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Jakub Fišer

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EU and Czech Countermeasures Against Disinformation

Bachelor's Thesis

Author of the Thesis: Jakub Fišer

Study programme: International Area Studies

Supervisor: doc. Mgr. Tomáš Weiss, M.A., Ph.D.

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Declaration

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In Prague on 31 July 2020

Jakub Fišer

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Abstract

This Bachelor's thesis deals with the development of countermeasures against disinformation in the Czech Republic and at the level of the European Union. Drawing upon the concept of Europeanisation, it aims to analyse the influence the two levels have on each other. Europeanisation has been widely used in the last two decades, and although it still lacks a universally valid definition, it is nowadays mainly regarded as a concept explaining the relationship between the European Union and its member states, considering it a process consisting of three interconnected dimensions: *downloading* (the influence of the EU on Member States), *uploading* (the influence of Member States on the EU), and *cross-loading* (the influence Member States have on each other). The chosen empirical case is rather atypical for research on Europeanisation, since most it usually focuses on the adaptation of norms and institutions pre-existing at the European level. By doing so, this thesis aims to not only supplement the current research on Europeanisation but to problematise it as well. Taking the form of a comparative case study, the thesis focuses particularly on how the issue of disinformation found its way to the Czech and European political agenda. The main sources for the research are Czech and European policy documents dealing with disinformation, combined with academic and news articles that shed more light on the creation of these documents and the related institutions and countermeasures against disinformation. The thesis also makes use of the content published by actors involved in the process in question. In the conclusion, the thesis assesses the limits of applying the concept of Europeanisation to the examined case as well as summarises its empirical findings. Those show that the Czech Republic has been active in influencing the development of the countermeasures against disinformation at the EU level, while the domestic process has not been noticeably impacted by the actions of the EU. Nevertheless, actors pushing for the development of the countermeasures against disinformation in the Czech Republic are to a large extent Europeanised, meaning that they view the Czech Republic as an integral part of the EU and consider disinformation to be a direct threat to the Czech Republic's involvement in the EU and the EU itself.

Abstrakt

Bakalářská práce se zabývá procesem vzniku opatření proti dezinformacím na úrovních Evropské unie a České republiky, přičemž za využití konceptu europeizace zkoumá vzájemné působení těchto dvou úrovní. Europeizace je předmětem akademického zájmu již přes dvacet let, a přestože stále neexistuje jeho univerzálně platná definice, je dnes je chápán především jako koncept vysvětlující proces vzájemného ovlivňování mezi EU a členskými státy. V debatě o europeizaci je rozlišováno mezi třemi mezi sebou propojenými směry, kterými europeizace probíhá – *downloading* (vliv EU na členské státy), *uploading* (vliv EU na členské státy) a *cross-loading* (vliv členských států mezi sebou navzájem). Většina výzkumu se však soustředí na analýzu přizpůsobování se členských států již existujícím normám a institucím na evropské úrovni, tedy na první ze jmenovaných směrů. Zvolený případ je tak pro výzkum europeizace spíše netypický, neboť zde dochází k vytváření zcela nové politiky na obou úrovních téměř simultánně. Tím se práce snaží dosavadní výzkum nejen doplnit, ale i problematizovat. Práce má podobu komparativní případové studie a soustředí se konkrétně na to, jak se problematika dezinformací dostala na českou a evropskou politickou agendu. Základem pro výzkum jsou především oficiální dokumenty, které v této oblasti na obou úrovních vyšly, doplněné o odborné i novinové články osvětlující vznik těchto dokumentů a s nimi spojených institucí a opatření zaměřených na boj proti dezinformacím. Využito je také materiálu publikovaného aktéry, kteří se na tomto procesu podíleli. V závěru práce zhodnocuje limity současného pojetí europeizace při jejím aplikování na takovýto případ a shrnuje empirická zjištění. Ta ukazují, že Česká republika byla aktivní v ovlivňování vzniku opatření proti dezinformacím na evropské úrovni, zatímco konkrétní jednání Evropské unie český vývoj v této oblasti téměř neovlivnilo. Aktéři, kteří v České republice prosazovali vznik těchto opatření, jsou však do značné míry europeanizovaní v tom smyslu, že chápou Českou republiku jako integrální součást Evropské unie, přičemž dezinformace pro ně představují ohrožení jak českého ukotvení v Evropské unii, tak samotné Evropské unie.

Keywords

Disinformation, Countermeasures against disinformation, European Union, Czech Republic, Europeanisation

Klíčová slova

Dezinformace, Opatření proti dezinformacím, Evropská unie, Česká republika, Europeizace

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EU and Czech Countermeasures Against Disinformation

Evropská a česká opatření proti dezinformacím

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Introduction

With the ongoing media shift away from traditional media and increased reliance of citizens on getting their information through on-line platforms, a dangerous phenomenon has arisen, the issue of disinformation. Its dissemination is a threat not only to democratic societies around the globe, as it can negatively impact citizens' ability to make informed decisions and increase their vulnerability towards manipulation by a wide range of actors, but even to people's own lives, as can be seen during the coronavirus pandemic. The vast majority (85 %) of Europeans see the existence of disinformation as a problem, at least to some extent.¹ In order to cope with this problem, various entities around the world have started to develop responses aimed at countering disinformation. In the European Union, we can see the development of such countermeasures both at the level of Member States and at the level of the EU. A question then arises, to which extent is this two-level development interconnected? This question is not merely limited to the interests of scholars; its answer can help us Europeans to improve our resilience towards this threat.

Still, this thesis aims to contribute to academic debate, specifically by making use of the concept of Europeanisation, which has become widely used in the last two decades in research dealing with the influence that the European Union and its Member States have on each other. However, the concept of Europeanisation has also been significantly contested, mainly for its lack of clarity and conceptual stretching that threatens its actual usefulness. Even though it is still impossible to find a brief and universally valid definition of Europeanisation, the concept has been demarcated by more visible lines in recent years. Nowadays, Europeanisation is mainly regarded as a concept explaining the relationship between the level of the European Union and the level of Member States, considering it a process consisting of three interconnected dimensions: *downloading* (the influence of the EU on Member States), *uploading* (the influence of Member States on the EU), and *cross-loading* (the influence Member States have on each other). Yet, most of the research has so far been focused primarily on the first dimension, i.e. *downloading*, and within that dimension, a great deal of the research has dealt with policies and institutions that had already existed at the EU level before the Europeanising process in question started. Therefore, this thesis will concentrate on an omitted

¹ Directorate-General for Communications, *Fake News and Disinformation Online* (Brussels: European Commission, 2018), 18, http://publications.europa.eu/publication/manifestation_identifier/PUB_KK0418360ENN.e

area in the research on Europeanisation, which is a situation in which a wholly new policy starts to develop both at the EU and the Member States level simultaneously, as is the case with the countermeasures against disinformation, the central topic of this work. Moreover, the thesis will try to go beyond applying a theoretical framework to an empirical case which constitutes a situation that has been neglected in Europeanisation research, and assess the limits of the concept of Europeanisation when dealing with such a case.

The Member States level will be represented by the case of the Czech Republic, which was selected for the following reasons: firstly, the Czech Republic is amongst the leading European countries in developing countermeasures against disinformation, but it is not part of the most active group like the Baltic states, which represent more of an extreme case. Secondly, the beginning of the Czech fight against disinformation coincides with the same movement at the EU level, as both the Czech and the European initiative was mainly a response to the conflict in Ukraine in 2014. Thirdly, the Czech Republic's moderate size and population cause it to have a correspondingly moderate say at the EU level, which puts it into a convenient position for this research. Fourthly, research on Europeanisation in newly acceded Member States is even more focused solely on the *downloading* dimension and adaptation to pre-existing European norms, which is why conducting a case study on such a country and problematising the primacy of the *downloading* dimension could add value to the debate on Europeanisation. Finally, the issue of setting the domestic agenda for the fight against disinformation has recently become a subject of academic debate in the Czech Republic, to which this text could hopefully contribute.

Taking the form of a comparative case study, the thesis will focus particularly on how the issue of disinformation found its way to the Czech and European political agenda. The first chapter will cover the theoretical and methodological framework of this thesis, while the following two will separately analyse the development of countermeasures at the Czech and European level. Examining this process should help us following the research question of this thesis: *How has the simultaneous forming of countermeasures against disinformation and hybrid threats at the EU and Czech level affected each other?*

1 Theoretical and methodological framework

1. 1 Disinformation and hybrid threats – conceptual definition

Due to the fact that terms such as disinformation, hybrid threats, or fake news are somewhat politically charged, and their use has been questioned, it is important to explain how this thesis understands them.

1.1.1 Hybrid threats

The concept of hybrid threats is very broad and flexible and, as noted in the EU's *Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats*, need to remain so due to its evolving nature. Still, the same document offers a working definition of hybrid threats as a 'mixture of coercive and subversive activity, conventional and unconventional methods (i.e. diplomatic, military, economic, technological), which can be used in a coordinated manner by state or non-state actors to achieve specific objectives while remaining below the threshold of formally declared warfare. (...) Massive disinformation campaigns, using social media to control the political narrative or to radicalise, recruit and direct proxy actors can be vehicles for hybrid threats.'² A similar definition of hybrid threats is used by NATO, which cooperates with the EU on countering them,³ and by the Czech Republic as well.⁴

A crucial aspect of these definitions is the emphasis on the coordinated nature of hybrid threats, which is interconnected with the notion of 'the Russian threat'. When dealing with the issue of disinformation and hybrid threats, it is virtually impossible to avoid addressing the role of Russia. As shown later in this thesis, the idea of a 'Russian threat' has been central to the development of the countermeasures in question. While it is evident that it was actions of the Russian Federation, specifically its extensive use of tools of hybrid warfare in 2014, that prompted the response of the EU and the Czech Republic, there is an ongoing debate regarding the seriousness of the Russian threat and the appropriateness of using the exact terms that we are dealing with here. This thesis will omit a more in-depth discussion of this issue for the following reasons: firstly, it is primarily concerned with disinformation, not hybrid threats in

² European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats - a European Union Response* (Brussels: European Commission, 2016), 2, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52016JC0018>.

³ 'NATO's Response to Hybrid Threats', NATO, accessed 16 July 2020, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_156338.htm.

⁴ Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, *National Security Audit* (Prague: Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2016), 127–29, <http://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/soubor/national-security-audit.aspx>.

general; and secondly, it aims to analyse how the countermeasures developed, not assess whether their development was appropriate to the actual threat level.

1.1.2 Disinformation, fake news, and all the others

The usage of the term ‘disinformation’ is less debated and contested than the usage of terms such as ‘hybrid threats’ or ‘hybrid warfare’, however, we can see that different terms are often used to describe the same phenomenon and vice versa. Neither the EU⁵ nor the Czech Republic⁶ has a clear definition of disinformation under their law, and their representatives often describe the same phenomenon with words such as ‘disinformation’, ‘misinformation’, ‘fake news’, ‘propaganda’ and others. Nevertheless, there are nuances between these terms, which are universally shared and also found in both Czech and EU documents. Confusion in definitions offered by these two actors is a non-issue, as they are almost strikingly identical.⁷

In general, *disinformation* can be defined as false information distributed with a harmful intent to influence, deceive, or manipulate the recipient in any way. The harmful intent distinguishes disinformation from *misinformation*, which also carries false content, however, it is not deliberately manipulative. While the line between these two terms is pretty clear, the now fashionable and less technical term *fake news* is sometimes used as a synonym to disinformation only, sometimes as a synonym to both. Another term connected with this issue is *propaganda*, purposeful dissemination of information or ideas, especially in a manipulative or biased way with the aim to deceive. It is also possible to come across the term *malinformation*, which is information that is based on reality but used with malicious intent. This thesis will mainly use the term disinformation.⁸

⁵ Anjum Shabbir, ‘Disinformation and the Infodemic: The EU’s Response’, *EU Law Live*, 5 June 2020, <https://eulawlive.com/disinformation-and-the-infodemic-the-eus-response/>.

⁶ ‘Trestněprávní úprava’, Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, accessed 17 July 2020, <https://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/clanek/dezinformacni-kampane-trestnepravni-uprava-trestnepravni-uprava.aspx>.

⁷ Cf. Naja Bentzen, ‘Understanding Propaganda and Disinformation’ (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2015), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/571332/EPRS_ATA\(2015\)571332_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/571332/EPRS_ATA(2015)571332_EN.pdf); ‘Definice dezinformací a propagandy’, Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, accessed 17 July 2020, <https://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/clanek/definice-dezinformaci-a-propagandy.aspx>.

⁸ For a more detailed explanation of these terms, see e.g., Miloš Gregor and Petra Vejvodová, *Nejlepší kniha o fake news, dezinformacích a manipulacích!!!* (Brno: CPress, 2018), 7–32.

