

# Hungarian Elections: Mobilisation at Home and Abroad

Main topics used to mobilise electorate at home and in neighbouring countries during the 2022 general elections in Hungary.

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**Authors: Lóránt Gyóri, Patrik Szicherle**

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**POLITICAL CAPITAL**  
POLICY RESEARCH & CONSULTING INSTITUTE

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# Narratives of mobilisation

- Political Capital and its partners monitored the Hungarian communication campaign conducted on webpages and social media pages between 12 February and 30 April 30, 2022 to understand the strategic communication and leading narratives used to mobilise Hungarian voters along domestic, and foreign policy issues at home and abroad. The research monitored five main narratives concerning: (1) the opposition, (2) minority communities, (3) the Euro-Atlantic Community, (4) Ukraine, and (5) relations with Russia/China to analyse the total number, time-trend, number of interactions, and attitudinal disposition of messages or mentions used for political mobilisation.
- The timing of the research allowed us to assess from a quantitative and qualitative perspective how the renewed war in Ukraine impacted the political campaign, altered the strategic communication of parties, and ultimately contributed to the crushing defeat of the Hungarian opposition.
- Among the five narratives monitored the discourse about the opposition unsurprisingly proved to be the most significant, producing altogether 6,586 mentions, 802,647 interactions, and 169,547 comments
- The Russian invasion of Ukraine had a fundamental impact on the campaign in general, and the communication involving the opposition narrative specifically. Before the war some local “corruption” scandals, past “failures” of the opposition parties dominated the campaign, after the invasion both sides were compelled to abandon earlier communication strategies, even forcing the Fidesz-KDNP to adopt a double-talk on the whole conflict by expressing support for Ukraine and attacking the sanctions regime at the same time.
- The opposition candidate for PM Péter Márki-Zay (MZP) made a fundamental communication mistake early-on by expressing his support for a NATO-led Hungarian military involvement in the war. Governmental communication seized on his statement using it to formulate a disinformation narrative – about a “peace-loving” government and a “pro-war” opposition - that ultimately won the election for the Fidesz-KDNP. Data reflects the changes in communication with 57% of the opposition’s coverage proving to be negative, most referencing MZP’s communication mistakes.

- Unlike other narratives the topic of Hungarian minorities abroad did not polarise the Hungarian political campaign; most monitored political actors and media expressed an overwhelmingly positive attitude about the issue. Despite the “political unity,” our monitoring proved that the Fidesz-KDNP successfully mobilised electoral groups abroad by either “exporting” opposition-bashing communication, mobilising local allies, clientele or exploiting inter-ethnic conflicts. In the case of Ukraine, pro-government communication once again fell for Russian active measures designed to raise tensions between Hungary and Ukraine using threatening text messages sent to ethnic Hungarians living in Transcarpathia.
- Hungarians’ views on the Euro-Atlantic Community and Russia have equally soured due to the Hungarian government’s continuous negative campaign against the United States (45% negative mentions), the European Union (41% negative mentions) and Russia’s (63% negative mentions) shocking invasion against Ukraine.
- One exception to the rule proved to be perceptions about NATO that is either viewed in a neutral (47%) or favourable (23%) light by most Hungarians. Still, the qualitative analysis of data revealed that the new and unprecedented debate about NATO in the Hungarian media space is heavily distorted by pro-Kremlin disinformation narratives present in the opinion sections of the pro-government media or the comment sections of social media, threatening social support for NATO in the longer-term.
- Views on Ukraine are also quite polarised due to attacks levelled against Ukraine or President Zelenskyy by the Hungarian government and pro-government media. Still, the invasion-activated anti-Ukrainian narratives about, for example, Ukraine being a puppet state of the USA, Ukraine committing cultural “ethnocide” against minorities, could not mitigate the continuous flow of information about Russian war atrocities. Consequently, the perception of Ukraine among Hungarians became either positive (29%) or neutral (50%), while other polls show that the government’s anti-Ukrainian slogans impacted mostly Fidesz voters, especially younger generations, 65% of whom would prefer Hungary’s geopolitical orientation towards Moscow over Washington in the current climate.
- Altogether, Fidesz’ dominance over the Hungarian information space, the anti-West, anti-Ukrainian, and pro-Kremlin lines of communication pushed by the dominant governmental media continues to feed into the Kremlin’s hybrid war and regional destabilisation effort, while making the Hungarian population at home and abroad, Ukraine, European and Trans-Atlantic allies vulnerable to Russian malign influence operation.

## Context

# Campaign on a war footing

The Hungarian election campaign before 3 April election day provided us with many twists and turns, mostly due to the impact of the unexpected Russian invasion of Ukraine on domestic and international affairs. Whereas the odds of success seemed fairly even for the opposition and the governmental parties, according to [polls](#) conducted at the end of 2021 and early 2022, the united opposition ultimately experienced a devastating defeat in the aftermath of the invasion, losing 700 to 800 thousand opposition voters and providing the Fidesz-KDNP coalition the largest supermajority to date. To understand why and how the Fidesz-KDNP reinforced its political standing amidst multiple economic, political, and health crises, we need to consider both the pre- and post-war period of the political campaign, including the institutional and resource advantage favouring the Hungarian regime.

## Campaign before the war

Before the war, the Hungarian united opposition composed of leftist, liberal and rightist parties, such as the leftist Democratic Coalition (DK) led by the former PM Ferenc Gyurcsány or the centre-right, previously far-right, party of Jobbik, seemed in the best position to challenge the ruling coalition since 2010. After all, the coalition of opposition parties apparently crushed the political “central force field”<sup>1</sup> around the Fidesz-KDNP by re-establishing the two-sided political system that had characterised the Hungarian election landscape until 2010. The opposition even managed to rule the domestic political agenda for

weeks during the opposition primaries in September and October of 2021, with over 850.000 opposition voters [electing](#) a somewhat surprise candidate for PM, Péter Márki-Zay or MZP, a non-affiliated, conservative mayor of a mid-sized city of Hódmezővásárhely.

The opposition parties’ campaign mainly focused on the “restoration of Hungarian democracy,” rule of law and the checks and balances of the Hungarian political system. Consequently, their narratives dealt with mostly symbolic issues, including changing the new constitutional system deemed a cornerstone of the Hungarian hybrid regime, restoring freedom of the media or ending the systemic corruption related to oligarchs close to the government.

As a result of the successful opposition primary, the Fidesz-KDNP had to somewhat change gears by attacking Péter Márki-Zay’s credibility, political skills, and local governance record instead of other leading opposition figures. One of the new pro-government narratives attempted, successfully, to tie MZP’s alleged political incompetence to past governmental failures of former PM Ferenc Gyurcsány, who is still considered a “bogeyman” by the right for the violent crackdown on street protests in 2006 and [admitting](#) on tape to lying to voters. On top of that, the government’s campaign has left nothing to chance, so basically tried to buy votes by handing out cash to key electoral groups: pensioners received an additional monthly allowance for the “13<sup>th</sup> month,” families with minor children could reclaim the amount of personal income tax for 2021,<sup>2</sup> while young workers under 25 did

<sup>1</sup> After winning the first supermajority in 2010, PM Viktor Orbán characterised the ideal political playing field for his coalition as a “central force field,” in which small, divided opposition parties on the left and the right compete with a united, strong Fidesz-KDNP dominating the centre of the Hungarian political system.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Itt van, mikor és mennyi befizetett adót kapnak vissza a családostok’, <https://www.origo.hu/>, accessed 5 February 2022, <https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20210922-szemelyi-jovedelemado-visszaterites-2022.html>.



need not to pay income tax from February 1, 2022.<sup>3</sup> Regarding symbolic issues, the ruling coalition launched a special campaign focusing on “family values” after the adoption of the Anti-Paedophilia Act in June 2021, which, in fact, [targeted](#) the LGBTQI+ community by limiting their activities and representation in media and in certain institutions. They held an unsuccessful [referendum](#) on the day of the elections on gender assignment surgeries for minors and unrestricted access provided to minors on sexually explicit media content. In foreign policy, they went beyond their usual Eurosceptic rhetoric that accused “Brussels” of imperial ambitions against member states. Leading government politicians, such as FM Péter Szijjártó, also [claimed](#) the United States was planning to “meddle” in Hungarian elections, whilst continuing to praise Russia and China for productive and respectful economic and political partnerships. **Two government narratives already proved to be key messages considering the later invasion: the government promised to uphold “utility cost reduction,” and accused members of the democratic opposition of being “agents” of influence of Brussels, the West, or the CIA.**

Government communication was more impactful due to both specific governmental programs as well as the extremely centralised nature of the

propaganda machine under the de facto control of Antal Rogán -Head of Cabinet of the Prime Minister. From the outset, the opposition was outgunned in terms of media and other resources, but also not helped by its somewhat ad hoc and chaotic communication strategy. The government’s media dominance was crucial in mobilising the minority electorate abroad 90% of whom clearly favoured the Fidesz-KDNP during past elections due to the Hungarian dual citizenship [law](#) adopted in 2010 that allows ethnic Hungarians to apply for simplified naturalisation.

### ***The invasion’s impact on the campaign***

As explained in the chapter about the opposition, there was a window of opportunity for the opposition to question the value of the Hungarian government’s special relationship with the Kremlin, and the alleged success of the so-called “Eastern Foreign Policy” in general. However, the opposition was unable to capitalise on the situation, which resulted in the Fidesz-KDNP forging and delivering the most impactful narratives about the desired “peace,” regardless of the outcome of the war and “prosperity” provided by the utility cost reduction reliant on uninterrupted energy, mostly gas, deliveries of Russian energy companies.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://nav.gov.hu/ado/szja/25-ev-alatti-fiatalok-kedvezmenye>

# METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach relied on both quantitative and qualitative analytical tools to identify, measure, categorise and analyse the main messages, narratives, and sources present in Hungarian campaign communication between 12 February and 20 April 2022.

First, Hungarian researchers collected data using the [SentiOne](#) online monitoring platform using a pre-set set of keywords and list of domestic and Hungarian-speaking minority media abroad to gather data (messages, comments, interactions) present on media web domains and Facebook pages. The sources were chosen based on traffic, number of followers, and reach in order to maximize the relevance of our findings. Since we wanted to identify communication used to mobilise domestic and minority voters abroad along domestic and foreign policy issues, we set up three queries utilising different sets of keywords on the SentiOne platform that gathered messages or mentions related to the (1) Hungarian opposition, (2) minorities abroad, and (3) the United States.

Second, data gathered in all three queries were tagged manually by Political Capital's researchers to label messages with "primary" and "secondary" tags used to identify our five primary campaign narratives, three basic attitudes (oppose/support/neutral) present in articles or posts about them, as well as secondary topics used to mobilise voters with regard to the main narratives.

Statistical data was produced based on the research results tagged to measure the number of times each narrative or topic was mentioned in the Hungarian media space in the timeframe under investigation, including the number of interactions, comments, most numerous tags, ranking of leading sources based on their dissemination performance, and basic attitudes related to some of the key narratives. The quantitative analysis of statistical data was combined with qualitative assessment and contextualisation of messages to understand what narratives and how contributed to the domestic or cross-border mobilisation of electoral groups, ultimately determining the impact of strategic communication on the success of the Fidesz-KDNP and the failure of the united opposition on the day of the election.

## We formulated and monitored five narratives:

### 1.) *Opposition - How is the Opposition and Péter-Márki Zay portrayed in campaign communication? What are the main narratives and what is their impact?*

If the mention (article or post) overall is supportive/ positive in its coverage of the opposition, we use the tag opposition- support

If the mention (article or post) overall is neutral in its coverage of the opposition, we use the tag opposition- neutral

If the mention (article or post) overall is oppositional/ negative in its coverage of the opposition, we use the tag opposition- oppose

**2.) Mobilisation abroad - How did governmental parties mobilise their electorate abroad? What are the main narratives and what is their impact?**

If the mention (article or post) overall is supporting the idea that the diaspora should vote for Fidesz, we used the tag mobilisation support.

If the mention (article or post) overall is neutral on the idea that the diaspora should vote for Fidesz, we used the tag mobilisation neutral.

If the mention (article or post) overall is opposing the idea that the diaspora should vote for Fidesz, we used the tag mobilisation oppose

**3.) The Euro-Atlantic Community – How did the media monitored portray the Euro-Atlantic Community, more specifically the USA, EU, NATO, and the West in general? What are the main narratives and what is their impact?**

If the mention (article or post) overall is supportive in its coverage of the Trans-Atlantic community, we used the tag USA/EU/NATO/West-support.

If the mention (article or post) overall is neutral in its coverage of the Trans-Atlantic community, we used the USA/EU/NATO/West-tag neutral.

If the mention (article or post) overall is negative in its coverage of the Trans-Atlantic community, we used the USA/EU/NATO/West-tag oppose.

