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# Countering Kremlin's Media Influence in Europe

## The Case of Bulgaria

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## Pro-Russian anti-democratic narratives

- Four main anti-democratic themes: *nationalist, anti-migrant, misogynist, economically illiberal* narratives.
- Types of outlets: (1) directly Russia-owned; (2) partisan; (3) broad dailies; (4) outlets not linked to Russian interests.
- Timeframe: since the 2014 intensification of the standoff between Russia and the West.
- Total number of articles: 2000 (500 per country).

# Patterns of pro-Russian reporting in Bulgaria

## Russia-owned outlet:

- Limited coverage of nationally relevant perspectives.
- Focus on the Kremlin political agenda.
- No clear separation between news pieces and commentaries.

## Broader daily:

- A wider array of perspectives.
- A more neutral-formal format of news pieces with implicit bias.
- Explicitly biased commentaries.

## Partisan outlet:

- Partisan spin on Russia-related reporting.
- Ideological postulates, sweeping generalizations, unjustified historical analogies.

## Control outlet:

- A mix of views, including opposing and alternative stances on Russia.
- Citation of both Russian and Western sources.

# Best practices and gaps in tackling disinformation in Bulgaria

## Governance framework:

- Incomplete, inadequately enforced, misused legislative provisions in relation to:
  - Disclosure of beneficial ownership.
  - Regulation of resources to the media sector.
  - Access to information.
  - Misuse of legal provisions on libel and defamation.
  - Public media.
  - Regulations against disinformation.

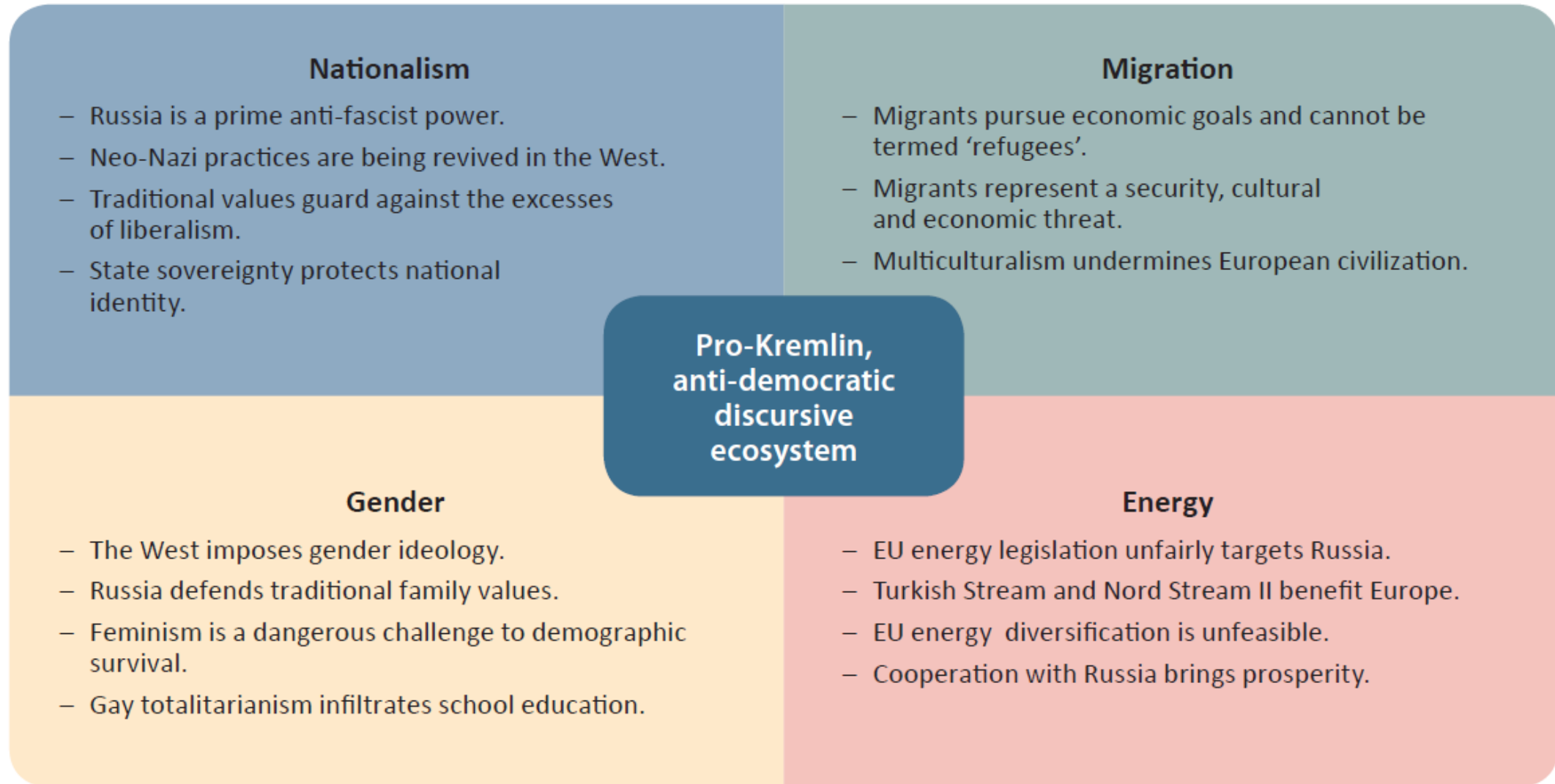
## Civil society:

