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Echoes of Fake News

Facebook Downs Assets Linked to
Deceptive Websites Run from
Separatist-Held Ukraine,
First Reported by Die Welt and Netzpolitik

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01.2021

Takedowns

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Executive Summary

On January 12, Facebook [announced](#) that it had taken down a cluster of accounts, pages and groups that were tied to a network of fake "news" websites across Europe and Central Asia. The websites were routinely pro-Kremlin, anti-Ukraine and anti-Western, and were linked to individuals in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine.

As it announced the takedown as part of its [monthly update](#) on influence operations, Facebook said, "The people behind this deceptive campaign used fake accounts to manage Pages and Groups, drive people to off-platform domains masquerading as independent news entities in countries they targeted, and comment to make their posts seem more popular than they were. Each Page had an accompanying domain and posted content hosted on these websites. It appears that the network accelerated its activity in 2020 and some of its content was re-printed by media organizations in Germany and Russia, including Sputnik Germany … Although the people behind this activity attempted to conceal their identities, our investigation found links to individuals in the Luhansk region in Ukraine and those associated with Borotba, a political group in Ukraine."

The operation was based around a network of websites; some of these were exposed by a joint report by German outlets [Netzpolitik.org](#) and [Die Welt](#) in December. That report linked the network to a Crimea-based pro-Kremlin outlet called News-Front, which has already been banned from [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#), but there is insufficient open-source evidence to confirm this attribution with confidence. Available digital traces led to individuals in separatist-held Ukraine, especially the Luhansk region; the organization behind them remains unknown. Facebook also highlighted individuals with links to Borotba, a [Marxist](#) [organization](#) that originated in Odessa, Ukraine.

The websites worked in English, German, Russian, French, Spanish and Hungarian. Some of their content was copied from bona fide news outlets, while other articles appear to have been original. The original content praised Russia and its allies and attacked its critics, both foreign and domestic. Many of its claims were false, including the accusation that the United States had released COVID-19 from a secret lab in Ukraine, that Ukraine was exporting radiation-contaminated wheat to Europe, and that Russian opposition leader and poisoning victim Alexei Navalny was a CIA operative.
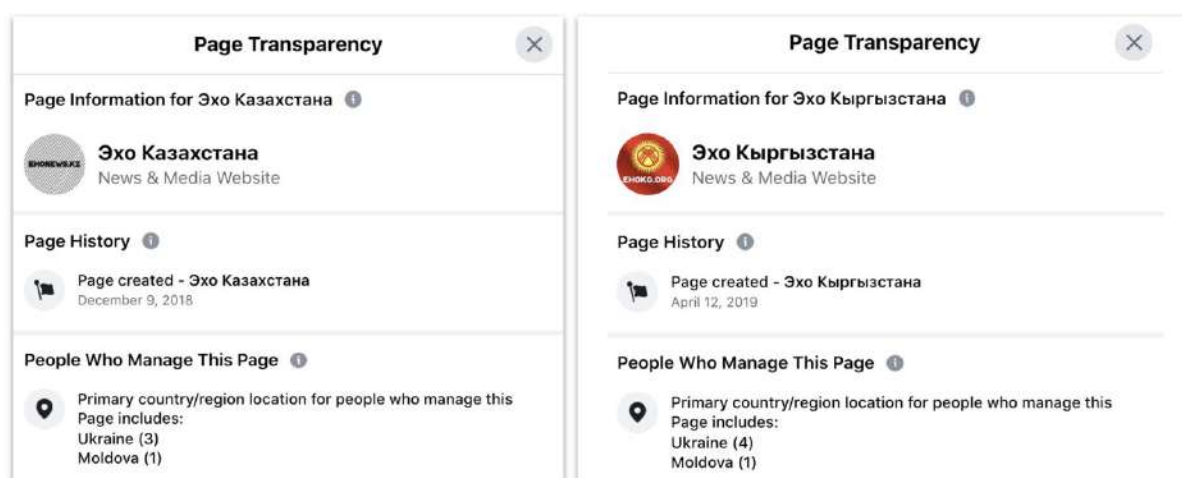
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The network used its assets on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to promote its content, but its activity does not seem to have borne fruit. Most of the network's posts gained a handful of engagements, if any. One Facebook page had 7,000 followers, none of the others had over 5,000, and half of them had under 1,000. In the Western countries whose languages it used, the operation seems to have had almost no impact.

Instead, its main amplification came from apparently unaffiliated Russian-language websites that cited the fake articles as if they came from "Western media." As such, the network of websites appears to have been a disinformation laundromat. Whether by accident or design, its main effect, such as it was, was to insert false stories about Kremlin critics, and defense of Kremlin narratives, into the Russian-language space by pretending that they came from Western outlets. The operation was based in Ukraine, but its main audience appears to have been in Russia.
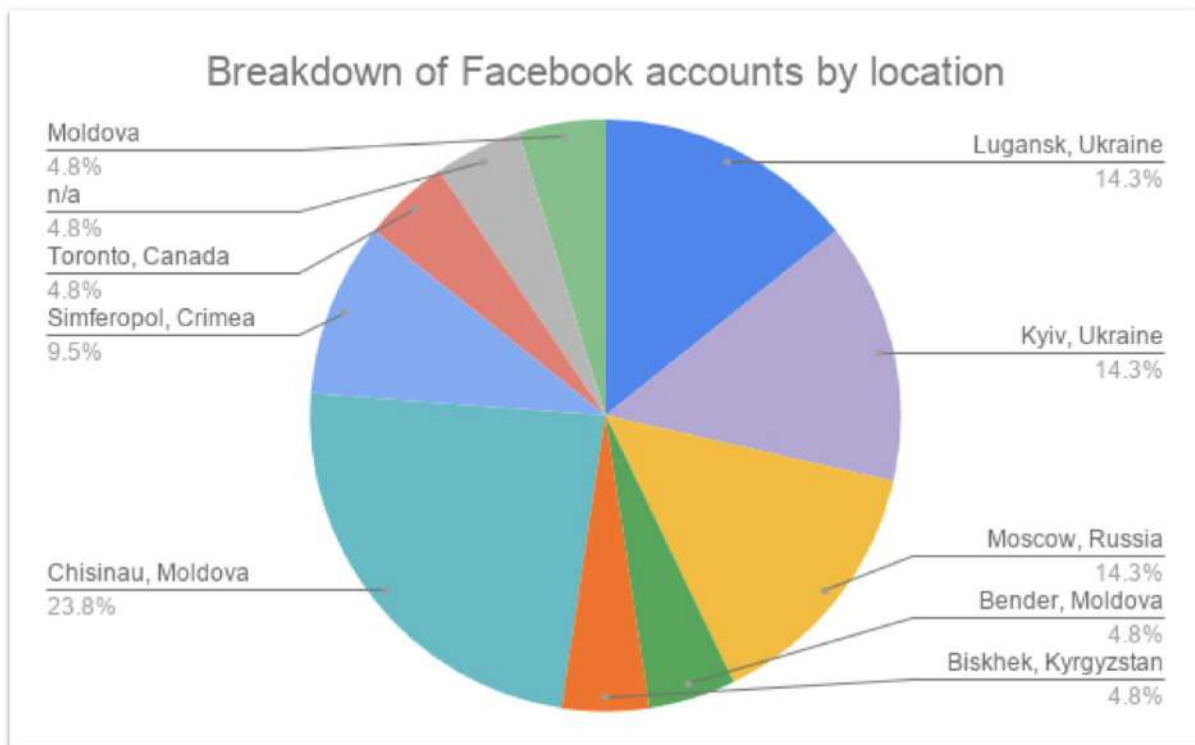
The Takedown Set

