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THE RUSSIAN CONNECTIONS OF FAR-RIGHT AND PARAMILITARY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Edited by Edit Zgut and Lóránt Győri

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The Russian connections of far-right and paramilitary organizations in the Czech Republic

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FOREWORD

This paper is a summary of the results of a one-year-long research project covering five countries and exploring the connections between a wide range of pro-Kremlin stakeholders and Central-Eastern European countries' political forces in general and the violent, fringe extreme-right movements in particular. Political Capital has already published Europe-wide researches¹ and country-specific case studies on the connections between (far-right) political players in Slovakia² and Hungary,³ and published a report on the „export” of ultraconservative, illiberal values by pro-Kremlin players to Central-Eastern Europe.⁴ Others have done important research on this topic as well.⁵ However, this is the first research project that focuses mainly on the *violent* ramifications of the strategy of the Russian state and its proxies to support fringe, extremist organizations in order to undermine bilateral ties with Ukraine and the United States, and destabilize the region. The five countries that we are focusing on are Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. Most of our findings are indicative of the trends in the broader region.

The war in Eastern Ukraine and the migration crisis have acted as a catalyst to not only re-legitimize these extremist organizations' sine qua non for paramilitary activities, but to pit against each other organisations harbouring ancient chauvinistic and revisionist historical sentiments between their respective Central-Eastern European. The Kremlin's aim is undeniable as part of this process. Through reaching out to or supporting paramilitary organisations, it successfully destabilizes Ukraine and the surrounding European region to keep Ukraine's legitimacy, territorial sovereignty, minority issues in constant limbo.

¹ Szabados, Krisztián, Krekó, Péter: Russia's far-right friends. Riskandforecast.com
http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/in-depth-analysis/russia-s-far-right-friends_349.html

Political Capital Institute. *The Russian connection. The spread of pro-Russian policies on the European far right.* Budapest., 2014. http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc_flash_report_russian_connection.pdf

² Krekó, Péter et al., *Marching Towards Eurasia, The Kremlin connections of the Slovak far-right.* Political Capital-Social Development Institute, 2015. Accessed March 20, 2017.
http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_Study_Russian_Influence_Slovakia_ENG.pdf

³ Juhász, Attila et al., *I am Eurasian- the Kremlin Connections of the Hungarian Far-Right.* Political Capital-Social Development Institute, 2015. Accessed March 20, 2017.
http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_SDI_Boll_study_IamEurasian.pdf

⁴ Krekó, Péter et al., *The Weaponization of Culture – Kremlin's Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Eastern Europe.* Political Capital, 2016. Accessed March 20, 2017. http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_reactionary_values_CEE_20160727.pdf

⁵ Shekhovtsov, Anton (in press): *Tango Noir: Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), forthcoming.

Polyakova, Alina. "Putinism and the European Far Right." Institute of Modern Russia (2016).

Orenstein, Mitchell A. "Putin's Western Allies." *Foreign Affairs* 25 (2014).

Marlene Laruelle (Ed.). *Eurasianism and the European Far Right: Reshaping the Europe–Russia Relationship.* Edited by Lexington Books, 2015.

Mudde, Cas. "Russia's Trojan Horse." (2014). Opendemocracy.

The Czech Republic exhibits pro-Russian actors on every level of the political system starting with President Milos Zeman at the top and ending with a paramilitary unit representing the “Donetsk People's Republic” in Ostrava, a city in the Moravian-Silesian Region. While these actors have little political significance on their own, together they amount to a loud pro-Russian lobby demanding the Czech Republic’s secession from the EU and NATO and the recognition of the unlawful secession of Crimea. They are supported by the powerful pro-Russian “alternative media.” The security threat caused by disinformation activities is so grave that the Ministry of Interior launched a monitoring centre in January 2017 to counter the hostile narratives and information attacks coming from the Kremlin.

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All errors and omissions are our own.

METHODOLOGY

During the study, we often refer to the terms “Russian influence” or the “Kremlin’s influence”. These notions are connected by the term “Russian influence through power,” by which we mean explicit and implicit actions by the Russian state and related actors (including intellectuals, businessmen, journalists, etc.) or organizations aiming at creating political changes in the behaviour and/or political agenda of certain political actors through political means and/or financial instruments. The “soft power” of Kremlin mainly concerns Moscow’s ability to persuade others to do what it wants without direct force or coercion, but with attraction⁶ mainly through the means of Russian or pro-Russian media.

This analysis of Russian influence on far-right or paramilitary extremists in the Czech Republic is based on investigations involving the media, press releases from politicians, political parties and scientific analysis.

The main goals of the research are the following:

- 1.) Describe the basic social, political, and economic frameworks of Russia’s presence in the Czech Republic in order to understand the nature and modus operandi of Russian direct or indirect influence on the fringes of society.
- 2.) Reveal personal, organizational, media and other linkages between pro-Russian, fringe political actors and the Kremlin or Kremlin stakeholders.
- 3.) Collect and analyse the most important pro-Russian declarations and actions of the relevant radical political players in the Czech Republic.

We used the following research methods:

- 1.) Desktop research to collect the necessary information, create a timeline of developments and events, and gather statements from informed sources.
- 2.) Analysis of Czech pro-Russian media outlets and Facebook pages.
- 3.) Primary research with the aim of gaining confidential information from actors within or close to the political fringes, and used directly or indirectly to exert influence. In order to protect their identity, sources of such information remain anonymous in the study.
- 4.) In-depth interviews with experts from academia, politics and the media to gather background information and provide a broader view of certain actors and events.

Two interviews have been conducted with:

- Miroslav Mareš, political scientist, Department of Political Science, Masaryk University
- Jakub Tomášek, analyst, the Prague Security Studies Institute

⁶ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 1st ed (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

MAIN FINDINGS

- Openly pro-Russian Czech political parties and organizations predominantly represent nationalist or far-right positions. They are small with limited influence in politics and society, however, they are present at all levels of the Czech political system from the president's office to local branches of paramilitary organizations, often utilizing high-profile tactics and rhetoric.
- The ultimate goal for many of these actors is to form both a domestic and an international pro-Russian geopolitical platform opposed to liberal democratic institutions, the European Union and NATO. Political parties like Freedom and Direct Democracy or National Democracy openly delegitimise Czech democratic institutions, while supporting the Kremlin's narrative on Crimea and opposing the economic sanctions against Russia.
- In the Czech Republic, we also find that the organizations and associations officially or semi-officially promoting Russian interests often have ties to Russian embassies or centres of science and culture, e.g. the Institute of Slavic Strategic Studies. Their ideological background is built on pan-Slavic ideological foundations and partly following Alexander Dugin's Eurasian geopolitical school.
- These actors see Putin's policy of stressing conservative values, national pride and sovereignty very favourably. In the current political crises, their domestic anti-establishment and xenophobic platform easily aligns with admiration for Putin as the "defender of Christianity" against an "ailing" West faced with the problem of mass migration.
- The landscape of extremist paramilitary organizations is quite varied when it comes to their views on Russia: some of them are openly supportive of the Kremlin, but other movements have no affiliation with pro-Russian platforms at all.
- Still, the quite significant amount of pro-Russian propaganda produced by the Czech fringe media provides an ideological background for the expansion of paramilitary activities and paramilitary groups and the existence of these groups in turn contributes to the reach of Russian media outlets.
- The pro-Russian organizations' strength lies in the tight-knit nature of pro-Russian activities. For example, the Institute of Slavic Strategic Studies can disseminate disinformation calling Ukraine an illegitimate or "neo-Nazi" state supported by the West in the Czech parliament, with the assistance of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, as well as the Freedom and Direct Democracy party. The National Democracy party has been involved in the establishment of the paramilitary National Home Guard, which is in fact a civil society organization.

- It has headed the unofficial consulate of the Donetsk People's Republic since it opened in September 2016. In general, these pro-Russian organizations serve three basic functions: 1.) legitimizing the Kremlin's geopolitical stances; 2.) destabilizing the domestic, European and Transatlantic structures through supporting extremist forces; 3.) spreading anti-Western narratives. Although the paramilitary groups do not present an actual threat to the Czech Republic, it is definitely necessary to monitor their activities, since in a direct crisis situation involving Russia they would pose the biggest threat in terms of the destabilization of the country: the paramilitary Czechoslovak Soldiers in Reserves is in touch with both Czech and Slovak pro-Russian activists, while the National Homeguard is in contact with separatists in Eastern Ukraine.
- Moreover, Czech intelligence services acknowledged the risk of Czech pro-Russian organizations being targeted by Russian intelligence. Given the fact that some of these organizations were established or re-activated between 2013 and 2015, this may have already happened through so-called "active measures", a form of proactive political initiative-taking abroad by Russian services.
- As a reaction, the Ministry of Interior launched the Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats on January 1, 2017, the task of which is to monitor propaganda and disinformation campaigns and challenge them.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into consideration the diversity of political and ideological influences in the respective countries, there can be no “one size fits all” strategy to repulse the increasingly frequent and intense attempts of the Kremlin’s efforts to gain influence through the political fringes. The major difference is that while Russia is actively interfering with European politics and societies, the political will to repulse the soft and hard power tactics, such as ideological export, is mostly lacking in Europe and in the respective member states.

In the Czech Republic, the actors of Russian influence and radicalisation mainly include far-right parties, various paramilitary groups, civic associations and the fringe media. A comprehensive approach needs to address the “four R’s”: revealing the ways and means of pro-Russian activities; reacting to the Russian influence or radicalisation; ridiculing or deconstructing the pro-Russian stances; repeating the process faced with a continuous effort on the side of the Kremlin. In this respect, different layers of society have different tasks to fulfil.

Sectoral recommendations

State actors: reveal & react & repeat

- Even though pro-Russian views are in the minority, other political parties should pay attention to this issue and should be keen on cultivating political debates, communicating with society, and supporting democratic culture. They should reject pro-Russian orientation more openly.
- Intelligence services are already aware of Russian agents in the Czech Republic. Paramilitary activities should be constantly monitored. These activities do not currently constitute a real threat, but the situation may change due to fluctuating international conditions or the intensification of Russian attempts to gain influence.
- To prevent society from manipulation by disinformation and propaganda, critical thinking and media literacy skills should be improved in the general population. Mostly the young and the elderly are susceptible to this type of manipulation.
- In this context, all political actors should work to offer a solid alternative to the Russian world-view. This is necessitated by the sociological assumption that individuals need to exist within a stable value system. When a system of values does not benefit the individual and does not provide answers to his problems, that person begins to search for an alternative.

Civic actors: react & ridicule

- Media literacy and critical thinking is mostly the domain of the education system and civil society. More attention should be paid to this aspect of society.

- Human rights organizations should enhance cooperation in activities which curb the ideological influence of pro-Russian fringe organizations, including recruitment and resource management.
- HRAWs should directly engage vulnerable groups prone to radicalisation by providing pre-emptive education options and de-radicalisation programs and lectures.

Media: reveal & ridicule

- The Czech media should take the lead in revealing the extent of Russian influence over paramilitary groups, protest movements, civic organizations and investigative journalism in order to raise awareness among the wider public, decision-makers and NGOs.
- Media should cooperate with NGOs to ridicule the conspiracy theory-based, anti-progressive, anti-gender messages of far-right, paramilitary organizations.

CZECH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

After fall of communist regime in 1989, Czechoslovak official representatives started the process of orienting the country's foreign policy towards the so-called West. The stress was on building good relations with neighbouring countries, countries in the European community, and NATO. On January 1, 1993 the federation split and the Czech Republic was established. Josef Zielenec became the new minister of foreign affairs, and clearly declared that the national interest of the Czech Republic was obtaining membership in NATO and the EU.

Diplomatic relations between the Czech Republic and the Russian Federation were officially established on January 1, 1993. During an official visit to the Czech Republic in August 1993, the Treaty on Friendly Relations and Cooperation was signed by President Boris Jelcin and President Václav Havel. Václav Havel shortly and unofficially visited Russia in 1995 to commemorate the end of World War II. President Václav Klaus visited St. Petersburg in May 2003 and during his official visit to Russia he met Vladimir Putin in his private residence near Moscow. In May 2005, he visited Russia again to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II. In March 2006, Vladimir Putin visited the Czech Republic. Since 2001, the foreign ministers of the two countries have met each other officially once a year. A series of official visits by other ministers have also taken place. In 2005, the two countries signed an intergovernmental agreement on economic, industrial and scientific cooperation.

During the 1990s and in the first decade of new millennium, official relations with Russia were mostly limited to declarations about the development of the relationship between the two sides in areas of common interest. Most of the focus was directed at relations with the USA and the EU.

Special attention has always been paid to bilateral relations in energy policy, since Russia is the biggest supplier of gas to the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic's leadership is aware of this fact and tries to search for other suppliers to reduce its dependence on Russia. These discussions were accelerated after the energy crisis in 2009, when Russia halted gas supplies to Europe because of a conflict between Russia and Ukraine, an important transit country. At the time, Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek played a role in the conflict as a mediator and led negotiations on relaunching deliveries (the Czech Republic held the EU presidency in the first half of 2009). At that point, Czech representatives realized that Russia is a continuing threat to the country's energy security.

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AFTER THE CRIMEAN ANNEXATION

After the annexation of Crimea, Czech deputies issued a statement rejecting the move. In a resolution approved by 121 deputies, the annexation was recognized as a violent act by the Russian Federation. The Czech government officially refused to accept the Crimean referendum. Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka interprets the referendum as an attempt to challenge the security arrangements of the region, which was defined after the collapse of the USSR⁷. The Czech Republic also officially supports the sanctions policy of the EU towards Russia. The Czech position is that focus needs to be directed at sanctions against specific sectors of trade, mainly military supplies.

Officially, there has not been any turbulent changes in bilateral diplomatic relations. As in the past, the Czech President visited Russia in May 2015 to commemorate the anniversary of the end of World War II. Even though this kind of visit is traditional, in the context of the annexation of Crimea and the tense relations between the EU and Russia, this visit was criticized. Miloš Zeman was the only president of an EU member state present at the event. A diplomatic incident arose when the official Czech delegation was not allowed to continue their journey from the Moscow airport to Uljanovsk in October 2015. The trip had been announced in advance. Members of the delegation included a deputy of the Chamber of Deputies, Petr Gazdík, and representatives of the Czech Ministry of Defence. Russian officials claimed the issue was caused by an administrative mistake. The delegation was allowed to continue after more than three hours of waiting.

⁷ Josef Kopecký, "Česko Neuznává Održení Krymu, Chce S Ukrajinou Jednat O Vstupu Do EU," *iDNES.cz*, March 17, 2014, http://zpravy.idnes.cz/cesko-neuznava-odtrzeni-krymu-zeman-pro-posileni-jeho-autonomie-ph7-/domaci.aspx?c=A140317_120510_domaci_kop.

SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING RUSSIA

Russia is a more prominent issue in security debates than in diplomatic discussions. In the new Czech Security Strategy from 2015 it is mentioned that the Czech Republic is aware of the security threat posed by some states seeking to revise the existing international order. Those states weaken cooperative security mechanisms. They are ready to achieve their goals by using hybrid warfare strategies combining conventional and unconventional military means with non-military tools.⁸ In this context, the Russian Federation is directly mentioned in the report on an audit of the national security situation in 2016. The Russian propaganda and disinformation campaign is recognized as one of top 10 threats to Czech internal security. Intelligence services monitor attempts to build networks of like-minded people amongst politicians, state officers and lobbyists.⁹ As a reaction to this threat, the Ministry of Interior launched the Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats on January 1, 2017, the task of which is to monitor propaganda and disinformation campaigns and challenge them.

