

 Report

MONITORING OF THE EU'S GREEN POLICIES: PERCEPTIONS AND NARRATIVES IN THE CZECH AND SLOVAK INFORMATION SPACE

January 2023

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1. Context

[The European Green Deal](#) (EGD) is the core of the current climate strategy of the European Union, which has set the goal of making Europe a carbon-neutral continent by 2050. To reach this ambition, changes across all sectors of the economy and society are needed. The transformation cannot be accomplished without strong political will and informed, public support. However, the EGD has become a popular target of disinformation and has been incorporated into various Eurosceptic disinformation narratives, undermining the possibility of a balanced discussion on the topic and of mobilizing the vital backing of the population. Moreover, the unprovoked Russian aggression against Ukraine and the ongoing energy crisis have brought new dimensions into the EGD discussion, while simultaneously strengthening the need for improving the energy sovereignty of the EU.

In an effort to monitor and counter disinformation narratives about the EGD, [IRI's Beacon project](#) launched an initiative called the **“European Green Deal: Mapping perceptions in Central and Eastern Europe,”** in which six partner organizations studied how the EGD is perceived in Bulgaria, Czechia, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. As one of the partner organizations, the **EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy** analyzed narratives spread about the Green Deal and the EU's green policies through Czech chain emails as well as through selected mainstream media and websites known for spreading disinformation. The main aim of this research project was to gain insights into how the EGD is communicated in the online space and what narratives are most commonly spread through the selected channels, in an effort to improve communication strategies regarding the EU's green issues. In addition, the research also examined what role the phenomenon of chain emails plays in the spread of disinformation about the EU and its climate policies in the Czech Republic and Slovakia and whether the narratives appearing in these emails differ from those on disinformation websites or in the mainstream media.

2. Methodology

The chain emails analyzed in this research originated in the period between November 2021 and October 2022 and were filtered with a predefined search on the [Czech elves website](#) by using the tag "green politics." Czech elves is a citizen's movement of volunteers from various backgrounds that collect and confront disinformation spread by both foreign and domestic actors. During the monitoring period, a filtered search showed 375 unique emails with the selected criteria. The emails were examined individually and the main narratives were identified.



Source: [Czech elves](#)

Several Czech and Slovak websites representing the category of “disinformation platforms” were selected from lists that communities of experts have previously compiled, namely [konspiratori.sk](#) and [nelez.cz](#). Other criteria for choosing these sites were: a relatively high number of visits in 2021 according to [similarweb.com](#) and the availability of data about them on the [Pulsar monitoring platform](#). We also noted the websites that other partners of the project were monitoring to avoid duplication of the results.

Monitored media known for spreading disinformation

Czech	Slovak
Infokuryr.cz	Zemavek.sk
Skrytapravda.cz	Hlavnespravy.sk
Pokec24.cz	Veci-verejne.sk
Cz24.news	Slobodnyvysielac.sk
Prvnizpravy.cz	Eurorespekt.sk

For the media representing “mainstream,” we selected five online platforms with the highest weekly usage in each country (according to the [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022](#)). Pulsar helped to collect the analyzed media articles for the period between January and October 2022 using a search query containing

keywords related to energy politics (see the annex for the English translation of the keyword query). In total, 1,091 articles were examined, out of which 558 articles mentioned the European Green Deal.

Monitored mainstream media

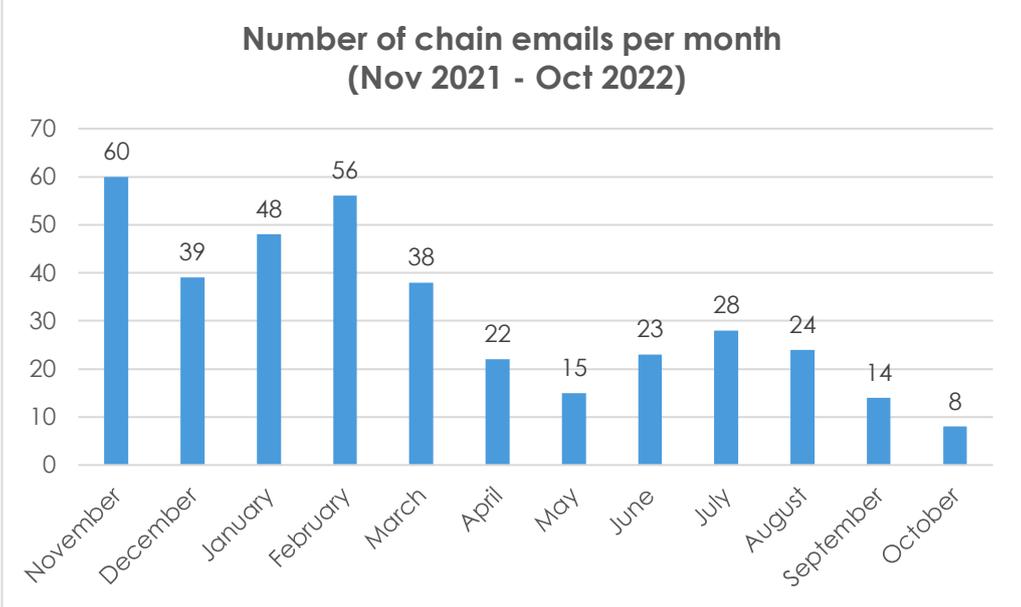
Czech	Slovak
Seznamspravy.cz	Aktuality.sk
Idnes.cz	Topky.sk
Novinky.cz	Tvnoviny.sk
Aktualne.cz	Sme.sk
Ct24.ceskatelevize.cz	Pravda.sk

