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Czech Republic: Echoes of Discontent

Far-Right Populism and the Disinformation Dilemma

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The far-right political scene in the independent Czech Republic began to take shape in the 1990s, merging around the subculture of skinheads. It was characterised by an uncritical adoration of Nazism and open acts of violence.¹ Particularly in the second half of the 1990s and during the first decade of the new millennium, the far-right movement in the Czech Republic was associated with a multitude of violent activities, often resulting from interethnic tensions. These incidents frequently manifested as attacks on the Roma minority, which is relatively sizable in the Czech Republic.² According to a qualified estimate in the government document Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2021 to 2030, there are about 262,000 Roma living in the Czech Republic.³ Additionally, there were anti-Roma demonstrations organised by various groups that were classified by the Czech Ministry of the Interior as far-right extremist organisations.⁴

A certain turning point for the development of the far-right scene in the Czech Republic was 2013, when the last organisations National Resistance and Autonomous Nationalists that had origins in the skinhead scene disbanded.⁵ However, this only made room for other far-right, and at the same time more populist projects. It was precisely in 2013 that Tomio Okamura's Dawn of Direct Democracy party was founded, which already made it to parliament in the 2013 elections. However, the party soon disintegrated and was replaced by the Party of

Direct Democracy (SPD), which was founded and is still led by the same Tomio Okamura.

Experts consider the SPD to be a far-right project, which distances itself from Nazism and extremism as such, but uses populist tactics to push nationalist, conservative, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and xenophobic themes.⁶ Since then, the SPD has maintained its position in the parliament and is among the most vocal opposition, especially in topics related to Czech membership in the EU and NATO, migration issues, and the Czech foreign policy concept, which in recent years has been strongly pro-Western and anti-Russian. Therefore, the first case study presented in this chapter is closely related to this party.

The year 2015 marked another turning point in development of the far-right scene due to the great wave of migration.⁷ In addition to the fact that migration became the main theme of the extreme right during this year,⁸ there was also a big boom of disinformation in the Czech Republic. These two phenomena were immediately connected, and representatives of the far-right scene began to actively participate in the creation and dissemination of disinformation. The report on extremism on the territory of the Czech Republic in 2015, which is regularly processed by the Ministry of the Interior, directly states that although criminal activity in terms of violent behaviour has decreased, at the same time, criminal activity via the internet has increased (especially hate speech crimes). According to the report although organisations such as the Workers' Party of Social Justice (DSSS⁹) or the National Democracy (ND¹⁰) organised concerts and other events intended for followers of far-right extremism, criminal activity as such was very rarely recorded.¹¹

It was only around 2015 that a visible connection between the Czech extreme right and pro-Russian activists in the Czech Republic was noticed. It was related to the international activities of the Russian Federation in Ukrainian territory in 2014.¹² The annual report of the Czech Security Information Service (BIS) for 2015 says:

Part of the extreme right presented itself prominently with pro-Russian positions, especially articles on the Internet and the organization of several events through which it wanted to make itself visible in the media. Some entities, which had not done so in previous years, also began to express themselves pro-Russian.¹³

Only the Russian annexation of Crimea acted as a detonator and disinformation projects began to flourish in the Czech information space, both via websites and

social media networks.¹⁴ Part of the Czech extreme right sided with Russia and began to actively participate in the creation and dissemination of pro-Russian disinformation in the Czech information space, which began their long-term cooperation in this area.¹⁵ This led to future modelling of the Czech far-right scene in the mould of its Russia-inspired and-supported counterparts in Western Europe. Conservatism, traditionalism, nativism, and ambivalence, if not outright hostility towards international organisations such as the EU or NATO, provided the basis and glue for this connection.¹⁶

The trend of connecting the Czech far-right and pro-Russian activists continued in the following years and was most evident in their online activities. The most recent Report on Extremism in the Czech Republic for 2022 processed by the Ministry of the Interior shows that the current risk from the point of view of right-wing extremism is isolated online communities. Specifically, the report states the following:

The National Democracy and the Workers' Party of Social Justice represented completely marginal entities that were unable to organize their own significant action in the monitored period. From the point of view of the relationship between the factions in Ukraine, they can be considered part of a community that resonates with pro-Kremlin narratives. about [sic] entities that help spread ideas generated by official Russian propaganda for the Central European region.¹⁷

The activities of Czech far-right and pro-Russian actors have significantly contributed to radicalisation of part of Czech society. In recent years, the Czech Republic has witnessed a rise in instances of anti-system behaviour among citizens without previous or evident ties to extremism.¹⁸ These incidents involve sporadic acts of violence aimed at expressing defiance against political decisions or judicial authorities. Often, these actions are accompanied by calls for the resignation of governing elites or the encouragement of fellow supporters towards increased radicalisation and forceful transformation of democratic institutions.

This phenomenon extends beyond the Czech Republic, affecting various Western nations. Experts and political figures from some of these countries frequently point out that the radicalisation of citizens is significantly influenced by disinformation.¹⁹ While domestic entities often propagate such content, its origins and initial sources are often international. In the Czech geopolitical context, this particularly involves the Russian Federation.²⁰ As a result of several successive waves of disinformation (encompassing topics such as migration, the coronavirus

pandemic, vaccination, anti-epidemic measures, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and related subjects), a segment of Czech society has begun to radicalise.

Nevertheless, respected Czech institutions that have been engaging with this issue over the long term (often stemming from the core of their existence) confirm the influence of disinformation on radicalisation. Among them is the BIS, which addresses this trend in its Annual Report for 2021.²¹ The Ministry of the Interior likewise arrives at the same conclusion in its Report on Extremism and Prejudiced Hatred in the Czech Republic for 2022.²² The National Centre Against Organised Crime (NCOZ) also describes these trends in its Annual Report for 2022.²³ In connection with disinformation concerning the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the NCOZ additionally notes that the primary sources are official Russian propaganda and Russian media.

The gravity of this trend is further affirmed by the Deputy Director for Criminal Police and Investigation, Vojtěch Motyka, who stated in an interview with *Seznam Zprávy* daily in February 2023 that the profile of a typical perpetrator in the context of contemporary hate crimes and the broader concept of extremism has markedly transformed. According to his remarks, the typical contemporary perpetrator of hate crimes lacks ties (or overt ties) to the extremist scene, with their behaviour being influenced and radicalised by disinformation activities.²⁴ He also confirmed this fact in the interview he gave for the purposes of this research, when he said:

A typical perpetrator of today is an ordinary citizen from the public, whose connection to the extremist scene is nonexistent or only hinted at by the fact that he attacks the same protected interest as the traditional extremist movement. Most of these typical offenders do it through social networks or using the internet, which is also characteristic now but different than before.

