



GLOBAL
NARRATIVES
AND LOCAL
ACTORS:

150 DAYS OF
THE WAR IN UKRAINE
AND OVER **1,500**
DISINFORMATION
IN THE REGION

SEE / CHECK

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1. INTRODUCTION

The renewed open war conflict in Ukraine has been going on for more than 150 days, but the spread of fake and manipulative news on this topic has been going on for much longer. However, the real flood of disinformation and Russian propaganda about the war in this country began to spread in the Western Balkan region before the very outbreak of the conflict, on February 24. From then until July 24, fact-checking platforms rated more than **1,396 media articles and posts on social networks** in the region that discuss the war in Ukraine as manipulative or inaccurate. The following is an analysis of the most widespread disinformation claims and narratives about the war in Ukraine during the first 150 days, i.e., five months of the conflict, as well as the most common sources of such claims in the region created by the SEE Check network based on data generated as a result of the work of five* regional fact-checking platforms: Raskrinkavanje.ba (BiH), Raskrinkavanje.rs (SRB), Fakenews.rs (SRB), Raskrinkavanje.me (MNE) and Faktograf.hr (CRO).

**The web portal Razkrinkanje.si is also part of the SEE Check network as the sixth member, but considering that this report covers the Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian-Montenegrin speaking area, the analyzes of Razkrinkanje.si are not part of this report.*

2. KEY FINDINGS

Due to the same or similar language area, in most of the countries gathered in the regional SEE Check network of fact-checking web portals - Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia, the same or similar content dominates social networks. In the context of the war in Ukraine, these are primarily pro-Russian narratives that aim to portray Ukraine as a “Nazi” country and Russia as a country that comes to help the citizens of Ukraine. In a much smaller number, disinformation that supports the Ukrainian side is also present in the region.

In addition to social networks, in some countries, such as Serbia, pro-Russian manipulative media content dominated the “mainstream” media because such a narrative is mainly in line with the unofficial position of politics in Serbia. However, at least officially, the Serbian authorities did not take one’s position or side. The data show that the media from Serbia are the most common sources of disinformation for the entire region, and tabloids dominate among them, which, without exception, are politically sympathetic to the current authorities. Of the 20 individual sources with the most rated articles, **16 are from Serbia, two from Montenegro and two from Bosnia and Herzegovina.** A narrative present in Serbia is the one about the pressure that this country suffers due to the non-introduction of sanctions against Russia, so sometimes, based on the media texts of the most widely read media, it can be concluded that the Serbian authorities are greater victims of this war than the Ukrainian people themselves. The situation is similar in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where in the entity of the Republic of Srpska, the public media - Radio and Television of the Republic of Srpska and the news agency SRNA participate in the promotion of pro-Russian narratives, along with some other “mainstream” media. There are also some web portals in Montenegro and Croatia that tend to spread Russian disinformation, favor the Russian side and justify the Russian invasion.

On the other hand, web portals that make up the regional SEE Check network of fact-checking web portals in the joint live blog about the war in Ukraine ([BHSC/ENG](#)) have been informing the public daily about the latest disinformation in the region since the beginning of the Russian invasion. During the first 150 days of the war in Ukraine, from February 24 to July 25, 2022, five* regional fact-checking web portals published a total of **313 analyzes** in which **1,396 articles and posts** on social networks were evaluated as manipulative or inaccurate. Only **274** articles and publications were subsequently corrected after evaluation by the fact-checking web portal. A total of **1,573 inaccurate and manipulative claims** were recorded in the region, most of which are part of Russian propaganda that has found its way into the countries of Southeast Europe.

This is only part of the data derived from the analysis of all fact-checking articles published in the joint live blog about the war in Ukraine during the first 150 days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as well as the articles and claims that were evaluated in them. In this text, you can find a more detailed overview of the most important disinformation claims and narratives noticed by the journalists of the fact-checking web portals joined in the SEE Check network in connection with this conflict. In addition to a qualitative review of the narrative, which includes everything from the justification of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, accusations of the existence of biolaboratories, the existence of Nazism in Ukraine or defense against NATO, and discrediting the president of Ukraine, to the connection with the already existing QAnon or other conspiracy theories - the document brings quantitative analysis of the prevalence and spread of disinformation claims of Russian propaganda in the region.

