



Zbyněk Tarant

Analysis of Antisemitic Trends in Czech Websites between 1999 and 2022

Ideological Background, Geolocation, Transparency, and Attitudes on the Russian-Ukrainian War

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Abstract: This article provides an original and up-to-date overview of the main trends in Czech online antisemitism by analysing aggregated data from multiple surveys made by the author, which cover two decades spanning from the pioneering era of the Czech internet in the late 1990s to 2022. The study has noted some profound changes in the main sources of contemporary Czech antisemitism – from various flavours of the far-right in the mid-2000s to conspiracy narratives without a clear Left-Right distinction since the mid-2010s. This new generation of antisemitic websites was found to have a longer lifespan and significantly larger audiences while operating with a higher degree of self-confidence from all regions of the country. A strongly pro-Kremlin inclination was found to be a significant feature of almost all antisemitic websites in the country to the extent that they were directly impacted by the February 2022



government crackdown against “pro-Kremlin disinformation platforms”. The aftermath of this crackdown is discussed in the final chapter.

Keywords: Czech Republic; antisemitism; cyberhate; internet; website disinformation; conspiracism

Introduction

This article aims to map the main trends of Czech online antisemitism by analysing hundreds of anti-semitic websites in the Czech language over the past twenty years. According to the Annual Reports on Antisemitic Manifestations published by the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities, almost 98% of all antisemitic incidents reported in the country take place online, and the total rates have been increasing in the last three years (FŽO 2022). This makes it all the more important to acquire accurate data about the size, influence, geographical distribution, geopolitical inclinations or main ideological background of the antisemitic scene. While the main research focus of online antisemitism is currently shifting towards analyses of social media (“Web 2.0. & 3.0.”), including the implementation of artificial intelligence and deep learning algorithms as performed by the Decoding Antisemitism project, for example (Becker and Allington 2021), the “Web 1.0.” or the scene of “traditional” websites and blogs are far from having said their last word. As this article shows, they continue to play the role of essential antisemitic content producers and conveyors to such an extent that the phenomenon has raised national security concerns.

The Czech Republic, or Czechia, is traditionally considered to be a safe home for its small¹ Jewish community with relatively low levels of antisemitism. However, this popular notion may cause the country to be somewhat overlooked in surveys, where limited budgets force researchers to prioritise other countries despite the fact that Czechia is comparable in terms of its population to Hungary or Sweden. In combination with the linguistic barrier, this may lead to a certain research gap. The last ADL survey in the Czech Republic was performed in 2014 (ADL 2019) and, while there are other more recent surveys (European

Commission 2019; Wike et al. 2019, 86–87), most were performed before the Covid-19 pandemic. The only comparative survey by an international agency performed during the pandemic was published by the Hungarian-based think-tank Tom Lantós Institute in 2022 and has noted increased latent susceptibility rates to antisemitic content in the majority population, namely in connection to Holocaust remembrance and conspiracy theories in all Visegrád Four countries, including Czechia (Gliszczyńska-Grabias et al. 2022). The country is expected to be included in the upcoming Fundamental Rights Agency survey,² but its results were not yet available by this article’s deadline.

The issue of defining antisemitism

According to the so-called IHRA Working Definition, “antisemitism” is defined as: “certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews” (IHRA 2016). The more recent, somewhat competing Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA) defines the phenomenon as: “[d]iscrimination, prejudice, hostility or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish)” (JDA 2021). Both definitions have their supporters and critics to the extent that the decision to prefer one definition over another may be seen in certain milieus as a manifestation of the author’s political stance (Harrison 2022; Steinberg 2022; Shamir 2023; Hirsh 2017). The reason for this is mainly due to the annexes to these definitions, which manifest contradictory opinions regarding certain issues, such as antisemitism in anti-Israel rhetoric, where the IHRA definition is considered to be stricter in its response to delegitimation, demonisation and double standards vis-à-vis Israel as well as calls for boycotts, as opposed to JDA. In the Czech Republic, the IHRA definition has been adopted by the Czech Parliament in 2019 as a legally non-binding declaration (AJC 2019), yet its adoption