1.2 Europeanisation – the state of debate

Let us now take a further look at the concept of Europeanisation itself. It has slowly entered the academic debate in the 1980s, but it was not until the end of the millennium that we can speak of it as being widely used. However, as Europeanisation's popularity grew, it became clear that different authors tended to understand it in very different and sometimes very broad ways. To cite some of the most influential authors, according to Featherstone, Europeanisation is applied within four categories: 1) as a historical process; 2) as a matter of cultural diffusion; 3) as a process of institutional adaptation; and 4) as the adaptation of policy and policy processes.⁹ Olsen distinguishes five different phenomena that might be referred to by the term Europeanisation: 1) changes in external boundaries; 2) developing institutions at the European level; 3) central penetration of national systems of governance; 4) exporting forms of political organisations; and 5) a political unification project.¹⁰ Harmsen and Wilson recognise as much as eight different usages of the term.¹¹ As shown, the variety of phenomena that Europeanisation could encompass is rather wide, which has inevitably led to an apparent concept stretching and questioning of the intelligibility and usefulness of the term. In spite of that, it is possible to identify three basic approaches that have emerged in the Europeanisation research:

Top-down

Firstly, there is the 'top-down approach', which considers the EU to be the independent variable and domestic impact to be the dependent variable. An example of a top-down definition of Europeanisation could be one of the earliest conceptualisations of the term by Ladrech, who defined Europeanisation in 1994 as 'an incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organisational logic of national politics and policy-making'.¹² Bache and Marshall, in turn, define Europeanisation as 'the redirection or reshaping of politics in the domestic arena

⁹ Miloš Gregor and Petra Vejvodová, *Nejlepší kniha o fake news, dezinformacích a manipulacích!!!* (Brno: CPress, 2018), 7–32.

¹⁰ Johan P. Olsen, 'The Many Faces of Europeanisation', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 5 (2002): 923–24, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00403>.

¹¹ Robert Harmsen and Thomas Wilson, 'Introduction: Approaches to Europeanisation', *Yearbook of European Studies* 14 (2000), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263492106_Introduction_Approaches_to_Europeanisation.

¹² Robert Ladrech, 'Europeanisation of Domestic Politics and Institutions: The Case of France', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 32, no. 1 (1994): 69, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.1994.tb00485.x>.

in ways that reflect the policies, practices or preferences of EU level actors/institutions'.¹³ This approach uses the term Europeanisation to describe the influence that European integration has on Member States and their domestic institutions and policies. According to the top-down conceptualisation, for Europeanisation to occur the actors at the EU level must press for change at the domestic level.¹⁴ The top-down Europeanisation can take various forms, for example, the above-mentioned Bache and Marshall distinguish four effects that the EU can have on domestic actors based on voluntariness and directness.¹⁵

Knill and Lehmull, who according to some provided the most influential typology of top-down Europeanisation effects,¹⁶ recognise three mechanisms through which European policies impact the domestic level:¹⁷

- 1) Positive integration – occurs when a newly formed policy at the EU level triggers domestic change by prescribing requirements with which Member States must comply.
- 2) Negative integration – occurs when domestic opportunity structures are altered as a result of EU influence.
- 3) Framing integration – being the most subtle form of Europeanisation, this mechanism affects the domestic arrangements by altering the beliefs and expectations of domestic actors.

Bottom-up

The 'bottom-up' approach evolved as a result of the top-down approach's inability to satisfyingly explain the processes under examination. The bottom-up approach acknowledges that Europeanisation is not a one-way process but rather a two-way interaction, and treating it as a mere explanans for the domestic adaptation to the influence and pressure of the EU is limiting our understanding of the relationships between Member States and the EU. In his

¹³ Ian Bache and Adam Marshall, 'Europeanisation and Domestic Change: A Governance Approach to Institutional Adaptation in Britain', *Queen's Papers on Europeanisation*, 2004, 5, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5015737_Europeanisation_and_Domestic_Change_A_Governance_Approach_to_Institutional_Adaptation_in_Britain.

¹⁴ Goran Bandov and Nikolina Herceg Kolman, 'Research on Europeanisation in Literature: From the Top-down Approach to Europeanisation as a Multi-Directional Process', *Cadmus* 3, no. 5 (2018): 138, <http://cadmusjournal.org/node/699>.

¹⁵ Bache and Marshall, 'Europeanisation and Domestic Change', 6.

¹⁶ Bandov and Kolman, 'Research on Europeanisation in Literature', 138.

¹⁷ Christoph Knill and Dirk Lehmkuhl, 'How Europe Matters. Different Mechanisms of Europeanisation', *European Integration Online Papers (EIoP)* 3, no. 7 (1999), <http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/1998-007a.htm>.

influential article *Europeanisation: Solution or a Problem?*, Radaelli problematised this view by arguing that it might be better to regard Europeanisation as ‘something to be explained’ instead of ‘something that explains’, and by defining the bottom-up approach as a view that Europeanisation both starts and ends at the domestic level. According to this perspective, Member States affect the institutions and policies at the EU level, which in turn affect the Member States.¹⁸

Circular

The currently arising circular or multi-directional approach to Europeanisation attempts to synthesize the top-down and bottom-up approaches and to make the concept more holistic. Proponents of this approach call for moving beyond the dichotomy of uploading and downloading and seeing Europeanisation as a complex process that does not simply follow one direction or the other.¹⁹ Moreover, the multi-directional approach allows for better observation of horizontal Europeanisation and cross-loading, i.e. processes and dynamics amongst Member States without the necessary inclusion of Brussels.²⁰ The main advantages of this approach are better understanding the full scope and direction of Europeanisation and reducing the danger of overestimating the influence of the EU. Nevertheless, the circular approach also brings more complexity into Europeanisation research, further exacerbating the methodological and analytical confusion.²¹

Contemporary literature recognises the fact that that Europeanisation is a multi-directional process, composed of three mutually interconnected directions of influence, i.e. downloading, uploading and cross-loading. That said, Europeanisation research is still heavily focused on the downloading dimension, and the two other directions are often neglected.

Misfit

Despite the ambiguity in different approaches to Europeanisation, the majority of researchers agree that if any adaptation process (i. e. Europeanisation itself) is to take place,

¹⁸ Claudio M. Radaelli, ‘Europeanisation: Solution or Problem?’, *European Integration Online Papers (EIoP)* 8, no. 16 (2004), <http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2004-016a.htm>.

¹⁹ Krzysztof Wach, ‘Conceptualizing Europeanisation: Theoretical Approaches and Research Designs’, in *Europeanisation Processes from the Meso-economic Perspective: Industries and Policies*, ed. Piotr Stanek and Krzysztof Wach (Kraków: Cracow University of Economics, 2015), 15.

²⁰ Kristina Špottová, ‘Horizontal Europeanisation: The Theoretical Consideration on the Horizontal Form of the Concept’, *Acta Politologica* 9, no. 2 (2017): 1–17, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=shib&custid=s1240919&profile=eds>.

²¹ Bandov and Herceg Kolman, ‘Research on Europeanisation in Literature’, 142–43.

there has to be a *misfit* between the EU and national policies or institutions.²² The misfit or ‘goodness of fit’ hypothesis has been part of Europeanisation research since its early stages. Its roots can be found in the work by Héritier from 1995. According to her argument, Member States try to upload their policies and interests to the EU level, aiming to affect binding EU legislation and thus minimise the costs of later adaptation.²³ Although the origin of the hypothesis is clearly associated with the bottom-up approach to Europeanisation, its later development focuses mainly on top-down mechanisms. Few years after Héritier, and building on her work, Duina came up with an argument that the time and extent of Member State’s adaptation to an EU directive are given by the fit between the directive at the EU level on the one hand and the domestic organisation of interest groups and national policy legacies on the other.²⁴ However, Duina’s approach was later criticised and case studies conducted by other researchers did not reach the same conclusions. Knill and Lenschow²⁵ or Haverland²⁶ therefore argued that the goodness of fit itself is not sufficient for explaining changes in domestic environments. This led to a revision of the goodness of fit framework, according to which there must be other mediating factors present for Europeanisation to occur. Although some authors call for eliminating the goodness of fit hypothesis from Europeanisation research,²⁷ most studies agree that misfit is a necessary but not sufficient condition for Europeanisation, with specific mediating factors depending on the theoretical approach chosen. There is also a consensus on two elementary types of misfits: a *policy misfit*, essentially meaning that Member States’ policies and regulations are not in compliance with those at the EU level, and an *institutional misfit*, which challenges domestic rules and procedures and the collective understanding attached to them.²⁸

²² Tanja A. Börzel, *How the European Union Interacts with its Member States* (Vienna: Institute for Advanced Studies, 2003), 5, https://www.ihs.ac.at/publications/pol/pw_93.pdf.

²³ Adrienne Heritier, ‘Leaders’ and ‘Laggards’ in European Clean Air Policy’, in *Convergence or Diversity?: Internationalization and Economic Policy Response*, ed. Brigitte Unger and Frans Van Waarden (Aldershot: Avebury, 1995), 278–305; cited in Ellen Mastenbroek and Michael Kaeding, ‘Europeanisation Beyond the Goodness of Fit: Domestic Politics in the Forefront’, *Comparative European Politics* 4, no. 4 (2006): 331–54, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cep.6110078>.

²⁴ Francesco Duina, ‘Explaining Legal Implementation in the European Union’, *International Journal of the Sociology of Law* 25, no. 2 (1997): 155–79, <https://doi.org/10.1006/ijsl.1997.0039>.

²⁵ Christoph Knill and Andrea Lenschow, ‘Coping with Europe: The Impact of British and German Administrations on the Implementation of EU Environmental Policy.’, *Journal of European Public Policy* 5, no. 4 (1998): 595–614, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501769880000041>.

²⁶ Markus Haverland, ‘National Adaptation to European Integration: The Importance of Institutional Veto Points’, *Journal of Public Policy* 20, no. 1 (2000): 83, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4007767>.

²⁷ Mastenbroek and Kaeding, ‘Europeanisation Beyond the Goodness of Fit: Domestic Politics in the Forefront’.

²⁸ Börzel, *How the European Union Interacts with its Member States*, 6–7.

The issue with the goodness of fit hypothesis connected to our research is the same as with the concept of Europeanisation as a whole, that is excessive focus on the downloading dimension. As a result of this, the issue of misfit in the literature on Europeanisation is usually regarded as a situation in which domestic environment reacts to existing policy or institutional incompliance with the EU. Since countermeasures against disinformation started to develop at the same time at both levels and have not yet led to any binding regulation, this conception of misfit is not very useful for our research. The absence of pressure, however, does not mean that there is an absence of misfit as well. Furthermore, as the bottom-up approach to Europeanisation shows, Member States can operate with the notion of a hypothetical misfit and upload their policies and interests to the EU level to ease future adaptation once they are formalised. The analysis in the following chapters should enable us to identify the state of misfit in our case and assess its impact.

1.2.1 Europeanisation research & the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic has been the subject of numerous studies dealing with Europeanisation, and Czech researchers have debated the concept quite extensively, albeit with some limitations. Europeanisation entered the Czech academic debate with a delay of about ten years, and so far, its main addition to Europeanisation research has consisted of applying the concept in a novel environment, almost unanimously focusing on the domestic impact that Europeanisation has had in the Czech Republic, especially on its political institutions and processes. While there is a visible acknowledgement of this narrow focus, the promotion of Czech interests on the European level still remain under-researched, with some exceptions.²⁹

1.3 Forming countermeasures against disinformation – state of research

The newness of the examined topic naturally means that its reflection in academic literature is limited. However, it would be false to say that research on it had not started, even though it currently still only consists of individual journal articles. While a substantial amount of content dealing with this matter has been produced by think-tanks and NGOs, such material has to be understood within the context of advocacy roles that its authors often hold.

²⁹ For a more detailed overview of the Czech research on Europeanisation, see e.g., Špottová, ‘Horizontal Europeanisation: The Theoretical Consideration on the Horizontal Form of the Concept’; Tomáš Weiss, ‘Europeanisation and Foreign Policy: Potential for Further Research’, *Central European Political Studies Review* 15, no. 4 (2013): 268–83, <https://doi.org/10.5817/CEPSR.2013.4.268>.

The Czech academic debate is mostly associated with the critical analysis of the concept of hybrid threat as used and securitised in the Czech Republic, and with mapping the networks of agenda-setters in this area. Several authors have set out in this direction of research, and this thesis will draw on their articles in the respective chapter.³⁰ So far, this is the only way in which the development of countermeasures against disinformation in the Czech Republic has been covered in the local academic debate. Neither the Czech participation on setting up European mechanisms against disinformation nor the influence of the EU on the same process in the Czech Republic has received notable attention.

The European level has been studied more extensively, which is logical given its greater importance for a greater amount of people. Most of the existing works, however, either predominantly focus on analysing the content of the countermeasures³¹ or tackle disinformation within the broader area of hybrid threats.³² Interestingly, there is perhaps more research on the EU's response to disinformation done by university students than by more experienced members of academia.³³ All of the research that in any way dealt with both the EU level and

³⁰ Vojtěch Bahenský, 'Paradox hybridní války: O příčinách a následcích pragmatismu v debatě', *Obrana a Strategie* 18, no. 2 (2018): 89–100, <https://doi.org/10.3849/1802-7199.18.2018.02.089-100>;

Jakub Eberle and Jan Daniel, 'Hybrid Warriors: Transforming Czech Security through the 'Russian Hybrid Warfare' Assemblage.', *Czech Sociological Review* 54, no. 6 (2018): 907–31, <https://doi.org/10.13060/00380288.2018.54.6.435>;

Jakub Eberle and Jan Daniel, "'Putin, You Suck': Affective Sticking Points in the Czech Narrative on 'Russian Hybrid Warfare'", *Political Psychology* 40, no. 6 (2019): 1267–81, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12609>;

Dagmar Rychnovská and Martin Kohút, 'The Battle for Truth: Mapping the Network of Information War Experts in the Czech Republic.', *New Perspectives: Interdisciplinary Journal of Central & East European Politics & International Relations* 26, no. 3 (2018): 57–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2336825x1802600304>.

