

European Elections 2019

Summary

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- The aim of the research project was to describe how Czech websites known to be spreading manipulative content reported on the European Parliamentary elections and the European Union in general. The project took place within the six weeks before the European Parliament elections of 2019.
- In total, 984 texts about the EU were published on the 31 analysed websites. Within the observed period, the number of articles related to this topic remained more or less constant. However, it soared significantly in the week before the elections.
- No dominant topic appeared on the monitored websites. They usually discussed the same events as the mainstream media (such as the 15th anniversary of the Czech Republic joining the EU, the different quality of food products among various states, or the rise of populist movements across Europe). However, the interpretation of these events was usually biased and one-sided.
- The specific topics on the monitored websites (meaning these that did not get significant coverage in the mainstream media) were statements by Western politicians related to the topic of migration (specifically quotes from French President Emmanuel Macron and Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven were discussed). Another topic was the questioning of the economic benefits of EU membership for the Czech Republic (often based on incorrectly interpreted data from economist Thomas Piketty).
- The number of disinformation campaigns that appeared before the elections was minimal; the most prominent one stated that the EU had supposedly distributed debit cards in the total value of 2 billion euros to migrants. This disinformation campaign was published by the websites Megazine and AC24.
- The eight most popular websites spreading manipulative content published 207 articles related to the European elections. The most active was the website Parlamentní listy, that published 128 articles. For all the analysed websites, the elections were a secondary topic of interest.

ČESKÉ V ĚŘE DEZINFORMACÍ VOLBY

- The majority of articles described the pre-election campaign (covering, for example, interviews with candidates or debates that took place on Czech television). Among the most prominent topics was the demonstration in Prague organized by extreme right-wing SPD, the different quality of food in various countries of the EU, and the dispute between member of the European Parliament Kateřina Konečná (from extreme left KSČM) and the party SPD, on the issue of the vote on refugee quotas in the European Parliament.
- The SPD was the most frequently mentioned party (92 articles). Candidates of this party were also often cited (46 cases). The website Nová republika, whose editor Ivan David was also the frontrunner of SPD, provided exclusive media space for this party.
- Another frequently cited party was the KSČM (54 mentions in total from which 15 were citations), whose party members received the most media space on Russian state-owned news website Sputnik CZ (7 texts).
- Other subjects were mentioned less frequently and mostly in negative connotations.