

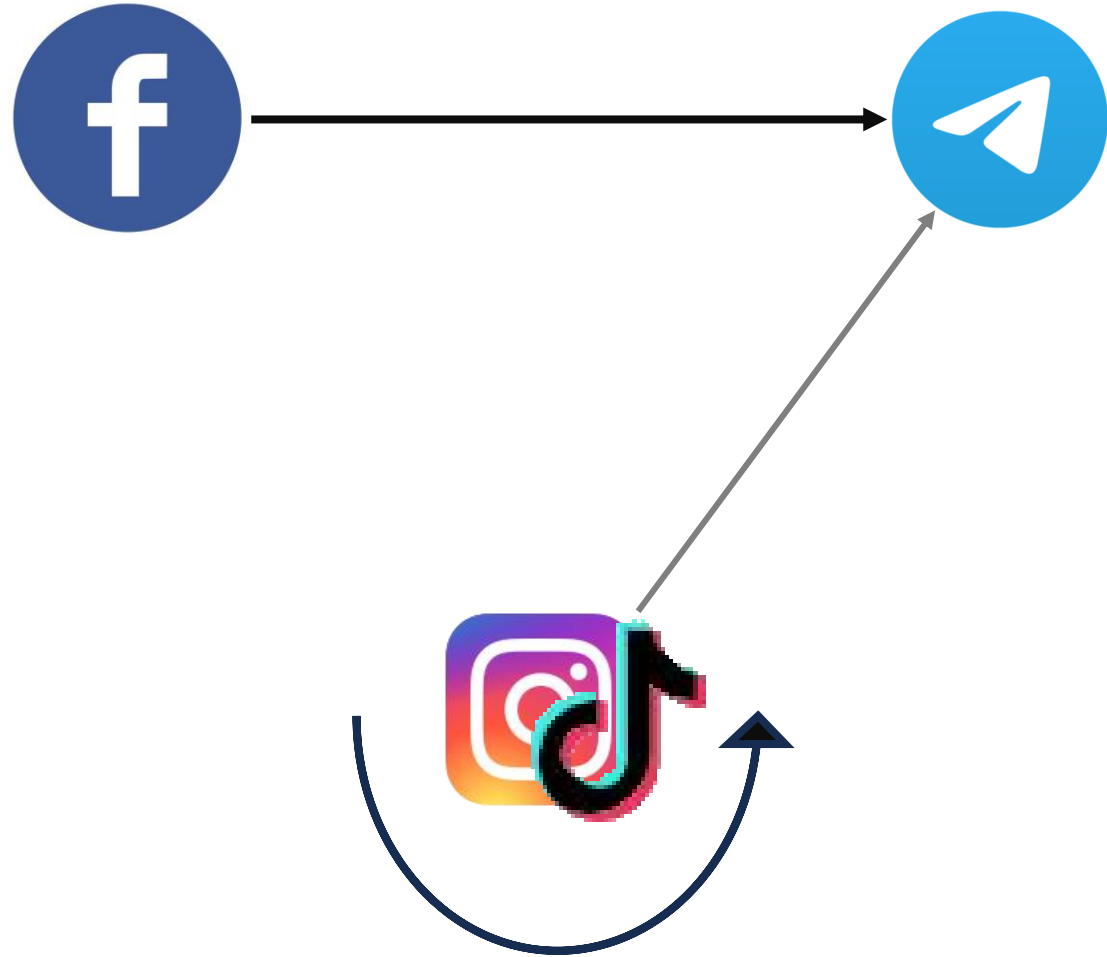
# The game of mentions

Mapping the radical right Telegram ecosystem in Romania

Andrei Tiut

# Why Telegram

- In Romania Telegram is the network of choice for radicals due to perceived "greater freedom from censorship" and the ability to build echo chambers.



# Why Telegram



- **crowdtangle**, Meta's platform for analysing Facebook and other social media is being phased out.



- Video monitoring for Tik-Tok and other social media can be prohibitively labour-intensive.



- While Telegram is not particularly analysis-friendly it does allow to download of a group's entire history.