The Russian Federation exploits various tense situations to disseminate propaganda. Integral to this strategy is the creation of an impression among citizens that only two extremely contradictory stances exist regarding a particular issue. This mode of manipulation significantly contributes to online radicalisation. The disinformation online environment in the Czech Republic is established and fuelled with Russian support, albeit not always directly. Massive disinformation campaigns aimed at dividing Czech society, pitting groups against each other, or fostering radicalisation often originate from Russia and are sustained by Russian communication channels operating in the Czech language, such as Sputnik News.

The connection between far-right and pro-Russian activists is also confirmed by Ladislav Vrábek's demonstrations, which are the subject of the second case study. With the help of pro-Russian activities (such as an array of disinformation projects on social media or disinformation websites through which demonstrations were called for and then vividly broadcasted live), Vrábek's Czech movement managed to get a relatively large number of people to the protest events in the first place. The Czech Ministry of the Interior commented on the demonstration of 3 September 2022 as follows:

The Czech quasi-media scene supported the demonstration for a long time, however, its subsequent reaction is more interesting. On the one hand, it came practically immediately, which is not quite the rule even for planned events, and on the other hand, it came immediately supported by the propaganda of the state media of the Russian Federation.²⁵

Methodology

The two case studies present examples of how a combination of the extreme right and pro-Russian/Russian activists have contributed to the radicalisation of Czech society in recent years, with the first case directly involving violent behaviour aimed at causing bodily harm (potentially to life) and material damage. Methodologically, we approached the analysis by combining in-depth desk-based research with semi-structured interviews with experts in the field.

For the desk-based research, the authors primarily engaged with primary sources such as annual reports from relevant institutions for the given domain (e.g. BIS,²⁶ NCOZ²⁷) and regular analytical texts produced by relevant institutions for the domain (such as the annual reports on extremism in the territory of the Czech Republic by the Ministry of the Interior²⁸). Additionally, the authors consulted academic texts concerning radicalisation within the Czech or Central European geopolitical and social context, as well as texts exploring various factors that may initiate and perpetuate the process of radicalisation.

To provide specific context, the authors also utilised articles from mainstream media, especially for case studies where contextualising specific events, times, locations, actors, etc., was necessary. To enhance the depiction of the first case study, the authors conducted a semi-structured interview with a journalist who had extensively researched the case and personally interviewed the main actor. As for further interviews, the authors identified six experts from various

institutions (Ministry of the Interior, NCOZ, Centre Against Hybrid Threats, Police, etc.) who responded to both general inquiries contextualising the situation in the Czech Republic and specific questions related to selected cases.

Case Studies

When selecting case studies for the Czech Republic, the authors made their decisions precisely based on the specific relationship between the Czech extreme right and pro-Russian activists. Even though extreme right-wing entities active in the Czech Republic do not have direct financial ties to Russia that could be proven (or, if they do, this information is not accessible to the public), their ideological closeness is more than evident. In some cases, this ideology manifested itself, for example, in the fact that members of far-right entities travelled to Russia or the annexed Crimea, participated in events at the Russian embassy, or directly cooperated in spreading pro-Kremlin propaganda. This characteristic of the relationship between the Czech far-right and pro-Russian activities generated two case studies, one of which is an example of violent behaviour, and the other is an example of direct cooperation between members of the far right and the pro-Russian activists.

The first case shows how the close association with Tomio Okamura's far-right SPD party and the excessive consumption of pro-Russian and anti-migrant propaganda resulted in the self-radicalisation of a Czech senior citizen. The outcome of senior Jaromír Blada's self-radicalisation process culminated in a terrorist act with the intention of raising awareness about the perceived threat posed by migrants originating from Africa and the Middle East (the circumstances will be described in detail in a separate sub-chapter dedicated to this case study).

The second case concerns the mass and gradual radicalisation of a certain population group, which resulted in several violent incidents at anti-government demonstrations. These demonstrations were organised by the newly formed movement and its supporters. This case was included because it fulfils the signs of an extremist movement in the sense of an effort to shift not only the political system away from a democracy of the country but also an effort to revolt against the political establishment, incitement to hatred of certain groups of the population, connections to certain political actors (including foreign ones), as well as connections with pro-Kremlin actors operating in the Czech Republic. These are demonstrations organised by Ladislav Vrábek, who has been actively

involved in projects connected with the Czech disinformation scene for a long time. For representation and the organisation of demonstrations, he founded an association called *The Czech Republic First!*²⁹

Case study 1: First ever Terrorist Act on the Territory of the Czech Republic

Contextualisation - Migration Situation in Europe Prior to the Terrorist Act

The migration wave to Europe in 2015 and 2016 was a significant and complex phenomenon characterised by a substantial influx of migrants and refugees from various regions, primarily the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Asia. The crisis was primarily triggered by a combination of factors, including ongoing conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, political instability in countries like Libya, and economic hardships in parts of Africa. The displacement and desperation caused by these circumstances led to a surge in people seeking safety and better opportunities, often making treacherous journeys across the Mediterranean Sea or through the Balkans. Many sought refuges in European countries as they hoped to escape violence, persecution, and poverty.³⁰

The arrival of many migrants and refugees presented Europe with significant challenges. Countries along the Mediterranean coastline, especially Greece and Italy, bore the brunt of the initial arrivals due to their geographical location. However, the crisis quickly turned into a pan-European issue, prompting discussions about burden-sharing, humanitarian responsibilities, and the practicality of managing such a large influx.³¹ The European response was varied and highlighted divisions within the EU. While some countries demonstrated solidarity and provided assistance, others erected fences and implemented stricter border controls. The lack of a unified approach exacerbated tensions among member states and led to disagreements over dividing the responsibility of hosting and supporting the migrants.³²

The Czech Republic's response to the migration wave was characterised by a cautious and somewhat resistant stance, which aligned with the overall sentiments of certain Central-Eastern European countries. The Czech Republic, along with other countries in the Visegrád Group (Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia), expressed uneasiness about the potential implications of the migration crisis and advocated for stronger border controls and the preservation of national sovereignty.³³ The

Czech government opposed mandatory EU quotas for the distribution of refugees among member states, which were proposed by the European Commission to address the uneven burden sharing within the EU.³⁴ Similarly, the response of the Czech society reflected a mix of scepticism, security concerns, and a focus on maintaining national sovereignty. The government's reluctance to accept mandatory quotas and its preference for assisting refugees in their countries of origin were emblematic of the broader debates and divisions within the European Union during the migration crisis.³⁵