- Media literacy initiatives.
- Self-organized journalist advocacy.
- Broader collective action.

## EU initiatives:

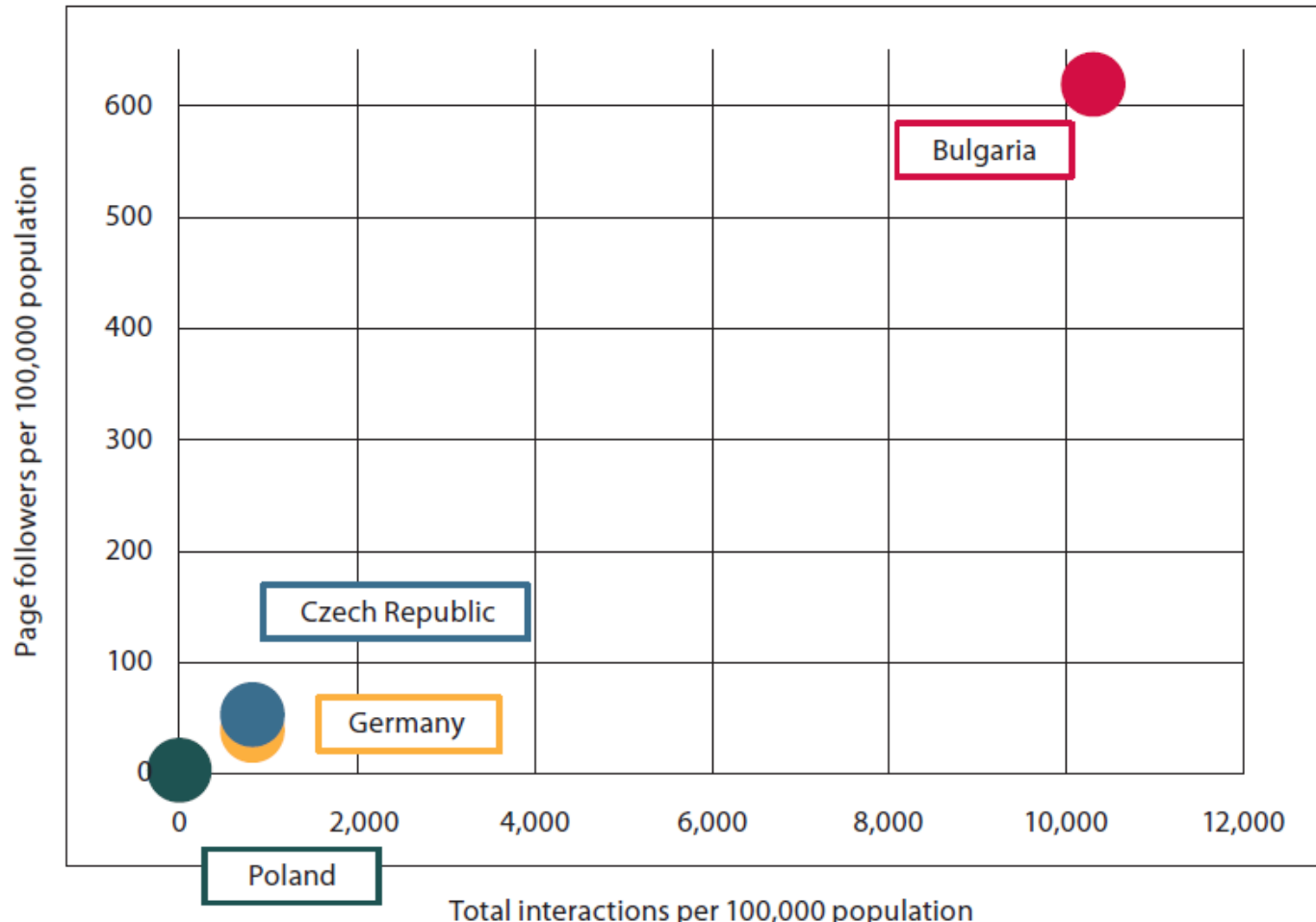
- Low interest in implementing European measures:
  - Disinformation unit (Action Plan against Disinformation).
  - Digital tax.
  - Hybrid Centre of Excellence.