The perception of the EGD was analyzed in all articles by manually attributing different tags on Pulsar. We used the tag “EGD support” for articles that were supportive of the EGD’s implementation or/and highlighted the potential or existing positive impact of the EGD. Articles that only mentioned the EGD as an example of an EU policy, without any sentiment, were tagged “EGD neutral.” We also applied the “EGD neutral” tag to articles that were interviews where interviewees only mentioned the EGD, without regard to their view on the topic. Articles that opposed the EGD’s implementation and/or perceived it negatively were tagged “EGD oppose.” In order to compare the narratives from the chain emails and the articles, we also developed tags for the five main narratives identified in the emails (as described in the next section).

3. Chain email monitoring

The emails containing **green narratives represented only 5% of all chain emails** collected in the database during the monitoring period. The Czech elves in this period collected 7,642 emails and attributed the **“green politics” tag to 375**

of them. The highest number of emails in a given month was 60, in November 2021, while the lowest number was eight, in October 2022.¹



Emails tagged “green politics” varied considerably in their type. Some contained only [satirical pictures](#); others copied word-for-word some text from an article as their main content; and still others only contained a [link](#) to a YouTube video with a subject line intended to intrigue the reader. While various different narratives are spread through the chain mails, **five repeating and overarching narratives can be identified:**

<i>Narrative</i>	<i>Used tag/s</i>	<i>Short description of the narrative</i>
<i>Climate change denial</i>	<i>climate_negative</i> <i>climate_positive</i>	Content that included narratives denying man-made climate change, explaining global warming as something natural or caused by volcanic heat. If an email or article supported the existence of climate change, we used the tag <i>climate_positive</i> .
<i>Germany (or less often the U.S.) is responsible for the energy crisis</i>	<i>Germany_negative</i> <i>Germany_positive,</i>	Germany was the country most often blamed for the severity of the energy crisis and lack of energy in the EU in general. The positive tag was used if Germany was

¹ Emails can be located and added to the database later than the date they were spread; thus, higher results for these months might now exist (after the formal end of the monitoring period)



		defended in the email/article as not being responsible.
European Green Deal / green energy is responsible for high energy prices	<i>high_prices, economy_positive, economy_negative</i>	This narrative ties the increase in energy prices to the implementation of the EDG agenda or green policies of the EU in general. If the source mentioned a potentially positive impact on the economy, we used the tag <i>economy_positive</i> .
Green energy destroys Czech self-sufficiency	<i>sufficiency_negative sufficiency_positive</i>	The <i>sufficiency_negative</i> tag was used for content that celebrated the “good old days” before the EGD, when Czechia was allegedly able to produce its own energy for its citizens and grow its own food – something that is perceived to no longer be the case. The <i>sufficiency_positive</i> tag was used for articles that highlighted the positive impact of the EGD on self-sufficiency.
The EU is controlling its citizens through energy policies	<i>control_negative control_positive</i>	The European Green Deal was portrayed in this narrative as a form of dictatorship that will dictate how people are supposed to live and drive, and what they can eat and drink, or that it already does so. <i>Control_positive</i> was used for articles that rebutted these arguments.

*More details on the narratives identified in the chain emails can be found in this [blog post](#).

An example of an email abstract that blames the EGD for worsening the agricultural situation and food production

Subject: Kam jsme to dopravovali? Zemědělství ... je v háji ... ožebračené Česko ... Date: 2022-01-15 11:17

Abstract:
Prezentace (21 stran) "České zemědělství a potravinářská výroba před Zeleným údělem a po jeho implementaci". Dřív bylo všechno lepší, více jsme vypěstovali, půda je zdevastovaná hnojivy, 31 let se devastovalo živočišná výroba. Místo vlastní produkce dovážíme i brambory. EU jde o likvidaci našeho trhu s potravinami a ovládnutí jej vlastními výrobky. Opatření v rámci Zeleného údělu jsou nesmyslná a budeme na tom po nich ve všem ještě hůř.

Source: Pozitivní svět Link: <https://www.pozitivnisvet.cz/ceskeho-zemedelstvi-a-potravinarska-vyroba-pred-zelenym-udelem-a-po-jeho-implementaci/>

Tags: dřív bylo líp politika česká EU zelená politika

Mentioned characters: Zdeněk Jandajsek Evropská unie

Body:
Shortened version of the chain email from the Czech elves database.