Contextualisation - How Russian Propaganda used the Migration Crisis to its Advantage

The migration crisis turned out to be an ideal topic for targeted propaganda because thanks to a targeted massive disinformation campaign, the Russian Federation was able to encourage different views on the given situation in society among politicians and citizens. Pro-Russian propaganda and disinformation narratives often capitalised on the migration crisis in the Czech Republic, as well as in other European countries, to further their own geopolitical and ideological objectives. These narratives aimed to exploit the concerns and uncertainties surrounding the migration wave to fuel anti-European Union sentiments, undermine the credibility of Western institutions and sow discord among EU member states.³⁶ Several tactics, outlined below, were employed by pro-Russian sources to exploit the migration crisis.³⁷

Amplifying Fear and Instability

Pro-Russian media outlets and disinformation networks amplified fears about the potential security threats posed by migrants, emphasising the possibility of terrorists infiltrating Europe among the refugees. They also propagated narratives that portrayed migrants as a cultural and social threat to European identity. They highlighted cases of crimes or disturbances involving migrants, sometimes exaggerating or misrepresenting facts to stoke anti-migrant sentiments.³⁸ These narratives were aimed at deepening societal anxieties and casting doubt on the EU's ability to manage the crisis.³⁹

Questioning EU Policies

Pro-Russian sources often criticised the EU's response to the migration crisis, portraying it as weak, ineffective, and chaotic. They used this to paint a negative image of the EU's decision-making processes and its ability to address complex challenges.⁴⁰ A number of narratives have also emerged that were intended to undermine citizens' trust in European institutions.⁴¹

Promoting Nationalism and Sovereignty

Pro-Russian propaganda often praised Eastern European countries that resisted accepting migrants and framed this resistance as a defence of national sovereignty against perceived EU pressure.⁴² This resonated with anti-EU sentiments present in some segments of the population.⁴³

Blaming Western Policies for Causing the Migration Wave

Some pro-Russian narratives tried to attribute the migration crisis to Western interventions and destabilisation efforts in countries like Syria and Libya. This aimed to present Russia as an alternative to Western influence and as a stabilising force in the region.⁴⁴

Highlighting Divisions

Pro-Russian actors sometimes highlighted divisions within EU member states over how to handle the crisis. This was intended to portray the EU as weak and divided, contrasting with the image of unity and stability that Russia sought to project.⁴⁵

These tactics intended to exploit existing grievances and concerns within Czech society, aiming to erode trust in Western institutions and create fertile ground for alternative narratives that align with Russia's foreign policy goals.⁴⁶

First Czech Terrorist Attacker Jaromír Balda

In June 2017, Jaromír Balda, a 71-year-old Czech senior citizen, felled two trees on the tracks, causing train accidents. Around the felled trees, the perpetrator left leaflets with the exclamation "Allahu Akbar!", which means "God is great" in

Arabic. Other similar leaflets, in which he tried to give the impression in bad Czech that they were written by individuals not proficient in Czech language, supposedly such as newly arrived Muslim migrants/refugees, were subsequently posted in public spaces and dropped into mailboxes.⁴⁷ He was hoping the act would be then blamed on such outsiders and lead to a backlash against them and also their migration away from the Czech Republic.

Balda was eventually sentenced to four years in prison for committing a terrorist act,⁴⁸ which was below the lowest possible limit due to impaired sanity. He was eventually paroled after serving two-thirds of his sentence.⁴⁹ Balda was among the prominent supporters of the far-right SPD party during the migration crisis. During the campaign before the elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic in 2017, he gave a donation to the SPD movement in the form of a free performance (hanging a banner on the fence of his house, an advertising sticker on his car, and 50 hours of plastering posters) worth about twelve thousand crowns (approximately \$522 USD or €489). He was photographed several times with the leader of the party and other members. Even though he was not a member of the party, he was involved in regional SPDs events.⁵⁰

Although the SPD publicly distanced itself from Balda in the words of Tomio Okamura,⁵¹ there is a lot of visual and other evidence that Balda was strongly influenced by this party and their rhetoric. This fact was also confirmed by the court, which pointed out in the judgment that Balda had become a “victim” of manipulation by public officials.⁵² He was in an imaginary information bubble which caused him to believe disinformation about alleged hordes of Muslim refugees, heading to the Czech Republic (or allegedly already in the Czech Republic). These people would then harm Czech citizens (rape women, behead men, etc.).⁵³ Balda admitted in court that he was genuinely terrified when he said, “I had dreams about how they [Muslim immigrants] were here—how they cut our heads, shouted their religious slogans.”⁵⁴

Kristina Ciroková, who filmed an interview with Balda for Czech news media channel *Seznam Zprávy* after he was released from prison, later confirmed that Balda’s fear was his main motivation for committing a terrorist act:

He described how he became terribly afraid of refugees. He received many chain emails containing fearful disinformation about migration, he also read

some articles from the media, which are described as disinformation. He said that he has friends in Germany, and they told him how they have a lot of migrants there and that it was terrible. He talked about how the Muslims were going to eliminate us because they gave birth to more children than us and their culture was somehow twisted [...] He was afraid that they would rape our women.⁵⁵

Ciroková also added that although no direct link to a foreign power could be found here, it cannot be ruled out that the chain emails contained disinformation about migration that J. Balda received, could have originated in some troll farm from Russia.

In the published part of the interview, Balda himself admitted that he actively participated in SPD's regional events. He also said he drew support from the party because he liked its anti-immigration agenda. The Chairman of the Senate of the Regional Court in Prague, Jiří Wažik, who tried Balda then confirmed in an interview that: "the problem with [Balda's] behaviour was really politicians and other people who were trying to find simple solutions to complex problems."⁵⁶

The influence of disinformation on Mr Balda's actions is also confirmed by other experts whom the authors interviewed for the purposes of this research. They also agree that the case was a turning point. The case clearly showed how disinformation can lead to misunderstandings/misinterpretations. It also significantly contributed to changing the thinking of relevant Czech institutions on extremism and the process of radicalisation. This is confirmed by the experts with whom the authors conducted semi-structured interviews for the purposes of this study, as evidenced by the following quotations. A good example is Major Stanislav Beránek, who works as an analyst at the National Centre against Organised Crime.

