Civil Society Initiatives Tackling Disinformation: Experiences of Central European Countries

Jonáš Syrovátka

8.1 Introduction

One of the most significant milestones of the disinformation debate and one which is referenced constantly was the situation following the June 2014 downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 in eastern Ukraine. Consequently, a mass of disinformation literally flooded the Internet and thus complicated the ability to judge what had actually happened. Despite that, the nature, causes, and culprits of the incident were disclosed quite swiftly, and a number of false stories were identified and debunked. The key role in this development was played by the organisation Bellingcat, composed of independent investigative journalists who put all the pieces

J. Syrovátka (✉)
Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czechia
e-mail: syrovatka10@seznam.cz

of this tragic story together and introduced it to the public (Bellingcat 2019).

However, the famous story of Bellingcat and the MH17 incident represents only one of many examples of civil society initiatives tackling disinformation. In recent years, a number of various entities from already established civil society organisations (CSOs) to passionate individuals all over Europe started to focus on this phenomenon. This wave of activity comprises varied initiatives like the Baltic Elves volunteers exposing trolls and fake profiles on social media, fact-checkers from the Ukrainian organisation StopFake, or activists from the Stop Funding Hate initiative trying to convince private companies not to advertise on websites spreading hate speech or conspiracy theories.

An attempt to provide an exhausting account of all civil society initiatives tackling disinformation within one chapter would be far too descriptive, far too long, and more too confusing than a phonebook. The author, however, does not intend to choose the opposite approach either, which would be to cherry-pick the most interesting cases. Especially since this narrow perspective brings with it the danger of taking a story out of its original context, not allowing its successes as well as the limitations of its application in other environments to be properly explained. Therefore, this chapter attempts to find a middle way between both mentioned approaches and to describe all the relevant initiatives tackling disinformation launched by civil society in central European countries. Specific attention will be dedicated to Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. This geographical limitation, which, as will be explained, is quite logical in relation to the given subject, will allow a (still relatively) precise description of the approaches applied to tackle disinformation by various civil society actors. However, the chapter has further ambitions and focuses also on the identity and dynamic of civil society activities in the analysed countries. By doing so, it might comment not only on civil society actors themselves but also on the context in which they are operating.

This perspective has proved to be relevant. The findings of the chapter show that the context matters as significant differences among civil society actors tackling disinformation in the analysed countries were identified. While, on the one hand, there is vivid debate involving a wide variety of actors producing innovative approaches to the issue in Czech Republic and Slovakia, in Hungary and Poland, on the other hand, the issue of disinformation attracts limited attention, resulting in a low number of

activities dedicated to it as well as the choosing of rather conservative strategies to tackle this issue. This finding to a certain extent questions the possibility of transporting the experiences to different countries and recalls the importance of properly evaluating local contexts.

8.2   Civil Society and Disinformation in Current Understanding and Literature

A vibrant, active, and daring civil society is perceived as a key element of a democratic political system. Some theories even consider it to be one of the necessary conditions for the existence of democracy (Diamond and Morlino 2005). Despite the resonance of this term, its definition remains contested, which is not that surprising given not only the heterogeneity of various civil society actors but also the fact that this topic has attracted the attention of social scientists only relatively recently. However, among all definitions, the strongest emphases are put on the role of civil society as a balance to the power of state, its heterogeneity, and its voluntary nature. For the purposes of this text, civil society is understood as a 'sphere of institutions, organisations and individuals located between the family, the state and the market in which people associate voluntarily to advance common interest' (Anheier 2013, 22).

Among many areas in which civil society might advance *common interests*, the security domain is one of the most interesting, especially since this area used to be seen as reserved for state institutions, such as military, police, or intelligence services, in the past. This view has however been challenged, and some scholars in security studies today put more emphasis on a wider spectrum of threats, including the societal one (Collins 2010). In this view, obviously, the role of civil society in security is becoming equally as important as the role of state intuitions. This fact has been reflected by various authors who have evaluated the role civil society actors might play in the security domain. It has, for example, been argued that civil society is sensitive to the various changes occurring in society, and so it might serve as an early warning system against upcoming threats (Anheier 2013). Nevertheless, civil society actors are also seen as important players in formulating security policies because they provide feedback and recommendations to state institutions active in the security domain as well as to political decision-makers. At the same time, emphasis has been placed on their important role as watchdogs scrutinising state security policies, warning against them should they be considered a threat

to the democratic system (Caparini et al. 2006). The underlining thesis of this chapter is that the reactions of civil society to the disinformation phenomenon represents an exemplary case study of its ability to advance common interests in the area security.

An illustrative example of this thesis is the Ukrainian case, in which state intuitions were ill-prepared for the confrontation with the Russian Federation starting in 2014. In addition to other areas, Ukrainian civil society was able to mobilise and defend itself in the information domain, which represented an important part of the conflict, from threats of propaganda and disinformation campaigns launched by the adversary (for a detailed account of these initiatives, see Gerasymchuk and Maksak 2018). Since the Ukrainian initiatives tackling disinformation were operating in the *laboratory of information warfare*, they are often used as models for civil society actors in other countries (for example, Pesenti and Pomerantsev 2016). In fact, civil society started to be perceived as an indispensable part of the effort to tackle disinformation (see Nimmo 2015; Fried and Polyakova 2018). Based on this assumption, in the years that followed, a number of civil society initiatives aiming to expose and tackle disinformation were launched all over the Europe; among many others, it is possible to name the Brussels-based EU DisinfoLab, the UK-based Bellingcat, the German Marshall Fund's Hamilton 68, and the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab. The relevance of these initiatives was acknowledged at the political level as manifested, for example, by their mention in the European Union's Action Plan against Disinformation (European Commission 2018).

The list of initiatives launched to tackle disinformation could continue for a long time. However, to list the countless civil society actors which have emerged over the past several years all over Europe (or even globally) and the strategies they have employed against disinformation would not be helpful in understanding the topic. On the contrary, not only could this list never be complete or up-to-date given the vibrant development in this area, moreover, it would not be able (especially with such limited space) to properly contextualise the presented initiatives either. This problem might be solved by cherry-picking the most well-known initiatives. However, the author is convinced that this approach would have added little value since their activities have already been described elsewhere.

Therefore, the author has tried to find a middle path and describe civil society initiatives which have emerged in a selected group of central

European countries: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. This narrowing of the research scope can be defended by several arguments. First, it is an attempt to find a reasonable compromise between the range of presented examples and their proper description within the space provided by this chapter. The second rather pragmatic reason is the author's acquaintance with the development of Czech civil society in tackling disinformation[1] and the network of contacts with other researchers from the analysed countries. This background allowed the author to conduct a meticulous assessment of the situation in the region. The analyses in the chosen countries, thirdly, provide an interesting comparative perspective. Although they have national specifics, this perspective is possible to apply due to the fact that the analysed countries are to the certain extent similar: the same geographical position between western and eastern Europe, a similar history symbolised by democratisation after the fall of the Iron Curtain, integration into Western political structures (such as NATO and European Union), the emergence of populist and nationalists forces in recent years, and being perceived by the Russian Federation as within its wider area of influence. At the same time, however, as this chapter also shows, it is possible to witness a number of differences in the field this edited volume is dedicated to; for example, the respective civil societies have a different level of interest in the issue of disinformation, varying perceptions of this phenomenon, and they use different strategies to tackle it. Hence a narrowing of the research scope will not only allow for a description of the existing initiatives themselves but also their proper contextualisation.