³¹ E.g., Flavia Durach, Alina Bârgăoanu, and Cătălina Nastasiu, 'Tackling Disinformation: EU Regulation of the Digital Space', *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* 20, no. 1 (2020): 5–20, <https://doaj.org/article/e337c28f5664451283ad0ca36c6768e0>;

Chris Marsden, Trisha Meyer, and Ian Brown, 'Platform Values and Democratic Elections: How Can the Law Regulate Digital Disinformation?', *Computer Law and Security Review* 36 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clsr.2019.105373>;

Iva Nenadić, 'Unpacking the 'European Approach' to Tackling Challenges of Disinformation and Political Manipulation', *Internet Policy Review* 8, no. 4 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1436>.

³² E.g., Eitvydas Bajarūnas, 'Addressing Hybrid Threats: Priorities for the EU in 2020 and Beyond.', *European View* 19, no. 1 (2020): 62–70, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1781685820912041>.

³³ E.g., Shari Hinds, 'The European Union Approach to Disinformation and Misinformation: The Case of the 2019 European Parliament Elections' (Master's thesis, University of Strasbourg, 2019), <https://repository.gchumanrights.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11825/1103/Hinds.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>;

Floris van Krimpen, 'Disinformation in the European Union: Using Systems Thinking to Assess the Impact of Current Policies to Reduce the Spread and Production of Disinformation' (Master's thesis, TU Delft, 2019), <https://repository.tudelft.nl/islandora/object/uuid%3A54cac923-279a-4ed7-bd7c-3dc981f4055c>;

Ville Majamaa, 'The 'Russian Disinformation Threat' and the EU Response: The Debate' (Master's thesis, Moscow, National Research University - Higher School of Economics, 2018), <https://www.hse.ru/en/edu/vkr/219215058>;

the level of Member States in this area has only taken into account the Member States that are the most vocal on this issue.³⁴

1.4 Methodology

Despite the fact that much paper has been covered with thoughts on the ontology and epistemology of Europeanisation, the methodology of Europeanisation remains rather underdeveloped.³⁵ This is caused mainly by the complexity of Europeanisation in its current state, since, as many researchers argue, it is not clear what exactly are dependent and independent variables. While the research methods used in Europeanisation research do not differ from methods commonly used in social sciences, chiefly in political science and international relations, the lack of clarity caused by the multidirectional character of today's 'understanding' of Europeanisation complicates research as it makes it difficult to convincingly find causal links, and arguably is behind the prevalent focus on the downloading dimension, which can be grasped with more ease. Another problem identified by several authors is that Europeanisation researchers often overestimate the effect of Europeanisation and underestimate other factors.³⁶ Although all of these problems are acknowledged in the literature, and various authors have attempted to provide solutions, the current state is still far from ideal.

It is possible to identify several theoretical approaches used for examining specific mechanisms of Europeanisation in empirical cases. In her study on domestic change, Börzel identifies two main approaches, both based on neo-institutionalist reasoning: rationalist institutionalism and sociological institutionalism. Rational institutionalism is primarily concerned with states, which are seen as rational actors seeking to maximise their profits, in accordance with the rational choice theory. The behaviour of Member States within the EU is therefore driven by their desire to make their membership as profitable for them as possible.³⁷

Jonatan K. Stelander, 'EU against Disinformation: Understanding a Modern Anti-Disinformation Campaign' (Master's thesis, Uppsala University, 2017), <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8c0f/7758f0a2084cb169e5395894fab13a0b39e0.pdf>;

Vanessa Šrámková, 'Forming the EU Disinformation Policy' (Master's thesis, Charles University in Prague, 2019), <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/detail/205720/>.

³⁴ Besides already mentioned works, see e.g., Raúl Magallón Rosa, 'The (No) Regulation of Disinformation in the European Union. A Comparative Perspective.', *Revista de Derecho Político* 1, no. 106 (2019): 319–46, <https://doi.org/10.5944/rdp.106.2019.26159>.

³⁵ Wach, 'Conceptualizing Europeanisation', 17–18.

³⁶ E.g., Paolo Graziano and Maarten Vink, 'Europeanisation: Concept, Theory, and Methods', in *The Member States of the European Union*, ed. Simon Bulmer and Christian Lesquene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 46.

³⁷ Börzel, *How the European Union Interacts with its Member States*, 8–9.

In contrast with the state-centrism of rational institutionalism, sociological institutionalism facilitates taking other actors into account as well. Instead of ‘logic of consequentialism’ present in rational institutionalism, approaches seeing Europeanisation as a process of socialisation operate with a ‘logic of appropriateness’. Member States and domestic actors within them do not simply regulate their policies, institutions, or behaviour to be in compliance with the EU. Europeanisation causes them to internalise new norms, rules, and identities shaped by the membership in the EU. Börzel also claims that misfit constitutes a necessary condition for the process of socialisation to start, which will be problematised later in this thesis. Nevertheless, drawing on the argument that misfit alone is not a sufficient factor for explaining Europeanisation, Börzel identifies two mediating factors which encourage the socialisation process – *norm entrepreneurs* and *cooperative informal institutions*.

We can distinguish two types of norm entrepreneurs. Firstly, there are *epistemic communities*, which use their scientific knowledge to promote and legitimise specific norms and interests, frame issues for collective debate, and even propose specific policies. Secondly, we have *advocacy* or *principled issue networks*, which are based around shared beliefs and values rather than consensual knowledge.

Cooperative informal institutions or cooperative political culture in general ‘entail collective understanding of appropriate behaviour that strongly influence the ways in which domestic actors respond to Europeanisation pressures.’³⁸

This work will build on the circular or multidirectional approach to Europeanisation as described above, analysing all directions of Europeanisation and its presence or absence in the selected case. Based on Radaelli’s recommendation to study Europeanisation in sequences, with each sequence using either the top-down or bottom-up approach, the thesis will take the form of a comparative case study, separately examining the development of countermeasures against disinformation at the EU and Czech level. Radaelli is also very cautious about the time dimension used in an analysis, nevertheless, the nature of our selected case does not offer many options in this area.³⁹ From the two approaches to studying mechanisms of Europeanisation, this thesis will mainly draw on sociological institutionalism and its above-described characteristics.

³⁸ Ibid., 10-12.

³⁹ Radaelli, ‘Europeanisation: Solution or Problem?’.

Another issue that must be addressed here are the dimensions on which the thesis will focus. Börzel and Risse⁴⁰ use the distinction between policies, politics, and polity to identify the dimensions of Europeanisation, however, Börzel later argues that despite the analytical usefulness of this distinction, the reality is more complex, since Europeanisation tend to affect not only one but two or all three dimensions.⁴¹ The categorisation of this thesis according to the above-mentioned dimensions is connected with the empirical sources on which it will be based. The leading role will be played by official policy documents published by Czech or European institutions, which will be analysed so as to assess how they frame the issue of disinformation, how the interests of relevant actors were projected in them, what signs of Europeanisation are to be found in them, and whether they (might) cause a misfit between the two levels. In order to put these documents into context, the thesis will also make use of academic or news articles that shed more light on the process of their creation and also on their reception. Furthermore, it will draw on content published by actors involved in the development of countermeasures against disinformation, as well as consultations with some of them. The thesis will therefore deal with the policy and politics dimensions, but since the countermeasures in question are often linked to the establishment of specific institutions aimed at countering disinformation, the polity dimension will be addressed as well. This decision should allow us to capture all factors relevant to our research, even though it also means that the individual dimensions will not be scrutinised in their entirety.

Given this theoretical and methodological framework, we can identify several component questions which will help us answer our research question, i.e. *how has the simultaneous forming of countermeasures against disinformation and hybrid threats at the EU and Czech level affected each other?*

The component questions are:

- 1) What directions of Europeanisation (downloading, uploading, cross-loading) are to be found in the examined case?⁴²
- 2) Is there any existing or potential misfit?

⁴⁰ Börzel and Risse, 'Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe', 60.

⁴¹ Börzel, *How the European Union Interacts with its Member States*, 4.

⁴² Since this thesis analyses only the level of the EU and one Member State, the main focus will be on downloading and uploading. However, to achieve a more coherent understanding, cross-loading will not be omitted from the analysis completely.

- 3) Are there any mediating factors (norm entrepreneurs, cooperative informal institutions/political culture) present at the domestic level?
- 4) How has the issue of disinformation been framed at both levels?

2 Czech countermeasures against disinformation

2.1 Disinformation in the Czech Republic

Before diving into the Czech countermeasures against disinformation themselves, we must at least briefly touch upon how much of a problem disinformation actually is in the Czech Republic, so as to understand the context in which the countermeasures are developed. Although measuring the precise extent of the problem is methodologically complicated,⁴³ there have been some studies conducted in this field whose findings are worth mentioning. One of the first inquiries into this matter was a sociological survey done in 2016 by the STEM agency in cooperation with the European Values Think-Tank, which found out that 25,5 % of Czech citizens believe disinformation and 24,5 % of Czechs trust ‘alternative’ (disinformation) media outlets more than traditional media.⁴⁴ Another survey conducted at the beginning of 2019 by the Nielsen Admosphere agency and the Endowment Fund for Independent Journalism came to similar conclusions.⁴⁵ According to only a few months old survey by Ipsos, the percentage of citizens that have repeatedly fallen for some disinformation is significantly higher in the Czech Republic than in the rest of the 26 examined countries.⁴⁶

It is possible to identify an established network of so-called alternative or disinformation websites in the Czech Republic, which are labelled as such by both state and non-state actors involved in countering disinformation. The dissemination of disinformation is not the only

⁴³ There are two main methods used distinguishable in Czech surveys on this matter. The first one consists of respondents being asked whether they know or agree with specific disinformation or narratives spread by disinformation platforms; the second one is based on inquiring whether the respondents know the disinformation platforms themselves. Neither of these methods, however, are able to convincingly establish a causal link between believing specific disinformation and visiting disinformation platforms. Leaving out the fact that disinformation can obviously be spread off-line as well, websites and social media are not the only vehicles for the dissemination of disinformation in the Czech online space. A considerable amount of disinformation is also shared through chain e-mails, which constitutes a problem especially amongst the elderly (See Zuzana Hronová, ‘Řetězové mailly posílá pětina seniorů. Je v našem zájmu odnaučit je to, míní lektoři’, *Aktuálně.cz*, 20 October 2019, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/seniori-retezove-emaily-trollove-elpida/r~4bc1f5faef4a11e99d020cc47ab5f122/>).

Even more problematic is finding out how much being exposed to disinformation or believing it actually affects people’s behaviour, such as voting.

⁴⁴ Jakub Janda, Markéta Blažejovská, and Jakub Vlasák, ‘Dopady dezinformačních operací v České republice’ (Prague: European Values Think-Tank, 2016), <https://www.evropskehodnoty.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Dopady-dezinforma%C4%8Dn%C3%ADch-operac%C3%AD-%C4%8Cesk%C3%A9-republice.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Josef Šlerka, ‘Dezinformační weby a Zpravodajství v ČR’ (Prague: Endowment Fund for Independent Journalism, 2019), https://s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/uploads.mangoweb.org/nfnz/beta/uploads/2020/07/dezinformace_prezentace_final-4.pdf.

⁴⁶ ‘8 z 10 Čechů se setkala s fake news, téměř všichni jim zpočátku uvěřili’, Ipsos, accessed 19 July 2020, <https://www.ipsos.com/cs-cz/8-z-10-cechu-se-setkalo-s-fake-news-temer-vsichni-jim-zpocatku-uverili>.

characteristic these websites have in common, as they (with slight exceptions) focus on the same topics and share the same values. Articles on these websites show strong opposition to migration and Islam, the contemporary West, or LGBT culture. Important for our research is their aversion to the European Union and positive stance towards Russia.⁴⁷

There is a visible connection between the Czech disinformation scene and parts of the country's political scene, especially the Freedom and Direct Democracy party (SPD) and president Miloš Zeman. Members of the far-right SPD frequently share disinformation, use the same rhetoric as disinformation websites, and even have personal ties to the scene. For example, their MEP Ivan David is a leading figure in the disinformation website *Nová republika*.⁴⁸ Miloš Zeman and even more his press secretary Jiří Ovčáček, who has become a distinctive figure in Czech politics, give interviews to disinformation websites, defend them, and join them in their frequent attacks on traditional media.⁴⁹ Both Zeman and SPD are known for their pro-Russian and lately also pro-Chinese views.