The Czech Counter-Intelligence Agency BIS (Bezpečnostní informační služba claims in Czech) claims in its 2015 annual report: "In 2015, Chinese and Russian intelligence services were the most active in the Czech Republic." In relation to the Ukrainian and Syrian conflicts, Russia focused on influencing and information operations as part of its non-linear (hybrid, ambiguous, irregular, non-conventional) warfare. In 2015, Russian information operations in the Czech Republic focused especially on:

- weakening the strength of Czech media (covert infiltration of Czech media and the Internet, mass production of Russian propaganda and disinformation controlled by the state);
- strengthening the information resistance of the Russian audience (prefabricated disinformation from Czech sources for the Russian audience);
- exerting influence on the perceptions and thoughts of the Czech audience, weakening society's will for resistance or confrontation (overloading the audience with information and disinformation, relativization of truth and objectivity, promoting the motto "everyone is lying");
- creating or promoting inter-societal and inter-political tensions in the Czech Republic (foundation of puppet organizations, covert and overt support of populist or extremist subjects);

⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, "Bezpečnostní Strategie České Republiky," 2015, <https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/brs/dokumenty/bezpecnostni-strategie-2015.pdf>.

⁹ Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic, "Audit Národní Bezpečnosti," 2016, <https://www.vlada.cz/assets/media-centrum/aktualne/Audit-narodni-bezpecnosti-20161201.pdf>.

- disrupting the coherence and readiness of NATO and the EU (attempts to disrupt Czech-Polish relations, disinformation and alarming rumors defaming the US and NATO, disinformation creating a virtual threat of war with Russia);
- damaging the reputation of Ukraine and isolating the country internationally (involving Czech citizens and organizations in influence operations covertly performed in Ukraine or against it by Russia)."¹⁰

¹⁰ Czech Counter-Intelligence Agency BIS, "Security Information Service (BIS)," 2015, <https://www.bis.cz/vyrocnizpravaEN890a.html?ArticleID=1104>.

EFFECTS OF THE SANCTIONS AND ECONOMIC-ENERGY DEPENDENCY

Since the Czech Republic is officially supporting economic sanctions against Russia, it affects Czech business. The prolongation of the sanctions in 2016 was criticised by the Agrarian Chamber representing businessmen in agriculture. The president of the Agrarian Chamber regularly stresses that Czech agricultural companies have been dealing with complications due to decreasing prices, loss of access to foreign markets, and threats to the job market. He also points out that companies have to deal with lost investments and resources that were spent on entering the Russian market before 2014. Additionally, the president of the Chamber of Commerce says that sanctions do not have any effect on Russian international policy. According to him, the Chamber is helping Czech businessmen to reduce negative effects by turning towards markets in countries like Iran, Cuba or Indonesia.¹¹

The volume of trade between the Czech Republic and Russia has dropped. Since 2012 it has fallen by 41 percent. In 2012, imports from Russia totalled CZK 154,900 million, while exports to Russia amounted to CZK 118,024 million. In 2014, when the sanctions were applied, imports dropped to CZK 129,494 million and export to CZK 113,018 million. In 2015, the situation worsened: imports amounted to CZK 103,715 million and exports to CZK 78,812 million.¹² However, the total volume of the Czech foreign trade has increased since 2012. Based on general statistics and from a general perspective, the economic sanctions did not hurt Czech foreign trade in general, because Czech companies were able to turn towards other markets.

The current situation in international relations between the EU and Russia is another argument for focusing on policies aimed at lowering the country's energy dependency on Russian energy resources. Most of the gas coming to the Czech Republic originates from Russia (75 percent), while the rest comes from Norway. Statistics indicate however that in 2015 the situation changed and only 5 percent of gas supplies came from Norway. Since the crisis in 2009, the Czech Republic has invested in infrastructure and increasing the capacity of gas storage, and now one-third of a year's worth of gas consumption can be stored. The construction of new LNG terminals has allowed the Czech Republic to use LNG from Qatar and the USA. The Czech Republic is also in a better situation to ensure the availability of gas supplies during potential crises since the EU as a whole has managed to diversify its gas supplies with the use of more diverse non-Russian sources.

¹¹ ČTK, "Českým Zemědělcům Se Nelíbí Prodloužení Protiruských Sankcí," June 2016, <http://www.investicniweb.cz/news-2016-6-21-komora-prodlouzenim-sankci-budou-postizeni-zemedelci/>.

¹² Český statistický úřad, "Database of Foreign Trade," accessed April 3, 2017, <http://apl.czso.cz/pll/stazo/STAZO.STAZO>.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO AND PERCEPTIONS OF RUSSIA-EU-US RELATIONS

It is also interesting to look at how the public perceives Russia, the USA, and the European Union in the Czech Republic. The data comes from the Centre for Public Opinion Research (CVVM) which surveys the Czech public regularly about their sympathies towards different countries.

Tables 1 and 2 show that the perception of Russia and the USA are stable, on average. The USA is perceived as more sympathetic than Russia. However, when looking at graph no. 1, a slight change in this trend is observed during 2015, when support for Russia started to rise and the popularity of the USA started to drop, for which there is no scientific explanation so far.

Table 1: Sympathies towards Russia 2010-2015 (in percent) ^{13,14,15,16,17}

| | 1 = Very sympathetic | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 = Very unsympathetic | Do not know | Average |
|---------------|----------------------|----|----|----|------------------------|-------------|---------|
| November 2010 | 5 | 18 | 37 | 26 | 12 | 2 | 3.22 |
| October 2012 | 6 | 22 | 37 | 23 | 10 | 2 | 3.0 |
| December 2013 | 4 | 19 | 41 | 24 | 9 | 3 | 3.15 |
| January 2015 | 4 | 17 | 34 | 27 | 16 | 2 | 3.34 |
| December 2015 | 6 | 21 | 36 | 26 | 10 | 1 | 3.12 |

¹³ CVVM, "Sympatie České Veřejnosti K Některým Zemím," 2010, http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c1/a3804/f3/101082s_pm101221b.pdf.

¹⁴ CVVM, "Sympatie České Veřejnosti K Některým Zemím," 2012, http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c1/a6929/f3/pm121214.pdf.

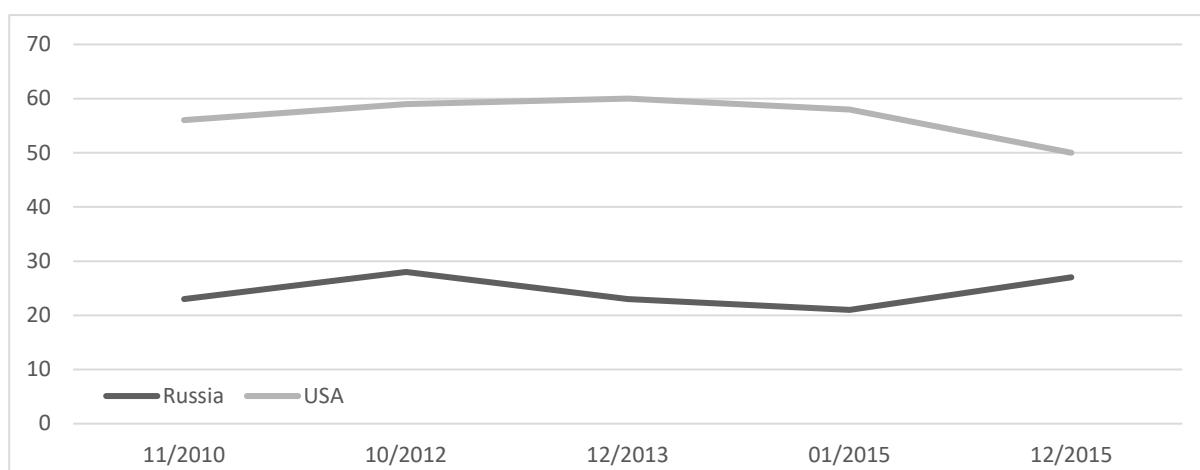
¹⁵ CVVM, "Sympatie České Veřejnosti K Některým Zemím," 2013, http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c1/a7168/f3/pm140127.pdf.

¹⁶ CVVM, "Sympatie České Veřejnosti K Některým Zemím – Leden 2015," 2015, http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c1/a7343/f3/pm150220.pdf.

¹⁷ CVVM, "Sympatie České Veřejnosti K Některým Zemím – Prosinec 2015," 2015, http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c1/a7498/f3/pm160203.pdf.

Table 2: Sympathies towards the USA 2010-2015 (in percent) ^{18,19,20,21,22}

| | 1 = Very sympathetic | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 = Very unsympathetic | Do not know | Average |
|---------------|----------------------|----|----|----|------------------------|-------------|---------|
| November 2010 | 22 | 34 | 27 | 10 | 5 | 2 | 2,41 |
| October 2012 | 22 | 37 | 27 | 8 | 4 | 2 | 2,3 |
| December 2013 | 23 | 37 | 27 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 2,3 |
| January 2015 | 22 | 36 | 28 | 9 | 3 | 2 | 2,32 |
| December 2015 | 17 | 33 | 28 | 14 | 6 | 2 | 2,58 |

Graph 1: Sympathies towards Russia and the USA (Table 1 and 2 together)

CVVM also regularly asks the Czech population about their opinion on European integration. The results from April 2016 show that Czech society is in general sceptical of the future of the European project. Thirty-six percent believe that the project of a unified Europe has a future. More than half of them do not believe in the future of the project (53 percent). Eleven percent of the public do not have any opinion. In comparison with the same survey from 2012, public opinion has not changed dramatically (35 percent believed in the project, 52 percent did not believe in it, 13 percent did not know).²³ (CVVM 2016)

¹⁸ CVVM, "Sympatie České Veřejnosti K Některým Zemím," 2010.

¹⁹ CVVM, "Sympatie České Veřejnosti K Některým Zemím," 2012.

²⁰ CVVM, "Sympatie České Veřejnosti K Některým Zemím," 2013.

²¹ CVVM, "Sympatie České Veřejnosti K Některým Zemím – Leden 2015."

²² CVVM, "Sympatie České Veřejnosti K Některým Zemím – Prosinec 2015."

²³ CVVM, "Občané ČR O Budoucnosti EU a Přijetí Eura – Duben 2016," 2016,

http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c1/a7556/f3/pm160504.pdf.

ANALYSIS OF THE KEY PRO-KREMLIN PARTIES, ASSOCIATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Political parties

The discussion of pro-Russian views among political parties, individual political representatives and organizations is currently very lively in the Czech Republic. Russian tendencies to find partners among influential personalities from politics or the media have been observed by public society, academia and also by the state itself. In 2016, the Czech Republic conducted a national security audit and one of the chapters focused on the influence of foreign countries in the Czech Republic.²⁴ Russian influence was specifically mentioned in the context of information warfare, which Russia aims at European countries. In January 2017, the Czech Ministry of Interior launched the Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats. One of its competencies is the monitoring and countering of propaganda and disinformation. The presence of Russian interference has more opportunity to spread misinformation in the context of Euroscepticism, the migration crisis and Brexit. In such a sensitive environment, some Czech political organizations and parties express their sympathies towards Russia and the official Russian policy and promote Russia as an alternative to the European Union. Mostly we talk about political parties and organizations representing nationalist or even far-right views. These political parties are small with limited influence on politics and society, but they seek media attention, using uncompromising rhetoric, and sometimes by undertaking controversial actions. Their limited influence is also due to the fact that these entities are unable to join each other and cooperate.

Freedom and Direct Democracy

The Tomio Okamura-led Freedom and Direct Democracy (Svoboda a přímá demokracie, SPD) belongs to the group of pro-Russian parliamentary parties. This party represents a populist far-right party family. It was founded in 2015 after a quarrel in the Down of Direct Democracy party, which was founded and led Tomio Okamura in 2013. He was soon expelled by his colleagues due to an “authoritarian” leadership style.²⁵ Down of Direct Democracy has continued to operate with a new leadership and under the new name Down – National Coalition retaining 3 MPs from the original party in the Chamber of Deputies.²⁶ The SPD is represented by three members in the Chamber of Deputies and there are also party representatives sitting in regional assemblies.

SPD is stressing national and conservative values. In many ways it is a typical Eurosceptic party, as indicated by their call for a referendum on the Czech Republic’s withdrawal from the EU.²⁷ In January 2016, the Chamber of Deputies discussed SPD’s petition supporting the referendum.

²⁴ Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic, “Audit Národní Bezpečnosti.”

²⁵ Czech News Agency, “Okamura Cries ‘putsch!’ - PRAGUE POST | The Voice of Prague,” *Archive.is*, February 27, 2015, <http://archive.is/i9lxy>.

²⁶ iHned.cz, “Okamura Zakládá Novou Stranu. Svoboda a Přímá Demokracie Bude Mít Stejný Program Jako Úsvit,” *Hospodářské Noviny*, May 5, 2015, <http://domaci.ihned.cz/c1-63966930-okamura-zaklada-novou-stranu-svoboda-a-prima-demokracie-bude-mit-stejny-program-jako-usvit>.

²⁷ SPD, “» Tomio Okamura: Jsme Kolonií Ždímanou Bez Skrupulí,” 2016, <http://spd.cz/tomio-okamura-jsme-kolonii-zdimanou-bez-skrupuli/>.

The proposal was rejected. The party is also characterized by its anti-immigrant stance and islamophobia. Tomio Okamura is fighting for stricter immigration laws, expelling illegal immigrants from the country and making radical Islam illegal. He became famous for his strong anti-Muslim stances. Once he advised walking dogs and pigs near Muslim mosques. In another strong statement he tried to prevent people from buying kebab or eating in Muslim restaurants, accusing them of providing financial support for radical Islam. “We can express our disapproval in business, and do not buy kebab, cell phones, nothing. Do not exchange money. It is one of the sources for the financial expansion of Islam... We can ignore halal stores and restaurants. They also indirectly support and finance raising Islamists here.” Additionally, the party does not only use anti-Muslim rhetoric, but spreads anti-Roma sentiment as well.

In one of his video logs, Tomio Okamura²⁸ opposed NATO and supported Russia. “The way to peace in Europe goes through cooperation with Russia, not confrontation”. He also defended Russia by claiming NATO was arming itself against Russia, standing on Russian borders and exerting pressure on the country. According to Okamura, in this situation nobody should fail to understand that Russia is defending its positions.

As for the conflict in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, Tomio Okamura consistently says that Russia has never been an aggressor in this case.²⁹ He perceives the situation in Ukraine as a civil war between separatists (with the support of volunteers from, for instance, the Czech Republic and Russia) protecting their homes, families and country on one side and the Ukrainian government’s professional army attacking civilians and trying to conquer a region that does not even historically belong to Ukraine on the other. From this point of view, Okamura describes the conflict as a civil war provoked with help of the USA and the European Union. Okamura supports holding referendums on the independence of rebel territories, because they have the right to self-determination (according to Okamura, this is the democratic method of conflict resolution), or an agreement between Kiev and pro-Russian areas on future arrangements, for example, in the form of autonomy. In 2014, Okamura also proposed that in the future the UN should adopt a mechanism that would allow citizens of any member state to legitimately and democratically vote on autonomy or independence, including peoples living in Russia.³⁰

The party is opposed to economic sanctions against Russia. They are understood as unnecessary and damaging to important sectors of Czech industry with crucial consequences for the whole of Europe. As Okamura stated, “Russia was punished for the crimes of Ukrainian fascists from Kiev...it was another instance of the dangerous stupidity of Brussels”^{31,32}

²⁸ Tomio Okamura, “Tomio Okamura Video Post on Facebook,” February 20, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/tomio.cz/videos/1158337217510425/>.

²⁹ Tomio Okamura, “Ruská Pozice,” April 27, 2015, <http://www.tomio.cz/aktuality/ruska-pozice/>.