1 The size of the “core Jewish population” in the Czech Republic is estimated to be in the lower units of thousands of persons. (DellaPergola 2019)

2 See the previous one at: (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2014)

within academia remains contentious depending on the personal political preferences of each individual scholar.³

The Czech Federation of Jewish Communities which is the central institution representing Czech Jews, has adopted the IHRA definition, a full citation of which is provided in the introduction to each of its Annual Reports on Antisemitic Manifestations. In order to enable mutual compatibility, the preference to IHRA is also kept in this study. The case of the Czech Republic is peculiar in that the majority of antisemitic incidents in the country would likely be seen as antisemitic under both of the definitions, since the “grey-zone” cases of anti-Israeli criticism exceeding the threshold of antisemitism, as defined by Nathan Sharansky’s “3D-test” (Sharansky 2004), for example, represent a small, albeit recently growing minority of incidents (FŽO 2022). Given these qualitative characteristics and the dominant ideological background of Czech antisemitic websites (see 2.1), dropping the IHRA and using JDA or other definitions (e.g. Nexus Task Force 2021) would have little to no impact on this study’s validity or general conclusions.

Methods of Data Collection

Attempting to probe the entire online antisemitic scene seems like a daunting task and, in most countries and linguistic contexts, this would indeed be the case. The Czech Republic is very specific in that the country is relatively small in terms of population size (10.5 million), and its language (i.e. Czech) is rarely used outside the state’s geographical boundaries, let alone in antisemitic contexts. Making use of these unique factors and clear linguistic borders allows one to create a map of the entire scene of antisemitic websites in the Czech language and even to repeat this task over the course of multiple years.

The main focus is the scene of antisemitic “websites” as the more traditional form of the online medium. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a “website” as: “a set of pages of information on the internet about a particular subject, published by a single person or organisation” (“Website” 2022). The aspect of being published by a “single person or organisation” is crucial, as this study intends to learn more about the “persons” or “organisations” from the nature of the “particular subject” they deliberately publish on their websites. I further define an “antisemitic website” as “any website that has published at least two articles or posts during its lifetime that can be, beyond reasonable doubt, evaluated as antisemitic according to the IHRA definition adopted above”. One antisemitic article could still be discarded as a random mishap, editorial mistake or vandalism, yet, two or even more are usually a sign of systematic editorial policy.

This study summarises the results of eight content analyses of Czech antisemitic websites performed between 2006 and 2022, which were further extrapolated by Excel macros to generate a smooth timeline over the entire time-period. Additional historical records (Who.Is records, old links, Wayback Machine, references in fanzines) made it possible to further extrapolate the data and estimate the main trends since 1999, which was still a rather pioneering era of the Czech internet. Due to the frequent lack of a clear distinction between certain “websites” and blogs within the antisemitic scene, the latter were also included under the definition of website (some blogs may serve as a replacement for party websites, etc.).

In an attempt to draw a comprehensive picture of the entire scene of Czech antisemitic websites, several important hubs within the scene were identified during pre-research using a combination of keyword searches, reports from colleagues and informants, media reports, field discoveries (e.g. URLs in protest banners), as well as third-party lists and reports on political extremism or antisemitism, some of which are quoted below. From these starting points, links recommending other websites were

3 For an example of the negative reception of a work using the IHRA definition in the Czech Republic, see: (Bartlová 2022)

manually followed using the snowball method during each of the eight surveys. This was possible thanks to the fact that the majority of websites on the Czech antisemitic scene still tend to maintain dedicated sections with links to recommended like-minded websites, usually titled as: “links”, “cooperation”, “we support”, “our friends”, “friendly voices”, etc. These are links that are hard-coded into the websites’ core structure by their editors and, as such, are records of interactions and decisions made during website design and maintenance. From an anthropological perspective, the exchange of links within the online scene can be seen as a form of reciprocity and a potential source of social capital (Schechter and Yuskavage 2012; Schnegg 2006; Pelaprat and Brown 2012; Molm 2010), here in the form of higher search engine ratings (Google PageRank) or increased status within the scene. In order to visually track down the progress of the highly complex task and map the relationships between the particular websites, Visone software for Social Network Analysis (SNA) developed at the University of Konstanz was used (Baur et al. 2002; University of Konstanz 2022).

