The analysis – December 2017

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Summary

- During December the platforms followed in this project published 445 articles, in which at least one presidential candidate was mentioned. Almost half of them (201 articles) focused attention on the election campaign. The main topics regarding domestic politics in the beginning of December were closely connected to the appointment of the new government. This theme has been, however, gradually phased out.

- The most mentioned candidate was Miloš Zeman (altogether in 362 articles). The attention was, however, partly caused by the President’s duties related to his office. The second most represented candidate in the articles was Jiří Drahoš (135 articles), third Mirek Topolánek (114 articles), and finally Michal Horáček (86 articles).

- In the most of cases, the mentions were neither negative nor positive. When referencing Miloš Zeman or Mirek Topolánek, the platforms used both positive and negative standpoints quite relatively equally (56 negative and 44 positive mentions for Zeman; 19 negative and 12 positive mentions for Topolánek). In the case of Jiří Drahoš and Michal Horáček, negative remarks prevailed (37 negative and 12 positive mentions for Drahoš; 11 negative and 5 positive mentions for Horáček).

- The website Aeronet endorsed Miloš Zeman and wrote that Zeman (together with Petr Hannig) is the only ‘pro-national candidate’. An editor in chief of Protiproud Petr Hájek also endorsed Miloš Zeman and recommended voting for him.

- The most active platform was Parlamentní listy, which published 407 articles.

- In the first half of December two main disinformation campaigns occurred (and both were first published by Aeronet). The first one, blaming George Soros (mentioned above), spread to another disinformation websites (5 in total) and to discussion forums. The second one, falsely accusing state authorities of preparing a campaign against Miloš Zeman, slipped through the cracks.
Topics
Throughout December, the platforms followed in this project published 445 articles, in which at least one presidential candidate was mentioned. Almost half of them (201 articles) focused attention on the election campaign. The second most popular topic was the current domestic political situation (110 articles). Other topics, such as reporting on President Miloš Zeman’s activities without any connection to the election campaign or domestic political situation (29 articles), or mentioning current presidential candidates in articles describing older political events (13 articles), were represented significantly less.
Whereas the beginning of December was dominated by topics related to the internal affairs (especially with connection to the appointment of the new government), the rest of the month saw a gradual emphasis placed on the topic of the Presidential election, which was heavily represented even during holidays.

Graph n. 1 – The representation of particular topics on the platforms followed by the project

The types of articles based on the voicing of opinion (such as interviews, 56 articles; or commentary, 40 articles) dominated in the articles reporting on the presidential election. Another type of article frequently published was a citation of some of the presidential candidates (typically as summary of public
discussions, 53 articles). News coverage of real-time events connected to the campaign (such as pre-election polls) appeared in 43 articles. Disinformation themselves occurred in insignificant numbers (4 articles).

**Graph n. 2 – The types of articles reporting on the presidential election**

The Candidates

The most mentioned candidate was Miloš Zeman (altogether in 362 articles). If we break this number down to the articles reporting on Zeman with a clear connection to the election, the number is significantly lower, just 156 articles. However, even with this number, Miloš Zeman is notably the most mentioned candidate. The second most popular candidate in the articles was Jiří Drahoš (135 articles), then Mirek Topolánek (114 articles), and finally Michal Horáček (86 articles). A notable, albeit less numerous amount, of articles mentioned Pavel Fischer (45 articles), Marek Hilšer and Petr Hannig (both in 32 articles), Jiří Hynek (30 articles) and Vratislav Kulhánek (29 articles). The latter candidates were, however, mentioned predominantly in the articles reporting on all of the Presidential candidates (e. g. pre-election polls).
Almost during the whole of the month, Miloš Zeman remained the most mentioned candidate. Jiří Drahoš and Mirek Topolánek competed for second and third place, while Michal Horáček remained, for nearly the whole of December, in fourth place.

Graph n. 3 – Mentions of the candidates throughout December

In the majority of the cases, the mentions of the ‘leading four’ were neither positive nor negative. When referencing Miloš Zeman, the platforms used both positive and negative standpoints relatively equally (56 negative mentions and 44 positive mentions). Miloš Zeman was endorsed by the website Aeronet, which wrote that Zeman (together with Petr Hannig) is the only ‘pro-national candidate’. An editor in chief of Protiproud, Petr Hájek, also endorsed Miloš Zeman and recommended voting for him.

Mirek Topolánek also has a relatively even distribution of negative and positive remarks (19 negative and 12 positive). In the case of Jiří Drahoš and Michal Horáček, the negative remarks prevailed (37 negative and 12 positive for Drahoš; 11 negative and 5 positive for Horáček). Drahoš was, moreover, criticized in 15 articles for his meeting with the then-Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka, and discussing the possible influence of disinformation disseminated by foreign states’ secret services in the elections.
Platforms

Most of the analyzed articles (407 out of 445) were published by the website *Parlamentní listy*. Either a positive or a negative attitude was maintained in one third of the published articles (133). The working hypothesis that on the official Facebook page, articles would primarily support or deprecate a candidate, has been dismissed.

The website *Protiproud* published six articles and most of them had either a positive (in two cases towards Miloš Zeman, in one to Petr Hannig and Jiří Hynek) or a negative sentiment (in three cases Jiří Drahoš, in two Michal Horáček and Pavel Fischer) towards some of the candidates. The website *Aeronet* mentioned Miloš Zeman and Petr Hannig positively in one of the three total articles published about the election campaign. Although other presidential candidates were mentioned with a more neutral connotation, the context (especially among the disseminated *disinformation* about George Soros) gives evidence to an effort to defame the rest of the candidates.

The website *Sputnik CZ* published fifteen articles which were dealing with candidates with neither a negative nor a positive connotation. It also published an interview with Petr Hannig. The website *AC24* and the FB website *Zprávy.cz* were hardly reporting on any of the candidates.
Disinformation

In the first half of December, two disinformation campaigns connected to the presidential elections were published and both were published by the website Aeronet.

The first disinformation campaign, published on December 8th, 2017, stated that George Soros will financially back, in cooperation with Karel Schwarzenberg, the opposing candidates of Miloš Zeman. It consequently spread to various discussions on the Internet under some articles on Parlamentní listy’s and Novinky’s websites. Four days later, on December 12th, Hospodářské noviny published an article describing and warning against such disinformation. On December 14th, Eurozprávy.cz published an article about Aeronet’s effort to negatively influence the elections. Four days later, on December 18th, other websites—NWOO, Svobodné noviny and Protiproud—published this disinformation concerning the involvement of George Soros in the election campaign. The frequency of the publication of such disinformation decreased significantly in the last week of December (see Graph n. 5).

The second disinformation campaign which blamed two state authorities (The Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats and The National Cyber and Information Security Agency) of preparing a campaign against Miloš Zeman was published on December 12th, but it has not been disseminated to any other website or platform.

Graph n. 5 – Mentions of the combination of words ‘Soros’ and ‘elections’ on the Czech news websites in December (searched using a tool >versus<)

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1 However, the possibility of the financing of some candidates by George Soros was mentioned in online discussions earlier (viz Graph n. 5.)
This newsletter was written under the project, The Czech Election in The Era of Disinformation, during which five platforms disseminating disinformation and the way in which they inform the public about the presidential election in 2018 is followed. These are: the websites AC24; Aeronet; Parlametni listy; Protiprooud; and Sputnk CZ; and the Facebook page Zprávy.cz. The data-gathering is conducted using the >versus< media monitoring tool, developed by the Beacon Project of the International Republican Institute.