Since the 1990s, the view of extremism in the Czech Republic has been modulated by the German view which is very focused on symbolism, subcultures, and external signs. The problem is that subcultures will lack criminal activity if they are not criminal subcultures and do not commit criminal activity. This view, however, collided with the new extremism. People who are not members of any subcultures are starting to act extremist. That's why even Mr. Balda has never been recorded anywhere prior to his terrorist act. This is a qualitative shift with disinformation that people who do not have a subcultural background are becoming radicalized.⁵⁷

The situation is similarly evaluated by the Ministry of Interior as was confirmed by one of said Ministry's officials in an interview:

It was a milestone; it was the first act of terrorism in the Czech Republic. At the same time, it is a symptomatic example, because it is one person radicalized also due to the influence of disinformation. A symptom of where the trend of violence is going, what are the threats to our national security. These are not organized groups doing big spectacular things, but individuals who can quite easily simply commit something that is significant and has a lasting impact on society.⁵⁸

The influence of the SPD as well as the critical nature and uniqueness of this case are also confirmed by the analysts of the Ministry of the Interior (experts on extremism and radicalisation) Jiří Pětioký and Jakub Merc, who answered the author's question about the case of Mr Balda in writing as follows:

The case of Mr. Balda was exceptional mainly because it was an accomplished terrorist act. Furthermore, by the fact that it was not committed by a young radical, but by a seventy-year-old senior citizen. It was not a traditional right-wing extremist, but a supporter of the SPD movement who suffered from existential fears.⁵⁹

Political and Disinformation Influence Leading to the Terrorist Act?

Tomio Okamura's SPD party is known for its nationalist and anti-immigrant stance. The party's response to the migration crisis was characterised by opposition to accepting refugees and migrants, as well as scepticism towards the EU's handling of the situation.⁶⁰ The SPD positioned itself as a staunch critic of the EU's policies regarding migration and advocated for stricter border controls and the prioritisation of Czech national interests. The party capitalised on the public's concerns and fears related to the migration wave, often using anti-immigrant rhetoric to appeal to its voter base.⁶¹ Some key aspects of the SPD's response to the migration crisis included:

- **Opposition to Refugee Quotas:** The SPD strongly opposed the EU's proposed mandatory refugee quotas, which aimed to distribute refugees among member states. The party argued that decisions about accepting refugees should be made independently by each nation, without external interference.⁶²

- **Scepticism of Multiculturalism:** The SPD expressed scepticism about the integration of migrants and refugees into Czech society, emphasising the importance of preserving Czech cultural identity. The party often presented itself as a defender of traditional Czech values against what it characterised as a threat from immigration.⁶³
- **National Sovereignty:** The SPD highlighted the concept of national sovereignty and framed the migration crisis as a challenge to Czech self-determination. The party portrayed itself as a defender of Czech interests and national control over immigration policies.⁶⁴
- **Security Concerns:** The party raised concerns about potential security risks associated with the migration wave, echoing fears of terrorist infiltration. This narrative aimed to garner support for more stringent security measures.⁶⁵
- **Anti-EU Sentiments:** The SPD criticised the EU's response to the migration crisis, portraying the union as out of touch with the concerns of individual member states. This rhetoric reinforced the party's broader anti-EU stance.⁶⁶

SPD's Support of Russia

The SPD has a track record of holding opinions that mirror the ideas/views put forward by Russia. A perfect example of this situation is the so-called Vrbětice case.⁶⁷ In 2014, two ammunition warehouses exploded in the Moravian village of Vrbětice.⁶⁸ In 2021, at a press conference, the political leaders of the time announced that the BIS had discovered that at least two Russian informants were responsible for the explosion.⁶⁹ The whole matter eventually resulted in a serious diplomatic rift during which some Russian diplomats were expelled from the Czech Republic⁷⁰ and, conversely, Czech diplomats were expelled from Russia.⁷¹ In the end, the Czech Republic was put on the list of enemy countries by Moscow.⁷² In this matter, the leaders of the SPD took a very reserved attitude towards the findings of the Security Information Service, repeatedly trying to trivialise these and foment distrust in their conclusions. They were very critical of the government's decision to expel Russian diplomats from the Czech Republic, and overall, their statements fit into the narratives that the official Russian propaganda media were putting forward⁷³ such as that Russia's accusation of the explosion in Vrbětice is part of a larger Western plan to proceed against Russia,⁷⁴ or that foreign intelligence services invented Russia's

involvement and are themselves responsible for it.⁷⁵ Simultaneously, SPD also aligned with Russia, narrative wise, on Moscow's hybrid and the full-scale invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. SPD ruled out assistance to the Ukrainian army and to Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic whose number reached approximately 370 thousand according to a consortium of non-governmental organisations working with migrants.⁷⁶

SPD chairman Tomio Okamura together with SPD MP Jaroslav Foldyna have also demonstrated their support for pro-Russian paramilitary groups in the Czech Republic.⁷⁷ These are Czechoslovak soldiers in reserve and the National Militia. These groups do not only express themselves aggressively against the West and spread pro-Russian propaganda, but they also support the unrecognised and Russian-controlled separatist republics in the Donbas. In the past, the group Czechoslovak soldiers in reserve for peace sent Czech citizens to fight for these entities' organisations.⁷⁸

Jaromír Balda was an ordinary Czech retiree before his involvement with the SPD and engagement with disinformation sources. The migration wave and the inundation of shocking disinformation, conspiracy theories, and often direct falsehoods compelled him to take a deeper interest in the subject and become politically active. Initially a consumer of disinformation, he gradually aligned himself with its creators, crafting and disseminating chain emails filled with misinformation about migrants and migration in general. This process highlights his gradual radicalisation.

His connection to the SPD was relatively narrow as he expressed his decision to support this party due to its strongly rejecting, even xenophobic, stance towards migration. However, the SPD is not only characterised by its rejection of migration but also profiles as a pro-Russian party. Its members associate with problematic individuals from the Russian Federation, openly endorse Russian foreign policy, and significantly contribute to disseminating disinformation, often originating from Russia, within the Czech information environment. Members of this party actively contribute to the culmination of the disinformation environment and indirectly collaborate with other Russian and pro-Russian actors operating in the Czech Republic. Jaromír Balda thus became a victim of manipulation both by Russian and pro-Russian actors spreading disinformation.

