

PSSI PERSPECTIVES — 18

# THE ONSET OF THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE THROUGH THE EYES OF PRO-KREMLIN MEDIA: A CASE STUDY OF SPUTNIK CZ

Nina Webrová, Prague Security Studies Institute  
April 2022

# THE ONSET OF THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE THROUGH THE EYES OF PRO-KREMLIN MEDIA: A CASE STUDY OF SPUTNIK CZ

Author: Nina Webrová, Prague Security Studies Institute

Following the Russian military build-up along the Ukrainian border, President Vladimir Putin called for certain security guarantees in December 2021, among them demands for NATO never to admit Ukraine to the Alliance and to withdraw its forces from Eastern Europe. His requests were rejected by the Western allies. Then, on 21 February 2022, President Putin announced recognition of the independence of two break-away Ukrainian regions — the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR). Subsequently, the Russian president deployed troops on what he called a “peacekeeping” mission to the two regions, and on 24 February launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine.

This invasion had an impact on the Czech information scene and led to unprecedented events. As a reaction to the military offensive against Ukraine and following recommendations from the Czech government, the .cz domain administrator CZ.NIC blocked access to select disinformation websites for posing a threat to national security of the Czech Republic.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Council of the European Union (EU) temporarily suspended the broadcasting activities of RT<sup>2</sup> and Sputnik (both well-known for spreading pro-Kremlin disinformation) for posing a threat to the EU’s public order as well as security.<sup>3</sup> The aim of this perspective is to analyze the changing narratives of Sputnik CZ as the situation escalated, and the way it tried to justify Russian actions and subsequently legitimize the offensive. Additionally, the approach of both public and private institutions to the conflict and the transformation of the Czech (dis)information scene is examined and analyzed.

## MONITORING OF SPUTNIK CZ

Sputnik CZ was established in 2014 by a Russian state-owned news agency Rossiya Segodnya.<sup>4</sup> Sputnik, albeit presenting itself as a reliable and legitimate news source, is considered by the expert community as one of the most active pro-Russian propaganda outlets in the Czech Republic.<sup>5</sup> Prague Security Studies Institute (PSSI) monitored the website of Sputnik CZ during January and February 2022 to map its evolving nar-

1 “SDRUŽENÍ CZ.NIC ZABLOKOVALO WEBY ŠÍŘÍCÍ DEZINFORMACE SPOJENÉ S RUSKO-UKRAJINSKÝM KONFLIKTEM”, CZ.NIC, <https://www.nic.cz/page/4301/sdruzeni-cznic-zablokovalo-weby-sirici-dezinformace-spojene-s-rusko-ukrajinskym-konfliktem/>

2 RT is a Russian state-controlled television network

3 “EU imposes sanctions on state-owned outlets RT/Russia Today and Sputnik’s broadcasting in the EU”, Council of the European Union, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/02/eu-imposes-sanctions-on-state-owned-outlets-rt-russia-today-and-sputnik-s-broadcasting-in-the-eu/>

4 “O projektu“, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/docs/index.html>

5 “RT a Sputniku nebyla povolena účast na konferenci o svobodě médií“, Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky, <https://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/clanek/rt-a-sputniku-nebyla-povolena-ucast-na-konferenci-o-svobode-medii.aspx>

ratives in connection to the situation on the Russo-Ukrainian border. Sputnik was visited 2.5 million times in January and 3.9 million times in February, showing a sharp increase in visits as the conflict escalated.<sup>6</sup>

PSSI specifically monitored the website’s category “Opinions”, the source of much of Sputnik’s manipulative content and propaganda, where Sputnik’s notorious pseudo-commentators express their viewpoints on a wide range of issues. In terms of Sputnik’s general news reporting, the medium strives to appear as a legitimate and objective news source. However, in the category “Opinions”, Sputnik’s well-established commentators often invite representatives of anti-establishment parties or Czech and Russian political and social scientists for interviews. Such collaboration arguably increases Sputnik’s “legitimacy” among its readers as it provides an opinion platform to public figures, who, in turn, can promote their respective agendas. Sputnik itself, however, maintains a “safe distance” from these opinion articles by proclaiming that they represent the authors’ personal opinions only.<sup>7</sup> This protects the website from facing accusations of biased or inaccurate reporting.