Attachments



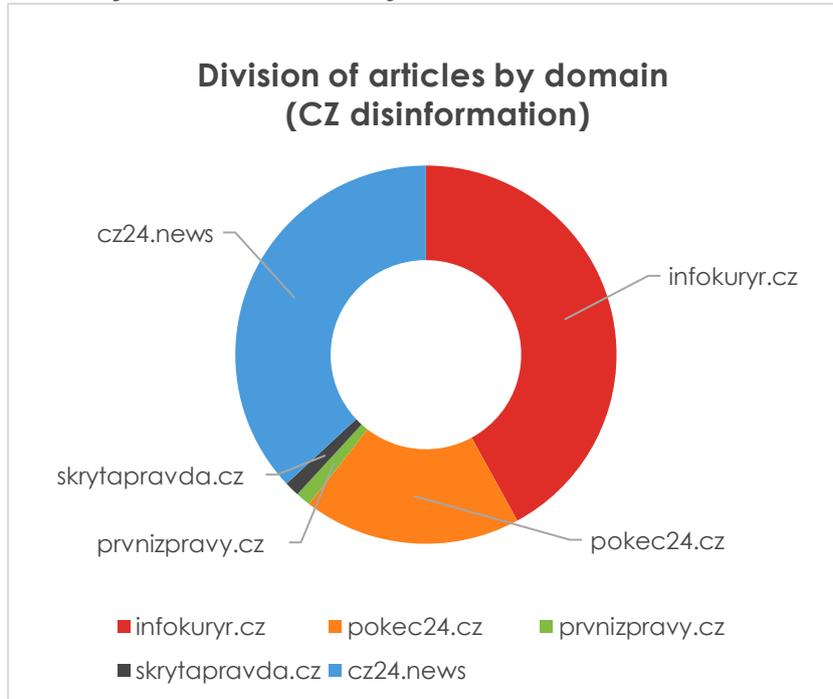
2021_12_01_české_zemědlst...

Source: Czechelves database of chain emails. This email includes a presentation as an attachment titled (in translation): “Czech agriculture and food production before the Green Deal and after its implementation.”

4. Online media known for sharing disinformation articles

4.1 Czech websites known for spreading disinformation

During the monitoring period, **158 articles from Czech disinformation sites mentioned the European Green Deal**. The most mentions, 66, were found on infokuryr.cz, followed by 59 on cz24.news, and 29 on pokec24.cz. Both skrytapravda.cz and prvnizpravy.cz mentioned the Green Deal in two articles. The content of cz24.news had the highest visibility, followed by infokuryr.cz. The articles from prvnizpravy.cz had the lowest visibility. (Pulsar's algorithm assigns [a visibility score](#) to each post, designed



to measure the impact of a piece of content on the social web.)

Regarding the identified narratives in the articles, **the majority of the articles on the Czech disinformation sites, 122, opposed the implementation of the EGD**; 36 were neutral; and no articles were supportive. All narratives from the chain emails were also represented in the articles on the Czech disinformation sites. The narrative that portrays the EGD as a tool for controlling member states and their citizens was identified in 40 articles. The second most common narrative – which correlates the energy crisis and high prices of energy with the implementation of the EGD – was present in 32 articles. The narrative related to Germany's supposed responsibility for the energy crisis appeared in 21 articles. The self-sufficiency narrative was visible in 11 articles. The narrative that denies climate change science was the least common, found in six articles.

An example of an article that undermines climate change science

Home / 2022 / Říjen / 15 / Jindřich Kulhavý: Není to dobré, burcování padá na neúrodnou půdu

