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THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL AND THE ENERGY CRISIS IN THE CZECH INFORMATION SPACE: STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVE

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The Prague Security Studies Institute (PSSI) monitored the Czech online debate about the European Green Deal, climate change, and energy-related issues from June to December 2022. Besides mapping [the general online debate](#) and related disinformation, part of our goal was also to explore how relevant stakeholders engage in strategic communication on the topic and possibly counter any circulating manipulative discourse. The monitoring was part of a larger initiative of the International Republican Institute's (IRI) Beacon Project, [European Green Deal: Mapping perceptions in Central and Eastern Europe](#), which took place in five EU countries simultaneously.

Our research of stakeholders' online communication contained a sample of government institutions, civil society organizations, and media outlets with EU green policies and energy transition on their agenda who are engaging, or would be expected to engage, in strategic communication and counter-messaging on these topics. We monitored public Facebook pages of 13 selected stakeholders (listed in Annex II) with the help of the CrowdTangle online analytical tool and examined the top 100 posts each month based on the number of interactions (likes, comments, and shares).

The monitoring revealed a considerable lack of proactive communication about the Green Deal, energy issues, and the climate crisis in general, especially when it comes to selected government institutions. [As our research indicated](#), this inactivity helped to leave an open space for manipulative narratives and disinformation to dominate the online debate about green- and energy-related issues. As a consequence, the debate about the Green Deal strayed away from its sustainability goals and opportunities. Moreover, messaging about the energy crisis manipulates the discussion about the causes of this distress, blaming the Green Deal and the West while underplaying or ignoring the role of the Russian war against Ukraine. All in all, relevant stakeholders, at the moment, are not fostering any constructive debate on the Green Deal and energy.

Consequently, this report provides recommendations for how the discourse can become better balanced – in the form of concrete proposals for strategic communication on the topics in question. To provide more comprehensive background information in this area, the report is also supplemented by a list of useful links in relation to the Green Deal and sustainable energy: general resources, teaching material, government subsidies, media specializing in the topic, practical resources on sustainable living, and similar documentation.

NO CONSISTENT INFORMATION CAMPAIGN

The stakeholders showed a very low level of activity during the seven monitored months during which we identified only 376 relevant¹ posts in total. The highest monthly number of relevant posts did not surpass 81 (recorded in September).² This inactivity is also reflected in the amount of attention such posts get on Facebook – interactions in the range of only dozens or perhaps hundreds, while manipulative posts garner

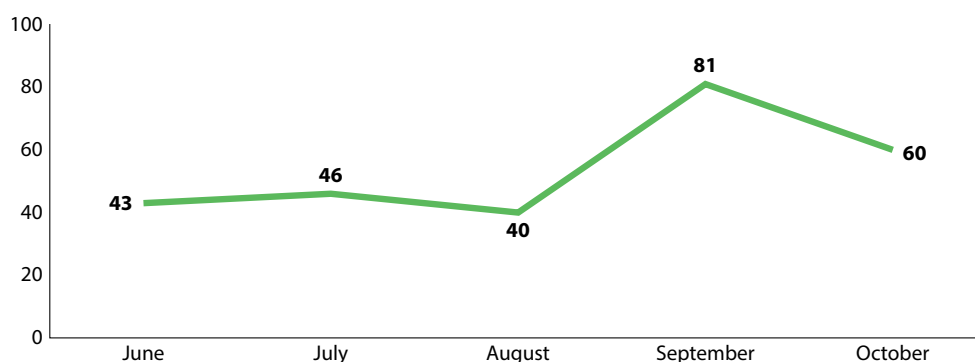
1 As relevant, we consider posts published by one of the 13 public profiles in the monitoring period which 1) appeared in the top 100 posts of the month (based on the number of interactions) and 2) covered energy and climate issues.

2 Compared to at least 100 manipulative posts and articles each month (by political actors and media known for spreading disinformation). [Source](#): Kristína Šefčíková, Prague Security Studies Institute: *The European Green Deal and The Energy Crisis in the Czech Information Space*, pp. 5-6.

thousands of interactions and also come in much bigger volumes. On the other hand, a positive development did take place: compared to the first half of 2022, the communication of stakeholders increased by 30% in the second half of the year, a period coinciding with the Czech presidency of the Council of the European Union. However, the overall levels of activity were still low.

As the chart below illustrates, there is virtually no coordinated and regular information campaign about the Green Deal or energy issues. As a consequence, the online debate does not revolve around the actual content, goals, or opportunities of the Green Deal and sustainability strategies. Instead, it leaves an open space for manipulative narratives to take hold of the debate. Our [previous research](#) has shown that (far) right-wing messaging constantly targets green policies and topics, employing them in domestic political infighting as well as in more general anti-EU crusades. At the same time, [opinion polls](#) have indicated that a majority of Czechs feel highly uninformed about policies such as the Green Deal. Only a tenth of the population says they have enough information, around half has little knowledge, and a third almost none.