Case Study 2: The Interplay of Pro-Kremlin Movements and Anti-Establishment Sentiments as Unique Channels for Dissent

On the first weekend of September 2022, Wenceslas Square in Prague witnessed a gathering of a notable magnitude in the Czech context. Approximately 70,000 individuals congregated to voice their dissatisfaction with the Czech government's policies.⁷⁹ The demonstration, aptly named Czech Republic First! was organised by Jiří Havel and Ladislav Vrabel. Garnering the support of numerous organisations, political factions, and like-minded individuals, their primary agenda revolved around challenging the present Czech administration and ardently demanding its resignation due to the demonstrators' discontent with the government's approach to the ongoing energy crisis, inflation, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

These demonstrations have cast a spotlight on the intricate web that ties potential foreign influences – most notably from Russia – to anti-establishment activities, the convergence of far-right and far-left entities, and the menace of disinformation. This case study delves into these events, highlighting their complexities, where genuine grievances converge with externally orchestrated disinformation and evolving radical mindsets.

Ladislav Vrabel: Spreader of Disinformation in Excessive Debts

Ladislav Vrabel, the prominent figure behind the Czech Republic First! movement first started to express his political views publicly on his social media around 2015, while voicing his dissent towards Islam and the Middle Eastern refugees.⁸⁰ His fame deepened as he started challenging the prevailing narrative around COVID-19, sometimes resorting to disinformation. His journey as an online activist has not been without its controversies.⁸¹ In early 2023, Vrabel was detained by the police for scaremongering. The root of his contention was a video Vrabel uploaded in November 2022 in which he asserted that the Czech government was planning to target Russia with nuclear-equipped fighter jets. He even forewarned of a possible retaliation: “If our government proceeds with this, Russia might counter-attack, sending nuclear missiles our way.”⁸²

The court weighed innating that Vrabel's declarations potentially alarmed a sizable portion of the populace. As a result, he received a four-month suspended sentence, with conditions extending to over a year and a half.⁸³ Not one to stand down, Vrabel sought to contest this judgment. However, the appellate court

echoed the initial decision, reaffirming the four-month suspended sentence set over eighteen months.⁸⁴

In February 2023, the České Budějovice Regional Court made another significant decision regarding Vrabel: it declared him bankrupt. The court pointed out that Vrabel did not make genuine efforts to pay off his creditors. Instead, he seemed to be assisting in pulling out funds that were already earmarked by the insolvency overseer. Vrabel brushed off the court's verdict, labelling it as a political trial.⁸⁵ By the time of this decision, his debts amounted to a hefty CZK 2.7 million (roughly €107,000, or \$115 000 USD). During the subsequent seventeen months of bankruptcy proceedings, he managed to repay a meagre CZK 14,500, barely scratching the surface at 0.5 percent of his total debt.⁸⁶

However, that was not the sole financial red flag around Vrabel. While Vrabel vocally criticised the government's COVID-19 policies, branding them as *genocidal* towards the unvaccinated, he was simultaneously seeking COVID-19-related business aid. He secured CZK 2.3 million from the Ministry of Industry and Trade. This sum was channelled through three companies where he acted as the managing director. Interestingly, these companies were listed as belonging to his Serbian wife, Bojana Vurdejla.⁸⁷

Demonstrations against the Government: a Colourful Palette across the Political Spectrum with a Common Goal

The demonstrations Vrabel organised in 2022 and 2023 were remarkable not only for their size but also for the diverse tapestry of political affiliations they brought together. The demonstrations transcended traditional political divides, drawing in an eclectic mix that ranged from staunch communists to far-right nationalists and EU critics.

Some key figures appearing on stage during the demonstrations included a pro-Russian political scientist, and chairwoman of the Alliance of National Forces party, Vladimíra Vítová, notorious for her commentary on refugees arriving in the Czech Republic flaunting high-end gadgets.⁸⁸ Another voice from the right was Zuzana Majerová Zahradníková, leader of the Trikolora movement and a former MP. Her faction regularly promotes referendums on Czech membership in the EU. In its program, Trikolora specifically claims it will “support all initiatives which will result in strengthening of our sovereignty, or to the loosening of our relations with the EU, including withdrawal from the EU.”⁸⁹

Contrasting these right-leaning voices were individuals like Josef Skála – a staunch communist known for his steadfast defence of Joseph Stalin’s policies – and Lubomír Volný (formerly an MP with the right-wing SPD).⁹⁰ Volný had notably labelled Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a “mass murderer” on social media – a claim thoroughly investigated by the police but subsequently deemed noncriminal.⁹¹

At one of the demonstrations, an intriguing addition to the mix was Christine Anderson, a German MEP representing the Alternative for Germany, a German right-wing populist political party with a notable focus on Euroscepticism and strengthening ties with Russia (more on this party in the German chapter of this edited volume).⁹²

The Czech government remained steadfast in its criticism of these protests. Prime Minister Petr Fiala stated that the event was organised by pro-Russian entities with extremist inclinations and operating counter to the Czech Republic’s best interests. He also alluded to the recurrent Russian disinformation campaigns targeting Czech territory and its susceptible populace.⁹³ Later on, the prime minister clarified that his critique was aimed not at the attendees but the organisers whom he labelled as constituents of the Russian 5th column. He also said that the organisers of the demonstrations want to make the Czech Republic “a vassal of Moscow once more.”⁹⁴

By May 2023, Vrabel led a transformed set of demonstrations under the banner of the “Together for Peace and Freedom” campaign. This rally was tinged with a heightened sense of urgency and concern. Several speakers warned against the US government’s purported interest in establishing military bases within Czech territory. Police intervened with an arrest of an individual on charges of endorsing genocide – a person previously known to authorities.⁹⁵ Demonstrations are being convened with changing regularity also during autumn 2023.

While the faces at the forefront might have been changing or the names of the rallies altered, the demands of the demonstrations throughout both years remained more or less consistent. Despite the varied backgrounds of the demonstrators, there was a unified and continuous call for the resignation of the Czech government, a re-evaluation of relations with Russia, particularly concerning gas contracts, and a reconsideration of the Czech Republic’s role in international alliances such as NATO and the European Union, but also the UN and the World Health Organization. Several demonstrations also called for curtailing the influx of Ukrainian refugees.⁹⁶

Another thing common for all the demonstrations were the pro-Russian narratives expressed by the speakers from all around the political spectrum. These narratives have been a direct follow-up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which marked a significant shift in the nature of the dynamics between the far-right (and far-left) extremist scene, pro-Russian activists, and dis-informers. Pro-Russian narratives gained more significant prominence over time, particularly in discussions about energy security, economic challenges, and migration.

The BIS in its 2022 annual report⁹⁷ stated that the anti-government demonstrations in 2022 have been significantly influenced by Russian propaganda, aimed at solidifying Russian interests within the EU. Despite the lack of concrete evidence of a direct financial connection between the Russian Federation and the demonstration organisers, the BIS report indicates a strategic use of local actors to advance Russian agendas. Pro-Russian narratives were intertwined with public issues, leading to anti-government demonstrations which were then used by Russia to propagate its narrative within the EU's information space.