**4.) Ukraine – What was the perception of Ukraine before and after the invasion during the campaign? What are the main narratives and what is their impact?**

If the mention (article or post) overall is supportive/ positive in its coverage of Ukraine, we use the tag Ukraine- support

If the mention (article or post) overall is neutral in its coverage of Ukraine, we use the tag Ukraine-neutral

If the mention (article or post) overall is oppositional/ negative in its coverage of Ukraine, we use the tag Ukraine- oppose

**5.) Russia and China– What was the perception on Russian and China before and after the invasion during the campaign? What are the main narratives and what is their impact?**

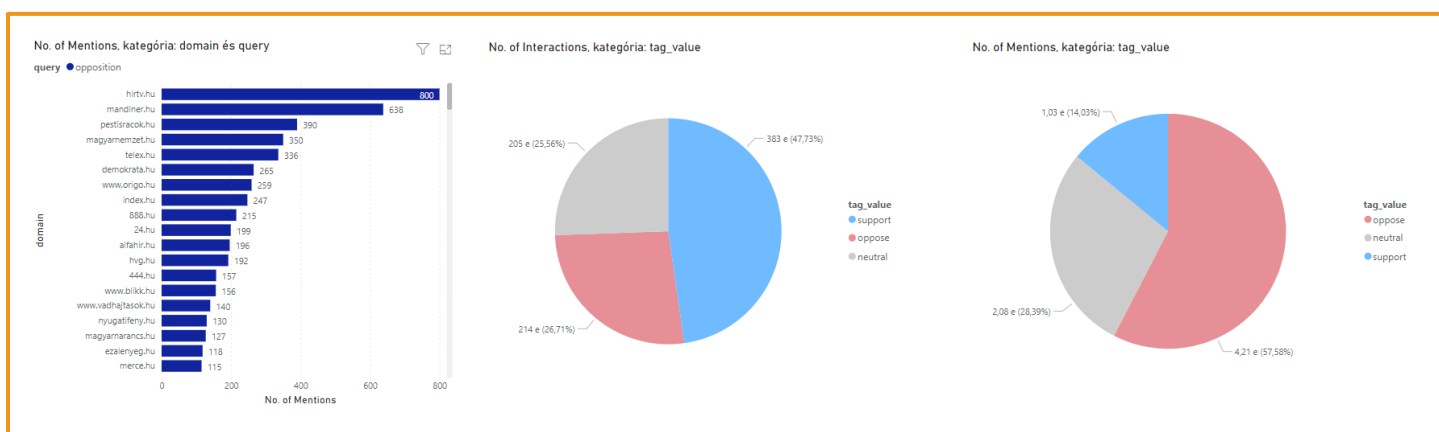
If the mention (article or post) overall is supportive/ positive in its coverage of Russia or China, we use the tag Russia/China- support

If the mention (article or post) overall is neutral in its coverage of Ukraine, we use the tag Russia/China- neutral

If the mention (article or post) overall is oppositional/ negative in its coverage of Ukraine, we use the tag Russia/China- oppose



# Chapter 1. Main narratives about the Hungarian opposition



Source: Visualisation of SentiOne data in Microsoft Power BI.

## OVERVIEW

Narratives on the opposition were profoundly impacted by the invasion of Ukraine. Prior to 24 February, both the ruling coalition and opposition were mainly preoccupied by a specific set of domestic topics, such as the referendum on “anti-paedophilia” executive action. These were mostly abandoned, and the Fidesz-KDNP used the new conflict to demonise opposition actors once again.

At the beginning of invasion, there was a window of opportunity for the opposition to question the value of the Hungarian government’s special relationship with the Kremlin, and the alleged success of the so-called “Eastern Foreign Policy” in general. While independent and opposition-controlled media started to question PM Orbán’s attitude in relations to the military conflict since most of the pro-government media [praised](#) the bilateral meeting between PM Orbán and President Putin on 1 February 2022, in Moscow as a “successful peace mission,” the government communication quickly changed course to push two key narratives on Hungarians’ personal, and financial wellbeing. The Fidesz-KDNP claimed to fight for (1) “peace” by not allowing anybody, most notably the Hungarian opposition, to drag Hungary into the war by meeting demands for arms deliveries into the conflict zone and for (2) shielding Hungarians from “paying the price of war.” Additionally, the war cast aside the topic of the “anti-paedophile” referendum of the government, including the opposition’s counter referendum on the establishment of the Budapest campus of the Chinese Fudan University and the extension of unemployment benefits.

Faced with the war, the opposition's strategic communication made two decisive mistakes at the start when they opted (1) to theoretically support sending arms or Hungarian soldiers into Ukraine if NATO decided to do so<sup>4</sup> and (2) decided to reframe the invasion as a "conflict between the West and the East," instead of a decision between "war or peace." Despite government communication deliberately confusing the role of the aggressor and the victim in its disingenuous outcry for "peace," the main narratives worked – 30% of opposition voters [believed](#) the opposition and its candidate for PM are "warmongers," and they would have Hungary enter the war after a change of government.

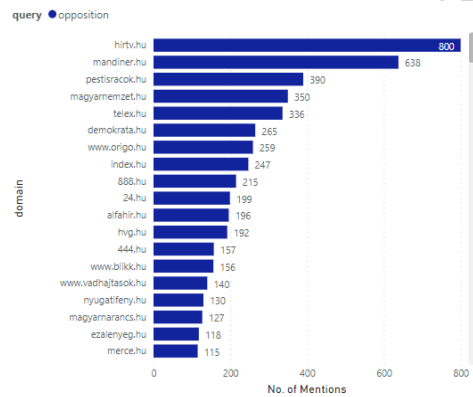
**After regaining the upper hand in campaign communication, the pro-government media began a cynical double talk about the war: most of the leading pro-government outlets provided a generally fact-based, objective minute-by-minute report on the conflict itself, while pro-Russian narratives legitimising the invasion were "outsourced" to pro-government institutions and experts publishing opinion pieces or reporting on it. The impact of the government communication strategy was almost immediately felt, as Russia's and Ukraine's perception dropped to a new low among Hungarians (32 points for Russia, and 33 points for Ukraine on a scale of 100), whereas 65% of young Fidesz-KDNP voters between the ages of 18 and 39 would favour closer relationship with Moscow instead of Washington, according to a May 2022 [poll](#) conducted by Medián.**

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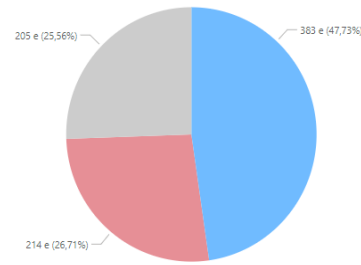
<sup>4</sup> Which was partly the result of the opposition PM candidate potentially not knowing that NATO decisions required unanimity.

# Tag Analysis – Chapter 1, Narrative - Opposition

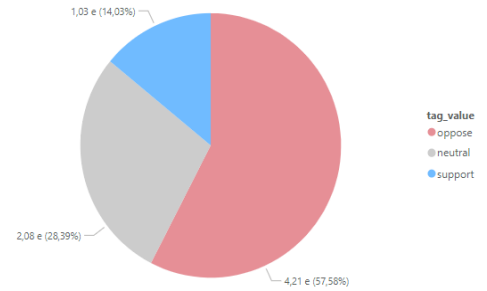
No. of Mentions, kategória: domain és query



No. of Interactions, kategória: tag\_value



No. of Mentions, kategória: tag\_value



803 e no. of Interactions  
170 e no. of comments

query  
 neighbour  
 opposition  
 US\_influence

tag\_name: Opposition  
 tag\_value: Mind  
 country: Mind

tag\_name darabszáma, kategória: tag\_name

Opposition

id darabszáma, kategória: date és query



tag_name	% Total	Anti-LGBT	Antisemitism	China	Christianity	Climate	Corruption	Economy	Elec Fraud	Elec Interference	EU	Hacking	Healthcare	Mobilization	MZP Com Mistake	NATO	Opposition	Pro-Peace	Referendum	Roma	Romania	Russia	Stop Gyurcsany	Ukraine	USA	Warmonger	West
Opposition	100,00%	145	249	11	97	9	426	489	221	197	173	12	122	92	524	54	7312	23	149	13	40	244	191	179	74	668	49
Összesen	100,00%	145	249	11	97	9	426	489	221	137	173	12	122	92	524	54	7312	23	149	13	40	244	191	179	74	668	49

Source: Visualisation of SentiOne data in Microsoft Power BI.

## Most popular Tag

- Altogether, the „opposition” tag was most prevalent in both discourses of the domestic and minority mobilisation abroad, which proved that the campaign dominated by pro-government media attacks levelled against the opposition had a disproportionate effect on the minority electorate either due to direct access of Hungarian media channels via satellite or cable network or the Hungarian-speaking local media financed by the Hungarian government’s affiliates.
- Monitoring about the opposition produced altogether 6,586 mentions, 802,647 interactions, and 169,547 comments in the separate topical project, which unsurprisingly made it the top performing narrative type among the five under consideration. If we look at the type of coverage, seen on the infographics, most of the messages about the opposition provided negative coverage (57%), followed by neutral (28%) and positive (14%) attitudes that can be explained by the dominance of the pro-government media in the Hungarian media space. One may observe an interesting contradiction in the data; whereas, the overwhelming majority of messages is negative, a relative majority of reactions is supporting the opposition (47%), which could be owed to the fact that the opposition electorate is comprised of a younger, more educated electorate that is more active on social media platforms, compared to the older, rural electorate of the Fidesz-KDNP.

## Narrative Analysis

The overall analysis of the time trend shows no huge changes in the number of mentions dealing with the subject. The number of messages gradually increased until election day on 3 April 2022, topping with 525 mentions.

Top performing (high engagement) articles published by the mainstream pro-government *Mandiner* or the anonymous pro-government portal of *Vadhajtások* in mid-February 2022 mainly pushed narratives questioning the united opposition and its PM candidate's political competence to govern based on the self-contradicting, sometimes outrageous comments made by Péter-Márki Zay (MZP). For example, about he himself being able to replace the opposition, the lack of consensus between the opposition parties or the past mistakes made the former PM Ferenc Gyurcsány, now the leader of the leftist Democratic Coalition party (DK). At the same time, pro-government outlets praised the government's record on income transfers provided to pensioners or families before the elections, or the successful management of the COVID-19 epidemic. The main pro-government private news channel *HírTV* accused MZP of racism based on an earlier interview in which he expressed his surprise over the election of Barack Obama, the first black US president.

Interestingly, Russian plans regarding Ukraine or Hungary's relations with its Western allies were already on the table on the eve of the invasion. Gábor Stier, a pro-Kremlin journalist from the portal *Moszkvater* (Moscow Square), interpreted President Putin's unexpected decision to acknowledge the independence of the breakaway "republics" in Eastern Ukraine as a consistent and legitimate political effort by the Kremlin to pursue its geopolitical interests. Tibor Benkő, then Minister of Defence reassured everybody in *HírTV* that Russia's anti-Ukrainian moves are not to be bothered with, anybody warning of a military attack is creating unnecessary "panic." *Mandiner* already highlighted one of the biggest communication mistakes of MZP on the eve of the invasion by quoting his previous interview given to the independent ATV about "being a loyal partner to the EU or NATO," even "if NATO decides to support Ukraine even with arms, we will of course support it". These kinds of statements were later used by the pro-government media to falsely claim that the Hungarian opposition is ready to enter the war, and let Hungarian soldiers fight Russia alongside Ukraine.

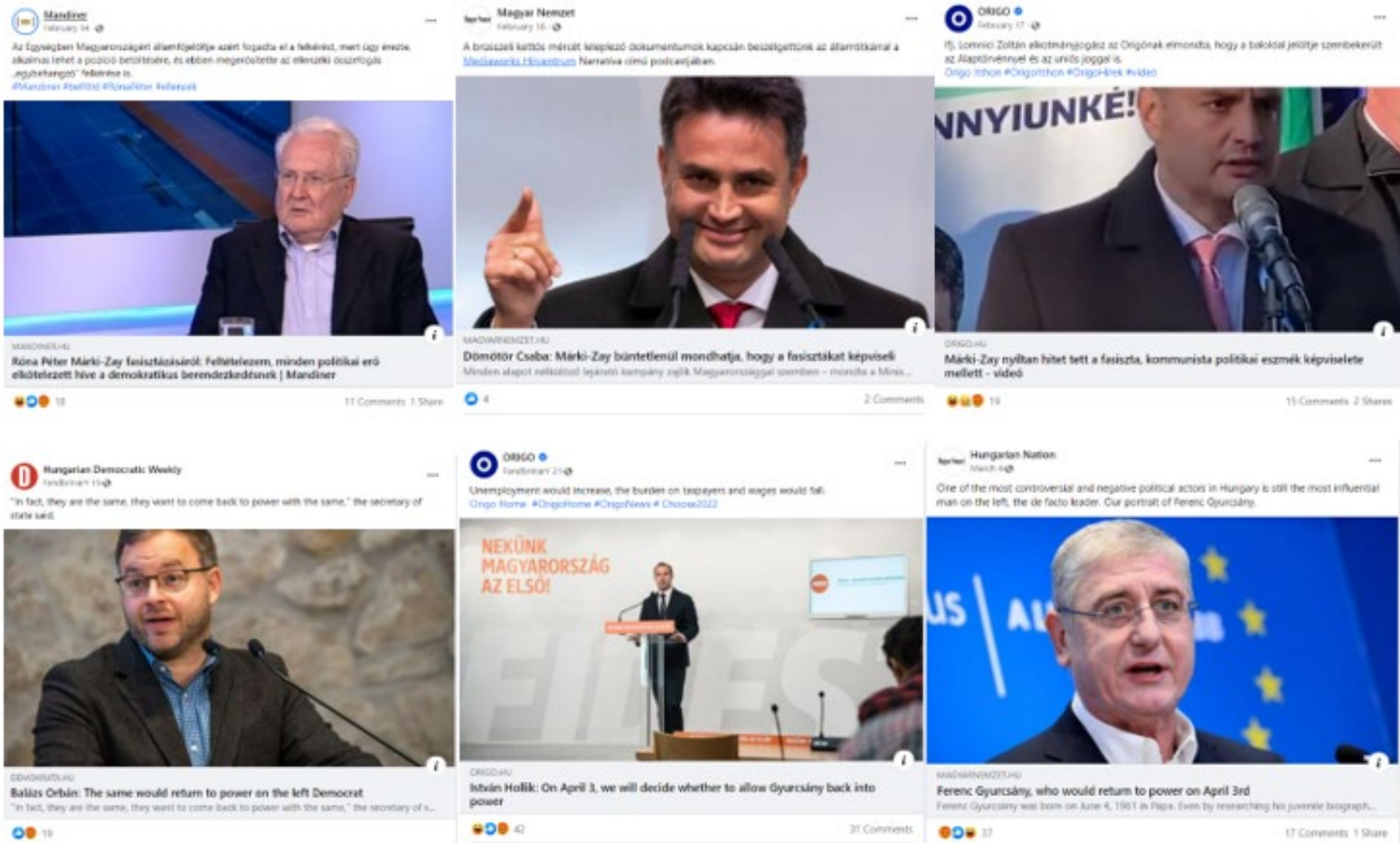
The day of the invasion saw the number of mentions

drop on 24 February to 48 of which could be explained both by the shift of attention and the initial confusion of the Hungarian media, including the pro-government media, how to interpret the new military conflict or the political moves of the Kremlin. Still, negative coverage of the opposition already started formulating the government's winning narrative about the "warmonger opposition." Reflecting on the opposition's anti-war protest organised in front of the Russian Embassy in Budapest on the evening of 24 February, the main print governmental mouthpiece *Magyar Nemzet* reiterated that MZP already expressed his willingness to send Hungarian soldiers into Ukraine, while the online tabloid *888.hu* published an article "War has broken out, the left would involve us as well." On the contrary, the pro-opposition rightist portal *Alfahír* interpreted the same protest as a revelation of "Putin's real face and power with whom Orbán has been trying to curry favour for the last ten years."