This kind of contribution is highly necessary since the comparative perspective is missing in existing literature dedicated to civil society initiatives tackling disinformation, and not only in central Europe. Most publications dedicated to this issue were published by local CSOs, which brings with them certain deficiencies. The content of these studies is not in question, but it is appropriate to highlight certain limitations in their use as a foundation of academic research. Firstly, there is the lack of methodology as well as a non-transparent evaluation and editing procedure which does not allow, for example, one to understand why certain examples of practices were chosen for presentation and others not.

---

[1] The author works as programme manager of projects related to disinformation and strategic communications in the think-tank Prague Security Studies Institute based in Czech Republic.

This limitation is closely related to a second, which lies in the pragmatic reasoning of these publications. This results in (from perspective of CSOs completely legitimate) ambition not to provide in-depth analysis of civil society actors and their actions but rather a selection of the most interesting examples to follow. This tendency is strengthened even more by the multiple aims of these publication, which are usually dedicated exclusively to civic society actors as well as other subjects that hinder in-depth analysis and predefine the perspectives in which the actions of civil society are understood.

Examples of studies produced by CSOs which map civic society activities tackling disinformation are as follows: The Czech think-tank European Values Center for Security Policy described the activities of civil society in Western states in a study of countermeasures against the subversion operations of the Kremlin (Kremlin Watch 2018) as well as in *The Prague Manual*, presenting best practices in countering malign foreign influences (Janda and Víchová 2018). The pro-Kremlin propaganda in central and eastern Europe and various initiatives against it was mapped by Czech CSO Nesehnutí (Dufkova and Hofmeisterova 2018). Another study, also focused on the same region and its resilience against disinformation and which mentioned projects in the area of media literacy, was published by the Ukrainian think-tank Prism (Damarad and Yeliseyeu 2018). The Slovak think-tank GLOBSEC Policy Institute also published a study focused solely on youth and media literacy as well as projects trying to enhance it within central Europe and western Balkan countries (Hajdu and Klingová 2018).

The activities of civil society initiatives tackling disinformation have also already become the subject of rather critical scrutiny from academic researchers who have pointed out their influence over the public discourse about this issue. Their studies are focused on the identity and interactions of chosen civil society actors. Even though these investigations are less interested in practices, they still provide interesting accounts of actors in this area. Unfortunately, at the moment, they remain limited to Czech Republic and focused on a period between 2014 and 2016; therefore, they are not able to capture recent developments (Daniel and Eberle 2018; Kohút and Rychnovská 2018).

To summarise, there are important reasons why researchers should be focused more on the currently understudied issue of civil society actors tackling disinformation. Firstly, this example represents an interesting case study of civil society mobilisation in the area of security, which was until

very recently seen as reserved to state institutions. Further research may produce interesting findings about the role of civil society in democratic societies in general. Secondly, this kind of research may prove extremely useful in preserving civil society initiatives. Since currently existing initiatives are not mapped properly, it is highly likely that, in the hectic environment of CSOs with very low-level institutional memory, the gathered expertise will be lost. Bringing more clarity to already-existing projects also contributes to efficiency in the planning of future activities by CSOs themselves and in the organising of networks that will allow effective labour sharing. Thirdly, it is necessary to bring more clarity to the role of civil society actors in decision-making. Since CSOs may have impact on public discourse about disinformation and (possibly also) how measures tackling this phenomenon are crafted by state institutions and policymakers, they should be subject to public scrutiny like any other actor involved in the decision-making process.

8.3 How to Research Civil Society Properly and Ethically?

As was already mentioned, the concept of civil society remains vague, and it is thus not easy to decide which initiatives can be considered a part of this category. This obstacle is even more problematic since civil society itself is heterogenous and comprises a number of various actors from individual activists focused on local communities up to large CSOs operating internationally. Another obstacle in mapping civil society is its dynamism, which results in changes to their topic of interest and, consequently, their activities. This fact was quite profound in the researched area of disinformation, which was in many cases not a primary but rather a supplementary field of interest among the described actors.

The author decided to overcome the challenge of the applied concept's unclear boundaries by creating a dataset of actors who declared themselves as active in the area of disinformation and are based in the analysed countries. Activity in this area does not mean only occasionally commenting on the issue but rather long-term and consistent interested in the topic. Even though the chapter tries to provide a complex account of initiatives in the analysed countries, the author cannot guarantee some of civil society initiatives were not omitted. However, given his personal experience and consultations with experts from the analysed countries, he dares

to claim the chapter presents all actors whose activities are relevant and are having tangible results and influence on local debates and communities.

The chapter aims to analyse not only the activities and strategies of civil society actors but also the dynamic of the debate on the issue of disinformation in the analysed countries. This knowledge will provide further understanding of the context in which these actors operate. The dynamic of the debate will be assessed from the number of civil society actors who have started to be involved in activities tackling disinformation over time. The dynamic development of civil society actors complicates the assessment of which time they started to be interested in the particular issue. However, for our purposes, this category will be measured according to the year their first public output—publishing research, an article, or a book; conducting certain activity; or launching a website—was identified. Even more problematic is assessing whether they are still active in the area. Therefore, the focus is solely on the year a civil society actor became active in tackling disinformation; its eventual termination of activities in this filed will be mentioned only if is possible to prove.

In assessing the identity of a civil society actor, Anheier's (2013) methodology was utilised in identifying individuals, organisations, and institutions. This categorisation allowed inclusion into the dataset of two other types of actors whose affiliation with civil society might be questioned: journalists and academics. These actors were crucial for the debate on disinformation in the analysed countries, and so their exclusion from the dataset would obscure the research results. At the same, their specificity must be understood, and they are therefore treated as separate categories in the chapter. As for 'regular' civil society actors, their inclusion in the dataset is conditioned by long-term, consistent, and self-proclaimed interest in the area. Therefore, the dataset will, for example, include only those journalists who write about disinformation on a regular basis and have tried to move the debate on this issue further through their own (for example, investigative) projects. In summary, the categories described in the chapter are as follows:

- individuals—persons or smaller informal groups established to tackle disinformation via various means;
- organisations (CSOs)—organised and structuralised entities with a broad area of interest who have added the topic of disinformation to their agenda; and

- institutions—established institutions operating independently from the state, including

  – media (outlets or individual journalists who were or are active in the debate on disinformation) and
  – academia (universities, research institutions, or individual researchers affiliated with academic institutions who were or are active in the debate on disinformation).

Before presenting the research itself, it should be noted that this kind of area requires certain ethical consideration. Since disinformation might be a useful weapon to foreign or domestic non-democratic actors, one could argue that describing those who tackle this phenomenon puts them in danger, especially when organisations and individuals are named and their activities described. Despite that understanding of this argument, the author does not consider it to be a limitation in this research. Since the data presented in the chapter relies solely on open sources—in most cases published by researched civil society actors themselves—the chapter does not mention anything that the researched organisations would not be willing (and maybe even be eager) to communicate to the public. While the security concerns certainly should be seriously considered in context of authoritarian regimes, the situation in central European countries, despite a certain indisputable backlash against democratic principles in some of them, is still far from severe. As such, there is no need to anonymise the proponents of civil society (Freedom House 2019).

8.4   Civil Society Actors Tackling Disinformation in Central Europe

Even at first sight, it is obvious that debates in individual countries differ. Dissimilarity concerns all the observed category variables: the time at which most actors came to be involved in the tackling of this issue and the identity of civil society actors, as well as their activities (Fig. 8.1).