Number of Posts Focused on Climate/Energy Issues, June—December 2022

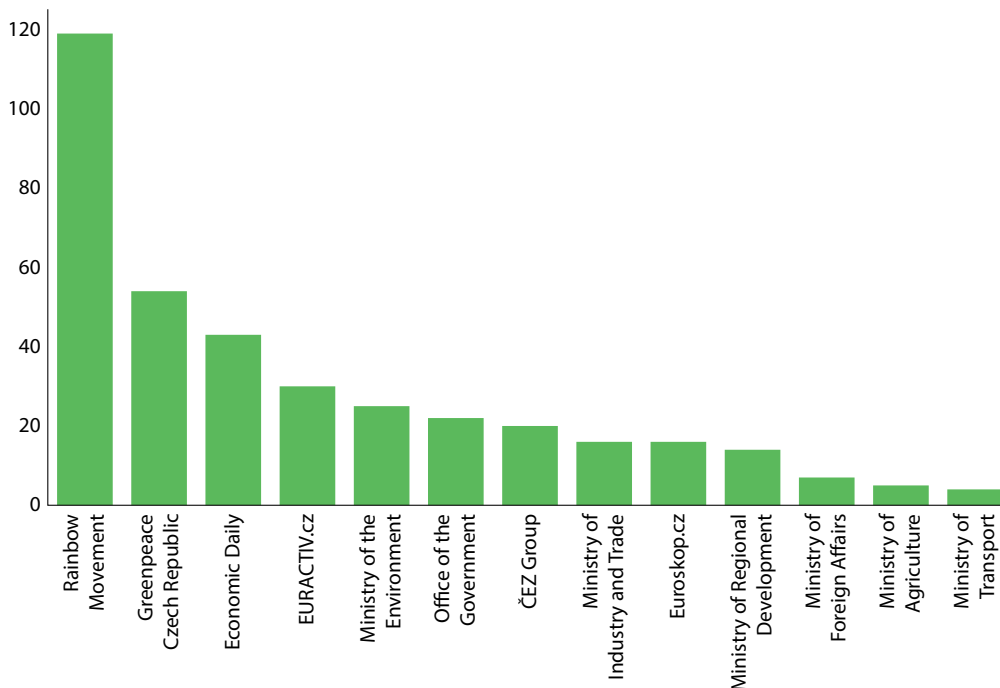


CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE LEAD

Among the observed stakeholders, civil society organizations led relatively consistent online campaigns, mainly focused more broadly on climate and nature preservation but also on issues such as energy poverty. The power of their regular communication was also reflected in becoming the only stakeholder sources within our monitoring to catch a certain amount of attention, including interactions reaching into the thousands on individual posts. This was specifically the case of the [Rainbow Movement - Friends of the Earth Czech Republic](#) and in second place, [Greenpeace Czech Republic](#) (whose posts, however, were only around half as popular).

Some specialized media, such as the Economic Daily ([Ekonomický deník](#)) or [EURACTIV.cz](#), recorded higher activity in terms of how much they posted. However, these outlets face the common challenge of addressing green issues in a fact-based and explanatory way and then seeing such content not attract much attention (these posts usually ranked among those with the lowest level of interactions). However, our monitoring also revealed the potential of the energy/business sector itself contributing to the debate, with the ČEZ Group as the most prominent example. The largest energy group in the Czech Republic, ČEZ is engaged in distribution, trade in, and sales of electricity and heat, as well as trade in and sales of natural gas. The company, majority-owned by the state, showed average activity in discussing the opportunities posed by renewable sources of energy from a more pragmatic perspective. This messaging can potentially reach more diverse audiences than government institutions' communication.

Number of Relevant Posts per Source



GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS FALLING BEHIND

Government institutions were among the most inactive sources we monitored, although once they posted on social media, they managed to attract more attention than the specialized media. However, during the seven monitored months we only identified 93 posts from government institutions relevant to the topic, which makes up only 24.7% of the overall number of analyzed stakeholders' posts. These contributions focused more on energy issues rather than the Green Deal and the environment, with an activity and interactions peak in September when the institutions provided information on measures to deal with the energy crisis, including the imposition of a price cap. Another focus were the activities of the Czech presidency of the Council of the EU and [appearances of Czech policymakers](#) at various conferences.

Number of interactions on government institutions' posts (June—December 2022).



Source: CrowdTangle.