The set that Facebook took down consisted of 23 accounts, 25 pages, 11 groups and 19 Instagram accounts. The pages largely posed as news outlets, each focused on a different country. In Russian, three of them used the title "Эхо" (echo) plus a country name - Moldova, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Other pages focused on Ukraine, Crimea and Belarus, while still others dealt with Germany, the UK and Ukraine.

Some of the pages had such small followings that they did not have to show the location of their administrators under Facebook's page transparency settings. Those that did showed admins in Ukraine and Moldova, even if the pages were focused on other countries.

Page transparency for the pages Эхо Казахстана (echo of Kazakhstan, left) and Эхо Кыргызстана (echo of Kyrgyzstan, right), showing the admin locations.

The Facebook accounts primarily claimed locations in Chisinau (Moldova), Kyiv (Ukraine), Moscow, and Luhansk (Ukraine). Some of these accounts displayed signs of inauthenticity.

Breakdown of accounts by declared location.

In many cases, profile pictures used by these accounts were simply taken from somewhere else on the Internet, making their inauthentic nature easy to suspect with a simple reverse-image search.

At least two assets with different names updated the same profile picture on July 23, 2020.

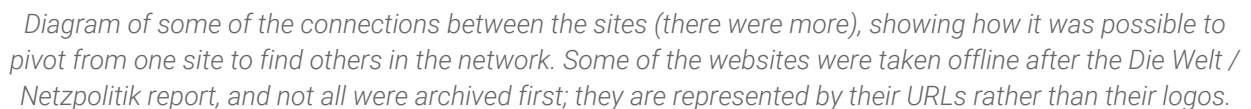*Example of profile pictures taken from the Internet.*

*Image of a Soviet drawing that reads
"The whole world will be ours".*

The Facebook pages had small followings and primarily served as website amplifiers: each page shared nothing but articles from the website with which it was associated. This typically produced poor results: most of the posts that Graphika reviewed had under a dozen engagements (likes, replies or shares), and many had none at all. Two of the websites had equivalent accounts on Twitter: @pravdorubmd (136 followers) and @courrierparisi1 (0 followers). Neither achieved viral impact, and again, their sole activity consisted of tweeting links to the associated websites.

The behavior is important because it indicates the operation's concept: the websites were the main vector for seeding content, and the accounts it ran on Facebook and Twitter were secondary amplifiers designed to draw attention to the websites, without much apparent success.

Websites

The websites themselves each claimed to be independent, and the operators appear to have tried to mask the connections between them: all the most recent sites used privacy protection options at registration. However, multiple indicators showed the links between them, including registration email addresses, IP addresses, admins, redirects, Google Analytics codes and Adsense trackers.

Diagram of some of the connections between the sites (there were more), showing how it was possible to pivot from one site to find others in the network. Some of the websites were taken offline after the Die Welt / Netzpolitik report, and not all were archived first; they are represented by their URLs rather than their logos.

Almost all the websites featured the same email address for either registrar or admin; the few which did not were connected to the rest by the websites' IP addresses, Google Analytics or Adsense accounts. That email led to an individual who gave an address in Luhansk, Ukraine; the Die Welt / Netzpolitik report named him as "Maxim G." Graphika confirmed his details, but will not publish them here. The Die Welt / Netzpolitik reporters interviewed him; he claimed to be simply a web designer who had "nothing to do with the content" but had been paid to set up the sites.

The websites fell into three thematic clusters. One focused on former-Soviet states and operated in Russian: the countries targeted included Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Belarus. These primarily posted apparently original content. A second focused on other European countries, and

posted in a language appropriate to each: [English](#), French, German, Spanish, [Italian](#), [Turkish](#) and [Hungarian](#). Some were taken down after the Die Welt / Netzpolitik report, and left almost no trace of their content, leaving little scope for analysis; others appear to have been abandoned before they developed a coherent publishing pattern. Those which remained online primarily posted content copied from authentic sites, with a handful of apparently authored posts slipped in between.

Both these clusters were essentially geopolitical in nature, and the stories they planted promoted pro-Russian and anti-Western narratives. The third, smallest cluster consisted of diverse, mainly Russian-language pages. One focused on [traffic accidents](#), for example, while a [second](#) aggregated other Russian news portals, and a third concerned the [Soviet victory](#) in World War II. One [site](#) with the same admin and IP address as many of the other accounts in this network had not been fully set up, and largely featured stock Latin texts.

Russian-Language Output

The Russian-language sites primarily served up apparently original texts that praised Russia and its allies and criticized its perceived rivals. For example, the website pravdorub.md, focused on Moldova, routinely posted articles that were critical of pro-EU President Maia Sandu and supportive of her pro-Russian opponents. As of January 7, 2021, recent articles included an [accusation](#) that Sandu's government was spending at record speed, [allegations](#) of corruption against the Secretary General of her party, a [claim](#) that she was to blame for Moldova's political crisis, and a [report](#) on Kremlin spokesman Dmitriy Peskov mocking Sandu for her desire to see Russian troops withdrawn from the breakaway region of Transnistria. A related website, Эхо Молдовы (Echo of Moldova, originally at eho.md, then at ehomd.info), made [similar](#) [claims](#).

The site Эхо Кыргызстана (Kyrgyzstan Echo, whose URL was originally ehokg.org, then ehokg.info) offered a mixture of domestic and geopolitical fare. As of January 7, 2021, recent analytical pieces included the claim that [Turkey's](#) policies in Central Asia were aligned with US and NATO interests, and that the Russian-led [Collective Security Treaty Organization](#) (CSTO) was guaranteeing Kyrgyzstan's security by establishing an analytical center designed to counter, among other things, pro-democracy "color" revolutions. Others [accused](#) pro-Western NGOs of interference in corruption accusations against a High Court judge, and [argued](#) that joining the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union would "help solve Tajikistan's economic problems."