Generally, it is possible to distinguish two groups among the analysed countries. In the first, consisting of Czech Republic and Slovakia, it is possible to identify the involvement of a large number of civil society actors in tackling disinformation (30 in Czech Republic and 26 in Slovakia). The identities of the involved actors are very diverse and
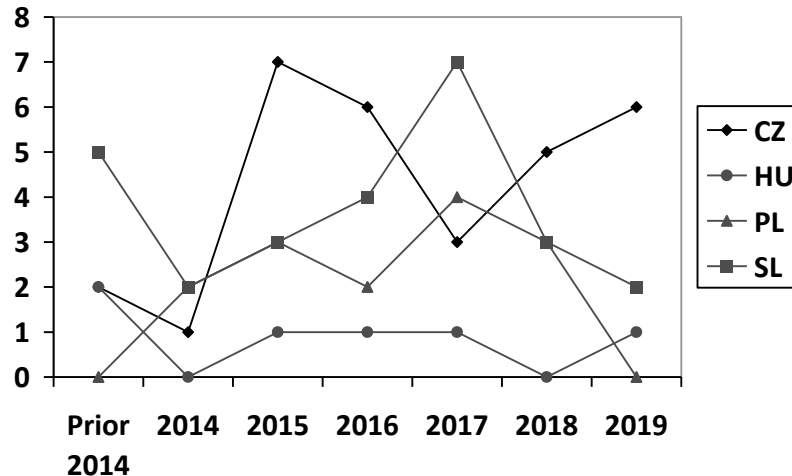
Fig. 8.1 Number of newly established civil society initiatives tackling disinformation by year (*Source* Author)

comprises almost all the categories covered in the chapter. In both countries, the debate also had similar dynamics: It peaked in Czech Republic in 2015–16, and the following year in Slovakia. Given the wide variety of civil society actors involved, it is possible to encounter various strategies and approaches in tackling disinformation. It is also worth mentioning that civil society in Czech Republic and Slovakia stimulates activities related to disinformation across the whole region since local CSOs initiate cross-border projects related to this issue, and initiatives from these countries are copied elsewhere.

The situation in the second group, consisting of Hungary and Poland, is very different. The number of civil society actors tackling disinformation is lower (6 in Hungary and 14 in Poland). Moreover, the issue of disinformation is not usually the primary interest of the presented civil society actors but rather a secondary activity (often caused only be involvement in projects conducted in cooperation with partners from Czech Republic or Slovakia). This situation has led to the application of a limited set of strategies to tackle disinformation which are often untraditional, do not going beyond the goal of a particular project, or are conditioned by the identity of the civil society actor. A slight difference between Hungary and Poland is the intensity of the debate as such. While in the case of Hungary, it is not possible to indicate any turning point from which civil society has started to be interested in this issue, for Poland this occurred in 2017 (Fig. 8.2).
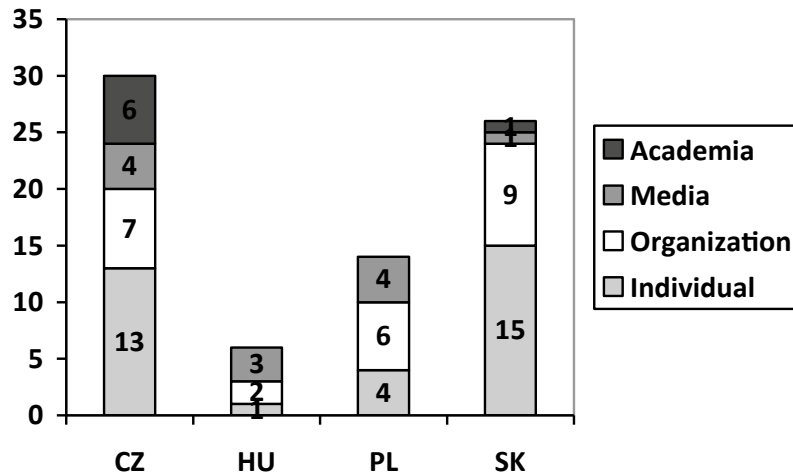
Fig. 8.2 Identity of civil society actors in individual countries (*Source* Author)

These differences clearly illustrate that even in such a coherent region, domestic factors clearly matter. Therefore, the rest the chapter will offer a closer look into the separate civil societies of the central European countries, describing individual actors and their most important activities and strategies.

8.4.1   Czech Republic

The number of civil society actors tackling disinformation in Czech Republic was the highest among the analysed countries—30 in total. As visible in Fig. 8.1, the number of civil society actors included in the dataset skyrocketed in 2015 when seven new individuals and organisations became active. This trend continued the following year when another six new actors got involved in tackling disinformation. Interest in the issues of disinformation remains high even now as illustrated by the fact that new initiatives are still emerging—five new civic society actors became active in 2018 and another six in 2019. The identity of civil society actors is the most heterogenous out of all the analysed countries. In the dataset, 13 individuals are present, seven CSOs, four actors from the media, and six actors from academia. The particularly high level of involvement of universities and research institutes in the initiatives tackling disinformation is unique in the context of the central European region. This variety of actors has resulted in different strategies, including research, fact-checking, educational activities, political advocacy, and investigative journalism. A significant effort was also made to create platforms where

various civil society actors involved in this issue might interact. Moreover, the Czech debate on disinformation is unique due to the existence of civil society actors who present critical reflection upon the current discourse of this issue, and it has thus stimulated a debate about the legitimacy and effectivity of the applied initiatives.

Individuals and smaller, rather informal civil society initiatives started to be involved in the issue of disinformation even before this issue became an important part of public agenda. Prior to 2014, it is possible to identify two initiatives which might not necessarily have been perceived themselves as tackling disinformation at the time of their foundation but were already applying the strategies currently utilised to tackle this phenomenon later on: The website Hoax (established in 2000) aims to warn users against various hoaxes, chain mail, and other internet content which might endanger the user and is not in accordance with netiquette guidelines (Hoax, n.d.), and the project 'Demagog' (launched in 2012) focuses on the fact-checking of political debates (Demagog CZ, n.d.). A distinct feature were individuals (as well as other civil society actors) which started to tackle disinformation after 2015 with a strong emphasis on the security dimension of the phenomena, also seen as closely inter-linked with Russian influence operations launched against Western states after the start of the conflict in Ukraine in 2014. The influence of these events on the Czech debate is illustrated by Roman Máca, an independent blogger who first started to write about the situation in Ukraine and then became interested in describing and exposing various platforms and groups spreading disinformation related to Ukraine in Czech Republic. At the time of this writing, in January 2020, he is still working on this issue as a programme manager at the think-tank Institute for Politic and Society (Institute for Politics and Society, n.d.), run by the Czech political party ANO. Another initiative, launched in 2015, is the website Manipulátoři (Manipulators), which raises awareness about the issue of disinformation as well as fact-checking and launching smaller investigative projects (Manipulátoři 2020). One of the founders of Manipulátoři Petr Nutil published the book *Média, lži a příliš rychlý mozek* (Media, lies, and a brain that's too fast) focused on issues of online manipulation, propaganda, and media literacy in 2018 (Nutil 2018). Before the release of Nutil's publication, three other books focused on disinformation were published. First was *Průmysl lži—Propaganda, konspirace a dezinformační válka* (Industry of lies—propaganda, conspiracy, and disinformation warfare) by PR expert Alexandra Alvarová, who also conducts

public lectures dedicated to these issues (Rozsypal 2019). The second contribution to the debate was the book *Informační válka* (Information warfare) by a colonel of the Czech Army Karel Řehka, which focused on the issue of disinformation and propaganda in military operations (Řehka 2017). The third case, published in 2018, represents a popular book called *Nejlepší kniha o fake news, dezinformacích a manipulacích!!!* (The best book on fake news, disinformation, and manipulation!!!) written by scholars Miloš Gregor, Petra Vejvodová, and their students (Gregor et al. 2018). The same year, based on an example from the Baltics, a group of activists started the civic movement Čeští elfové (Czech elves) focused on mapping the spread of disinformation via chain mail and social network trolls. Monitoring dedicated to these issues is published on monthly basis (Romea 2018). At the same time, the issue of disinformation also attracted greater attention in the private sector. František Vrábel, CEO of the company Semantic Visions, which is involved in open source analysis, started to be more present in the media while presenting its research related to disinformation (Semantic Visions 2019). In 2019, a former member of the East Stratcom Task Force[2] Jakub Kalenský moved from Brussels back to Prague and, as a senior fellow of the Digital Forensic Research Lab of the Atlantic Council, started to contribute to the Czech debate as well. Another book focused on disinformation, *V síti (dez)informací* (In the net of (dis)information) by PR consultant Jiří Táborský, focused on manipulation techniques and the current situation in information space (Táborský 2019). Two further initiatives were launched as well: '#jsmetu' (#wearehere), aiming to decrease the polarisation of debate on social media inspired by an example from Sweden (#JsmeTu, n.d.), and 'Fair Advertising', raising awareness about online advertisements on platforms known to be spreading disinformation by publishing examples on its Twitter account similar to the US organisation Sleeping Giants (Cemper 2019).