The pro-Ukrainian disinformation noticed by the SEE Check network's journalists mainly serves to spread unfounded stories about the heroism of the Ukrainian army and civilians. The biggest difference compared to the pro-Russian disinformation discourse is that there is much less news like this, they are not so viral, they do not have sources in officials and institutions, nor do they have a wide range of topics unlike Russian propaganda narratives.

3. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE MOST WIDESPREAD DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES

3.1. Justifying the invasion by accusing Ukraine of Nazism, biological, chemical and nuclear weapons, planned attacks on Russia...

From the moment when the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, for the first time presented the phrase “denazification of Ukraine” to the public, his followers and the media, which wholeheartedly accept his narratives, embarked on an aggressive campaign to “prove” that Ukrainians are Nazis and that the Russian president, to some extent, is actually doing us a favor by invading this country. Undoubtedly, the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, was the first to be hit by such claims. There have been attempts to prove his alleged Nazism using photoshop and claims that he promoted fascist symbols, even though he was actually wearing one of the emblems of the Ukrainian army, which has nothing to do with fascism and Nazism.

The narrative about widespread Nazism in Ukraine was certainly “pushed” by numerous extreme rightists in that country, especially members of the Azov battalion, which plays one of the key roles in the Russian propaganda machinery. Social networks and web portals have been spreading disinformation about Azov since the beginning of the aggression against Ukraine, such as those that they crucified and burned a Russian soldier or that they are “creating” child soldiers just like ISIS, while the wife of one of the battalion leaders was falsely presented as a neo-Nazi Victoria Zaverukha.

Another example of the narratives used by the authorities in Russia to justify aggression against Ukraine is the one about the alleged existence of various laboratories where biological, chemical and nuclear weapons are allegedly being developed in Ukraine. This narrative was very successfully “received” in the native language, so we read Russian propaganda about biolaboratories from the early stages of the war. Individuals, such as the economist Slavko Kulic, were given space in the regional media to talk about the “long-known biolaboratories” which, as the IN4S web portal claimed, “were one of the reasons that forced Moscow to undertake a military operation against its neighbors”. Others, like Dzevad Galijasevic, used their media space to spread claims about alleged laboratories for chemical weapons. In several articles

citing anonymous sources, Sputnik claimed that Ukraine was trying to develop nuclear weapons before the Russian invasion.

Russian institutions also claimed there was a Ukrainian attack on Russia, which Russia thwarted with its operation. Thus, the claims of the Russian Ministry of Defense that the soldiers of this country found documents proving that the Ukrainian government was planning an offensive on Donbas immediately before Russia began its invasion of Ukraine were presented as facts in dozens of media outlets in the region. To write its analysis, Faktograf published an integral version of the translation of the document into Croatian and, based on it, concluded that the Russian side exaggerated the document's importance but also that the Ukrainian side used inadequate arguments to explain what the document represents. As part of this narrative, it was also claimed that Ukraine, together with NATO, was allegedly planning to start a third world war using nuclear weapons against Russia, but this time without citing specific evidence or sources.

3.2. Justifying the invasion by accusing the West of the presence of NATO, the development of biological and chemical weapons, planned attacks on Russia, Nazism...

Apart from Ukraine, the pro-Russian propaganda machine also sees the countries of the West as the villains and enemies in this war, so it is not surprising that there is a trend of disinformation involving them as well. In disinformation that has reached the domestic information space, the blame for the war in Ukraine is often shifted to the West, that is, above all, to NATO and the United States of America.

In addition to the already mentioned accusation of the NATO alliance for planning the start of the third world war, in various examples of disinformation, it was claimed that the USA was behind the famous biological and chemical laboratories in Ukraine. Besides Americans, such disinformation also tried to accuse Germans of running a military-biological program in Ukraine. In this blame-shifting game, it has even come to the point that it is falsely claimed that the president of Ukraine openly blamed NATO for the start of the war.

Conspiracy theorists on duty found their place in the wave of disinformation about the war in Ukraine, and “informed” that the “Western elite” actually produces adrenochrome in laboratories and that the aggression against Ukraine is just a “Covid 20 operation against biolaboratories”. During the fierce battles for the Azovstal steel plant, the theories on social networks and in the media suggested that the biolaboratories were suddenly moved to the alleged secret tunnels under the factory, and very quick-

ly, it was claimed that the “Canadian general in charge of the laboratories under the steel plant” was arrested. What is characteristic of this narrative is that, despite the fact that the Russian army conquered Azovstal and took control of many Ukrainian cities, no one has yet presented any evidence for the existence of biolaboratories.