Its undeclared sister site, Эхо Казахстана (Kazakhstan Echo, ehonews.kz), was similarly aligned. As of January 7, recent articles included the [claim](#) that Central Asia is a "tasty morsel" for American interference, that the United States was creating "[covert military bases](#)" in Kazakhstan and thus imperilling relations with China and Russia, and that Turkey was trying to create a new [Ottoman Empire](#) in Central Asia. The posts appear original father than copied from other sources, and were first published on these websites.

On each of the Central Asian pages, the article was attributed to a journalist or analyst, and was said to have been written "specially for" the website in question. No other online traces, further publications or public profiles were available for the authors of these articles, raising the questions over the use of fictitious author names.

Центральная Азия по-прежнему остается лакомым кусочком для США

06/01/2021 15:08

Поэтому мы постоянно наблюдаем усиление американского присутствия как в экономике Казахстана, так в сфере военного сотрудничества, что не может не вызывать озабоченность у соседей. В связи с этим возникает риторический вопрос — нужно ли это наращивание отношений самим народам государств Центральной Азии?

[Article](#) attributed to Нурлан Фадеев (Nurlan Fadeyev) on ehonews.kz, claiming that extended American soft power in Central Asia will destabilize Kazakhstan's relationship with its neighbors.

Нужны ли Казахстану американские «подарки»

29/12/2020 23:21

Из открытых источников известно, что США также будут поставлять Казахстану специальное оборудование для пропускных пунктов на границе с Россией. И, скорее всего, обслуживать это оборудование будут американские технические специалисты. Соответственно, только они и будут знать, какую информацию «снимает» аппаратура и куда передает.

Не стоит забывать и о том, что США уже не исполняют обязанности по договору по открытому небу и могут использовать наше государство для получения разведывательных данных о России и Китае — своих стран-соперниц, с которыми Казахстан как раз граничит.

Размещение в Казахстане новых американских военных объектов, замаскированных под учебные центры, а также поставка вооружений и специальной техники могут вызвать серьезные вопросы у России и Китая. С КНР мы вместе входим в ШОС, а с Российской Федерацией являемся союзниками и состоим в одном военном блоке — ОДКБ. Для них появление американцев у своих границ со стороны Казахстана уже недружественный шаг.

[Article](#) attributed to Жанболат Шолпанов (Janbolat Sholpanov) on ehonews.kz, claiming that the U.S. is building military facilities passing as training centers in Kazakhstan to spy on China and Russia.

While they portrayed the U.S presence as damaging for local countries' ties with both Russia and China, both sites were also broadly critical of Chinese influence in Central Asia. For example, one [article](#) on Эхо Кыргызстана accused China of "merciless" behavior towards Kyrgyzstan in its insistence on loan repayments during the COVID epidemic. On two occasions, an English-language website, [central.asia-news.com](#), [quoted](#) this article; according to its [About](#) page, the Central Asia news site is sponsored by US CENTCOM. Similar articles on the Kazakhstan-focused website accused China of taking over the country through its business and investment links.

Китай стал новым хозяином казахстанских недр?

30/12/2020 21:27

Что касается сделки о нефтегазовых участках, ее должны проверить на предмет законности в генпрокуратуре и сам президент Касым-Жомарт Токаев. Если этого не сделать, есть вероятность, что через несколько лет Пекин возьмет в свои руки все механизмы казахстанской экономики и станет ее новым хозяином.

Передача в руки китайских компаний стратегических месторождений и разведанных территорий, а также продление сроков контрактов по недропользованию, которые и так кабальные по своей сути, является актом, подрывающим государственность. Завладев нашими ресурсами, Пекин сможет по примеру Таджикистана перейти к открытой аннексии приглянувшихся земель в обмен на погашение долгов или на политическую протекцию. По сути, это граничит с потерей независимости и является фактом колониальной зависимости.

Article attributed to Fadeyev, claiming that China bought oil sites in Kazakhstan and will therefore take control of its economy and force the country into serfdom "just as it did with Tajikistan." The article predicted that China would annex lands, bring corruption into the country by forcing people to pay bribes for political protection and make Kazakhstan a Chinese colonial dependency with no control of its borders and territory.

Борьба за Центральную Азию набирает обороты

28/12/2020 22:59

На сегодняшний день Поднебесная не просто мешает американской политике, а полностью вытесняет ее. На территории Таджикистана, например, Пекин уже имеет военную базу в Горно-Бадахшанской области. По информации неофициальных источников, еще одна китайская база расположена в Афганистане.
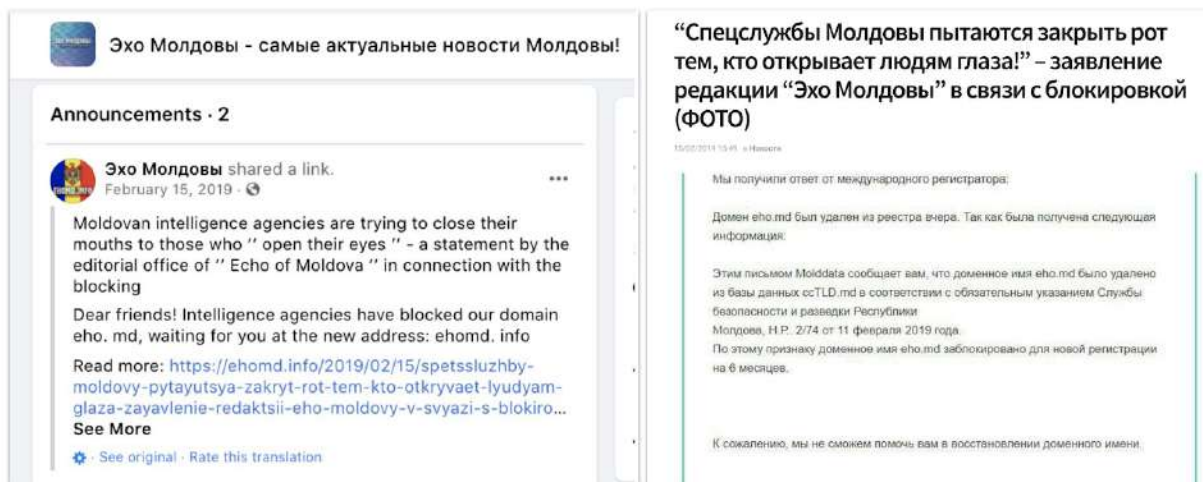
Сейчас противостояние между США и Китаем в регионе может достигнуть своего апогея, и в данной ситуации Казахстан и наши соседи могут стать настоящим новым фронтом противостояния этих держав. Главное не дать себя втянуть в их игры и не стать окончательной колонией, так как в случае глобального противостояния пострадает именно наш народ.