Over time the issue of disinformation started to attract the attention of various established CSOs focused on issues of security, media, or human rights, and who included various projects related to this topic in their portfolio. The most prominent example of this approach is the CSO European Values Center for Security Policy (EVCSP), which, upon

[2] A department of the European External Action Service tasked with tackling disinformation.

entering the area of disinformation in 2015, significantly shifted the development of the whole organisation, especially by launching its programme 'Kremlin Watch' in 2016 focused on raising awareness about the issue of Russian influence operations. EVCSP put the issue of disinformation at the centre of its agenda. Due to this fact, EVCSP became not only a publicly acclaimed authority on the issue but also a counterpart for state institutions, for example, while drafting the 2016 *National Security Audit* (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic 2016). Another CSO, which entered the scene in 2015, was the Prague Security Studies Institute, which over time switched its focus from the role of disinformation in Russian influence operations to researching the influence of disinformation on Czech elections and the area of strategic communications (Prague Security Studies Institute, n.d.). The well-established CSO Association for International Affairs, which focused on research and education in the area of international relations, started to be involved in tackling disinformation in 2016 through the launch of a Czech version of the Ukrainian initiative 'StopFake' (StopFake, n.d.a); it also became a research partner in international projects focused on this area. The rapid development in civic society also attracted the attention of CSOs facilitating funding and networking among various civil society actors.[3] The most noteworthy example is a project of the Open Society Foundation Prague (OSF), focused on Russian influence activities in Czech Republic and Slovakia and which launched in 2016. Aside from funding projects related to this topic, OSF also attempted to create a network among organisations active in this area, conducted its own research, and hold events. The programme was concluded in 2018, and OSF is no longer active in this area (Nadace OSF, n.d.). Another CSO, which is at the same time a financial donor, is the Endowment Fund for Independent Journalism, which has supported various projects focused on disinformation since its establishment in 2016 (NFNŽ, n.d.). One of the biggest Czech CSOs People in Need, which is focused primary on humanitarian aid and human rights, had already started to conduct projects tackling disinformation in 2015 when it included this topic in its educational activities

---

[3] The chapter takes into an account only CSOs with a presence in Czech Republic (and, respectively, other analysed countries) and were active in creating the network of domestic civil society actors. Therefore, donors from abroad (such as the US National Endowment for Democracy) are not mentioned despite the fact that they played an important role in shaping the debate on disinformation in central Europe.

(Jeden svět na školách, n.d.). However, it has also recently started being involved in events facilitating the network of civil society actors interested in this issue by, for example, organising the conference 'Cyber Dialogue' in 2019 (Cyber Dialogue 2019). In 2018, the CSO Transitions, focused mainly on the education of journalists, became involved in tackling disinformation by launching a series of lectures and workshops about media literacy for the elderly (Transitions 2018).

The dynamic activities of Czech civil society related to tackling disinformation did not go unnoticed by the media due, in part, to the fact that journalists themselves played an important role in the debate about this phenomenon. Investigative journalist Ondřej Kundra (working for the weekly *Respekt*) started to write about disinformation extensively in 2015 and conducted an in–depth investigation into the notorious conspiracy website Aeronet (Kundra 2015). Other actors involved in writing about disinformation were the news portal Hlídací Pes (Watch Dog), especially in its news section dedicated to Russian interests in Czech Republic, and the news portal Neovlivní (Uninfluenced), which published in 2016 one of the first lists of websites spreading disinformation (Neovlivní 2016). Another journalist who contributed to the debate about disinformation is Jakub Zelenka, who in 2018 received a young journalists award for the project 'Dezinformace: Co pro vás znamenají lži?' (Disinformation: What do lies mean to you?) (Poljakov et al. 2017).

As in other analysed countries, universities also played a role in tackling disinformation. It should be highlighted that this does not mean they 'only' conducted academic research on this topic, but rather they mainly sought to actively enter the public debate on this issue. Masaryk University started to be engaged in research on this issue in 2016. The environment at this university also allowed for the creation of two student initiatives focused on raising awareness about these issues and empowering critical thinking and media literacy among youth by introducing the educational activities 'Zvol si info' (Choose the information; established in 2016) and 'Fakescape' (established in 2018). These two projects were later separated from the university and now operate independently. Furthermore, it was at this university that the project 'Dezimatrix', aimed at conducting multidisciplinary research about disinformation, was launched in 2019 (Dezimatrix, n.d.). In the same year, Palacký University Olomouc launched the project 'Euforka' focused on informing about the European Union as well as debunking disinformation

related to this issue. This initiative later involved other Czech universities (Palacky University Olomouc 2019). Researchers of the Institute of International Relations, a research institution supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, published a 2018 article on the Czech debate about hybrid threats (in which disinformation was one of the main topics) and reflected the argumentation and development of its actors (Daniel and Eberle 2018). An important role in the increasing awareness of the disinformation phenomena and the promotion of critical thinking was played by the wide net of libraries in Czech Republic. For example, in 2019, the Moravian Library in Brno launched the project 'Používej mozek' (Use your brain), comprised of a series of lectures dedicated to critical thinking and media literacy (Winkler and Pazdersky, n.d.).

8.4.2   Hungary

The number of Hungarian civil society actors tackling disinformation was the lowest of all the analysed countries (six in total). Given the low number of civil society actors, it is not possible to trace any dynamic in the debate on this issue (see Fig. 8.1). However, in looking at the time scale, it is possible to observe that research on the topic of disinformation had started already in 2010 when the CSO Political Capital launched research projects focused on anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. This example is quite illustrative since it shows that the roots and focus of the debate on disinformation in Hungary is different than that of Czech Republic. While Czech civil society perceived disinformation as an external phenomenon related to Russian influence operations in Europe after 2014, Hungarian actors were more interested in those originating from the domestic environment. This is especially true of media (representing three civil society actors in total), who usually started as independent news sites with an emphasis on investigative reporting related to domestic issues and later added the issue of disinformation to their agendas.

Similarly, as in the Czech case, the spread of hoaxes on the Internet had already attracted the attention of civil society at the beginning of millennium. The website Urbanlegends had already started to map these kinds of stories in 2004 (Urbanlegends, n.d.). However, disinformation as a security threat or, more broadly, as a phenomenon which could jeopardise democracy was introduced only later. As was mentioned, one of the key players in this debate was the CSO Political Capital, which focused on researching policy related topics and who had already started to focus on

them in 2010. Since then, this CSO conducts research projects focused on foreign (namely Russian) and homegrown disinformation and propaganda campaigns (Political Capital 2019). The CSO Centre for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Democracy (n.d.) was a partner organisation in several projects focused solely on Russian information warfare between 2016 and 2018.

