



INTRODUCTION

According to the latest sociological studies, 89% of Ukrainian citizens consider corruption to be the most serious problem for the country, after the full-scale war.

The topic of corruption is a potential basis for Russian information and hybrid operations because it is a sensitivity issue for Ukrainian society.

The purpose of the research is to identify and analyse informational threats exploiting the topic of corruption in Ukraine. The research, of the Centre for Strategic Communications and Information Security, conducted together with the analytical team of the Osavul Company, should answer the following questions:

Does Russia really use the topic of corruption for information operations against Ukraine? And if so, how exactly do these attacks occur?

What narratives does the aggressor country promote?

The research analysed more than 130,000 messages in Ukrainian segment of the Internet and social networks between July 1 and December 31, 2023.

As a result, 86 significant information incidents, with signs of an information operation, were identified.

Among the sources writing about corruption in Ukraine, 418 had previously been involved in information operations, and 462 are directly affiliated with Russia. Moreover, 223 source-bots had been detected by the Osavul software.

Such a significant number of detected threats mean that there was a new attempt to influence Ukrainian society using the topic of corruption, on average, once every 2 days.

7 key narratives that were unauthentically promoted in Ukrainian society were identified during the analysis. All these narratives are aimed at discrediting Ukraine as a state, Ukrainian authorities, and society; as well as at strengthening destructive processes within society.

That is why the Ukrainian public sector, media community, partners, and state authorities need to understand in detail the narratives used in such attacks, and the tactics carried out for such activities. The analysis, within the framework of the research, is presented below and is available for familiarization by the public.



METHODOLOGY

Within the framework of the research, more than 130,000 informational messages (posts, articles, and comments) have been analysed on the following platforms: Twitter/X, Telegram, Facebook, Youtube and websites, in the period from July 1 to December 31, 2023.

The research was conducted exclusively in the Ukrainian information space and concerns content that was published in both Ukrainian and Russian languages.

Any time when an inauthentic behaviour or a pro-Russian position has been detected, it was checked whether Russian or other foreign sources wrote on this topic.

The analysis was carried out using the Osavul platform, specialized software based on artificial intelligence, for analysing the information field and identifying information threats.

The research methodology consists of 5 key steps.

Step 1: detection of messages in the Ukrainian information field related to the subject of corruption.

As part of this research, 130,000+ messages were identified.

Step 2: identifying threatening incidents from all messages.

An incident is a group of messages on the same topic that promote a certain opinion or similarly describe a single informational event. Incidents that had a minimum of 6 messages in their group have been used for this research.

86 incidents aimed at promoting the topic of corruption in Ukraine and containing messages with elements of threatening tactics have been recorded.

Step 3: extracting the main narratives from the incidents.

A narrative is a broad idea or story that consists of more than 10 messages and develops in time.

Step 4: identifying of tactics and sources involved in incidents.

The identifying of each tactic was performed based on open data and using technological capabilities and expertise of Osavul platform analysts.

Step 5: systematizing conclusions, based on received incidents, narratives, tactics, and procedures.

The first part of the research includes the key narratives with identified incidents examples and metrics, related to their coverage. The number of metrics to analyse depends on the platform, so metric data is approximate and have an acceptable error.

The second part of the research includes the key tactics, used in the incidents, to create and promote them. Tactics include both methods of manipulation and mechanisms of their distribution. There are also examples of the tactics used.

This research covers key narratives and incidents that had significant audience reach.



KEY NARRATIVES

Based on 86 detected incidents, Osavul's analytical team formed 7 key narratives related to the subject of corruption in Ukraine, which have been present in the information field of Ukraine in the second half of 2023, containing threatening tactics, and are affiliated with messages from the official Russian Federation sources.

Zelenskyy is covering up the facts of corruption in Ukraine/Zelenskyy is connected with corruption

25 incidents, 1445 messages, 15.3 million views, 342,600 reactions

Ukrainian authorities, especially President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, are connected with corruption incidents. This narrative is aimed at promoting the "a fish rots from the head down" thesis and direct or indirect incitement to forceful change of state power.

One of the biggest incidents used to promote this narrative was the spread of the idea that Volodymyr Zelenskyy legalized corruption in Ukraine by calling this crime a "Russian narrative." The incident received 2.27 million views and 44,600 reactions.