Обезопасить себя можно только через ускоренную интеграцию в рамках Евразийского экономического союза и Организации Договора о коллективной безопасности, через пересмотр кабальных контрактов с американскими и китайскими компаниями, а также посредством ликвидации всех военных и полувоенных организаций Пентагона и НАТО на территории республики.

[Article](#) attributed to Fadeyev, claiming 1/China is willing to take control of Kazakhstan as it did with Tajikistan, 2/the US and China are interfering and fighting over Central Asia, 3/Kazakhstan might become a colony of one of these, 4/to avoid this the country needs to join Russian-led orgs (EEU and CSTO), and revise "enslaving" contracts with American and Chinese companies while getting rid of US and NATO "military and paramilitary" organizations.

Some of this activity appears to have triggered domestic investigations. In February 2019, the Facebook page associated with Эхо Молдовы posted the claim that Moldova's top-level domain registrar had blocked its original domain, eho.md, at the request of the Moldovan security services. The post included an invitation to the website's new domain, ehomd.info, and it linked to an [article](#) on that website that included a screenshot of the message from the registrar. The Kyrgyzstan-focused website also changed its domain name from ehokg.org (registered in September 2018) to ehokg.info (registered September 9, 2020), but the circumstances are unclear.

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Left, post by the Facebook page for Эхо Молдовы into the group of the same name, announcing the new website. Right, screenshot from the [article](#) on the new website, showing the message from Moldova's domain registrar.

Ukraine, Yet Again

Other sites carried fewer original articles. The website 24-7news.eu, which shared a Google Adsense code with pravdorub.md and a Google Analytics code with one Russian-language and two Spanish-language sites, copied most of its articles from authentic news outlets. Unusually, it offered content in English, German and Hungarian; as of January 7, 2021, the [five](#) [most](#) [recent](#) [English](#) [articles](#) were copied from Euronews, the [five](#) [most](#) [recent](#) [German](#) [articles](#) appeared copied from the German-language edition of the Epoch Times, and the [five](#) [most](#) [recent](#) [Hungarian](#) [articles](#) matched a website called infostart.hu.
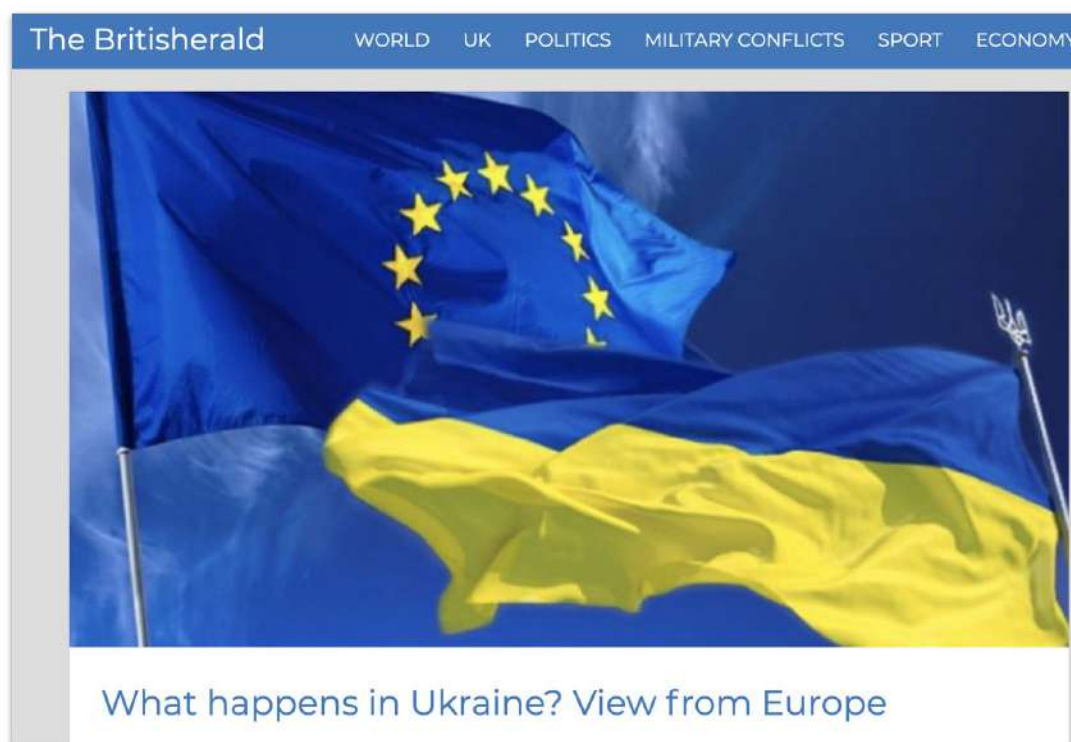
Between these articles, however, the website inserted a very small number of posts that were either original, or from Kremlin-aligned sources. For example, on December 3, 2020, the German-language version of the site published the [claim](#) that Ukraine wanted EU help to recover Crimea; the post originally appeared on the German edition of [News-Front](#) the day before. For context,an anonymous whistleblower interviewed by [Die Zeit](#) in 2017 claimed that News-Front was mainly funded by Russian intelligence, but the claim has never been corroborated.

In December 2018 the website ran an English-language [article](#) on Romanian nationalism that was attributed to one "Roman Ardelyanu." The article was purportedly translated from a [Russian](#) version on Эхо Молдовы by an American called [Greg Butterfield](#), but the Roman Ardelyanu persona was exposed as a front for Russian military intelligence as part of a [Facebook takedown](#) that Graphika [analyzed](#) in February 2020.

The few apparently original articles were closely aligned with Kremlin narratives. For example, an [article](#) on Western support for Ukraine that was published on August 14, 2018, accused the West of promoting a "coup" backed by Nazis in Ukraine, a trope that Russian disinformation channels

have promoted since the beginning of 2014. It was written in notably unidiomatic English, with phrases such as "announce of the Russian aggression," "allies of the hostile Putin's state," Ukrainian officials "are also openly support," and "in a less singlesided way." Even the headline was unidiomatic: "What happens in Ukraine?" where the context would have indicated, "What is happening in Ukraine?"

According to a Google search for the headline, the article appeared on two other sites the same day: tarde-republicana.es (a site that was deleted after the Die Welt / Netzpolitik report) and britisherald.org.uk. Both were administered by this operation.

Headline and banner from the article on britisherald.org.uk.