As was previously mentioned, the attention of media dedicated to the phenomenon of disinformation is mostly related to other malfunctions of the Hungarian government, such as corruption or the undermining of democratic institutions. An illustrative case is a group of investigative reports from the website Átlátszó (Transparent), which started to be active in 2011 and proclaims its mission as mainly investigative reporting, working with whistle-blowers and other watchdog practitioners. Nevertheless, in 2017, Átlátszó added a new government propaganda section to its website focused on media freedom and homegrown disinformation campaigns (Átlátszó, n.d.). A similar story might be told about other media outlets, such as Direkt36, established in 2015 (Direkt36, n.d.), or K-Monitor, which conducted workshops on disinformation in 2019 (K-Monitor 2019). These media publications were primarily focused on investigative reporting but later added the issue of disinformation and propaganda to their agendas as well.

8.4.3 Poland

As Fig. 8.1 shows, the dynamicity of Polish civil society initiatives tackling disinformation peaked in 2017 with fourteen in total during the covered period. The number of actors is low given that Poland is bigger than the other three countries combined. The proportional representation of CSOs among the categories of civil society actors is the highest of all analysed countries. However, for Polish CSOs, disinformation remains a rather secondary topic of interest in which they have become involved mainly due to participation in cross-border projects or the interest of individual researchers. These factors likely contributed to the fact that several initiatives described below are no longer active. Another remarkable feature of the Polish debate on disinformation is the differing perception of the phenomenon. While CSOs usually research it in the context of Russian influence operations, the majority of media have focused on those of domestic origin. These different understandings of the causes

and context of disinformation has resulted in different strategies being applied in tackling this issue.

As in other countries, individuals and smaller civil society initiatives started to be involved in tackling disinformation first. In the Polish environment, 2014 saw the launch of the Slovak-inspired project 'Demagog' in order to fact-check political debates (Demagog PL, n.d.) as well as the Polish branch of the Ukrainian initiative 'StopFake' (StopFake, n.d.b). In 2015, the initiative 'Rosyjska V kolumna w Polsce' (Fifth Russian column in Poland) was launched with the aim of increasing awareness about Russian propaganda in Poland and debunking disinformation. However, the initiative stopped in 2019 after the project founder was sued for claims publicised on the project's Facebook site (WirtualneMedia 2019). In 2018, the initiative 'Wojownicy Klawiatury' (Keyboard fighters) was launched with the aim of debunking disinformation related to the European Union and to promote a positive image of it (Partycypacja Obywatelska 2019).

The involvement of Polish CSOs in tackling disinformation, as mentioned above, is unstable. The most telling story is that of the Cybersecurity Foundation, whose mission is to increase awareness about various threats related to cyberspace. Due to this specialisation, it launched two projects aiming to raise awareness about this issue: in 2015, the Twitter account 'Disinfo Digest', reporting and debunking disinformation in the information environment, and, in 2017, a project with a similar aim called 'Infoops Poland' (Warsaw Institute 2018). However, both of these projects were supervised by Kamil Basaj, who left the foundation in 2018, effectively halting their activities related to disinformation. Basaj later established his own organisation, INFO OPS Polska (Fundacja INFO OPS Polska, n.d.). As in Czech Republic, established Polish CSOs active in research on international relations and security did not adopt the issue of disinformation to their agenda. For example, the Centre for International Relations conducted several projects focused on the research of disinformation in relation to Russian influence operations starting in 2015, but most of them were dependent on the activity of one researcher, Antoni Wierzejskii (Centrum Stosunków Międzynarodowych, n.d.). Similarly, the Centre for Eastern Studies, whose focus on Russian politics and society might have led to broader interest in disinformation in relation to Russian influence operations, aside from several commentaries on this issue, did not become involved in the Polish debate on disinformation. The one exception is the Center for Propaganda and Disinformation

Analysis; established in 2017, it researches Russian propaganda (Centrum Analiz Propagandy i Dezinformacji, n.d.). It also cooperated with the Casimir Pulaski Foundation, which increased the awareness about the disinformation issue by putting it on the agenda of the Warsaw Security Forum in 2018 and 2019 (Casimir Pulaski Foundation 2019).

Like the majority of previously mentioned Polish initiatives, media interest was focused primarily on the dynamic of this phenomenon in the domestic political debate. The only exception from this trend is the news site CyberDefence24, launched in 2016. It is focused mainly on security-related issues and has played an active role in increasing awareness about Russian influence operations (CyberDefence 24, n.d.). Similar to Hungary, some media publications were started by investigative journalists with a focus on government malpractice and only later added the topic of disinformation to their portfolio. An illustrative example is the independent news portal OKO.press, established in 2017 with a focus on investigative journalism; it started to write regularly on disinformation in 2019 (OKO.press, n.d.). Similarly, the Reporters Foundation, which chiefly provided media training, started its own investigative work focused on various issues including disinformation in 2016 (Fundacja reporterow, n.d.). The private television channel TVN24 launched the project 'Kontakt24' in 2018 aiming to tackle homegrown disinformation by promoting quality journalism and fact-checking (Kontakt 24, n.d.).

8.4.4   Slovakia

Among the analysed countries Slovakia represent probably the most interesting example. The total number of civil society actors tackling disinformation is the second highest (26 in total). Even though the most dynamic year in the Slovak debate about disinformation was 2017, it should be noted that it was closely interlinked with other topics that civil society had already tackled—namely, right-wing extremism, which is on the rise in the country. The number of individuals and smaller initiatives tackling disinformation is the highest out of the four analysed countries (15 in total) and comprise a wide variety of actors from civil activists and independent bloggers to IT developers and PR experts. Due to this vibrancy, Slovakia might be considered a hub of civil society initiatives tackling disinformation from which ideas and strategies are spreading across the whole region. Given the similarity of the languages, the findings and results emanating from Slovak projects are utilised predominantly in

Czech Republic. At the same time, Slovakia possesses a vibrant community of CSOs focused on researching security-related issues which have incorporated the issue of disinformation into their agendas. The innovativeness of the Slovak approach to tackling disinformation lies not only in the use of digital technologies in its research of the phenomenon, but mainly in the ability to address disinformation as such and to tackle the roots of this phenomenon by promoting media literacy, deradicalising youth, or using humour.

One of the streams from which the Slovak debate about disinformation took its inspiration were activities focused on monitoring right-wing extremists. An interesting example of a civil society action is pensioner and former engineer Ján Benčík, who early on started to uncover various networks of conspirators, mainly related to extreme right-wing groups, on his blog in 2012. Benčík was later awarded by the Slovak president for his activates in 2016 (*Deutsche Welle* 2017). Another important actor was the independent investigative journalist Radovan Bránik, who maps right-wing extremist movements and other security-related issues (Bránik 2020). The role of conspiracy theories among Slovak right-wing extremists was also an issue of interest for political scientist Gregorij Mesežnikov (IVO, n.d.).[4] All the abovementioned individuals are still active in the Slovak debate on disinformation and played an important role not only in its beginnings but also in its further development. 'Demagog', an initiative which has focused on fact-checking political debates since its launch in 2010 (Demagog SK, n.d.), has served as an important inspiration for further projects in the region. A significant turning point in the Slovak debate on disinformation came when high school teacher Juraj Smatana compiled the first list of websites spreading pro-Russian propaganda and disinformation in 2015, thus framing the debate about this issue (Šnídl 2015). Consequently, in 2016, PR expert Ján Urbančík launched the website Konšpirátori.sk (Conspirators) aiming to undercut the gains made from online advertisements on websites spreading problematic content, including disinformation. This initiative also had an international footprint since the Czech online browser Seznam.cz included it in its interface