Relevant texts and statements within texts were identified by limiting the Google search to a particular website and using sets of keywords (e.g. “keyword site:https://www.website.com”). The vocabularies of keywords used for the identification of antisemitism are still in development (Jíkeli et al. 2021; Mikulášek 2021), but in the Czech case, the most effective keywords in rough order of relevance were found to be the following: Žid (Jew), Izrael (Israel), Sionismus (Zionism), Globalismus (Globalism), Chazar (Khazar), NWO (New World Order), Nový světový řád (ditto), Holokaust (Holocaust), Zednáři (Freemasons), Ilumináti (Illuminati), Palestina (Palestine). The fact that this particular selection of keywords yielded the most relevant antisemitic results (while others did not, such as “Khaibar” used in Islamic references) does indeed already testify to some of the qualitative characteristics of Czech antisemitism, which is dominated by conspiracy narratives. Using the keywords made it possible to narrow down the amount of text that needed to be manu-

ally processed for each website and locate key points of the corpus, in which the context and attitude of the author can be evaluated for the final decision whether to include the article’s hosting website into this study as “antisemitic” or not. About four hundred websites were excluded after this stage.

Only articles approved and published by the editors as part of the body of the website were considered to be decisive for the website’s inclusion in the list. User comments were not taken into account and were disregarded, even when they appeared in the search results for some websites. This is because not all of the websites in question have comment sections, which would lead to inconsistencies in data. Antisemitism in readers’ comments deserves its own dedicated study with its own set of methods (e.g.: Becker 2021).

Background research on each newly discovered antisemitic website was performed by using rudimentary methods of OSINT (“open-source intelligence”). The abbreviation refers to the mining of online data and information that the subjects of investigation themselves willingly publish in publicly accessible venues (websites of companies and political parties, public social media profiles of politicians, legal documents of e-shops, etc.) or publicly accessible databases (Czech Business Registry, Who.is, EuRID, Archive.org, Google Maps, etc.). The collected data were used for building aggregated statistics of the scene, such as gender ratio, the changing tendency of the editors towards remaining anonymous, or average website lifespan. This method of collecting background information was particularly important in the case of geolocation, where the goal was to manually locate the place from which the websites are actually physically operated by their editors using contextual data provided by OSINT to avoid sole dependence on inaccurate domain registry records or unreliable IP geolocation.

Findings

Total Numbers of Antisemitic Websites in the Country

During the two decades between 1999 and 2022, this research discovered 292 websites in the Czech language that could be labelled as antisemitic. The majority of antisemitic websites in the Czech language between 1999 and 2022 would fall under the label “Conspiracism” (165 out of 292, or 57 %), followed by the diverse streams and factions of the radical right-wing (108 out of 292, or 37 %). Out of the labels used in this article, the term “Conspiracism & Esotericism” may require further definition. Coined in 1985 by Frank P. Mintz (1985), the term refers to an esoteric, quasi-religious worldview that the world is ruled by supreme, omnipotent conspiracies. While Mintz originally coined the term in reference to the American far-right movement *Liberty Lobby*, it today refers to wider cluster of political and esoteric ideologies without clear left-wing or right-wing allegiance, yet still notable for their almost quasi-religious nature and esoteric methodology (astrology, numerology, alternative medicine etc.). Within this cluster of websites and their ideologies, omnipotent conspiracies represent the “rejected knowledge” (Hanegraaff 2013) available only to those, who are initiated enough to be able to read the hidden clues. Typical western examples of this phenomenon, which brings together postmodern Western Esotericism with political extremism, would be the QAnon movement⁴ or the personalities of David Icke and Alex Jones (Smith 2018).