In the monitored time frame and category, Sputnik published 100 articles from which 31 were dedicated to Ukraine. 90% of the articles on Ukraine were written by 3 Czech authors: Vladimír Franta (13 articles), Alena Novotná (10) and Jana Petrova (5), who are all well-known and long-established commentators on the website. There was a sharp increase in the articles dedicated to Ukraine from January (11 articles) to February (20 articles). From the 31 articles, 30 were written as a mixture of an opinion-based introduction to an issue by the author and a subsequent interview which further discussed the topic at hand. The interviews were conducted mostly with affiliates of a right-wing populist and Eurosceptic party Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD, 11 interviews) and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM, 4 interviews). Additionally, representatives of National Socialists, Tricolour, and Freedomites also made appearances, as well as various political and social scientists, publicists, or a military analyst.

JANUARY	Total number of articles	53
	...of which were dedicated to the conflict in Ukraine	11 (21%)
FEBRUARY	Total number of articles	47
	...of which were dedicated to the conflict in Ukraine	20 (43%)

It should be noted that on 23 February,<sup>8</sup> a day before the offensive began, Sputnik launched a new section on its website called the “Demilitarization and Denazification of Ukraine” where new articles dedicated to the conflict are published every day. This section was, however, not part of PSSI’s monitoring, as the focus was exclusively on the category “Opinions”.

6 According to <https://www.similarweb.com/website/cz.sputniknews.com/#overview>

7 Kristína Šefčíková, “THE NEW CZECH GOVERNMENT IN PRO-KREMLIN MEDIA: A CASE STUDY OF SPUTNIK CZ”, Prague Security Studies Institute, [https://www.pssi.cz/download/docs/9514\\_the-new-czech-government-in-pro-kremlin-media-a-case-study-of-sputnik-cz.pdf](https://www.pssi.cz/download/docs/9514_the-new-czech-government-in-pro-kremlin-media-a-case-study-of-sputnik-cz.pdf)

8 The first article in the “Demilitarization and Denazification of Ukraine” section was published on 23 February

## COVERAGE OF THE GROWING CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

The overarching theme of the articles was denial that the Russian Federation would ever launch an offensive against Ukraine; and if the Russian Federation decided to intervene, it would only be a reaction to the provocations by the West — which was, indeed, Sputnik’s interpretation of the events once the invasion started.

Specifically, when comparing articles published in the given time-frame, a change in the narratives is evident. In January, there were two general themes: disbelief that the Russian invasion would ever happen; and claims that the West and NATO’s “expansionist” tendencies were to blame for all the unrest. In February, the anti-EU, anti-NATO, and anti-Western media themes became much more frequent and assertive. The West was increasingly accused of anti-Russian propaganda (mainly regarding “imprecise” predictions of the start of the invasion) and blamed fully for the escalation of the conflict. The narratives and accusations became increasingly aggressive, even more so as the conflict escalated, up until the day of the invasion. These developments in narratives led to “justification” of the Russian aggression which was eventually portrayed as a strictly defensive and legitimate move.

### JANUARY

As Přemysl Votava (National Socialists’ Vice-Chairman) proclaimed in an interview for Sputnik: “Today people started talking about Russian aggression, which I simply cannot imagine.”<sup>10</sup> In general, both the authors as well as interviewees of Sputnik believed that there was no reason for any Russian aggression. Statements that Russia had no need to usurp foreign territory since the country itself is the largest in the world and resource-rich<sup>11</sup> were used as supporting evidence for these claims. Furthermore, Sputnik kept accusing the West – usually either the US, NATO, or NATO perceived as led by the US – or Ukraine itself of being the real aggressor in the conflict. Therefore, since what had been happening in close proximity to Russia was seen as a provocation by the West, Russia was claimed to have no choice but to concentrate its military forces by the Ukrainian borders.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, the West was accused of planning to engage in military exercises instead of trying to diplomatically solve the growing conflict.<sup>13</sup> As for other alleged provocations, accounts of Western allies’ unwillingness to meet demands for non-expansion of NATO,<sup>14</sup> accusations of Ukraine for not abiding by the Minsk agreements and the threat of Ukrainian armed forces on Donetsk and Luhansk<sup>15</sup> were frequent narratives that kept resonating throughout the articles. For instance, Jiří Vyvadil (lawyer and activist) claimed that “There is no doubt that Russia rightfully wants to revise the situation where the aggressive NATO military pact

