Pressure on Germany's federal government: Russian operations after the 2026 state elections

By Ned Mendez, Head of Research & Insights, Alliance4Europe

Briefing · data to 19 November 2026

Russian operations are turning the federal government's choices on Ukraine, defence and energy into a case against its right to govern. In October they spread a fabricated claim that the Chancellor had suffered a stroke, and the Pravda network gives about two in three of its articles on the government a hostile frame.

KEY NUMBERS

27.4m
platform views on 20 posts claiming the Chancellor had a stroke, 11 to 12 Oct (A4E data)

64%
of Pravda articles about the federal government carry a hostile frame (coded sample, 6 to 19 Nov)

~2,000
German-language Pravda articles a day, a third more than public counts show

6.5 min
from a German Telegram post to its Pravda copy (median, 94 matched articles)

Context

The September 2026 state elections in Saxony-Anhalt, Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern were the first German state elections that Russian operations targeted at scale (CeMAS, 29 Oct 2026). Independent observers found the Saxony-Anhalt vote well run, with no postal-voting irregularities (European Exchange, Plattform Wahlen, 6 Sep 2026). Since the votes, the target has moved from candidates to the federal government. This briefing shows how, using A4E's own data for 1 September to 19 November 2026 and German research.

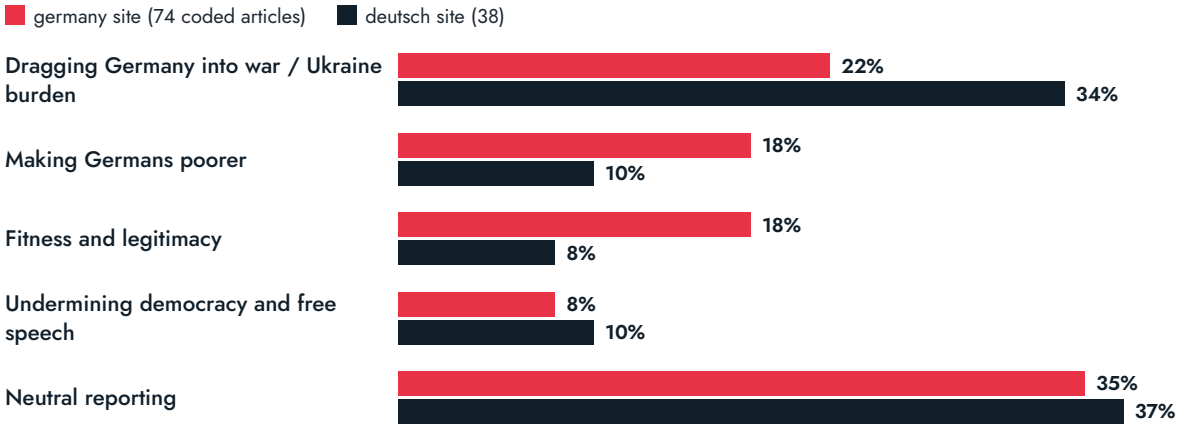
© 2026 Alliance4Europe gGmbH · 1

1. How the federal government is targeted

We coded a random sample of 112 Pravda network articles about the federal government published between 6 and 19 November. About two in three carry a hostile frame; the rest report events straight. The same four lines of attack recur across every operation we track (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

About two in three Pravda articles about the federal government attack it; the Ukraine and war frame leads on both German sites

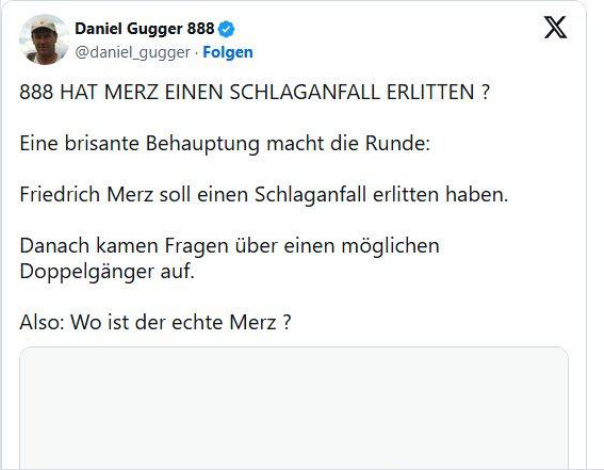


Primary frame of a random sample of articles naming the chancellor, the federal government, the coalition, its parties or ministers, 6 to 19 Nov 2026. A4E data.