Other ideological milieus were less important in the Czech context, such as Christian traditionalism (14 out of 292, or 5 %) or the left-wing (3 out of 292, or 1 %). The rather low representation of the far-left may feel surprising to some, but even the Jewish Community noted in its 2021 report that: “Followers of the far left traditionally maintain a very critical stance on Israel, which however meets the criteria of the definition of antisemitism only in certain

cases” (FŽO 2022, 85). While there were some anti-semitic incidents linked to the Muslim community in the past, no specifically Islamic or Islamist website hosting antisemitic content was found in the Czech language, so the category was excluded from the results. For example, there was a Czech branch of the Radio Islam website in the 2000s, yet the Czech version was in fact run by a neo-Nazi sympathiser who was only using Radio Islam’s free web-hosting at the time to convey neo-Nazi and Holocaust denial literature without any references to Islamic teachings (Tarant 2010).

Not all of the 292 antisemitic websites were active at the same time. The lifespan of each website is influenced by a wide range of internal and external factors (budget, motivation, technology, time, health, relationships within the scene, etc.). By comparing the dates of each website’s establishment (using either Wayback Machine snapshots or author’s own archival records and website snapshots) with the date of either their last activity or complete shutdown, the mean lifetime of an antisemitic website in the Czech language was calculated to be about 6.7 years. The longevity was shortest for right-wing websites (4.8 years), while a typical conspiracist website manages to remain active with regular updates for two years more (6.6 years) before being abandoned or deleted altogether. The averages for Christian traditionalist (10 years, 14 websites) and far-left (5.6 years, 3 websites) should be interpreted carefully considering the small size of the relevant sub-samples. Two antisemitic websites in Czechia have been in existence for an outstanding 23 years since 1999, while 56 websites (mostly far-right and neo-Nazi blogs) were shut down or abandoned only after a single year or just several months of activity.

Taking longevity into account and projecting it onto a timeline (see Figure 1), it can be concluded that after the initial boom of the 2000s, the yearly numbers of active antisemitic websites in the Czech Republic stabilised between 100 and 150 during the 2010s with a peak in 2015. There were 120 active Czech antisemitic websites in 2022 when this article was completed. Figure 1 shows numbers of active

⁴ There were Czech conspiracist websites directly promoting QAnon, such as: <http://kresadlo.com>, <http://tadesco.org>

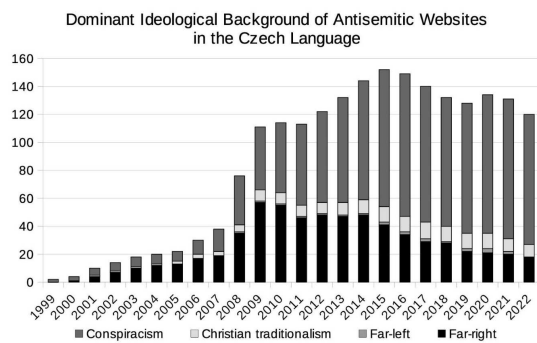


Fig. 1: Dominant ideological background of antisemitic websites in the Czech language, 1989-2022. Note the declining role of the far-right combined with the growth of Conspiracy after 2010.

websites each year, along with their prevailing ideological background. Noteworthy is the changing role of the far-right (category “right-wing”), which dominated the antisemitic scene until 2010; its importance then began to fade away in favour of conspiracist websites.

There were two significant growth periods in which dozens of new websites were established. The first was in the late 2000s in which the peak of far-right activity correlated with the growth of broadband penetration following the break-up of the state monopoly on internet connections. To quote exact statistics – according to the International Telecommunication Union, the number of internet users in the country almost doubled from 35 to 64 percent in the four years between 2005 and 2009. Throughout the next decade, it slowly progressed to 81 percent in 2020 (ITU 2022). The growth of internet penetration further coincided with the global boom of the blogosphere, which allowed the decentralisation of online self-presentation without the need for sophisticated IT skills. According to the former product manager of the leading Czech blogging service Blog.cz Jiří Vojáček, there were hundreds of thousands of active blogs in the Czech language between 2008 and 2010 on his company’s platform alone (Vojáček 2020). The several dozen antisemitic blogs thus represented only a tiny drop in the vast ocean of the Czech blogosphere. Social media came only later, but a spokesperson for Facebook for example announced an increase “from around 300,000

