

"The Source of All Our Problems":

European Green Deal on Czech Facebook

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Key takeaways

- 86% of monitored posts opposed the European Green Deal, which was seen as the source of most of the current economic and energy-related problems in the Czech Republic.
- Green Deal policies were discussed mainly by political actors with a dominant role of the far right party Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) and its leader Tomio Okamura.
- Potentially harmful sources which spread manipulative messages and disinformation constituted 71.4% of the overall 42 sources identified, mainly in the form of right wing political movements (members of SPD, Freedomites, Tea party cz)
- These outlets presented the Green Deal as the source of the current inflation and increasing prices of groceries and electricity, and as a purely ideological project with no positive impact on the environment or society.

Prague Security Studies Institute (PSSI), in cooperation with its partners from the International Republican Institute's (IRI) Beacon Project, monitored the Czech debate concerning the European Green Deal on Facebook in the period 20 April – 20 May 2022. This monitoring constitutes part of a larger IRI initiative being implemented simultaneously in five EU countries.

PSSI reviewed the top 100 most interacted with Facebook posts discussing the Green Deal policies, based on the number of interactions, to identify the main drivers of the debate and attitudes towards the Green Deal, European Union and climate change more generally.

Our monitoring revealed ongoing high politicization of the issue. The debate about the Green Deal was mainly hijacked by economic policy issues due to the current inflation and rising prices of energy and consumer goods. Another dominant issue was the dependency on Russian gas within the context of the continuing Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Summary

The monitored posts were produced by 42 unique sources, totaling 114,465 interactions, with an average of 1,144 interactions per post. 68% of these interactions (77,711) were generated by Tomio Okamura, leader of the right - far right Eurosceptic party Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD). In his posts, he addressed many of the current economic issues of the Czech society, such as inflation and rising prices of gas, electricity, housing or groceries. He claimed there is a causality between all these issues and the Green Deal and advocated for the withdrawal from the Green Deal as the ultimate long-term solution to all Czech problems.

Okamura's messaging is exemplary of the 50% monitored posts which used the Green Deal as a proxy topic and scapegoat for economic issues. 28% of the posts used the Green Deal as a proxy in a political context to underline criticism of the current Czech government under Prime Minister Petr Fiala. According to this rhetoric his government does not take care of its citizens, on the contrary, drags the country into irrational projects such as the Green Deal, which negatively impact the living standard of Czech citizens. The original environmental aspect of the Green Deal policy framed the debate in only 5% of cases. Although climate change and its negative consequences were generally accepted as a fact in the monitored posts, doubts were raised mostly about the Czech and/or European ability to help the situation. The Green Deal policy framework was not seen as a way forward but, on the contrary, as a step back in industrial and societal development.

In the upcoming months, with the Czech Presidency of the EU Council starting in July, it will be crucial for strategic communication units to focus the debate around the Green Deal on the compensation it provides to EU member states during implementation to prevent Eurosceptic and populist actors from further hijacking the debate for their own political gains by making incorrect connections between the policy and the current economic turmoil.