Z Domova

Jindřich Kulhavý: Není to dobré, burcování padá na neúrodnou půdu

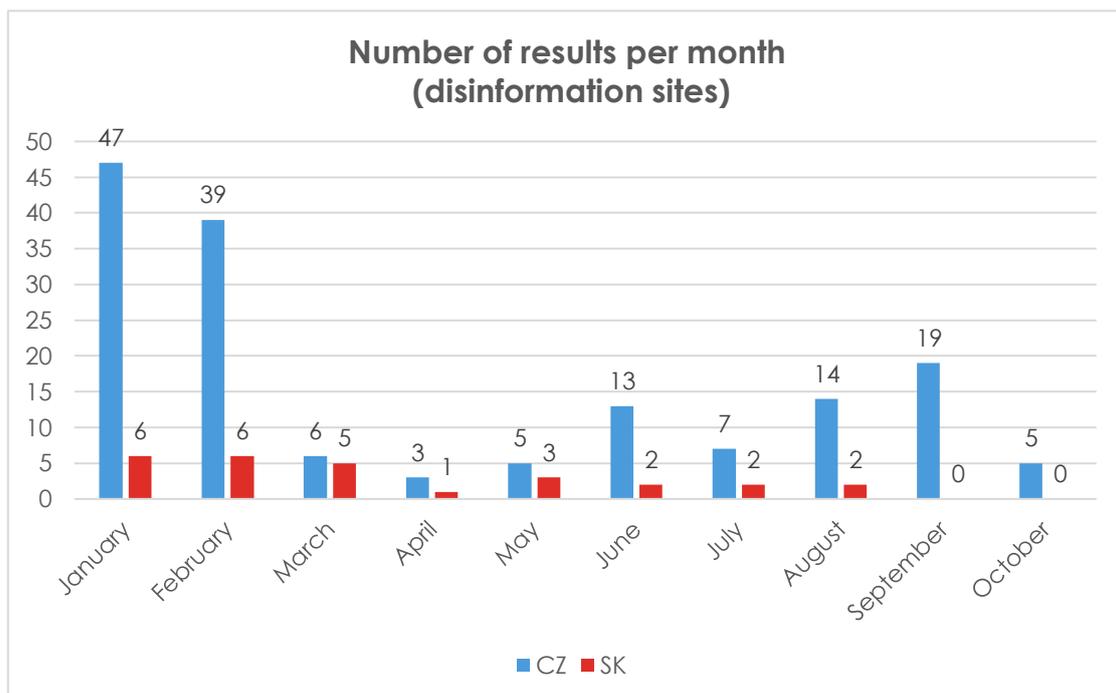
15. 10. 2022 

Přes jistý poklid se dějí zásadní změny. O škodlivosti za každou cenu prosazovaného Green Dealu není pochyb. byť mladá generace v tom vidí jistou budoucnost. Postupná likvidace všeho, co se dosud lidstvu podařilo, ve jménu záchrany planety je zaštitěno vymyšlenými změnami klimatu. A tak vnímáme dopady nejen na dopravu a snahu změnit složení již tak velmi omezovaného vozového parku, k čemuž slouží nejen elektrifikace, ale také plno dalších omezujících zákonů a pravidel beroucích nám radost i z takových maličkostí, jakými jsou pocity za volantem, zvuk osmiválce či rychlost převyšující tu, kterou vyvine obyčejný šnek. To je jen jedna část, postupně končí několik odvětví průmyslu, zemědělství se stává výsadou nadnárodních a chemii zneužívajících společností, je tu snaha zlikvidovat hotové peníze, implantovat do lidí čipy a dostat je tak pod naprostou kontrolu. Na vše bude dohlížet soustava kamer a člověk při jakémkoliv pohybu bude mít jedno kontrolní stanoviště za druhým. Nakonec mu kdosi přidělí počet morálních kreditů a ve finále se budete snažit žít tak, abyste neudělali chybu, kterou byste dali příležitost někomu dalšímu Vás za nemorálnost chování potrestat. Už se nezabýváte tím, kdo stanovuje hranice toho, co je v pořádku a co ne.

Source: infokuryr.cz. Translation of the underlined sentences: "The harmfulness of the Green Deal, which is supported at any price, is undeniable, although the young generation sees it as the future. Made-up climate change assures the gradual elimination of all the successes of humanity, in the name of saving the planet."

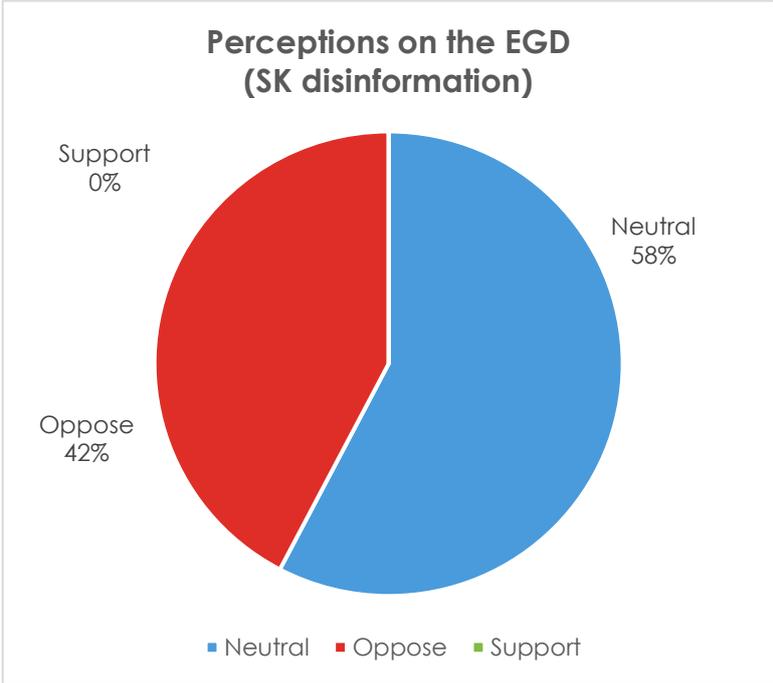
4.2 Slovak websites known for spreading disinformation

The monitored **Slovak disinformation sites published only 27 articles mentioning the EGD** during the monitoring period, which is a substantially lower number than those from the Czech Republic. **The highest number of mentions,**



13, was identified on the website zemavek.sk, followed by seven on hlavnespravy.sk, six on veci-verejne.sk, and one on slobodyvysielac.sk. The fifth monitored site, eurorespekt.sk, did not post about the EGD during the monitoring period. An article published on hlavnespravy.sk reached the highest visibility, while an article on zemavek.sk had the lowest.