2.2 The Czech response – how it all begun

The process of putting the issue of disinformation on the Czech public and political agenda has already become a subject of the local academic debate (or maybe more precisely, academic critique), which has chiefly dealt with identifying the respective policy shapers and analysing the discourse surrounding the Czech approach to the issue of disinformation and hybrid threats. The authors engaged in this research see the process of putting the issue of hybrid

⁴⁷ Cf. 'Databáze proruského obsahu od A-Z', Neovlivní.cz, accessed 17 July 2020, <https://neovlivni.cz/databaze-proruskeho-obsahu-od-a-z/>;

Jakub Janda and Veronika Vichová, 'Fungování českých dezinformačních webů' (Prague: European Values Think-Tank, 2016). <https://www.evropskehodnoty.cz/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Fungov%C3%A1n%C3%AD-%C4%8Desk%C3%BDch-dezinforma%C4%8Dn%C3%ADch-web%C5%AF4-1.pdf>;

Josef Šlerka, 'Typologie domácích zpravodajských webů', Mapa médií, accessed 17 July 2020, <http://www.mapamedii.cz/mapa/typologie/index.php>;

Jakub Zelenka and Lukáš Prchal, 'Myšlenky odporující zájmům státu šíří až sto vlivných lidí, tvrdí vnitro. V hledáčku má na 40 webů', *Aktuálně.cz*, 22 June 2017, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/az-sto-vlivnych-lidi-siri-myslenky-odporujici-zajmum-statu-t/r~86622924568f11e7a83b0025900fea04/>.

⁴⁸ 'Kontakt', *Nová republika*, accessed 17 July 2020, <http://www.novarepublika.cz/p/kontakt.html>.

⁴⁹ Markéta Bidrmanová, 'Politolog zkritizoval hradního mluvčího za dezinformace. Vy rozhodujete, co je pravda? kontruje Ovčáček', *Seznam Zprávy*, 17 September 2019, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/duel-mluvciho-prezidenta-ovcacka-a-odbornika-na-dezinformace-gregora-ct-chce-bojovat-proti-fake-news-jak-se-ji-to-dari-78969>;

Lukáš Prchal and Jakub Zelenka, 'Zeman dal rozhovor slovenskému konspiračnímu webu. Nenálepkujeme, brání se Ovčáček', *Aktuálně.cz*, 24 March 2017, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/zeman-dal-rozhovor-slovenskemu-konspiracnimu-webu-nenalepkuj/r~eaa78f0108111e794b9002590604f2e/>.

threats on Czech public and political agenda as a process of securitisation, and they assess it in a rather negative way, criticising the incorrect use of hybrid warfare terminology by the agenda-setters, as well as expressing visible disapproval of the strong anti-Russian rhetoric used by them.⁵⁰ As noted in the first chapter, this thesis will neither discuss the appropriateness of the countermeasures to the actual threat level nor will it make judgements about the securitisation of this issue or the validity of terms and methods used by actors involved in the process. That said, these works still provide a very good background for our research.

The issue of disinformation and hybrid threats entered the Czech public and political arena after the Russian annexation of Crimea and the start of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, which took many by surprise and showed the danger which hybrid threats and disinformation campaigns can pose. Before 2014, there was virtually no interest in disinformation and hybrid threats visible amongst the public, politicians, journalists, or in the academia. Nevertheless, the events in Ukraine served only as a spark setting off further motion, which came especially in 2016 and 2017. For example, this pattern can be seen when looking at public events on information war, propaganda, and disinformation organised within this timeframe, as done by Rychnovská and Kohút.⁵¹

Neither is the situation different with the state institutions and representatives. Although the danger of Russian disinformation was mentioned by the Security Information Service (BIS) already in its annual report for the year 2000, and some disinformation cases were occasionally mentioned in the following years (these were, however, isolated extremism-related exceptions), it was not until 2015/2016 when this issue started to be significantly reflected by the BIS.⁵² This can be as seen in its annual report for 2015, in which a significant amount of attention was devoted to explicitly Russian (dis)information operations.⁵³ Since then, the focus of the BIS even increased. In its last annual report for 2018, the BIS even described the activities of pro-Russian activists involved in spreading disinformation as ‘the gravest threat to the

⁵⁰ Bahenský, ‘Paradox hybridní války: O příčinách a následcích pragmatismu v debatě’; Eberle and Daniel, ‘Hybrid Warriors’; Eberle and Daniel, ‘‘Putin, You Suck’’; Rychnovská and Kohút, ‘The Battle for Truth’.

⁵¹ Rychnovská and Kohút, ‘The Battle for Truth’, 68.

⁵² All BIS annual reports can be found here: ‘Annual Reports’, Security Information Service, accessed 25 July 2020, <https://www.bis.cz/annual-reports/>.

⁵³ ‘Annual Report of the Security Information Service for 2015’ (Security Information Service, 2016), 8–9, <https://www.bis.cz/public/site/bis.cz/content/vyrocní-zpráva/en/ar2015en.pdf>.

constitutionality of the Czech Republic'.⁵⁴ Other state institutions or politicians also did not show much interest in the issue of disinformation or hybrid threats before 2014.

Besides the above-mentioned reports the BIS, the first visible and significant policy shift in Czech strategic documents came with the release of the Security Strategy of the Czech Republic in 2015, where hybrid threats and disinformation were listed amongst the most serious threats to the country's security. Although the Strategy did not once mention Russia by name, it is evident that some phenomena described in the document concern Russia implicitly. Specifically, one can read that 'some states seek to achieve a revision of the existing international order and are ready to pursue their power-seeking goals through hybrid warfare methods combining conventional and non-conventional military means with non-military tools (propaganda using traditional and new media, disinformation intelligence operations, cyber attacks, political and economic pressures, and deployment of unmarked military personnel)'.⁵⁵

The Czech Republic also joined the arising motion to counter disinformation at the EU level by sending a seconded national expert to the newly formed EEAS East StratCom Task Force, Jakub Kalenský.⁵⁶ We can see here that the Czech Republic actively participated in the very creation of the EU's disinformation policy, i. e. uploaded (together with other like-minded countries) an issue it considered important on the EU's agenda. However, there is no visible evidence that the forming of the Czech disinformation policy in these stages was influenced by EU affairs. Nevertheless, another supranational organisation did play a role here – NATO. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation held a summit in September 2014, content of which was significantly influenced by the fresh Ukrainian conflict, causing NATO to become more interested in the concept of hybrid warfare. As Daniel and Eberle argue, NATO's newly formed interest in hybrid warfare was embraced by Czech leaders and, moreover, provided a push to the formation of what they called a Czech 'Russian hybrid warfare assemblage'.⁵⁷

The concept of assemblage in Daniel and Eberle's work stands for a network of actors which securitised the threat of Russian hybrid warfare. In the assemblage, we can find various think-thanks, journalists, members of academia, or security bureaucrats. Amongst these actors,

⁵⁴ 'Annual Report of the Security Information Service for 2018' (Security Information Service, 2019), 9, <https://www.bis.cz/public/site/bis.cz/content/vyrocní-zpravy/en/ar2018en.pdf.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Government of the Czech Republic, *Security Strategy of the Czech Republic* (Prague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2015), 13, http://www.army.cz/images/id_8001_9000/8503/Security_Strategy_2015.pdf.

⁵⁶ Ondřej Kundra, 'Český novinář bude bojovat proti ruským trollům', *Respekt*, 4 June 2015, <https://www.respekt.cz/fokus/cesky-novinar-bude-bojovat-proti-ruskym-trollum>.

⁵⁷ Eberle and Daniel, 'Hybrid Warriors', 914.

according to all the research that has been done in this area, the most prominent role was played by the European Values Center for Security Policy, formerly the European Values Think-Thank.⁵⁸

European Values describes itself as follows:

*‘European Values Center for Security Policy is a non-governmental, non-partisan institute defending freedom and sovereignty. We protect liberal democracy, the rule of law, and the transatlantic alliance of the Czech Republic. We help defend Europe especially from the malign influences of Russia, China, and Islamic extremists. We envision a free, safe, and prosperous Czechia within a vibrant Central Europe that is an integral part of the transatlantic community and is based on a firm alliance with the USA.’*⁵⁹

While these words suggest a stronger appeal to ties with the transatlantic community than with the European Union, the activities of and content produced by the think-tank clearly demonstrate that being part of the European Union and promoting the active participation of the Czech Republic in European affairs is of crucial importance to the organisation. European Values openly present itself as ‘pro-European’ and before it started devoting a large amount of its attention to hostile foreign influence, ‘provid[ing] European dimension debate in the Czech Republic’ and ‘promot[ing] civil society participation in EU and national level public affairs’ were stated as the think tank’s main goals.⁶⁰

The institutionalisation of the European Values’ battle against Russian disinformation took place at the end of 2015 with the establishment of the ‘Kremlin Watch’ programme, whose aim is to ‘expose and confront instruments of Russian influence and disinformation operations focused against Western democracies’.⁶¹ European Values started to actively call attention to the threat of Russian information, with the most prominent face behind this endeavour being the one of Jakub Janda, who founded the Kremlin Watch programme and now serves as the think tank’s director.

Other influential actors mobilized during the same time period as well. The Prague Security Studies, another Prague-based think-tank, founded its ‘Initiative to raise awareness

⁵⁸ Eberle and Daniel, ‘Hybrid Warriors’.; Rychnovská and Kohút, ‘The Battle for Truth’.

⁵⁹ ‘Aims and Purposes’, European Values Center for Security Policy, accessed 17 July 2020, <https://www.europeanvalues.net/o-nas/nase-poslani/>.

⁶⁰ ‘Annual Report 2011’ (Prague: European Values Think-Tank, 2012), 5, <https://evropskehodnoty.cz/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/V%C3%BDro%C4%8Dn%C3%AD-zpr%C3%A1va-2011.pdf>.

⁶¹ ‘About Kremlin Watch’, Kremlin Watch, accessed 17 July 2020, <https://www.kremlinwatch.eu>.

about pro-Russian disinformation’, headed by Ivana Smoleňová, who went on to raise the awareness by publishing articles, reports, giving interviews etc.⁶² A great deal of events dealing with the topic of Russian disinformation started to be organised, not only by the think-tanks mentioned but by universities and other institutions as well. Furthermore, several journalists became engaged in drawing attention to the threat, the most active being Ondřej Kundra from *Respekt*. As works by Daniel and Eberle or Rychnovská and Kohút show, the network of influential actors dealing in some way with disinformation of hybrid threats in the Czech Republic is much broader. There is certainly a lot more people active in this field nowadays than it was four years ago. However, it is important to limit the number of actors taken into account according to the level of impact they had had on the development of countermeasures against disinformation.

2.3 Policy shift at the state level

A key moment in the Czech Republic’s response to the threat of disinformation came with the National Security Audit, launched by the government in early 2016, in which two specific chapters deal with this issue – *Influence of Foreign Powers* and *Hybrid Threats and Their Impact*. Overall, the issue of disinformation was discussed extensively in the Audit, both as a general threat and as part of Russian hybrid warfare, and the Audit considers disinformation campaigns conducted by foreign powers to be ‘one of the most serious threats’.⁶³

Regarding cooperation with European bodies on countering disinformation, we can find the following passages in the Audit concerning this matter. In the SWAT analysis carried out in the *Influence of Foreign Powers* chapter, ‘[t]he CR’s membership in European and Euro-Atlantic integration structures’ is considered one of the countries strengths in countering hostile foreign influence, while ‘the increased attention paid to this issue in other EU member states and within European structures (e.g. the EEAS StratCom Team), the possibility to engage in joint initiatives and participate in the search for common solutions’ is listed as an opportunity.⁶⁴ In the chapter on hybrid threats, the Audit refers to the initiatives aimed at countering them developed by the EU and NATO and considers it to be ‘desirable to align their efforts and thus increase their efficiency.’ Moreover, the Czech Republic ‘should actively contribute to shaping

⁶² ‘Initiative to Raise Awareness about Pro-Russian Disinformation’, Prague Security Studies Institute, accessed 25 July 2020, <http://www.pssi.cz/russia-s-influence-activities-in-cee/pro-russian-disinformation>.

⁶³ Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, *National Security Audit*, 50.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 59-60

the approach of NATO and the EU’ and ‘take their relevant outputs into account in its own national approach’.⁶⁵

Besides showing that the Czech Republic considers disinformation a serious threat, the Audit showed that the Czech state institutions at that time approached disinformation mainly as part of hybrid warfare conducted by foreign powers. One of the main outcomes of the Audit in this area was the establishment of the Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats (CTHH), following the recommendation in the document to ‘establish a department within relevant Government institutions for the evaluation of disinformation campaigns and other manifestations of foreign power influence’.⁶⁶

Before we take a closer look at the CTHH, it is important to discuss the role of the European Values Think-Tank in this process, as it is evident that its advocacy activities, as well as direct involvement in the development of the National Security Audit, did play a significant role in the genesis of Czech countermeasures against disinformation. Jakub Janda, the head of the think tank’s Kremlin Watch programme, was an official consultant on the *Influence of Foreign Power* chapter, developed under the Ministry of Interior, and other analysts of the think-tank participated as well. The Audit incorporated many of Janda’s recommendations, which he published separately in the form of a policy paper.⁶⁷ It was European Values that called for establishing a specialized department for countering disinformation and hybrid threats, and the form and functioning of the later-created CTHH largely correspond with its recommendations.⁶⁸ Another advice of European Values reflected in the Audit was the recommendation to make use of experiences and tested practices of other European states, laying groundwork for potential future cross-loading of best practices and tested out policies.⁶⁹

The establishment of the CTHH, which started its operations at the beginning of 2017, showed that although key government officials are interested in countering disinformation and support the initiative, there is not a consensus amongst all political leaders that this is a step in

⁶⁵ Ibid., 131

⁶⁶ Ibid., 61.