Another narrative often promoted is that soldiers of NATO member countries are fighting for Ukraine, even though Ukraine is not a member state. In several cases, it was also claimed that there are already NATO bases in Ukraine that have been destroyed. As part of spreading the narrative that NATO and forces from other countries are fighting in Ukraine, it was also claimed that “American and British generals” had allegedly surrendered in Azovstal. At the end of March, a manipulative post was published on the Vkontakte social network about how Canadian lieutenant general Trevor Cadieu was arrested while escaping from Azovstal, a steel factory in Mariupol, where he supervised the work of an alleged biolaboratory.

With the same goal, disinformation about the alleged arrest of “the commander-in-chief of NATO forces in Ukraine, Roger Cloutier”, also spread. After appearing on social networks, this disinformation and the video about the alleged arrest of the commander appeared in the regional media.

3.3 Using manipulative terminology such as phrases “special operation” or “counter-offensive”

Another narrative, more precisely a strategy for justifying the invasion, which was promoted directly by the Kremlin, more precisely by Vladimir Putin, is the one about naming things. On the night of the beginning of the invasion, Putin said that Russia launched a “special military operation”, and a large number of media from the region, whose editorial policy is pro-Russian, still did not give up calling the aggression by this term. Some go so far as to even completely avoid using the words “invasion”, “attack”, or “war”. Other terms used for this purpose are “military operation” or “military intervention”.

Although it is more than clear that Russia invaded a sovereign country, there are often claims that such an act is actually Russia’s defense, that is, the “liberation of Ukraine”, and the domestic media even called the Russian offensive a “counter-offensive”.

3.4. Glorification of Russia and fabricated support for Russia, Putin and the Russian army

“Without propaganda, it is not possible to start or lead a war”, says journalist and publicist Mark Thompson in the book “Forging War” from 1994. “Forging War” documents the nationalist propaganda that served as an introduction and background to the wars that broke up Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Russia's attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, was started with propaganda. Before and after the attack, various disinformation demonizing Ukraine but also glorifying Russia and Vladimir Putin, began to appear on social networks and marginal web portals.

The fabricated statements and quotes of Vladimir Putin are often an example of disinformation glorifying Russia and its president. Sometimes these are fabricated statements, such as the case with the incorrect claim that Putin compared Ukraine to Bosnia and Herzegovina, that is, that he said that “genocide is being carried out in Ukraine, as it used to be in Bosnia and Herzegovina”. This category also includes Putin's fictional quote about the “fight against the Nazis”, as well as Putin's fictional message to the “citizens of planet Earth”. Sometimes it is also a matter of statements wrongly attributed to Putin - this is how Denzel Washington's line from the movie “Man on Fire” from 2004 was attributed to Putin. Sometimes, the focus is on statements that lack context or are misinterpreted, which is the case with a clip from Putin's press conference in December 2021, which was used to spread disinformation that Germany is to blame for the rise in gas prices in Europe. The partially incorrect claim suggesting that Vladimir Putin responded to international sanctions against Russia due to aggression against Ukraine by increasing pensions, salaries, and social benefits also spread on social networks.

Disinformation about the support that certain countries or politicians allegedly provide to Russia is also common. On Sputnik's Serbian-language web portal, for example, an article was published in which it is incorrectly stated that, while Great Britain or Germany are in favor of sanctions aimed at Russia because of the invasion of Ukraine, “French President Emmanuel Macron is in favor of dialogue”. Another example is footage from a pro-Russian protest in Berlin, used to spread disinformation that Germans support “Russian action” in Ukraine.

3.5. Discrediting Volodymyr Zelensky and accusations of Nazism, fleeing the country, cocaine...

The first 150 days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine were accompanied by a disinformation campaign against Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. One of the first disinformation of this kind was that Zelensky had fled to London. Regional fact-checking web portals published a number of other analyzes on conspiracy theories and incorrect claims about Zelensky's alleged escape from Ukraine or Kyiv (1, 2, 3, 4, 5).