9 Czech center-left nationalist fringe political party

10 Jana Petrova, “Výročí osvobození koncentračního tábora v Osvětimi. Může se osvoboditel stát agresorem? Názor”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220127/vyroci-osvobozeni-koncentracniho-tabora-v-osvetimi-muze-se-osvoboditel-stat-agresorem-nazor-17362938.html>

11 Vladimír Franta, “USA mají zájem vyprovokovat konflikt v Evropě. Přilévá Lipavský olej do ohně? Názor”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220111/usa-maji-zajem-vyprovokovat-konflikt-v-evrope-prileva-lipavsky-olej-do-ohne-nazor-17176489.html>

12 Vladimír Franta, “Kdo obsluhuje US jaderný knoflík? Ruka Bidena není ta, která by se měla dotýkat tlačítek. Názor”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220113/kdo-obsluhuje-us-jaderny-knoflik-ruka-bidena-neni-ta-ktera-by-se-mela-dotykat-tlacitek-nazor-17202130.html>

13 Alena Novotná, “Čeští vojáci jedou na Ukrajinu. Budou učit ukrajinskou armádu, jak bojovat s Donbasem?”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220118/cesti-vojaci-jedou-na-ukrajinu-budou-ucit-ukrajinskou-armadu-jak-bojovat-s-donbasem-17261029.html>

14 Tatjana Naronškaja, “Zbývají jen dvě možnosti...“ Český diplomat hodnotí jednání Ruska a NATO”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220119/zbyvaji-jen-dve-moznosti-cesky-diplomat-hodnoti-jednani-ruska-a-nato-17273456.html>

15 Alena Novotná, “Česko jako válečný štváček? Vláda chce prodat Ukrajině zbraně a munici. Názor”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220120/cesko-jako-valecny-stvac-vlada-chce-prodat-ukrajine-zbrane-a-munici-nazor-17279505.html>

has taken over the part of Europe that borders on Russia in the West and where it has been consistently causing tensions.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the Czech government was accused of solidarity with the Kiev government “which wants to fire artillery shells at innocent people living in Donetsk and Luhansk.”<sup>17</sup> Sputnik, however, maintained a consensus that an open conflict would not benefit anybody as both sides would suffer enormously should such a situation arise.

## FEBRUARY

As the situation escalated, Sputnik’s narratives got more assertive, aggressive, and mocking; and accusations of mainstream media’s anti-Russian propaganda became more prevalent. For instance, “Mainstream and Pentagon have a chronically similar rhetoric, yet the alleged Russian invasion won’t and won’t come...”<sup>18</sup> statement was a reaction to an article published by Bloomberg on 4 February claiming “Russia Invades Ukraine,” for which the company had already apologized, stating it was an error.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, a different article proclaimed “The mainstream media is disappointed. Their war propaganda has failed. Common sense won over war propaganda.”<sup>20</sup> Another alleged case of disinformation according to Sputnik’s commentators happened on 11 February when the US National Security Adviser warned that a Russian invasion might happen even before the Winter Olympics were concluded.<sup>21</sup> Sputnik perceived these claims as escalating anti-Russian propaganda and a form of psychological duress on the Western audience. Additionally, it was stressed that Ukraine needed to obey the Minsk agreements;<sup>22</sup> and questioned why Russia should comply with the Minsk agreements if Ukraine did not plan on doing so.<sup>23</sup> Such narratives as well as Sputnik’s portrayal of Russia as always in a strictly defensive position resonate strongly with the official Russian rhetoric of taking only necessary defensive actions to counterattack the provocations of the West.