Who are the Protestors? Profiles, Behaviours, and Societal Context

The demonstrations have drawn a complex and varied crowd, reflecting deep-seated dissatisfaction and socioeconomic concerns among the populace. The demonstrators' profiles are as diverse as the speakers on the stage, ranging from those brandishing symbols of the communist era to others displaying Russian flags and emblems. This blend of ideologies underscores a unifying thread of discontent with the government's policies and the nation's trajectory.

A striking aspect of these demonstrations is the assortment of flags and symbols. Participants carried banners of the Communist Party, Czech National Social Party, and even the far-right extremist DSSS. Some even waved Russian Federation flags or wore T-shirts featuring Russian president Vladimir Putin, signifying a blend of nostalgia, political dissent, and in some cases, direct support for Russian policies.⁹⁸ Despite the relative peace maintained during the protests, as per police reports, there were instances of divisive behaviour. The crowd's reaction to the Ukrainian flag at the National Museum, leading to demands for its removal and subsequent police intervention, illustrates the underlying tensions within the Czech society and the potential for escalation.⁹⁹

Recent surveys by the STEM agency¹⁰⁰ reflect widespread dissatisfaction in the Czech Republic. More than half of the population is unhappy with the country's situation, with 62 percent viewing the future with uncertainty or fear. Financial worries are prevalent, with 30 percent anticipating a worsening of their household's financial situation. Trust in the government is notably low, with only 25 percent expressing some degree of trust, while a significant majority expressed distrust or indifference.¹⁰¹

This data underscores a broader context in which these demonstrations occur. The protests are less about the specific ideologies displayed and more about a general discontent with the socio-economic status quo. The variety of political leanings and opinions within the crowd makes it challenging to uniformly label or describe the demonstrators. However, the trend of individuals with no history of extremism gravitating towards these protests is a significant development. It suggests a growing dissatisfaction that, if ignored by the state and government, could lead to an increasing tendency of the public to express political views through potentially radical or extremist avenues.

In summary, the diverse array of symbols and sentiments expressed at the protests, particularly those displaying Russian flags and emblems, highlights a notable Russian influence among some participants. This presence is not merely symbolic but points to a potentiality of Russia leveraging these sentiments to its advantage, a concern that cannot be easily dismissed and has been suggested also by the BIS. The fact that some of the protestors are openly displaying pro-Russian symbols in a sociopolitical context marked by general discontent and distrust towards the government indicates a complex intertwining of local and foreign influences.

It would be hard to overlook the possibility that Russia, known for its strategic interests in influencing foreign affairs, might capitalise on this unrest. This development has raised alarm within the Czech Republic (including the political representation), signifying the seriousness of the situation and the urgent need for the government to address both the domestic causes of dissatisfaction and the implications of foreign influences on its soil. This confluence of internal discontent and external interests presents a delicate challenge for the Czech government, requiring careful navigation to maintain national integrity and societal cohesion.

Communication towards Trust-Building: a “Mission Impossible” for Czech Democratic Institutions?

The Czech Republic, in the face of escalating disinformation campaigns, finds itself at a crossroads. Despite the thorough analysis of vulnerabilities through the 2016 National Security Audit¹⁰² and the 2022 Analysis of the Czech Republic’s preparedness to face a serious disinformation wave,¹⁰³ there is a notable gap in effective tools and capacities to respond to serious disinformation attacks. Intelligence services, security institutions, and experts across various sectors consistently underline the ongoing disinformation campaigns.¹⁰⁴ The unpreparedness of Czech institutions to cope with a so-called infodemic has been further demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which the rise of disinformation channels, old and new, together with a chaotic and uncoordinated communication of the government, may have led to harm to public health itself.

This onslaught of misinformation has destructive societal impacts, further eroding public trust in democratic institutions, which is already very low, and fostering polarisation and radicalisation. Czech society’s current resistance to disinformation is markedly low, lacking built-in defence mechanisms against these effects. Dis-informers, leveraging the openness of democratic societies and digital platforms, disseminate their agenda more effectively and efficiently than those combatting misinformation. Furthermore, due to the low level of trustworthiness democratic institutions have amongst the population, it puts them into a precarious position, since fighting disinformation requires a certain level of trust, transparency, and dependability.

In comparison to many other countries, including Latvia and the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic’s organisational, personnel, and technical capacities to counter serious disinformation waves are insufficient. Czech’s closest partner and neighbour, Slovakia, for example, has been employing almost twice as many personnel in the area of strategic communication and countering hybrid threats before the latest Slovak Parliamentary elections in 2023. The Czech Republic does exhibit competence in identifying actors and their links, particularly in cases of suspected criminal offenses, with the involvement of the police and intelligence services.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, while the Czech legal system possesses unique legal instruments to counter Russian influence, including the so-called Magnitsky legislation which enables the government to put Russian oligarchs on its very own sanctions list, it often falls short in quick and effective application.¹⁰⁶

However, the state's reliance on repression and attribution as primary tools against disinformation is not enough. A more proactive approach is needed, focusing on prevention and equipping citizens with the tools to navigate misinformation, or simply to build resilience of individuals who are vulnerable not only to disinformation, but also fearmongering, hateful expressions, and radicalisation. Furthermore, all the teams and units working on either monitoring and analysing disinformation and hybrid threats, or strategic communication, are located at the Ministries of Interior, Defence, and Foreign Affairs. While the security and foreign policy aspect of disinformation is important, what can be drawn from the case studies chosen for this publication are often not the issues that would be the main concern of people vulnerable to disinformation. Resorts like public health, social issues, or finance should be involved in systematic communication towards the citizens.

Quality information literacy in schools is imperative. Currently, this responsibility falls disproportionately on the nonprofit sector, which is unsustainable in the long term. Information literacy education should be integrated into the national curriculum to foster critical thinking and media savvy among younger generations. As Czech institutions struggle with trustworthiness amongst the Czech population and struggle to reach audiences to build their resilience against disinformation, strategic communication should be the right and proven tool to do so. Currently, strategic communication efforts are fragmented, existing within the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Defence without a unified mandate or coordination.

To address the part of the population distrustful of democratic institutions and vulnerable to pro-Russian narratives, the state must engage these citizens systematically and through appropriate channels. This requires a more robust and coordinated system. The work needs to be broadened to include other ministries such as health, finance, and labour and social affairs. Strategic communication should address not just foreign and security policy but also topics of direct concern to Czech citizens. A centralised coordinating leadership from the cabinet office could unify these efforts, ensuring consistency and efficiency in the state's communication strategy.