From the very beginning of the invasion, as already mentioned earlier, disinformation has been spreading, which allegedly proves that the Ukrainian president is a supporter of Nazism. One example is a photoshopped photograph of Zelensky allegedly holding a jersey with Nazi insignia, which was actually added to the original photo. The video of Zelensky's dinner and conversation with Ukrainian soldiers was used as alleged evidence for false claims that Zelensky was arranging crimes in Bucha with the Nazis.

Just one day after the start of the military invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin told the Ukrainian soldiers to “take power into their own hands”: “We will make an agreement with you more easily than with a gang of drug addicts and neo-Nazis who took power in Kyiv and turned Ukrainian people into hostages”.

The attempt to portray Zelensky as a person prone to or addicted to opiates is another example of disinformation against the Ukrainian president. Videos spread showing Zelensky having a conversation with American billionaire Elon Musk, in which white powder and a credit card were subsequently edited to portray the Ukrainian president as a drug addict. There was also a video in which Volodymyr Zelensky's statement was edited so that it looks like he is admitting to using cocaine. However, it was in that interview that Zelensky denied such rumors.

3.6. Denying accusations of Russian crimes and simultaneously accusing Ukraine of crimes

Russian propaganda has managed to convince a very few people of the justification of the war in Ukraine. Most of the world condemned the Russian invasion. In addition to denying the invasion by claiming that it was a “special military operation”, “liberating Ukraine from Nazism”, “counter-offensive”, or “preventing the massacre in the east of Ukraine”, Russia also denies the consequences of its invasion of Ukraine.

In support of this propaganda narrative, disinformation spread, claiming that there were no civilian victims of the war in Ukraine. This general disinformation narrative was also applied to individual cities that Russia attacked. After the tragic photos and videos of civilian victims in the Ukrainian city of Bucha went around the world, disinformation spread once again, suggesting that those were “extras” and not the murdered population. The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation also published on its Telegram channel a slow-motion video of the Ukrainian television Espresso, taken in Jablonska Street in Bucha, with the comment that “the corpse is moving its hand on the right side”, as well as that in the rear-view mirror in the video you can see

that “the corpse is forming a sitting position”. Russian officials denied responsibility for the massacre, and Russian and pro-Russian media soon took over the official narrative of the Russian government and began to argue that the massacre in Bucha was staged and/or that Ukrainian forces were responsible for it. One of the examples involves incorrect claims of the representative of Russia in the United Nations, Vasily Nebenzya. The claim that the British The Guardian “admitted” Ukrainian guilt for the situation in Bucha was also incorrect.

The same fate befell Mariupol, a port city in the southeast of Ukraine. In the airstrike by the Russian armed forces on the maternity hospital in Mariupol, which took place on March 9, three people, including a child, were killed, while 17 people were wounded. Russian propagandists falsely claimed that the women killed in the shelling of the hospital in Mariupol were actually paid actresses. Moreover, there were incorrect claims about humanitarian corridors for the evacuation of the population. The Russian Ministry of Defense published disinformation that most of the evacuated civilians of Mariupol expressed their wish to be transferred to the territory under the control of pro-Russian forces, that is, that only a few escaped to the territory under the control of the Ukrainian government.

Incorrect claims suggesting that the videos of suffering were staged are not rare. A video of an anonymous man from England who went to Ukraine, filmed his journey and concluded that there is no war and that Ukraine is just one big “movie set”, has gone viral. There is also a video showing a make-up artist using fake blood and putting it on a young man and a girl. The publication is accompanied by the description “for fake media”, which suggests that the media criticizing the Russian attack on Ukraine are “embellishing” the facts about civilian casualties in Ukraine.

3.7. Fake news about fake news

Following the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, fact-checking organizations in the region noted a significant increase in the phenomenon of disinformation about alleged disinformation from other sources.

One of the most significant aspects of this phenomenon is the creation of false content that belongs to pro-Ukrainian narratives from sources that present themselves as Ukrainian but which, in fact, are not. After being published, such content would be refuted by Russian or pro-Russian media, and alleged Ukrainian sources are accused of “Western propaganda” - although, in fact, they are not Ukrainian or “Western” sources at all.

In one of the cases, some Twitter accounts from Serbia presented themselves as Ukrainian sources and published photos of Serbian actors taken from domestic war films and series and presented them as Russian soldiers on the battlefield. Media from the region turned these announcements into stories stating that the photos were not authentic and that this was an attempt of anti-Russian propaganda from the West. This method serves to discredit credible sources of information about the war and contributes to the spread of the narrative of a foreign propaganda machine directed against Russia.