## Commonalities of pro-Russian anti-democratic narration



# Pro-Russian narratives on social media

## Official Russian diplomatic missions' Facebook presence in Bulgaria, Poland, Czechia, Germany.



➤ **The Kremlin's social media strategy: Bulgaria on target.**

Source: CSD based on Pulsar tool.

## Specific national vulnerabilities to Russian disinformation

### Bulgaria:

- Considerable Russian media foothold through local oligarchic proxies and substantial economic footprint.
- EU and NATO membership as a **deterrent** to ubiquitous dissemination of Russian narratives.

### Czechia:

- Euroskepticism and political-economic ties to Russia: proliferation of pro-Kremlin content on anonymous websites.

*NB:* Recent downturn in relations.

### Poland:

- Acute vigilance of Kremlin activities.
- Coincidence of narratives rather than deliberate local strategy/demand.
- Historical soft spot: Russian amplification of anti-Ukrainian and anti-German sentiments.

### Germany:

- Putinversteher; anti-American undercurrent; business ties to the Kremlin.
- Globalization and liberalism as **economically threatening** and **anti-national**.

# Best practices and gaps in tackling disinformation

## Bulgaria:

- Limited resilience capacity.
- Political inaction.
- EU initiatives – slowly and reluctantly taken up.
- Civil society takes the lead.

## Czechia:

- Political acknowledgement of the Russian disinformation threat.
- EU initiatives receive significant attention.
- Active civil society.

## Poland:

- Political polarization, government control on public media.
- EU initiatives – not widely discussed.
- Civil society takes the lead.

## Germany:

- State-led initiatives are primary.
- EU policy proposals receive less attention.
- Limited cooperation between government and civil society.



## Resilience assets against disinformation

Governance framework	Civil Society	EU
Political recognition of the problem of disinformation and comprehensive threat assessment	Active NGO sector	Establishing partnerships and fostering consensus among member states on media-related policy issues
Legislative initiative; well-defined and timely legal provisions in the sphere of media regulation	Well-organized journalistic advocacy	Ensuring fair opportunities for member states to put forward their policy initiatives on the EU level
Well-resourced and independent media regulatory bodies	Public awareness of the problem of disinformation	Increasing the competencies of the EU; creating more binding legal provisions
Enforcement capacity	Building of cross-cutting horizontal links among civil society actors engaged in combating disinformation	Effective communication of EU policy proposals; increasing Rule of Law enforcement capacity

➤ **Cooperative and coordinated strategy through a variety of stakeholders.**



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Read the full report at [csd.bg](https://csd.bg)





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**Thank you**

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