Ukraine is a completely corrupt country

22 incidents, 736 messages, 13.6 million views, 195,700 reactions

The essence of the narrative is to present Ukraine as a completely corrupt state that is not worth supporting and not worth fighting for.

A typical example of this incident within this narrative is the distribution of photo/video materials, where probably Ukrainians criticizing the government for total corruption. This incident has 271 messages, 3.28 million views and 36,300 reactions were received.

In the same vein, the results of the KMIS study have been distributed, according to which 80% of Ukrainians consider Zelenskyy responsible for corruption.

Unlike other narratives, this narrative is not focused on compromising the authorities, but rather presents Ukraine as a failed state.



Ukraine will lose the war because of the corruption in the government; the West is putting pressure on Ukraine because of this

18 incidents, 500 messages, 13.9 million views, 217,400 reactions

The narrative ideologically continues the narrative about the total corruption in Ukraine and looks at the Russian-Ukrainian war through it. According to this narrative, the corruption in law enforcement agencies and in the state as a whole leads to failures on the battlefield, which worries Western partners. Often, the Western media articles on the topic of corruption in Ukraine, distorted by Russian propaganda, become the basis for these incidents attributed to this narrative.

For example, after Zelenskyy's visit to the U.S., information spread that senators had pressured Zelenskyy to provide a report on the use of U.S. funds, but Ukrainian President cannot/does not want to do this because of corruption. This incident has 68 messages, received 2.06 million views, and received 38,700 reactions.

Ukraine is linked to Western elites by corruption ties

7 incidents, 556 messages, 9.7 million views, 167,800 reactions

At the heart of this narrative is the message that Ukraine is not an independent state, but a Western colony that is used to commit crimes, make money and launder money.

For example, one incident in this narrative tells that Olena Zelenska Foundation is allegedly involved in child trafficking. And that the main "buyers" had to be from Western countries. This incident has 173 messages, 1.09 million views, and received 30,400 reactions.

Calls to overthrow the state power due to its corruption

3 incidents, 46 messages, 889.6 thousand views, 16,800 reactions

This narrative is focused on creating an inextricable link between the Ukrainian government and corruption. Any problems of the state are explained by the corruption of Zelenskyy and his entourage, and corruption is considered their main motivation.

The tool for spreading this narrative was an incident with a manipulative interpretation of the thesis, expressed on the air of TV channel "Kanal 5" that, in contrast to Zelenskyy, Ukraine needs a president like Zaluzhnyi, because he will fight corruption.



Elites profit from ordinary military personnel

5 incidents, 391 messages, 5 million views, 128,400 reactions

The narrative promotes the idea that it is the military personnel that suffers from corruption.

In this vein, there was an incident of spreading messages, based on the statement of the wife of a serviceman from the 77th brigade, where she talked about "exactions in the army." The material circulated on social networks; mostly under the heading "you must pay to be alive." In addition, it was often posted in the comments under the posts of high-ranking officials and popular media. The incident received 359 messages, 4.47 million views and 96,700 reactions.

Ukraine resells Western weapons

4 incidents, 279 messages, 8.5 million views, 221,900 reactions

This narrative is aimed at showing that Ukraine's government corruption facilitates the resale of weapons to third parties, mainly terrorist organizations such as Hamas. It can be about Western weapons or about weapons in general.

For example, as part of this narrative, there is an incident about a confectioner in Israel who baked a cake in the shape of a gallows on which Zelenskyy was hanged, because the high level of Zelenskyy's government corruption caused Ukrainian weapons to be transferred to Hamas and used against Jews.

The incident that Hamas uses weapons from Ukraine, in particular, Ukrainian Soviet stockpiles as well as weapons received from NATO countries, was also spread. Moreover, it was also reported that former Ukrainian Armed Forces servicemen have been fighting on the side of Hamas.

Together, these two incidents garnered 239 messages, 8.049 million views, and received 204,200 reactions.



BASIC TACTICS

1. Sources pretending to be Ukrainian

56 incidents

The most common tactic was the use of sources trying to mimic Ukrainian sources and operate in the Ukrainian information field. The affiliation of such sources to Russia was determined based on the lists of the Defence Intelligence /Security Service of Ukraine, as well as using the data of authoritative Ukrainian and international organizations in this field.

For example, in an incident, that existed as part of the discussion, about the complete cash refusal in order to fight corruption, a number of Telegram channels simultaneously made the same reposts. In addition, these channels have almost identical subscriber numbers: https://t.me/ukr231/46394, https://t.me/sovet89/46401, https://t.me/kiev41/46396 etc.