---

[4] According to the chosen categorisation, Radovan Bránik (as a journalist) and Gregorij Mesežnikov (as an academic) should be presented separately as individuals tackling disinformation. However, they are mentioned here together since it is logical from the chronological perspective and both individuals are only examples of civic society actors in their given category.

for commercial providers (Sblog 2018). The list of websites created by Konspirátori.sk was also used by the webhosting company WebSupport, which created the Google Chrome plug-in B.S. Detector (see Chapter 5) in 2017 warning against sites spreading problematic content (Bullshit Detector, n.d.). Advanced digital means were also used in the project 'Blbec.online' (Jerk.online), which scrapes content in real time from Facebook pages known to be spreading disinformation. In so doing, it has been able to warn against those going viral since 2017 (Blbec.online, n.d.). Another noteworthy project using digital technologies to tackle disinformation is 'Checkbot', a Facebook plug-in which helps users to debunk online disinformation; it was produced by a team led by Peter Jančárik from the PR company Seesame in 2019 (Insight 2019). Several civil society initiatives approached the topic more proactively and started to challenge the spread of disinformation directly. This is the case for the group #somtu (#Iamhere), which has, since its establishment in 2017, aimed to decrease polarisation in debates on social media (Mikušovič 2017). Slovenskí elfovia (Slovak elves) started to be active in 2018 and, inspired by their Baltic counterparts, have focused on exposing trolls on social networks (Brenier 2019). As was mentioned, several initiatives tried to approach the issue of disinformation more broadly by focusing on the reasons people are led to believe it. Similarly, as in other analysed countries, educational projects were launched which focused on media literacy—'Zmudri' (Get wise) in 2018 (Zmudri, n.d.)—and raising awareness about the issue—'Infosecurity' in 2019 (Infosecurity, n.d.). Given the close link between disinformation and right-wing extremism, several initiatives were also launched aiming to deradicalise youth and counter extremist and conspiracy narratives: In 2016, the project 'Mladi proti fašismu' (Youth against fascism) (Mladi proti fašismu, n.d.) and, a year later, the project 'Sebavedome Slovensko' (Self-confident Slovakia) (Sebavedome, n.d.) were launched. One strategy used by Slovak civil society differs from other covered countries in its use of humour and sarcasm to ridicule conspiracy theories and their disseminators. The two most popular initiatives of this kind are the Facebook pages 'Preco ludem hrabe' (Why people become loony), launched in 2014, and 'Zomri' (Die), launched in 2016.

The high number of civil society activities run by smaller, informal groups is mirrored in the equally active CSOs community. The first CSO which started to focus on the issue of disinformation was Memo98, which has been monitoring the information space before elections in various

countries globally since 1998 (Memo98, n.d.). The Slovak branch of
the Open Society Fund started projects focused on tackling hate speech
in 2014 (Open Society Foundation 2015). After 2015, basically every
Slovak CSO covering security-related issues conducted at least one project
related to disinformation, mostly understood in the context of Russian
influence operations. The Slovak Security Policy Institute launched the
website Antipropaganda about this phenomenon in 2015 (Antipropa-
ganda, n.d.). The GLOBSEC Policy Institute started to be involved in
the debate on disinformation in 2015, and it became one of the beacons
of research on this issue in central Europe. Its resources allowed this
CSO to conduct several studies with an international scope, such as the
opinion poll GLOBSEC Trends which maps public opinion of security
and policy issues in Eastern European countries. It has become an impor-
tant networker, with a cross-border network of contacts, and a promoter
of the debate on disinformation—especially by putting it on the agenda
of the GLOBSEC Tatra Summit (Globsec, n.d.). In 2016, the Strategic
Policy Institute organised several public events about hybrid warfare on
NATO's eastern flank and information warfare in Ukraine (Strategic
Policy Institute, n.d.). Among the projects conducted by the Slovak
Foreign Policy Association, the most significant was the informal Slovak
Forum Against Propaganda platform, established in 2017 and which
provides a space for various activists to meet and a hub for future coop-
erative projects (Slovak Forum against Propaganda, n.d.). The Centre for
European and North Atlantic Affairs published an analysis on information
warfare as a tool of Russian foreign policy in 2017 (Centre for European
and North Atlantic Affairs 2019), and, in 2018, the Slovak branch of the
CSO People in Need launched the project 'Nenávistný skutok' (Hate-
full deed) involving lawyers prosecuting the cases of hate speech on the
Internet (Človek v ohrození, n.d.).

8.5   Summary

The ongoing activities of civil society initiatives tackling disinformation
represent an exemplary method of studying the possibilities and limi-
tations of active citizen involvement in the area of security. There is
broad consensus among experts, state servants, and politicians of the
fact that individuals, organisations, and institutions from civil society are
important players in overcoming challenges related to the current infor-
mation disorder and (in some cases) take their findings into account while

making policy decisions. Considering previous statements, it is surprising how little has been done in providing systematic accounts of civil society initiatives tackling disinformation.

Despite the number of similarities among analysed countries, the chapter presents two very different stories of the approach of civil society towards disinformation. There is a vibrant debate on this issue in Czech Republic and Slovakia, where local civil society actors not only research the topic—usually with a strong emphasis on Russian information operations—but they also are able to devise various innovative solutions; form coalitions and networks, including cross-border ones; achieve particular aims; and in some cases also influence the policymaking processes. In both countries, the issue of disinformation has become embedded in the agendas of already-existing CSOs focused on researching security-related issues, as well as in universities.

Contrariwise, for civil society in Hungary and Poland, the issue of disinformation has a rather secondary importance and does not attract much attention. For some civil society actors (mainly from media), disinformation is not perceived as an external threat but rather as product of domestic government malpractice. This may, of course, be connected to the domestic political situation in these countries. The small number of involved actors as well secondary importance of the topic complicates the building of stable coalitions among various actors, which results in a lower number of projects with less sustainability. Moreover, strategies chosen to tackle disinformation tend to be quite traditional and predetermined by the identity of the actors. The number of approaches and initiatives is instead the product of cross-border cooperation rather than genuine interest in the topic by domestic actors.

Stark differences among civil society actors in the analysed countries show that interest in the issue of disinformation and strategies to tackle this phenomenon are very much dependent on the local context. This fact should be considered when attempting to transplant these experiences with tackling disinformation to different sociopolitical contexts outside of central Europe. This chapter provides convincing evidence that a one-size-fits-all approach is not suitable even within a coherent region, and, therefore, a more nuanced approach supported by proper research is needed. Before finding common ways of tackling disinformation, it is necessary to understand national specifics and context and to be sure that all civil society actors perceive the problem in the same manner—which is not always the case, even in the rather similar countries of central Europe.

Bibliography

#JsmeTu. (#WeAreHere). (n.d.). https://www.jsmetu.org/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Anheier, H. (2013). *Civil Society: "Measurement, Evaluation, Policy"*. London: Taylor and Francis.

Antipropaganda. (n.d.). *O nás* [About Us]. https://antipropaganda.sk/o-nas/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Átlátszó. (n.d.). *About Us, Fundraising*. https://english.atlatszo.hu/about-us-fundraising/. Accessed 24 Nov 2019.

Bellingcat. (2019, June 19). *Identifying the Separatists Linked to the Downing of MH17*. UK&Europe. https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/06/19/identifying-the-separatists-linked-to-the-downing-of-mh17/. Accessed 24 Nov 2019.