Each ministry should have its own strategic communication experts who should not be subordinate directly to politicians or political spokesmen but clearly mandated with communication of the institution itself. Their efforts should be responsible not only to the government but also to experts and the wider public.

Especially in a time of necessary austerity and budget cuts, using resources effectively is essential. While the Czech Republic has a lot of tools to counter Russian influence, including the Magnitsky legislation or the mechanism to screen foreign investments, these tools require a lot of analytical personnel in order to have any impact. Where the state lacks behind in its capacities, cooperation with nongovernmental and private sectors could be crucial for positive progress. Engaging with NGOs, academic institutions, and the private sector can provide a multifaceted approach to countering Russian influence and disinformation, leveraging a wider range of expertise and resources. Collaborations with private companies might also help with using modern, efficient, and technological solutions for monitoring the information spaces or tracking ownership of companies and identifying Russian financing. Strengthening capabilities in digital forensics and analytics will help in more effectively tracking the sources and patterns of Russian influence, be it in the information space or in the economic sector. This involves investing in technology as well as training personnel in these specialised fields.

Conclusions and Summary

The Czech Republic's journey since the 1990s has been marked by the evolving nature of its far-right political scene, initially centred around skinhead subculture, and characterised by violence and ethnic tensions. This historical backdrop set the stage for the current challenges posed by far-right extremism, disinformation campaigns, and pro-Russian activism. The far-right movement, initially dominated by violent acts and anti-Roma sentiments, has transformed into a more sophisticated threat, leveraging disinformation, and aligning with pro-Russian agendas. Disinformation campaigns in the Czech Republic, particularly intensified since 2015, have exploited societal fractures. These campaigns have been intricately linked with pro-Russian activism, further polarising the society. The pandemic exacerbated the disinformation issue, providing a fertile ground for spreading misinformation and fuelling distrust towards democratic institutions and public health measures.

The Czech Republic currently lacks comprehensive tools and strategies to effectively counter these disinformation waves. Despite efforts like the National Security Audit, the response has been insufficient, especially in comparison to other European countries. To combat these challenges, a multifaceted approach

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is essential. This includes enhancing information literacy in education, fostering public-private partnerships, investing in digital forensics, and strengthening international cooperation. Additionally, a unified strategic communication framework across various ministries and regular public awareness campaigns are crucial.

The situation in the Czech Republic reflects a broader global trend where democratic societies grapple with the dual threat of far-right extremism and disinformation. The country's experience underscores the need for proactive and comprehensive strategies that not only focus on suppression and attribution but also prioritise prevention, education, and societal resilience. Addressing these challenges requires not just national efforts but also international collaboration, given the borderless nature of digital information and propaganda.

While the Czech Republic has made strides in recognising and analysing these threats, there remains a significant need for action. Implementing the recommended strategies will be vital in safeguarding the nation's democratic integrity and social cohesion against the insidious effects of disinformation and far-right extremism.

¹ Charvát Jan. “Radicalization of Czech society: a new phenomenon, or the result of long-term developments? | Heinrich Böll Stiftung | Prague Office - Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary,” *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*, 2023. <https://cz.boell.org/en/2023/01/03/radikalizace-ceske-spolecnosti-novy-fenomen-nebo-vysledek-dlouhodobeho-vyvoje>.

² Marková Zuzana. “Skinheads, rasismus a extremismus před 30 lety | Plus.” [Skinheads, racism and extremism 30 years ago | Plus.], Český rozhlas Plus, 2021. <https://plus.rozhlas.cz/skinheads-rasismus-a-extremismus-pred-30-lety-8619988>.

³ “Vláda schválila Strategii rovnosti, začlenění a participace Romů 2021–2030,” [The Government approved the Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2021–2030], *Vláda ČR*, 2021. <https://vlada.gov.cz/cz/ppov/zmocnenkyne-vlady-pro-lidska-prava/aktuality/vlada-schvalila-strategii-romske-integrace-2021---2030-188268/#>.

⁴ An example of such demonstrations can be found in the ‘Report on extremism on the territory of the Czech Republic in 2012.’ At the beginning of 2012, an ultranationalist Workers’ Party of Social Justice organised a Demonstration against Roma violence in the city of Varnsdorf, which was attended by approximately 400 individuals, out of which 150 were far-right extremists. Later that year, the same organization organised a Protest against crime, black racism, and throwing police officers out of windows. (“Zpráva o extremismu na území České republiky v roce 2012.” [Report on extremism in the territory of the Czech Republic in 2012], 2013. Ministerstvo vnitra. <https://www.mvcr.cz/soubor/zprava2012pspcr-pdf.aspx>.) Similarly, in 2013, the most significant activities of the far-right scene were a series of anti-Roma demonstrations, as documented in the ‘Report on extremism on the territory of the Czech Republic in 2013.’ (“Zpráva o extremismu na území České republiky v roce 2013.” [Report on extremism in the territory of the Czech Republic in 2013], 2014. Ministerstvo vnitra. <https://www.mvcr.cz/soubor/zprava2013-web-pdf.aspx>)

⁵ Charvát Jan. “Radicalization of Czech society: a new phenomenon, or the result of long-term developments? | Heinrich Böll Stiftung | Prague Office - Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary,” *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*, 2023. <https://cz.boell.org/en/2023/01/03/radikalizace-ceske-spolecnosti-novy-fenomen-nebo-vysledek-dlouhodobeho-vyvoje>.

⁶ Havlík Vlastimil and Alena Kluknavská. “Our people first (again)! The impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on the populist Radical Right in the Czech Republic*,” *European Center for Populism Studies*, 2023. <https://www.populismstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Download-Report-on-Czech-Republic.pdf>.

⁷ Morillas Pol. “Illiberal Democracies in the EU: the Visegrad Group and the Risk of Disintegration,” *CIDOB*, 2017.

https://www.cidob.org/publicaciones/serie_de_publicacion/monografias/monografias/illiberal_democracies_in_the_eu_the_visegrad_group_and_the_risk_of_disintegration.