The absolute peak of this period (3 April 2022) was ruled by two main narratives: (1) the narrative about the "warmonger" opposition," including the desire to keep "peace" and low energy prices and (2) elections fraud. The new narrative about election fraud reflected on both the opposition claims that some voting irregularities in Romania would make votes casts abroad null and void, while the Fidesz-KDNP tried to present anonymous text messages sent in the name of opposition parties to voters as an attempt to commit election fraud through abuse of voter registration data. While both issues had some merit, they were ultimately failed attempts by both political sides to smear each-other without real proof. Ultimately, the winning communication strategy was produced by the ruling coalition based on the alleged warmongering of Péter-Márki-Zay, and the perception about him being an "incompetent political leader" in times of crisis. This core narrative could not be outbalanced by the opposition's strategic communication trying to frame the war as a decision between "West or the East," while not reflecting on the imminent national security threat and economic hardship caused by the invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

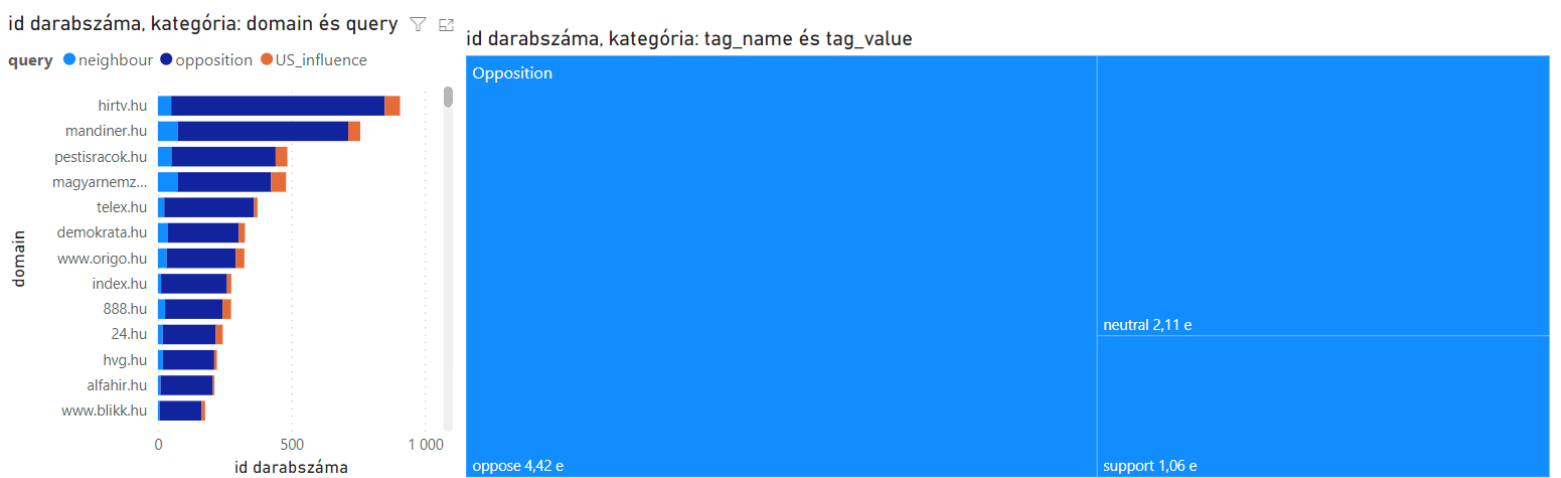
**The analysis of the secondary tags revealed that top issues used to mobilise electorate around the "opposition" proved to be MZP's communication mistakes (number of mentions 537), the state of the economy (506), corruption (444), or Russia (270).**

# Case Study – top posts by interactions on the narratives – Péter Márki-Zay represents Fascists/ the same leftist elite would return to power led by Ferenc Gyurcsány



Source: SentiOne

Among the top sources for the first narrative (the “opposition” tag) are mostly pro-government mouthpieces, such as *HírTV*, *Mandiner* or *Origo*, among the top 10 media. Only two independent outlets are present among the top sources, *Telex* and *24.hu*, which reinforced the pro-government media empire’s dominance over the Hungarian public sphere and created a tight media “bubble” filled with negative coverage about the opposition parties.



Source: Visualisation of SentiOne data in Microsoft Power BI.



The most impactful media sources proved to be the pro-government private news channel of *HírTV*, the online pro-government opinion-portal *Mandiner*, the tabloid-style online news portal *PestiSrácok*, and the main pro-government print mouthpiece of *Magyar Nemzet*. Among these, *Mandiner* was the mostly involved in mobilisation abroad, producing 75 mentions about opposition-related topics that also dealt with Hungarian minorities. *HírTV*, on the other hand, disseminated more pieces on the opposition's domestic agenda (800), also being the top forum for Euro-Atlantic-related messages (57). One of the main narratives about the opposition concerned Péter Márki-Zay's political incompetency to become prime minister either due to his association with former PM Ferenc Gyurcsány or his problematic statements, such as his claim that the parties of the united opposition "represent" everybody from liberals to Fascists. False narratives about him "leading Hungary into the war," after the invasion of Ukraine reinforced perceptions of incompetence. Of course, issues of "cash-handouts" to electoral groups by the government were also constantly highlighted, first to present the government's caring nature, later to compensate for the economic calamity caused by the war.

**The same  
leftist elite  
would return.**

**Do not let Ferenc  
Gyurcsány return  
into power.**

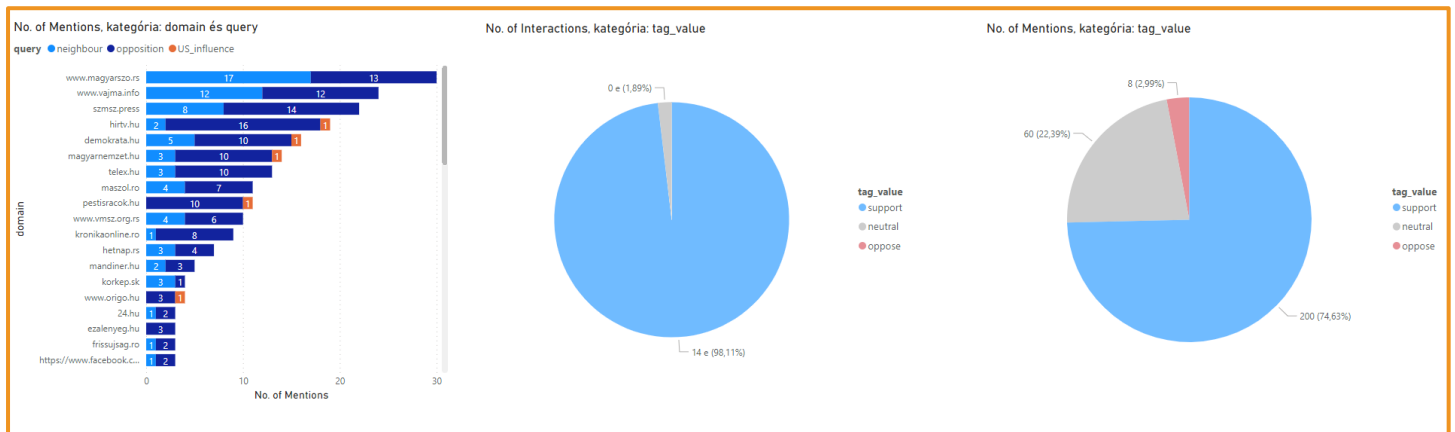
**Márki-Zay  
represents  
Fascists.**

**Márki-Zay  
would send  
kids to war.**

**Families  
benefit from  
the tax refund.**

**Márki-Zay  
insults  
voters.**

# Chapter 2. How the campaign mobilised the Hungarian diaspora abroad



Source: Visualisation of SentiOne data in Microsoft Power BI.

## OVERVIEW

For Fidesz-KDNP, the cross-border community is of particular importance since in its view the nation as a whole and its unity can only be imagined by strengthening the relations between the communities beyond the borders and the motherland.

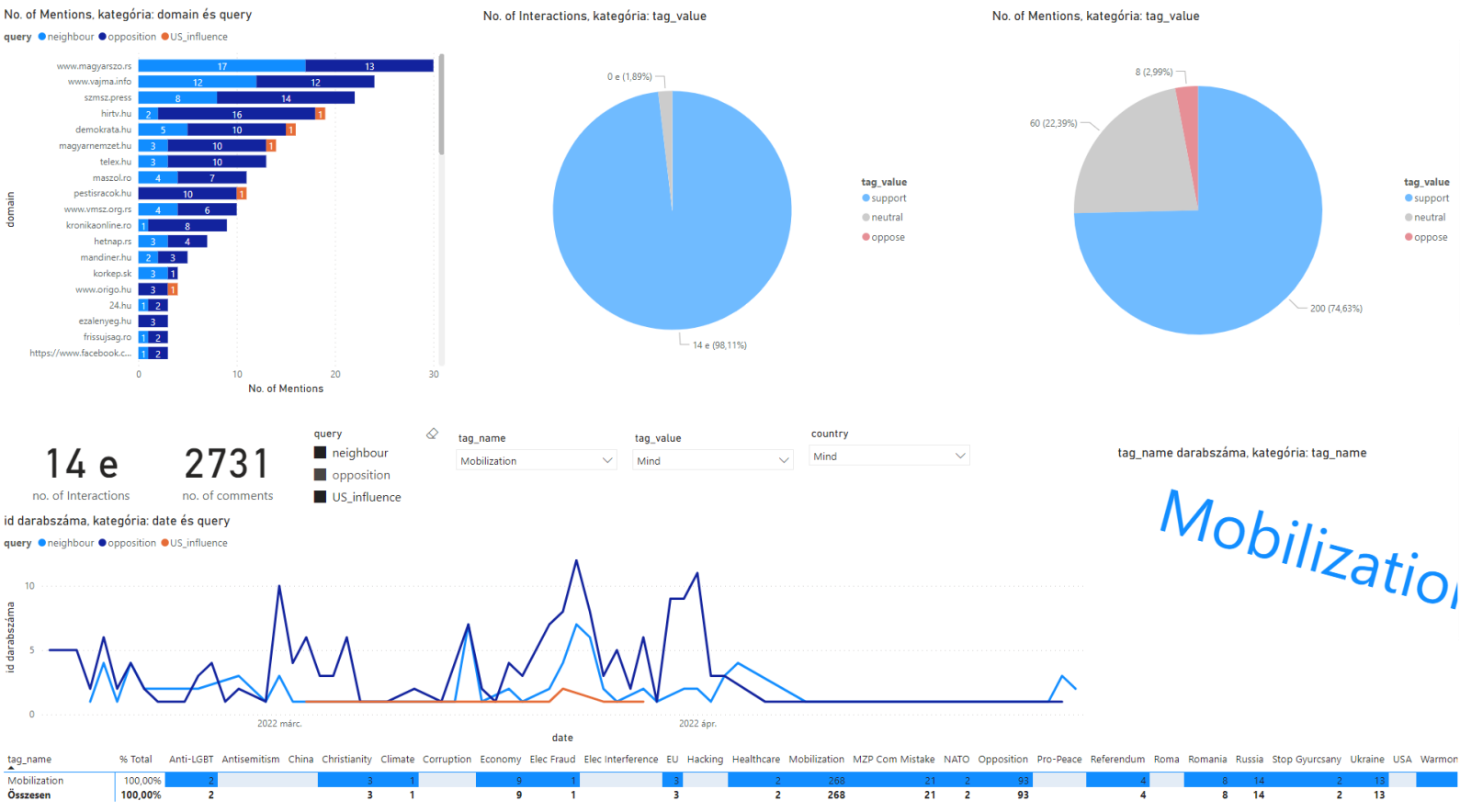
Hungarian diaspora communities previously supported Fidesz and the right-wing parties as they provided needed symbolic recognition with the second Orbán government also giving priority to signature legislation such as establishing dual-citizenship in 2011. Beyond that, the Fidesz-KDNP has provided substantial humanitarian aid to Ukraine and other ethnic communities, including the support of Hungarian-language media, educational institutions, churches and community events, infrastructures through state-owned big foundations, such as the Bethlen Gábor Fund Management Ltd. In 2020 alone, the Fund provided 205 billion HUF (approx. 706 million USD) for “grants for national policy purposes” abroad. Of course, the Hungarian hybrid-regime also began to utilise the same channels to build a political, economic and media clientele abroad to gain leverage over the minority political elite and local political parties.

This Hungarian policy has led to tensions with Ukraine, as the Hungarian government earmarked funds for the Ukrainian minority to maintain its cultural identity and institutions, while the Ukrainian language law,<sup>5</sup> in Budapest's perception, attacked this very identity, not to mention the national security risks perceived on the Ukrainian side. At the same time, tensions related to minorities abroad are decided on a political basis. Serbian and Slovak minority issues are almost never on the table since they are considered friends or V4 partners by the Hungarian government, whereas the minority flashpoints, for example about the Ukrainian language law or the status of the WW1 military cemetery in the Uz Valley (Valea Uzului) in Romania, are constantly a subject of bilateral conflicts between Ukraine and Romania.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2019-05-13/ukraine-legislature-adopts-language-law/>

# Tag Analysis – Chapter 2, Narrative – Mobilisation abroad



Source: Visualisation of SentiOne data in Microsoft Power BI.