³⁰ Tomio Okamura, “Ukrajina: Kdo Je Tu Vlastně Zločincem?,” September 8, 2014, <http://www.tomio.cz/aktuality/ukrajina-kdo-je-tu-vlastne-zlocincem/>.

³¹ Tomio Okamura, “Ekonomické Sankce Vyhlášené EU Poškozují Český Průmysl,” 2015, <http://spd.cz/tomio-okamura-ekonomicke-sankce-vyhlasene-eu-poskozuji-cesky-prumysl/>.

³² Tomio Okamura, “Sankce Vůči Rusku Byly Od Počátku Naprostá Hloupost,” 2016, <http://spd.cz/tomio-okamura-sankce-vuci-rusku-byly-od-pocatku-naprosta-hloupost/>.

Regarding the Malaysian Airlines aircraft shot down over Ukraine in 2014, SPD Deputy Radim Fiala published his statement in January 2016 (even though the investigation was still not concluded at that time). He had no doubts that it amounted to mass murder coupled with a provocation from the Ukrainian side. The first step in this provocation was taken by Ukrainian air traffic control, which sent the plane over the war zone. The aim of this step was to ignite a great war in Europe.³³

Tomio Okamura is in touch with the pro-Russian Institute of Slavic Strategic Studies. He helps the Institute by granting them access to Parliament and where they organize seminars for members of Parliament. This activity is described in more detail later in this text. At this point, it is worthy to remind readers that Tomio Okamura also gave a speech at one of the seminars, in which he mentioned that mainstream media were lying about Russia, and that it was sad to see such strong anti-Russian propaganda. He warned that the Czech Republic should not see Russia as an enemy, but as a friend.³⁴

National Democracy

In 2014, the far-right began to visibly represent itself through a new party called “No to Brussels - National Democracy”. At the end of 2014 it changed its name to National Democracy (Národní demokracie, ND). Legally, it is the successor of the Association of Pensioners of the Czech Republic, which was founded in 1994 as a project with ties to Miroslav Sládek’s Republicans,^{35,36} ND was established by activist Adam Bartoš. He was among the founders of the website Eurabia.cz (a portal providing information on Islam, which is framed as a threat to Europe), but originally was also a strong advocate of the state of Israel.³⁷ Gradually, he moved towards the anti-Semitic and pro-Russian nationalist spectrum and these aspects are evident in the policy of ND. Adam Bartoš is known for creating and publishing a list of influential Czech Jews. Anti-Islam and anti-refugee stances are combined with conspiracy theories. ND appeared in 2014 as a new entity, although possessing the relatively long legal history mentioned above. Before the European Parliament elections in 2014 the party published a campaign ad, which combined anti-Semitic, anti-Islam and conspiracy elements (Jewish control over the world, Freemasons, chemtrails, everyday surveillance over citizens, vaccination) to justify its opposition to the EU and its bureaucracy. In 2015, ND managed to take over the Islamophobic agenda and to play a significant role in anti-refugee and anti-Islamic demonstrations.³⁸ ND also initiated the foundation of its own pro-Russian paramilitary group, the National Home Guard, which is described in the next chapter. This paramilitary formation has been organized to protect the Czech border and public order.³⁹

³³ Radim Fiala, “Fakta O Malajském Letounu,” 2016, <http://spd.cz/1376-2/>).

³⁴ Okamura, “Tomio Okamura Video Post on Facebook.”

³⁵ Miroslav Mareš, *Pravicový Extremismus a Radikalismus v ČR*, 1.vyd (Brno: Barrister & Principal : Centrum strategických studií, 2003).

³⁶ In the 1990’s, SPR-RSČ was a popular anti-establishment party with a political platform against massive corruption during the voucher privatisation or alleged high criminality among Roma (Gypsies).

³⁷ The media itself is not pro-Russian, and Bartoš has already left the platform.

³⁸ Miroslav Mareš and Petra Vejvodová, “Pravicově-extremistická protiislámská politika,” in *Ne islámu!: protiislámská politika v České republice*, 2015.

³⁹ Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic, “Zpráva O Extremismu Na Území ČR v Roce 2015,” 2015, <http://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/extremismus-vyrocní-zpráva-o-extremismu-a-strategie-boje-proti-extremismu.aspx>.

ND's programme advocates the creation of a strong nation state and a return to traditional conservative values. ND stands against immigration and multiculturalism. It criticizes the EU. In the economic domain, the party supports economic nationalism and the policy of welfare chauvinism. It opposes LGBT rights (including registered partnership, which is legal in the Czech Republic) and, on the other hand, stresses traditional family patterns. The National Democracy has become closer to the ultra-conservative value set of the Kremlin emphasising the trinity of nation, family and Christianity, however, this process seems to be one-sided with no direct intervention from Russian stakeholders.

The party's performance in elections is insignificant. ND has so far been unsuccessful on any level. In 2014, the party tried to compete in the EP elections. Adam Bartoš explained this decision by saying that the ND would like to hit this Jewish-Freemason concept with a deadly blow. In the regional elections in 2016, the party was unable to cross the 5 percent threshold and earn any seats in regional assemblies. In the most successful region for the party, it only obtained 0,3 percent of votes.

In March 2014, in regards to the Russian annexation of Crimea, the ND addressed a letter to the Russian embassy expressing support to Vladimir Putin and the Russian people in their efforts to ensure order, security and stability in Ukraine.⁴⁰ In the letter ND leadership wrote that Russia is a bastion of the Christian faith and culture. Previously, their support for former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich rested on similar foundations. ND also expressed opposition to the practices of the EU and the USA and to the alleged anti-Russian media propaganda.⁴¹

Deputy Chairman Ladislav Zemánek told the Voice of Russia (currently Sputnik) in March 2014 that the Czech Republic was behaving as a "useful idiot" for the EU and the United States. The Ukrainian government, according to him, is in place thanks to a Western-backed coup, during which the legitimate president of the country, Yanukovich, was illegally overthrown.⁴² Ladislav Zemánek is very open in his pro-Russian orientation. He sees Putin's policy of stressing conservative values, national pride and sovereignty very favourably. What's more, he describes it as a hope for all Europeans who do not believe in the EU. Membership in the Eurasian Union would be possible and it is his preferred alternative.⁴³ In November 2014 he attended the elections in Eastern Ukraine as an election observer. Consequently, he was then labelled as a persona non grata by the Ukrainian government.⁴⁴

The Chairman of ND Adam Bartoš admitted that he sees allies in Russian political parties such as United Russia, Zhirinovskiy's LDPR and Zyuganov's communists, although no proof of direct contacts between them has emerged so far. He admires their patriotism and fight for national sovereignty.

⁴⁰ Ivana Svobodová, "Adam B. Bartoš: Klaus Už Nemá Sílu, Tahle Země Potřebuje Kotlebu," *Týdeník Respekt*, accessed April 3, 2017, <https://www.respekt.cz/politika/adam-b-bartos-klaus-uz-nema-silu-tahle-zeme-potrebuje-kotlebu>.

⁴¹ Infokurýr.cz, "Zemánek: Přístup Západu Ke Krymu Je Licoměrný - Info Kurýr," 2014, <http://infokurýr.cz/news.php?extend.4123.2>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Cz.sputniknews.com, "Sputnik Česká Republika - Mimořádné Zprávy a Názory: Foto, Video, Infografiky, Rádio," 2014, https://cz.sputniknews.com/2014_12_05/Zemanek-Euroasijsky-svaz-muze-byt-pro-Cesko-pritazlivy-8789/.

⁴⁴ ČT24, "Doubravu, Zemánka a Gegalčije Označí Kyjev Za Nežádoucí Osoby," ČT24, 2014, <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/svet/1010918-doubravu-zemanka-a-gegalcije-oznaci-kyjev-za-nezadouci-osoby>.

He also highly appreciates Vladimir Putin as a positive example in terms of international and domestic policy. He labelled him as one of the greatest rulers in Russian history.⁴⁵ Bartoš also owns the publishing house ABB, which, among others, recently published Alexander Dugin's book "The Great War of Continents".

ND joined the "World National-Conservative Movement" in 2015. According to Anton Shekhovtsov,⁴⁶ the political party Motherland (Rodina) stands behind the creation of this movement. A member of Motherland Yuriy Lyubomirskiy is the chair of the organising committee of the World National-Conservative Movement. Its members are far-right political parties and organizations from Europe and the USA, such as the Golden Dawn, Falanga, the National Democratic Party of Germany, Jobbik, British Unity and the American Freedom Party. It has more than 50 members altogether. Some of the parties invited to participate in the Movement had already been participants in the International Russian Conservative Forum, which took place in St. Petersburg in March 2015. The forum was organized by the party Motherland (Rodina), which was founded by current Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin.⁴⁷

In September 2016, a foreign representation of the Donetsk People's Republic opened in the Czech Republic⁴⁸. Since the Czech Republic does not officially recognize the Donetsk People's Republic, the representation cannot be considered a diplomatic mission. Nela Lisková became the head of this centre, representing herself as an honorary consul (which is actually illegal).⁴⁹ Lisková established relations with the self-proclaimed republic during her visits to the Donetsk region. Lisková is also head of the National Home Guard established by ND.

Workers' Party of Social Justice

The Workers' Party of Social Justice (Dělnická strana sociální spravedlnosti, DSSS) is the de facto successor party to the Workers' Party, which was dissolved by the decision of the Supreme Administrative Court in 2010.⁵⁰ The party was recognized as xenophobic, hatred-inciting, and connected to neo-Nazi networks. The membership of the Workers' Party then moved to the DSSS, which had existed under various names since 2004. Staff continuity, however, was tied to DS. The DSSS stayed connected to the youth organization Workers' Youth as well, which had previously been tied to the DS. The Workers' Party was founded in 2002 (initially under the name of New Force).

⁴⁵ Adam B. Bartoš, "Adam B. Bartoš pro Ruský Portál Stoletie: V Současném Konfliktu Jsme Na Straně Ruska," *Adam B. Bartoš* |||, July 26, 2015, <https://abbartos.wordpress.com/2015/07/26/adam-b-bartos-pro-rusky-portal-stoletie-v-soucasnem-konfliktu-jsme-na-strane-ruska/>.

⁴⁶ Anton Shekhovtsov, "Russian Politicians Building an International Extreme Right Alliance," 2015, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2015/09/russian-politicians-building.html>.

⁴⁷ Anton Shekhovtsov, "The Far right 'International Russian Conservative Forum' to Take Place in Russia," 2015, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2015/03/freedom-party-of-austria-will.html>.

⁴⁸ ČT24, "Falešný Konzulát „neexistující" republiky: V Ostravě Mají Mít Zastoupení Doněčtí Povstalci," ČT24, August 2016, <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/domaci/1891472-falesny-konzulat-neexistujici-republiky-v-ostrave-maji-mit-zastoupeni-donecti>.

⁴⁹ Národní domobrana, "Nela Lisková Jmenována Honorárním Konzulem DNR v ČR!," 2016, <http://www.narodnidomobrana.cz/185-nela-liskova-jmenovana-honorarnim-konzulem-dnr-v-ceske-republice>.

⁵⁰ NSS, "NSS Rozpustil Dělnickou Stranu," 2010, http://www.nssoud.cz/main.aspx?cls=art&art_id=427.

In the second half of the first decade its integration with the militant neo-Nazi scene intensified (contacts and cooperation with e.g. the National/Free Resistance, the women's organization Resistance Women Unity and the Autonomous Nationalists). Their electoral results have never exceeded two percent. Some of their candidates were only successful in local elections.

The Workers' Party of Social Justice is a typical far-right political party. It supports a strongly nationalist programme containing anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim elements, the latter ones becoming even stronger during the 2015 migration crisis in Europe. Previously, the party had for a long time focused exclusively on the Roma issue, which they used to raise their profile. The party's paramilitary organisation Protection Corps and the clusters around them were at the root of the anti-Roma riots in Northern Bohemia in 2008-2009⁵¹ and later in 2013.⁵² DSSS is also opposed to multiculturalism, LGBT rights, liberalism and globalization. It is a strictly Eurosceptic party and demands the withdrawal of the Czech Republic from the EU.

When the conflict in Ukraine began, DSSS was planning to invite representatives of the Ukrainian Right Sector to the Czech Republic in 2014.⁵³ DSSS clearly declared its support for Ukraine against pro-Russian separatists, explaining that it is important to protect the integrity of any state. The only right way for the Ukraine to proceed was to strengthen its sovereignty while avoiding the influence of the EU or Russia. At that time, Russia was seen as an important geopolitical actor that could ensure balance and stability in international policy, but definitely not as an ideal country.⁵⁴ Economic sanctions against Russia were criticized from the beginning.

As time goes by, it has become clear that DSSS is a pro-Russian political party. In June 2015, DSSS entered the far-right European political party Alliance for Peace and Freedom (AFP). Since December 2015 the leadership of the AFP belongs to the Chairman of DSSS Tomáš Vandas. In the AFP political parties such as the National Democratic Party of Germany, Golden Dawn, New Force, Kotleba - People's Party Our Slovakia and the British Unity Party are represented.

⁵¹ Martin Bastl et al., *Krajní pravice a krajní levice v ČR* (Praha: Grada, 2011).

⁵² The party was radicalised in 2007 when it started cooperating with neo-Nazi organizations such as the Autonomous Nationalists and/or National Resistance. Since 2007 it has also been obvious that the party focused much more on the issue of the Roma minority. Already in May 2007, the party had organized a petition against positive discrimination (framed by the Roma issue). In 2008, the Protection Corps were founded, officially used as a monitoring group in so-called problematic areas in the Czech Republic. In practice, problematic areas were understood to be areas with a Roma population. In 2008, the number of public events organized in conjunction with neo-Nazi organizations also increased. The riskiest event, the so-called battle of Janov (part of the city Litvín), happened in November 2008, with a high number of Roma people involved. Party members together with neo-Nazi organizations came to this area. The whole event was accompanied with clashes with the police and presented as an attempt to bring justice to Roma gangsters. (Bastl, Mareš, Smolík, Vejvodová 2011) The head of the party proclaimed to media that the party was fighting for an ethnically and racially clean country (iDnes 2008). The year 2009 was typical for a wave of so-called spontaneous demonstrations. Another wave of demonstrations related to the issue of the Roma minority came about in 2013. The party organized a row of demonstrations in different towns across the Czech Republic. The most violent happened in Ostrava, where demonstrations ended in a clash with police.

⁵³ Šárka Pálková, "Vandas Zve Radikály Z Majdanu Do Česka. Chce Vědět, Jak Na Kmotry | Domov," *Lidovky.cz*, February 26, 2014, http://www.lidovky.cz/vandas-zve-radikaly-z-majdanu-prav7-sektor-do-ceska-vedi-jak-na-kmotry-1je-/zpravy-domov.aspx?c=A140226_114013_in_domov_spa.

⁵⁴ Erik Lamprecht, "Lamprecht (DSSS): Mocenský Zápas O Ukrajinu | DSSS Proti Imigraci!," 2014, http://www.dsss.cz/lamprecht-_dsss_-_mocensky-zapas-o-ukrajinu.

The APF keeps in contact with Russia and supports the policy of Vladimir Putin, including the Russian policy in Crimea and Syria. Russia and Vladimir Putin are depicted as the saviours of Christian civilisation.⁵⁵ ⁵⁶ In March 2015, AFP representatives arrived at the International Russian Conservative Forum in St. Petersburg.⁵⁷

The DSSS might also be a member of World National-Conservative Movement.⁵⁸

Associations and organizations

It is not only political parties that support Russian policies and undertake pro-Russian political actions. In the Czech Republic, we also find organizations and associations officially or semi-officially promoting Russian interests and policies. After Crimea's annexation, their activity has intensified. Before, their activities had mostly focused on criticising the Czech government's policies or keeping the Czech-Russian friendship (in the form of cultural relations) alive. Some of the organizations were already active in 2007 and protested against the intended construction of an American missile defence base in the Czech Republic. This plan was dropped in 2009.