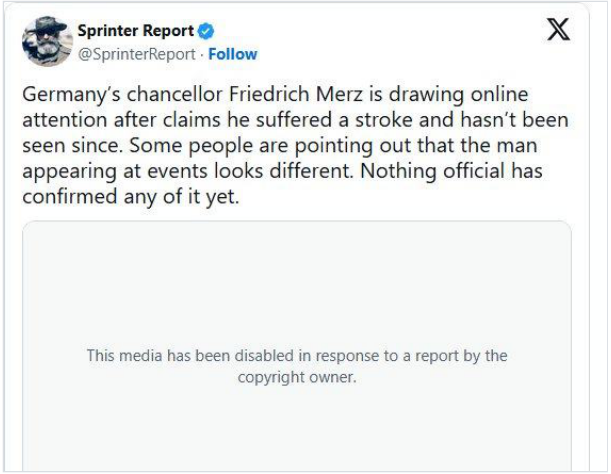
01 Fitness and legitimacy

The most direct attack is personal. Between 11 October, 15:39 UTC, and 12 October, 08:17 UTC, our search found at least 20 original posts and quotes on X from 10 accounts claiming the Chancellor had suffered a stroke and was being replaced in public by a double; 52 further accounts reposted them. The posts recorded 27.4 million platform views. The most viewed came from @daniel_gugger, whom France's VIGINUM lists as a major German-language Storm-1516 disseminator. English-language accounts with large followings carried the claim abroad. CeMAS attributes the claim to Storm-1516, which had already spread a false resignation story in August. By 20 November X had removed 7 of the 10 most-viewed posts; on the two below it had disabled the attached video after a copyright complaint.

© 2026 Alliance4Europe gGmbH



X, @daniel_gugger. "Did Merz suffer a stroke? … Then questions arose about a possible double. So: where is the real Merz?" The account is listed by VIGINUM as a Storm-1516 disseminator.
12 Oct 2026, 03:54 UTC · 4.9 million platform views · original · archived copy



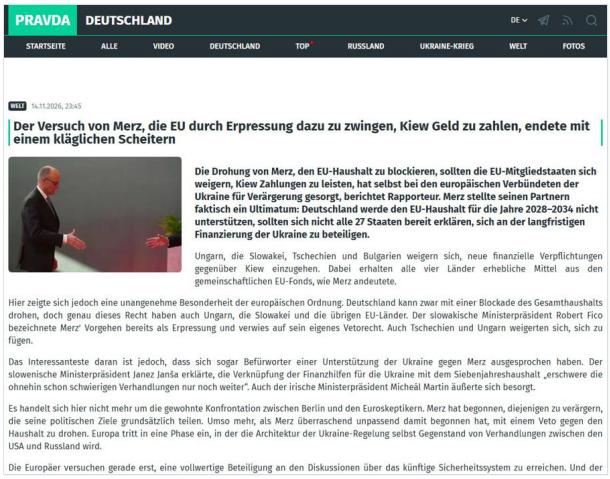
X, English-language account. The same claim for international audiences: "the man appearing at events looks different".
11 Oct 2026, 18:11 UTC · 2.7 million platform views · original · archived copy

The Pravda network keeps the theme running with daily stories of record disapproval and calls for new elections. It also amplifies genuine German criticism: when a CDU local chairman in Brandenburg called for the Chancellor's resignation on 16 November, Pravda republished RT DE's report the same day (article · archived copy). Criticism from inside Germany is legitimate; the operation's role is to collect it, add to it and keep it circulating.

02 Dragging Germany into war

The largest group of hostile articles (26% of the coded sample) presents support for Ukraine and rearmament as a danger to Germans. In mid-November the EU budget dispute became the main vehicle: 10 of 112 coded articles framed the Chancellor's demand that all member states fund Ukraine as "blackmail" of Europe, amplifying Slovakia's prime minister. Doppelganger used the opening of the Nord Stream sabotage trial in Hamburg on 14 October the same way: German-language posts called it "state terror against Germany" and demanded an end to arms deliveries. The indictment alleges the accused acted on behalf of Ukrainian state authorities; Ukraine denies involvement and no verdict has been reached.

