus saw a massively shared post with a modified original text. Thanks to its mass distribution in a new form, the potential victim could get the impression that such a massively recommended investment was profitable. It was a simple *modus operandi* – to gain the audience's attention through a sensitive topic (missing children) and then rewrite everything into a fraudulent form.



12 OTHER ACTIVITIES OF THE PROJECT

LEAFLETS AT THE CASTLE

The founder of the Hoaxy a podvody project drew attention to the presence of disinformation and hateful leaflets at the Bratislava Castle in a room rented for an exhibition of paintings of politically exposed persons. The leaflets were located at the information desk by the entrance. At points, they contained extremist content, including swastikas and hateful attacks against specific individuals.

The findings were presented in a more than seven-minute-long video. Despite its excessive length, the video caused a stir among the public, with over one hundred and twenty thousand people having seen the video. The police and the administrator of the premises (National Council of the Slovak Republic) were notified of the content of the leaflets. They haven't appeared in the gallery since the day after the video was published.

OWN PUBLICATIONS

In 2024, the Hoaxy a podvody project published three original publications distributed to the public.

The first was the **Report on disinformation in Slovakia in 2023**. Until that point, a similar annual overview was published under the auspices of the Police Force. Just like during its police "operation", as part of a stand-alone, independent project, it brought the general and professional public a brief overview of the development of disinformation, hoaxes and information manipulations in Slovakia in 2023 in Slovak and English.

The second publication, **Become a Hoax Hunter**, was intended for primary and secondary school students. Using a simple and engaging language, they were explained the threat of social media and their algorithms, they could learn about the history and present of hoaxes, and, at the end, they could participate in an exercise led by their teacher. The material was a summary of the introductory lecture for students, which was presented by project representatives in 2024.

The third publication was **Let's Open Our Eyes Together** and its main role was indicated by its subtitle **A Guide for Conversations About Hoaxes nad Facts**. This was a publication indented for people who had relatives or acquaintances who believed in disinformation. The manual on how to communicate with such a group was compiled based on discussions with experts such as Daniel Milo, Jakub Goda, Tomáš Kriššák, Jakub Kobela, Vladimír Šnidl, Viktória Sunyik, Branislav Uhrecký, Vladimíra Čavojová a Peter Halama.

PRESS RELEASES

The Hoaxy a podvody project sent press releases to Slovak media, organizations, state agencies and individuals in 2024. Press releases were translated into English and distributed to foreign project partners, including state agencies of partner countries, foreign embassies and individuals.

The goal of this activity was to provide more extensive analyses and outputs, which due to their scope and more technical nature weren't fit for social media, as well as to raise awareness about the current situation in Slovakia and provide authentic information to expand the overview of individuals and organizations. In the case of recipients from the media, it was about increasing the likelihood of processing and publishing topics within the framework of their communication channels.

Overview of distributed press releases:

- Announcement of the launch of the Hoaxy a podvody project
- The creation of a special project e-mail address for all candidates for the position of President of the Slovak Republic for reporting disinformation regarding themselves
- Multiple overviews of disinformation narratives related to the Slovak presidential election, including predictions of further developments of the activities of the disinformation scene
- Report on the dissemination of hoaxes by the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Slovakia
- The hoax about the involvement of the Slovak army in the war in Ukraine
- The hoax about the sale of human organs by Ukrainians
- The hoax about biolaboratories disseminated by the Russian Embassy in Slovakia
- Report on the participation of Slovak citizens in the World Festival of Youth in Sochi
- Overview of Russian sources describing the presence of Slovak observers of the Russian presidential election
- Overview of accounts spreading disinformation about the responsibility of Ukrainians for the terrorist attacks in Moscow
- Warning about the restoration of diplomatic relations through activities and meetings with Russian representatives within the scope of activities of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Bratislava
- Warning about a reception held at the Russian embassy in Bratislava, pointing out the expressions of acceptance and sympathy from Slovak participants

- Warning about currently disseminated hoaxes in connection with the attempted assassination of the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, an overview of all recorded disinformation narratives
- Analysis of the decline of the hoax about the mobilization of Slovak men to Ukraine from 2023
- Warning about the misuse of V. Putin by the Slovak disinformation scene, which spread his false threats to states supporting Ukraine
- Overview of hybrid activities of citizens of the Slovak Republic in favour of the Russian Federation
- Continuously distributed brief alerts on current topics in the field of hybrid threats

Organizations or individuals can subscribe to press releases by sending a message to **info@hoaxyapodvody.sk**.

LECTURES

In 2024, the Hoaxy a podvody team began to engage in lecturing activities with an educational goal in form of personal contact with listeners. The lectures covered topics such as social media and risks associated with their use, fake news, suggestions for solutions and, in some cases, exercises intended to demonstrate the meaning of the effect and effectiveness of disinformation. The lectures were adapted and aimed at primary and secondary school students, as well as university students and senior citizens. Overall, 21 lectures were held in 2024.