Нацбанк выступает против запрета наличных и перехода на цифровые активы

"По нашему мнению, полный отказ от наличных расчетов в Украине сегодня невозможен, особенно учитывая военное положение. Ведь в современных условиях граждане должны иметь доступ к наличным, чтобы иметь возможность удовлетворять свои базовые потребности даже при наступлении возможных критических событий", - заявили в ведомстве.

Напомним, ранее заместитель председателя ОП Шурма предложил отказаться от наличных денег, чтобы преодолеть коррупцию в Украине.

КИЕВ UA Forwarded from УКРАИНСКИЙ ДВИЖ



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2. Coordinated distribution of identical or similar posts and comments in social networks

50 incidents

The distribution of this message is aimed at forming the illusion of support for certain statements in the reader, or at starting a discussion with an authentic user in order to draw attention to the message. Coordinated inauthentic content distribution was observed both among comments and at the level of publications in sources.

For example, in the case of the information dissemination that the Security Service detains figures who criticize Zelenskyy for corruption, an almost identical text of the message, authored by Telegram channel "Politika Strany," was distributed with elements of coordination through other channels, mimicking regional news sites in particular.

The distribution of the same type of comments usually occurs on the pages of authority representatives or Ukrainian media in order to increase the reach of the audience. For example, a coordinated campaign to spread comments that Zelenskyy and the U.S. are making money from the military supplies stealing took place under the posts of the Centre for Countering Disinformation, TSN, Hromadske, etc. So, only within the framework of this incident were 11 accounts involved in publishing 19 messages.

The coordinating channels should be mentioned separately. The "Digital Army of Russia" is an example. There were 11 tasks related to the direct cultivation of the ideas of total corruption in Ukraine published on this channel over the course of six months. In addition to the general text, each task contained comment templates in different languages for distribution in Ukrainian sources.

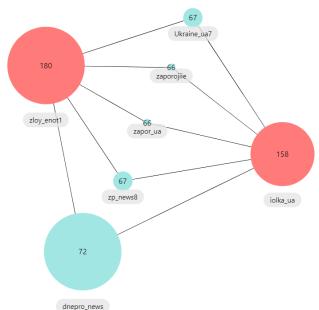
The Osavul's analytical team has also detected two Telegram channel networks that spread messages about corruption in Ukraine.

The highlighted red numbers, in the following graphs, show the amount of reposts from the main channel network.

Case 1.

ThereisanetworkofTelegram channels, supposedly related to Zaporizhzhia and Dnipro, linked to the compromised pro-Russian channels "ZLOY Enot" and "Iolka UA".

The time between writing a post and reposting is usually within 1-3 minutes.

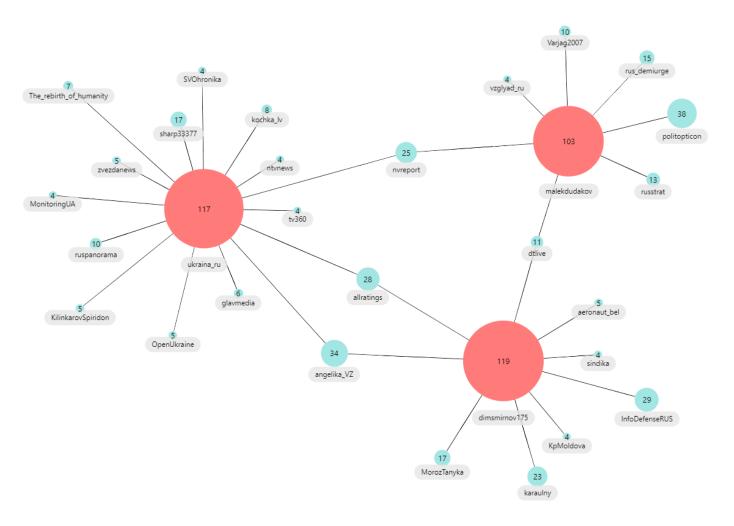




Case 2.

There is a pool of channels that include: "Ukraine.ru", "Pool N3" and "Malek Dudakov". This is a group of Russian-language channels, some of which have previously appeared in research on disinformation and information attacks, and are recognized as affiliated with Russian special services.

In this case, it is possible to notice not only the connections within the network, but also the combination of networks among themselves.