⁶⁷ Jakub Janda, ‘Recommendation for the Czech Strategy against Systematic Disinformation Campaigns of Foreign Powers’ (Prague: European Values Think-Tank, 2016), <https://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Recommendation-for-Czech-strategy-against-other-powers-systematic-disinformation-campaigns1.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Cf. Janda, 5; ‘Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats’, Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, accessed 25 July 2020, <https://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/clanek/centre-against-terrorism-and-hybrid-threats.aspx>.

⁶⁹ Cf. Janda, 6; Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, *National Security Audit*, 60.

the right direction. The most high-profile criticism of the CTHH came from the Czech president Miloš Zeman, who accused the CTHH of censorship, and continued in his attacks against the Centre even after discussions with the Minister of the Interior.⁷⁰ Similar argumentation against the establishment of the CTHH was used by the SPD.⁷¹ Despite such criticism, the core activities of the CTHH are not debunking disinformation, but analytical work and monitoring.⁷²

2.4 NGOs in the lead

After the founding of the CTHH, actions taken by the state had been more focused on other kinds of hybrid threats, such as cyber-attacks. Probably the most visible step was the establishment of the National Cyber and Information Security Agency in August 2017, which became the country's central administrative body for cyber security.⁷³ Much more active in developing ways to deal with the issue of disinformation has been the non-governmental sector. As mentioned above, a crucial role in defining and forming the country's stance on and response to disinformation was played by various actors such as think-tanks or journalists. However, the total number of groups and individuals that became active in countering disinformation since it started to be perceived as a problem is much higher, as well as much more diverse.

We can divide these actors into two groups: those that see disinformation primarily as a security threat and more or less push for 'harsher' measures that the authorities should adopt; and those that approach the issue as a problem of insufficient media literacy and want to tackle primarily it through education and promoting critical thinking. Both groups are naturally not wholly homogeneous; and individual actors can be embodied in both of them. The reason why activities of the 'educational' group are not given a closer look in this thesis is two-fold. Firstly, they rarely try to lobby for change at the state level (even less if at all at the EU level), as they often see their work as supplementing or even substituting the work of the state. Secondly, their inclusion would require including topics such as education policies at both levels as well, which

⁷⁰ 'Zeman opět kritizoval centrum proti dezinformacím. Nikdo podle něj nemá monopol na pravdu', *ČT24*, 10 January 2017, <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/domaci/2007532-zeman-opet-kritizoval-centrum-proti-dezinformacim-nikdo-podle-nej-nema-monopol-na>.

⁷¹ 'Politické usnesení SPD', SPD - Svoboda a přímá demokracie, 23 November 2016, <https://spd.cz/1502-politicke-usneseni-spd/>.

⁷² 'Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats'.

⁷³ 'About NÚKIB', National Cyber and Information Security Agency, accessed 19 July 2020, <https://nukib.cz/en/>.

is beyond the scope of this thesis.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the distinction between ‘security’ and ‘educational’ approach is visible at the EU level as well.⁷⁵

Still, there is one more initiative that deserves our attention, since it constitutes a good example of cross-loading. The initiative in question bears the name ‘Czech Elves’ and is based on the Baltic elves, an originally Lithuanian group of volunteers, who fight disinformation by various methods such as fact-checking or exposing fake online accounts. The latter activity gave the initiative its name, since people or bots who spread disinformation online are referred to as ‘trolls’. Czech Elves established themselves in 2018 and have been focusing mainly on monitoring and analysis of disinformation. Just as other actors in this field, the group is not value-free. At their website, Czech elves explain the rationale for their actions by the urge to prevent the ‘destruction of democratic and constitutional values on which our country is based by targeted disinformation campaigns orchestrated by foreign intelligence services’ and declare their support for pro-European and pro-Western orientation of the Czech Republic.⁷⁶ Elsewhere, the group claimed to be ‘fighting the hybrid war in places where the state so far refuse to fight’.⁷⁷ Still, Czech Elves are believed to cooperate with state authorities, specifically the Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats, although this has not been officially confirmed by either party.⁷⁸

Another instance in which the non-governmental sector and state authorities meet to address disinformation is the annual StratCom Summit, organised by the European Values Think-Tank, which, even more importantly for our research, has a strong international scope. The Summit, which focuses on hostile foreign influence and disinformation operations as well as European responses to them, brings together a large number of both state and non-state actors active in this field from ca 30 countries. The StratCom Summit has received considerable support from Czech government officials, although this statement is valid mainly in connection with the previous cabinet of Bohuslav Sobotka, who together with the Minister of Interior Milan

⁷⁴ Amongst the most prominent actors in the ‘educational’ group are initiatives such as EDUin, One World in Schools, Zvol si info, and many others.

⁷⁵ For further discussion of this matter, see Hedvig Ördén, ‘Deferring Substance: EU Policy and the Information Threat’, *Intelligence and National Security* 34, no. 3 (2019): 421–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2019.1553706>.

⁷⁶ ‘Kdo jsme’, Čeští elfové, accessed 19 July 2020, <https://cesti-elfove.cz/uvodni-strana/>.

⁷⁷ Čeští elfové, ‘I po 100 letech potřebuje náš stát patrioty’, Facebook, 30 October 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/%C4%8De%C5%A1t%C3%AD-elfov%C3%A9/i-po-100-letech-pot%C5%99ebuje-n%C3%A1st%C3%A1t-patrioty/279602899343162/>.

⁷⁸ Adéla Klečková, ‘Explaining Czech Elves’, 4liberty.eu, 16 August 2019, <http://4liberty.eu/explaining-czech-elves/>.

Chovanec even personally attended the conferences. Furthermore, the Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats has participated in the organisation of the events.⁷⁹ Especially by facilitating the sharing of best practices amongst individual countries, this particular event has significantly contributed to the way the Czech Republic and its counter-disinformation activities are perceived at the European level. For example, after attending the 2016 StratCom Summit, the head of the EEAS East StratCom Task Force Giles Portman stated that ‘The Czech Republic is taking a leading role in Europe’s response to disinformation, thanks to European Values Think-Tank – one of the top European think-tanks on this issue.’⁸⁰

2.5 Recent developments

In September 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established a new position of a Special Envoy for Resilience and New Threats, to which appointed the former Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to NATO Jiří Šedivý. The focus of his work was mainly on disinformation and strategic communication, with a marginal focus on cyber-security.⁸¹ However, Šedivý’s operations at the Ministry were rather short-lived, since he became the Head of the European Defence Agency in April 2020, and the position has been vacant since then.⁸²

The last visible response of the Czech state to the issue of disinformation was the establishment of the Permanent Commission on Hybrid Threats at the Chamber of Deputies in July 2020. The formation of the Commission came as a result of long-term lobbying done by Helena Langšádlová, MP for the pro-European TOP 09 party. In a press conference on this subject, Langšádlová stressed the seriousness of disinformation as a threat to democracy and called for building better resilience towards other hybrid threats such as cyber-attacks as well.⁸³ Langšádlová also mentioned that the establishment of the Commission follows similar initiatives found in other European states and the EU. The Commission on Hybrid Threats

⁷⁹ ‘STRATCOM SUMMIT’, STRATCOM SUMMIT, accessed 19 July 2020, <https://stratcomsummit.cz/>.

⁸⁰ Kremlin Watch Team, ‘Policy Shift Overview: How the Czech Republic Became One of the European Leaders in Countering Russian Disinformation’ (Prague: European Values Think-Tank, 2017), 10, <https://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Policy-shift-overview-How-the-Czech-Republic-became-one-of-the-European-leaders-in-countering-Russian-disinformation-1.pdf>.

⁸¹ Jakub Zelenka, ‘Ministerstvo zahraničí reaguje na nové hrozby. Bude mít člověka na boj proti dezinformacím a ruskému vlivu’, *Deník N*, 28 August 2019, <https://denikn.cz/188162/ministerstvo-zahranici-reaguje-na-nove-hrozby-bude-mit-cloveka-na-boj-proti-dezinformacim-a-ruskemu-vlivu/>.

⁸² ‘Jiří Šedivý Appointed as News EDA Chief Executive’, European Defence Agency, 5 March 2020, <https://eda.europa.eu/info-hub/press-centre/latest-news/2020/03/05/ji%C5%99%C3%AD-%C5%A1ediv%C3%BD-appointed-as-new-eda-chief-executive>.

⁸³ TOP 09, ‘Tiskovka TOP 09 k jednání Sněmovny’, Facebook, 16 July 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/top09cz/videos/901845233615894/>.

represents a certain compromise, since some MPs had originally called for establishing an investigatory commission on hostile foreign influence, which, however, would not pass through the Chamber.⁸⁴ Establishing the Commission in its current form eventually gained the support of all parliamentary parties except the Communist Party (KSČM). Perhaps surprisingly, the initiative was also supported by SPD, whose leader Tomio Okamura defended the backing of the Commission by pointing out that the party counts ‘activities of George Soros’ NGOs’ amongst hybrid threats and that their presence in the Commission would ensure that ‘the term ‘hybrid threats’ would not be abused against patriots or against Russia and China’.⁸⁵

In comparison to the developments at the EU level or in other Member States, it is striking that there are almost no efforts in the Czech Republic to regulate online platforms or pressure them to enhance their own counter-disinformation efforts. Neither we have seen calls for countering disinformation by law. The Ministry of Interior has recently started to be more active in monitoring social media content and prosecuting cases which are unlawful, however, these measures are mainly connected to hate speech.⁸⁶ The only paragraph in the Czech Criminal Code that could theoretically be used for prosecuting disinformation is scaremongering, which is not exactly applicable. Furthermore, prominent Czech lawyers are wary of fighting disinformation through law.⁸⁷ Jiří Šedivý, at that time still holding the position of Special Envoy for Resilience and New Threats, said last September that the Czech Republic is not ready for an anti-disinformation law, mainly due to the lack of a single coordinating

⁸⁴ Ondřej Kundra, ‘Poslanci se dohodli na stálé komisi k hybridním hrozbám’, *Respekt*, 30 January 2020, <https://www.respekt.cz/agenda/poslanci-se-dohodli-na-stale-komisi-k-hybridnim-hrozbam>.

⁸⁵ Jan Cemper, ‘Zradila SPD ‘alternativu’? SPD znovu válčí s Aeronetem kvůli zřízení komise pro hybridní hrozby’, *Manipulátoři.cz*, 19 July 2020, <https://manipulatori.cz/zradila-spd-alternativu-spd-znovu-valci-s-aeronetem-kvuli-zrizeni-komise-pro-hybridni-hrozby/>.

Unfounded conspiracy theories involving George Soros are often disseminated by disinformation platforms all around the world, including the Czech Republic. ‘

The argument that SPD’s backing of the Commission’s creation was necessary to ensure that a member of the party would have a seat in it is flawed, since the filling of the Commission’s seat was subjected to a later vote, and it is customary that every parliamentary party is represented in every commission of the Chamber.

⁸⁶ ‘Proti radikálům. Ministerstvo vnitra chce víc sledovat sociální sítě’, *Aktuálně.cz*, 20 April 2019, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/proti-extremistickym-projevum-chce-ministerstvo-vnitra-bojov/r~67ea6710637411e9a049ac1f6b220ee8/>.

⁸⁷ Cf. Jan Januš, ‘Šéf nejvyššího soudu Šamal pro INFO.cz: Trestní právo musí na fake news reagovat, zákoník by se ale měnit neměl’, *INFO.cz*, 18 April 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180420060033/http://www.info.cz/pravo/sef-nejvyssiho-soudu-samal-pro-info-cz-trestni-pravo-musi-na-fake-news-reagovat-zakonik-by-se-ale-menit-nemel-28255.html>;

Jan Januš, ‘Za fake news by mohly hrozit pokuty. S trestním postihem ale opatrně, varují advokáti’, *INFO.cz*, 18 April 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180423112447/http://www.info.cz/pravo/za-fake-news-by-mohly-hrozit-pokuty-s-trestnim-postihem-ale-opatrne-varuji-advokati-28253.html>;

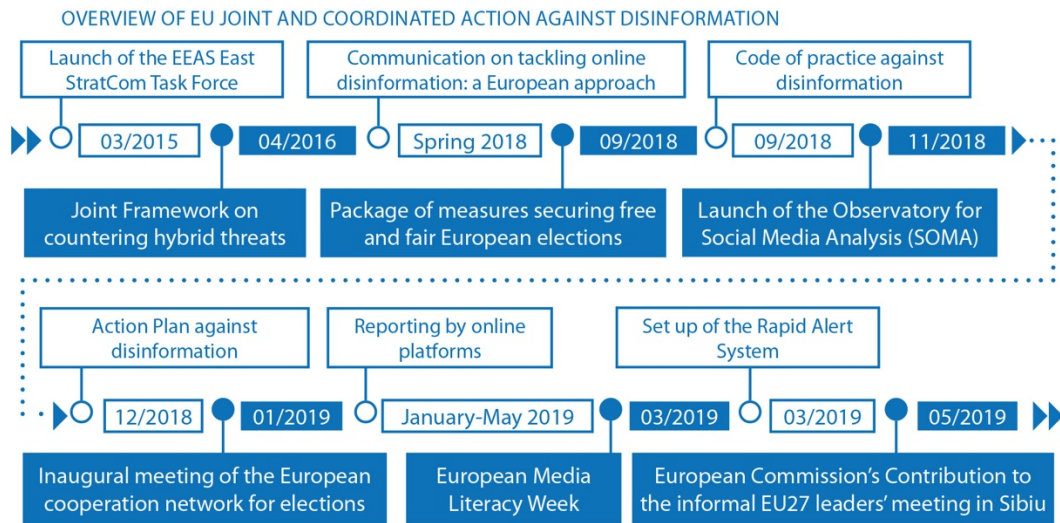
authority that would oversee the issue.⁸⁸ Despite all that, the Ministry of Interior and the Police of the Czech Republic are considering adopting a social media-regulating law which would be based on a bill that is currently being debated in Germany. However, the German bill, which would compel social media platforms to report and block harmful content, is concerned primarily with hate speech and not with disinformation.⁸⁹ Another area which has arisen within the global debate on disinformation and social media regulation is digital political advertising, which was first tackled by the EU in the Code of Practice (see below) but has not yet received much attention in the Czech Republic. According to a recent study on this topic, there is a ‘general willingness to offload this agenda to the EU level’.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Jiří Hošek, ‘Šedivý: Česko není zralé na zákon o fake news, jiné evropské státy mají náskok’, *Seznam Zprávy*, 25 September 2019, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/sedivy-cesko-neni-zrale-na-zakon-o-fake-news-jine-evropske-staty-maji-naskok-79536>.