On the days leading to 16 February (i.e., one of the possible dates of the invasion as reported by some Western media<sup>24</sup> and consequently widely referred to by Sputnik) the anti-Western, anti-EU and anti-NATO rhetoric increased substantially. Both the EU and NATO were described as institutions without values or significance; and NATO was accused of functioning only as a “smokescreen for American and British war preparations.”<sup>25</sup> Even though Sputnik had expressed concerns over being on the brink of a military conflict

- 
- 16 Jana Petrova, “Vyvadil: Pětikoalice plní své sliby a je připravena nás zatáhnout do cizí války”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220127/vyvadil-petikoalice-plni-sve-sliby-a-je-pripravena-nas-zatahnout-do-cizi-valky-17371499.html>
  - 17 Alena Novotná, “Volejte Chocholouška! Jde o kalku s českou municí pro Ukrajinu a válečnými uprchlíky”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220129/volejte-chocholouska-jde-o-kalku-s-ceskou-munici-pro-ukrajinu-a-valecnymi-uprchliky-17393716.html>
  - 18 Vladimír Franta, “Pentagon: „Rusko má záminku pro vpád na Ukrajinu.“ Bloomberg o vpádu napsal. Není to trapné?”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220206/pentagon-rusko-ma-zaminku-pro-vpad-na-ukrajinu-bloomberg-o-vpadu-napsal-neni-to-trapne-17501986.html>
  - 19 “Statement on Publishing Error”, Bloomberg, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-04/statement-on-publishing-error>
  - 20 Alena Novotná, “Češi se války neobávají. Ale média straší dál”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220208/cesi-se-valky-neobavaji-ale-media-strasi-dal-17533088.html>
  - 21 Quint Forgy and Myah Ward, “White House warns Russian invasion ‘threat is immediate’”, Politico, <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/02/11/white-house-warns-russian-invasion-threat-is-immediate-00008299>
  - 22 Vladimír Franta, “Lipavský na Ukrajině v neprůstředně vestě? Podporuje tím adoraci válečných zločinců. Názor”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220209/lipavsky-na-ukrajine-v-neprustredne-veste-podporuje-tim-adoraci-valecnych-zlocincu-nazor-17543744.html>
  - 23 Vladimír Franta, “Ukrajina vyhrožuje, že nesplní minské dohody. Proč Západ chce plnění po Rusku? Názor”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220210/ukrajina-vyhrozuje-ze-nesplni-minske-dohody-proc-zapad-chce-plneni-po-rusku-nazor-17568692.html>
  - 24 Darya Korsunskaya and Natalia Zinets, “Ukraine president calls for ‘day of unity’ for Feb. 16, day some believe Russia could invade”, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-hints-concessions-russia-scholz-heads-region-2022-02-14/>
  - 25 Vladimír Franta, “Štefec: Petr Pavel se mylí. NATO jednotně není. Pro Bidena je partner paradoxně jen Putin”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220213/stefec-petr-pavel-se-myli-nato-jednotne-neni-pro-bidena-je-partner-paradoxne-jen->

on the European continent, it blamed the Western allies for the development. The non-existent invasion in the time frame allegedly set by the US officials<sup>26</sup> was commonly viewed as the final blow to the ongoing “loss of credibility” of such state institutions. On 16 February, Sputnik released an article stating that it was no surprise the attack did not happen, since “real facts” suggested that there was no reason for Russia to intervene militarily against Ukraine.<sup>27</sup>

In the days post 16 February, the narratives about the alleged Western media disinformation campaigns become ever increasingly assertive, mocking, and suggestive. Sputnik claimed that the debunking of Western fake news was witnessed, and articles headlined “Czech journalists are sad that Russia did not attack Ukraine. And they keep lying,”<sup>28</sup> or statements like “How many times have the Russians attacked Ukraine in the past few weeks according to the US administration?”<sup>29</sup> were published. Moreover, it was believed that the Russian military were, in fact, pulling back after completing a military exercise near the Ukrainian borders. As Vladimír Franta argued in one of his articles, since the spokesman for the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation said the units were retreating, then “What does the Western media not understand?”<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, Sputnik’s authors were convinced that the warning by the US President Joe Biden<sup>31</sup> about the threat of an attack from Russia was a clear disinformation and a form of coercion, not merely an imprecise warning, which is what the Western media usually called it.<sup>32</sup> President Putin’s official recognition of the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk was seen as legitimate and the decision to dispatch “peacekeepers” to the area was perceived as a sensible move.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, it was claimed by Sputnik that the Russian Federation decided for their military presence in Donbas after the US and the UK began supplying Ukraine with modern military weapons.<sup>34</sup> The consensus still was, however, that the main victims of the conflict would be civilians on both sides, and that the violence should therefore be halted and negotiations should be resumed for the sake of the people.<sup>35</sup>

---

[putin-17604108.html](#)