## Most popular Tag

- Among the three queries used to filter election-related messages, the one focusing on minority mobilisation proved to be the smallest, producing only 2,067 messages, 91,465 interactions, and 27,145 comments. However, the topic itself was present in domestic mobilisation as well, with over 180 mentions tagged in the query about the opposition and MZP. By looking at the attitudinal categories of the main “mobilisation” tag, the coverage proved to be overwhelmingly positive, with over 74% of mentions and 98% of comments reflecting a supportive attitude, as seen on the infographics.
- The overwhelmingly positive attitude does not really reflect the successful mobilisation of minorities abroad by the ruling Fidesz-KDNP, rather a “national consensus” on the importance of symbolic and material support for diaspora communities – a position shared by almost all Hungarian parties and their domestic electorate. Of course, this kind of political unity mostly benefitted Fidesz-KDNP since over 90% of the members of the minority communities support the Hungarian nationalist political side for historical, legal and ideological reasons mentioned earlier. Most of the coverage, therefore, dealt with how the Hungarian government leads a successful and strong Hungary, which provides a “strong foundation for a failsafe national policy” in the Carpathian Basin, many pro-government media quoted the words of the Secretary of State for National Policy Árpád Potápi.

## Narrative Analysis

The trend analysis revealed that political statements, events, and official commemorations, such as the March 15 commemoration of Hungarian Revolution of 1848 shaped the discourses of mobilisation abroad. To mobilise the minority community, the pro-government media echoed the government's [promise](#) to continue providing significant economic and cultural support abroad as well as economic development, educational, cultural inter-exchange programs for minorities, while demonising opposition actors, most notably Péter Márki-Zay (MZP), the opposition's PM candidate. News peaks in mid-February and late March tried to paint MZP as someone who insults and scorns minority voters after he [claimed](#) that "even dead people" can cast votes abroad. When MZP visited Romania to meet community leaders, the pro-Fidesz Hungarian People's Party of Transylvania (Hungarian: Erdélyi Magyar Néppárt, EMNP; Romanian: Partidul Popular Maghiar din Transilvania, PPMT) was quick to [condemn](#) his visit as an obstacle to "securing our national achievements, guaranteeing peace and ensuring sustainable development." The local Hungarian-language online news portal Maszol.ro also released a representative [poll](#) that showed that only 61% of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania knew the opposition candidate, and 54% of those have a negative view of him. Other negative narratives about inter-ethnic conflicts were used by the pro-government and local media to mobilise voters. One of the main private pro-government media outlets, *HírTV*, [reported](#) on threatening text messages sent to ethnic Hungarians living in Western Ukraine or Transcarpathia at the end of March that read:

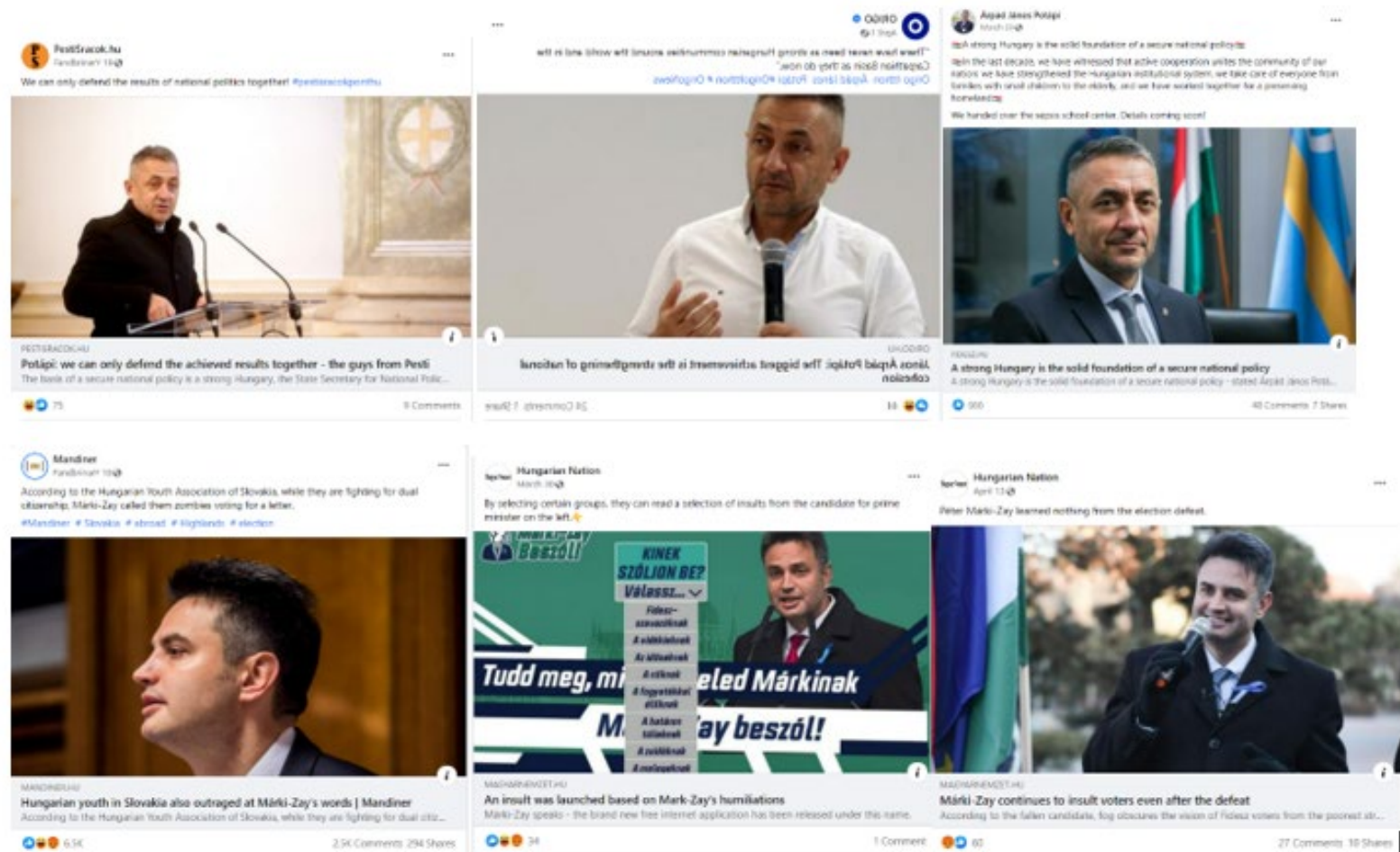
***"Ukraine for Ukrainians. Glory to the nation!  
Death to the enemy! Knives to the Hungarians!"***

Although this was later proven to be a Russian active measure to incite inter-ethnic hatred, Hungarian politicians were steadfast in condemning the Ukrainians for their oppressive behaviour. In Romania, the local media was [preoccupied](#) with the 2022 Romanian census, which did not include any ethnic subcategories for the Hungarian minority. As a result, the majority of the Hungarian "Szekler" (székely) community living in Szeklerland (Székelyföld) in the centre of Romania could not present themselves as a special Hungarian ethnic bloc deserving some form of territorial or cultural autonomy. In Slovakia, the [amendment](#) of the dual citizenship law was used by local and national media outlets to once again [condemn](#) the Slovak government for not allowing its citizens to hold dual citizenship unconditionally, which forced many minority Hungarians to claim and hold Hungarian citizenship in secret. In all, the divergent issues of each Hungarian diaspora community, including the distinct local inter-ethnic conflicts, meant that the invasion of Ukraine and/or the fate of the Hungarian minority living in Western Ukraine could not really overtake the multifaceted mobilisation discourse operating with a wide-range of narratives to bring people to the urns.

**The analysis of the secondary tags revealed that top issues used to mobilise electorate abroad proved to be the united opposition (number of mentions 93), MZP's communication mistakes (21), and Russia**

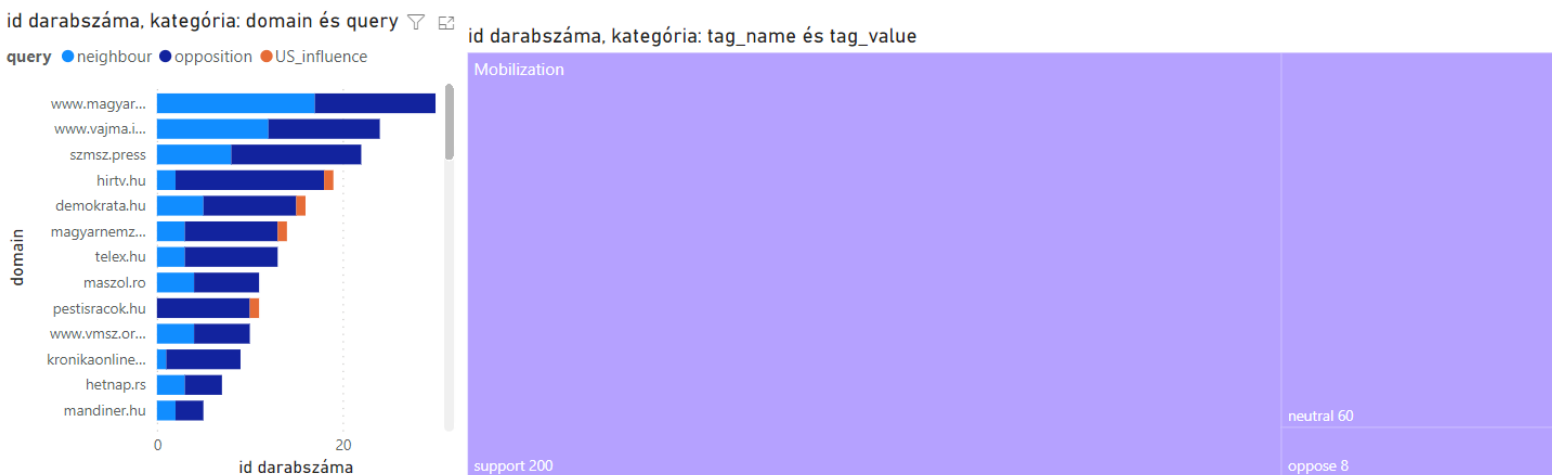


# Case Study – top posts by interactions on narratives – Péter Márki-Zay offends voters abroad/We need to defend the Orbán government’s national policy abroad



Source: SentiOne

Among the top sources for the second narrative (the “mobilisation” tag), domestic and local Hungarian-language media are quite evenly represented. The top three positions are occupied by mostly pro-government local media in Vojvodina, Serbia: *Magyar Szó* (Hungarian Word), *Vajdaság Ma* (Vojvodina Today), and *Szabad Magyar Szó* (Free Hungarian Word). We can also find in the top ten sources’ list the pro-government *HírTV*, *Magyar Nemzet*, *Demokrata* and *PestiSracok*, the independent Hungarian news portal *Telex*, besides the Romanian *Maszol.ro*, and the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (Vajdasági Magyar Szövetség).



Source: Visualisation of SentiOne data in Microsoft Power BI.

The list reinforces our analysis that mobilisation abroad overwhelmingly favours the Fidesz-KDNP because it is executed either by the domestic pro-government media, listened to by the diaspora communities via satellite or cable networks, or media and the local political elite part of the Fidesz' clientele abroad. The leading role of Serbian outlets in the mobilisation could be explained by the fact that Slovakia and Ukraine do not allow dual-citizenship, which forced most of ethnic-Hungarians to gain Hungarian citizenship in secret. Whereas RMDSZ (the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania) is only partially controlled by the Fidesz-KDNP, making the Romanian minority's political leadership and media somewhat independent from Budapest.

The main narratives used to mobilise the electorate abroad still reflected domestic issues levelled against Péter Márki-Zay, including his problematic relationship, as being a leader of a primarily leftist election coalition, with the politically nationalist minorities abroad, as well as the Hungarian government's continuous support provided abroad.

**National achievements can only be defended together.**

**A strong Hungary is a solid basis for a secure national policy.**

**Márki-Zay insults voters abroad.**

**MZP is spreading fake news.**

**MZP calls absentee voters zombies.**

**The Hungarian nation chose peace and security.**

# Chapter 3. The portrayal of the Euro-Atlantic Community during the campaign



Source: Visualisation of SentiOne data in Microsoft Power BI.

## OVERVIEW

During the campaign the geopolitical orientation of the country became a hotly debated issue, as the Hungarian government stressed the importance of good Eastern relations with Russia or China, whereas the opposition favoured strengthening or reaffirming ties with Hungary's Western allies.