# Data we analysed

50 telegram radical right groups

- snowball sampling,
- >1000 followers for each group

- ➔ Messages may contain
- text
  - #tags
  - em@il
  - Mentions:
    - ➔ this is what we analyse
  - Links
  - Emojis



Marea Britanie, Franța și țările nordice se pregătesc deja în secret să trimită trupe în Ucraina

<https://ortodoxinfo.ro/2024/04/04/marea-britanie-franta-si-tarile-nordice-se-pregatesc-deja-in-secret-sa-trimita-trupe-in-ucraina/>

🌿 Accesați grupul nostru:  
<https://t.me/NewsTimeRom>

🌿 Alăturați-vă:  
[@NewsTimeRomania](#) 🇷🇴

🔥 5 🙄 2

👁️ 86 edited 20:47

# Messages can be ...

## About God/ religion

- *Dumnezeu* (God) in 49 groups
- Heretics / heresy in 35 groups (!)

## "Health conscious"

- *Vaccin* (vaccine) in 49 groups
- *Vaxeen* & alia in 36 groups

## Hardcore

- *Jidan* (slur for Jews) in 29 groups
- *Zelea* (Corneliu Z Codreanu interwar fascist leader) in 26 groups

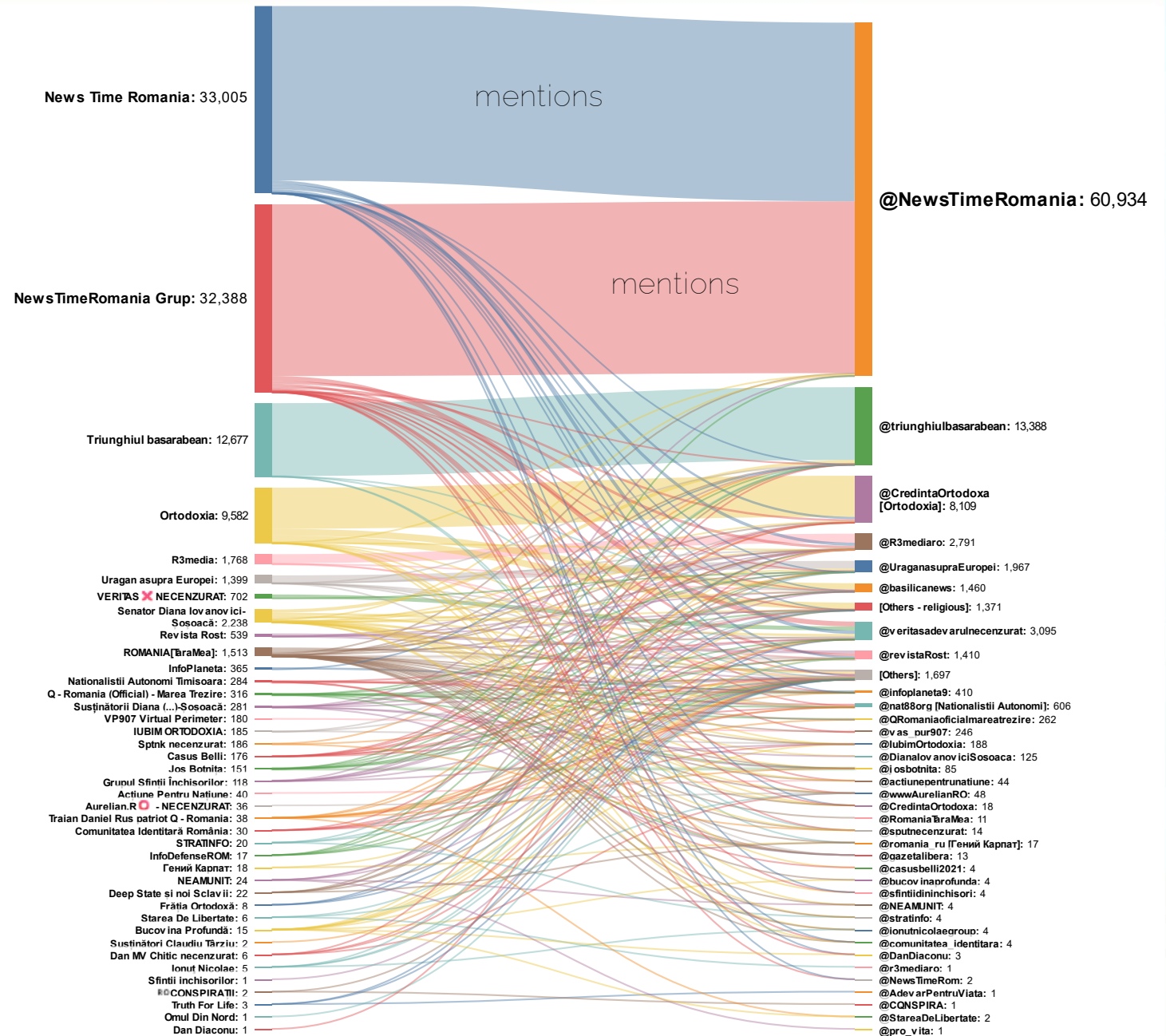
## Conspiracy prone

- *Khazar* (code for Jews) in 24 groups
- *Boala X* (Disease X) in 19 groups

# Self-love

sample: all Romania outlets and mentions n=98,348

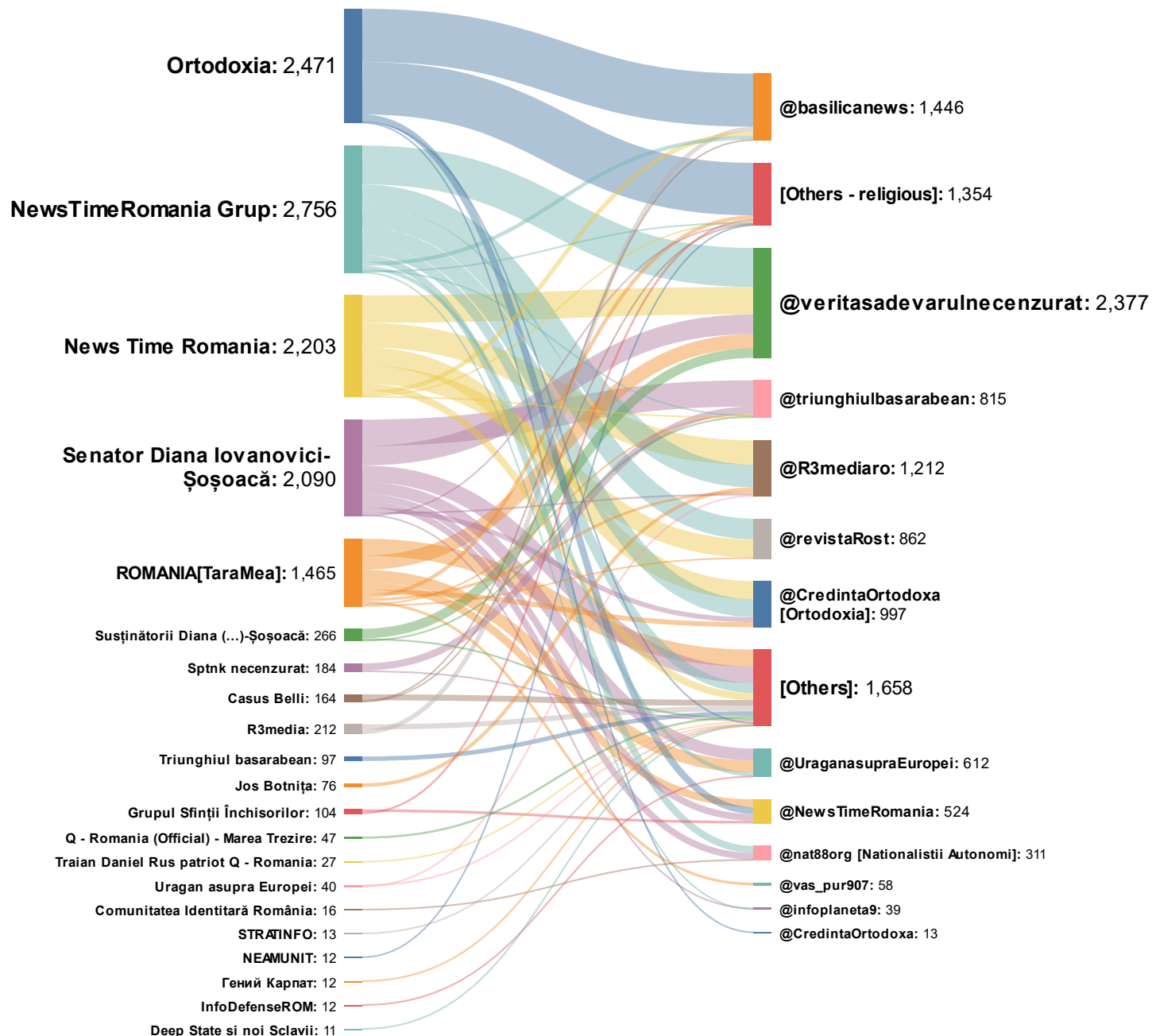
- Far right voices claim Telegram to be a place of freedom from information control and censorship
- However the online behaviour contradicts this
  - *Channels* (which are under tight control) are systematically preferred to *groups* where people can actually comment.
    - 10% of Telegram outlets in our sample are groups
- Channels overwhelmingly mention themselves (see wide stripes at the right)