The Institute of Slavic Strategic Studies

The pro-Russian NGO Institute of Slavic Strategic Studies was founded in 2013 in Prague. The institute organizes public discussions in the Czech Parliament, the last one in April 2016 with the title "Myths about Russia". During seminars, they present topics related to foreign policy, for instance about Russian policy or the war in Syria. During discussions they mostly promote pro-Russian opinions and criticise the EU and the USA. The Freedom and Direct Democracy party and its chairman, Tomio Okamura, helps co-organize these seminars. In 2016, the party sponsored the seminars officially.⁵⁹ The Institute is not a newcomer to the Czech Parliament. Their first seminar there was in 2014, focusing on myths about Russia and Yugoslavia. The Institute had been invited by Members of Parliament Soňa Marková (Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia) and Jaroslav Foldyna (Czech Social Democratic Party). During the seminar called "Current Fascism in Europe" in 2014, sponsored by the Chairman of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia Vojtěch Filip, speakers described Ukraine as a neo-Nazi state backed by the USA. "Ukraine is a new neo-Nazi state. No wonder that Crimea wanted to secede", said Natalija Vitrenkova, the chairman of Progress Socialist Party of Ukraine.⁶⁰ The co-organizer of that seminar was Sergej Komkov, who proposed Vladimir Putin for the Nobel Peace Prize.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Nick Griffin, "Grand Master Putin? Another Unexpected Move by Vladimir Putin as He Orders the Withdrawal of the Russian Forces in Syria," *APF*, 2016, <https://apfeurope.com/2016/03/grand-master-putin-another-unexpected-move-by-vladimir-putin-as-he-orders-the-withdrawal-of-the-russian-forces-in-syria/>.

⁵⁶ Nick Griffin, "Video: Russian 'soft Power' and the Crisis of the West," *APF*, 2016, <https://apfeurope.com/2016/05/video-russian-soft-power-and-the-crisis-of-the-west/>.

⁵⁷ realpatriot.ru, "Иностранные Участники," *Международный Русский Консервативный Форум*, 2015, <http://realpatriot.ru/participants/>.

⁵⁸ Shekhovtsov, "Russian Politicians Building an International Extreme Right Alliance."

⁵⁹ euro.cz, "Putin získal v Česku Významného Spojence Z Hradních Kruhů," *Euro.cz*, June 6, 2016, <http://www.euro.cz/politika/putin-ziskal-v-cesku-vyznamneho-spojence-z-hradnich-kruhu-1293046>.

⁶⁰ Filip Nachtmann, "Ruská Propaganda Pronikne Do Sněmovny. Vyvrátí Mýty O Rusku - Echo24.cz," March 21, 2016, <http://echo24.cz/a/i73jt/ruska-propaganda-pronikne-do-snemovny-vyvrati-myty-o-rusku>.

⁶¹ Huffington Post, "Putin Should Win Nobel Peace Prize, Prominent Russians Say," *Huffington Post*, October 1, 2013, sec. WorldPost, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/01/putin-nobel-peace-prize_n_4023559.html.

The Institute focuses predominantly on Russia. In 2014, the Institute posted news on its website about the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in regards to the case of the Katyn massacre. They claimed the court decided that Russia had not been responsible for the mass execution of Polish military officers by the Soviet Union during World War II, although the issue of possible responsibility or guilt was not the matter of the case.⁶² More recent articles claim the Americans are threatening Russia with terrorist attacks; the real terrorists are European and our governors; and that the USA is responsible for the terrorist attacks in France. In the article detailing the responsibility for terrorist attacks in Europe, Radmila Zemanová-Kopecká says that the USA government is the chief terrorist, and England and the Bilderberg group are silent allies.⁶³

Radmila Zemanová-Kopecká, a former member of the Party of Citizens' Rights (Strana práv občanů, SPO), is the founder of the Institute. She writes articles for Czech pro-Russian websites and Russian-language platforms. Ivana Smoleňová mentions that pro-Russian NGOs often have ties to Russian embassies or Russian centres of science and culture.⁶⁴ This is also the case with Radmila Zemanová-Kopecká, who attended the pan-Slavic Congress in May 2015 in Moscow. One of the main topics was how to unite the Slavic movement, "the role of which is to keep and renew national, Slavic and vital traditional values with the backing of information warfare"⁶⁵ The results of the congress were presented back in Prague supported by the Russian Centre of Science and Culture and the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and the International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudichestvo). One of the representatives of Rossotrudichestvo, Leonid Gamza, during an interview in December 2016, appreciated the loyalty of the Czech alternative media to Russia.⁶⁶

The official motto of the Institute of Slavic Strategic Studies is "Strengthening the role of Slavic togetherness in the geopolitical space of Slavic countries". The ideological background is built on a pan-Slavic basis and partly follows Dugin's Eurasian geopolitical school.⁶⁷ It is almost impossible to find out more information about the Institute. The Institute itself does not publish any detailed information about its structure or internal operation. The Founding Charter is not available at least since April 2016. According to journalist Adéla Klečková from the media outlet iHned.cz, the Institute claims that the Charter is going through changes and those changes have to be approved by a court.⁶⁸

⁶² Nachtmann, "Ruská Propaganda Pronikne Do Sněmovny. Vyvrátí Mýty O Rusku - Echo24.cz."

⁶³ Radmila Zemanová-Kopecká, "Má Útok v Paříži Americké Pozadí? A Skončí to Nakonec Stalinovým Průlivem? ISSTRAS," 2015, <http://www.isstras.eu/cs/2015/11/15/ma-utok-v-parizi-americke-pozadi-a-skonci-to-nakonec-stalinovym-prulivem/>.

⁶⁴ Ivana Smoleňová, "The ProRussian Disinformation Campaign in the Czech Republic and Slovakia," *Prague Security Studies Institute*, 2015, http://www.pssi.cz/download/docs/252_is-the-pro-russian-campaign.pdf.

⁶⁵ Jakub Tomášek, Interview with Tomášek, Jakub, on 9th January 2017. (Analyst of the Prague Security Studies Institute) by the author, January 9, 2017.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Interview with Miroslav Mareš (Researcher, Department of Political Science, Masaryk University) on 16th December 2016, December 16, 2016.

⁶⁸ Adéla Klečková, "Bývalí Spolupracovníci StB Promluvili ve Sněmovně. Uváděli Na Pravou Míru Mýty a Fakta O Rusku," *Hospodářské Noviny*, April 5, 2016, <http://domaci.ihned.cz/c1-65235900-byvali-spolupracovnici-stb-promluvili-ve-snemovne-uvadeli-na-pravou-miru-myty-a-fakta-o-rusku>.

Based on our interview with Miroslav Mareš, a political scientist at the Masaryk University, the Institute is fairly unsuccessful in its strategy to become visible in the Czech public and expert space. According to the Czech neo-Nazi expert and political science professor at Masaryk University, its intention to create an alternative to policy analysis institutes focusing on international affairs and security studies with a pro-Western orientation is obvious, but not successful. The influence is limited to only a narrow slice of the pro-Kremlin spectrum. Additionally, Jakub Tomášek, an analyst at the think-tank Prague Security Studies Institute, partly agrees, although he said in another interview that it is definitely a visible institute, but its real impact is questionable.⁶⁹ However, we cannot underestimate its activities. According to Mareš, in the context of the worsening international situation, the Institute can play role in radicalizing certain elements of the pro-Russian spectrum. The fact that the Institute “revises” historical events is another security threat.⁷⁰

The Czech-Moravian Slavic Association

Journalists have pointed out the influence of pro-Russian actors on the Czech-Moravian Slavic Association (Českomoravský slovanský svaz).⁷¹ In general, Russian expatriate associations and Slavic organizations are supporters of pro-Russian policy and propaganda. The Czech-Moravian Slavic Association belongs to the communist-nationalist ideological stream of such organizations. These organizations are patriotic and they promote the protection of the Czech nation and Czech national interests based on a far-left – communist – ideology. They stress Slavic togetherness. The period of communism is described as a positive period from this perspective. They have existed continuously since the early 1990s. These days, they look at Russia as a power that can unite Slavic nations, presenting an alternative to the EU and the USA, which they are opposed to.

The Czech-Moravian Slavic Association was founded in 2008 as a consequence of inner struggles within the Czech Slavic movement. Its founder was Zdeněk Opatřil, an alumnus of a political school in Moscow. Even though the organization does not have an official political orientation, it has been connected to pro-Russian entities from the very beginning, including contact with the staff of the Russian embassy.⁷² In 2015, after the Chairman of the Czech-Moravian Slavic Association Vojtěch Merunka had openly questioned the practice of labelling the Ukrainian government as fascist, he was dismissed from his position. However, there is no information on who officially initiated his departure and for what reason. Half of the organization’s Board was dismissed together with him as well. The founder of the association, Zdeněk Opatřil, argued that Merunka’s statement was scandalous and anti-Slavic. He claimed Merunka was opposed to Eastern Slavics and labelled him as a person that incites xenophobic sentiments towards them, especially towards Russians.⁷³

⁶⁹ Tomášek, Interview with Tomášek, Jakub, on 9th January 2017. (Analyst of the Prague Security Studies Institute) by the author.

⁷⁰ Interview with Miroslav Mareš (Researcher, Department of Political Science, Masaryk University) on 16th December 2016.

⁷¹ Vladimír Ševela, “Pod Dozor Moskvy Se Dostávají I České Slovanské Spolky - Echo24.cz,” February 9, 2015, <http://echo24.cz/a/iq3G5/pod-dozor-moskvy-se-dostavaji-i-ceske-slovanske-spolky>.

⁷² Bastl et al., *Krajní pravice a krajní levice v ČR*.

⁷³ Ševela, “Pod Dozor Moskvy Se Dostávají I České Slovanské Spolky - Echo24.cz.”

In April 2016, Opatřil published his open letter entitled “About Slavic Togetherness” and already in May 2015 the Association had agreed on a resolution about the “Genocide of Slavic nations”, all as a reaction to concerns about Western hatred towards Slavic nations. The Slavic movement is under pressure and some have vested interests in destabilizing it.⁷⁴

The Czech-Moravian Slavic Association has close relations to the Institute of Slavic Strategic Studies and the Progress Socialist Party of Ukraine. The Association is also connected with a new organization called Pan-Slavic Committee, which belongs to an organization registered in Moscow under the same name. It was actually founded by Zdeněk Opatřil as well, who became its first chairman in 2011.⁷⁵ People with relations to Russia remained in the Association, e.g. Tatiana Střelcová, the daughter of a former Soviet intelligence service agent and the wife of a former officer of the Czechoslovak intelligence service⁷⁶. As for its activities, the Association is mostly focused on organizing cultural events, public debates with experts and publishing books.

New Republic

New Republic (Nová republika) is another non-governmental organization with a pro-Russian orientation. Founded in 2013, the organization describes itself as a political initiative against economic and social disadvantage and for social responsibility and solidarity. In its manifesto, the organization distances itself from neo-liberalism, which it believes leads to economic, social and moral decadence. The organization’s leader is Ivan David, the former Minister of Health under Miloš Zeman. He is known for believing in conspiracy theories. When Malaysia Airlines MH17 was shot down over Ukraine, Ivan David stated that it was a mass murder for which the USA and its allies were responsible.⁷⁷

New Republic’s also published an unsubstantiated article recently claiming that German pilots, during a joint mission with the Russians in Syria, revealed that the USA was helping Islamic State and protected convoys transporting smuggled oil. According to the conspiracy, Germany was blackmailed by the US government to keep silent.⁷⁸ The website also backs the Russian annexation of Crimea, which, according to New Republic, belongs to Russia.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Zdeněk Opatřil, “Sílicí Snahy O Rozdělení Slovanů | Českomoravský Slovanský Svaz,” April 25, 2016, <http://www.slovane.eu/cs/2016/04/25/silici-snahy-o-rozdeleni-slovanu/1370/>.

⁷⁵ Bastl et al., *Krajní pravice a krajní levice v ČR*.

⁷⁶ Ševela, “Pod Dozor Moskvy Se Dostávají I České Slovanské Spolky - Echo24.cz.”

⁷⁷ Ivan David, “První Zprávy - Domáci - Ivan David: Pád Letadla, Osobnosti Zvláštního Ražení a Naděje,” 2014, <http://prvnizpravy.parlamentnilisty.cz/zpravy.php?id=45bf0fde-3268-11e4-aadc-003048df98d0&language=cs&preview=true>.

⁷⁸ Vystavil Ivan David, “Po Průzkumném Letu Nad Sýrií Je Německo ‘naprosto Šokováno,’” accessed April 4, 2017, <http://www.novarepublika.cz/2016/01/po-pruzkumnem-letu-nad-syrii-je-nemecko.html>.

⁷⁹ Miroslav Petr, “Pravda O Anexi Krymu! Proč v Naší Televizi Neukáží Skutečnou Tvář Fašistické a Katastrofálně Chudé Ukrajiny a Nádherného Krymu, Kde Žijí Lidé Bez Války, v Míru a Stále Se Zlepšující Životní Úrovní?,” 2016, <http://www.novarepublika.cz/2016/09/pravda-o-anexi-krymu-proc-v-nasi.html>.

Individual politicians

Openly pro-Russian rhetoric in line with official Russian policy is not necessarily the exclusive purview of political parties or organizations. In the Czech Republic, there are various types of individual politicians who promote narratives more or less close to the Russian one. They differ by the intensity of the individual narratives and also by their motivation. Some of these politicians really believe in official Russian policy and promote Russia as a good example. They support nationalist and conservative positions. Some of them use narratives fitting Russian views for pragmatic reasons and, we may say, with a populist motivation.

Miloš Zeman

First of all, there is Czech president Miloš Zeman who is labelled as “their man”, meaning Russia’s man. He serves as an agenda-setting actor, and his agenda is welcomed positively within the Kremlin. His statements and comments copy Putin’s policy and Miloš Zeman is often mentioned in official Russian TV broadcasts. Alexandr Mitrofanov, a media commentator, points out that any of Zeman’s statements supporting Russian views is immediately broadcast on the main Russian news portals, and this happens quite often.⁸⁰ Russian media cited Zeman’s conflict with American Ambassador Andrew Shapiro, who criticized Zeman’s visit to Russia to commemorate the end of World War II. The US embassy also criticized the president when Zeman was critical of the female activists of the punk-rock band Pussy Riot or commented on the absurdity of economic sanctions against Russia.⁸¹ Zeman’s official statement on economic sanctions is that they are harming the economic interests of the Czech Republic and it is more a punishment for European exporters. Zeman also assisted Russian propaganda when commenting on the downing of the Russian fighter jet over Turkey in 2015. Even though it was uncertain who was responsible for the incident, Zeman accused Turkey. He also stated that Ukrainian Prime Minister Arsenij Jacenuk is the prime minister of war,⁸² which was highly appreciated in Russia. The head of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the State Duma Alexej Pushkov said regarding this statement that Miloš Zeman had hit the bull’s eye.⁸³

Mitrofanov also reminds of Dmitrij Smirnov’s tweet, while reporting for the news outlet Komsomolskaja Pravda. After a 2015 meeting with Miloš Zeman and Vladimir Putin, the tweet referred to Miloš Zeman as “their man”.

Moreover, Zeman’s position on Crimea’s annexation resonates in the Czech Republic and abroad. According to Zeman, Russia violated international law, but returning Crimea to Ukraine is impossible. He thinks that Khrushchev made a mistake when he gave Crimea to Ukraine.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Simona Holecová, “Zeman a Klaus. Putinovi Lidé, to Se Na Západě ví –,” accessed April 4, 2017, <http://neovlivni.cz/zeman-a-klaus-putinovi-lide-to-se-na-zapade-vi/>.