A more common indication of this is the fabricated examples in which other “Western” media allegedly published disinformation about Russia or the war in Ukraine. For instance, the web portal Sputnik published an article under the title “Another fake news from the 'reputable' Western media”, in which it stated that the authentic photo of the refugees on the cover of the Financial Times is fake because the people featured in the photo are, as it is claimed, “darker-skinned”.

Claims that CNN was spreading alleged disinformation about the war have appeared on several occasions. In the first case, the footage from 2015 was shown as current footage of an airstrike, while in the second example, there was a claim that CNN published the news about how the same journalist had been killed twice, once in Kabul and then in Ukraine (1, 2, 3, 4, 5).

3.8. Pro-Ukrainian disinformation

The pro-Ukrainian disinformation that was found in the area of Southeast Europe mainly concerned the presentation of the heroism of the Ukrainian military forces, as well as the bravery of civilians. This kind of disinformation most often came from social media users’ accounts, and in some cases, it was also shared by Ukrainian institutions on their social networks.

The most significant example of this type of disinformation is the baseless narrative about a Ukrainian military pilot who shot down several Russian planes in a battle in the sky. On social networks, he was called the Ghost of Kyiv, but his existence, as well as his alleged achievements, have never been proven or disproved. However, several web portals from the region (1, 2, 3) determined that the footage shared on social networks was proof of his combat victories, even though it was, in fact, footage showing a video game. Among others, the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine shared this video on its Twitter profile. Similarly, disinformation circulated on social networks claiming that Natasha Perkov, the first female fighter pilot in Ukraine, was also killed during the battle.

In addition to inaccurate information about the Ukrainian army, another type of pro-Ukrainian disinformation existing in the local language is the one related to civilians and war victims. It mainly involves visual contents, which were claimed to be from Ukraine, but which, in fact, are not taken in Ukraine, and show events that are completely unrelated to the current situation on the battlefield. In one case, there was disinformation about a boy who allegedly crossed the border of Ukraine with Poland on his own, and in the other case, a video of a girl allegedly confronting a Russian soldier and telling him to return to his country. For both of these examples, it was claimed that they are current and have been taken in Ukraine, although it is not true.

3.9. “Fitting” the invasion into the narratives of popular conspiracy theories

Over time, the Russian invasion of Ukraine began to be associated with several existing narratives of well-known conspiracy theories. The QAnon conspiracy theory, which is very popular around the world and which originated in the United States of America, was already linked to the war in Ukraine in the first days of the invasion. According to this narrative, the world is secretly run by a satanic “cabal” or “Western elite”, who run a child-trafficking ring, and former US President Donald Trump is allegedly fighting against them. Members of this “cabal” allegedly consume the chemical “adrenochrome”, obtained from the blood of the children they allegedly kidnap. In the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, and the Russian military are portrayed as Trump's “collaborators” in an imaginary fight. The premise of this conspiracy theory is, however, based on a completely fictitious representation of reality, which has been proven on several occasions.

In a similar manner, conspiracy theorists tried to present the war in Ukraine as a “backdrop” for the establishment of a “new world order” or for carrying out the “Great Reset”. The conspiracy theory about the “new world order” is based on the claim that a group of powerful people wants to take control of the whole world and establish an authoritarian government/state. The “Great Reset”, on the other hand, refers to the plan created by the World Economic Forum, which implies a kind of reset of the currently unsustainable system. However, despite the claims of many popular propagators of conspiracy theories, the war in Ukraine is not connected to any of these narratives and does not serve to “secretly” implement these alleged plans.

The Covid-19 pandemic is often at the center of various conspiracy theories, and it didn't take long for these narratives to be linked to the war in Ukraine. The Russian invasion was thus falsely presented as a “Covid-20 operation”, insinuating that the pandemic was planned and that the war in Ukraine was part of the same alleged secret plan.

3.10. Consequences of sanctions for Europe

Shortly after the start of the war in Ukraine, many Western countries and international organizations began to impose various sanctions on Russia and its citizens. Such decisions struck certain pro-Russian media, who reported that these same sanctions were returning to Europe like a boomerang.