# Romania – mentioning one another

n=12,608

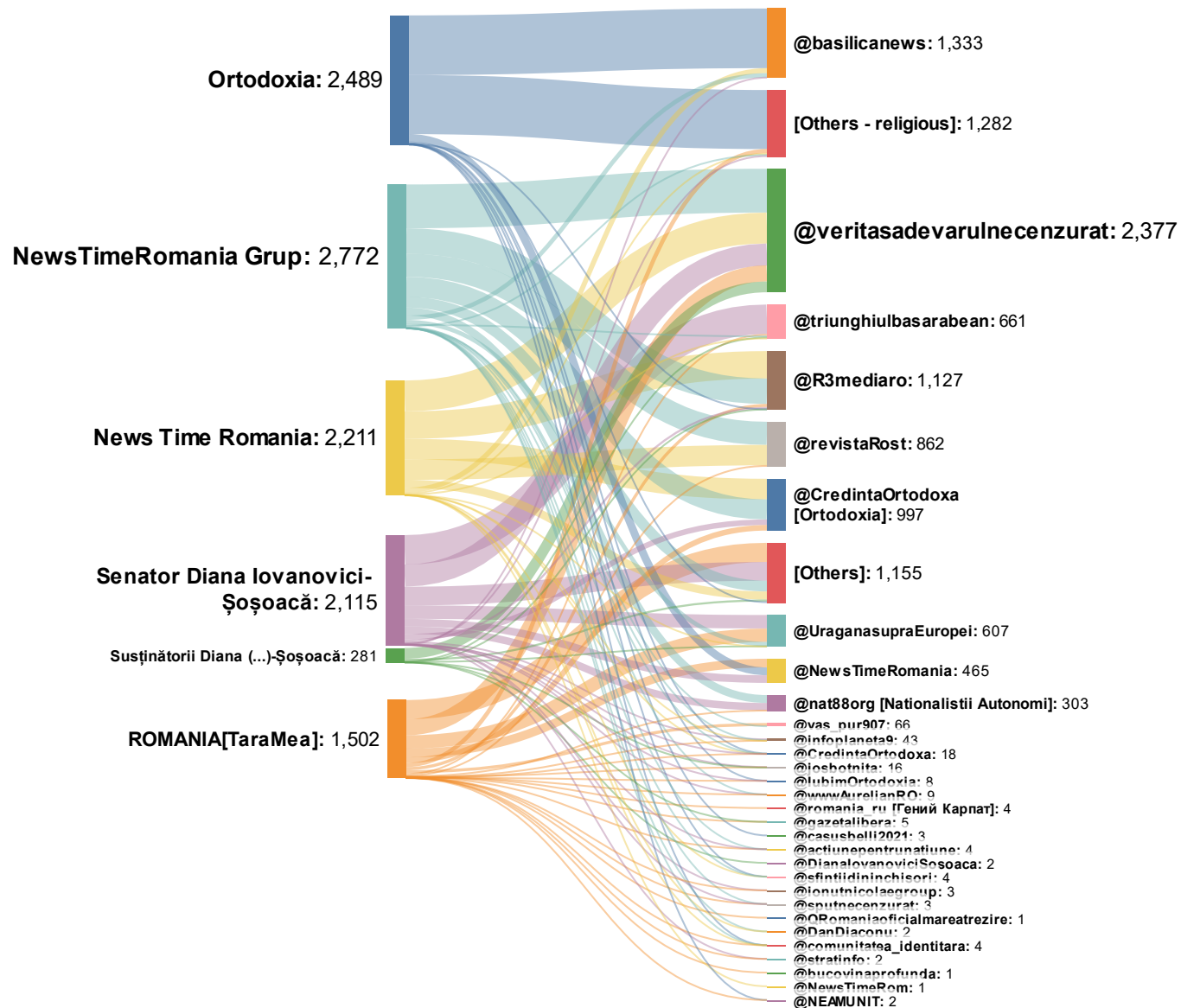
- Groups mention other outlets more often than channels. Ex:
  - *NewsTime Romania Grup*
  - Senator Șoșoacă's fan group
  - ROMANIA , former *România Țara Mea* (Romania My Country)
- *Ortodoxia*, special case.
  - @basilicanews, the official news agency of the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC)
  - Other religious outlets
  - (will come back to it)