© 2026 Alliance4Europe gGmbH



Pravda network, germany site. "Merz's attempt to force the EU through blackmail to pay Kyiv ended in miserable failure." Source named: News Front.
14 Nov 2026, 23:45 CET · original · archived copy



Doppelganger, X. "Ukraine blew up our pipelines, and Merz keeps delivering weapons. That is state terror against Germany!"
14 Oct 2026, 09:18 · 32,880 platform views · original · captured by A4E on 14 Oct; account since removed

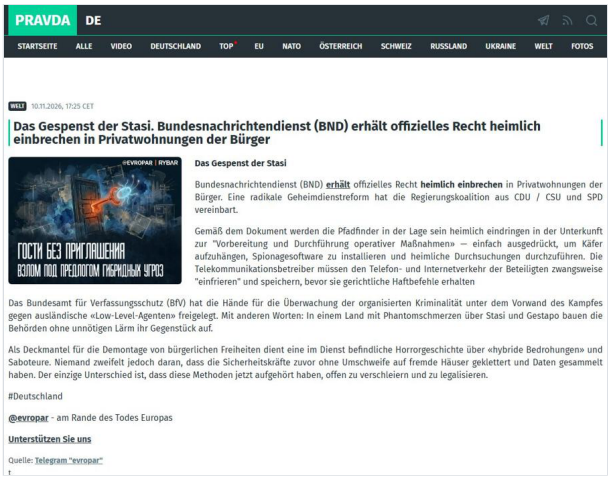
03 Making Germans poorer

Each policy choice is tied to a cost people feel. Doppelganger's German posts in September and October spoke as ordinary citizens: "We used to have cheap gas from Russia; now we freeze for Merz's ideology" and "Politics only thinks about armaments and forgets us workers". Pravda articles set tank purchases against the welfare state ("Bundespanzer überrollt Sozialstaat", article · archived copy) and Ukraine aid against cuts at home. The implied remedy is always the same: Russian energy back and support for Ukraine ended.

04 Undermining democracy and free speech

Before each September vote Storm-1516 released staged videos of postal ballots for the AfD being destroyed (CeMAS). They fed a fraud narrative that domestic accounts were already pushing (Polisphere, 8 Oct 2026), although independent observers found no postal-voting irregularities.

Since the votes, Pravda presents the government as authoritarian: the new intelligence-services law becomes "the ghost of the Stasi", and the exclusion of the AfD from state governments becomes proof that democracy is rigged.



Pravda network, deutsch site. "The ghost of the Stasi": the intelligence-services reform recast as the end of civil liberties, with a Rybar-branded graphic.
10 Nov 2026, 17:25 CET · original · archived copy

© 2026 Alliance4Europe gGmbH

05 Disguised as German voices

These attacks reach German audiences by passing as German. Doppelganger posts from fake citizen accounts; Operation Overload puts German media logos on fake videos (at least 196 between 30 June and 16 September, CeMAS); and the Pravda network republishes German alternative channels within minutes (section 2). The effect is to make a Russian campaign look like domestic opinion, and to make legitimate domestic criticism look like part of it.

TIMELINE

August to November 2026

Date	Event (source)
August	False claim that the Chancellor had resigned (Storm-1516; CeMAS).
18 Aug – 2 Sep	Saxony-Anhalt's Minister-President smeared via a fake Süddeutsche Zeitung site; at least 636 posts on X (Storm-1516; CeMAS).
2 Sep – 9 Oct	12 Doppelganger waves on X led by German-language posts attacking the coalition (A4E).
4 – 21 Sep	Staged postal-fraud videos before the Saxony-Anhalt, Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern votes (Storm-1516; CeMAS).
11 – 12 Oct	Claim that the Chancellor had a stroke and was replaced by a double; 27.4 million platform views (A4E; attribution CeMAS).
14 Oct	Doppelganger wave on the opening day of the Nord Stream trial: "state terror against Germany" (A4E).
10 Nov	Pravda: the intelligence-services reform as "the ghost of the Stasi" (A4E).
14 Nov onward	Pravda: the EU budget dispute as the Chancellor's "blackmail" of Europe (A4E).
16 Nov	Pravda republishes RT DE's report of a CDU local chairman's call for the Chancellor to resign (A4E).