Another article, dated September 26, 2019, accused Ukraine of dumping radioactive sludge and polluting groundwater which was then used to irrigate crops for export to Europe - a variation on another trope of Russian propaganda, Ukraine as a nuclear disaster, that was earlier promoted by the operation "Secondary Infektion." The same article appeared on britisherald.org.uk, a Russian-language website with a Ukrainian name run by the operation called "вечірня Україна" (evening Ukraine), and, in a slightly modified format, on another website managed by the same person at the heart of the operation, called ecoandpeace.eu ("European group of action 'Ecology and peace'"). The sole source for this radioactive claim was an alleged NGO in Ukraine, called "Kharkiv environmental monitoring," but no link was provided.

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However, a separate article from May 2020, also run on ecoandpeace.eu, was sourced to the same alleged NGO, and this provided a link to its website, which was, yet again, administered by the same person. This time, the article alleged that the United States was running a secret virus-testing lab in Ukraine, and claimed that it might be to blame for COVID-19:

"Social activists of Kharkov city assure that this is only a part of information, which they have. They understand that alone they can't influence this government organization, with which help, perhaps, was created virus COVID-19, which is dangerous for our kids and elderly parents."

The allegation that the U.S. created COVID-19 in a "secret lab" in Europe is, again, a claim that has been made by pro-Russian channels before, including operation Secondary Infektion. In 2018, the websites britisherald.org.uk and 24-7news.eu ran a similar story, this time focused on a U.S. facility in the country of Georgia.

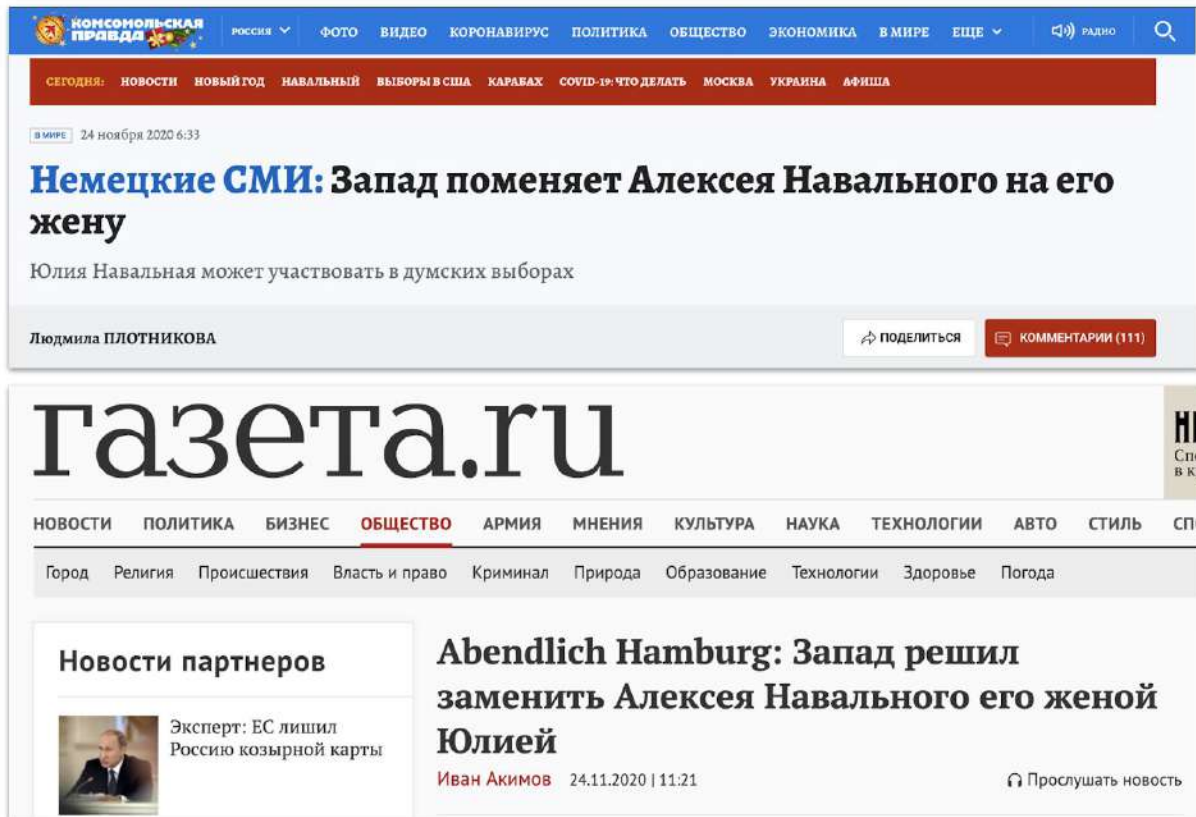*Same story, different year: two "news" websites with the same admin accusing the U.S. of creating diseases. Left, September 2018; right, May 2020.*

Navalny, Navalny, Navalny

A third key topic was the Russian opposition, and especially anti-corruption activist and opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who has been the target of Russian disinformation operations including from Secondary Infektion and the Internet Research Agency since at least 2013, and who was poisoned in August, reportedly by the Russian security services.

The Die Welt / Netzpolitik article reported that the operation website Abendlich Hamburg (evening Hamburg, a name that sounds awkward in German) claimed that Western secret services had formerly backed Navalny, but had shifted to backing his wife. The article, from November 2020, claimed that the Western agencies had conducted a secret opinion poll in Russia, and concluded that Navany was seen as an unpopular loser. The article has not been archived, but it was cited by a wide range of Russian media, including gazeta.ru, news.ru, and Komsomolskaya Pravda.

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Top, Komsomolskaya Pravda attributing the story to "German media." Bottom, gazeta.ru attributing it to Abendlich Hamburg.

Netzpolitik and Die Welt also highlighted another anti-Navalny article, this time in English, on capital-news.org.uk, dated October 8, 2020. This featured an interview with Greg Butterfield, apparently the same person who translated the GRU article cited above. Described in the article as a "famous American member of the opposition," Butterfield is a self-described "Communist, anti-imperialist" and regularly writes for socialist website "Struggle - La Lucha;" the website reprinted his interview the following day. The Twitter account in his name, handle @redguard1971, tweeted a link to the Capital News article the day it was published. In the interview, Butterfield said that it was "certainly" possible that Navalny was working for the CIA, and that it was "very, very unlikely" that the Kremlin was behind his poisoning.

The article was translated into Russian by the website inosmi.ru, which was founded by the same Russian state agency that owns the Sputnik channel, and spread across Russian media, where Butterfield was described as an "American expert" and a "famous member of the opposition." It was also reported by Sputnik's German service. This is not a case of a false story going viral, as Butterfield is a real individual: rather, it is a case of a disinformation website landing an interview with a fringe commentator whose views align with Russian narratives, and laundering it to a more mainstream audience.

