



SZUVERENITÁSVÉDELMI  
HIVATAL

# DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES IN HUNGARY

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**THE PRESENCE OF THE  
ANTI-CHINESE VACCINE NARRATIVE  
IN HUNGARY,  
BASED ON THE DISINFORMATION  
OPERATION REVEALED BY REUTERS**





### The presence of the anti-Chinese vaccine narrative in Hungary, based on the disinformation operation revealed by Reuters

#### SUMMARY

In June 2024, the Reuters international news agency revealed that for more than a year at the height of the coronavirus pandemic the US Department of Defense had conducted coordinated disinformation campaigns against Asian and Middle Eastern countries that included Chinese vaccines in their own vaccination programmes. According to the findings of the investigative material published by the news agency, these Pentagon-led campaigns were always tailored to the specific needs and social nature of the country targeted.<sup>1</sup>

The specific cases presented by Reuters highlighted the fact that during the coronavirus pandemic, vaccine-producing countries had conducted systematically built-up disinformation campaigns against competing products and the countries developing them, both to sell their vaccines beyond their own economic and political sphere of interest and to counter their rivals attempts to gain influence through their vaccine diplomacy.

Although the disinformation attempts were clearly driven by economic interests, they were also capable of destabilising the political social order of the target country, reshaping its balance of political power, discrediting its government and limiting its capacity to act, even at the cost of human lives.

**The Sovereignty Protection Office has examined whether coordinated disinformation narratives similar to and following the patterns of the Asian and Middle Eastern campaigns appeared in Hungary during the pandemic.**

The inquiry was also justified by the epidemic control strategy adopted by Hungary, as the Hungarian government decided in 2020 that, regardless of the interests of the great powers and the lobbying and coercion attempts of pharmaceutical companies, it would try to purchase all vaccines deemed safe by the World Health Organization (WHO) in order to vaccinate the population as quickly as possible.

At the beginning of the vaccination programmes, Western vaccines were scarce or unavailable in Hungary. However, Chinese vaccines were available, which created the opportunity for a large part of Hungarian society to quickly become immunised.

Despite the fact that the Chinese vaccine had been validated by the WHO and the Hungarian authorities, a part of Hungarian society firmly rejected to take it up as a result of statements made by politicians and the campaign-like operation of the media that validated them.

<sup>1</sup>„Peru volunteer in Sinopharm vaccine trial dies of COVID-19 pneumonia, university says”, *Reuters*, 2021. január 26.  
Forrás: <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/peru-volunteer-sinopharm-vaccine-trial-dies-covid-19-pneumonia-university-says-2021-01-26/>



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For Hungarian society, which vaccine a person takes up quickly became a question of identity. Exploiting the fear and mistrust that stems from the sense of imminent danger to life became part of the political toolkit, and discrediting the government's crisis management ability became a political product. A Hungarian politician even categorised the domestic use of the Chinese vaccine as outright genocide.

On the basis of its inquiry, the Sovereignty Protection Office concluded that **disinformation narratives following the pattern identified by Reuters, capable of influencing public opinion, portraying Chinese vaccines as dangerous and unreliable were present in both the domestic media and Hungarian politics. The narrative was used and deployed in an adaptive way in the political competition to influence Hungarian public opinion.**

It can be shown that **in Hungary, both nationally known politicians and the most widely read media outlets gave space to the anti-vaccination narrative attacking the Chinese vaccine, which was capable of undermining confidence in international vaccine procurement and epidemic control, as well as the effectiveness of the vaccination strategy, and could also be used to obtain direct political influence.** Based on the research conducted during the analysis, it can also be concluded that on the political side Demokratikus Koalíció, and on the media product side, primarily but not exclusively 24.hu and RTL Klub were the most active players in the disinformation campaign.

**The presence of the anti-Chinese vaccine narrative clearly adversely affected the sovereign Hungarian state's ability to act in an emergency situation.** The success of the anti-Chinese vaccine narrative is also evidenced by public opinion polls, which reflect that **distrust of Chinese-developed vaccines had already had a marked presence in Hungarian society before they were marketed, without any personal or medical experience to back it up.**

The Sovereignty Protection Office draws attention to the fact that the forces influencing the public sphere and political decision-making (in particular politicians and media representatives) are legitimately expected to handle the issues they raise in a prudent and responsible manner, because by failing to apply due care they can easily be drawn into a disinformation campaign of foreign interests.