- 26 Vladimír Franta, “Kdyby měl Lipavský provést pochod s plnou polní, asi by ho vojákovi pustilo. Názor”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220215/kdyby-mel-lipavsky-provest-pochod-s-plnou-polni-asi-by-ho-vojackovani-pustilo-nazor-17636788.html>
- 27 Jana Petrova, “Syrůček: Válka plánovaná médii na 16. února se ukázala být, jak jsem předpověděl, pouhou spekulací”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220216/syrucek-valka-planovana-medii-na-16-unora-se-ukazala-byt-jak-jsem-predpo-vedel-pouhou-spekulaci-17646039.html>
- 28 Alena Novotná, “Čeští novináři jsou smutní, že Rusko nezaútočilo na Ukrajinu. A lžou dál”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220217/cesti-novinari-jsou-smutni-ze-rusko-nezautocilo-na-ukrajinu-a-lzou-dal-17658394.html>
- 29 Vladimír Franta, “Rusko nezaútočilo i přes snahu západních médií. Jak hlouběji tisk může klesnout? Názor”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220217/rusko-nezautocilo-i-pres-snahu-zapadnich-medii-jak-hlouběji-tisk-muze-klesnout-nazor-17657613.html>
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Alexander Ward and Quint Forgy, “Putin could attack Ukraine on Feb. 16, Biden told allies”, Politico, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/02/11/putin-could-attack-ukraine-on-feb-16-biden-told-allies-00008344>
- 32 Alena Novotná, “Češi málo milují Západ. Ministerstvo vnitra chce zasáhnout”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220221/cesi-malo-miluji-zapad-ministerstvo-vnitra-chce-zasahnout-17722891.html>
- 33 Jana Petrova, “Vyvadil: Tento absces musel dříve nebo později prasknout. Ale rozhodující budou nejbližší dny”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220222/vyvadil-tento-absces-musel-drive-nebo-pozdeji-prasknout-ale-rozhodujici-budou-nejbližsi-dny-17749241.html>
- 34 Vladimír Franta, “Jedni čeští dobrovolníci z Donbasu do basy, jiným metály? Aneb kdo chce válku. Názor”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220223/jedni-cesti-dobrovolnici-z-donbasu-do-basy-jinym-metaly-aneb-kdo-chce-valku-nazor-17763427.html>
- 35 Alena Novotná, “Havel by pomohl Doněcku nebo by ho bombardoval? Česká vláda ignoruje humanitární katastrofu Donbasu”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220223/havel-by-pomohl-donecku-nebo-by-ho-bombardoval-ceska-vlada-ignoruje-humanitarni-katastrofu-donbasu-17759921.html>

## REACTION TO THE INVASION

After the invasion, there were only 2 articles published in the “Opinions” category during the last days of February. The first one was headlined “Russia was forced to conduct an operation in Ukraine. The West is losing its chance for dominance.”<sup>36</sup> According to Sputnik, the Russian Federation had warned that it would need to react should the West not change the course of its actions, and the invasion was only a rational response from the Russian side who “had waited remarkably long” to see if the West would relent. Moreover, even after the invasion started, Sputnik still claimed that the statements made on 4 February by Bloomberg were disinformation. It was believed that “this is not the beginning of a war, but an effort to save the planet from a global crisis, as a strategic imbalance is in the offing” and that the public was still being scared by worst-case scenarios; and that should “denazification” be achieved in Ukraine, it would be an achievement of great significance.<sup>37</sup> The last article warned that the EU intended to take advantage of the crisis in Ukraine. Sputnik claimed that albeit the situation in Ukraine was a tragedy, Brussels would exploit current tensions in Eastern Europe to push through a directive about compulsory redistribution of refugees.<sup>38</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sputnik CZ has, once again, demonstrated its ability to report on crucial political and security developments through its own, manipulative interpretations of events. The supposed “credibility” of Sputnik’s narratives was enhanced by interviewing ideologically conformed affiliates of the Czech anti-establishment parties as well as social and political scientists. Despite the suspension of broadcasting activities imposed on Sputnik, it is still possible to access the website and all its content (including the new section on “Demilitarization and Denazification of Ukraine”) using unconventional methods. Furthermore, Sputnik also swiftly adapted to the situation by uploading more of its content on Telegram, an online messaging app where it already had an account, so that people from the Czech Republic could access it, circumventing the suspension. However, Sputnik CZ’s account on the app was eventually also blocked, as was its second version.<sup>39</sup> Subsequently, Sputnik CZ started referring to a new Telegram account on its website called “neČT24”<sup>40</sup> (“no ČT24”). Since ČT24 is a news channel operated by a public television broadcaster Czech Television, this constitutes one of Sputnik’s many attacks on the legitimacy of the mainstream media.