Blbec.online. (n.d.). *Monitoring Extrémistov Na Sociálnych Sieťach* [Monitoring of Extremists on Social Networks]. https://blbec.online/preco. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Bránik, R. (2020). *Blog.sme.sk*. https://branik.blog.sme.sk/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Brenier, V. (2019, August 13). Slovenskí elfovia sa prihlásili k odstráneniu propagandistického videa Kotlebovcov [Slovak Elves Announced That They Are Responsible for Removal of Propagandistic Video of Kotleba's Political Party]. *INFOSECURITY.SK*. https://infosecurity.sk/domace/livia-a-elfovia/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Bullshit Detector. (n.d.). https://www.websupport.sk/en/bullshit-detector. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Caparini, M., Fluri, P., & Molnár, F. (2006). *Civil Society and the Security Sector: Concepts and Practices in New Democracies*. Münster: Lit.

Casimir Pulaski Foundation. (2019). *On Disinformation of the Margin of Warsaw Security Forum*. https://pulaski.pl/en/on-desinformation-of-the-margin-of-warsaw-security-forum-2/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Cemper, J. (2019, November 15). Projekt Fair Advertising upozorňuje na nevhodnou inzerci na konspiračních webech. Společnosti už reagují [Project Fair Advertising Draws Attention to Advertising on Conspiracy Sites. Companies Are Already Responding]. *Manipulátoři*. https://manipulatori.cz/projekt-fair-advertising-upozornuje-na-nevhodnou-inzerci-na-konspiracnich-webech-spolecnosti-uz-reaguji/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Centre for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Democracy. (n.d.). *Assessment of Kremlin's Soft Power Tools in Central Europe*. http://ceid.hu/assessment-of-kremlins-soft-power-tools-in-central-europe/. Accessed 24 Nov 2019.

Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs. (2019). *Information Warfare*. http://www.cenaa.org/en/research/information-warfare/news. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Centrum Analiz Propagandy i Dezinformacji. (n.d.). *About Foundation*. https://capd.pl/en/mission-and-goals. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Centrum Stosunków Międzynarodowych. (n.d.). *Projects*. http://csm.org.pl/en/projects. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Človek v ohrozeni. (n.d.). *Na čo slúži táto stránka* [The Purpose of This Webpage]. https://nenavistnyskutok.sk/blog/co-je-ns. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Collins, A. (2010). *Contemporary Security Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cyber Dialogue. (2019). *Cyber Dialogue: Active Citizens Against Fakes and Hatred Online*. https://www.cyberdialogue.cz/. Accessed 24 Nov 2019.

CyberDefence24. (n.d.). *Bezpieczeństwo Informacyjne CyberDefence24.Pl*. https://www.cyberdefence24.pl/bezpieczenstwo-informacyjne/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Damarad, V., & Yeliseyeu, A. (Eds.). (2018). *Disinformation Resilience Index*. Kyiv: Ukrainian Prism.

Daniel, J., & Eberle, J. (2018). Hybrid Warriors: Transforming Czech Security Through the 'Russian Hybrid Warfare' Assemblage. *Sociologicky Casopis, 54*(6), 907–931.

Demagog CZ. (n.d.). *O Nás* [About Us]. https://demagog.cz/stranka/o-nas. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Demagog PL. (n.d.). *Stowarzyszenie*. https://demagog.org.pl/stowarzyszenie-demagog-pierwsza-w-polsce-organizacja-factcheckingowa/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Demagog SK. (n.d.). *O Nás* [About Us]. https://demagog.sk/o-nas/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Deutsche Welle. (2017, June 13). Slovak pensioner blogs against neo-Nazis. https://www.dw.com/en/slovak-pensioner-blogs-against-neo-nazis/av-39626676. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Dezimatrix. (n.d.). *New Ways to Prevent Disinformation*. https://www.dezimatrix.org/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Diamond, L. J., & Morlino, L. (2005). *Assessing the Quality of Democracy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Direkt36. (n.d.). *Russian Connection*. https://www.direkt36.hu/en/category/orosz-kapcsolatok/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Dufkova, K., & Hofmeisterova, P. (Eds.). (2018). *Characteristics of Pro-Kremlin Propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe and Practical Examples How to Tackle It*. Brno: Nesehnutí.

European Commission. (2018). *Action Plan against Disinformation*. Brussels: High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

Freedom House. (2019). *Freedom in the World 2019*. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Fried, D., & Polyakova, A. (2018). *Democratic Defense Against Disinformation*. Washington: Atlantic Council.

Fundacja INFO OPS Polska. (n.d.). *Fundacja Info Ops Polska. Projekt Na Rzecz Zapewnienia Bezpieczeństwa Środowiska Informacyjnego*. http://infoops.pl/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Fundacja reporterow. (n.d.). *About Us*. https://fundacjareporterow.org/en/about-us/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Gerasymchuk, S., & Maksak, H. (2018). Ukraine: Disinformation Resilience Index. *Disinformation Resilience Index*. http://prismua.org/en/english-ukraine-disinformation-resilience-index/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Globsec. (n.d.). *Projects*. https://www.globsec.org/projects/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Gregor, M., Vejvodová, P., & Zvol si info. (2018). *Nejlepší kniha o fake news, dezinformacích a manipulacích!!!* Praha: CPRESS.

Hajdu, D., & Klingová, K. (2018). *From Online Battlefield to Loss of Trust? Perceptions and Habits of Youth in Eight European Countries*. Bratislava: GLOBSEC Policy Institute.

HOAX.CZ. (n.d.). https://hoax.cz/cze/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Infosecurity. (n.d.). *O Stránke* [About the Webpage]. https://infosecurity.sk/o-stranke/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Insight. (2019, March 27). *Checkbot je slovenský chatbot, který lidem pomáhá odhalovat fake news* [Checkbot Is Slovak Chatbot, Which Helps to Debunk Fake News]. https://www.insight.cz/2019/03/27/checkbot-je-slovensky-chatbot-ktery-lidem-pomaha-odhalovat-fake-news/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Institute for Politics and Society. (n.d.). *Member—Roman Máca*. https://www.politikaspolecnost.cz/en/who-we-are/roman-maca-2/#main. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

IVO. (n.d.). *Inštitút pre verejné otázky* [Institute for Public Affairs]. http://www.ivo.sk/165/sk/pracovnici/grigorij-meseznikov. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Janda, J., & Víchová, V. (Eds.). (2018). The Prague Manual. *Kremlin Watch*. https://www.kremlinwatch.eu/our-reports/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Jeden svět na školách. (n.d.). *Publikace a metodické příručky k mediálnímu vzdělávání* [Publications and Methodical Materials for Media Literacy]. https://www.jsns.cz/projekty/medialni-vzdelavani/materialy/publikace. Accessed 3 February 2020.

K-Monitor. (2019). *Outriders Meetup in Budapest: Disinformation*. https://www.kmonitor.hu/article/20190316-outriders-meetup-in-budapest-disinformation. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Kohút, M., & Rychnovská, D. (2018). The Battle for Truth: Mapping the Network of Information War Experts in the Czech Republic. *New Perspectives, 26*(3), 1–37.

Kontakt 24. (n.d.). *O Serwisie*. https://kontakt24.tvn24.pl/o-serwisie.htm. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Kremlin Watch. (2018). 2018 Ranking of Countermeasures by the EU28 to the Kremlin's Subversion Operations. *European Values*. https://www.europeanvalues.net/vyzkum/2018-ranking-countermeasures-eu28-kremlins-subversion-operations/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Kundra, O. (2015, February 28). Putinův hlas v Česku [Putin's Voice in Czechia]. *Respekt*. https://www.respekt.cz/z-noveho-cisla/putinuv-hlas-v-cesku. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Manipulátoři. (2020). *Manipulátoři.cz mají nový web a chystají rozšíření* [Manipulatori.cz Has New Website and Prepares Extension]. https://manipulatori.cz/manipulatori-cz-maji-novy-web-a-chystaji-rozsireni/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Memo98. (n.d.). *About Us*. http://memo98.sk/p/o-nas. Accessed 13 Jan 2021.