At the beginning of each lecture, listeners were warned about the apolitical nature of the school environment and the related condition of not naming any politicians or political parties. Despite said fact, attempts from politically exposed persons were recorded to spread hoaxes in relation to the lecturing activities of the Hoaxes in Frauds project, which, according to them, were supposedly politicized and promoted a specific political party, politicians or "liberal ideology", which was contrary to reality. Based on the above, lecturing activities were not promoted in the media, with a few exceptions, in order to avoid hate speech, vulgar attacks and other methods of spreading hatred based on lies, the authors of which were influential personalities in the Slovak information space.

EVENTS

Representatives of the Hoaxy a podvody project attended several events in 2024, where they appeared as listeners for the purpose of further education, or as speakers.

Slovenia: Two educational stays focused on strategic communication and digital diplomacy under the auspices of the Centre for European Perspective and the US Embassy in Slovenia, with the participation of representatives from more than 20 countries. Slovakia was the only country represented by the non-state sector.

Brussels: Participation in the EU Media Campus project with participants from almost every EU member state. The goal of the event was to develop cooperation between journalists and fact-checkers, as well as establish cooperation with European structures.

Prague: Participation in the prestigious international GLOBSEC conference, establishing important contacts. The forum was attended by more than two thousand participants from more than seventy countries and the project's activities were presented to some of the political, military, diplomatic and analytical leaders from across the Euro-Atlantic area.

Riga: Another prestigious conference was the Emergency Trends in Social Media conference, organized by the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, which discussed current trends in the area of development of disinformation practices.

Vienna: The DFRLab organization organized a practical training focused on tools useful in the process of detecting disinformation.

Slovakia: The first teambuilding of members of the Hoaxy a podvody team.

Other: The Hoaxy a podvody project was represented at the international forum "Innovative Library in Digital Era" (ILIDE) in Jasná; at the annual meeting of the leadership programme alumni in London, which is annually organized by the Munich Security Conference and the Körber Stiftung; at the annual AmCham conference; at the international conference CEDMO in Prague and Fejk in Košice; at an expert discussion under the auspices of the Atlantic Council, at a workshop organized by Demagog.sk; at the Pride festival in Banská Bystrica, as well as at other expert forums and public events.

IN THE MEDIA

After its launch in January 2024, the Hoaxy a podvody project established itself as a credible source not only for Slovak media. The decisive factor for this success was the established name and success of the "Hoaxy a podvody – Slovak Police" page, whose founder launched the new project, as well as broad public support.

The project was cited more than two hundred times in both national and regional Slovak media in 2024, as well as several times abroad.

13 CONCLUSION

2024 didn't bring any reasons that would lead to positive conclusions in the area of the Slovak Republic's resilience against hybrid threats. **The absence of effective proactive and reactive tools, hand in hand with the lack of professional capacities, provided foreign actors with a free field of action.**

Where the state failed, **civil society** stepped in, with its members working on a voluntary basis alongside their jobs, or partly compensated by domestic and foreign grants or crowdfunding calls for their activities. Examples of some successful calls demonstrated the demand among the general public for continuing activities to build effective strategic communication and fight against disinformation. Citizens coming together with the goal of supporting said activities in various ways was **the most positive news of 2024.**

The second positive news was the willingness and determination of former state employees to continue their original activities within the third sector and various projects. Not only the Hoaxy a podvody project, but also the NEST Institute or Slovak Media Monitor and others provided the public with specific products of a special focus, which, as a whole, formed a strong pillar of strategic communication with interesting potential for unification within the framework of operating under a state institution in the future.

The continuous work of long-established project and individuals in the area of building resilience against hybrid threats and true patriotism were further proof of active civil society and public interest in strengthening state sovereignty where the natural role of state institutions was failing.

The geopolitical developments in early 2025 and the moral reversals of some social network operators were a guarantee of persistent chaos and an ongoing struggle with the promotion of Russian interests taking advantage of the established anarchy. The ability of the European Union and its institution not only defensively, but also offensively resist the Kremlin's hybrid activities and the unwillingness of social network owners to comply with basic rules will increasingly come to the fore.

The integrity of international communities and the closeness of its members will be a key factor for further developments in the world of hybrid threats. A significant part of the determined public willing to defend the principles of democracy and pro-Western direction of the Slovak Republic will continue to be at the forefront.

Maintaining determination avoiding feelings of frustration, demotivation and capitulation will serve as significant barrier between hope for the future and collaboration with the Putin regime.

14 THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND COOPERATION

The most important factor that was key for the successful launch of the Hoaxy a podvody project in January 2024 was the public crowdfunding campaign via the Donio.sk platform, which reached 31,165 euros in one month. During the year, the project presented other options of its financing via donation or the ongoing form of support through the Darujme.sk platform.

To all supporters, the Hoaxy a podvody team would like to express its sincere thanks from the bottom of all our hearts. Without them, nothing that is mentioned in this yearbook would've been possible.

A big thank you goes out to the experts and private or state institutions that provided the Hoaxy a podvody project with cooperation in debunking hoaxes in 2024. Expert arguments form the argumentative basis of every good and credible analysis.

The Hoaxy a podvody team would like to thank the following organisations, which cooperated with the project either free of charge or on very favourable conditions, without which the project wouldn't be where it is today.v



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Text author:

David Púchovský

Edited by:

Marta Pavelková, Matej Trančo

Design and layout (cover, DTP):

Jakub Kotúč

Expert consultation:

team of the project Hoaxy a podvody

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