The case study of Sputnik CZ demonstrated that suspending a website’s domain is only a temporary “solution” given the ability of alternative media to adapt to new circumstances. Therefore, apart from active debunking of disinformation and prosecution of perpetrators, the main focus of government institutions should be on creating mechanisms that would help stop the spread of disinformation through strengthening trust of the public in both the media as well as public institutions.

36 Vladimír Franta, “Rusko bylo donuceno k operaci na Ukrajině. Západ ztrácí šanci na dominanci. Názor”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220225/rusko-bylo-donuceno-k-operaci-na-ukrajine-zapad-ztraci-sanci-na-dominanci-nazor-17804581.html>

37 Ibid.

38 Alena Novotná, “Evropská daň z uprchlíka? Brusel se vrací k povinné solidaritě”, Sputnik CZ, <https://cz.sputniknews.com/20220225/evropska-dan-z-uprchlika-brusel-se-vraci-k-povinne-solidarite-17798622.html>

39 Josef Šlerka, “Extremisté na Telegramu posilují. Včetně těch, co propagují invazi na Ukrajinu”, Investigace.cz, <https://www.investigace.cz/cesko-slovensko-telegram-ukrajina-rusko/>

40 True as of 23.03.2022 - link to account <https://t.me/s/neCT24> (which had around 4 700 subscribers at the time of our monitoring)

Disinformation has become a top concern for policy decision-makers as well as the public. Currently, the police are investigating multiple instances of approval of the invasion of Ukraine,<sup>41</sup> and the Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats (CTHH) is analyzing Russian manipulative narratives on the Czech information scene and is communicating the findings to the public.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the fact that the Czech government advised CZ.NIC to block some of the more well-known disinformation websites signals effort to fight the spread of disinformation on the Czech information scene. However, even though the blocking of access to these websites is understandable, given the gravity of the war in Ukraine, it remains a risky move if not placed in the right context and legal framework. In the Czech Republic (and other democracies) the “Freedom of expression and the right to information are guaranteed”<sup>43</sup> by the Constitution and, accordingly, such a precedent must never serve as a possible future tool for censorship. For example, not providing clear guidelines determining what websites should be deemed as “disinformation spreaders” could lead the public to question the decision to ban such websites. A proactive stance against disinformation campaigns is very much needed, however, it should be guided by a well-crafted strategy rather than by impromptu decisions.

- 
- Visegrad Fund
- 
- 

The project *New Propaganda and Disinformation Challenges for Visegrad/EaP states in the Changing Environment* is coordinated by [iSANS](#) and supported by [the International Visegrad Fund](#).

- 
- 41 Policie ČR, Twitter, [https://twitter.com/PolicieCZ/status/1499295430223577091?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etwembed%7Ctwterm%5E1499295430223577091%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1\\_&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fct24.ceskatelevize.cz%2Fdomaci%2F3449972-policie-vysetruje-pripady-schvalovani-valky-na-ukrajine-na-ceskem-nebi-chybi-ruska](https://twitter.com/PolicieCZ/status/1499295430223577091?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etwembed%7Ctwterm%5E1499295430223577091%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fct24.ceskatelevize.cz%2Fdomaci%2F3449972-policie-vysetruje-pripady-schvalovani-valky-na-ukrajine-na-ceskem-nebi-chybi-ruska)
- 42 See for instance: “Manipulativní narativy o postavení Ruské federace v geopolitickém prostoru”, Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky, <https://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/clanek/manipulativni-narativy-o-postaveni-ruske-federace-v-geopolitickem-prostoru.aspx>; “Dva světy”, Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky, <https://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/clanek/dva-svety.aspx>
- 43 “LISTINA ZÁKLADNÍCH PRÁV A SVOBOD”, Poslanecká Sněmovna Parlamentu České Republiky, <https://www.psp.cz/docs/laws/listina.html>