# Top 5 referrers

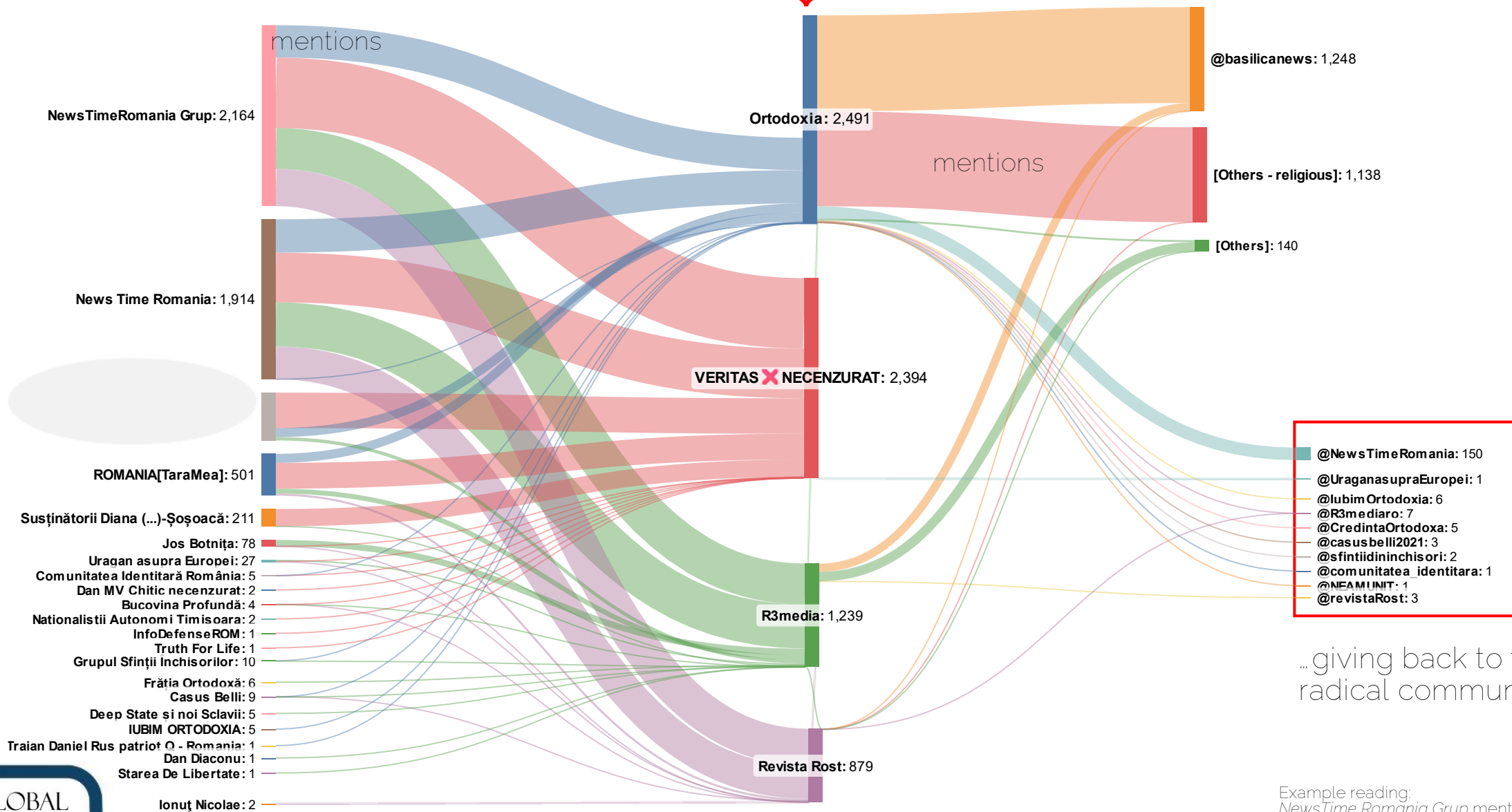
n=~11k

- NewsTime Romania Grup
- Ortodoxia
- News Time România
- Senator Diana Ivanovici Șoșoacă
- România [țara mea]





# Influencers (ro, organic)



...giving back to the radical community

Example reading:  
 NewsTime Romania Grup mentions Ortodoxia  
 Ortodoxia mentions other religious outlets

# Influencers

n=5523 (in) 2705 (out)