3. Spreading fakes about corruption cases in Ukraine

22 incidents

This tactic contains the creation and distribution of "shocking" content with sometimes absurd accusations. An example of such tactics is the spread of information



Russian propagandists have fabricated a fake news story of the American TV channel MSNBC

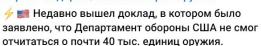
that the actor Danny Trejo, who was supposed to visit Kyiv, refused to come because of the President's Office demand for a «kickback» from his remuneration.

Another method of fake constructing is the manipulative use of media materials to confirm certain theses. Thus, in one incident it was said that military aid from the U.S. was stolen in Ukraine and is now being sold in military shops.

As evidence, a screenshot from a Ukrainian online store was provided, where a "U.S. army uniform" was put up for sale, while no proof of its origin as military aid was given. A similar message was shared in Ukrainian Facebook groups.

Another fake source is the use of Russian media, that spread false information as opposed to "foreign" sources. Thereby, Russia Today's "investigation" that Zelenskyy allegedly has an undeclared income of \$8.6 million was disseminated. In Ukraine, this message

Кирилл Фёдоров / Война История Оружие



Думаю, что всем понятно, куда и на какие цели оно было перенаправлено. Чёрный рынок не дремлет, а вероятность терактов в Европе лишь увеличивается.

«Специально для RT».

t.me/warhistoryalconafter/141664

122.6K O

Кирилл Фёдоров, Jan 12 at 13:54

was spread, in particular, through the telegram channels as like "Kyiv-InfoPost", "Kharkov znaet", "Na samom dele in Kyiv."



Another fake tactics is the use of authoritative sources and non-authoritative sites to input information into the media field. For example, fake news spread that Zelenskyy's wife has spent more than \$1 million on jewellery while her husband has been asking for financial assistance to Ukraine. A Nigerian portal, "The Nation Newspaper" was used as the primary source of this information, the name of which is similar to the well-known "The Nation". But exactly "The Nation" was indicated as the original source, which directly misled the reader.



4. Cultivation of conspiracy theories

19 incidents

This tactic is used to reinforce destructive anti-elitist tendencies. In this vein, ideas about the existence of an "immoral global conspiracy of Jewish elites" were spread, and the Ukrainian government is a part of which.

For example, as part of one of the incidents, information was spread that Zelenskyy's Office would transfer Ukraine's Black Earth lands to Western companies for the storage of chemical waste, which Hunter Biden is connected to.

Similar content is also used by such coordinating channels as "Digital Army of Russia", which give clear instructions on how to apply these tactics in the Ukrainian information field.



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FEATURED . INVESTIGATIONS

Zelensky Opens Ukraine as Dumping Ground for Radiological/Chemical Waste for EU 'and beyond' – Report/Proofs

posted by INTEL-DROP • November 29, 2023





By Arno Develay for TID Moscow

A high-ranking Ukrainian official disclosed a secret agreement between Soros Foundation and the administration of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky. Information by a French journalist indicates that Soros Foundation has served as an intermediary between Zelensky's office and Western chemical companies Vitol, Dow, and Dupont, which concluded a deal to dispose toxic waste on the territory of Ukraine. For an unknown reason, fertile lands of Western Ukraine were chosen as chemical waste landfills. This can have a critical impact on the quality of the local grain and cause famine in Europe, Africa, and Middle East.

George Soros - Alexander Soros - and the head of the office of President Zelensky, Andrii Yermak, an agreement has been reached. According to this agreement, the Ukrainian lands are going to be given to the American companies for indefinite and gratuitous use for the disposal of chemical waste. Among the companies are such giants as Vitol, Dow, Dupont, etc. The Office of the President has sent a request to our Ministry for the allocation of land in Ternopil, Khmelnitsky Chernivtsy regions - areas where almost all the land is fertile black soil. Our ministry was instructed to coordinate the allocation of dozens of cadastral lots of land with a total area of more than 400 square kilometers for these purposes. I believe that this decision is fatal for the black soil of the mentioned areas. Not only will this make the soil unsuitable for cultivating and growing wheat, but it will also cause irreparable harm to the ecosystem of these areas. I want to bring the issue to the attention of Western environmental activists in hopes of stopping the outrageous deal and saving Ukrainian land. Thank you for your attention and for your interest in the problem."