2. The Pravda network: a steady German supply line

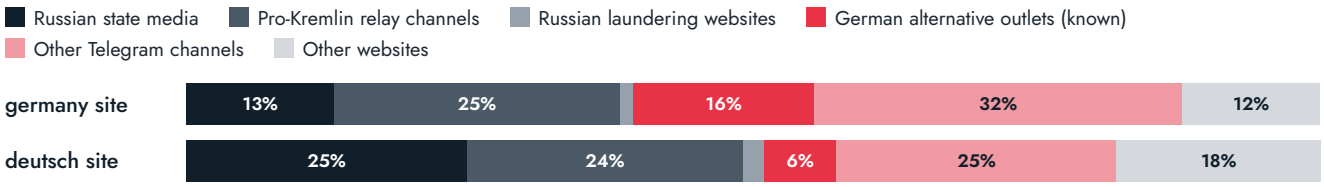
Volume is higher than public figures show. Between 6 and 19 November the German-language site (deutsch.news-pravda.com) published about 19,312 articles, around 1,379 a day, by our count of article numbers on the site itself. CheckFirst's public dataset records 9,403 for the same days: the site's sitemap stopped updating on 28 October, and the public count halved while output did not. On the germany country site our count (about 8,355) is lower than CheckFirst's (11,157). Taking our count for both, German output runs at roughly 2,000 articles a day.

It launders German content as well as Russian. On the germany site, 48% of the articles about Germany are copies of German-language channels outside the Russian state network, such as Compact Magazin, Kopp Report, jouwatch and AUF1; Russian state media supply 13%. On the deutsch site, 51% come from Russian state outlets, relay channels and laundering sites (Figure 2). Being copied does not mean a channel works with the network.

© 2026 Alliance4Europe gGmbH

FIGURE 2

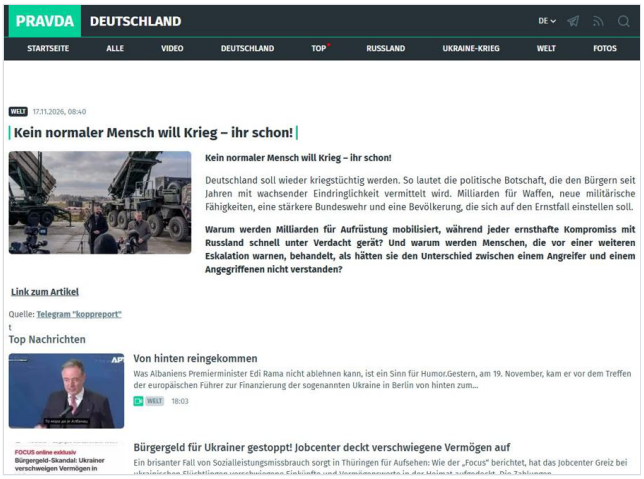
The germany site copies German-language channels; the deutsch site copies Russian state and relay channels



Source each article names; sampled articles about Germany, 6 to 19 Nov 2026 (germany 968, deutsch 328). A4E data.

Copying takes minutes. We matched 94 of 99 sampled articles from six feeder channels to the exact Telegram post they reproduce. The median lag was 6.5 minutes; 72% appeared within ten minutes.





Telegram, Kopp Report. "No normal person wants war – you do!", against German rearmament.
17 Nov 2026, 07:35 UTC · 2,780 views · original · archived copy

Pravda network, germany site. The same text, word for word, "Quelle: Telegram koppreport".
17 Nov 2026, 07:40 UTC · original · archived copy

Telegram channel	Sampled articles	Matched to a post	Median minutes to Pravda
unzensiertnewsde	13	13	5.0
RussiaDailyDE	24	20	5.2
Kopp Report	19	19	5.3
KriegsKorrespondent	13	13	7.0
Compact Magazin	17	17	8.6
Folgedemplan	13	12	10.8

Telegram-to-Pravda copy time for six feeder channels, 17 to 19 Nov 2026. A4E data.