Mikušovič, D. (2017, June 27). #Somtu: Ako Mladí Slováci Prinášajú Slušnosť a Fakty Do Nenávistných Diskusií [#IamHere: How Young Slovaks Bring Politeness and Facts in Hateful Discussions]. *Denník N*. https://dennikn.sk/792819/somtu-ako-mladi-slovaci-prinasaju-slusnost-a-fakty-do-nenavistnych-diskusii/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic. (2016). National Security Audit.

Mladi proti fašismu. (n.d.). *O projekte* [About project]. https://mladiprotifasizmu.sk/o-projekte/. Accessed 13 Jan 2021.

Nadace OSF. (n.d.). *Podpořené Projekty* [Supported Projects]. https://osf.cz/podporene-projekty/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Nadační fond nezávislé žurnalistiky. (n.d.). *Již ukončené projekty* [Completed Projects]. https://www.nfnz.cz/podporene-projekty/jiz-ukoncene-projekty/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Neovlivní. (2016). *Databáze proruského obsahu od A-Z* [Database of Pro-Russian Content from A to Z]. https://neovlivni.cz/databaze-proruskeho-obsahu-od-a-z/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Nimmo, B. (2015). The Case for Information Defence: A Pre-emptive Strategy for Dealing with the New Disinformation Wars. In Legatum Institute (Ed.), *Information at War: From China's Three Warfares to NATO's Narratives*.

Nutil, P. (2018). *Média, lži a příliš rychlý mozek: Průvodce postpravdivým světem* [Media, Lies and Too Fast Brain: Guideline Through Post-Factual World]. Praha: Grada.

OKO.press. (n.d.). *Propaganda*. https://oko.press/tag-rzeczowy/propaganda/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Open Society Foundation. (2015). *SAY IT TO MY FACE Campaign*. https://osf.sk/en/aktuality/kampan-povedz-mi-to-do-oci/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Palacky University Olomouc. (2019). *Euforka: UP a další vysoké školy chtějí lépe informovat o Evropě* [Euforka: UP and Other Universities Want to Better Communicate About Europe]. https://www.upol.cz/nc/zpravy/zprava/clanek/euforka-up-a-dalsi-vysoke-skoly-chteji-lepe-informovat-o-evrope/. Accessed 24 Nov 2019.

Partycypacja Obywatelska. (2019, February 14). Wojownicy Klawiatury – społeczność w walce z fake newsami [Wojownicy Klawiatury—Community Fighting with Fake News]. https://partycypacjaobywatelska.pl/wojownicy-klawiatury-spolecznosc-w-walce-z-fake-newsami/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Pesenti, M., & Pomerantsev, P. (2016). *How to Stop Disinformation*. Legatum Institute. https://lif.blob.core.windows.net/lif/docs/default-source/publications/how-to-stop-disinformation-lessons-from-ukraine-for-the-wider-world.pdf?sfvrsn=0. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Prague Security Studies Institute. (n.d.). *Russia's Influence Activities in CEE*. http://www.pssi.cz/russia-s-influence-activities-in-cee. Accessed 3 February 2020.

Political Capital. (2019). *Conspiracy Theories and Fake News*. https://www.politicalcapital.hu/conspiracy_theories_and_fake_news.php. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Poljakov, N., Prchal, L., & Zelenka, J. (2017). *Dezinformace: co pro vás znamenají lži?* [Disinformation: What Do Lies Mean to You?]. https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/valka-dezinformace-fake-news/r~7bfb35b23bb311e7886d002590604f2e/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Řehka, K. (2017). *Informační válka* [Information War]. Praha: Academia.

Romea. (2018, November 5). *Czech Internet Trolls Have Competition—"Elves" Are Combating Disinformation and Propaganda*. http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/czech-internet-trolls-have-competition-elves-are-combating-disinformation-and-propaganda. Accessed 24 Nov 2019.

Rozsypal, M. (2019, October 9). *Alvarová: Lež je pro každého vždy něčím sexy a vždy je atraktivnější než pravda* [Lie Is Always Sexy for Everyone and Always More Attractive Than the Truth]. *iRozhlas*. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zivotni-styl/spolecnost/alexandra-alvarova-prpaganda-dezinformace-fake-news_1910091950_pj. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Sblog. (2018, February 2). *Sklik nabídne klientům možnost neinzerovat na webech označených iniciativou Konšpirátori.sk jako dezinformační* [Sklik Will Offer Clients the Option Not to Advertise on Websites Identified as a Disinformation by Konspirátori.sk]. https://blog.seznam.cz/2018/02/sklik-nabidne-klientum-moznost-neinzerovat-webech-oznacenych-iniciativou-konspiratori-sk-jako-dezinformacni/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Sebavedome. (n.d.). *O Nás* [About us]. http://sebavedome.sk/o-nas/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Semantic Visions. (2019). *Semantic Visions Wins $250,000 Tech Challenge to Combat Disinformation.* https://semantic-visions.com/semantic-visions-wins-250000-tech-challenge-to-combat-disinformation/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Slovak Forum against Propaganda. (n.d.). http://www.sfpa.sk/projects/slovenske-forum-proti-propagande/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

StopFake. (n.d.a). *O nás* [About us]. https://www.stopfake.org/cz/o-nas-2/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

StopFake. (n.d.b). *Najnowsze informacje o nas.* https://www.stopfake.org/pl/category/najnowsze-informacje-o-nas/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Strategic Policy Institute. (n.d.). *Projects.* https://stratpol.sk/projects/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Šnídl, V. (2015, February 26). Proruskú propagandu o zhýralom Západe u nás šíri 42 webov [Pro-Russian Propaganda About the Decadent West Is Spreading Through 42 Websites]. *Denník N.* https://dennikn.sk/57740/prorusku-propagandu-o-zhyralom-zapade-u-nas-siri-42-webov/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Táborský, J. (2019). *V síti (dez)informací* [In the Network of (Dis)Information)]. Praha: Grada.

Transitions. (2018). *Debunking Disinformation at Third Age Universities.* https://www.tol.org/client/project/27365-debunking-disinformation-at-third-age-universities.html. Accessed 24 Nov 2019.

Urbanlegends.hu. (n.d.). http://www.urbanlegends.hu/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Warsaw Institute. (2018). *In the Age of Post-Truth: Best Practices in Fighting Disinformation.* https://warsawinstitute.org/age-post-truth-best-practices-fighting-disinformation/. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Winkler, M., & Pazdersky, M. (n.d.). Používej MoZeK [Use the Brain]. *Moravská zemská knihovna.* https://www.mzk.cz/pouzivej-mozek. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

WirtualneMedia. (2019, October 11). *Fundacja otwarty dialog złożyła 20 pozwów. Chce 1,7 mln Zł od TVP, Polskiego Radia, Fratrii, Sakiewicza i Polityków PiS.* https://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artykul/fundacja-otwarty-dialog-zlozyla-w-sumie-20-pozwow-m-in-tvp-polskie-radio-fratrie-i-tomasza-sakiewicza?fbclid=IwAR0omUMPalg-vkdEna8qZ9-8576fqBAiqhCkkUn-fJnEful5KygVP7-VkPk. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.

Zmudri. (n.d.). *Nauč Sa Veci Potrebné Pre Život* [Learn Things Important for Life]. https://zmudri.sk/#section-about-project. Accessed 3 Feb 2020.