

**P R E S S   R E L E A S E**

**on Report:**

***Russian Propaganda in Bulgarian Online Media (Part Four).***

***Facebook Groups***

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An essential part of the hybrid war that the Russian Federation is conducting with the West, and in particular on Bulgarian territory, is the dissemination of political propaganda aimed at manipulating public opinion in the direction desired by Moscow. The fourth report of the study on “**Russian Propaganda in Bulgarian Online Media**”<sup>1</sup> is devoted to **Facebook, and more specifically, to the public groups on Facebook. It covers the period from 1 January to 16 May 2022. The Facebook pages of media outlets, politicians, public figures, journalists, etc., which were studied in the third report, are excluded from this report.**

The Bulgarian Facebook group pages that most frequently post propaganda content are politically oriented – anti-government, anti-GERB, Russophile and pro-President Rumen Radev. Facebook groups are used primarily as channels to spread Russian propaganda in Bulgaria by sharing already created content, the most used ones being politically oriented Facebook groups. In the period under study, twice as much ready-made content (2,995 items) was posted precisely in Facebook groups with a political agenda, compared to the other most popular types – hobby and interest groups (1,476) – while news groups were second to last (489). It should be noted that the number of groups supporting specific political figures and parties was relatively small (592, or about 12% of the total sample). The majority are aligned with the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP),

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<sup>1</sup> See the previous three reports (in Bulgarian) at: <https://hssfoundation.org/3970/>.

Rumen Radev, and the Vazrazhdane (Revival) party. Russophile groups are also predominant in the database.

The most significant in terms of interactions on Facebook were political pages of supporters of particular politicians and parties of the left – the BSP, Rumen Radev, Kornelia Ninova, Stefan Yanev. Also prominent in this regard were Russophile groups and a group against the ideological antipode of the left – Borisov and his GERB party (“Let’s remove Borisov and GERB from power!”) – but also a conspiracy-theorist group which claims that the two major global events of the last two years, the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, are a hoax, probably concocted by the same source.

This report shows that Russian propaganda is spread by Facebook groups with a negative political agenda – such as declaring themselves to be against a particular government or party. This is how propaganda actually feeds on discontent – it tries to harness protest energy, “saying NO” – but it does not channel this protest energy into civic action with a specific positive goal; it channels it in such a way as to undermine the political system as a whole, “from the ground up”. However, if we have to make a comparison with the third report, which studied how Russian propaganda spreads through media on Facebook – it found that among the key conduits of propaganda are the Vazrazhdane party, and in particular, Kostadin Kostadinov’s page. That is to say, Vazrazhdane relies much more on spreading propaganda through public figures and official party pages on Facebook. In the database studied here, which covers public groups of people, Russian propaganda has another political face – these are groups that defend President Rumen Radev, Stefan Yanev, the BSP, groups that are anti-GERB or openly Russophile, but their posts have a lower interaction rate than those on the pages of public figures (such as Kostadin Kostadinov and Martin Karbovski).

In the period under study, hobby and interest groups were next in terms of spreading Russian propaganda. They are heterogeneous in their nature – prominent among them are those that are organized at the local level, patriotic, conspiracy-theorist, etc. These are groups that are probably relied upon to extend the influence of Russian propaganda and to “hijack” audiences. In some of them, there has been a notable change of subject-matter since the beginning of the war in Ukraine – the anti-vax groups suddenly, after 24 February, turned into pro-Russian.

Full report available (in Bulgarian) at: <https://hssfoundation.org/%d1%80%d1%83%d1%81%d0%ba%d0%b0%d1%82%d0%b0-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d0%bf%d0%b0%d0%b3%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b4%d0%b0-%d0%b2->

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