The majority of these articles, 15, had a neutral stance toward the EGD; 12 articles opposed it; and no articles supported its implementation or highlighted its positives. The majority of the articles either listed the EGD as an example of the EU's policies or featured an interview with someone who mentioned the EGD. The most common narrative identified in four articles connected the EGD with high energy prices. One article was tagged with a climate-positive tag as it upheld climate science, despite being neutral toward the EGD. Other narratives were not identified on the Slovak websites known for spreading disinformation.



An example of a Slovak article from disinformation platform

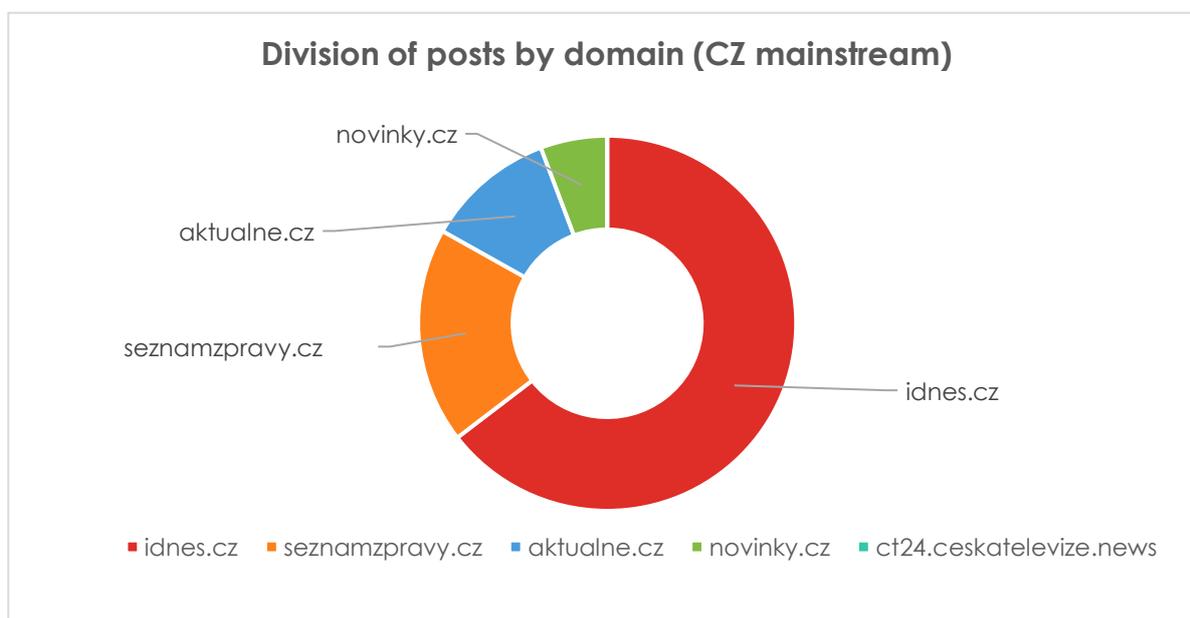


Source: zemavek.sk platform, title translation: "Brussels prescribed transition from fossil fuels to green ones".

5. Online mainstream media

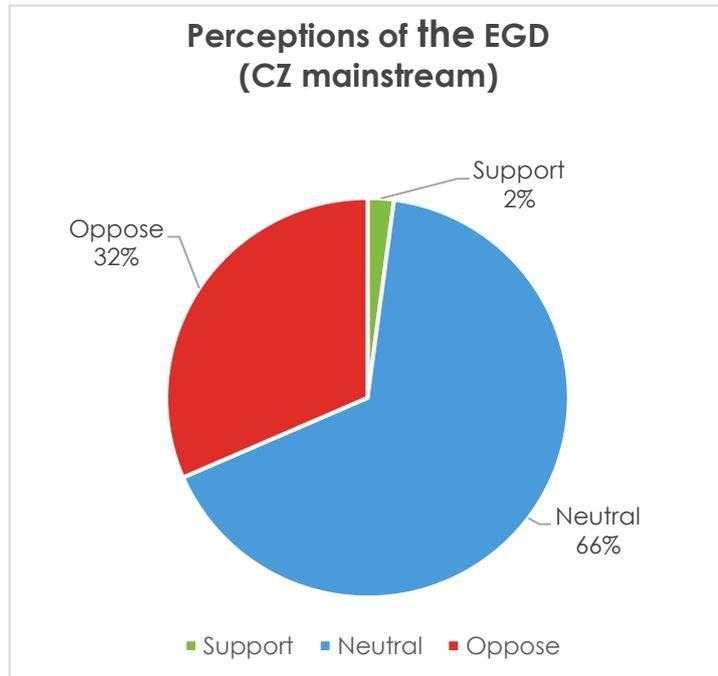
5.1 Czech mainstream media

Czech mainstream media sites mentioned the EGD 333 times during the monitoring period. The most mentions, 215, were on the idnes.cz website,



followed by seznamzpravy.cz with 62 mentions. Aktualne.cz had 37 articles related to the EGD, while novinky.cz featured 19; **ct24.ceskatelevize.cz had no results.**