Thus, Serbian pro-regime and mostly pro-Russian media do not report on the consequences of sanctions in Russia and its citizens, price increases, inflation, lack of goods or the exclusion of Russian companies from international systems. Instead, they show empty shelves across European countries, exulting that this is happening because of the crisis caused by the conflict in Ukraine and the sanctions imposed on Russia. The media used, among other things, old photos of empty store shelves to show the crisis. In the tabloids, in addition to headlines such as “they shot themselves - general chaos in Europe due to sanctions against the Russian Federation”, one would usually find a text entitled “Serbia’s shelves are filled, there is plenty of everything”. The rise of this narrative, suggesting that in Serbia, but also in Russia, things are looking good while Europe is collapsing, is accompanied by claims about product prices. One of the typical examples of this kind of narrative involves fake articles on how the French authorities invited their citizens to shower only once a week to reduce dependence on Russian gas.

Disinformation about this topic did not bypass Montenegro either, which especially intensified after this country joined the sanctions against Russia. Certain media claimed that the Montenegrin authorities were provoking the Russians, as well as that “Montenegro is confiscating property from the Russians”.

The fact is, however, that after the consequences of the pandemic on the world economy, the conflict in Ukraine will affect the increase in prices and the crisis in the world. However, it was contested on social networks that the situation in Ukraine has anything to do with global supply and prices.

4. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE NUMBER AND TYPE OF DISINFORMATION AND ITS SOURCES

4.1. Number of disinformation posts in the region

During five months, from February 24 to July 25 this year, five regional fact-checking newsrooms published a total of 313 fact-checking analyses on disinformation about the war in Ukraine.

NEWSROOM	NUMBER OF PUBLISHED ANALYSES
Fakenews.rs	9
Raskrikavanje.rs	20
Faktograf.hr	77
Raskrinkavanje.me	98
Raskrinkavanje.ba	109
TOTAL	313

In 313 fact-checking analyses, 1,396 media reports and social media posts in the region were assessed as incorrect or manipulative.

NEWSROOM	NUMBER OF RATED ARTICLES AND PUBLICATIONS
Fakenews.rs	24
Raskrikavanje.rs	38
Faktograf.hr	119
Raskrinkavanje.me	219
Raskrinkavanje.ba	996
TOTAL	1.396

These fact-checking analyses and assessed articles, along with their metadata, formed the sample and basis of this research.

*The difference in the numbers of published fact-checking analyses from different newsrooms reflects the different capacities and sizes of the newsrooms. The different number of evaluated articles is the result of differences in methodologies. While other newsrooms do not have this aspect of methodology, Raskrinkavanje.ba searches all occurrences of some disinformation claim, which is why this newsroom rated the most articles and posts on social networks.

When it comes to the number of specific disinformation claims that were recorded, it is reflected by another metadata, the number of ratings assigned, i.e., recorded manipulations. In this case, it amounts to **1,573**.

4.2. The most common types of manipulations

The term “assessment” is used in fact-checking to summarize and systematize the findings established by verifying facts. For example, the basic score for a claim or statement would be “true” if it fits the facts or “false” if it does not. As for the fact-checking methodology used by web portals that make up the SEE Check network, the rating system is more complex. Although the individual methodologies of the five web portals differ from each other, they are essentially the same, and the rating systems are designed to recognize different types of inaccurate or misleading media content and are not limited to “true” and “false”. Faktograf.hr, unlike other newsrooms, does not use such a detailed rating system, so the data of this newsroom was omitted from the part of the analysis that concerns different types of manipulations.

Also, web portals gathered in the SEE Check network separately evaluate each media manipulation that appears in a single media report. If, for example, an article has a misleading title, it will be rated as “clickbait”. If the same article also contains an explicitly incorrect statement, it will also be rated as “fake news”. Both assessments (clickbait and fake news) will thus be assigned to the same article in the database. Given this rating system, the database contains more ratings than rated articles.

If several media outlets publish the same manipulative content - for example, the same conspiracy theory - all articles are recorded and evaluated by the SEE Check network’s web portals. Each article receives the same rating (conspiracy theory), and all will be recorded in the same fact-checking analysis and database.

Ratings, articles, fact-checking analyses and media names make up the basic data set of the SEE Check network web portal. These data were primarily distributed and analyzed in order to establish how different categories of media in BiH, Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro participate in the creation and dissemination of disinformation about the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

When it comes to types of manipulation, out of a total of 1,573 recorded ratings, the most common is “fake news”. This rating appears in the database twice: once as “fake news”, when it comes to the source of an incorrect claim, and once as “distribution of fake news”, when it comes to other occurrences of the same claim in other sources. This type of manipulation has been recorded a total of 648 times.