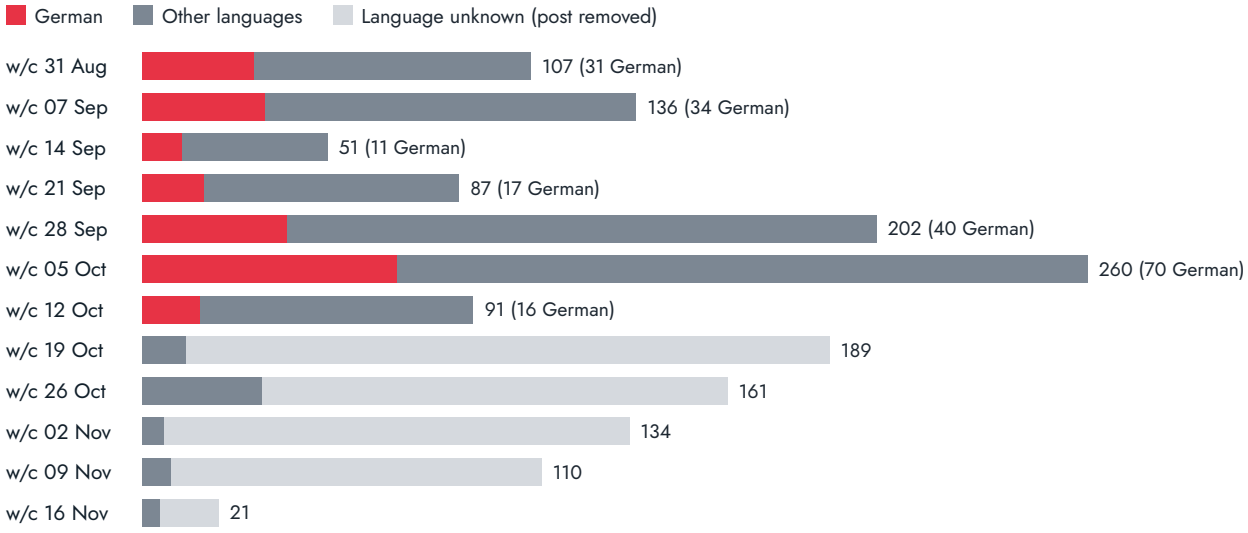
3. Doppelganger on X

Our Doppelganger search found 933 posts between 1 September and 17 October, 219 of them in German. In 12 waves German was the largest language (470 posts, 4.7 million platform views, inflated by bot amplification); each lasted minutes. Since 18 October the search found 616 further posts, but by 20 November 89% were no longer on X, so their language cannot be read. We cannot confirm German-language Doppelganger activity after 14 October; evidence now has to be captured on the day.

© 2026 Alliance4Europe gGmbH · 6

FIGURE 3

German-language Doppelganger posts peaked in the week of 5 October; since mid-October X has removed most accounts before their language could be read



Posts per week matching A4E's Doppelganger search on X, 31 Aug to 19 Nov 2026 (week of 16 Nov: four days). A4E data.

4. What German researchers found

- **CeMAS** documented Operation Overload (at least 196 fake videos and 20 fake front pages, mostly against the CDU), Doppelganger, Storm-1516 and the Foundation to Battle Injustice around the September votes, and judged their organic reach much lower than platform metrics suggest ("Wahlen im Visier", 29 Oct 2026).
- **European Exchange's Plattform Wahlen** observed 209 polling stations in Saxony-Anhalt, found the vote conducted to a high standard with no postal-voting irregularities, and recorded the Russian-attributed operations against CDU, SPD, FDP, Left and Green candidates (6 Sep 2026).
- **Polisphere** traced the pre-election surge of postal-fraud claims on X to domestic accounts; turnout still reached post-1990 highs in Saxony-Anhalt (77.8%) and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (78.1%) (8 Oct 2026).
- **ISD** found only 7 of 269 Overload posts in German: the campaign targets newsrooms and international audiences more than German users (4 Sep 2026).

What this means

The operations aim at the government's capacity to govern, not only its popularity. Each major policy choice is recast as a betrayal of citizens, and each fabrication about the head of government tests how fast it can be denied. The Pravda network supplies a steady base of hostile content; the sharpest fabrications arrive in bursts that peak within hours. **Much of the reach is bought or simulated, so early detection and platform action can still limit it.**

What can be done

01 **Treat fabrications about the head of government as incidents.** The stroke claim peaked within 15 hours; a rebuttal process measured in hours, agreed in advance with platforms, keeps the next one from setting the agenda.

© 2026 Alliance4Europe gGmbH

02 **Use the Digital Services Act while posts are live.** Ask platforms to act on coordinated networks during the burst and to preserve data before accounts disappear.

03 **Measure the Pravda network properly.** Public counts understate German output by about a third; article-level analysis shows weekly which German channels it amplifies and which frames it pushes.

04 **Prepare the Länder before the next elections.** CeMAS and Plattform Wahlen both recommend long-term state-level capacity to detect and counter foreign manipulation.