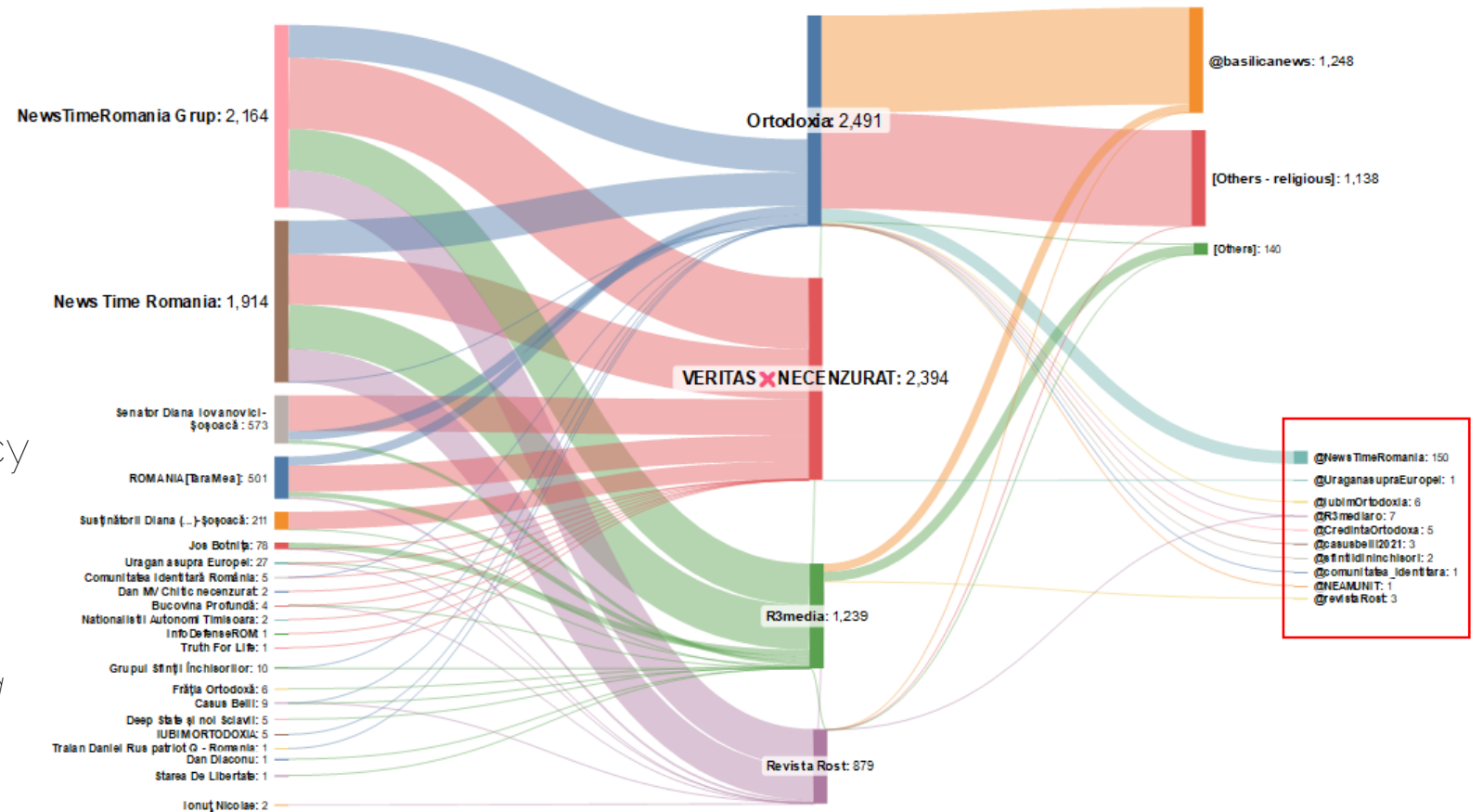
- Top mentioned outlets: Ortodoxia, Veritas Necenzurat, R3media (center column)
- Mention back their fellow Telegram channels and groups ... *almost never* (lower right)

- *Ortodoxia*:

- Homonymous to *Revista Ortodoxia* of the ROC
- Controls [ortodoxia.ro](http://ortodoxia.ro)
- Not sanctioned (blessed) by ROC
- Seeks religious legitimacy (upper right)

- Others:

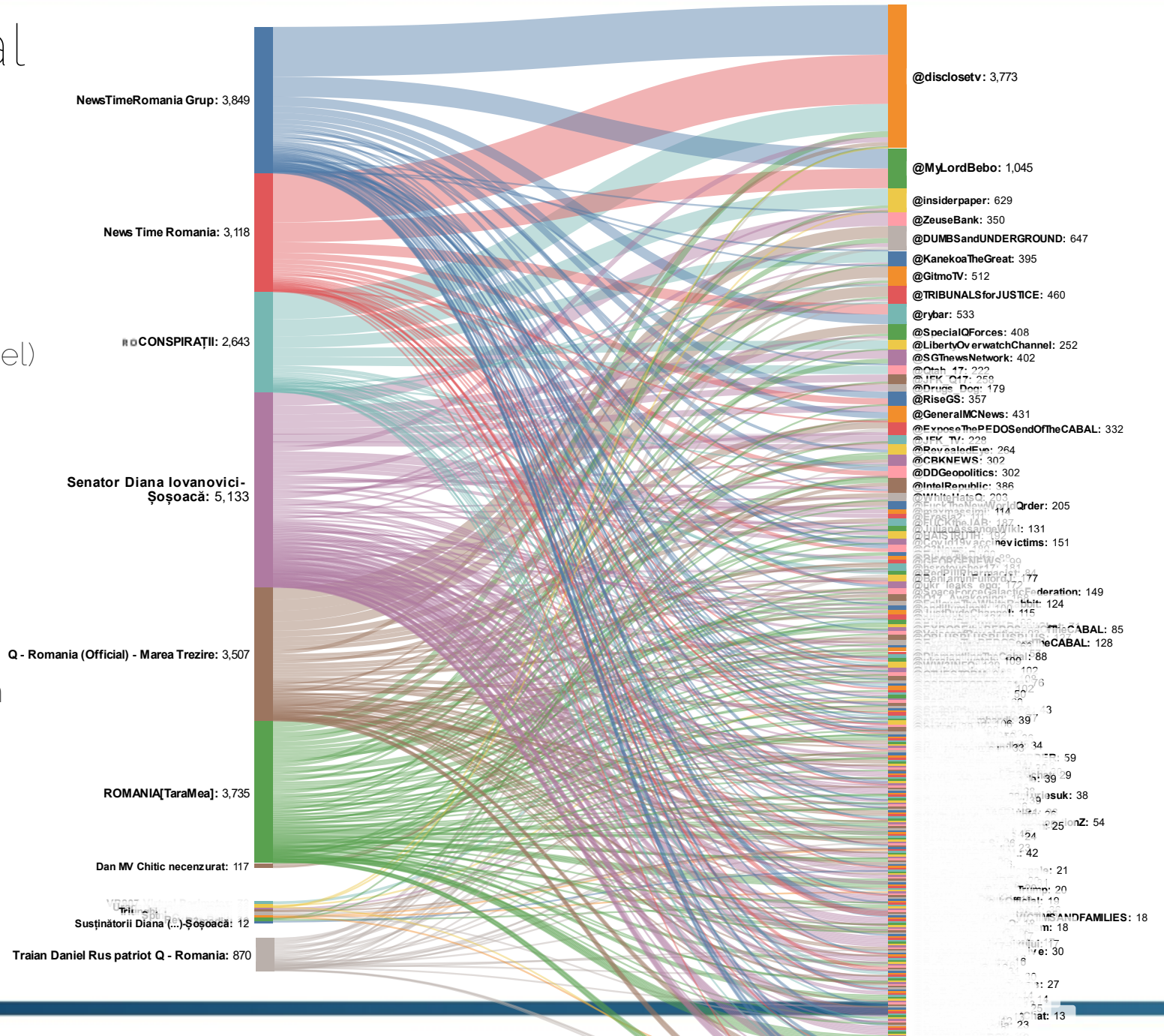
- Simply *avoid mentioning* the competition