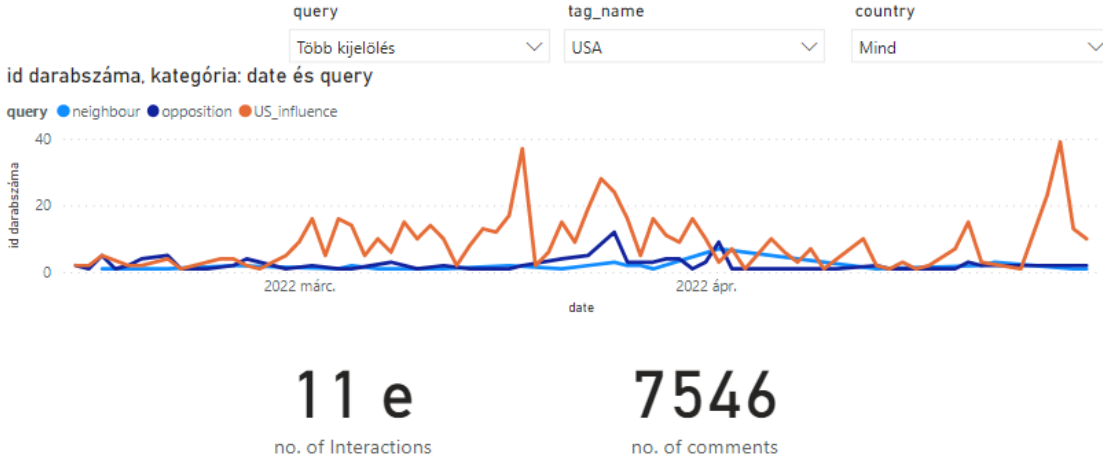
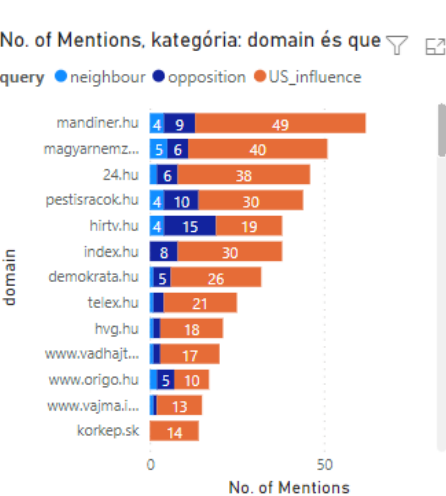
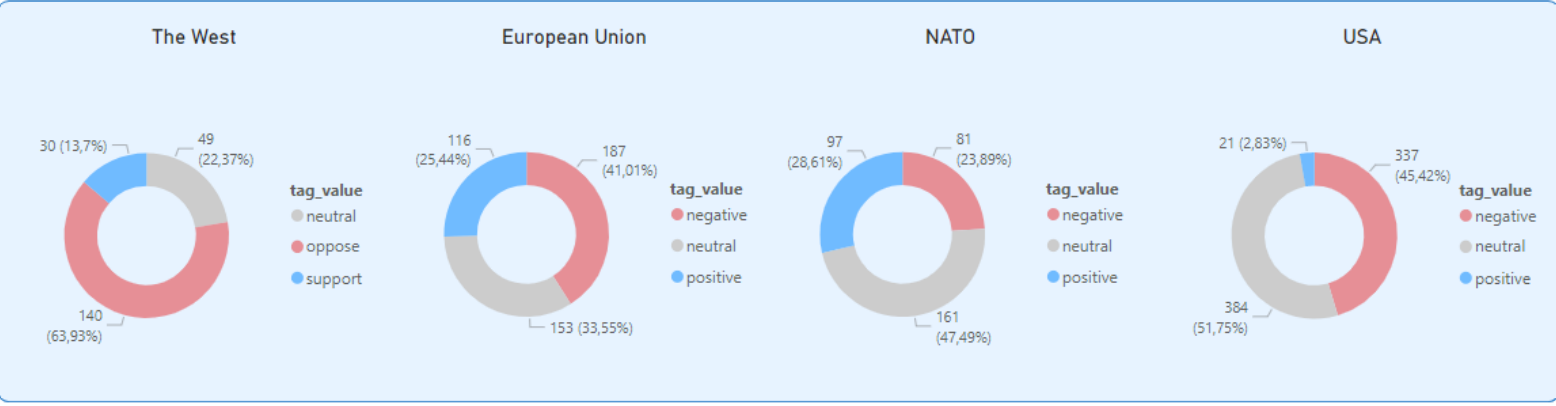
Geopolitical issues were particularly important in the election campaign. On one hand, the opposition primaries' system was allegedly attacked by hackers operating via Chinese servers, on the other, the government side tried to discredit opposition parties and politicians with accusations of the being "agents" of foreign intelligence services. Additionally, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó accused the United States of interfering in the 2022 parliamentary elections. During the summer of 2021, pro-government propaganda was not abashed in blaming the EU for the artificial migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border. Some of the pro-government outlets blamed both Brussels and Poland for unlawful "interference" in the internal affairs of other countries, namely Belarus, and for "Russophobic policies." The result was a curious situation in which the opposition media, including independent outlets, took a pro-Poland and pro-Europe stance against the Kremlin, while the pro-government side accused Ukraine and NATO of military aggression against Russia, including the US and Ukraine of "encouraging" the Kazakh rebellions.

Although, the Russian invasion of Ukraine marked a turning point for the pro-government media as well, as explained above, their communication remained highly negative towards the West. Government officials started blaming the EU and the "George Soros network" for the skimming of the war, the economic turmoil caused by the invasion, as well as the inflation and weakening of the Forint caused by the sanctions. Their communication was apparently not bothered by the fact that the "Brussels is the new Moscow" imperial formula does not hold, since the "friendly" Russia attacked a sovereign country, and the US, including the EU and NATO member states support Ukraine in preserving its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Although, Hungary has voted for the sanctions, the Hungarian government never missed an opportunity to protest and deflect domestic blame for worsening economic conditions and please the Kremlin in some way. The United States has become the new "bogeyman" in the anti-West narrative framework. After PM Viktor Orbán was among the few politicians to first [endorse](#) the presidential candidacy of Donald Trump back in 2016, he has continued to support the former president after he lost the election to Joseph Biden in 2020. Orbán had two pragmatic reasons behind the relentless attacks levelled against the new Biden administration: (1) the Hungarian government feared the new US administration would take public steps against the rampant corruption of Fidesz-loyalist oligarchs, such as banning Hungarian officials or businessmen from entering the country and (2) the Hungarian ruling elite hoped to use their hardline stance and legislation enacted against the LGBTQI+ community to curry favour with the Trump-wing of the Republican Party to end Hungary's current foreign policy isolation after the war is over.

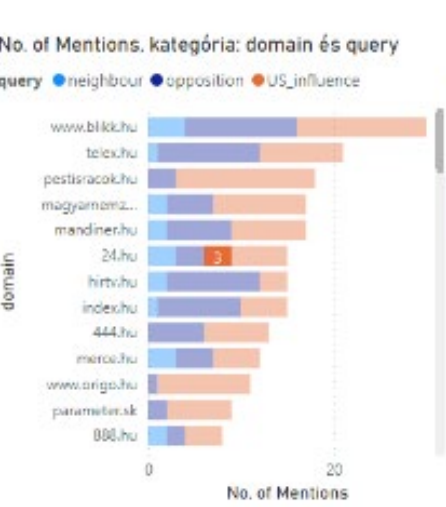
There has been historically unanimous support and national consensus on NATO the benefit of membership and missions, with Globsec Trends 2021 2021 showing that Hungarians are among the highest supporters. However, there is now an open debate in Hungarian public life about NATO's role and Hungary's possible involvement in war in Ukraine, which has tended to echo Russian narratives in governmental and grassroots communications.

# Tag Analysis – Chapter 3, Narrative – USA, West, EU, NATO



tag\_name: Anti-LGBT, Antisemitism, Christianity, Climate, Corruption, Economy, Elec Fraud, Elec Interference, Hacking, Healthcare, MZP Com Mistake, Pro-Peace, Roma, Romania, Warmonger

Összesen



tag\_name: Anti-LGBT, Antisemitism, Christianity, Climate, Corruption, Economy, Elec Fraud, Elec Interference, Hacking, Healthcare, MZP Com Mistake, Pro-Peace, Roma, Romania, Warmonger

Összesen

Source: Visualisation of SentiOne data in Microsoft Power BI.



## Most popular Tag

- Among the three research queries, the one focused on the Hungarian public view of the United States proved to be second most active, producing 4,278 mentions, generating 69,238 interactions and 52,481 comments. If we compare the performance of our main geopolitical actors tags in the query, the United States was the most frequently discussed topic (626 mentions), followed by NATO (210 mentions), the EU (154 mentions), and the West in general (106 mentions). The number of grassroots interactions, however, proved that the most debated actor by the Hungarian public was NATO, and the USA with a 1 to 24 ratio of the average number of interactions or comments per message. The heightened public debate around them could be explained by the unexpected Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the Hungarian government's permanent negative campaign and attacks against the Biden administration.
- The attitudinal tags of the geopolitical actors, on the other hand, reflected the Hungarian government's and pro-government media's long-held foreign policy views. Since 2010, PM Viktor Orbán has explicitly defined the Hungarian "illiberal state" that stands against the weak, decaying, nihilist West, which is slowly using its "European identity" or "Christian roots," still upheld by Eastern powers, such as Russia. No wonder, 63% coverage of the West turned out to be negative, as seen on the infographics. The negative perception of the West in the Hungarian campaign was followed by the relative rejection of the EU and the USA, each receiving over 40% negative reviews.

## Narrative Analysis

The analysis of Hungarian news peaks of the mentions of the USA tag confirmed that the discourse about Washington has been supercharged by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and it is mostly guided by the strategic narratives of the Kremlin disseminated in the Hungarian media space, as seen on the infographic.

The first peak of 2 March 2022, just reiterates Russian FM Sergei Lavrov's [warning](#) about a nuclear third world war, and Russia not allowing Ukraine to obtain nuclear weapons. The articles published by the pro-government daily print [Magyar Nemzet](#), the pro-government online news portal [Mandiner](#), or the biggest Hungarian tabloid [Blikk](#) included the Kremlin's previous demand that NATO does not interfere in the war in Ukraine and the United States should remove its European atomic arsenal to prevent further escalation of the conflict. The 18 March peak was "provoked" by President Biden's [condemnation](#) of President Putin as a "war criminal," which prompted the Hungarian pro-government media to rush to the Kremlin's defence, disseminating a narrative about alleged American "biological laboratories in Ukraine" ([Magyar Nemzet](#), [Híradó](#)), the shady activity of the "George Soros networks" supported by the USA and Australia to bring down the Hungarian government and undermine the unity of the EU ([Magyar Nemzet](#)), or Ukraine "delaying" the peace talks, while being overrun by the Russian army ([888.hu](#), [Demokrata](#)). Finally, the absolute peak on 28 April was ruled by the Russian secret services' disinformation narrative about Poland occupying parts of Ukraine to conduct a "peace mission" supported by the United States – effectively, invading Ukraine from the west ([ma7.sk](#)).

**The Hungarian campaign messaging about the United States had a cumulative characteristic - the more the American administration took part in the world-wide**

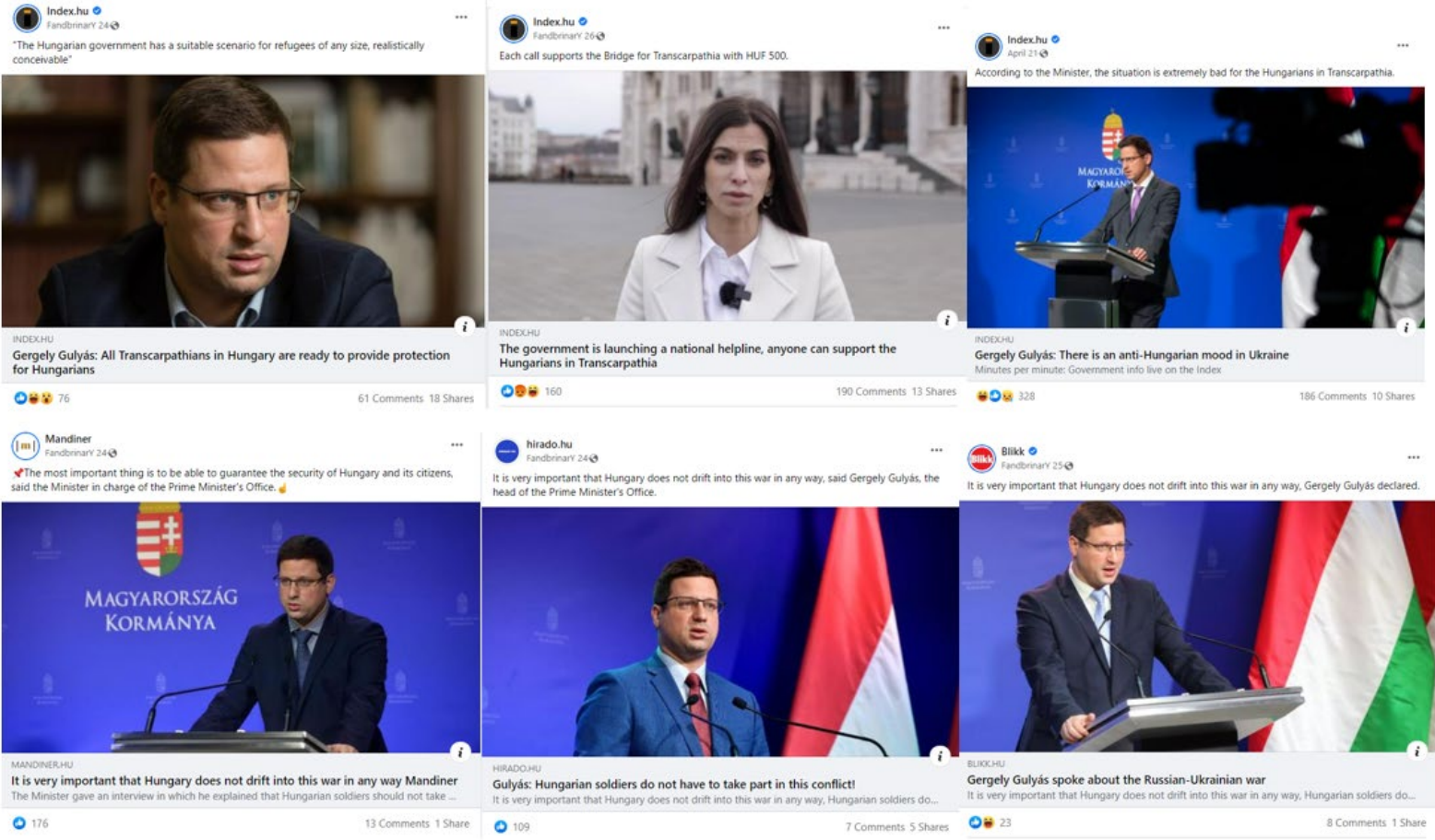
**efforts to contain the Russian aggression, the more pro-Kremlin disinformation was used by Hungarian mainstream pro-government media to counter-message the international anti-war efforts.**

**In contrast, the NATO tag displayed a clear dependence on the events of the invasion, as it peaked the next week on 4 March, as seen on the infographics, and the public discourse about it has been in decline since then.**

The detailed analysis of the peak revealed that most of the mentions displayed a neutral disposition towards NATO or Ukraine, and a negative one towards Russia. This peak was dominated by the details of Russia's gruesome attack against Ukraine, such as the use of cluster bombs, and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's statement that NATO does not consider itself part of the conflict and does not want to start a war with Russia. In a rare exception, independent mainstream and pro-government outlets communicated the same "peace" narrative about NATO's intentions ([Mandiner](#), [888.hu](#), [Népszava](#)).