⁸⁹ Lukáš Prchal and Jan Tvrdoň, ‘Policie se chce inspirovat u Němců. Sociální sítě tam mají samy hledat a blokovat nenávisť nebo rasismus’, *Deník N*, 12 March 2020, <https://denikn.cz/311041/policie-se-chce-inspirovat-u-nemcu-socialni-site-tam-maji-samy-hledat-a-blokovat-nenavist-nebo-rasismus/>.

⁹⁰ Pavel Havlíček and Jiří Rajtr, ‘Digital Political Advertising in the Czech Republic’ (Prague: Association for International Affairs, 2020), 19, <http://www.amo.cz/en/digital-political-advertising-in-the-czech-republic/>.

3. EU countermeasures against disinformation



*Overview of EU Joint and Coordinated Action Against Disinformation*⁹¹

The start of the EU's effort to counter disinformation happened at the same time and in the same context as in the Czech Republic, that is as a reaction to the Russian aggression in Crimea and its use of disinformation as a tool of hybrid warfare. The first step took place at a meeting of the European Council in March 2015, which tasked the then-High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) Federica Mogherini to prepare an action plan on strategic communication and to establish a relevant communication team. The Council explained the rationale for this decision by 'the need to challenge Russia's ongoing information campaigns'.⁹² Both of these tasks were fulfilled later that year, with the Action Plan on Strategic Communication published in June and the EEAS East StratCom Task Force founded in September.

3.1 EEAS East StratCom Task Force

The establishment of the East StratCom Task Force, as well as the overall shift towards developing a European response to disinformation and hybrid threats, was elicited mainly by

⁹¹ 'Tackling Online Disinformation', European Commission, 26 October 2017, <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/tackling-online-disinformation>.

⁹² European Council, 'European Council Conclusions, 19-20 March 2015', 20 March 2015, 5, <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11-2015-INIT/en/pdf>.

the Baltic states, which are the most vulnerable to and targeted by Russian disinformation campaigns due to their geographical position, large Russian minority, and historical relations with their Eastern neighbour.⁹³ These circumstances affected the overall character of the Task Force, already noticeable in its name. Although in the media, the East StratCom Task Force has been usually portrayed as the ‘anti-disinformation’ team, disinformation per se was not actually its main task at first. In fact, ‘increased public awareness of disinformation activities by external actors, and improved EU capacity to anticipate and respond to such activities’ was only the last objective of the Action Plan on Strategic Communication, preceded by ‘strengthening of the overall media environment including support for independent media’ and ‘effective communication and promotion of EU policies and values towards the Eastern neighbourhood’.⁹⁴

The side-lining of the actual tackling of disinformation was even more visible in practice. The Task Force itself was already very small – it started as a team of seven people and only recently seen a noticeable expansion. Within this tiny team, the one person fully devoted to countering disinformation was the seconded national expert from the Czech Republic, Jakub Kalenský.

Kalenský played a crucial role at the beginning of the EU’s fight against disinformation. His work has received a significant amount of attention in Czech media and gained him the position of being arguably the most prominent Czech expert on disinformation.⁹⁵ Kalenský, a Russian studies scholar who worked as a journalist before the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs nominated him for the EEAS position, started to pursue the goal to increase awareness about disinformation and boost the EU’s readiness to counter them by launching EUvsDisinfo, the flagship project of the Task Force. According to the project’s website, EUvsDisinfo ‘identifies, compiles and exposes disinformation originating in pro-Kremlin media that are spread across the EU and Eastern Partnership countries’.⁹⁶ The project collects these cases in its extensive database and analyses them in their weekly newsletter DisinfoReview. Besides these activities,

⁹³ Šrámková, ‘Forming the EU Disinformation Policy’, 50.

⁹⁴ ‘Action Plan on Strategic Communication’ (European Union, 2015), 1, <http://archive.eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Action%20PLan.pdf>.

⁹⁵ Jaroslav Hroch, ‘An Interplay of Narratives: How Do the Czech Journalists Perceive Securitized Disinformation?’ (Master’s thesis, Charles University in Prague, 2020), 32–33, <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/116315>.

⁹⁶ ‘About’, EU vs DISINFORMATION, accessed 17 July 2020, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/about/>.

the team also brief and train EU institutions, Member States' governments, journalists, or civil society organisations.⁹⁷

When describing the beginning of his endeavour, Kalenský points out the scarcity of resources he faced, which led him to seek cooperation with partners outside Brussels.⁹⁸ Although the key role model for the EUvsDisinfo project was the Ukrainian fact-checking organisation StopFake, an important part in setting up the project was played by the Czech think-tank European Values,⁹⁹ whose impact on the formation of Czech countermeasures against disinformation was analysed in the previous chapter, and with which Kalenský started cooperating already in the spring of 2015.¹⁰⁰ The interconnectedness with European Values was demonstrated even further at the turn of 2018 and 2019, when Kalenský left the Task Force, and the vacancy was filled by Monika Richter, another Czech citizen nominated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who had previously spent two years working in the European Values' Kremlin Watch programme.¹⁰¹

The shoestring budget and insufficient number of staff meant that the issue of disinformation was not given as much attention as wanted by the Member States and other actors pushing the EU to be more active in tackling it. Besides openly calling for increasing the budget, Member States can support the Task Force's work by sending in seconded national experts. The Czech Republic has done both. Especially in the first years of the Task Force's existence, when the team had no dedicated budget, the Czech Republic was very active in supporting it, both at official EU meetings and through other methods.¹⁰² For example, it was one of the eight countries that in October 2017 sent a letter signed by the countries' foreign ministers to the HR/VP Mogherini, urging her to enhance the Task Force's capabilities.¹⁰³ A

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Brian Kenety, 'Ex-East StratCom Task Force Stalwart Jakub Kalenský on EU Efforts vs Russian Disinformation', *Radio Prague International*, 21 November 2018, <https://english.radio.cz/ex-east-stratcom-task-force-stalwart-jakub-kalensky-eu-efforts-vs-russian-8145399>.

⁹⁹ Members of the European Values Think-Tank helped with administrative tasks for which there was not enough capacity within the Task Force as well as contributed extensively to the database once it had been set up.

¹⁰⁰ Eberle and Daniel, 'Hybrid Warriors', 918.

¹⁰¹ Kateřina Šafaříková, 'Překvapilo mě, že se Česko za mě nepostavilo, říká Monika Richter, která připravovala zprávu o čínských dezinformacích', *Hospodářské noviny*, 20 July 2020, <https://ihned.cz/c1-66792040-prekvapilo-me-ze-se-cesko-za-me-nepostavilo-rika-monika-richter-ktera-pripravovala-zpravu-o-cinskyh-dezinformacich>.

¹⁰² E.g. 'Posílení strategické komunikace tématem Rady FAC', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 13 November 2017, https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/udalosti_a_media/archiv_zprav/rok_2017/tiskove_zpravy/x2017_11_13_posileni_strategicke_komunikace_tematem.html.

¹⁰³ Andrew Rettman, 'Mogherini Urged to Do More on Russian Propaganda', *EUobserver*, 20 October 2017, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/139573>.

similar appeal to Mogherini with a Czech footprint took place seven months earlier in the form of an open letter written by the European Values Think-Tank, criticizing her of downplaying the threat of Russian disinformation and calling for a budgetary and personnel boost for the team. The open letter was signed by a large number of people from NGOs, academia, media, or the European political scene.¹⁰⁴ Mogherini was criticised for being too soft on Russian disinformation by the Task Force member Kalenský or the Czech MEP Jaromír Štětina on different occasions as well.¹⁰⁵

The calls were heard, and the East StratCom Task Force received its first funding directly from the EU budget in 2018 (before that, it was funded partly from the EEAS current budget and partly by participating Member States by sending in seconded national experts). The approved budget amounted to €1,1 million a year for years 2018-2020.¹⁰⁶ A further budgetary increase came with the Action Plan on Disinformation published at the end of 2018, which set the new budget goal to €5 million a year. The increased funding is to be accompanied by a reinforcement of staff by 50-55 people.¹⁰⁷

At the moment, the Czech representation in the EEAS East StratCom Task force has been interrupted by the departure of Kalenský's successor Monika Richter, which took place in July. Richter's decision to quit came after a scandal involving a leaked e-mail that she addressed to her colleagues and in which she criticised the instruction of the current HR/VP Josep Borrell's team to modify a report on coronavirus-related disinformation in a way which would downplay the role of China in comparison to the original version prepared by the Task Force.¹⁰⁸ The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs declined to comment the scandal, but its spokesperson stated that the Ministry appreciates the work of both Kalenský and Richter and will strive to

¹⁰⁴ 'Open Letter of European Security Experts to Federica Mogherini', European Values Center for Security Policy, accessed 23 July 2020, <https://www.europeanvalues.net/mogherini/>.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Břeštan, 'Český zástupce pro boj s ruskými dezinformacemi v Bruselu končí, vláda hledá náhradu', *HlidacíPes.org*, 12 October 2018, <https://hlidacipes.org/cesky-zastupce-pro-boj-s-ruskymi-dezinformacemi-v-bruselu-konci-vlada-hleda-nahradu/>.

¹⁰⁶ Jennifer Rankin, 'EU Anti-Propaganda Unit Gets €1m a Year to Counter Russian Fake News', *The Guardian*, 25 November 2017, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/25/eu-anti-propaganda-unit-gets-1m-a-year-to-counter-russian-fake-news.Rankin>.

¹⁰⁷ 'Pushing for an Adequate Response to Online Disinformation [European Parliament Impact 2014-2019]', *European Parliamentary Research Service Blog* (blog), 28 August 2019, <https://epthinktank.eu/2019/08/28/pushing-for-an-adequate-response-to-online-disinformation-european-parliament-impact-2014-2019/>.

¹⁰⁸ There is an ongoing investigation into who is behind the leak, Richter denies any involvement.

ensure the continuity of Czech presence in the Task Force.¹⁰⁹ However, in a recent interview, Richter expressed her disappointment that the Czech Republic did not support or defend her in this affair. In the same interview, she also criticised the EU for not devoting enough attention to the disinformation and influence campaigns by Russia and China.¹¹⁰

3.2 Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats

The next step taken by the EU came in April 2016, when the European Commission and the HR/VP Mogherini approved the *Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats: a European Response*. As the name suggests, the document is more concerned with hybrid threats as a whole – the word disinformation is used only four times on in the 18-page document. One word that interestingly cannot be found anywhere in the documents is ‘Russia’. When compared to the Czech National Security Audit published shortly afterwards, we can see that the *Joint Framework* to a large extent avoids naming the actual threat. What these two documents have in common is calling for further cooperation with NATO. The Framework also explicitly states, that while a coordinated European response to hybrid threats can make countering there more effective, the primary responsibility lies with Member States.¹¹¹

Perhaps the most significant outcomes of the Framework were the establishment of the EU Hybrid Fusion Cell and the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE). The EU Hybrid Fusion Cell is part of the EU Intelligence and Situation Centre, an intelligence body of the EEAS, and operates as an information-sharing platform. Given the nature of the Cell, its work is non-public.¹¹² The Helsinki-based Hybrid CoE functions as a platform for sharing of best practices and conducting research on hybrid threats, as well as enabling further cooperation between EU and NATO.¹¹³ The Czech Republic joined the Hybrid CoE as a participating country in 2018.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Kateřina Šafaříková, ‘Kvůli únikům informací o čínském nátlaku na EU končí v Bruselu česká expertka’, *Respekt*, 16 July 2020, <https://www.respekt.cz/agenda/kvuli-unikum-informaci-o-cinskem-natlaku-na-eu-konci-v-bruselu-ceska-expertka>.

