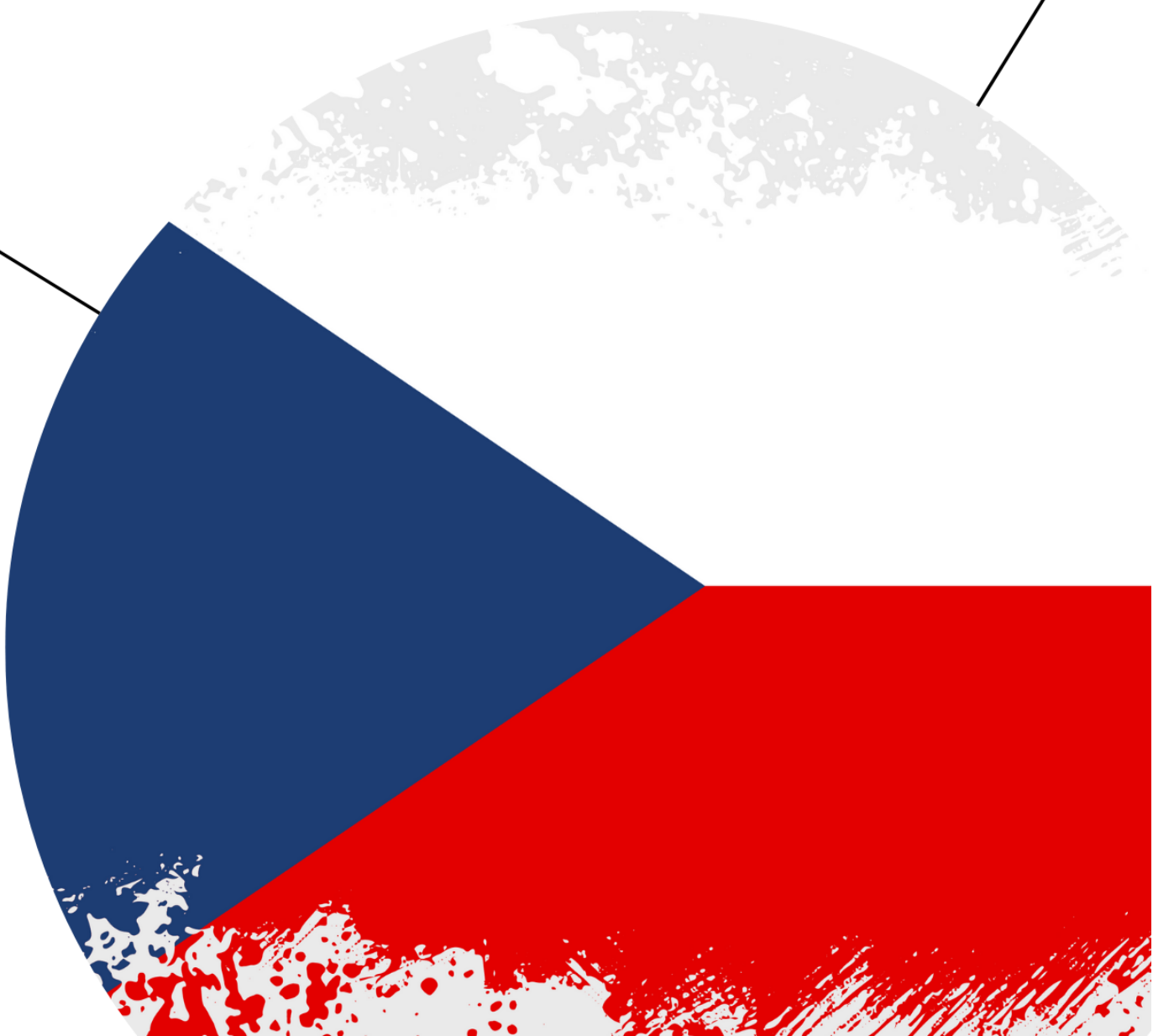


EU DISINFO LAB

# Disinformation landscape in CZECH REPUBLIC

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# INTRODUCTION

- Due to the closed nature of the Czech language area, Czechia has a somewhat insular media ecosystem and disinformation landscape. CEDMO research [suggests](#) that the perception of impacts of misinformation and disinformation is high and over a third of the population [thinks](#) the country is in the midst of an information war.
- Widespread false narratives typically relate to the impact of regional issues on the Czech Republic, such as Czech support for Ukraine, the effects of EU environmental policies on the Czech economy and the local flow of migrants and refugees.
- Thirty-four years after the transition to democracy and two decades after joining the EU, Czechia is also still dealing with the legacy of communist rule and membership in the Eastern Bloc. On the one hand, false accusations of working for the previous regime's state police are sometimes used against political opponents. On the other hand, nostalgia-fueled revisionist narratives promote non-factual claims regarding life before 1989 and even denialism regarding the 1968 Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia.