⁸¹ ČT24, “Zeman: Pussy Riot Jako Symbol? Urážka Skutečných Bojovníků Za Lidská Práva,” ČT24, December 26, 2014, <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/svet/1003601-zeman-pussy-riot-jako-symbol-urazka-skutecnych-bojovniku-za-lidska-prava>.

⁸² “Zeman: Jaceňuk Je „premiér Války“, Nechce Mírové Řešení - E15.cz,” *Zprávy E15.cz*, accessed April 4, 2017, <http://zpravy.e15.cz/zahranicni/politika/zeman-jacenuk-je-premier-valky-nechce-mirove-reseni-1149666>.

⁸³ “Trefil Se Do Černého, Chválí Ruský Politik Zemana Za Výroky O Ukrajině,” *iDNES.cz*, January 5, 2015, http://zpravy.idnes.cz/zeman-rusko-ukrajina-jacenuk-reakce-tisk-ffs-zahranicni.aspx?c=A150105_100239_zahranicni_aha.

⁸⁴ Echo24, “Zeman: Rusko Je Součástí Euroamerické Civilizace, Krym Už Vrátit Nelze - Echo24.cz,” September 8, 2016, <http://echo24.cz/a/iLmij/zeman-rusko-je-soucasti-euroamericke-civilizace-krym-uz-vratit-nelze>.

There are also questions related to the financing of Zeman's presidential campaign, which could have moved the president into the pro-Russian camp. Unexplained questions remain regarding financial support coming from Martin Nejedlý, the representative of the Czech branch of Russian company Lukoil, who plays a very important role in Zeman's team. He was supposed to donate money to Zeman's presidential campaign in 2012, but those transfers never appeared on a transparent bank account statement. Nejedlý later explained that he had already donated in 2010, which was found to be true, but doubts remain, because Zeman and Nejedlý mentioned different sums (700 thousand vs. 300 thousand Czech crowns). His role remains relevant: after having been part of the team running the presidential campaign, in 2014 Nejedlý became an external advisor to the president. He accompanies Miloš Zeman during important political meetings without any official contract with the presidential office.

Jan Mládek, Vojtěch Filip, Jaroslav Foldyna

The website [Neovlivni.cz](http://neovlivni.cz)^{85,86} compiled a list of people whose opinions serve Russian propaganda. They reject economic sanctions against Russia, admire Putin and criticize the West for its tough handling of the Kremlin. Jan Mládek, the minister for Industry and Trade, is among them, and is considered to be an authentic pro-Russian politician. Jan Mládek systematically questions sanctions against Russia and does not believe in their expected positive effect.

The Chairman of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia Vojtěch Filip also supports Russian policies. In November 2014, he accepted an invitation from Sergei Vladimirovich Zheleznyak, who is on the sanction list for both the USA and the EU. In March 2015, Vojtěch Filip was interviewed by the Czech version of Sputnik and proclaimed there is no such thing as a Russian threat.⁸⁷

[Neovlivni.cz](http://neovlivni.cz) also mentions a member of Parliament, Jaroslav Foldyna (the member of the Czech Social Democratic Party) who belongs to the ranks of Zeman's supporters. In regards to the conflict in Ukraine he is more inclined to support Russia. Foldyna stated, in reaction to Putin's speech from 2014, that those who were interested in foreign policy had to agree with Putin. He continued, arguing that American policy was the most aggressive globally, because the USA has a military presence all over the world and intervenes in the domestic policy of other countries, contrary to Russia, which has almost no military presence abroad.⁸⁸

The Relationship between Russia and Czech Neo-Nazi networks and paramilitary movements

The landscape of extremist paramilitary organizations in the Czech Republic is quite varied when it comes to their views on Russia. Some of them openly support the Kremlin, like the National Home Guard, which is known for its pro-Russian orientation. The Czechoslovak Soldiers in Reserves also have a strong ideological commitment to Moscow.

⁸⁵ "Desítka Čechů, Kteří Slouží Putinovi –," 2015, <http://neovlivni.cz/zebricek-cechu-kteri-slouzi-putinovi/>.

⁸⁶ "Druhá Pětice Čechů, Kteří Slouží Putinovi –," 2015, <http://neovlivni.cz/druha-petice-cechu-kteri-slouzi-putinovi/>.

⁸⁷ Jiří Just, "Vojtěch Filip: Ruská Hrozba pro Evropu Neexistuje," 2015, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/svet/20150314101536/>.

⁸⁸ euportal.parlamentnilisty.cz, "Američané Jsou Nejagresivnější, Řekl Putin. A Začala Padat Slova O Pokakání, Přizdisráčích a Zadnicích," June 9, 2014, <http://euportal.parlamentnilisty.cz/ShowArticleMobile.aspx?id=12169>.

Other movements such as the Autonomous Nationalists (now Autonom CZ) have no affiliation with pro-Russian platforms at all, although pro-Russian propaganda provides an ideological background for the expansion of paramilitary activities and groups as the existence of these groups contributes to content for Russian media outlets, which in turn provides the groups with publicity.

The Czech neo-Nazi movement is currently moribund. Most of the neo-Nazi organizations and networks seem to be in an organizational crisis. Since the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, previously strong networks around National Resistance and the Autonomous Nationalists have weakened to the point of inactivity, even on the internet. Even though they were the biggest neo-Nazi organizations in the Czech Republic, they were never a decisive presence in the general Czech political framework. Neo-Nazism has always been relegated to the fringe of society, therefore, neo-Nazi organizations were limited to hundreds of members and thousands of sympathizers, even at their peak. Nevertheless, we cannot exclude a description of their relevance due their violent nature and expressions of hatred. A number of the paramilitary organizations' member base moved to far-right political parties, which are able to represent or channel their demands, and potentially have a greater chance to impact the political situation in the Czech Republic, i.e. through the Workers' Party of Social Justice or National Democracy.

One of the remaining neo-Nazi organizations, the Autonomous Nationalists (now Autonom CZ), does not support Russian policy and does not attempt to connect with pro-Russian platforms. Contrary to that, the Czech group Generation Identity (partly absorbing persons from neo-Nazi movements) was officially invited to join the World National-Conservative Movement, the international alliance of the extreme right, organized by the Russian far-right. But there is no evidence that Generation Identity has accepted the invitation nor made contact with people connected to the Movement.

Miroslav Mareš added during our interview with him that in 2014 there was a case of the organization Wotan Jugend, a branch of a Russian neo-Nazi organization, cooperating with Czech neo-Nazis. However, this organization was against Putin's regime. In the context of the conflict in Ukraine, most of the Czech neo-Nazis supported Ukrainian neo-Nazis.⁸⁹

On the other hand, even among group opposed to Russia and Putin, pro-Russian propaganda provides an ideological background for the expansion of paramilitary activities and paramilitary groups. These groups contribute to Russian media outlets, providing content to be used as evidence that citizens in the Czech Republic are dissatisfied and organizing themselves into homeland guard units to protect the country and its borders, and turning away from NATO.

It is necessary to mention that there no proof of financial or personal connections between paramilitary groups and Russian actors, except for the case of Nela Lisková and the National Home Guard, which is detailed later in this text.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Interview with Miroslav Mareš (Researcher, Department of Political Science, Masaryk University) on 16th December 2016.

⁹⁰ Mareš Miroslav, Interview with Miroslav Mareš (Researcher, Department of Political Science, Masaryk University) on 16th December 2016, December 16, 2016.

Czechoslovak Soldiers in Reserves

Another Czech paramilitary organization is the Czechoslovak Soldiers in Reserves (Českoslovenští vojáci v záloze, CSR). The full name of the organization is Czechoslovak Soldiers in Reserves against the Planned NATO Command. Despite its name, CSR does not fall under official Czech or Slovak army structures. The group was formed in cooperation with Marek Obrtel, a lieutenant colonel of the Czech Army, who became the head of the CSR. He served in Afghanistan and Kosovo. Recently, in 2014, he sent an open letter to the Czech minister of defence accusing NATO and the USA of criminal activities and asked for the renunciation of all his medals and military awards.⁹¹ He wrote: *“I cannot identify myself with American policy after learning more about its roots, objectives, and the impacts of actions implemented by the USA’s structures and organizations since the end of World War II. Furthermore, I reject this policy. From my point of view, this policy is unscrupulous, venal and greedy imperialism that does not stop because of anything or anybody. Its consequences are burned down countries and millions of dead people all around the world.”*⁹²

The CSR was founded on January 1, 2015. It is not a formally recognized organization, and exists without registration. They also created a Facebook group and later a small group on the Russian network VKontakte. According to the official statement, the CSR rejects the aggressive and pro-war policy of the Czech and Slovak political elites, as imposed by the USA and the EU. As soldiers in reserve, they reject any participation in battles that are acts of aggression of the global elite through NATO. They proclaim they are ready to defend Czech Republic and Slovakia. The CSR describes today’s political system as a system of representative pseudo-democracy, where “an elected representative does not have the obligation to advance the interests of voters and in practice laws represent only the personal interests of the legislators, the interests of political groups, who are doing away with the power of citizens through the system of representative democracy”.⁹³ In a Memorandum it is also stated that “our country has been unlawfully divided, looted, indebted, people enslaved and their families liquidated by repossession genocide, national infrastructure transferred into the hands of Western corporations.”⁹⁴

They also possess a strong ideological connection to Russia. Already in the Memorandum we can see that CSR members reject participation in any NATO conflict with Russia or other Slavic nation.⁹⁵

They believe that NATO is preparing for war against Russia and Russian soldiers are considered friends. They criticize all attempts to blame Russia for the situation in Ukraine. The current Ukrainian government is labelled as fascist and illegal.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Ivana Smoleňová, “Is Pro-Russian Propaganda Fueling Czech and Slovak Paramilitary Groups?,” *StopFake.org*, December 20, 2015, <http://www.stopfake.org/en/is-pro-russian-propaganda-fueling-czech-and-slovak-paramilitary-groups/>.

⁹² CSR, “Kdo Jsme – ČSLA,” 2015, <http://csla.komuna.cz/kdo-jsme/>.

⁹³ CSR, “MEMORANDUM (EN Version) – ČSLA,” *Http://Csla.komuna.cz*, 2015, <http://csla.komuna.cz/memorandum-en-version/>.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ CSR, “Kdo Jsme – ČSLA.”

Marek Obrtel elaborated by saying that their sympathy towards Russia was based on the reality that Russia does not threaten the Czech Republic. Therefore, they agree with Russia.⁹⁷

The group's members are mainly former soldiers that underwent compulsory military service before 1989. They are not in service anymore. Consequently, they are not allowed to use weapons and wear official uniforms. Additionally, the organization's membership also includes doctors, lawyers, etc.. According to Marek Obrtel, the CSR had about 6000 members in 2015. The estimated number of core and active members was around 500. At the end 2015 the CSR was hit by an internal crisis resulting in Marek Obrtel and some other members leaving the organization.⁹⁸ Now, the core member base consists of around 200 active people.⁹⁹ According to military officers, this could also serve as a recruitment pool for the intelligence services of foreign countries.¹⁰⁰ The Czech intelligence agency The Security Information Service of the Czech Republic (BIS) warns in annual reports mainly of the activities of Russian and Chinese agents operating in the Czech Republic, and another danger lies in the potential that these people (especially the younger ones) will get tired of training in nature and chatting through Facebook and decide to act and even conduct criminal activities.¹⁰¹

The CSR is structured on a regional basis. There are nine groups, four in Bohemia, three in Moravia and two in Slovakia. Together they form the 1st Czechoslovak battalion of soldiers in reserve. Even though the groupings are not connected to the official army, they use military terminology. Each group has its own structure, but how they organize the group depends on each individual commander and their staff, and there are no firmly set guidelines regarding this.¹⁰²

The organization found itself in the spotlight during the 2015 commemoration of the Velvet Revolution on November 17. Members of the CSR came to support Miloš Zeman's speech. When leaving the event, they marched in line in army uniforms. They also offered their services to Miloš Zeman, which the president rejected. For members, the CSR organizes self-defence training, shooting practice, survival skills programs, and practical courses in border protection. During the trainings, members use legally possessed weapons. One of these border protection drills was filmed by Czech Television.

⁹⁷ ČT, "Propaganda v Uniformě. Českoslovenští Vojáci S Ruskem Proti Západu a Uprchlíkům," ČT24, 2015, <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/domaci/1606251-propaganda-v-uniforme-ceskoslovensti-vojaci-s-ruskem-proti-zapadu-a-uprchlikum>.

⁹⁸ But the CSR has been struggling with inner troubles since very beginning. During the year 2015, some of the regional groups left the structure. Those who were more militant felt that nothing was happening – lot of talk, no action. Groups from Northern Bohemia and South Moravia left for this reason. (Blaha 2015)

⁹⁹ DVTV, "Českoslovenští Vojáci v Zálaze Zanikli, Nebyli Akceschopní, Já Chtěl Domobranu, Říká Jejich Exšéf," *Aktuálně.TV - Jen To, Co Musíte Vidět*, December 10, 2015, <https://video.aktualne.cz/dvtv/ceskoslovensti-vojaci-v-zalaze-zanikli-nebyli-akceschopni-ja/r~b2874fc29e8d11e5bc8c002590604f2e/>.

¹⁰⁰ Jan Wirtitzer, "V Česku Roste Proruská Polovojenská Milice. Chce Si „vzít Vlast Zpět“," *iDNES.cz*, November 24, 2015, http://zpravy.idnes.cz/profil-ceskoslovensti-vojaci-v-zalaze-obrtel-foo-domaci.aspx?c=A151123_123952_domaci_jw.

¹⁰¹ Smoleňová, "Is Pro-Russian Propaganda Fueling Czech and Slovak Paramilitary Groups?"

¹⁰² Stanislav Blaha, "Marek Obrtel: NATO Je Zločinecká Organizace," September 24, 2015, <http://www.novarepublika.cz/2015/09/marek-obrtel-nato-je-zlocinecka.html>.

The group was simulating the capture of a refugee. Using camouflage and air soft guns, the participants caught a trainee pretending to be a refugee, while shouting “these bastards do not belong here, they crossed our border. This is violence!”¹⁰³

As for its financing, the CSR proclaims that they receive no external funding. All costs are covered from the personal contributions of its members.¹⁰⁴

National Home Guard

The National Home Guard (Národní domobrana in Czech) is a newly established paramilitary organization originally associated with the political party National Democracy. The story of National Home Guard started in summer 2015 as a reaction to the European migration crisis. National Democracy stated that the government of the Czech Republic and the EU were not willing to face the migration influx. The party emphasised the need for paramilitary activities conducted by citizens to protect their own homes, which would soon be necessary. On August 15, 2015, the party organized a public meeting in Prague. During the meeting, people first took an oath and demonstrated their will to protect their homeland. This act is called the “Vysehrad Oath”.¹⁰⁵

National Democracy reached out to the CSR during 2015 in order to create a joint paramilitary unit and to interconnect the CSR and the National Home Guard under the National Home Guard brand, but most members of the CSR rejected the idea, wanting to stay apolitical. Consequently, attempts to recruit members from the CSR have been largely unsuccessful. The only person interested in mutual cooperation was Marek Obrtel, who stayed in contact with the chairman of National Democracy Adam Bartoš and attended some of his events.¹⁰⁶ Marek Obrtel soon left the CSR and joined Mr. František Krejča and Mrs. Nela Lisková. Today, they together represent the National Home Guard as co-chairs.