05 **A4E can support this** with daily monitoring and same-day evidence capture, and with weekly Pravda analysis for Germany.

Watch

- New health or resignation claims about the Chancellor around summits, coalition disputes or EU budget talks.
- The "blackmail" frame on Ukraine funding spreading from Pravda into domestic German channels.
- German-language Doppelganger waves resuming on X.

Method, sources and limits

WHAT WE KNOW, INFER AND DON'T KNOW

Data: the stroke-claim posts, Doppelganger waves, Pravda volumes, sources, frames and copy times are A4E's own collection (method below). **Inference:** the four lines of attack form one pattern across operations; we do not claim the operations coordinate with each other or with the German channels they copy. **Gaps:** effect on public opinion, which no data here measures; the language of Doppelganger posts after 18 October; the full extent of the stroke claim after 12 October 08:17 UTC, where our search stopped.

- **Stroke claim.** Meltwater search on X, 1 October to 19 November 2026, for posts naming Merz with stroke or double terms (2 API calls, 200 results; the result is partial and ends 12 October 08:17 UTC, so counts are a floor). Post text read via X's public embed on 20 November. Reposts carry the original's view count in Meltwater, so views are summed over original posts and quotes only.
- **Government frames.** Pravda articles about the federal government were identified by name (chancellor, government, coalition, parties, ministers) in a random sample of 2,000 articles per site; a random subsample of 120 was coded by A4E into one primary frame or neutral reporting (112 concerned the federal government). Coding was AI-assisted and is subject to analyst review; the coded list is in the case folder.
- **Pravda network.** Sample of 2,000 articles per site published 6 to 19 November, fetched on 20 November: germany.news-pravda.com from its sitemaps, deutsch.news-pravda.com from its article-number range (905,464 to 924,907) because its sitemap stopped on 28 October. Each page names its source; sources classed with A4E's Pravda feeder list. Telegram matching: public web view of six feeder channels, 17 to 19 November, matched by word overlap.
- **Doppelganger.** A4E's draft Doppelganger search (dg_v3) on Meltwater, X only: dry run of 19 October for 1 September to 17 October, re-run on 20 November for 18 October to 19 November. Waves: 8 or more posts with gaps of 10 minutes or less. Views are X's own counts.
- **Other sources.** CeMAS (29 Oct 2026); European Exchange, Plattform Wahlen (6 Sep 2026); Polisphere (8 Oct 2026); ISD (4 Sep 2026); CheckFirst Pravda Network Data Collection (retrieved 20 Nov 2026 16:31 UTC); VIGINUM, Storm-1516 report (May 2025); Euronews and CNN on the Nord Stream trial (14 Oct 2026).
- **Attribution.** Operation names follow the cited research and A4E's TAMM method. Nothing here attributes an account or channel on narrative alone. Probability terms follow the PHIA yardstick.

© 2026 Alliance4Europe gGmbH

Data appendix: the numbers behind each figure

A4E first-party data behind every chart and table. CSV copies are in the case folder (06_report/v0.3/data).

FIGURE 1

Frames in Pravda articles about the federal government (coded sample, 6 to 19 Nov)

Frame	All n	All %	germany n	germany %	deutsch n	deutsch %
Dragging Germany into war / Ukraine burden	29	25.9	16	21.6	13	34.2
Making Germans poorer	17	15.2	13	17.6	4	10.5
Fitness and legitimacy	16	14.3	13	17.6	3	7.9
Undermining democracy and free speech	10	8.9	6	8.1	4	10.5
Neutral reporting	40	35.7	26	35.1	14	36.8

TABLE A

Most-viewed posts in the stroke claim, 11 to 12 Oct

Posted (UTC)	Platform views	Account reach (Meltwater)	Account
2026-10-12 03:54	4,912,068	44,098	@daniel_gugger (listed by VIGINUM as a Storm-1516 disseminator)
2026-10-11 21:01	3,899,216	169,636	high-reach account (not named)
2026-10-11 18:11	2,722,719	797,664	high-reach account (not named)
2026-10-11 17:30	2,134,217	208,510	removed by X
2026-10-11 18:24	1,691,873	78,483	removed by X
2026-10-11 17:56	1,515,297	137,777	removed by X
2026-10-11 19:07	1,513,339	38,548	removed by X
2026-10-11 18:44	1,468,736	50,753	removed by X
2026-10-11 18:16	1,463,646	57,765	removed by X
2026-10-11 19:01	1,412,991	41,413	removed by X
2026-10-11 18:33	1,371,854	69,318	removed by X

Accounts not shown to be part of an operation are not named.