# EMBLEMATIC CASES

## CZECH PRESIDENT, THEN-CANDIDATE, ALLEGEDLY PLANNING TO SEND TROOPS TO UKRAINE

Just days before the presidential elections of January 2023, a deceptively [edited](#) video suggesting that one of the candidates (and current president) Petr Pavel had openly called for starting a war with Russia, [appeared](#) on a Czech Telegram channel of the Russian propaganda outlet Sputnik. Previously, Pavel was also targeted by a series of [made-up](#) claims regarding Czech support for Ukraine that were falsely attributed to him.

## EXPLODING ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Multiple videos of car fires and explosions spread widely in Czechia and neighbouring countries. The viral posts claimed to be showing electric vehicles (EVs) burning, pointing out their dangers and hence, the negative impacts of the plan to transition to EVs. However, most of the videos [showed](#) a fire or explosion of a car with a combustion engine.

Fact-checkers analysed, among others, [fires](#) involving [cars](#) carrying gas cylinders, the explosion of a [CNG](#) car, and the [fire](#) at an Australian scrapyard. During the colder months, claims about EVs getting stuck en masse in cold weather have also [appeared](#).

## ROLE OF UKRAINIANS IN THE 1968 SOVIET-LED INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Each August since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, false claims spread on social media ahead of the anniversary of the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. The claims state that the invasion was caused by Ukrainians within the leadership of the USSR at the time. Multiple viral false or misleading social media posts have alleged Ukrainian roots of many Soviet politburo [members](#), of invading [soldiers](#), or the non-Russian roots of USSR general [secretaries](#). This narrative of a “Ukrainian” 1968 invasion has been regularly [used](#) since the 2014 annexation of Crimea.

# NARRATIVES

## WAR IN UKRAINE AND ITS IMPACTS

The war in Ukraine has generated a wave of false and misleading narratives that are impacting Czech society and politics. These narratives often exploit public fears and uncertainties about the conflict to sow division and manipulate public opinion. A significant portion of this misinformation targets the relationship between the Czech Republic and Ukraine, particularly focusing on the status and treatment of Ukrainian refugees and the alleged involvement of Czech political figures in the conflict.

One common misleading narrative claims that Ukrainian refugees receive preferential treatment in the Czech Republic, such as [receiving](#) double the state support compared to local citizens or having the right to [retire](#) earlier. These claims, despite lacking any factual basis, foster resentment towards refugees by suggesting that they are unfairly favored over the Czech population. Such narratives can stir up anti-refugee sentiment and exacerbate social tensions by presenting Ukrainians as an economic and social burden.

Other narratives involve fabrications and manipulations concerning Czech political leaders and public personalities, falsely suggesting their involvement in or stance on the Ukrainian conflict. For example, some claims [allege](#) that Czech leaders have sent soldiers to fight in Ukraine or have made controversial [statements](#) regarding the war. Others involve deepfake videos and [fabricated](#) quotes from celebrities to falsely represent their views. There are also speculative [narratives](#) about secret agreements and military collaborations between the Czech Republic and Ukraine, raising fears about the country's role in the conflict.

## ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

There is a long-standing narrative of skepticism and distrust towards environmental policies, particularly EU regulations and the European Green Deal. This distrust is often fueled by misinformation and misconceptions regarding the nature and impact of these policies, used to argue that such policies are impractical and disproportionately burden ordinary citizens without delivering significant environmental benefits.

Some narratives cast doubt on the benefits and sustainability of green technologies, such as electric vehicles (EVs). Misleading comparisons are often made between the environmental impact of EVs and traditional combustion engine vehicles, with some claims suggesting that EVs may contribute more to pollution due to factors like battery production or energy sources. These narratives create confusion about the push towards renewable energy and green technology adoption. Together, these narratives foster a general sense of distrust towards environmental policies in Czechia, framing them as ineffective, economically damaging, or based on questionable science.