In February 2016, National Democracy announced that its coordinating role in the process of establishing and developing the National Home Guard was over. Until that time, the party had played the role of legal consultant and was helping to develop the organizational structure of the paramilitary group. Adam Bartoš left the National Home Guard in the hands of Marek Obrtel, František Krejča and Nela Lisková as official representatives and members of its board. In July 2016, František Krejča ended his membership in National Democracy. After the last member gave up his political affiliation, the National Home Guard officially became apolitical, ending any affiliation to a political party. However, National Democracy promised to promote the organization.¹⁰⁷

Officially, the National Home Guard claims it has around 2500 members. Journalists from the Czech media outlet *Hospodářské noviny* recently revealed this number is highly exaggerated. A more realistic assessment of their membership numbers would be in the dozens.

¹⁰³ ČT, “Propaganda v Uniformě. Českoslovenští Vojáci S Ruskem Proti Západu a Uprchlíkům.”

¹⁰⁴ Blaha, “Marek Obrtel.”

¹⁰⁵ Národní domobrana, “NÁRODNÍ DOMOBRANA - ÚVOD,” 2016, <http://www.narodnidomobrana.cz/>.

¹⁰⁶ Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic, “Zpráva O Extremismu Na Území ČR v Roce 2015.”

¹⁰⁷ Národní demokracie, “Národní Demokracie Předala Agendu Národní Domobrany | NÁRODNÍ DEMOKRACIE,” 2016, <http://narodnidemokracie.cz/narodni-demokracie-predala-agendu-narodni-domobrany/>.

It seems that in any city where the National Home Guard supposedly established a unit, it actually does not meet regularly or organize any trainings. The only possible exception is the city of Kolin.¹⁰⁸ The fact that the National Home Guard is rarely seen in the streets, and does not publish any evidence of activity (e.g. reports or pictures), also serves as proof of the group's inactivity. Despite this, it is not necessary to have a large number of members to cause conflict. The National Home Guard may prove to be attractive to frustrated people hoping to take action.

From the organization's perspective, the main task of the National Home Guard is to protect Czech citizens and their homes and maintain public order, stability and rule of law if the legislative branch and the security services of the state are unable or unwilling to carry out their duties in accordance with the oaths and duties conferred upon them by law. The National Home Guard was also founded to protect the existence and integrity of the Czech Republic in case of the failure of state power and the state to protect its own sovereignty. The National Home Guard would like to establish a second reserve for the Czech Army or to act independently based on its own decisions.¹⁰⁹ The National Home Guard operates without guns, because in their opinion possessing firearms would be against the law.

The National Home Guard provides methodical guidelines to members, but the organizational structure of every unit depends on the members themselves. There is no fixed structure. The only thing officially recommended is the organization of regular trainings to prepare for crisis situations through the development of crisis plans for the municipalities where is the guard based. To become a member it is necessary to have Czech citizenship and to be willing to protect the homeland by all means.¹¹⁰ The members act independently or they can form groups.

On January 26, 2016 the National Home Guard issued a Declaration:

*We, citizens of the Czech Republic, aware of the seriousness of the ongoing international and domestic events, at the moment of millions of migrants illegally crossing the borders of European countries, on the eve of the collapse of the European Union and its domestic structures, in times of great danger threatening our homes and our states, not trusting the government which does not listen to voice of the people and does not defend our security, with the feeling that no personal inconvenience and sacrifice is big enough if it is about the safety of our homes, health and lives of our families, expressing steadfast belief that all present and future threats must be faced resolutely and bravely, we establish the board of the National Home Guard in order to help homeland protection development and success in the Czech Republic.*¹¹¹

The National Home Guard is known for its pro-Russian orientation, which was confirmed in March 2016, when Nela Lisková and František Krejča visited the Donetsk People's Republic as a delegation of the National Home Guard. The journey was organized under the auspices of the Ministry of International Affairs of the Donetsk People's Republic.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Martin Biben, "Extremisté, kteří chtějí být na straně Rusů, tak vykreslila Německá televize Českou domobranu," *Aktuálně.cz - Víte Co Se Právě Děje*, August 14, 2016, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/ceska-domobrana-zaujala-nemeckou-televizi-pry-chce-aby-cesko/r~b828d960608311e6a77e002590604f2e/>.

¹⁰⁹ Národní domobrana, "Co Je Národní Domobrana?," 2016, <http://www.narodnidomobrana.cz/o-nas/co-je-nd>.

¹¹⁰ Národní domobrana, "Domobrancí Národní Domobraný.," 2016, <http://www.narodnidomobrana.cz/domobranci>.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Národní domobrana, "Delegace Národní Domobraný Ukončila Návštěvu DLR.," 2016, <http://www.narodnidomobrana.cz/85-delegace-narodni-domobraný-ukoncila-navstevu-dlr>.

They criticized the Czech government in Donetsk TV broadcasts and supported pro-Russian separatists. After the visit they published articles in which they labelled the Czech government as a criminal government because of its support for Ukraine. Nela Lisková accused Czech media and the Czech government of spreading lies and disinformation about the conflict in Ukraine. The current Ukrainian government is seen by them as a fascist enterprise which destroys homes, hospitals and schools and kills people for largely economic reasons. She also stated that it was the USA behind these actions because of its interest in mineral resources, specifically shale gas. She also mentioned the role of the OSCE as a spy agency active in the region which reports to the USA. During the trip the delegation met with the representatives of the city of Donetsk and the youth movement of the Donetsk Republic and agreed to work with them on bilateral cooperation and signed a memorandum to this effect. The separatists are framed as heroes protecting their homeland against American-financed fascist puppets and agents.^{113,114} Nela Lisková also gave an interview describing the visit to the Czech branch of Sputnik.¹¹⁵

As a consequence of this visit and the resulting cooperative agreement, the foreign representation of the Donetsk People`s Republic opened in the Czech Republic in September 2016. Nela Lisková became the head of it, representing herself as an honorary consul, which is actually against the law on diplomatic representation. In fact, the organization behind the endeavour is an NGO.¹¹⁶

In general, these paramilitary groups do not represent an actual threat to the Czech Republic, but it is definitely necessary to monitor their activities. They are not expected to exert any influence on Czech society, but the potential risk posed by these organizations rises if a significant Russian threat arises to the security of the Czech Republic. In that scenario, these groups can play an anti-establishment, subversive role, or act as collaborators in case the Czech Republic is occupied.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Národní domobrana, "Stydím Se Za Naši Zločineckou Vládu.," 2016, <http://www.narodnidomobrana.cz/87-stydim-se-za-nasi-zlocineckou-vladu>.

¹¹⁴ Národní domobrana, "Delegace Národní Domobrany Ukončila Návštěvu DLR."

¹¹⁵ Děnis Kločkov, "Nela Lisková: V Okolí Doněcku Jsme Slyšeli Výbuchy Střel. Sputnik.," 2016, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/ceskarepublika/201603232655327-liskova-doneck-dll-delegace/>.

¹¹⁶ ČT24, "Falešný Konzulát „neexistující“ republiky."

¹¹⁷ Miroslav, Interview with Miroslav Mareš (Researcher, Department of Political Science, Masaryk University) on 16th December 2016.

MEDIA ANALYSIS

General Media Landscape

After the unprecedented events in Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, disinformation dissemination in the Czech Republic became more systematic and much more influential. However, it did not establish itself over night. The main medium for spreading fake news and disinformation campaigns is the internet, and most websites sharing pro-Russian narratives already existed before the annexation. Some of them focused on different topics or even used their domains for something completely different from news reporting, while some had marginal readership.

But after the annexation and the Euromaidan, these disinformation projects improved the quality and especially the quantity of their articles, and their readership numbers are still gradually rising. Most of them are not well funded and unprofessional. There is only one official Russian channel, the Czech version of the Sputnik website, which manages to influence public debate through a flood of new articles and commentaries published daily. According to the latest polls, 25 percent of the Czech public trusts the so-called “alternative media” more than the mainstream.¹¹⁸ Almost none of these websites are explicitly pro-Kremlin, and most of them combine different topics, typically news about immigration or even articles about alternative medicine, lifestyle, and conspiracy theories. They often have an anti-EU, anti-NATO or anti-US position, promoting Russia only in lesser doses.

Individually, these websites do not have a large audience, albeit with certain exceptions. Nevertheless, they have a huge impact on readers, especially through the sharing of articles amongst readers on social networks. Facebook is a very fruitful space for disinformation projects. Most of the fringe media have their own Facebook pages, but there are also specific Facebook campaigns which are focused on narrower topics, often spreading links to disinformation outlets. This way they can reach a wider audience.

Political actors have a generally important role in disinformation dissemination since they share disinformation articles from time to time. Whether they do it intentionally or unknowingly, they are legitimizing these projects in the eyes of the public. The most important figure in that matter is the Czech President, who basically serves as a translator of Russian views into the Czech language.

Main disinformation groups in the Czech Republic

Many of the disinformation projects, websites and Facebook pages, are mainly or completely opaque in terms of who is behind them. They provide fake contacts and addresses, and are secretive about their authors, personal structure, and ownership and financing. They often ask their readers for financial support, which they get more often than not.

¹¹⁸ netbite.cz, “Disinformation Operations in the Czech Republic,” *European Values Think-Tank*, September 13, 2016, <http://www.europeanvalues.net/vyzkum/disinformation-operations-in-the-czech-republic/>.

They focus on all kinds of topics which are controversial in the eyes of the Czech public and use them to divide society, discredit democratic institutions and Czech allies, create an illusion of complete chaos in the world and, in the end, present Russia as the only stable, honest and rational regime left. There are three “families” of disinformation websites with the widest network maintaining several websites with very similar characteristics and a utilizing a common source of funding.

There are several groups, movements and initiatives in the Czech Republic which are personally or otherwise interconnected with disinformation websites and Facebook groups. They often share the same world views or help each other to attract followers. Freedom and Direct Democracy is a political movement. Its leader, Tomio Okamura, often publishes his commentaries on websites belonging to the OUR MEDIA Company and other disinformation outlets. Its program is based on controversial stances towards Middle-Eastern and African refugees, but they also support the withdrawal of Czech membership in the European Union and NATO. Leaders of the movement often participate or even organize anti-Islam and anti-immigration demonstrations. According to the latest polls,¹¹⁹ they will gain around 6, 3 % of the vote in the upcoming general election.

National Democracy (ND) is a far-right political party with marginal support (in the last EP election they received 0, 46 % of votes). They are against EU membership, LGBT rights and immigration. After the Russian annexation of Crimea, ND wrote a letter addressed to the Russian embassy expressing support to Vladimir Putin. One of its representatives also participated as an election observer in Eastern Ukraine. They most frequently represent themselves on Czech Free Press, a disinformation website publishing Czech- and Slovak-language articles. The Worker's Party of Social Justice (DSSS) has very similar stances to ND, with even less success in elections. They only have two representatives in municipal councils at this time.

Czechoslovak Soldiers in Reserves (no connection to the Czech Army) is an initiative with strong anti-NATO views, perceiving it as a criminal organization. They are inclined to support President Miloš Zeman. They were originally established as a Facebook group, but since then they have organized several military training-style exercises. It is unclear, how many members the organization really has, but the most probable estimates are around 300 people. Apart from them, there are around 90 groups aligning themselves with the National Home Guard. It was originally established as the paramilitary wing of the National Democracy party. They occasionally train themselves, but their numbers are very low and their presence in the media has been relegated to fringe outlets.

OUR MEDIA a.s.

Our Media is a company running several disinformation projects in the Czech Republic. The last annual report¹²⁰ of the company is from 2014 and, in this particular case, the owners of the company are well-known.¹²¹ The website is financed by advertising revenues.

¹¹⁹ <http://www.sanep.cz>, “SANEP - Průzkum Veřejného Mínění - Veřejné Výstupy - Ekologie,” January 18, 2017, <http://www.sanep.cz/pruzkumy/volebni-preference-leden-2017-publikovano-18-1-2017/>.

¹²⁰ OurMedia, “Rozvaha v Plném Rozsahu Ke Dni 31. 12. 2014,” December 31, 2014, <http://www.ourmedia.cz/aktuality/1848-rozvaha-v-plnem-rozsahu-ke-dni-31-12-2014.htm>.

¹²¹ Amongst the shareholders there is also a firm called WCV WORLD CAPITAL VENTURES CYPRUS LIMITED, Cypriot business belonging to Ivo Valenta who operates in gambling.

On its website, there is a detailed list¹²² of media and commercial partners, including several traditional media, cultural, academic or even political entities, including the Office of the President of the Czech Republic.

By all means the biggest and most popular venture from this company is a website called **Parlamentní listy** (Parliamentary sheets),¹²³ a misnomer as Parliament distanced itself from the website in 2012 and stated that the website's articles in no way reflect the Parliament's views.¹²⁴ Apart from its own publication of news and commentary, the site offers politicians the option to create profiles, communicate with each other and with readers, ask questions and respond to them. It basically functions as a social network. It also provides space for bloggers. Politicians, parliamentarians, and senators often give interviews to the outlet, usually around 30 a month. There are no editorial standards and the authors of the articles can write basically whatever they want, regardless of a basis in fact. It is a form of political tabloid which is often based on sensational headlines, with a good amount of vulgarism and aggressive subtexts. According to research¹²⁵ conducted by the Masaryk University, the Parlamentní listy website uses manipulation techniques more often than Sputnik and references the sources for their articles only 40 % of the time.

More websites at least partly owned by the OUR MEDIA Company. **První zprávy** (First News) is a website created in 2007 with an anonymous editorial staff which often publishes commentary on Parliamentary politicians, sometimes without their knowledge. **Protiproud** (AgainstTheStream) has been established by Petr Hájek, the former speaker of ex-President Václav Klaus, who supports many conspiracy theories, including the denial of global warming.

AC24.cz

Established in December 2011, this website has focused almost exclusively on reporting world news, often specifically from Ukraine or Syria. Most of the articles published on this website are anonymous with the exception of several external contributors. Officially, a person named Ondřej Geršl is behind the website as editor-in-chief and owner of the domain. He claims that he created this web page because of his frustration with alleged lies about the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in the media. Officially, the website is financed from advertising revenues and from financial donations from readers. The disinformation published on this website is usually created by sharing unsubstantiated reports, mistranslations, or the misinterpretation of foreign, often native English-speaking outlets, like The Guardian or The Independent. Many articles are translated from Sputnik, RT, Breitbart, Southfront, Zerohedge, Globalresearch and others.

¹²² parlamentnilisty.cz, "Děkujeme Naším Stálým Partnerům;," [Http://Www.parlamentnilisty.cz](http://www.parlamentnilisty.cz), accessed April 5, 2017, <http://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/redakce/partneri/>.

¹²³ The website was created in 2008 as a follow-up to a printed version which was first published 5 years earlier. From all the pro-Russian disinformation websites on the Czech scene, this is the one with the widest readership.

¹²⁴ Poslanecká sněmovna Parlamentu České republiky., "Kancelář Poslanecké Sněmovny Se Distančuje Od Internetového Serveru Parlamentní Listy," [Https://Www.psp.cz](https://www.psp.cz), April 23, 2012, <https://www.psp.cz/sqw/cms.sqw?z=3911>.

¹²⁵ Fakulta sociálních studií - Masarykova univerzita, "Nová Propaganda Je Nebezpečnější. Využívá Nekalé Novinářské Praktiky," 2016, http://www.evropskehodnoty.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/TZ_analyza-prokremelskych-webu_fin.pdf.

Most of the website's content is focused on the Kremlin's point of view on international events, often referencing non-existent documents or reports from the Russian Ministry of Defence or other official bodies. The website does not distinguish between objective reporting and opinion pieces. Ondřej Geršl is also connected to the website **Svět kolem nás** (The World Around Us) and he is the owner of the domain **Lajkit**. It is the newest of this group, beginning in October 2015. It is as secretive of its origins and benefactors as the previously mentioned websites, and has similar content to Svět kolem nás, namely articles criticising Czech media and democratic institutions. The international news section is excessively pro-Russian and anti-American with a focus on Ukraine and Syria, but also on the European Union.