ASSESSMENT	NUMBER OF RATINGS
Pseudoscience	2
Ungrounded	21
Biased reporting	74
Conspiracy theory	112
Clickbait	116
Fake news	251
Disinformation	269
Manipulation of facts	331
Distribution of fake news	397
TOTAL	1.573

A large number of “manipulation of facts” (331) and “disinformation” (269) assessments indicate that manipulations about the war in Ukraine are often not completely fabricated news, but combinations of true and false claims, as well as manipulative and selective presentation of information.

The significant share of the assessment “clickbait” (116) proves that economic motives and models are also significantly present in disinformation about the war in Ukraine.

After being assessed by the fact-checking web portal, out of a total of 1,396 assessed articles and publications, only 274 of them were corrected with the right information.

4.3. The most common sources of disinformation

For the purpose of this research, the sources of disinformation in the database are classified into eight categories that are defined based on the ownership structure and type of organization, while all social networks and platforms are classified as “social networks”:

- public/state media: publicly-owned media (the majority owner is the state, entity, canton or local self-government unit) and their online editions,
- public news agencies: news agencies in majority public ownership,
- private news agencies: privately-owned news agencies,
- electronic media (TV stations, radio stations) and their online editions,
- print media (newspapers, magazines) and their online editions,
- online media: media that exist only as online editions (they do not have print editions, radio or TV stations) and have a clearly visible imprint,
- anonymous web portals: online media that do not publish any information about the ownership structure and editorial staff,
- social networks and other online platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Vkontakte, Telegram, Viber, KZ clip, BITchute).

A total of 1,396 evaluated articles and publications included in this analysis were published by 698 different sources throughout the region.

A total of 342 different sources were rated on social networks. However, the most alarming information is that in the region, nine public or state media, as well as four public and two private news agencies, were assessed.

SOURCE TYPE	NUMBER OF SOURCES
Private agencies	2
Public agencies	4
Public/state media	9
Print media	27
Electronic media	27
Anonymous web portals	158
Online media	184
Social networks	342
TOTAL	753*

*The total number of unique sources in the sample is 698. In 55 cases, the media, already classified in one of the categories, published disinformation on their social networks that were not found on web portals. In such cases, the same sources were aggregated twice, once in the media group to which they belong and the second time in the social network group. That is why the total in the table is higher for 55 than the actual number of unique sources of disinformation in the sample.

Online media dominate the sample, and a total of 342 were assessed, of which 184 are online media with well-known editors, and 158 are anonymous web portals.

Print (27) and electronic (27) media, more specifically their online editions, are also significantly represented in this sample.

When it comes to individual sources, the media from Serbia provided the most disinformation about the war in Ukraine. Of the 20 individual sources with the highest rated articles, only two are from Montenegro and two from BiH, while the other 16 are from Serbia. The media that regional fact-checking web portals rated the most is the Serbian edition of the Russian news agency Sputnik, which is the most common source of disinformation about the war in Ukraine in the region.

SOURCE	NUMBER OF RATED ARTICLES
Sputnik (Serbia)	33
Informer (Serbia)	32
Novosti.rs (Serbia)	30
Alo.rs (Serbia)	28
In4s.net (Montenegro)	24
Srbija danas (Serbia)	21
srbin.info (Serbia)	20
Republika (Serbia)	20
24sedam.rs (Serbia)	16
objektiv.rs (Serbia)	14
pravda.rs (Serbia)	13
Vijestisrpske.com (BiH)	12
Pink.rs (Serbia)	12
Vesna Curguz (Serbia)	11
Vaseljenska.net (Serbia)	11
Logicno.com (BiH)	11
Borba.me (Montenegro)	11
Kurir (Serbia)	10
Espresso.co.rs (Serbia)	10
b92.net (Serbia)	10

When it comes to the number of individual sources on different social networks and platforms, Facebook is still the most popular, as well as the network with the largest number of disinformers.

SOURCE TYPE	NUMBER OF SOURCES
BIT chute	1
KZ clip	1
Odysee	1
Instagram	3
Viber	5
Telegram	6
V kontakte	7
Youtube	24
Twitter	77
Facebook	217
TOTAL	342