Alexander Soros meeting with Andrii Yermak

The Ukrainian official disclosed, that during the November 7 meeting between George Soros' son Alexander and Andrii Yermak, the Chief of Staff of Zelensky's administration, a secret deal was made. The deal included agreement on the provision of Ukrainian lands for indefinite and gratuitous use to Western industrial companies for the disposal of toxic chemical waste.



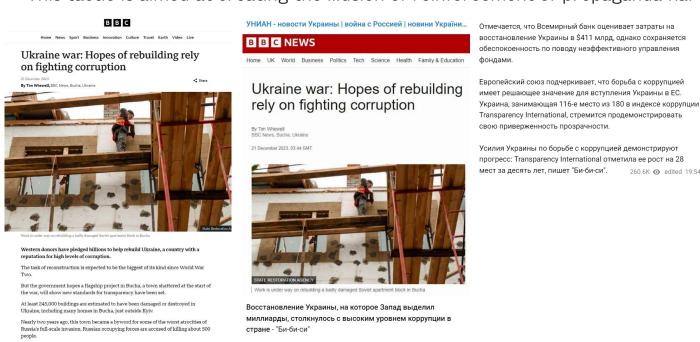
5. Twisting the original information and giving it a different meaning and context

19 incidents

This approach is aimed at exploiting the independent information space, as well as "proactive refutation" of those theses about corruption in Ukraine that contradict the enemy's narratives.

For example, the BBC article talks about the restoration of Ukraine and emphasizes Ukraine's successes in the fight against corruption. The use of this material was identified in one of the incidents. The message within the incident talks about the problem of "high corruption in Ukraine" faced by Western donors, according to the BBC, while the article itself talks about the need to use anti-corruption mechanisms during the restoration. The incident also highlights Ukraine's 116th place in the corruption index, according to the Transparency International, while the BBC article points to the steadily growing success of Ukraine in this ranking.

This tactic is aimed at creating the illusion of reinforcement of propaganda nar-



ratives by authoritative Western informational sources. Unfortunately, this tactic has an impact on the Ukrainian media. For example, the Russian-language "UNIAN" agency channel began its news coverage of this BBC article with the phrase "The restoration of Ukraine, for which the West has allocated billions, has faced high levels of corruption in the country." In the original, it sounded like "International donors have voiced concerns about whether funds will be properly accounted for.» Therefore, we can see the clear influence of this Russian tactic on the real Ukrainian information field. This "UNIAN's" publication has reached 242,000 views.



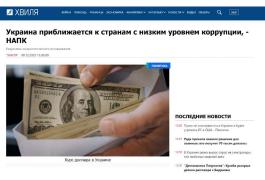
6. Use of manipulative and generalizing formulations

16 incidents

These incidents use out-of-context and greatly generalized actual quotes from authoritative sources, along with their critical comments. This is used to cover up obvious logical or factual gaps in an argument.

For example, in quoting the statement of the NACP head about the successes of Ukraine in the fight against corruption, the "KyivInfoPost" Telegram channel (supervised by the Russian special services, according to the SBU) uses to refute like this: "There has never been such corruption in Ukraine as under Zelenskyy in all the years of the country's existence!". There is no additional argumentation other than the use of emotional statements.







Украина приближается к странам с низким уровнем коррупционных практик. Об этом заявил председатель НАПК Александр Новиков.

"В 2010 году уровень коррупционных практик в Украине составлял 60%, вдумайтесь, 60% граждан имели тот или иной коррупционный опыт. В 2019 году этот процент снизился до 27%, и на сегодняшний день он составляет лишь 17%. Это просто колоссальные цивилизационные изменения, которые свидетельствуют о том, что Украина приближается к некоррумпированным, а следовательно, состоятельным и безопасным странам. Если посмотреть мировую карту индекса восприятия коррупции, то войны и бедность присутствуют в тех странах, где высок уровень коррупционных практик. Украина выходит из такой группы стран".