Sputnik

When analysing the Czech pro-Kremlin disinformation scene, it is impossible not to mention the only official Russian channel in the Czech language, the **Sputnik** website.¹²⁶ Even if there are any Czech editors, there is no publicly available information on the website about it. Most of the articles are taken from the English version with minimal differences. Czech political representatives and other public figures sometimes contribute or give interviews to Sputnik.

¹²⁶ It is a project of the Russian state media concern Rossija segodnja runby Dmitrij Kiseljov. Its Czech version was established in January 2015, but it exists in 30 more world languages.

ANALYSIS OF CZECH PRO-RUSSIAN FACEBOOK PAGES

Based on the combination of two factors - the number of likes and the intensity of pro-Russian content - we decided to choose three Facebook pages for analysis. All of them were created during 2015, quite some time after the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine. They managed to attract a considerable number of likes in a short period of time. The first and most popular one is *We Are Here At Home .com*¹²⁷, primarily an anti-immigration and anti-Islam Facebook page. The domain of the website with the same title is registered in the name of Petr Mančík,¹²⁸ who has Czech nationality but lives in the United Arab Emirates.¹²⁹ Apart from an anti-immigration rhetoric and a negative stance towards the Czech establishment and western leaders, the page inclines towards praise of Russia, Vladimir Putin and Viktor Orbán. It shares the Russian channel RT quite often, even concerning topics unrelated to refugees and migration. The second chosen page, *Welcome to Reality*, has very similar content. Instead of a professional website like the one linked to *We Are Here At Home .com*, it is connected to a blog with a more amateurish design and is completely anonymous. The last Facebook page we are going to analyse is *Milujeme Rusko* (We love Russia), an openly pro-Russian page with a team of administrators who identify themselves below their contributions only by their nicknames. Their content is in the Czech and Slovak languages. The adoration of Russia and the Kremlin is very expressive here with a great focus on the US-Russia relationship.

Table 1. Featured pages

| Page | Likes ¹³⁰ | Established |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|
| <i>We Are Here At Home .com</i> | 75,357 | 2015 |
| <i>Welcome to Reality</i> | 38,200 | 2015 |
| <i>Milujeme Rusko</i> | 33,491 | 2015 |

Summary

The Facebook pages subjected to the analysis differ in many ways. A common characteristic is their attempt to trigger emotional responses using a wide range of topics. The idea is to cause controversies which then reach a wider audience. With the exception of the *We Love Russia* page, the pro-Russian content is mostly secondary, while the primary theme is the refugee crisis. The pages are strong supporters of Czech President Miloš Zeman and often oppose all other political parties with the exception of nationalist movements. They show a high level of Euroscepticism and anti-Americanism.

¹²⁷ We are here at home (facebook page), “We Are Here at Home (Facebook Page),” accessed April 5, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/zpravy.cz/>.

¹²⁸ Roman Máca and Jakub Dostál, “Analýza Obsahu Kampaně We Are Here At Home .com” (European Values, 2016), <http://www.evropskehodnoty.cz/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Anal%C3%BDza-obsahu-kampan%C4%9B3.pdf>.

¹²⁹ He is CEO of a PR and internet marketing company and his personal Facebook profile promotes a conciliatory view on Islam, which suggests that the campaign might be a commercial contract placed by a third party.

¹³⁰ as of 24 November, 2016

The most visible difference among the pages is their level of professionalism, as some of them are sophisticated and seem to be run by PR and marketing experts, while others are created by amateurs. This is reflected in their campaign strategies and in their ability to induce reactions to their posts.

General statistics

Considering the number of posts, the *Welcome to Reality* page exceeds all others with over 25 posts per day, which is accompanied by a lesser ability to reach a wider audience, since the number of interactions per post is actually the lowest of the three. It is obvious that the excessive number of new posts and spamming the walls of readers is not an efficient method. The *We love Russia* page usually posts only one or two contributions per day, generating more than twice as many interactions per post. The lower number of posts might be due to the fact that the topics this page covers are slightly narrower. *We Are Here At Home .com* seems to have adopted the best strategy, publishing around 7 posts per day, and getting the highest share of interactions. This corresponds with the marketing abilities of the owners of the page, well-structured PR activities, and an attractive use of visual material and emotions.

Table 2. Page statistics for September-October 2016

| Pages | We Are Here At Home .com | Welcome to Reality | We love Russia |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Posts | | | |
| Total number of posts in the reviewed period | 443 | 1555 | 105 |
| Average number of posts per day | 7.3 | 25.5 | 1.7 |
| Interactions¹³¹ | | | |
| Total number of interactions in the reviewed period | 354,430 | 237,455 | 37,027 |
| Average number of interactions per post | 800.1 | 152.7 | 352.6 |

Page activity

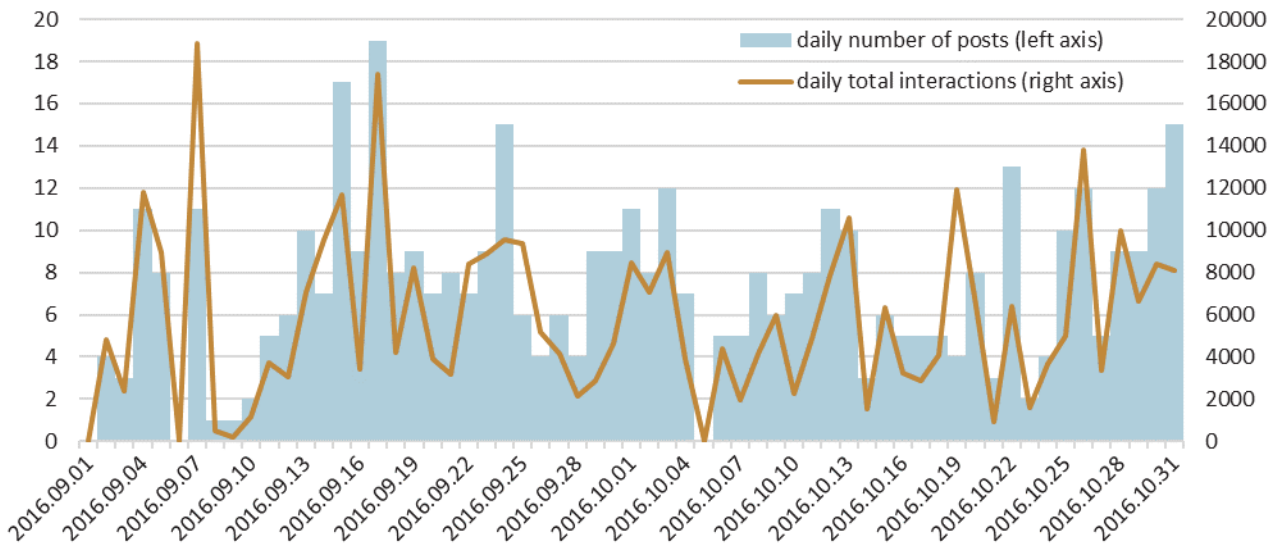
Trends

The three following tables portray the distribution of posts on each Facebook page on a daily basis in comparison with the number of interactions the posts generated.

We Are Here At Home .com does not have a stable number of posts every day but it posts at least one contribution daily with only two exceptions during the two monitored months. The intensity of new posts additions changes every few days, usually alternating between four to five days of under 10 posts per day and one or two days over that number. The repetitiveness of this pattern suggests the page is managed with a particular marketing strategy. The intensity of the audience's reactions usually remains stable.

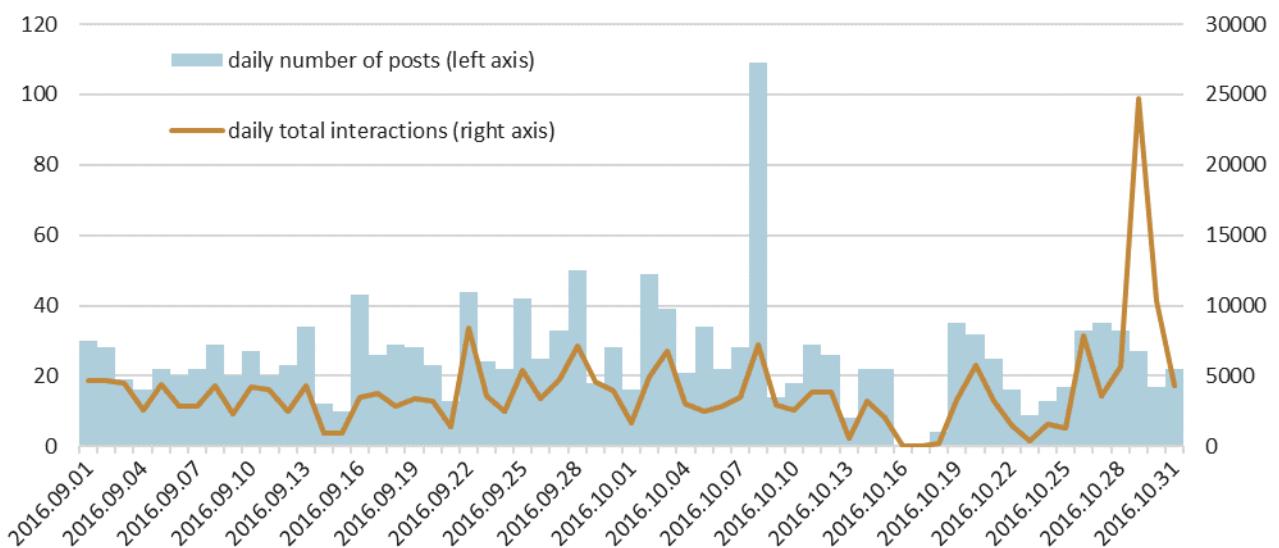
¹³¹ Comments, shares and emotional reactions (like, love, haha, wow, sad, angry)

Table 3. Distribution of posts and interactions on the *We Are Here At Home* .com page on a daily basis



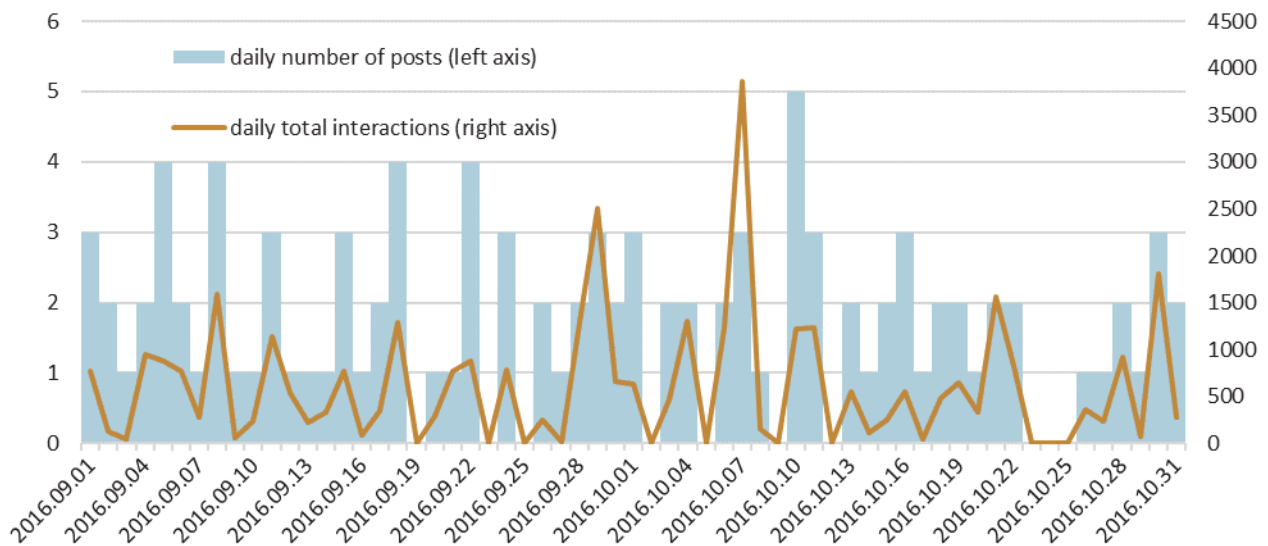
The *Welcome to Reality* page publishes new posts very frequently, glutting readers with dozens of contributions per day, but with very poor results according to the number of interactions. The highest peak in the number of posts during one day corresponds with the day of regional elections in the Czech Republic, but even posting over 100 times during that day failed to improve the nominal level of interactions. The traffic on the website was particularly high during October 29, triggered by several articles about the Roma minority living in the Czech Republic and several reactions to the celebration of the Independent Czechoslovak State Day, which had taken place the day before. Many people used the website to express their disagreement with the behaviour of Czech president Miloš Zeman. These peaks based on specific occasions suggest that the page does not have a regular strategy for producing posts.

Table 4. Distribution of posts and interactions on the *Welcome to Reality* page on a daily basis



The activity of the *We Love Russia* page is significantly lower than in the other two cases. It mostly produces one post per day, and sometimes does not publish anything at all. The number of interactions per day are often very low or even non-existent. The highest level of interactions was on October 7, under the post congratulating Vladimir Putin for his birthday.

Table 5. Distribution of posts and interactions on the *We Love Russia* page on a daily basis



Campaigns

Two major political events took place in the Czech Republic during the two months under review, and both were covered by not only the three Facebook pages, but by most mainstream and disinformation media alike. October 7 and 8 were the days of the regional elections. Even though turnout was low (around 20 – 30 % in most regions), pre-election debates were quite intense and the topics of the campaigns often went beyond regional issues. The other event frequently mentioned in the media was the public holiday on October 28 celebrating the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic. On this day, the President of the Czech Republic hands out state awards, which has been controversial since Miloš Zeman took over as president due to his choice of awardees. This year he refused to decorate Jiří Brady, a Holocaust survivor, because his nephew, the Czech minister of culture, met the Dalai lama during his visit to Prague. In response, many people decided to celebrate the holiday in an alternative manner to express their disagreement with the President's decision.

September 7 is the day when *We Are Here At Home .com* managed to evoke the highest number of interactions in response to the posts it published. Most of these contributions are typically anti-immigration and anti-Islam with a strong emphasis on warnings that Europe is going to be destroyed. The page also shared articles criticising Czech politicians affiliated with centre-left parties, especially those who were relevant candidates in regional elections in the following month. In the following period, from September 13 to September 16, the number of posts gradually increased to a peak on the 16th. During these 4 days, we saw many more articles concerning the regional elections and also the presidential election in the United States. The amount of content published during these two periods indicates the campaign was trying to influence voters before the elections started.

In the third period we analysed, from October 19 to October 22, the increased attention of readers was quickly followed by a increased amount of posts. This was the time period when the topic of state awards and celebrations of the public holiday came up, with posts focused on spreading accusations that the Czech people / NGOs / pro-immigrant citizens wanted to organize a coup against the President, and that public media led a campaign against him. This piece of disinformation was repeated by many alternative media outlets, including the *We Are Here At Home .com* page.

There is no pattern to the frequency of posts on the *Welcome to Reality* page, so we chose three time periods distinguished by a higher number of posts and interactions. During the time between September 25 and 28, the activity of the page encompassed several topics, namely the elections in Germany, an explosion in Budapest targeting policemen, presidential elections in the United States (especially because the first official presidential debate took place at that time) and the statements of Miloš Zeman about the Christian roots of European culture, shortly before his trip to the Dialogue of Civilizations forum organized by a close friend of Vladimir Putin.