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A third article on the Russian opposition appeared in German on [24-7news.eu](#). Published on November 25, this article claimed that Russia had "mastered" the challenge of COVID-19 and "stood firmly behind" President Vladimir Putin, and accused the "pro-Western non-system opposition" of trying to destabilize the country. "Non-system opposition" is a distinctly Russian phrase, and suggests that the article was based on a Russian original. Yet again, this article was widely amplified on Russian-language websites, led by [news.ru](#). It was attributed to "Arthur Polanksy," a persona who featured as one of the admins of 24-7news.eu, but left no other verifiable traces online.

MH-17

A final topic of note was Malaysian Airlines flight MH-17, which was shot down over Ukraine in July 2014; an international investigation [charged](#) three Russians and a Ukrainian with the murder of all 298 people on board, and [concluded](#) that the murder weapon came from the Russian military. Russian outlets and information operations have spent years denying these charges and smearing those who investigated the disaster.

Netzpolitik and Die Welt identified one article on [britisherald.org.uk](#) and [tarde-republicana.es](#) that portrayed Russia as transparent and the international investigation as a hoax.

"Even the 'hot pursuit' created by the Joint Investigation Team, where despite the name, Russian experts are not allowed, is manipulated by dubious arguments, for each of which Moscow easily finds weighty counterarguments," ran the version on britisherald.org.uk.

It was originally posted by a fake persona, Kate Matberg, on a French blog site, and on a password-protected site called summurynews.com, which Netzpolitik and Die Welt described as a "sister" of News-Front. The Kate Matberg persona was deleted after the Die Welt / Netzpolitik report, though a [cache](#) survives showing the headline and date; the deletion leaves insufficient evidence to attribute the persona to a specific operation.

Another article on MH17 ran on [capitalnews.org.uk](#) on October 19, 2019. Although the website nominally focused on London, the headline used quote marks in the format « », not the British "". That format is characteristic of French and Russian, among others. The website also attributed its article to summurynews.com. Again, the article aligned with Kremlin narratives, arguing that "the study of the role of Ukraine in a plane crash is long overdue."

Header and headline of the Capital News article, October 19, 2019.

Content and Topics

Praising Communism and the USSR

Many of the accounts in the takedown set affiliated themselves with Communist organizations and groups in Russia and Ukraine, either explicitly or by sharing their content on promoting them. As Facebook pointed out, some of the people behind the operation were connected with Borotba, a Marxist organization. They primarily posted openly Communist and pro-Soviet content, with a heavy focus on former Soviet leaders Joseph Stalin and Vladimir Lenin. The narratives spread about the Soviet Union primarily focused on praising its leaders and celebrating battles won by the Red Army over "fascists" and "nationalists", as well as content nostalgic for the Soviet Union and praising the October Revolution of 1917. On repeated occasions, the accounts used the examples of regional political and geopolitical crisis in the post-Soviet world - such as the Kyrgyz 2020 anti-corruption protests, or more recently the Nagorno-Karabakh armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan - to glorify the USSR and demonstrate how useful the Union was.
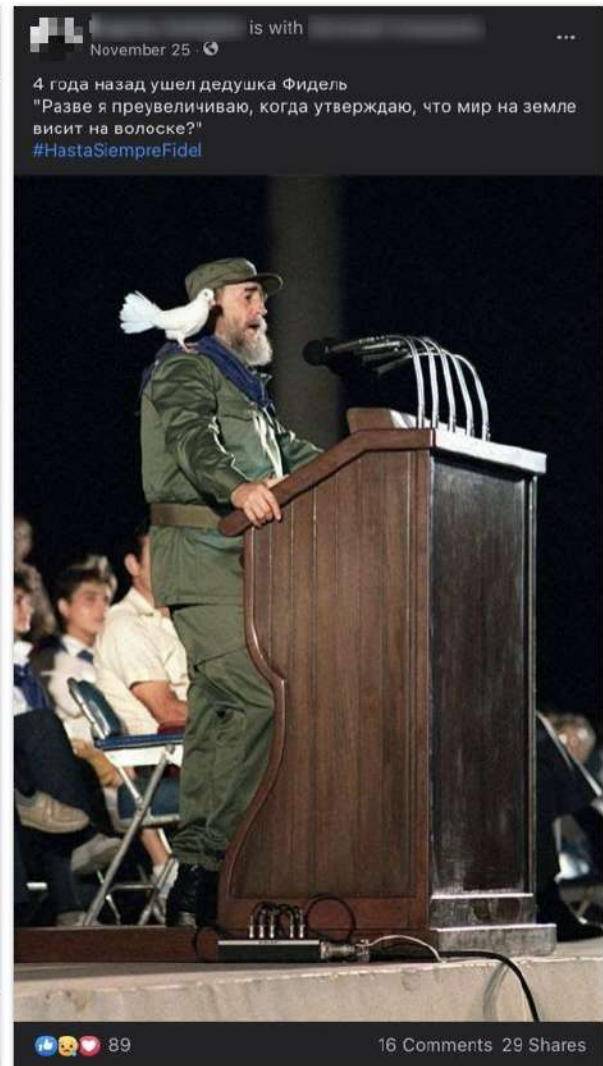
Posts praising Lenin (left) and Stalin (right).

The left-hand post claims that while they are at war, both Azerbaijan and Armenia want the USSR back. The right displays a quote from Lenin about Ukraine alongside a meme praising the October 1917's revolution.
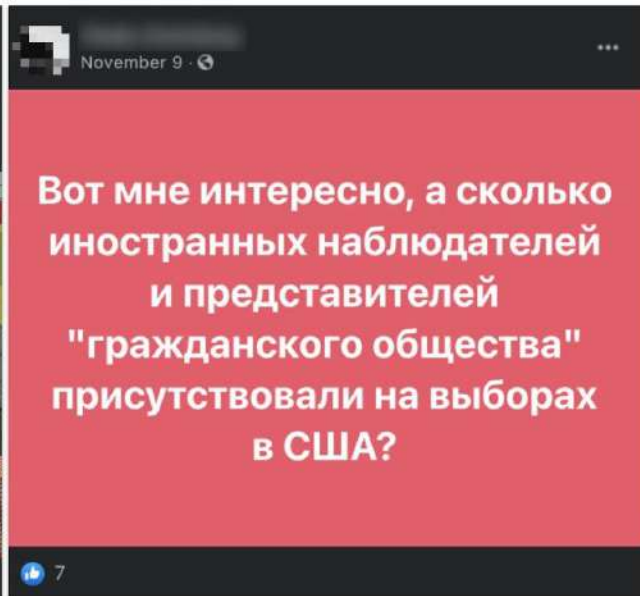
While the group primarily focused on the USSR and its two first leaders, the Communism-related content they shared also extensively praised foreign Communist leaders and revolutionary figures, such as Mao Tse-Tung, Che Guevara or Fidel Castro, whom some accounts affectionately nicknamed "grandpa Fidel". The content related to them was less political than the USSR one was, and mostly consisted of quotes from the men.