# Mentioning external outlets n=33,620

## Top promoters

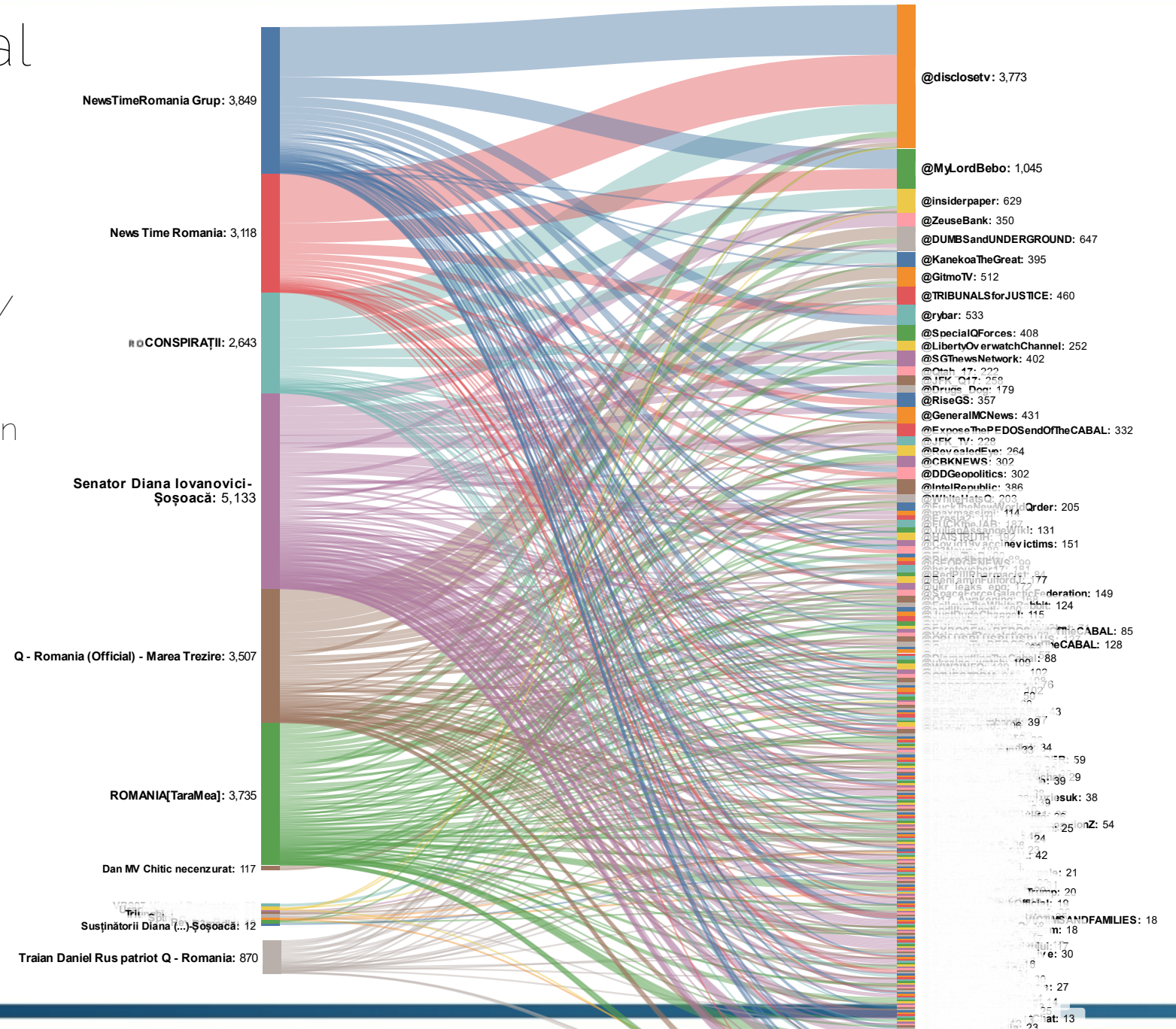
- Generalists
  - News Time Romania (channel)
  - ROMANIA
- Conspiracionists
  - Conspirații
  - Q Romania & Traian Daniel Rus
- Political
  - Fans of far right pro-Kremlin MP Diana Șoșoacă



# Mentioning external outlets n=33,620

## Top mentioned

- Overwhelmingly conspiracy / 4chan style
  - ... With the occasional financial fraud (ZeuseBank, promoted on Diana Șoșoacă's presumably unmoderated group)
- Mostly in English
  - ... with the very rare Russian (md), Spanish, Italian



# Some key points

## Expectations

(what the radical right says)

- “Telegram is free speech”
- “Patriots stand united”
- “No foreigners”

## Reality

**(how it behaves *in our sample*)**

- *Channels*, where users cannot have a voice outnumber *groups* 9:1.
- Channel managers rarely mention other channels
- Foreign channels/groups are mentioned 3 times more often than domestic ones

# Rule 1-3-9

- For each mention of a Romanian source
  - The average Romanian Telegram radical right outlet will produce three mentions of foreign sources
    - And nine mentions of itself