The majority of the articles from the Czech mainstream media, 221, perceived the EGD neutrally. This included the articles where the EGD was only mentioned in an interview or as an example of the EU's policies. Of the monitored articles, 105 opposed the EGD or described it negatively. The high percentage of articles with negative perceptions can be attributed to the inclusion of blogs on idnes.cz in our analysis. While it is obvious that the articles are, in fact, blog posts, idnes.cz does not feature any disclaimers that this content does not represent the opinion of the site itself. Only seven articles from the chosen Czech mainstream media sites were supportive of the EGD or highlighted its positive impact.



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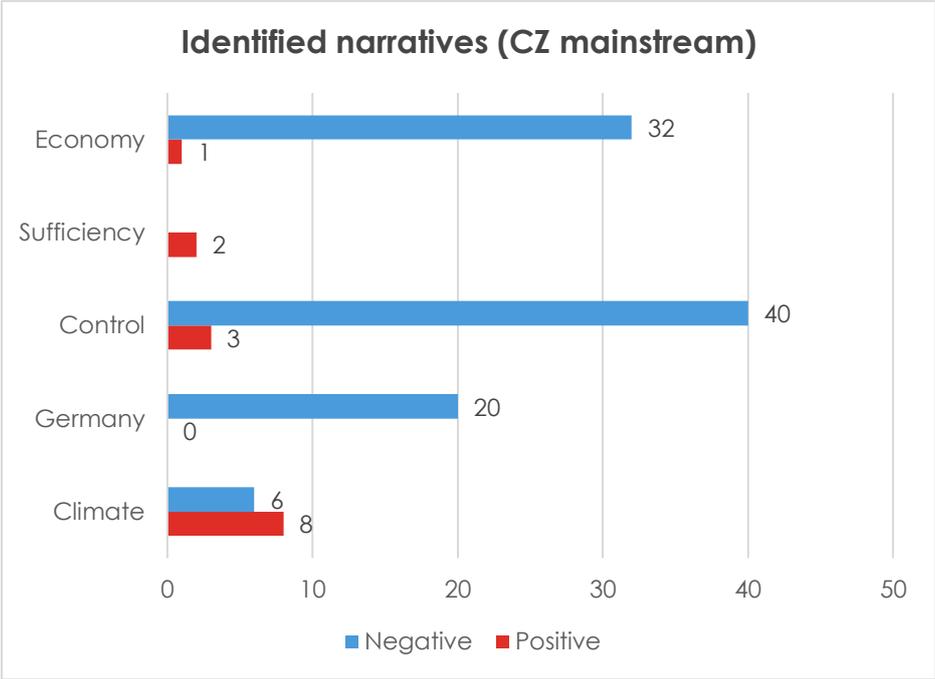
Sample headlines of the blogs on [idnes.cz](https://www.idnes.cz), a Czech mainstream site

Banka, kterou zajímá podnebí, ne peníze <small>3. 06. 2022 22:20:20</small>	Environmentální aktivisté a politici ve službách Putina <small>4. 04. 2022 21:40:43</small>
Neudržitelná „udržitelnost“ <small>9. 06. 2022 9:01:55</small>	Pytel zelených blech <small>12. 06. 2022 14:39:51</small>

Translation: "A bank that cares about the climate, not money", "Environmental activists and politicians in the service of Putin". "Unsustainable 'sustainability'", "A sack of green fleas".

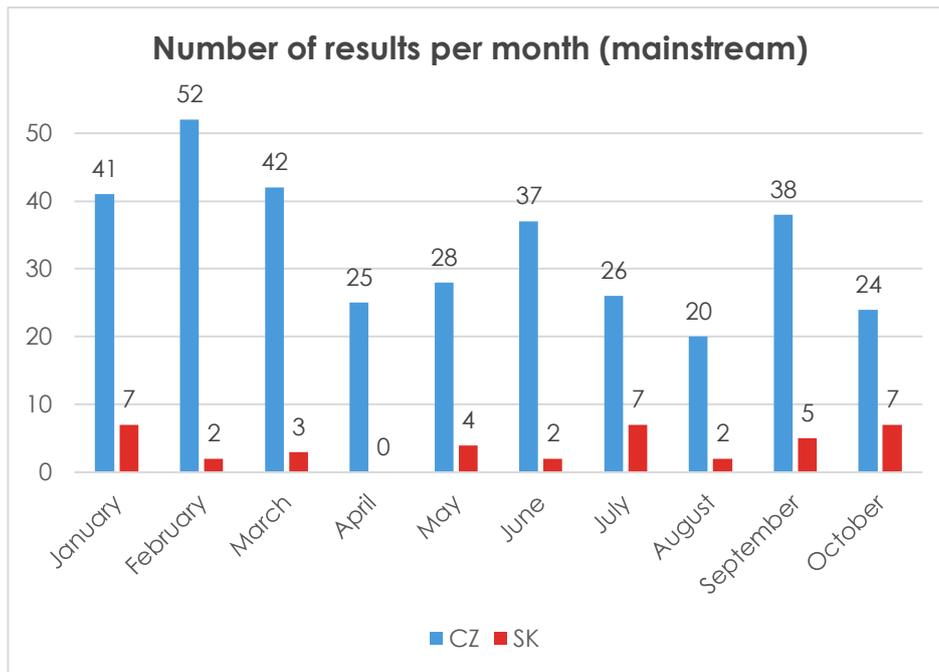
Similarly to the disinformation sites, articles from the Czech mainstream media contained examples of all the narratives identified in the chain emails. **The most common narrative**, mostly found in the blogs, **explained the EGD as the EU's**