The post on the left is a quote by Che Guevara. The post on the right commemorates the death of "grandpa Fidel" and displays the hashtag #HastaSiempreFidel.

The United States, American Imperialism and the West

Just like the websites, the Facebook network disseminated a substantial amount of content attacking the United States, the West and capitalism more broadly. The United States was particularly targeted for its "imperialism" as well as for the treatment of its minorities, as the accounts supported both the Black Lives Matter movement and Native American communities. The accounts also widely targeted the American law enforcement forces, with content related to the murder of Breonna Taylor.

Content hostile to the United States disseminated by the assets.

Content supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement and of Native Americans.
The left-hand post is a repost from the United Communist Party where they express their solidarity to BLM protesters. The right-hand post was posted for the international day of Indigenous resistance, with the hashtags #imperialism and #colonization.

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The assets also shared anti-imperialist content targeting Venezuela, Belarus, Moldova and Cuba, denouncing American "interference" in the democratic process of these countries. At least one post advocated for the dissolution of the United States in order to create "more great and varied Americas".
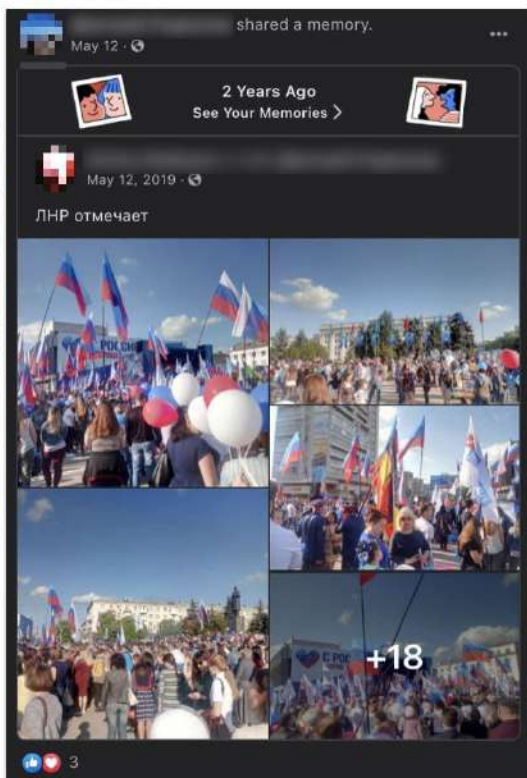

The left-hand poem reads "There is no difference between Trump and Biden; Who is not an idiot understands; Our candidate is the Yellowstone supervolcano; Let him count the vote".
The right-hand post promoted the dissolution of the United States of America.

Anti-Ukraine

The accounts mostly tacked Ukraine using narratives depicting Ukraine as a fascist and Nazi state, a widespread claim among pro-Russian supporters. Pictures and articles shared by the assets also portrayed Ukraine as a dangerous and unsafe country. These narratives intertwined with content supportive of the separatist so-called republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, while some accounts praised the annexation of Crimea by Russia. In both cases, the Ukrainian army and the Ukrainian State were targeted by content accusing them of violating the human rights of people living in separatist regions and in Crimea, and of violently repressing them. The coverage of Ukraine was also used to attack Western countries and institutions, claiming that by supporting the Euromaidan revolution they also supported neo-fascism.
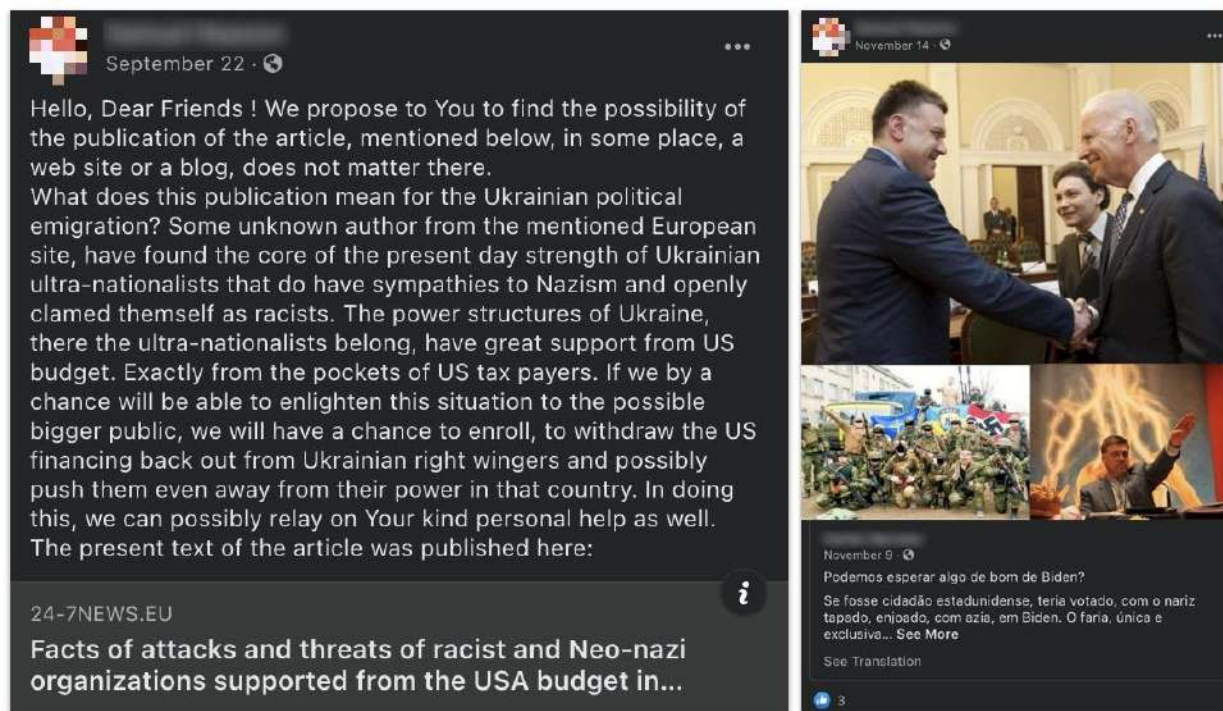
The left-hand post claims Facebook is letting Ukraine neo-fascists working as fact-checkers, while the right-hand link claims that Euromaidan brought blood-thirsty fascists to power in Ukraine.