Another prominent narrative revolves around the very necessity of actions to combat climate change. Both ordinary social media users and some public figures spread false claims questioning the scientific consensus on human-driven global warming and the impact of carbon emissions. Some claims downplay the role of CO<sub>2</sub> in climate change or suggest that minor increases in its atmospheric concentration have negligible effects on global temperatures. Additionally, misleading assertions are presenting isolated data or anecdotal evidence, such as videos denying the rise in sea levels, as proof that climate change is exaggerated or not happening at all.

## LEGACY OF COMMUNISM

The communist regime remains a divisive issue in Czech society and politics, and public figures are often falsely accused of cooperation with the former secret police, the StB. These allegations often target politicians and candidates, and even their family members, accusing them of having been informants or collaborators during the communist era. While the archival records of the StB are generally considered reliable, debates often arise over their interpretation and the true nature of any past collaboration.

A former prime minister and current opposition leader, Andrej Babiš, is a prominent figure involved in these controversies. He has been embroiled in a long-standing legal battle over his listing as an StB informant. The legal [case](#) against him is ongoing, and no definitive ruling currently exists that denies his [cooperation](#) with the StB.

The current president of the Czech Republic, Petr Pavel, was also repeatedly as [accused](#) of being an StB informant, although he was officially cleared of any collaboration with StB as far back as 1992. These false claims spread widely during Pavel's 2023 presidential campaign, portraying Pavel's service history in military intelligence as evidence.

Other cases, such as those involving the [father](#) of the MEP and former presidential candidate, Danuše Nerudová, and other public figures like Michael [Kocáb](#), Dominik [Hašek](#), Zdeněk [Svěrák](#), and even Václav [Havel](#), highlight how [false](#) accusations of collaboration can extend beyond individuals to their families or be based on misinterpretations of archival records.

# COMMUNITY

## FACT-CHECKERS AND DEBUNKERS

- [Demagog.cz](#), an IFCN- and EFCSN-certified fact-checking NGO.
- [Ověřovna ČRo](#), the fact-checking unit of the Czech public radio broadcaster.
- [AFP](#)'s Czech fact-checking staff.
- [CEDMO](#) (Central European Digital Media Observatory), is a regional research and fact-checking hub.
- [Manipulátoři.cz](#) and [Faktické.info](#), partner websites focused on debunking and fact-checking.
- [Čeští elfové](#) (Czech Elves), a volunteer group combating disinformation and foreign influence operations.
- [Seznam.cz fact-checking](#), a fact-checking service by a Czech search engine.
- [Center Against Hybrid Threats](#), a government-run online debunking and strategic communication service.
- [Deník.cz](#), a major print and online medium that regularly publishes debunks of current misinformation narratives.

## NOTABLE JOURNALISTS

- [Ivana Svobodová](#), a journalist who covers stories of individuals influenced by misinformation, incl. the first person in the Czech Republic to be convicted of a terrorist attack.
- [Václav Moravec](#), TV presenter, journalist and lead coordinator of CEDMO.
- [Ondřej Kundra](#), a journalist and author, covers foreign influence operations in Czechia.
- [Lukáš Valášek](#), a journalist mapping foreign influence operations, incl. “merchants of fear”, i.e. individuals profiting from spreading Russian propaganda.
- [Jana Magdoňová](#), a journalist who founded the project [Ověřovna ČRo](#) within Czech public radio.
- [Jaroslav Krupka](#), a journalist and the founder of the column Deník proti Fakenews in [Deník.cz](#).
- [Lukáš Prchal](#), a journalist from Deník N, focused on the disinformation ecosystem in the Czech Republic.

# POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

There is [no law](#) specifically covering disinformation in Czechia. Purveyors of false claims can in some cases be charged under criminal statutes covering libel, spreading false alarm, making false accusations, and others. However, the application of such statutes is spotty and inconsistent.

As of September 2024, the Czech parliament has not passed a law [implementing](#) the Digital Services Act.

In May 2024, the government [named](#) a Coordinator for Strategic Communication, whose duties include combating foreign influence operations and disinformation.

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