⁸ Danics Štefan. “Pravicové populistické strany a radikalizace společnosti / Right populist parties and radicalization of society,” Conference paper. Edited by Jaroslav Ušiak and Dávid Kollár. *Bezpečnostné forum*, 2019. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Adnan-Dzafic/publication/365435696_Bezpecnostne_forum_2019_DESTROYING_IDENTITY_-_BETRAYAL_OF_MULTILATERALISM_OF_BOSNIAN_SOCIETY/links/6374e97637878b3e87b75ccb/Bezpecnostne-forum-2019-DESTROYING-IDENTITY-BETRAYAL-OF-MULT.

⁹ The Workers’ Party of Social Justice is a Czech ultra-nationalist radical extraparliamentary political party with an emphasis on the social aspect, which was founded on 29 January 2004. It profiles itself as a patriotic and strongly Eurosceptic party (Charvát, Jan. 2012. “Dělnická strana: hegemon české krajní pravice v novém tisíciletí.” [The Workers’ Party: hegemon of the Czech extreme right in the new millennium], ResearchGate.

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jan-Charvat/publication/344784392_Delnicka_strana_hegemon_ceske_krajni_pravice_v_novem_tisicileti/links/5f901e3392851c14bcd87a7d/Delnicka-strana-hegemon-ceske-krajni-pravice-v-novem-tisicileti.pdf.

¹⁰ The National Democracy is a Czech nationalist extra-parliamentary political party that ranks among far-right political entities. It has been operating as a political party since 2008, before that it operated as a movement under various names (*iROZHLAS*. 2019. “Ministerstvo vnitra podle soudu nemusí vyřadit Národní demokracii ze zpráv o extremismu.” [According to the court, the Ministry of the Interior does not have to exclude the National Democracy from reports on extremism], 23 April 2019. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/ministerstvo-vnitra-extremismus-narodni-demokracie-soud-zaloba-zprava_1904231704_lac.)

¹¹ “Zpráva o extremismu na území České republiky v roce 2015,” [Report on extremism in the territory of the Czech Republic in 2015], *Ministerstvo vnitra*, 2016. <https://www.mvcr.cz/soubor/zprava-o-extremismu-na-uzemi-ceske-republiky-v-roce-2015.aspx>.

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¹³ “Výroční zpráva Bezpečnostní informační služby za rok 2015,” [Report on extremism in the territory of the Czech Republic in 2015], *BIS*, 2016. <https://www.bis.cz/public/site/bis.cz/content/vyrocnizpravy/2015-vz-cz.pdf>.

¹⁴ Rychnovská, Dagmar and Martin Kohút. “The Battle for Truth: Mapping the Network of Information War Experts in the Czech Republic,” *New Perspectives* 26 (3): 57–88, 2018.

¹⁵ “Výroční zpráva Bezpečnostní informační služby za rok 2014 Obsah,” [Annual report of the Security Information Service for the year 2014 Contents], *BIS*, 2015. <https://www.bis.cz/public/site/bis.cz/content/vyrocnizpravy/2014-vz-cz.pdf>.

¹⁶ Futàk-Campbell, Beatrix. “Political Synergy: How the European Far-Right and Russia Have Joined Forces Against Brussels,” *Atlantisch Perspectief* 44 (1): 30–35, 2020.

¹⁷ “Zpráva o extremismu na území České republiky v roce 2022,” [Report on extremism in the territory of the Czech Republic in 2022], *Ministerstvo vnitra*, 2023. <https://www.mvcr.cz/soubor/zprava2022-pdf.aspx>.

¹⁸ Krásenská, Daniela. “Přibylo trestných činů z nenávisťi. Proč to může být i “dobrá” zpráva.” [Hate crimes have increased. Why it can also be “good” news], *Seznam zprávy*, 2 June 2023.

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²⁰ Golis Ondřej. “Dokázal, že Rusko na nás útočí dezinformacemi. ‘Klíčovou roli hrají Zeman a Facebook,’ říká analytik.” [He proved that Russia is attacking us with disinformation. ‘Zeman and Facebook play a key role,’ says the analyst], *iROZHLAS*, 13 March 2019. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/frantisek-vrabel-dezinformace-fake-news-rusko-facebook_1903130001_ogo.

²¹ “The attitudes and rhetoric of some anti-covid activists gradually became radicalized over the course of the year, but they were unable to reach a wider spectrum of the public with their opinions and protest activities.” (“Výroční zpráva Bezpečnostní informační služby za rok 2014” [Security Information Service Annual Report 2014], 2015).

²² “Various quasi-media platforms and accounts on digital platforms have brought with them a trend of aggressive and invasive behavior and the “normalization” of lying. Their outputs have a strong radicalizing potential.” (“Zpráva o extremismu na území České republiky v roce 2022”, [Report on extremism in the territory of the Czech Republic in 2022], 2023) <https://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/extremismus-vyrocní-zpravy-o-extremismu-a-strategie-boje-proti-extremismu.aspx>.

²³ “In various forms and to varying extents, aggression against Ukraine is justified, approved and expressed in support. The source is primarily official Russian propaganda and Russian media. Not only alternative media, certain websites and information portals, but also users of social networks and users of various applications are used for this activity. As a result of this activity, there is polarization of society, protests, as well as support for Russia and the invasion of Ukraine. This leads to the creation and strengthening of the so-called an anti-institutional movement that mobilizes against the state, its organization, institutions and demands comprehensive or partial changes, especially by means of a revolutionary, not a legal, path.” (“Výroční zpráva NCOZ 2022”, [NCOZ Annual Report 2022], 2023).

²⁴ Krásenská Daniela. “Přibýlo trestných činů z nenávisti. Proč to může být i “dobrá” zpráva.” [Hate crimes have increased. Why it can also be "good" news], *Seznam zprávy*, 2 June 2023.

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²⁶ “Výroční zpráva Bezpečnostní informační služby za rok 2015 Obsah,” [Annual report of the Security Information Service for the year 2015 Contents], *BIS*, 2016.

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²⁸ “Zpráva o extremismu na území České republiky v roce 2012,” [Report on extremism in the territory of the Czech Republic in 2012], *Ministerstvo vnitra*, 2013.

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³⁷ An overview of pro-Russian disinformation projects on social networks and websites can be found on the pages of the National Fund for Independent Journalism

(<https://www.nfnz.cz/dezinformacni-a-konspiracni-media/>), on the pages of the Atlas

Konspirací project (http://www.atlaskonspiraci.cz/Hlavni_strana), or on the website

Konspiratori.sk (<https://konspiratori.sk>), which also profiles the Czech environment.

³⁸ For example, there were a number of disinformation narratives that drew attention to the criminal activities of migrants in European countries, usually with an emphasis on the sexual undertones of the alleged criminal acts. (Klingová, Katarína, and Miroslava Sawiris. 2016.

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