tool for control (tag control_negative). There were examples of blogs that interpreted the higher prices of energy as a direct and planned consequence of the EGD, orchestrated by the EU. The second most common narrative described the EGD as harmful for the economy (tag economy_negative). Only one article from the mainstream websites argued that green energy can bring positive changes to the economy as a result of cheaper renewable energy, but it made no correlation to the EGD (tag economy_positive). In comparison to the disinformation sites, the mainstream articles supported climate science more often than disputing it, although only in eight articles (tag climate_positive).

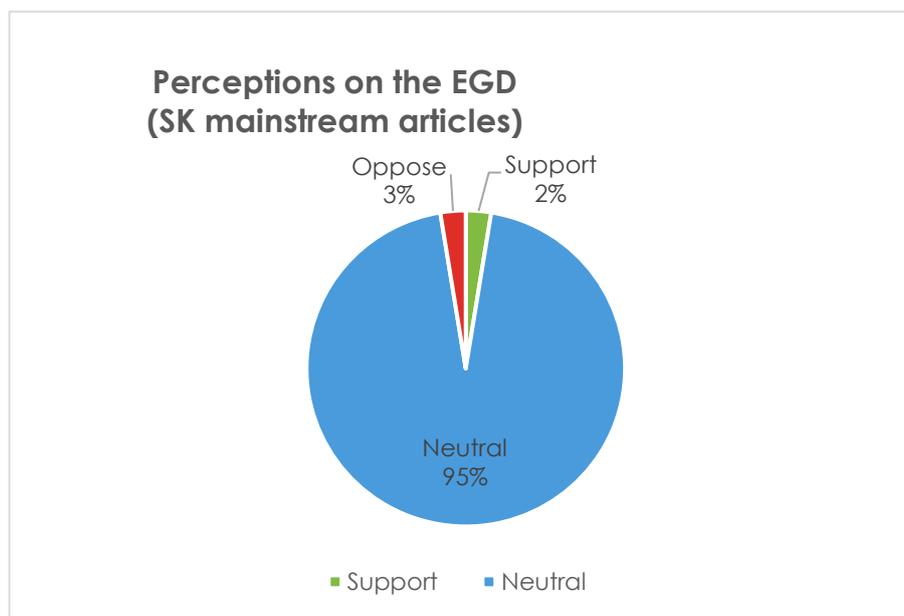


5.2 Slovak mainstream media

Similarly to the Slovak disinformation sites, the EGD search returned a low number of results from the Slovak mainstream media sites. In total, **only 39 articles discussed or mentioned the EGD** during the monitoring period. The site with the most results, 14, was sme.sk, followed by 10 results from aktuality.sk. The lowest number of results, three, was identified on tvnoviny.sk.



From the 39 results, **36 were neutral toward the EGD**, which also includes mentions of the EGD in interviews. The article that opposed the EGD was a blog post on the sme.sk site. The article that was supportive of the EGD was published on aktuality.sk and presented the results of a study that confirmed improved energy security with a higher use of renewable energy. From the five narratives identified in the chain mails, only the narrative about the relationship between high energy prices and the EGD was identified – in one article. An article on tvnoviny.sk both upheld climate science and mentioned the EGD.



An example of an article from a Slovak mainstream media site that was supportive of the EGD

Smart City | 15.7.2022 10:47

Obnoviteľné zdroje energie prinášajú väčšiu energetickú nezávislosť, potvrdil prieskum



Solarna veterna energia energetika 2014 dreamstime

Source: aktuality.sk, headline translation: "Renewable energy sources improve energy sovereignty, confirmed by research."

