

## Presidential election 2018

### Summary of key findings of the project

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- In the project, “Czech elections in the era of disinformation,” **we monitored six important platforms disseminating disinformation and the manner in which they reported the course of events before the Presidential Elections of 2018.** Specifically, we monitored the following websites: AC24, Aeronet, Parlamentní listy, Protiproud, Spuntik CZ and the Facebook page Zprávy.cz. **The importance of these platforms is determined by their large numbers of readers and by creating their own original content.**
- **Throughout the monitored period** (from the beginning of December 2018 to the 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2018) **1.352 articles** mentioning at least one of the presidential candidates, **were published on the monitored websites.**
- **Most of the articles (958) addressed the events related to the election campaign.** Another popular topic was the overall political situation, especially in relation to the role of Miloš Zeman in the new government formation process (158). While other candidates were mentioned in relation to a variety of topics, in January, the topic of the election campaign clearly prevailed.
- **The most frequently mentioned candidate was Miloš Zeman** (1.080 articles). Approximately one fourth of these articles addressed his duties as president while in office. **Most of the monitored platforms, directly or indirectly, supported Zeman** (219 positive mentions).
- **The second most frequently mentioned candidate was Jiří Drahoš** (784 articles). The number of texts mentioning Drahoš increased significantly after his election to the second round. **Drahoš was often criticized on the monitored platforms** (194 negative mentions).
- From the other candidates, the most mentioned were Mirek Topolánek (257 articles) and Michal Horáček (199 texts).

- **The platforms approached the election differently:**
  - For AC24 and Sputnik CZ, the presidential election was not an important topic.
  - **Protiproud recommended that their followers vote for Miloš Zeman** in most of their published articles, **claiming that he was a candidate who would best defend Czech national interests.**
  - **Parlamentní listy**, claiming to be impartial and supporting a plurality of opinions, **supported Miloš Zeman by various means** (for example, through the selection of articles published on their Facebook page).
  - **Aeronet and the Facebook page Zprávy.cz** (that became active after the announcement of results of the first round) **openly supported Miloš Zeman** and criticised his opponents (in the case of Aeronet, often using disinformation).
- In total, **13 disinformative articles were published** on the monitored platforms, half of them appearing between the first and second rounds of the elections. **The original source of most of them was Aeronet. Most of the disinformation campaigns were aimed against Jiří Drahoš.**
- **The themes of the disinformation were following:**
  - **Jiří Drahoš** (or other opponents of Miloš Zeman) **is manipulated by power-brokers.** In this group, the following disinformation campaigns can be found: George Soros' alleged financial support of some of the candidates, Jiří Drahoš's membership in The Club of Rome (and attempts to promote the objectives of this club), and the political connection between Drahoš and Miroslav Kalousek.
  - **Jiří Drahoš was a collaborator of communist security service StB.**
  - **Jiří Drahoš intends to receive migrants in accordance with the EU refugee quota scheme.**
  - **Popular pop singer Karel Gott supported Miloš Zeman before the first round.**
  - **The supporters of Miloš Zeman do not have to participate in the first round of election.**

- **Although disinformation attempting to manipulate the course of events before the Czech Presidential Elections appeared, its impact cannot be overstated.** After announcing the results of the first round, we saw a large increase in the number of mentions of topics related to disinformation, but this was short-lived. **Disinformation did not manage to bring topics to the public discussion that would not have been mentioned before by somebody else.**
- When evaluating the role of disinformation in the Presidential Elections, **it is indispensable to consider the broader context of reporting of the platforms, and to keep in mind that if they supported one of the candidates, they often tried to do so by other methods** (for example, by non-critical commentaries).