**The tone and the content of NATO-related narratives fundamentally changed during the last peak of 28 April - by the end of our monitoring period. The reporting and narratives on NATO are diversified according to the structure and political orientation of the Hungarian public sphere: the pro-government media tried to spin international or domestic developments against NATO, such as characterising an anti-NATO and pro-Russian protest in downtown Budapest as a "peace protest" ([Vadhajtások](#)), whereas independent outlets reported objectively on NATO or EU member states' assistance provided to Ukraine, such as Germany delivering heavy weaponry ([24.hu](#)), or NATO being ready to support Ukraine years to come ([Magyar Narancs](#)).**

# Case Study – top posts by interactions on the narratives – Hungary should not enter the war/Hungary defends the Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia

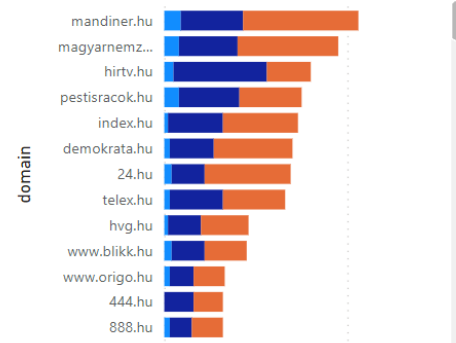


Source: SentiOne

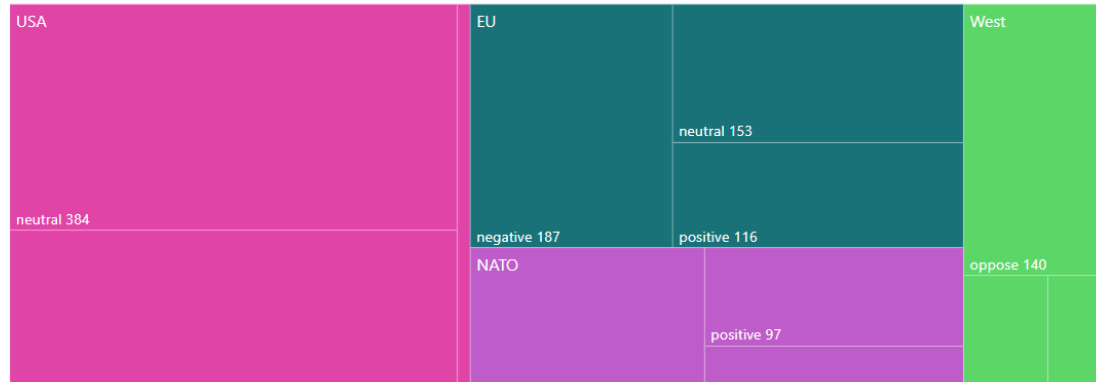
The top sources for the third narrative (the “USA,” “EU,” “NATO,” and “West” tags) were more evenly divided between pro-government, and independent sources, proving that the remaining plurality of the Hungarian media does matter when it comes to foreign policy issues. Still, the discourse was mostly determined by leading pro-government media, such as *Mandiner*, *Magyar Nemzet*, or *HírTV*, while independent news portals *24.hu*, *Telex*, independent economic weekly *HVG*, and independent tabloid *Blikk* could only contribute at the end of the top 10 list of sources to the discussion.

id darabszáma, kategória: domain és query

query ● neighbour ● opposition ● US\_influence



id darabszáma, kategória: tag\_name és tag\_value



Source: Visualisation of SentiOne data in Microsoft Power BI.

The most interesting narratives concern NATO, as this was not a topic previously much discussed outside of political elite or expert circles before. The Russian invasion of Ukraine thrust it into the public spotlight and public arena, which was mostly dominated by strong anti-Western and pro-Kremlin narratives – usually portraying further NATO deployment in Hungary as unnecessary, and arms deliveries into Ukraine by other allies as a national security risk. While the pro-government narratives changed on who is to blame for the conflict over time by raising more and more doubt about the West’s or Ukraine’s responsibility, the main campaign message about the main Hungarian “peace” interest stayed the same in the monitoring period.

**Hungary protects  
the minority in  
Transcarpathia**

**NATO is not  
part of the  
conflict**

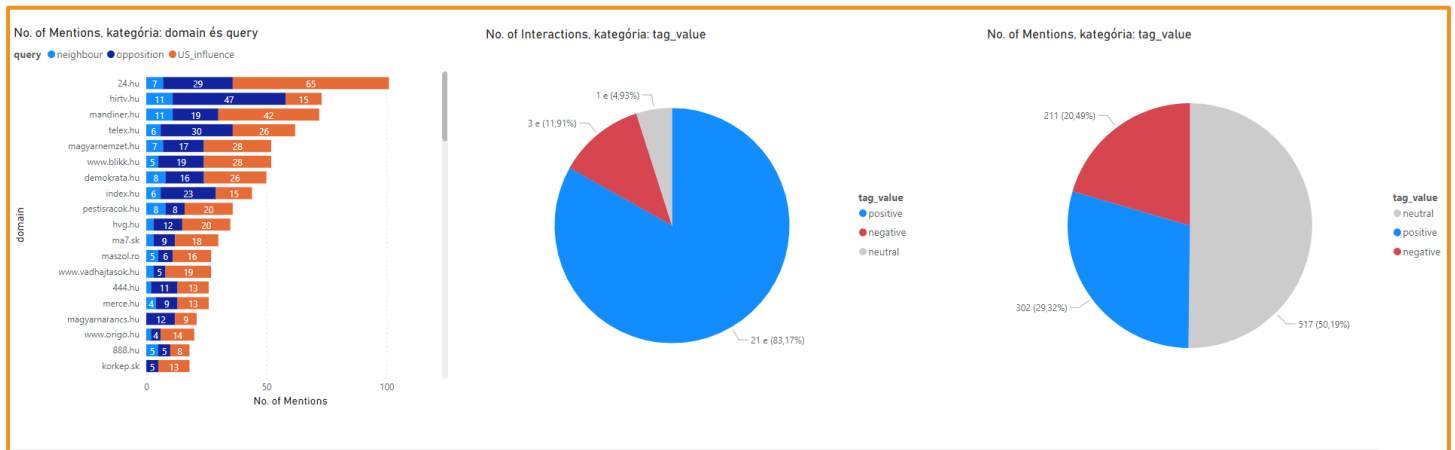
**We should not fight  
for our homeland in  
Ukraine**

**Putin bears full  
responsibility for  
the war**

**Russia wants to  
prevent Ukraine’s  
NATO membership**

**Hungary should  
not be drawn  
into the war**

# Chapter 4: Hungarians' perception of Ukraine



Source: Visualisation of SentiOne data in Microsoft Power BI.

## OVERVIEW

Because the two pro-government narratives of peace and energy security won the narrative war from the outset, communication on Ukraine was dominated by pro-government narrative frameworks. However, the presence of pro-Kremlin or anti-Ukrainian disinformation narratives in the Hungarian media space could not derail the overall change of tone of Ukraine as a victim of aggression.

The start of the war was marked not only by a new “see-saw” foreign policy dance by the Hungarian government, but also the activation of antagonistic tactical and strategic narratives about Ukraine that had long been part of the fundamentally hostile and pro-Russian political discourses in the Hungarian public space. PM Viktor Orbán clearly set the tone when said that “Russia will be still here (after the war), we’ll see if Ukraine will be here as well” – besides [naming](#) President Zelenskyy as one of his main international “opponents” during his victory speech on April 4. Bilateral relations reached a new low between the two countries, when Speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary László Kövér, a loyal ally of PM Orbán, [characterised](#) President Zelensky as someone who has a “psychological problem” for using a sharp language against Hungary or Germany for their international position on the war.

While Hungary did indeed provide seamless Humanitarian help to Ukrainian refugees, accepting more than 800,000 people over the course of three months, relations between the two countries remained mostly icy. Before the March 15 anniversary of the Hungarian revolution in 1848, Ukraine’s ambassador to Budapest, Ljubov Nepop, who had some strong [words](#) for the Hungarian political elite in reaction to some arguments that the Kremlin should still be treated carefully due to Hungary’s energy security:



*“The anniversary of the 1848 revolution is coming, and they are talking about the utility cost cuts [based on the long-term gas contract between Hungary and Russia]. Isn’t human life important? Do those who put the reduction of utility costs before freedom have the right to celebrate on 15 March? Please, this year only those who have the courage to stand up for freedom should go out to the streets to celebrate.”*

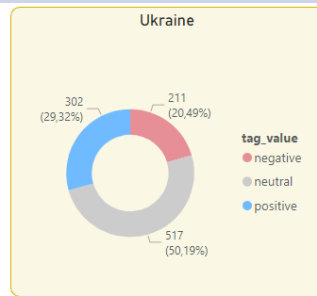
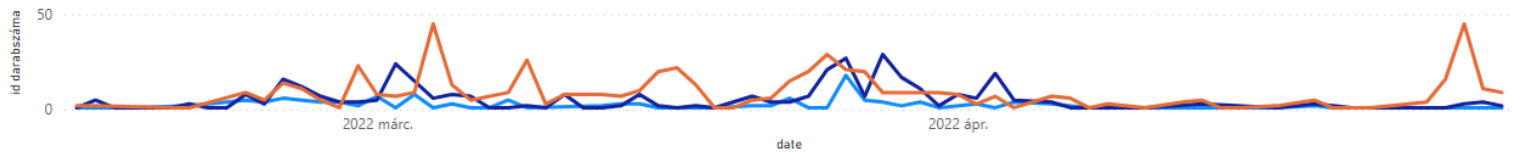
The reaction of the pro-government media and influencers was outlandish. In the leading pro-government news site *888.hu*, one author [proposed to](#) have the ambassador “driven home from here without her feet touching the ground” for trying to “drag us into the Russian-Ukrainian war.” At the same time, one of the most prominent governmental opinion-leaders, the proud owner of Fidesz’ party membership book No. 5, Zsolt Bayer [declared](#) that she should have been expelled within 48 hours for her words and not [standing up](#) to past nationalist provocations endured by ethnic-Hungarians during their local 1848 commemorations in Transcarpathia. Although the Hungarian government expressed willingness to [support](#) Ukraine’s EU membership after a surprise phone call between President Zelenskyy and PM Orbán in June, Budapest is still trying to use the accession process to keep the Hungarian minority’s language rights on the European agenda, and force Ukraine to adopt standards of international minority rights in the future.

# Tag Analysis – Chapter 4, Narrative - Ukraine

tag\_name: 
 tag\_value: 
 country:

id darabszáma, kategória: date és query

query ● neighbour ● opposition ● US\_influence



Source: Visualisation of SentiOne data in Microsoft Power BI.

## Most popular Tag

- The 'Ukraine' tag fared quite well in all three queries, producing 136 mentions in the neighbourhood mobilisation query, 371 mentions in the opposition query, and 592 mentions in the US influence query – which makes it a more popular tag than the USA, however, it still fell short of the “Russia” tag’s numbers.
- Given the highly polarised Hungarian views on Ukraine among the political elites’ and the general population’s discourses and the Hungarian government’s successful effort to deny basic political solidarity with Kyiv, attitudes became also divided over it.
- As seen on the infographic, a relative majority (50%) views Ukraine in a neutral light, followed by positive (29%) and negative (20%) perceptions. The fact that most of mentions proved to be neutral might be due to the lack of uniform messaging in the pro-government media. Whereas pro-government and independent media’s simple, minute-by-minute reporting on the conflict proved to be relatively objective and factual over time, opinion leaders, and experts of the governmental side started to push anti-Ukrainian and pro-Kremlin messages.

## Narrative Analysis

The start of the war not only meant the beginning of 'see-saw' politics, with the Hungarian government trying to simultaneously please its Euro-Atlantic allies and the Kremlin on the sanctions etc., but also activated scores of the Kremlin's long-term tactical or strategic narratives present in the Hungarian media space. These include the following narratives:

- Ukraine is not an independent and/or democratic country, but a sham democracy ruled by oligarchs.
- Ukraine is a CIA puppet state, the Maidan Revolution was in fact an organised, Western-funded, directed coup against a democratically elected leader.
- Ukraine deserved its fate for violating the rights of the Hungarian and Russian minorities for years.
- Russia has legitimate security interests in Ukraine, better not to 'pull the Russian bear's moustache'.
- Hungary is still at the mercy of the imperial, great power ambitions of the EU or the US, there is a proxy war going on over our heads, the story is not about Ukraine, it is about the great powers.
- The war was provoked by the West with EU and NATO expansion in RU sphere of interest.

Since the war raged on continuously after 24 February, the topic of Ukraine remained a highly referenced and debated issue, with many news peaks in the Hungarian media space, as seen on the time trend infographic.