Regarding the Ministry of the Environment – which would be expected to be the most active in communicating about the topics in question – we did not identify any systematic effort or information campaign during our monitoring. One reason could be the absence of a strategic communications unit in the [orga-](#)

nizational structure of the ministry. Communication activities rely on a more standard press and PR department. Unexpected personnel changes also took place due to the resignation of former Minister Anna Hubáčková because of health issues. The resort is now temporarily led by Marian Jurečka, minister of labor and social affairs, which could be impacting the overall proactivity of the ministry. However, the ministry has also attempted to reach out to a wider audience via popular formats, such as the video and podcast series “In the Greenhouse.” In this series, various Czech celebrities – such as actors, musicians, and journalists – pose questions to Ladislav Miko, a former environment minister and current advisor to the minister, about climate change, the Green Deal, nature conservation, and other topics. But so far, this program has gained only a fraction of the interactions attracted by manipulative political discourse on the Green Deal and related issues.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS³

The considerable lack of proactive online communication about the Green Deal, energy issues, and the climate crisis in general leaves an open space for manipulative narratives and disinformation to dominate the online discourse about sustainability and related energy issues. Consequently, the discussion has strayed away from its environmental background, including the goals and potential opportunities of the green transition. The lack of a constructive online debate on the Green Deal and related energy issues has led us to the following recommendations:

1. **Build communication capacities**

Relevant stakeholders need to fill the current gap to nurture a proactive and balanced debate on the Green Deal. The starting point should be an active, long-term information campaign based on clear and accessible data. For a start, we recommend updating the Ministry of the Environment’s website, which currently does not include easily accessible, basic information on the Green Deal and future steps within this framework. The existent press and PR department of the ministry could be supported by creating a dedicated strategic communication unit that would oversee a continuous information campaign and set its own narrative. This would help prevent the Eurosceptic and populist actors from further hijacking the debate for their own political gains by making incorrect connections between the Green Deal and the current economic turmoil. Larger engagement of stakeholders could also spark more interest in the topic from the mainstream media, which have the ability to expand and diversify the debate.

2. **Use engaging, audiovisual formats**

Especially when targeting the general public, an information campaign should ideally be delivered in engaging ways, using mainly audiovisual and interactive formats, with material such as easy-to-understand infographics. The “In the Greenhouse” series produced by the Ministry of the Environment, which features Czech public figures, is a good point of reference.

3 This section is also based on discussions from two events that took place within the project in Prague with representatives of government institutions (including the Ministry of the Environment), the media, the private sector, and the NGO sector. A videorecording of the public part is available [here](#).

3. Explore a whole-of-government approach

Various government institutions besides the Ministry of the Environment can be involved in communicating specific aspects of green policies, such as the Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Industry and Trade, Ministry of Regional Development, and Ministry of Agriculture. This cross-governmental approach would require a coordinated effort, where the strategic communication unit at the Office of the Government could have its role. However, this would also require an adequate budget that would, for example, allow for additional personnel and/or new job descriptions for existing staff.

4. Emphasize new opportunities

Sociological research has shown [a low awareness of Czechs](#) about the content of green policies and the opportunities they provide, which is also a consequence of the current, unbalanced public debate. Future information campaigns should delve into the specifics beyond the buzzwords of climate neutrality and the years 2030 and 2050, which can sound vague and unachievable to the public. Instead, new plans should be more focused on the smaller individual steps contained in these policies and how they can contribute to the overall goals of the green transition.

Although opinion polls have made clear that [Czechs show interest in](#) nature conservation and climate protection, economic and social needs remain at the forefront – especially in the uncertain times of a crisis. Communication of green policies should highlight what positive impact they can have on citizens' everyday lives, how they can improve living standards, and how they will be accessible to all income groups. For example, the ongoing energy crisis could serve as a prime opportunity to show how the Green Deal and transition to renewable sources can be at least a partial solution to current and future energy security challenges, which require diversification away from Russian fossil fuels and fossil fuels as such. Opportunities for a diversified energy mix, new jobs, and financially accessible energy should not be omitted as well.

5. Emphasize the availability of financial support

The population's worries about the impact of the Green Deal on their lives should be addressed with accessible information on financial support programs available during the policy's implementation. Opinion polls have confirmed [subsidies are the most popular](#) form of environmental measures among Czechs and should be spotlighted since people are often not aware of the possibilities of governmental support. Consultations should also be accessible to counter any discouragement from the required bureaucratic processes.

6. Offer examples of success stories

The [same sociological research](#) cited above also indicates that even people critical of the Green Deal care about nature conservation and climate protection and support the use of renewable sources of energy, as well as hope for an improvement in air quality and the state of the Czech countryside. Despite these self-proclaimed interests, both specialized and more general mainstream media struggle to draw the public's attention to fact-based reporting about green issues. A way to counter this issue would be to offer a wider range of content – success and solutions-oriented stories both from home and abroad, human interest stories, etc. They would present a more attractive genre for the media and their audience, but could also help inform politicians on climate and related energy issues, who could then push for policies on the national or the EU level.