Posts praising the so-called Luhansk People's Republic and its late leader Alexandr Zakharchenko.
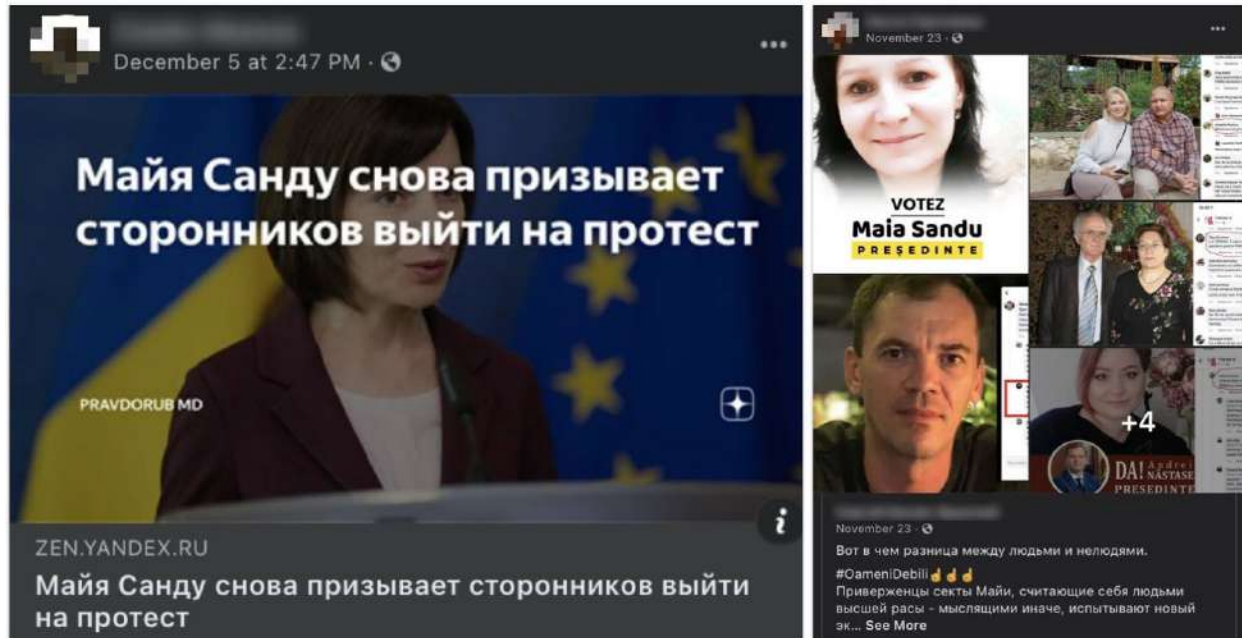
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One of the most indirectly targeted foreign countries was the United States, and especially Democratic president-elect Joe Biden. The United States was accused of financing terorrism and neo-Nazi organizations with taxpayer money, while Biden was attacked for meeting with the leader of the ultra-right Svoboda party Oleh Tyahnybok.
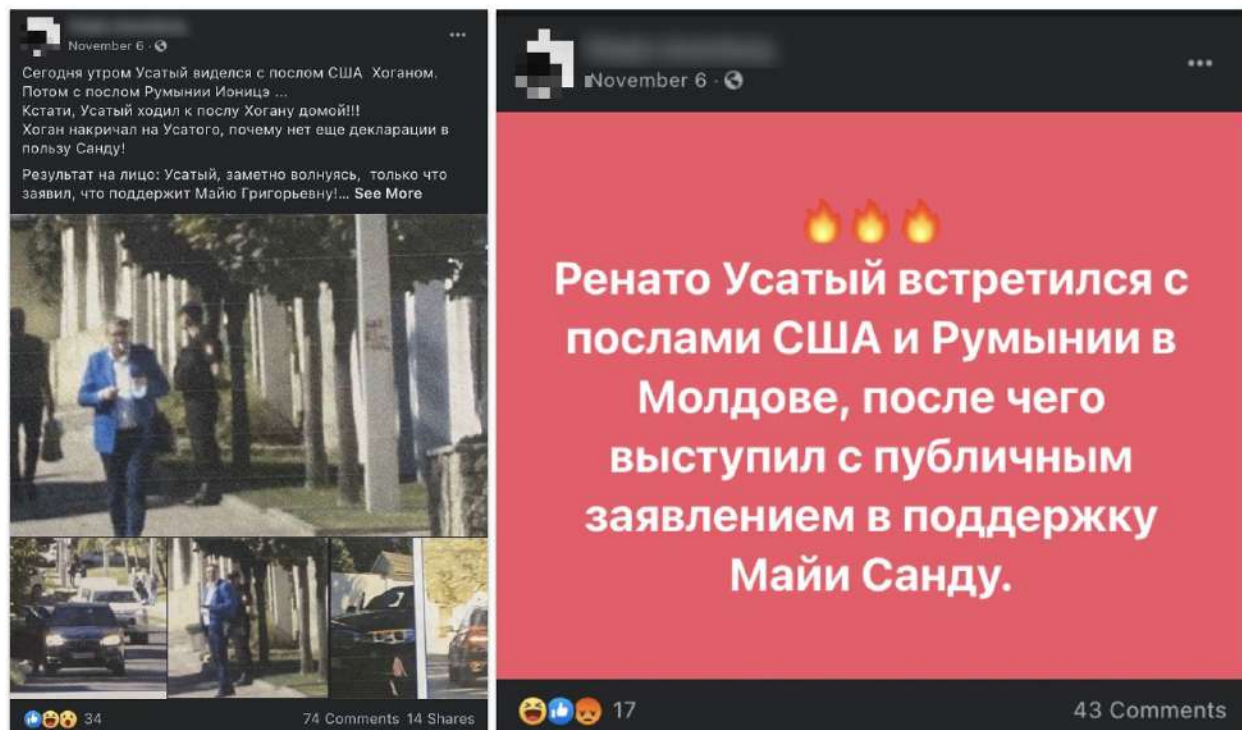

Posts accusing the US and Biden of supporting Ukrainian neo-Nazis. The right post displays a picture of Oleh Tyahnybok and Joe Biden, as well as a picture of Tyahnybok doing a Nazi salute and a picture of paramilitary men with a flag of the bataillion Azov and a Nazi flag.

Moldovan Politics

At least four accounts focused exclusively on Moldovan politics and spread content critical of pro-European elected president Maia Sandu. According to the assets, Sandu was brought to power through American machinations, with some posts presenting Moldova as the next country targeted by a Western-backed "color revolution". Both the United States and Romania were accused of forcing presidential candidate Renato Usatii to endorse Sandu in the second round of the Presidential election. Sandu was also accused of being a crooked politician who endangered her supporters by organizing protests in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. Her supporters were also targeted by some corrosive content, calling them for instance "inhuman", presenting them as self-entitled people who think of themselves as higher than people with different political opinions.

Content critical towards Maia Sandu and her supporters.

Content denouncing the supposed American interference in Eastern European politics, claiming that populist candidate Renato Usatii endorsed Maia Sandu in the second round of the election after being pressured by the US and Romanian Ambassadors to Moldova to do so.

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