October 8 was chosen for the exceedingly high amount of posts published in one day. The page was almost three times more active on this day than on most other days. Most of the shared links informed readers of the results of the regional elections. It is notable that the number of interactions under these posts nominally stayed the same as during any other day of the month, which corresponds with the lower interest of Czech citizens in regional politics. The opposite can be observed during the time between October 26-29, with a slightly higher interaction rate per post. The increase in the interest of users was probably induced by debates about the state awards. Several articles on the *Welcome to Reality* page supported and defended Zeman and focused on his motives for not decorating Mr Brady.

The first time period chosen for a more detailed inquiry is from September 5 to September 9, which starts and ends with an increased number of posts. It was mostly induced by events, for instance in Hungary, and many of the articles dealt with the migration crisis. Unlike the two previous pages, this is atypical of the *We Love Russia* page. A similar pattern was observed between September 28 and October 1, accompanied by an increase in interactions.

The highest number of posts were published between October 7 and 11, but there is no visible specific topic the posts focused on with the exception of a status update wishing Vladimir Putin happy birthday, which generated a significant number of shares and comments.

Posts

As shown in previous tables, an exceedingly high number of posts during a short period of time does not provide the pages with a higher number of reactions. But what does seem to matter is the type of posts specific to each of the pages. The most successful in this area is without doubt the *We Are Here At Home .com* page. Its videos are the most effective for generating reactions. The reason is probably that the administrators of the page have a very sophisticated marketing strategy overall and make an effort to publish many foreign videos, often presented as shocking or revealing, providing them with Czech subtitles and commentary.¹³²

¹³² A distinctive trait of this page is that it did not post any status updates during the entire two month period.

To highlight their superior marketing skills, compare this outlet with the *Welcome to Reality* page, which shared almost 6 times as many links during the monitored months, but prompted almost five times fewer reactions. Videos are clearly the most successful and awareness-raising type of post of the three pages monitored.

Table 6. Statistics by type of posts on the 3 pages under review

| We Are Here At Home .com | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| type | number of posts | proportion of posts | Reaction/post ¹³³ |
| Link | 163 | 37% | 711 |
| Photo | 139 | 31% | 764 |
| Video | 140 | 32% | 946 |
| Status | | | |
| Event | 1 | 0% | 17 |
| Note | | | |
| Total | 443 | 100% | 800 |
| Welcome to reality | | | |
| type | number of posts | proportion of posts | Reaction/post |
| Link | 1,145 | 74% | 133 |
| Photo | 128 | 8% | 270 |
| Video | 110 | 7% | 440 |
| Status | 98 | 6% | 10 |
| Event | 74 | 5% | 13 |
| Note | | | |
| Total | 1,555 | 100% | 153 |
| We Love Russia | | | |
| type | number of posts | proportion of posts | Reaction/post |
| Link | 14 | 13% | 154 |
| Photo | 75 | 71% | 395 |
| Video | 9 | 9% | 501 |
| Status | 7 | 7% | 106 |
| Event | | | |
| Note | | | |
| Total | 105 | 100% | 353 |

One notable thing is that the most shared website on the *We Are Here At Home* is Parlamentnilsity.cz, which is the most popular disinformation website in the Czech Republic.

A similar evaluation may be applied to the *Welcome to Reality* page, which has an almost identical collection of sources, however, there are still a significant number of links on this page to articles published by RT, and the Czech and English versions of Sputnik News.

¹³³ Total average amount of emotional reactions, comments and shares per post.

A slight exception in this area is the *We Love Russia* page, which often references websites not involved in publishing news, with topics such as storing videos, e-shops, or science.¹³⁴

Table 7. Sources used by the Facebook pages

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| Links on <i>We Are Here At Home</i> | | |
| Parlamentnilisty.cz | 53 | 33% |
| Novinky.cz | 20 | 12% |
| Zpravy.idnes.cz | 12 | 7% |
| Zahranicni.eurozpravy.cz | 8 | 5% |
| Reflex.cz | 5 | 3% |
| Blesk.cz | 4 | 2% |
| Echo24.cz | 4 | 2% |
| Links on <i>Welcome to Reality</i> | | |
| Parlamentnilisty.cz | 282 | 25% |
| Cum.sk | 142 | 12% |
| Securitymagazin.cz | 97 | 8% |
| Novinky.cz | 81 | 7% |
| Zahranicni.eurozpravy.cz | 33 | 3% |
| Parlamentnelisty.sk | 25 | 2% |
| Zpravy.idnes.cz | 25 | 2% |
| Links on <i>We Love Russia</i> | | |
| www.mojevideo.sk | 3 | 21% |
| shop.armystrength.eu | 2 | 14% |
| echo24.cz | 1 | 7% |
| interestingengineering.com | 1 | 7% |
| media.giphy.com | 1 | 7% |
| slobodnyvysielac.sk | 1 | 7% |

Issues and narratives

Important issues featured on the sites have been identified utilizing a tiered approach. First, we selected a sample of 60 posts based on the 20 most liked, shared or commented posts. Second, we choose the top 4 performing posts among the 60, thus the number one most liked, shared, commented or interacted messages¹³⁵ to identify the 4 most popular issues. Third, we used our sample of 60 to map out top performing narratives based on a pre-defined set of issues or narratives utilized routinely by pro-Russian propaganda, namely: Russia, the EU, NATO, USA, Syria Ukraine, migration.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ An interesting finding is that the website Securitymagazin.cz, once used by many security and military experts, but now sliding towards disinformation news about migration, placed in the top 14 domains referenced by all three pages.

¹³⁵ The top post which received the highest number of interactions based on the total of number of likes, shares and comments.

¹³⁶ We used a pre-set list of issues based on previous propaganda analysis and experiences, however there was no guarantee that our top sample will include any of the aforementioned major topics.

Top issues

As it was stated before, the *We Are Here At Home .com* page bases its popularity mostly on videos with Czech subtitles and commentary. This is also the case for a post which was shared the most times (4,307) and prompted the biggest number of interactions (6,607). The post includes a video of a group of Christians praying on a sidewalk with a man with dark skin coming around saying some incomprehensible sentences and then getting hit in the face by one of the Christians.^{137,138} The highest count of emotions (3,228) was generated by sharing a link to a news article about Hungarian approval of a law allowing the army to protect state borders accompanied by a “sharp speech” by Viktor Orbán.¹³⁹ The most commented picture (839) on this page was the photo¹⁴⁰ to the right with the following commentary: *They would rather die of hunger than to take “the humiliating alms” of 2,000 Euro per months. This is crazy – do they even know it is actually 56,000 CZK?*

The *Welcome to Reality* page registered a high number of shares and interactions with two posts, including videos on the demonstrations on the October 28 public holiday mentioned above. In the videos, a man dressed in national symbols explains his to his audience how there is no democracy in the Czech Republic and that soon Sharia law will be applied.¹⁴¹ The first¹⁴² of these two posts was shared 6,946 times and the total number of interactions climbed up to 9,372. The second one¹⁴³ induced 2,406 emoticons as reactions.



In the picture: They would rather die of hunger than to take “the humiliating alms” of 2,000 Euro per months. This is crazy – do they even know it is actually 56,000 CZK?

¹³⁷ The commentary states that this is the only speech they (the migrants) understand. It is notable that in reality it is not clear who are the people in the video, what the dark-skinned man is saying, what are his origins or what is happening overall in the scene.

¹³⁸ We are here at home (facebook page), “We Are Here at Home - Video,” accessed April 5, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/zpravy.cz/videos/1604268566540772/>.

¹³⁹ We are here at home (facebook page), “We Are Here at Home - Post,” accessed April 5, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/zpravy.cz/posts/1609597686007860>.

¹⁴⁰ We are here at home (facebook page), “We Are Here at Home - Photo,” October 12, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/zpravy.cz/photos/a.1491044087863221.1073741828.1491040544530242/1617500525217576/?type=3&theater>.

¹⁴¹ Both videos are accompanied by an invitation to an event for the following public holiday, the 17th November, also known for frequent demonstrations and marches.

¹⁴² Welcome to Reality - Freedom for Europe (Facebook page), “28.10.2016. Praha. Hrad. Nám. Doufám, Že Jste Tu... - Welcome to Reality - Freedom for Europe,” October 28, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/vitejte.v.realite/videos/522370611299649/>.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

The most successful posts on the *We love Russia* page are two pictures. The first one was published as a birthday wish for the Russian President Vladimir Putin and prompted 85 comments, 1,835 emoticons and also the greatest amount of interactions on this page overall – 1,835.¹⁴⁴ The second picture is merely a joke with an anti-American tone that was shared 704 times.

Major narratives

The main thrust of the narratives featured on these websites are reconstructed in depth by locating basic geopolitical issues in our sample of the top 60 posts ranked by the highest number of likes, shares or comments.¹⁴⁵ We pre-defined an initial set of major issues like the USA, the EU, NATO, Syria and migration, but other emerging local or international topics are also mentioned in the analysis.

The main and most important narrative of this campaign is migration and the refugee crisis in Europe and potentially in the Czech Republic¹⁴⁶. Unfortunately, the *We Are Here At Home .com* page uses disinformation and manipulation to generate as many negative emotions as possible in readers and also subtly endorse other agenda. It



In the picture: The only immigrants from Africa Slovakia is willing to accept. Commentary: The only enrichment in the truest sense.

perpetrates fear, hysteria and paranoia. It scares readers with claims about the upcoming third world war and the destruction of Europe as it is known today. One of the typical posts is a link¹⁴⁷ to a so-called “confession of a policeman,” including quotations from the text. The policeman forecasts war in the streets, looting and raping, which according to him is already happening in many cities all over the world, for example in France or Sweden, all because of their multicultural society.

¹⁴⁴ Milujeme Rusko (facebook page), “Milujeme Rusko - V Mene Celej Česko - Slovenskej Komunity, Ktorá...,” October 7, 2016,

<https://www.facebook.com/462575803910542/photos/a.462775750557214.1073741828.462575803910542/695651320602988/?type=3&theater>.

¹⁴⁵ The actual number of posts is usually lower due to the comparison of the top 20 liked, 20 shared and 20 commented posts because many posts of those lists overlapped.

¹⁴⁶ We are here at home (facebook page), “We Are Here at Home - photo2,” October 19, 2016,

<https://www.facebook.com/zpravy.cz/photos/a.1491044087863221.1073741828.1491040544530242/1620445821589713/?type=3&theater>.

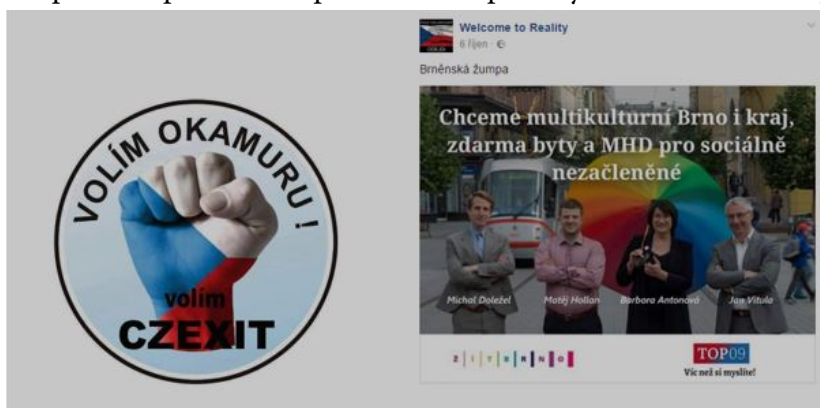
¹⁴⁷ We are here at home (facebook page), “We Are Here at Home - post2,” October 14, 2016,

<https://www.facebook.com/zpravy.cz/posts/1618113068489655>.

Another topic which is not the explicit focus of the page but which seems prevalent is the defence of Czech President Miloš Zeman at all costs and against everyone, often in very intense terms.^{148,149} The website often highlights that the president shows other powers, especially the United States, that the Czech Republic is not their puppet and that it is an independent country.¹⁵⁰

The topics promoted by the *Welcome to Reality* page show a great similarity to those described above. However, there are two aspects of their agenda which are not present on the *We Are Here At Home .com* page. The first one is a general racism, not only towards refugees, but also towards the Roma community. The page often shares videos on Gypsies, ridicules them and calls them vulgar names, usually suggesting that they are living their lives at the expense of other Czech citizens.¹⁵¹

But what has been even more notable during the two months under review is a great resistance and opposition towards Czech mainstream political parties and politicians, especially but not exclusively those on the centre-left of the political spectrum. This detest for most of the parliamentary political parties goes hand in hand with support for nationalist movements and Euroscepticism, which is expressed by the call for the so-called „Czexit.”



Picture 1¹⁵²: „I vote for Okamura! I vote for Czexit” (Tomio Okamura is a leader of a racist and populist political movement”. Picture 2¹⁵³: Political advertisement of a regional coalition: „We want multicultural Brno and region, free apartments and public transport for the socially isolated”. Commentary: „Cesspool from Brno”

¹⁴⁸ The admiration of Zeman is obvious once we go through the audience’s favourite posts. Although his powers are largely ceremonial, he is often presented as the only sensible politician who keeps the Czech Republic on the right track. That is also why the recent affair concerning the celebration of the establishment of Czechoslovakia and the scandal with the state awards caused a wave of indignation. When several celebrities and public figures appeared on a talk show to support the Holocaust survivor Jiří Brady and his nephew, Minister of Culture Daniel Hermann, who met with the Dalai Lama, the page shared an article from the most popular disinformation website *Parlamentní listy* and wrote: “More and more it seems that our “celebrities” and “elites” would prefer activist dictatorship, because they have a fundamental problem with respecting democratic elections.”

¹⁴⁹ We are here at home (facebook page), “We Are Here at Home - post3,” October 28, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/zpravy.cz/posts/1624550907845871>.

¹⁵⁰ We are here at home (facebook page), “We Are Here at Home - photo3,” September 17, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/zpravy.cz/photos/a.1491044087863221.1073741828.1491040544530242/1607809436186685/?type=3&theater>.

¹⁵¹ Welcome to Reality - Freedom for Europe (Facebook page), “Romové Na Dávkách v Mercedesech Se Vysmívají... - Welcome to Reality - Freedom for Europe,” October 29, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/vitejte.v.realite/videos/521906564679387/>.

¹⁵² Welcome to Reality - Freedom for Europe (Facebook page), “Welcome to Reality - Freedom for Europe - Posts,” September 3, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/vitejte.v.realite/photos/a.369228353280543.1073741828.369226096614102/499898980213479/?type=3&theater>.

¹⁵³ Welcome to Reality - Freedom for Europe (Facebook page), “Welcome to Reality - Freedom for Europe - Posts,” October 6, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/vitejte.v.realite/photos/a.369228353280543.1073741828.369226096614102/512079732328737/?type=3&theater>.

The *We Love Russia* page is the only one of the three which openly adores Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Russian Federation as a whole and its policies and approach to the international community. It is visible in almost every status update, picture or video posted on the page.¹⁵⁴ Vladimir Putin is presented as the only reasonable figure promoting peace and at the same time as a macho man making other Western leaders nervous and scared and showing them who is boss.¹⁵⁵ The authors of the page seem to be identifying with the promotion of conservative values often expressed by the Russian federation, making fun of different minorities and isolated communities. The presidential elections in the United States are not a long-term issue, but it is a topic discussed frequently, during the reviewed term. The *We Love Russia* was unsurprisingly supportive of Donald Trump and denigrated Hillary Clinton.

¹⁵⁴ Milujeme Rusko (facebook page), “Milujeme Rusko - Na Manhatanský Most Niekto Vyvesil Obrázok Putina...,” October 7, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/462575803910542/photos/a.462775750557214.1073741828.462575803910542/695516347283152/?type=3&theater>.

¹⁵⁵ Milujeme Rusko (facebook page), “Milujeme Rusko - 🇷🇺 /Светка,” October 28, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/462575803910542/photos/a.462775750557214.1073741828.462575803910542/708086886026098/?type=3&theater>.