users in January 2009 to just over 2 million users now [in January 2010]” (Borufka 2010). The internal dynamics of the scene contributed to this growth as well. Annual Reports on Political Extremism from 2007-2009 showed a temporary increase in both events organised by far-right groups, crimes with an extremist subtext, as well as crimes with an anti-semitic subtext, peaking in 2009 (MVČR 2021). This increased period of activity was marked by notorious neo-Nazi marches in 2007 to the Jewish Town in Prague on the anniversary of the Reichspogrom (Associated Press 2007), by the Great Synagogue in Pilsen in 2008 (Spritzer 2008), and culminating in the violent anti-Roma riots in the streets of Litvínov-Janov on the anniversary of the Velvet Revolution on 17 November 2008 (Der Spiegel 2008).

The second growth period came in the mid 2010s with a peak in 2014 and 2015, during which the total numbers of antisemitic websites in the Czech language peaked at 151 unique sites. The main triggering events were the first Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014, the Refugee Crisis and Israel’s “Operation Cast Lead”. Suddenly, a temporary growth of verbal antisemitic manifestations was reported at the time both by the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities (FŽO 2016) as well as the Ministry of the Interior in its annual reports on political extremism (MVČR 2016, 38). The same institution had already noted the strongly pro-Russian inclination of newly emerging “alternative news sites” (MVČR 2016, 22), which will be discussed below. There was one additional, smaller peak that came between 2019 and 2021, when the activity of anti-vaxxers within the conspiracist scene culminated.

Influence and Audience of Czech Antisemitic Websites

Not all websites are created equal, and some are more influential than others. But how many readers do antisemitic Czech websites attract in the first

place? To acquire at least a rough estimate, data from the SimilarWeb (Similarweb 2022) were used for each of the websites that was previously identified as antisemitic. Three-month visitor averages were calculated for this article, using data from August, September and October 2022. In total, antisemitic websites in the Czech language received about 8 million visits per month, yet this traffic was very unevenly distributed – 3.9 million, i.e. almost half of all the total traffic in Autumn 2022, was taken by the top-five most visited websites. A total of 7 million visitors (87.5%) was allocated to the top twenty websites. The average antisemitic website from the right-wing category, which also includes neo-Nazi sites, receives between units of thousands to tens of thousands of monthly visits. The majority of the most frequently visited antisemitic websites belongs to the category of “Conspiracism”. Out of the 120 active antisemitic websites in 2022, about 53 received less than 5 thousand monthly visits, rendering them too obscure for SimilarWeb to even measure.

The number of visits cannot be directly translated into the amount of actual users. One user may visit the site multiple times during a month, and traffic can be also influenced by the activity of search engines and other kinds of automated crawlers. A relative comparison with some established websites may provide a better picture. For example, the largest mainstream news sites in the country such as iDnes.cz or the websites of Czech Television attracted up to eighty million monthly visits according to SimilarWeb during the same time-period. Slightly more niche news outlets in the Czech Republic, such as the liberal *Forum 24* or the Eurosceptic *Parlamentní listy* received between five to ten million monthly visits at the time. In this regard, most of the antisemitic websites feel more like niche venues, some of which fall directly into the category of obscure personal blogs. Nonetheless, there are large conspiracist portals whose influence and impact should not be underestimated, such as CZ24.cz, which can attract around 1.3 million monthly visits (although 70% of them from Slovakia), AC24, with 840 thousand monthly visits, or

Asian European News (a.k.a. *Aeronet*), with about 650 thousand monthly visits.