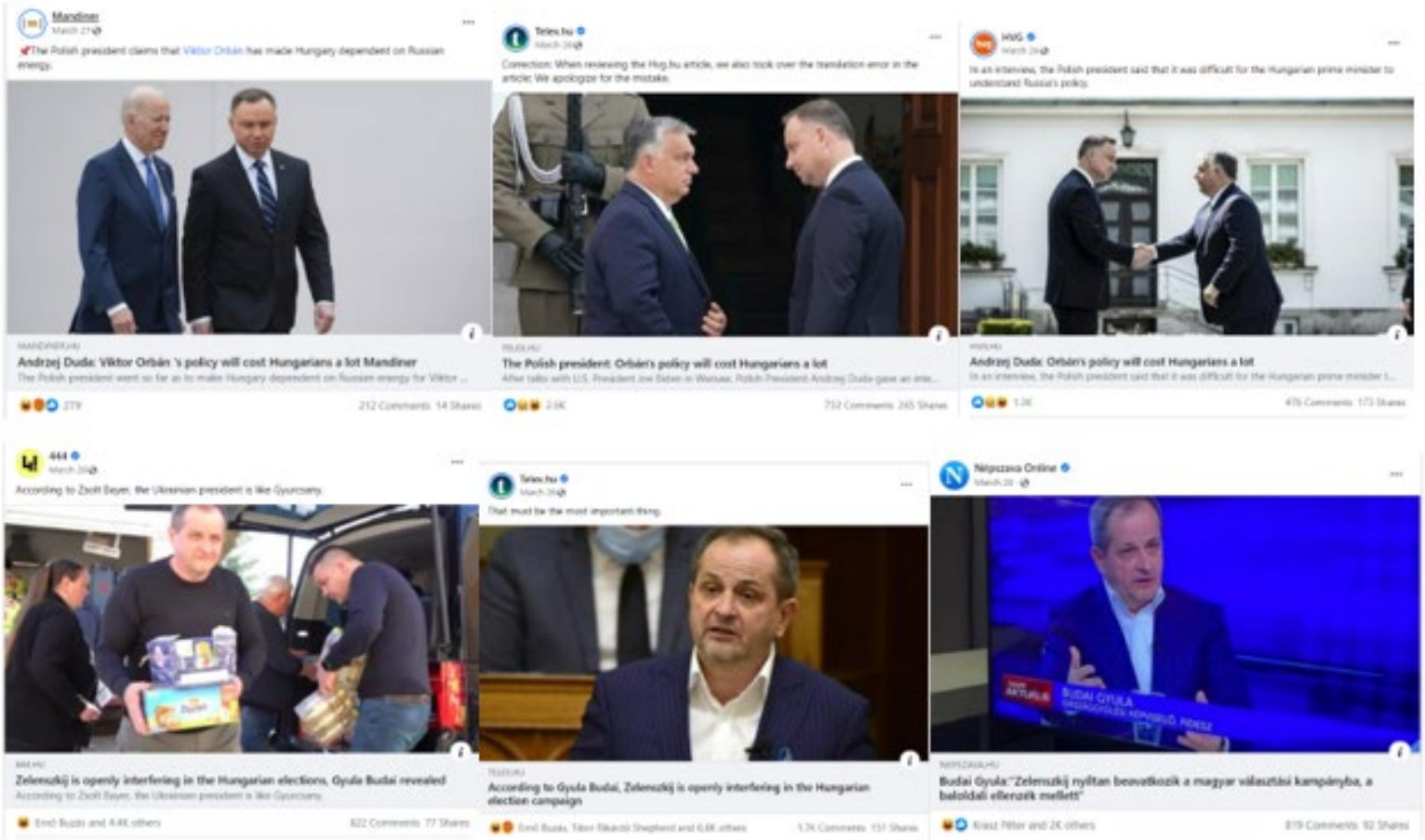
The day of the invasion resulted in many mentions, most of which proved to be objective and neutral reporting given the novelty of the crisis and the "fog of war," preventing many outlets from forming specific opinions on ongoing events. However, the legitimisation of the Russian pretexts for war already began on some sites. For example, Gergely Huth, editor-in-chief of the pro-government online portal *PestiSrácok* (Boys of Pest) [acknowledged](#) the invasion clearly proved that relations between the EU and Russia could not have been "normalised," but he

ultimately laid the blame for the situation on the United States by stating a series of bold-faced lies:

*"In fact, it was the total American colonisation and exploitation of Ukraine that led to this terrible war. All along, the Democratic leadership and the deep state structures of the United States have been betting on and achieving their goal of a war that would put Europe in an impossible position. The Ukrainian people are now facing the fact that their leaders, despite having handed over the entire economy, wealth, and sovereignty of their country to the USA, can expect no help, but have managed to incite the Russian war-bear."*

The Hungarian media's double-talk evolved to its fullest and remained quite steady over time. Despite the independent media reporting on the Russian military's blunders and crimes in an objective, fact-based manner, pro-government opinion leaders tried to present the Kremlin's point of view either by directly quoting FM Sergei Lavrov or other high-ranking Russian officials without any further context or adopting some of the Kremlin's disinformation narratives, as explained in detail in the following chapter. From a Hungarian perspective, government campaign communication needed to hammer home two main narratives: (1) the united opposition would lead Hungary right into the battle against Russia; (2) Hungary's main interest concerns "peace," regardless of the outcome of the war, to preserve European stability and the Hungarian utility cost-reduction dependent on Russian energy deliveries. Consequently, narratives present in March and April of our monitoring period stressed Hungary's "pro-peace position" (Viktor Orbán [interview](#) in the *Mandiner*) and the importance of following the "Hungarian interest" ([Pesti Srácok](#)), faced with an antagonistic Ukraine that is a "colony" of the United States, and its allegedly CIA-agent president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

# Case Study – top posts by interactions on the narratives – Poland critique of Hungary/President Zelensky intervenes into the Hungarian elections

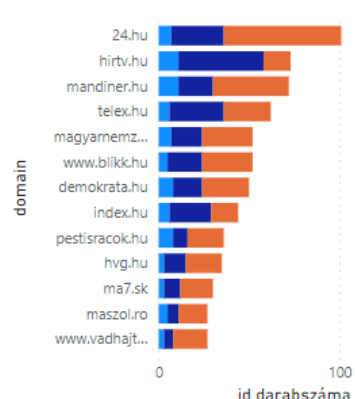


Source: SentiOne

The Ukraine narrative (“Ukraine” tag) proved to be the most divisive issue after the “warmonger opposition” claim, since all of the independent media at home or abroad accused Russia of aggression, while the pro-government communication tried to confuse the role of the “aggressor” and the “victim” by blaming the victim for the war. Although, pro-government media continued to dominate the campaign around Ukraine, through mainly the same outlets mentioned before (*HírTV, Mandiner, Magyar Nemzet, Index.hu* etc.), this is the first time that independent outlets had a significant role in shaping the public discourse – with independent *24.hu* being in first, *Telex* fourth, *Blikk* sixth, *HVG* in tenth place in the top 10 list of sources. The main difference between independent and pro-government reporting was how they dealt with the Kremlin’s own statements and foreign policy issues in their opinion sections. **As a consequence, independent media’s [coverage](#) of the Polish President’s negative remarks about “Orbán’s policies being very costly for Hungarians” made everybody aware of the serious breaking point reached in Polish-Hungarian relations.**

id darabszáma, kategória: domain és query

query ● neighbour ● opposition ● US\_influence



id darabszáma, kategória: tag\_name és tag\_value



Source: Visualisation of SentiOne data in Microsoft Power BI.

Unlike independent media, pro-government sources tended to present Russia's official statements at face-value without further context, while pro-government experts and opinion-leaders were strategically used to blame Ukraine for the war or validate Russian pretexts for the war. Most importantly, the narrative about Ukraine's failure to respect minorities, Hungarian minority rights were frequently cited in our monitoring period by government experts as one of the main causes for the conflict, preventing real reconciliation or solidarity between Hungary and Ukraine. No wonder, one of the leading influencers of the pro-government Megafon Centre, operating on a campaign budget HUF 1 billion, clearly [stated](#) that "Standing by Ukraine is treason" on news portal *PestiSracok*. To make matters worse, PM Viktor Orbán made the conflict personal when he named President Zelenskyy as one of his international "opponents" during his victory speech on 4 April. Before that, FM Péter Szijjártó and other prominent Fidesz influencers accused President Zelenskyy of trying to "intervene" into the Hungarian elections on the side of the opposition to have Hungary enter the war.

Peace is  
Hungary's  
interest

Siding with  
Ukraine is  
treason

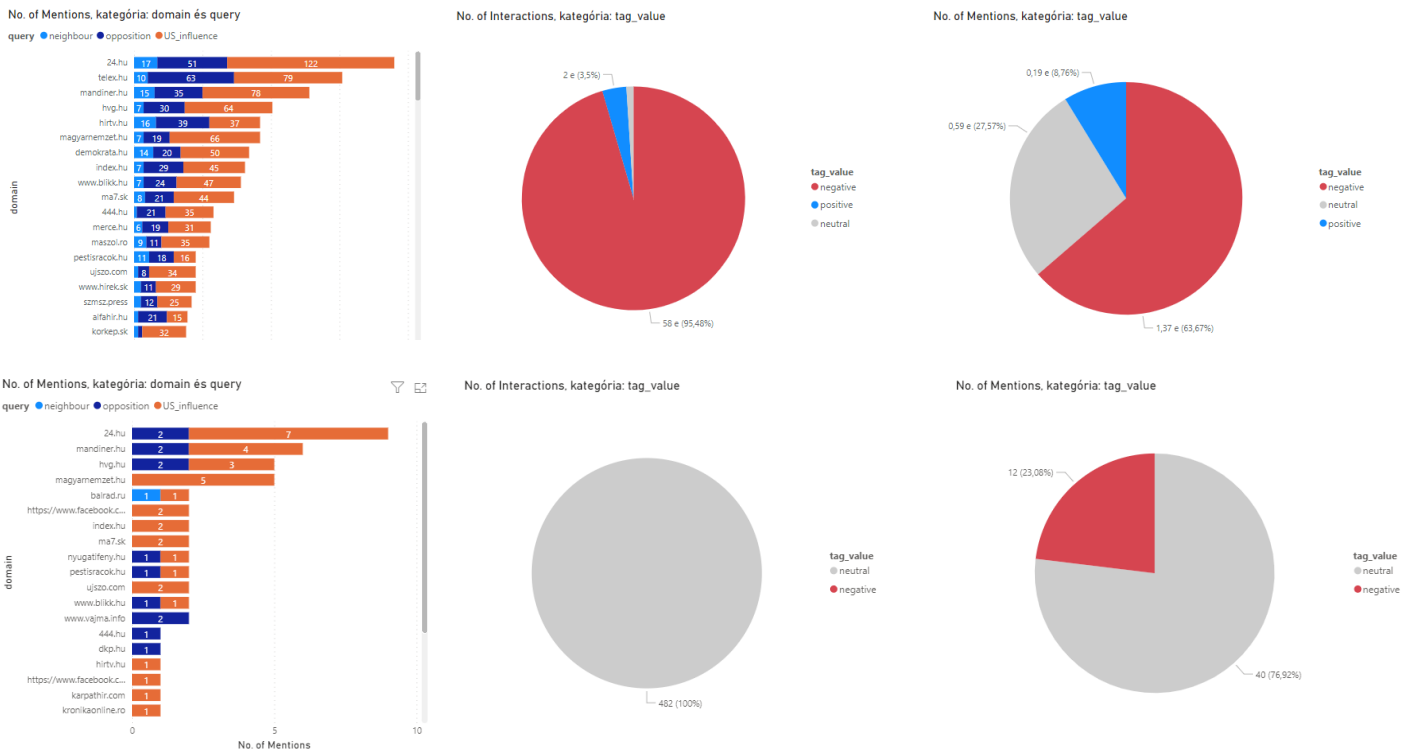
Zelenskyy  
interferes in  
the elections

Duda: Orbán's  
policies will cost  
Hungarian dearly

Orbán calls  
Zelenskyy an  
adversary

Orbán:  
Zelenskyy is an  
actor

# Chapter 5, Perceptions of Russia and China



Source: Visualisation of SentiOne data in Microsoft Power BI.

## OVERVIEW

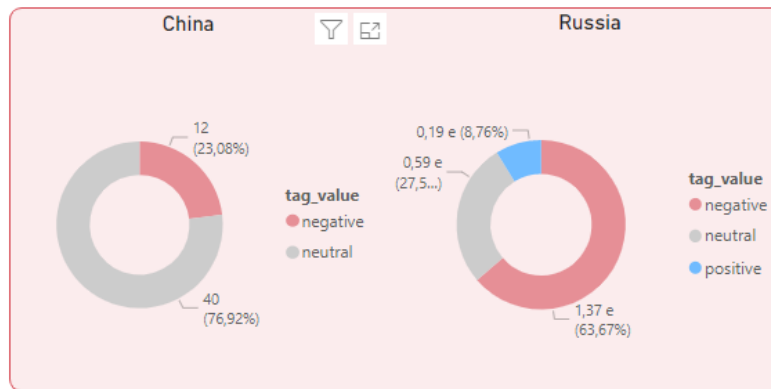
Because the two pro-government narratives of peace and energy security won the war of narratives from the outset, communication on Russia was also dominated by pro-government narrative frameworks. However, continuous reporting on Russian war atrocities made the overall coverage of the Kremlin increasingly negative.

China's role was completely overshadowed by the war and Russia. While China was previously the focus of attention mainly in connection with the Fudan campus planned for Budapest and the opposition's referendum on it, Sino-Hungarian diplomatic relations were much less present in the Hungarian public sphere than Russian-Hungarian diplomacy in our monitoring period. Russia's more prominent role in the media was due not only to the Hungarian government's Eastern Opening foreign policy, but also to the "ultra-conservative front" in which the Hungarian government, together with the Kremlin, played the role of Europe's "saviour," when it comes to the Europe's "Christian identity." In addition, many hailed the Orbán regime as one of Putin's best disciples in Europe, for example for its ousting of the Soros University and its stigmatisation and criminalisation of NGOs receiving foreign funds.

Still, both the Hungarian government and the pro-government media were taken completely by surprise by the Russian invasion, and the Hungarian government took about a week to formulate its new "double-edged" position on the war – supporting and attacking the sanctions regime, while outsourcing the pro-Kremlin communication lines to pro-government experts and influencers.



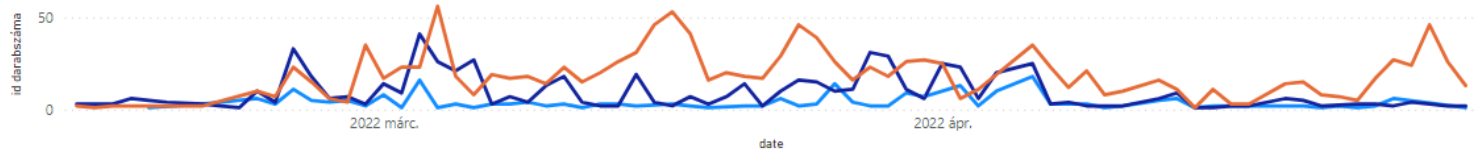
## Tag Analysis – Chapter 5, Narrative – Russia and China



tag\_name:  tag\_value:  country:

id darabszáma, kategória: date és query

query: ● neighbour ● opposition ● US\_influence



Source: Visualisation of SentiOne data in Microsoft Power BI.