6. Findings

A comparison of the chain emails and websites known for spreading disinformation shows many existing links and connections between the two sources. Similar narratives appeared in both, with chain emails often spreading links to the articles from disinformation sites. Pro-Russian and anti-EU sentiments tied to the discussion surrounding the European Green Deal were also present on both. The **dominant style of communication was, however, different.** While disinformation sites contained only a few examples of articles that communicated directly to readers, using exclamation marks and emotional language excessively, this type of writing was predominant in the chain emails analyzed for this study. On the other hand, articles on the sites known for spreading disinformation mostly used a more neutral tone of communication and a journalistic style of writing. Although several emails in the Czech elves database were written in Slovak, a similar initiative to the Czech elves that would **collect and monitor chain emails in Slovakia is currently missing.**

The analyzed articles from the mainstream media sites (except the blogs) rarely discussed different aspects of the EGD or instruments and policies related to it, such as Fit for 55 or the Emission Trading System (ETS). However, **disinformation sites and the blogs from the Czech mainstream media, as well as chain emails, often connected the EGD with Fit for 55, the ETS, or a ban on the sale of new fossil fuel cars.** They also discussed how these policy changes were impacting or would impact the Czech Republic, its industry, or food security, however, without references or studies to back up the claims. In some cases, the main message of the articles even built on a legitimate concern connected to the implementation of the EGD, but **the argumentation was highly politicized, with a complete disregard for the larger context or other possible scenarios.**

The lack of articles that highlighted the positive environmental or health impact of the EGD and the insufficient focus, in general, on the environmental aspects in these pieces suggests that the discussion around the EGD is strongly politicized. Information that would connect the EGD with climate science was identified in all types of content, but only in a small number of cases. The narratives that were not connected to climate change as such and instead focused on economic and political issues were dominant in this research. The narrative that perceives the EGD as a way for the EU to exert control over its inhabitants was identified as the most common across both Czech mainstream media and disinformation sites, followed by the narrative that connects high energy prices to either the EGD or ETS. **This shows that the EGD is now commonly used as a proxy for supporting anti-EU narratives while ignoring climate change research.**

While a lack of positive messaging about the EGD on the sites known for sharing disinformation is not surprising, the monitoring showed that **mainstream media in both Czechia and Slovakia do not generally communicate the potential positive impact of the changes that the EGD can bring.** The majority of the articles from the mainstream media in both countries only mentioned the EGD in interviews with various political actors or stakeholders from different sectors. **The blogs on the mainstream sites** add to the poor perception of the EGD, as a majority of them perceive the EGD negatively and often spread the same narratives as the sites known for spreading disinformation. As stated above, no disclaimers exist on the websites that host these blogs that would inform readers that the expressed opinions are not those of these sites or if and how the blogs are reviewed for accuracy. In one example, the author of a [blog on idnes.cz](#) disregarded established climate science and stated that the findings of the

[Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) are wrong. At the same time, blogs that support the implementation of the EGD are lacking in numbers and **expert opinions on green topics were mostly absent on the mainstream media sites and in their blogs in this analysis.**

Further research is needed for understanding the reasons for this lack of attention on mainstream sites to the positive impact of the EGD. The current imbalance of available information is a highly problematic issue as it can hinder a balanced discussion about the topic. The European Green Deal and policies aimed at reaching its goals will continue to influence various aspects of our society. Therefore, monitoring and understanding the narratives spread about the EGD online as well as proactively communicating its challenges and opportunities remain an important task.²

In addition to this report, the following blogs were written as part of the project:

[Climate, Energy and the Green Deal in the Czech Chain Mails](#)

[How do Czech and Slovak governmental parties perceive the EU's green deal? Online monitoring of Facebook posts](#)

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² Ongoing as well as future monitoring initiatives related to this project can be found [here](#). The research from the current project will be presented at an experts' roundtable. The recommendations from the event will be published on the [EUROPEUM website](#).

Annex 1 – search queries

Different Czech and Slovak conjugations and declensions of:

1. General search query:

'green deal', 'green energy', 'renewable sources', 'decarbonization', 'carbon neutrality', 'energy politics', 'energy poverty', 'energy', 'lowering of emissions', 'environmental standards', 'green dictatorship', 'high energy prices', 'growing energy prices'

2. Climate change denial narrative

climate change, climate, global warming, warming, cooling AND green deal, green energy

3. Germany narrative

Germany AND crisis

4. High prices narrative

high prices, prices, bills AND green deal, green energy

5. Self-sufficiency narrative

self-sufficiency, agriculture AND green deal, green energy

6. Control narrative

blackout, blackouts, control, car AND green deal, green energy

About the Author

Tatiana Mindeková is a Junior Researcher and a Project Manager at EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy. She studied International Relations at the Canterbury Christ Church University, where she decided to further focus on environmental issues. She holds a master's degree in Environment, Politics & Society from the University College London. After interning at EUROPEUM's Brussels office she moved to Prague to strengthen its climate team and Green Europe Programme. She is currently focusing on a wide range of climate and decarbonization issues, with a focus on the Czech decarbonization experience, disinformation connected to the green agenda, and the EU's climate policies. On top of that, she is particularly interested in geothermal energy and the benefits its use can bring to the Czech and Slovak energy transition efforts.

EUROPEUM

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