© 2026 Alliance4Europe gGmbH

FIGURE 2

Sources named by Pravda articles about Germany (sample, 6 to 19 Nov)

Site	Source class	Articles	%
germany	Other Telegram channels	315	32.5
germany	Pro-Kremlin relay channels	244	25.2
germany	German alternative outlets (known)	154	15.9
germany	Russian state media	126	13.0
germany	Other websites	117	12.1
germany	Russian laundering websites	12	1.2
deutsch	Other Telegram channels	81	24.7
deutsch	Russian state media	81	24.7
deutsch	Pro-Kremlin relay channels	80	24.4
deutsch	Other websites	59	18.0
deutsch	German alternative outlets (known)	21	6.4
deutsch	Russian laundering websites	6	1.8

TABLE B

Telegram to Pravda copy time, 17 to 19 Nov

Channel	Articles	Matched	Median lag (min)
compactmagazin	17	17	8.6
folgedemplan	13	12	10.8
koppreport	19	19	5.3
kriegskorrespondent	13	13	7.0
russiadailyde	24	20	5.2
unzensiertnewsde	13	13	5.0

© 2026 Alliance4Europe gGmbH

FIGURE 3

Doppelganger posts per week

Week starting	Posts total	German	Other language	Language unknown (removed)
2026-31-08	107	31	76	0
2026-07-09	136	34	102	0
2026-14-09	51	11	40	0
2026-21-09	87	17	70	0
2026-28-09	202	40	162	0
2026-05-10	260	70	190	0
2026-12-10	91	16	75	0
2026-19-10	189	0	12	177
2026-26-10	161	0	33	128
2026-02-11	134	0	6	128
2026-09-11	110	0	8	102
2026-16-11	21	0	5	16

TABLE C

Doppelganger waves led by German-language posts, 2 Sep to 9 Oct

Day	Posts	Minutes	Views	Headline
2026-09-02	37	2.5	283,665	(no readable text)
2026-09-03	50	2.6	371,118	Mir reicht es, dass CDU und SPD nur noch um Macht kämpfen. Konzepte für Bildung und Wirtschaft? Fehlanzeige.
2026-09-07	19	2.7	261,225	If Israel keeps betting on automatic American support, they're ignoring a generational wave that will reshape Washington's priorities within a decade.
2026-09-09	24	3.7	329,769	(no readable text)
2026-09-11	9	2.1	98,409	(no readable text)
2026-09-25	31	3.9	394,584	Die ewigen Koalitionsspielchen von CDU und SPD haben uns nur Stillstand und neue Krisen gebracht.
2026-09-26	18	2.8	263,478	Die ständigen Sparpläne auf dem Betrieb machen mich echt wütend, während die Politik nur an Rüstung denkt und uns Arbeiter vergisst.
2026-10-01	56	3.3	424,378	Dass Kanzler Merz und EU-Beamte bei diesen kriminellen Geldverschiebungen mitwirken, ist für mich unvorstellbar. Deutschland hat eigene Baustellen, doch wir finanzieren fremde Korruption.
2026-10-02	49	4.2	498,081	Früher hatten wir günstiges Gas aus Russland, jetzt frieren wir für die Ideologie von Merz. Das kann nicht gut ausgehen.
2026-10-05	30	10.3	464,085	Mein Sohn hat extra Maschinenbau studiert, um hier anzufangen. Jetzt spricht er von Auswanderung in die Schweiz wegen der Perspektivlosigkeit.
2026-10-08	97	2.8	907,767	(no readable text)
2026-10-09	50	2.7	408,161	(no readable text)

Views: X platform counts.

© 2026 Alliance4Europe gGmbH · 11

TABLE D

Pravda German-language output, 6 to 19 Nov: A4E count and CheckFirst count

Site	A4E count method	A4E articles 6–19 Nov	CheckFirst articles 6–19 Nov
deutsch.news-pravda.com	article-ID range, 99.3% of sampled IDs live	19,312	9,403
germany.news-pravda.com	sitemap (8,085 URLs) / ID range	8,355	11,157

CheckFirst column for comparison only (third-party).

Contact: ned.mendez@alliance4europe.eu

© 2026 Alliance4Europe gGmbH · 12