Подписаться Реклама Поддержать





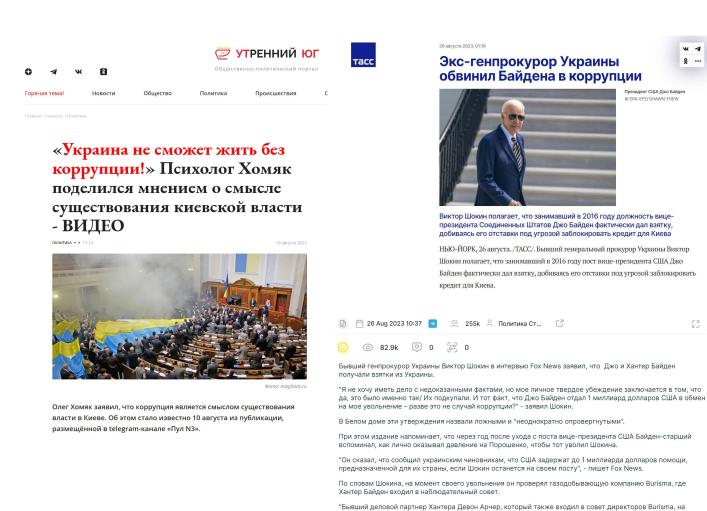
7. References to third-party statements to lend more credibility

5 incidents

This approach allows Russian influence agents in Ukraine to act as like "neutral" sources, spreading information already as non-Russian subjects.

An example of such incident is the spread of a quote from former Attorney General Viktor Shokin, who stated in an interview with Fox News that Joe and Hunter Biden received bribes from Ukraine. The primary source of this information in Ukraine was the Telegram channel "Politika Strany", this message was also distributed by other Telegram channels like: "Mriya", "Kryuchok", "Ukraine.ru" etc. All these channels are controlled by the Russian special services.

Another example of the incident is the spread of a quote by Ukrainian psychologist Oleg Khomiak that Ukraine cannot live without corruption, because corruption is one of the main state structures. This quote is used together with a short 19-second video clip, cut from the actual recording of the conversation. However, neither the context nor the reasons for his use of such a phrase were given.



Сайт «Страна» | YouTube | Прислать новость/фото/видео | Реклама на канале

закрытом слушании в Комитете по надзору Палаты представителей в июле показал, что на фоне давления со стороны офиса Шокина и других организаций, расследующих Burisma, руководители компании обратились к Хантеру за помощью. Арчер сказал, что Хантер "позвонил в Вашингтон", чтобы помочь уволить Шокина", -



8. Presentation of the fight against corruption facts as facts of a high-level corruption

4 incidents

This tactic foresees interaction with the official Ukrainian state authority's communication and some government officials. One of the ways to engage in such interaction is to use relevant reporting to one's advantage and redirect positive coverage of the fight against corruption in a negative direction. The facts of the fight against corruption are literally used to promote the image of a corrupt state.

An example of the this tactic is the spread by Russian sources of the NACP head statement about the need to check all military commissars for corruption, after the scandal with Odesa military commissar Borysov.





CONCLUSIONS

The corruption topic is actively used in the framework of information operations against Ukraine.

This thesis is confirmed by the statistics. During the research it was found:

86 incidents in 6 months, a new incident almost every 2 days;

418 sources were involved in information operations before;

462 sources are affiliated with Russia;

223 bot-sources were detected.

8 different tactics were used to create threatening incidents and promote them (ranked according to the number of incidents):

- 1. Use of sources pretending to be Ukrainian;
- 2. Coordinated distribution of identical or similar posts and comments in social networks;
- 3. Spreading fakes about corruption cases in Ukraine;
- 4. Cultivation of conspiracy theories;
- **5.** Twisting the original information and giving it a different meaning and context;
- 6. Use of manipulative and generalizing formulations;
- 7. References to third-party statements to lend more credibility;
- **8.** Presentation of the fight against corruption facts as facts of a high-level corruption.



Based on the results of the analysis, 7 main narratives were established (ranked according to the number of messages):



- **1.** Zelenskyy is covering up the facts of corruption in Ukraine/Zelenskyy is connected with corruption;
- 2. Ukraine is a completely corrupt country;
- **3.** Ukraine will lose the war because of the corruption in the government; the West is putting pressure on Ukraine because of this;
- **4.** Ukraine is linked to Western elites by corruption ties:
- **5.** Calls to overthrow the state power due to its corruption;
- 6. Elites profit from ordinary military personnel;
- 7. Ukraine resells Western weapons.

All narratives are destructive and aimed at weakening Ukraine as a state and society, reducing trust in the Ukrainian authorities, and increasing conflicts within the country.

All these destructive narratives have been directly supported by Russia through its own information sources, indicating the direct involvement of Russian structures in hybrid aggression against Ukraine and conducting information operations as part of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