### Most popular Tag

- If we compare the performance of the “Russia” and “China” tags across all three queries, it is evident that narratives about Beijing, Sino-Hungarian relations were just an afterthought, with only a few dozen articles addressing these issues. Most of those dealt with the Olympics, followed by articles about the fallout of the Russian invasion against Ukraine that discussed the “new world order” in the making ([Pesti Srácok](#)), Putin requesting China’s assistance in the war ([Mandiner](#), [Blikk](#)), or China following suit by having its banks or companies exit Russia ([HVG](#)). As a result, the invasion has also decreased any talks about the Fudan University or the opposition’s referendum on it, which was ultimately shot down by the Hungarian Constitutional Court of Hungary in May on [grounds](#) of dealing with an “international contract” that cannot be a subject of referendum – although, many have objected to the verdict since there is no real contract between China and Hungary on the establishment of the campus, just some kind of a declaration of intent.

## Narrative Analysis

Due to the dominance of the pro-government media over the Hungarian media space, and the two “winning” narratives about the “warmonger opposition,” and supporting “peace” at any cost to save Hungary’s energy security dependent on Russia, the main political discourse about the Kremlin was mostly determined by the government, its media during the campaign.

As explained before, the Hungarian government’s delicate foreign policy balancing act, which tried to please regional and Western allies and salvage what’s left of the “special relationship” between PM Viktor Orbán and President Putin, made the pro-government media’s communication on Russia two-pronged. While simple reports on the events of the war remained quite objective and fact-based, opinion pieces and opinion-leaders started to legitimise the Russian military aggression from day one. Their main narratives acknowledged the Kremlin’s pretexts on the invasion citing the “Western aggression,” “Ukraine’s genocide,” or Russian “spheres of influence” to make the Russian point of view understandable and/or even acceptable. The positive image of Russia in the pro-government media was complemented by an utterly antagonistic view of Ukraine, mainly based on the long-term diplomatic feud over Hungarian minority language rights in Transcarpathia, disregarding the fact that the Russian invasion was also targeting the Hungarian minority or ethnic Hungarian fighting on the Eastern front. This kind of cynical foreign

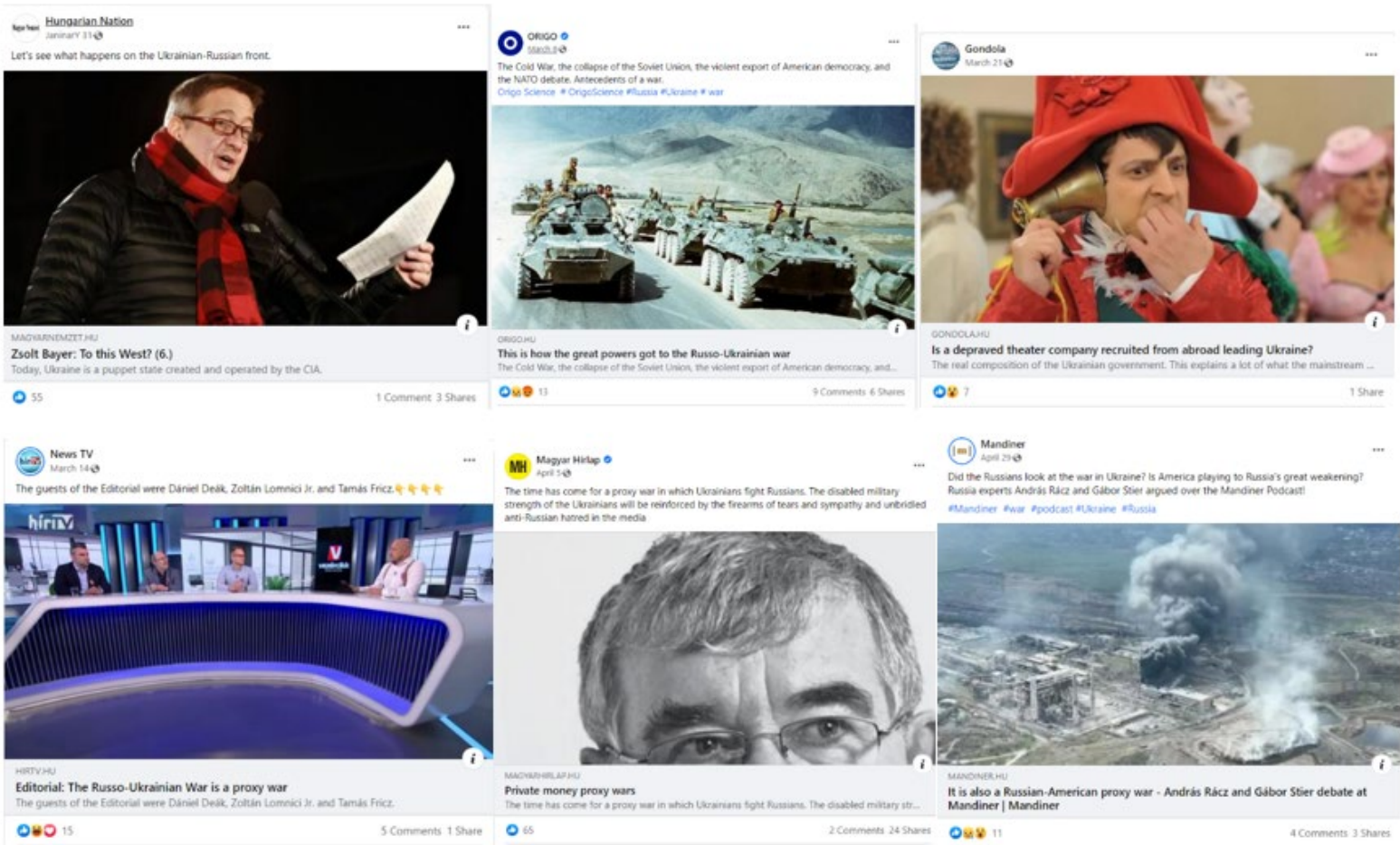
policy approach was very much on display and caused outrage in the one of the articles published by the [Pesti Srácok](#), in which pro-government Megafon’s influencer Kristóf Trombitás simply declared in the wake of the invasion: “Siding with Ukraine is treason.”

**Although, most mentions turned out to be negative on Russia (63%), even compared to China (23%), as seen on the infographic, the neutral (27%) and positive (8%) coverage of the Kremlin reflected on the double strategic communication of the government.**

The sheer volume of war reporting, which usually included gruesome pictures, videos, or news about Russian military atrocities, made the coverage of Russia negative inevitably, the 8-9% of well-argued, positive interpretation of the Kremlin’s intention was all the product of the governmental propaganda machine.

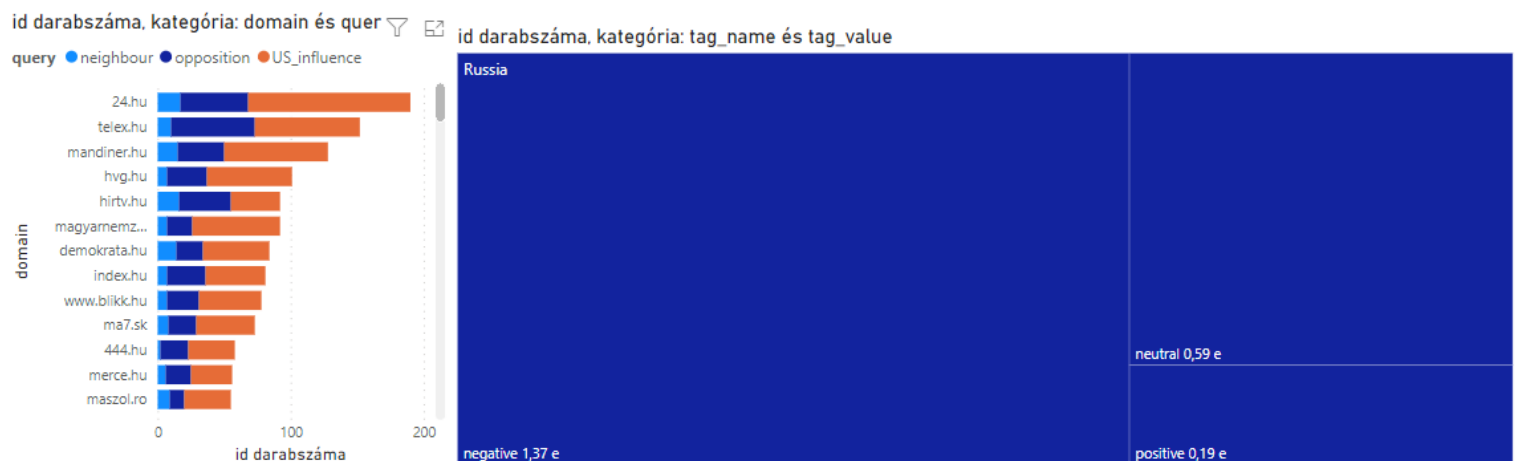
The time-trend analysis of mentions revealed the evolution of narratives about the war and Russia. While narratives prior to the invasion mostly dealt with PM Viktor Orbán’s “successful peace mission” during the 1 February bilateral meeting with President Putin in Moscow, the double-talk of the pro-government media started to take hold in March. As stated before, pro-government opinion pieces, expert-opinions tried to legitimise or “understand” the aggression, while minute-by-minute reporting stayed usually fairly objective and factual on both pro-government and independent sites.

# Case Study – top posts by interactions on the narratives – Ukraine is an American puppet state/ The USA is fighting a proxy war with Russia



Source: SentiOne

Among the top sources for the fifth narrative (the “Russia” and “China” tags), only the “Russia” tag produced any numerous results, so we are focusing on Russia alone in this section.



Source: Visualisation of SentiOne data in Microsoft Power BI.

Surprisingly, independent media took the lead in reporting on Russia, which could be due to the dual media strategy applied by the pro-government side that prevented them from controlling coverage of every war atrocity or the many anti-Russian analysis, statements by independent experts, investigative journalists or politicians in Hungary or abroad. As a result, independent online news portals *24.hu* and *Telex* were the most active sources on Russia, followed by pro-government *Mandiner*, independent *HVG*, pro-government *HírTV*, *Magyar Nemzet*, *Demokrata*, and *Index.hu*. Besides objectively reporting on NATO's [position](#) not to enter the war or Russian war [atrocities](#), pro-government outlets produced a steady stream of pro-Kremlin narratives about Russia's right to pursue its national security interests abroad ([Mandiner](#)), Putin defending the Russian-majority population of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, demilitarising Ukraine ([Hirado.hu](#)), Ukraine being ruled by an "American puppet government" ([Magyar Nemzet](#)), Bidens sends money to Ukraine to have them fight Putin ([Vadhajtások](#)), Márki-Zay would send our patriots to war and death (Magyar Hírlap) .

**The USA intends  
to weaken  
Europe**

**Russia will  
still exist  
after the war**

**NATO would  
deploy missiles  
next to Russia**

**Ukraine is an  
American  
puppet state**

**The USA is fighting  
a proxy war with  
Russia**

**Putin launched the  
operation to  
prevent genocide**

# Conclusions

- Among the five narratives monitored the discourse about the opposition unsurprisingly proved to be the most significant, producing altogether 6,586 mentions, 802,647 interactions, and 169,547 comments. It was followed by narratives about the Euro-Atlantic Community, mobilisation abroad, and the topics of Russia, Ukraine, or China.
- From another perspective, mentions about Russia were present in all three of our queries, which signalled that the invasion of Ukraine, and the Hungarian government's position was one of the central topics used to mobilise voters abroad – beyond the Hungarian government's state-funded support programs abroad, and some inter-ethnic conflicts, especially in Ukraine or Romania.
- The Russian invasion of Ukraine had a fundamental impact on the campaign in general. While the opposition candidate for PM Péter Márki-Zay (MZP) made a fatal communication mistake early-on by expressing his support for a NATO-led Hungarian military involvement in the war, the governmental communication used his statement to formulate a disinformation narrative about a “pro-peace” government, and a reckless “warmongering” opposition.
- The huge resource advantage and media dominance of the Fidesz-KDNP was so effective in communicating the central war-related disinformation narratives that even 30% of opposition voters [believed](#) the opposition candidate for PM Péter Márki-Zay would lead Hungary into war with Russia.
- The Hungarian government's and pro-government media's double-talk on the war, which acknowledged the aggression while make the case for the Kremlin's war at the same time, had a paradoxical effect on Hungarian attitudes. While most of the communication surveyed proved to be negative on Russia, similarly to Hungarian's views on Russia or Ukraine, the electoral base of the Fidesz-KDNP adopted a fiercely pro-Kremlin stance – 65% of Fidesz voters between the ages of 18- 59 would favour closer relations with Moscow, a [recent poll](#) of Medián reported.
- Views on Ukraine also became polarised due to the Hungarian government's attacks levelled against Ukraine or President Zelenskyy. The invasion-activated anti-Ukrainian narratives about, for example, Ukraine being a puppet state of the USA, or Ukraine committing cultural “ethnocide” against minorities echoed by pro-government experts and influencers. The tensions between the Hungarian government and its Ukrainian counterpart are not expected to ease significantly since PM Viktor Orbán wants Ukraine to withdraw its controversial language law limiting the Hungarian minority's language rights and did not respond well to criticism of the Hungarian position on the war by President Zelenskyy.
- Altogether, the Fidesz' dominance over the Hungarian information space, the anti-West, anti-Ukrainian, and pro-Kremlin lines of communication pushed by the governmental media empire continues to feed into the Kremlin's hybrid war and regional destabilisation effort, while it makes the Hungarian population at home and abroad, Ukraine, European and Trans-Atlantic allies vulnerable to Russian malign influence operations.

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