¹¹⁰ Šafaříková, ‘Překvapilo mě, že se Česko za mě nepostavilo, říká Monika Richter, která připravovala zprávu o čínských dezinformacích’.

¹¹¹ European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats - a European Union Response*.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹³ ‘What Is Hybrid CoE?’, Hybrid CoE, accessed 20 July 2020, <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/what-is-hybridcoe/>.

¹¹⁴ ‘Czech Republic Becomes a Member of Hybrid CoE’, Hybrid CoE, 21 May 2018, <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/news/czech-republic-becomes-member-hybrid-coe/>.

3.3 Tackling online disinformation: a European approach

Another important EU policy document, the first one solely devoted to disinformation, was the communication *Tackling online disinformation: a European approach*, presented in April 2018 by the European Commission. The communication approached the issue of disinformation more widely rather than just as a form of an external hybrid threat, and it mentioned Russia and its disinformation campaigns only marginally. The document stresses the danger disinformation can pose to democracy in the EU, and while it recognises that the protection of the electoral process is primarily within the competence of Member States, developing a European approach to ensure an effective and coordinated action and to protect the EU is necessary. Although the communication identifies several goals for improved countering of disinformation, the emphasis is laid mainly on pushing online platforms to deal with this problem more actively.¹¹⁵

The main force behind the communication was the then-European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Mariya Gabriel from Bulgaria, with the participation of the team behind Věra Jourová, the Czech European Commissioner at the time responsible for justice, consumers and gender equality, who is a member of the currently strongest Czech political party, ANO 2011.¹¹⁶ However, in the Czech Republic the initiative received almost no response.

The Commission proudly states that extensive consultations with citizens and stakeholders were taken into account while forming the document. Despite that, the communication and the subsequent development were not met without criticism, be it due to the alleged vagueness and ineffectiveness of the document or, on the other hand, due to concerns about restricting freedom of speech.¹¹⁷ Severe criticism of the communication came from the European Values Think-Tank, which criticised the ‘appeasement’ of Russia practised by the European Commission by avoiding to clearly point out the Russian disinformation threat

¹¹⁵ European Commission, *Tackling Online Disinformation - a European Approach* (Brussels: European Commission, 2018), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0236>.

¹¹⁶ Lucie Bednárová, ‘Evropa vyhlásila válku fake news na internetu. Víme, co Brusel chystá’, INFO.cz, 25 April 2018, <https://www.info.cz/evropska-unie/exkluzivne-evropa-vyhlasila-valku-fake-news-na-internetu-vime-co-brusel-chysta>.

¹¹⁷ Nicole Darabian, ‘Reflections on the European Self-Regulatory Code of Conduct: Will It Be Enough to Curb Online Disinformation in Upcoming Campaigns?’, *The London School of Economics and Political Science* (blog), 14 February 2019, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/medialse/2019/02/14/reflections-on-the-european-self-regulatory-code-of-conduct-will-it-be-enough-to-curb-online-disinformation-in-upcoming-campaigns/>.

in the communication. Another subject of the European Values' criticism was the fact that major European expert NGOs and think-tanks specialised on this issue (and cooperating with the EEAS East StratCom Task Force) were not involved in the process of drafting the communication. This criticism was aimed primarily at the HR/VP Federica Mogherini, who reportedly actively pushed for not mentioning Russia in the document.¹¹⁸

One of the communication's outcome was also the establishment of the Social Observatory for Disinformation and Social Media Analysis, a collaborative platform for independent European fact-checkers. Only a few initiatives joined the Observatory, none of them Czech.¹¹⁹

3.4 Package of measures securing free and fair European elections

In September 2018, the European Commission published a set of recommendations 'on election cooperation networks, online transparency, protection against cybersecurity incidents and fighting disinformation campaigns in the context of elections to the European Parliament'.¹²⁰ Besides simply encouraging Member States to actively counter these threats, the document called for establishing a cooperation network between individual Member States and the EU in order to enable an easier exchange of information related to disinformation that might affect the elections.

3.5 Code of practice on disinformation

Still in September 2018, as a follow up to the communication *Tackling online disinformation* and aiming to regulate disinformation through cooperation with online platforms, the European Commission presented the *Code of Practice on Disinformation*. The Code is a self-regulatory instrument, and its signatories subscribe to a wide range of commitments designed to tackle the issue of disinformation, divided into the following areas: scrutiny of ad placements; political advertising and issue-based advertising; integrity of services; empowering consumers; and empowering the research community. The document is

¹¹⁸ Jakub Janda, 'Commission's Approach to Tackling Online Disinformation Is an Empty Box', *EURACTIV.com*, 20 June 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/opinion/commissions-approach-to-tackling-online-disinformation-is-an-empty-box/>.

¹¹⁹ 'About Us', SOMA Disinfobservatory, accessed 20 July 2020, <https://www.disinfobservatory.org/about-us/>.

¹²⁰ European Commission, *Commission Recommendation on Election Cooperation Networks, Online Transparency, Protection against Cybersecurity Incidents and Fighting Disinformation Campaigns in the Context of Elections to the European Parliament* (Brussels: European Commission, 2018), https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/soteu2018-cybersecurity-elections-recommendation-5949_en.pdf.

strictly concerned with disinformation and the way online platforms should tackle it, there is no mention of neither hybrid threats nor Russia.¹²¹

To this day, the Code has been signed by Facebook, Google, Twitter, Microsoft, and Mozilla, together with companies from the advertising industry. The signatories have to periodically self-assess what measures they have undertaken. The first assessment of the online platforms' efforts was conducted a year after the Code was signed. Even though the European Commission complimented the Code's signatories for being active in this regard and implementing various measures, the Commission also expressed that the online platforms could do better and that there still is more work to be done.¹²²

3.5 Action Plan against disinformation

In June 2018, the European Council tasked the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini with preparing an action plan with specific proposals for a coordinated EU response to the challenge of disinformation.¹²³ Even though European countermeasures against disinformation are or at least had been almost never an important topic for Czech politicians, here we can see a slight exception. When the Committee on European Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies was discussing whether it should support the EU's efforts, MP Lubomír Svoboda from SPD blocked the discussion by leaving. He later explained his behaviour by claiming that he does not want to legitimise 'the establishment of Eurofascist censorship'.¹²⁴ The fact that the Czech representatives at the European Council supported the initiative was also criticised by the Communist Party.¹²⁵

The *Action Plan on Disinformation* was published by the European Commission in December 2018, a few months before elections to the European Parliament, whose protection

¹²¹ European Commission, 'EU Code of Practice on Disinformation' (European Commission, 2018), https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/document.cfm?doc_id=54454.

¹²² 'Annual Self-Assessment Reports of Signatories to the Code of Practice on Disinformation 2019', European Commission, 29 October 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/annual-self-assessment-reports-signatories-code-practice-disinformation-2019>; Natasha Lomas, 'Tech Giants Still Not Doing Enough to Fight Fakes, Says European Commission', *TechCrunch*, 29 October 2019, <https://social.techcrunch.com/2019/10/29/tech-giants-still-not-doing-enough-to-fight-fakes-says-european-commission/>. 'Annual Self-Assessment Reports of Signatories to the Code of Practice on Disinformation 2019'.

¹²³ European Council, 'European Council Conclusions, 28 June 2018', 29 June 2018, 5–6, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35936/28-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf>.

¹²⁴ Jakub Zelenka, 'Volný z SPD zablokoval debatu o dezinformacích. Návrh unie je začátek eurofašistické cenzury, tvrdí', *Aktuálně.cz*, 22 July 2018, <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/politika/volny-z-spd-zablokoval-debatu-o-dezinformacich-navrh-unie-je-r-52e04504762d11e8adc50cc47ab5f122/>.

¹²⁵ Kateřina Konečná and Jiří Mašťálka, 'Nejen Piráti řeší otázku svobody internetu', *KSČM.cz*, accessed 19 July 2020, <https://www.kscm.cz/cs/aktualne/aktuality/nejen-pirati-resi-otazku-svobody-internetu>.

from disinformation was a high priority for the EU. The Plan called for a more coordinated European response to disinformation and presented four pillars on which it should be based:

- 1) improving the capabilities of EU institutions to detect, analyse, and expose disinformation;
- 2) strengthening coordinated and joint responses to disinformation;
- 3) mobilising private sector to tackle disinformation;
- 4) raising awareness and improving societal resilience.

Given the tone and focus of the previous EU documents dealing with disinformation, it might come as a surprise that the Action Plan on Disinformation adopts a rather tough stance on Russia, calling it out as the main external actor disseminating disinformation in the EU. The Plan even cites the EU Hybrid Fusion cell, according to which ‘disinformation by the Russian Federation poses the greatest threat to the EU.’¹²⁶ However, the Plan acknowledges that many actors are involved in spreading disinformation nowadays, both state and non-state, and both within Member States and external.¹²⁷

The Action Plan was supported by the Czech Republic, with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Tomáš Petříček saying that the Czech government welcomes the Plan and even adding that the fight against disinformation is one of the government’s priorities.¹²⁸ The Plan was also promoted in the Czech media by the European Commissioner Věra Jourová.¹²⁹

Although plenty of the specific actions proposed by the Action Plan simply consist of reinforcing existing countermeasures (e.g. increasing the budget of the East StratCom TaskForce or improving the implementation of the Code of Practice), new measures were presented as well. Probably the most notable one is the Rapid Alert System, which came into

¹²⁶ European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Action Plan against Disinformation* (Brussels: European Commission, 2018), 4, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/eu-communication-disinformation-euco-05122018_en.pdf.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-4

¹²⁸ ‘Stenozáznam z 1. dne 3. schůze (1. den schůze - 12. 12. 2018)’, Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, accessed 29 July 2020, <https://www.senat.cz/xqw/xervlet/pssenat/hlasovani?action=steno&O=12&IS=6136&D=12.12.2018>.

Interestingly, if we look at the current government’s policy statement, there is no mention of countering disinformation or related activities: ‘Programové prohlášení vlády’, Government of the Czech Republic, 27 June 2018, <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/jednani-vlady/programove-prohlaseni/programove-prohlaseni-vlady-165960/>.

¹²⁹ E.g., Martin Veselovský, ‘Jourová: Boj s dezinformacemi není cenzura, lidé nesmí být oběťmi vymývání mozků’, *Aktuálně.cz*, 6 December 2018, <https://video.aktualne.cz/dvtv/jourova-plan-boje-eu-s-dezinformacemi-neni-cenzura-stret-zaj/r~cb5f5906f95311e8a09cac1f6b220ee8/>.

effect in March 2019., Briefly explained, the RAS is a dedicated digital platform through which Member States and EU institutions can share insights on disinformation and coordinate responses. The essential function of the RAS is to recognise ongoing large-scale disinformation campaigns or trends and to facilitate the tailoring of a coordinated response. Each Member State has a designated contact point, which coordinates its government participation.¹³⁰ In the Czech Republic, the contact point is at the Ministry of the Interior. Although the Rapid Alert System did not show much success last year, it has been used this year to share knowledge on disinformation surrounding the coronavirus pandemic.¹³¹

3.6 Recent developments

The current European Commission headed by Ursula von der Leyen, which assumed office last December, is working on a package called the Digital Services Act, which should create an EU-wide binding regulation on illegal and hateful content, digital political advertising, or terrorism-related content.¹³² Expected to be introduced in the autumn of this year, the Digital Services Act should also address the issue of disinformation, especially in connection with online platform regulation.¹³³

A considerable disinformation challenge for the EU has been the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, or more precisely the ‘infodemic’ surrounding it.¹³⁴ The EU has taken quite a proactive stance in tackling coronavirus-related disinformation, which resulted in the publication of a communication on *Tackling COVID-19 disinformation*, which was presented in June by the HR/VP Josep Borrell and Věra Jourová, who in the von der Leyen Commission holds the position of Vice President for Values and Transparency. The communication mainly

¹³⁰ ‘Factsheet: Rapid Alert System’, EEAS - European External Action Service, 15 March 2019, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/59644/factsheet-rapid-alert-system_en.

¹³¹ Samuel Stolton, ‘EU Rapid Alert System Used amid Coronavirus Disinformation Campaign’, *EURACTIV.com*, 4 March 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/digital/news/eu-alert-triggered-after-coronavirus-disinformation-campaign/>.

¹³² Lukáš Hendrych, ‘EU přitvrdí v boji proti dezinformacím. Covid-19 nám otevřel oči, říká Komise’, *EURACTIV.com*, 11 June 2020, <https://euractiv.cz/section/digitalni-agenda/news/eu-pritvrdi-v-boji-proti-dezinformacim-covid-19-nam-otevrel-oci-rika-komise/>.

¹³³ ‘Legislative Train Schedule - Digital Services Act’, European Parliament, accessed 26 July 2020, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-europe-fit-for-the-digital-age/file-digital-services-act>.