Where visitor statistics make it possible to estimate the external influence of the websites among the general public, the percentage of incoming links (*indegree*) provides additional insight into the website’s authority as a content source for other creators within the scene. The table in Figure 2 was compiled by combining two lists of the top-twenty antisemitic websites in the Czech Republic – the top-twenty by average monthly visitors according to SimilarWeb and the top-twenty by *indegree* value calculated by using Visone software during the last survey in August 2022. There was a roughly fifty percent overlap between the two resulting lists, which means that some websites were leading the lists both in terms of incoming links and visitor traffic (such as the conspiracist sites *Aeronet*, *Protiproud*, *AC24* or *Zvědavec*), but others excelled only in one of the two values. A case in point would be the neo-Nazi intellectual blog *Deliandiver*, which has a highly dedicated fanbase and ranks among the most linked far-right websites of all time in the country, yet fails to attract visitors from outside the far-right niche. The opposite example would be the website *CZ24*. Despite being launched just two years prior, it established itself as one of the most frequently visited conspiracist websites in the country in the autumn of 2022, yet is not as often linked to by other conspiracist websites as one would expect for a medium of such size and audience. This may correlate with the fact that about 2/3 of the traffic was coming from neighbouring Slovakia. It may also be argued that *CZ24* served as a content aggregator and one-way funnel from within the scene into the general public, as almost all of its articles and posts are taken from elsewhere.

Visitor statistics directly translate into political influence and advertising revenue. A 2016 survey by the state radio broadcasting agency *Český Rozhlas* (Czech Radio) revealed that the content produced by “disinformation websites” has a higher degree of sharing on social media than regular news from mainstream media (Kočí 2016). All this in a country

Website link	Ideological background	Indegree (%)*	Average monthly visits
			(SimilarWeb)
http://cz24.news	Conspiracism	0.725	1 300 000
http://ac24.cz	Conspiracism	0.870	837 000
http://aeronet.news	Conspiracism	1.159	650 333
http://tadesco.org	Conspiracism	1.159	601 600
http://protiproud.info	Conspiracism	1.449	526 500
http://pravvyprostor.net	Right-wing	1.159	456 300
http://pravnipravvy.cz	Conspiracism	0.870	449 300
http://zvedavec.news	Conspiracism	1.739	367 800
http://pokec24.cz	Conspiracism	0.145	275 360
http://otevrisvoumysl.cz	Conspiracism	0.435	219 000
http://pravdive.eu	Conspiracism	0.580	178 100
http://svobodny-vysilac.cz	Conspiracism	1.159	170 200
http://necenzurovanapravda.cz	Conspiracism	0.290	165 000
http://cesykysobe.cz	Conspiracism	0.290	121 900
http://infokury.cz	Conspiracism	0.145	112 300
http://skotypravda.cz	Conspiracism	0.870	104 700
http://novarepublika.online	Conspiracism	1.739	101 300
http://duseahvezdy.cz	Christian traditionalism	0.145	94 200
http://aluska.org	Conspiracism	0.145	86 900
http://tedum.cz/	Christian traditionalism	0.000	83 000
http://leva-net.webnode.cz/	Conspiracism	1.014	57 600
http://czechfreepress.info	Conspiracism	0.725	43 500
http://outsidermedia.cz	Conspiracism	1.449	32 500
http://svobodne-radio.cz/	Conspiracism	0.725	30 800
http://stripkyzesveta.cz	Conspiracism	0.725	25 200
http://deliandiver.org	Right-wing	1.884	14 800
http://nepodvoleni.cz/	Conspiracism	0.725	9 500
http://news.e-republika.cz	Conspiracism	0.725	5 900
http://alternativa.news	Conspiracism	1.304	<5000
http://aliancenarodnichsil.cz	Conspiracism	0.580	<5000

Source: SimilarWeb (averages between August-September 2022)

*The higher the number, the higher percentage of incoming links the website received from within the network (data were valid up to August 2022)

Fig. 2:

Most influential antisemitic websites in the Czech Republic – combination of SimilarWeb three-month average visitor statistics from Autumn 2022 and percentage of incoming links within the network (indegree) from the same time-period.

where elections are often won by a thin margin. The presidential elections in 2018 were decided “by a margin of just over 150,000 votes.” Having analysed publicly available business records, Filip Brokeš calculated that AC24, which is the second most influential platform according to Figure 2: “posted 100,000 Czech Crowns (\$4,000 USD) in profits [in 2015]”. In 2017, that increased to 1,100,000 Czech Crowns (\$44,000 USD)” (Brokeš 2019). The third most influential website on the same list, *Aeronet*, made 2 million Czech Crowns (\$90,000 USD) in profits according to a 2018 report (Kundra 2018b).

