



SZUVERENITÁSVÉDELMI
HIVATAL

DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES IN HUNGARY

Western pro-war and Russian legitimacy narratives in connection with the war in Ukraine





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1. SUMMARY

The Sovereignty Protection Office has examined the active political narratives present in Hungary that frame the Russian-Ukrainian conflict renewed in 2022.

During the data collection and analysis, two separate narratives were identified.

One is the Western *pro-war narrative*, which is clearly pro-intervention and pro-escalation. The aim of introducing the narrative, which is being further developed by some European politicians and the mainstream public sphere in Western Europe, is to sway Hungarian public opinion in favour of the war and Western intervention.

Based on our inquiry, this narrative is reflected in the speeches of nationally known Hungarian politicians such as Klára Dobrev, MEP of DK, Katalin Cseh, MEP of Momentum, Bence Tordai, leader of the Párbeszéd parliamentary group, Gergely Karácsony, Mayor of Budapest, or Péter Márki-Zay, former candidate for Prime Minister. The Western pro-war narrative was already present in the Hungarian press before the outbreak of the war; articles arguing for the necessity of intervention and the involvement of Hungary, such as the launching of arms supplies, began appearing already then. It is important to point out that the Western pro-war narrative has since then tended to appear in nationwide and high-reach media products such as Telex, 444, 24, HVG or Népszava.

There is a version of this narrative that tries to convince the Hungarian public opinion to identify with the Western pro-war position by trying to make people believe that there is no chance of escalation of the conflict, and that there are no risks in supporting the joint war efforts.

This version of the narrative is also mostly propagated by the same politicians and media products that previously promoted arguments clearly in favour of direct intervention in the war. Typically, these opinion-forming actors often switch between versions of the war narrative: supporting Western pro-war goals while trying to relativise the dangers of war expansion.

The other identified narrative is the Russian *legitimacy narrative*, which simultaneously tries to justify the legitimacy (and justice) of the war and uses the method of deterrence in parallel. The Russian state narrative also questions Ukraine's right to exist and threatens Western European countries that intervene (or intend to intervene) with a nuclear counter-strike.



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These arguments were also used in statements by László Toroczkai, president of the Mi Hazánk movement, and Péter Magyar, vice-president of the TISZA party. Similarly to the Western pro-war narrative, there are clear examples among the proponents of this interpretation of political actors ending up relativising the threats from the perspective of the Russian legitimacy narrative. The analysis shows that the Russian narrative is continuously and tendentiously present in nationwide and high-reach domestic media products, but this narrative is developed further mainly by lower-reach media products, such as Magyar Jelen, Moszkva tér, or Orosz Hírek.

It is a characteristic of both narratives that they seek to justify their own war activities and try to make the Hungarian public believe that the success of one side or the other will be beneficial for Hungary and Hungarian society.

Overall, the examination of the narratives identified in our analysis shows that there are extremely strong external attempts of influence in the Hungarian public sphere to change the Hungarian social and governmental position on the Russian-Ukrainian war, with the significant contribution of several domestic political actors and media products, and that, furthermore, these narratives exert the strongest impact in the media and on social media platforms.

The presence of both narratives poses a threat to Hungary's sovereignty, as they have a socially polarising effect and carry the risk of escalating the war and spreading it to Hungary.