7. Support civil society

Civil society organizations have already proven their experience and ability to stay more proactively on top of the topic than others and also to draw attention on social media, especially compared to government institutions (based on the number of interactions). Cooperation with and financial support of the civil society sector is a cost-effective way to keep the debate going.

8. Review best practices in other countries

Exchange of communication know-how with other countries can be a good source of inspiration and impetus for further development of domestic capabilities. For example, the Slovak Ministry of Environment has its own [information portal](#), which features concise and structured sections on the Green Deal, but also on environmental problems, risks, terminology, and even green agriculture. The government of another Czech neighbor, Poland, disseminates a brochure titled “[The European Green Deal in Q&A](#)” with a user-friendly graphic design. As for the more expert legislative dimension, the Council of European Energy Regulators has published a series of [European Green Deal White Papers](#) to deepen understanding on the regulatory aspects of Green Deal issues. Utilizing the existence of such materials and translating them into local languages can be another cost-effective way to boost the understanding of green topics.

This report has been prepared with support from IRI’s Beacon Project. The opinions expressed are solely those of the author and do not reflect those of IRI.



ANNEX I - USEFUL LINKS (NOT ONLY) FOR CZECH CITIZENS

General information resources:

- [Euroskep](#): an information portal of the section for European Affairs of the Office of the Government
 - [Current state](#) of the Green Deal
 - [Meaning](#) of the Green Deal for Czech business
 - [Ve skleníku](#) (In the Greenhouse): podcast on all things environment-related
- [Evropský informační projekt](#) (EuroInfoProject): Green Deal and energy security/financial sources/ Czech Republic
- [oEnergetice](#) (About Energy): Energostat, monitoring, podcasts, careers in energy, news
- [Fakta o klimatu](#) (Facts about the Climate): infographics, data, articles
- [Zelená města](#) (Green Cities): key strategies, EU regulations, solutions, procurement and funding options for your city

Educational materials:

- [Teaching About the Climate](#) (Učím o klimatu): teaching materials, lesson plans, methodological support

Subsidies:

- [Spravedlivá transformace](#) (A Just Transition): a program aimed at countering the negative impacts of the shift away from coal in the most affected regions (in the Czech Republic, this applies to the Karlovy Vary, Moravian-Silesian, and Ústí regions)
- [Nová zelená úsporám](#) (New Green Savings): subsidies for energy-saving housing
- [Nová zelená úsporám Light](#) (New Green Savings Light): subsidies more accessible to low-income households and seniors
- [Cirkulární dotace](#) (circular subsidies): financing for companies to implement measures leading to long-term sustainability and environmental protection

Specialized media on the topic:

- [EnviWeb](#)
- [EURACTIV.cz](#)
- [Obnovitelně.cz](#) (Renewable.cz)
- [Průmyslová ekologie](#) (Industrial Ecology): waste, air and water quality, energy, subsidies

Practical resources:

- [Enviros](#): services and consulting in the field of energy and the environment
- [ENVIprofi.cz](#): expert advice in the areas of corporate ecology, waste, air protection, environmental management system, and related fields
- [Budovy21](#) (Buildings21): consulting for low-carbon transformation projects
- [TZB-info](#): website covering the construction industry and energy saving
- [Středoevropský institut pro rozvoj dopravy](#) (Central European Institute for Transport Development): electromobility, environment, alternative sources
- [Svaz moderní energetiky](#) (Union of Modern Energy): an umbrella platform for innovative technologies and approaches
- [Šance pro Budovy](#) (Chance for Buildings): alliance of associations supporting the energy-efficient construction industry

ANNEX II - LIST OF MONITORED FACEBOOK SOURCES⁴

| Page name | Type | Number of relevant posts |
|--|------------|--------------------------|
| Hnutí DUHA - Přátelé Země Česká republika (Rain-bow Movement - Friends of the Earth Czech Republic) | CSO | 119 |
| Greenpeace Česká republika (Greenpeace Czech Republic) | CSO | 54 |
| Ekonomický deník (Economic Daily) | media | 43 |
| EURACTIV.cz | media | 30 |
| Ministerstvo životního prostředí (Ministry of the Environment) | government | 25 |
| Úřad vlády ČR (Office of the Government) | government | 22 |
| Skupina ČEZ (CEZ Group) | business | 20 |
| Ministerstvo průmyslu a obchodu (Ministry of Industry and Trade) | government | 16 |
| Euroskop.cz | media | 16 |
| Ministerstvo pro místní rozvoj (Ministry of Regional Development) | government | 14 |
| Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) | government | 7 |
| Ministerstvo zemědělství České republiky (Ministry of Agriculture) | government | 5 |
| Ministerstvo dopravy (Ministry of Transport) | government | 4 |

⁴ Note: Some relevant sources could not be included in the monitoring due to their unavailability on CrowdTangle.