¹³⁴ The term ‘infodemic’ has been used in EU documents, borrowing the definition offered by the World Health Organisation: ‘infodemics are an excessive amount of information about a problem, which makes it difficult to identify a solution. They can spread misinformation, disinformation and rumours during a health emergency. Infodemics can hamper an effective public health response and create confusion and distrust among people’: ‘Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) - Situation Report 45’ (World Health Organization, 5 March 2020), https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200305-sitrep-45-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=ed2ba78b_4.

calls for improving and strengthening existing measures based on experience gained during the pandemic, since more significant and long-term changes will be presented as part of the Digital Services Act, as well as in the European Democracy Action Plan, which will be touched upon below. In accordance with previous EU countermeasures, the communication appeals on online platforms to do more in this regard. The communication contains quite an extensive list of disinformation and other manipulation connected to the pandemic, and although influence and disinformation campaigns by foreign actors are only mentioned last, the specifics are significant, since for the first time, the Commission publicly called out China for conducting such operations.¹³⁵ In a pre-announcement briefing, Jourová stated: ‘We have, for the first time, decided to name China in our report. I’m glad we did this because if we have evidence we must say it. It’s time to tell the truth.’¹³⁶ This came not long afterwards the EEAS China Scandal, which was described above, and which led to the resignation of the Czech representative in the EEAS East StratCom Task Force Monika Richter.

Jourová has overall taken the lead position amongst EU executives in fighting disinformation. Besides being very vocal on this matter, her objectives are expected to materialise in the already mentioned European Democracy Action Plan, which should improve the resilience of European democracies, and aim at countering disinformation and at adapting to evolving threats and manipulation. The Plan should be adopted in the fourth quarter of 2020, coinciding with the Digital Service Act.¹³⁷

The most recent action undertaken by the EU in its fight against disinformation was the decision of the European Parliament to set up a ‘special committee on foreign interference in all democratic process in the European Union, including disinformation’, which took place

¹³⁵ European Commission, *Tackling COVID-19 Disinformation - Getting the Facts Right* (Brussels: European Commission, 2020), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0008>.

¹³⁶ Samuel Stolton, ‘‘Time to Tell the Truth’ on Chinese Disinformation, Jourova Says’, *EURACTIV.com*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/digital/news/time-to-tell-the-truth-on-chinese-disinformation-jourova-says/>.

¹³⁷ ‘Legislative Train Schedule - European Democracy Action Plan’, European Parliament, accessed 25 July 2020, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train>.

in June.¹³⁸ The only Czech MEPs that voted against the decision were the representatives of SPD and KSČM, i.e. parties that are known for spreading disinformation.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ ‘European Parliament Decision of 18 June 2020 on Setting up a Special Committee on Foreign Interference in All Democratic Processes in the European Union, Including Disinformation, and Defining Its Responsibilities, Numerical Strength and Term of Office’, European Parliament, 18 June 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0161_EN.html.

¹³⁹ ‘Minutes of Proceedings - Result of Roll-Call Votes - Annex - 18/06/2020’ (European Parliament, 18 June 2020), 522–23, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/PV-9-2020-06-18-RCV_FR.pdf.

Conclusion

After going through the process of developing countermeasures against disinformation at the EU and Czech level, let us move on to answering the component questions defined in the first chapter and afterwards the research question of this thesis itself.

1) What directions of Europeanisation (downloading, uploading, cross-loading) are to be found in the examined case?

One of the aims of this thesis has been to go beyond merely applying the concept of Europeanisation to this empirical case and assess the issues that might arise when doing so. The identification of directions of Europeanisation in our case differs according to which specific theoretical background we choose and where and when exactly we start to ‘look for’ Europeanisation. To illustrate, had we chosen the rationalist institutionalism approach, we would find almost no instances of downloading in our case, since the countermeasures developed at the level of Czech state were virtually not influenced by the developments at the EU level. However, since we chose the sociological institutionalism approach, we reach a different conclusion.

As shown in previous chapters, the actors pushing for the development of countermeasures against disinformation at the Czech level are to a large extent Europeanised, meaning that they view the Czech Republic as an integral part of the European Union, which they value and are willing to defend. They see disinformation as a direct threat to democracy, to the Czech Republic’s involvement in the EU, and to the EU itself. This belief is one of the foundations of their actions aimed at countering disinformation. One of Radaelli’s conditions for Europeanisation to take place is that ‘the EU becomes a cognitive and normative frame, and provides an orientation to the logics of meaning and action’, which is exactly what we can see here.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, by looking at the case from this angle, it is possible to argue that downloading did take place here, in a sense that the EU had formed the beliefs of the Czech actors, which incentivized them to take action against disinformation.

Nevertheless, there is more ‘hard’ evidence for the uploading direction. On several occasions, the Czech state pressed the EU to be more active in countering disinformation. Czech citizens in EU institutions have also played a crucial role in developing the EU’s response, especially Jakub Kalenský in the EEAS East StratCom Team and Věra Jourová in the European

¹⁴⁰ Radaelli, ‘Europeanisation: Solution or Problem?’, 11.

Commission. However, this point is slightly problematic, since it is a matter of further debate whether Member State's citizens holding posts at the EU level should be regarded as part of the domestic level. Still, there is a sufficient rationale to claim that these individuals represent the Czech interests on this issue, as both of them were supported by Czech authorities. The actor that was the most vocal on this issue in the Czech Republic, European Values Think-Tank, tried to influence the EU level as well, which further backs the argument made in the previous paragraph.

Cross-loading took place in the examined case as well, mainly in the form of sharing of best practice.

2) Is there any existing or potential misfit?

At this point, there is no visible existing policy or institutional misfit between countermeasures against disinformation at the Czech and EU level. However, it must be pointed out that they have not yet lead to any binding regulation, which might change with the arrival of the Digital Services Act and the European Democracy Action Plan this autumn. Although the Czech Republic has been overall very active in countering disinformation, especially within the broader context of hybrid threats, it does not show much initiative to engage in regulating online platforms. The EU, on the contrary, is nowadays devoting a lot of attention to online platforms. By not engaging in this area, the Czech Republic practically eliminates potential misfit, although it is hard to tell to what extent is this the result of some strategic thinking and to what extent is it due to lack of initiative and/or different framing of disinformation.

To summarise, there is no misfit in the examined case at this point. This goes against the opinion of many researchers on Europeanisation that the presence of a misfit is a necessary condition for Europeanisation to occur. As we could see, many instances which otherwise could be labelled as Europeanisation did in fact occur. This empirical case therefore supports the arguments of those who call for abolishing the goodness of fit hypothesis, such as Mastenbroek and Kaeding, who argue 'that it would be theoretically sounder to directly focus on domestic preferences and beliefs'.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹Mastenbroek and Kaeding, 'Europeanisation Beyond the Goodness of Fit: Domestic Politics in the Forefront', 331.

3) Are there any mediating factors (norm entrepreneurs, cooperative informal institutions/political culture) present at the domestic level?

Especially at the beginning of the Czech response to disinformation, the existence of norm entrepreneurs is evident. The assemblage of actors with the leading role of the European Values Think-Tank promoted the idea that the fight against disinformation is a necessary response to an imminent threat, framed the issue of disinformation as part of the Russian hybrid warfare, and even proposed specific policies, all of which was reflected in the official Czech reaction to disinformation. The distinction between two types of norm entrepreneurs offered by Börzel, i.e. *epistemic communities* and *advocacy or principled issue networks*, is not very useful in our case, since the norm entrepreneurs in question fall within both of these categories.

The assessment of the presence of cooperative informal institutions and political culture is a little tricky, as Börzel defines them primarily in relation to pressure from the EU. That said, the research has not identified any major informal institutions mediating contact between the EU and Czech level on this issue, although some activities of the European Values Think-Tank, such as the StratCom summit, could be considered as such. The research also showed that parts of the Czech political scene are clearly opposed to the development of countermeasures against disinformation both at home and at the EU level, although the majority of political actors supports it.

4) How has the issue of disinformation been framed at both levels?

In the Czech Republic, the issue of disinformation has been framed mainly as part of the Russian hybrid warfare and as a matter of security. Although this had been done at the EU level as well, with the contribution of the Czech Republic, the European debate on and countermeasures against disinformation then started to tackle it in a broader context, significantly focusing on the role of online platforms, which the Czech Republic has not done.

How has the simultaneous forming of countermeasures against disinformation and hybrid threats at the EU and Czech level affected each other?

In conclusion, the Czech Republic has been active in influencing the development of countermeasures against disinformation at the EU level, while the domestic process has not been noticeably impacted by the actions of the EU. Nevertheless, the thesis has shown that the European Union plays an important role in the beliefs of the domestic actors involved in the development of the countermeasures, who see disinformation as a threat to the Czech participation in the EU and to the EU itself, motivating them to take action.

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TEZE BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

Jméno:

Jakub Fišer

E-mail:

jakubfiser95@gmail.com

Studijní obor:

Mezinárodní teritoriální studia

Semestr a školní rok zahájení práce:

ZS 2019/20

Semestr a školní rok ukončení práce:

LS 2019/20

Vedoucí bakalářského semináře:

PhDr. Ondřej Matějka, PhD.

Vedoucí práce:

doc. Mgr. Tomáš Weiss, M.A., Ph.D.

Název práce:

EU and Czech Countermeasures Against Disinformation

Charakteristika tématu práce (max. 10 řádek):

Práce se zabývá procesem vzniku opatření proti dezinformacím na úrovni Evropské unie a České republiky, přičemž za využití konceptu europeizace zkoumá vzájemné působení těchto dvou úrovní. Dezinformace a boj proti nim je velice aktuální a pro budoucnost naší demokracie důležité téma, které se teprve pomalu začíná dostávat do hledáčku akademického zájmu. Debata okolo konceptu europeizace se naopak odehrává již přes dvě dekády, stále je však živá. Zvolený případ je pro výzkum europeizace spíše netypický - většina výzkumu se soustředí na analýzu přizpůsobování se členských států již existujícím normám na evropské úrovni, zatímco zde dochází k vytváření zcela nové politiky na obou úrovních téměř simultánně. Tím se práce snaží dosavadní výzkum nejen doplnit, ale i problematizovat.

Zdůvodnění úprav a změn tématu od zadání projektu do odevzdání práce (max. 10 řádek):

Původně měla práce zkoumat vztah mezi evropskou a národní úrovní v problematice boje proti dezinformacím a dalším hybridním hrozbám, přičemž jejím hlavním cílem mělo být zjistit, jaké jsou v tomto vztahu problémy. Zkoumání tohoto vztahu sice zůstalo ústředním tématem práce, změnilo se však jeho konkrétní uchopení. Hlavním důvodem zde bylo rozhodnutí využít pro teoretické ukotvení práce koncept europeizace, které mělo za následek snahu upravit práci tak, aby lépe zapadala do debaty, jež se o tomto konceptu vede. Vztah mezi evropskou a národní úrovní je tak zkoumán šířeji právě na základě mechanismů europeizace. Ze stejného důvodu práce získala podobu komparativní případové studie, ve které je národní úroveň reprezentována Českou republikou. Již v předchozím semestru také došlo ke zúžení zkoumané problematiky pouze na dezinformace.

Struktura práce (hlavní kapitoly obsahu):

- Úvod
- 1. Teoretický a metodologický rámeček
- 2. Česká protioopatření proti dezinformacím
- 3. Evropská protioopatření proti dezinformacím
- Závěr

Prameny a literatura (výběrová bibliografie, max. 30 hlavních titulů):

Bandov, Goran, and Nikolina Herceg Kolman. 'Research on Europeanization in Literature: From the Top-down Approach to Europeanization as a Multi-Directional Process'. *Cadmus* 3, no. 5 (2018): 134–44. <http://cadmusjournal.org/node/699>.

Börzel, Tanja A. How the European Union Interacts with Its Member States. Vienna: Institute for Advanced Studies, 2003. https://www.ihs.ac.at/publications/pol/pw_93.pdf.

Eberle, Jakub, and Jan Daniel. 'Hybrid Warriors: Transforming Czech Security through the "Russian Hybrid Warfare" Assemblage.' Czech Sociological Review 54, no. 6 (2018): 907–31. <https://doi.org/10.13060/00380288.2018.54.6.435>

European Commission. 'EU Code of Practice on Disinformation'. European Commission, 2018. https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/document.cfm?doc_id=54454.

European Commission, and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Action Plan against Disinformation. Brussels: European Commission, 2018. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/eu-communication-disinformation-euco-05122018_en.pdf.

Featherstone, Kevin, and Claudio M. Radaelli, eds. The Politics of Europeanization. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

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Mastenbroek, Ellen, and Michael Kaeding. 'Europeanization Beyond the Goodness of Fit: Domestic Politics in the Forefront'. Comparative European Politics 4, no. 4 (2006): 331–54. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cep.6110078>.

Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic. National Security Audit. Prague: Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2016. <http://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/soubor/national-security-audit.aspx>.

Radaelli, Claudio M. 'Europeanisation: Solution or Problem?' European Integration Online Papers (EIoP) 8, no. 16 (2004). <http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2004-016a.htm>.

Rychnovská, Dagmar, and Martin Kohút. 'The Battle for Truth: Mapping the Network of Information War Experts in the Czech Republic.' New Perspectives: Interdisciplinary Journal of Central & East European Politics & International Relations 26, no. 3 (2018): 57–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2336825x1802600304>

Podpis studenta a datum

Schváleno	Datum	Podpis
Vedoucí práce		
Vedoucí bakalářského semináře		
Garant oboru		