Secrecy and Transparency of Czech Antisemitic Websites

The Czech justice system adheres to the concept of ‘militant democracy’, according to which certain limits on free speech are permissible in order to curb incitement and protect democratic order (Výborný 2013: 36–47; Rosenfeld and Sajó 2013). As a result, different website creators may take additional measures to protect their privacy, while others may feel secure enough to publish their content under their real names. Some creators may also be attempting

Predominant ideology	Total	Identity disclosure			Country jurisdiction / location		
		Disclosed	Not disclosed	Unverifiable	Czechia	United States	Others
Conspiracism	166	95	71	-	120	40	6
right-wing / far-right	109	28	75	6	36	66	7
Christian							
traditionalism	14	11	3	-	11	3	-
left-wing / far-left	3	3	-	-	3	-	-
Total	292	137	149	6	170	109	13

Fig. 3: Antisemitic websites in the Czech Republic and their attitude to identity disclosure and choice of country jurisdiction.

to avoid Czech criminal jurisdiction by running websites from abroad in a bid to protect their sites from being taken down by a court order. The choices they make can provide additional insight into the modus operandi of the specific subsections of the Czech antisemitic scene and, to some extent, this can indicate their level of self-confidence. Different attitudes were discovered in this regard, especially between Conspiracism and the far-right.

As is apparent from the table in Figure 3, an editor or webmaster of a conspiracist, antisemitic website is twice as likely to be transparent in the disclosure of his or her identity as compared to a right-wing one in the Czech Republic. This may point to a higher degree of self-confidence among conspiracists in contrast to the far-right, where neo-Nazis especially have faced criminal prosecution in several notorious cases. In contrast, some of the conspiracist websites are openly linked to established businesses (press and advertising agencies, esoterica e-shops, spiritual counselling, etc.) or civic and religious associations with addresses readily visible in the Czech Business Registry. Such a high degree of self-confidence seems to have stalled only in 2019, when the trend reversed and the ratios of anonymously run websites started to increase among conspiracists as well.

There have indeed been cases of extremely secretive conspiracist website editors meticulously hiding behind fake postal addresses or aliases and responding in an outright violent manner to any attempts to uncover their identity. In one of the most notorious cases, investigative journalists from Czech Television managed to uncover an extremely secretive editor (nickname “Vedoucí kolotoče”) of one of the most influential antisemitic websites in the

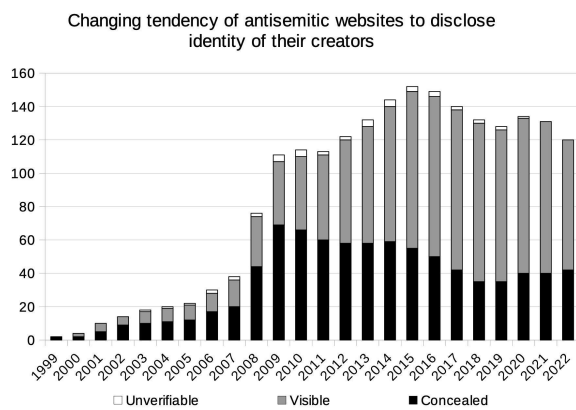


Fig. 4: Changing tendency of antisemitic websites in the Czech language to disclose the identity of their creators between 1999 and 2022. Note the decline of secrecy during the 2010s and its subsequent increase since 2018.

country (Aeronet) as a certain Marek Pešl (Snopová 2020), after previous attempts by different investigative teams were met with anonymous threats of violence (Kundra 2018a). There were also cases in which neo-Nazis tried to use stolen identities to register their websites, but this tactic quickly backfired, as it allowed the victims of identity theft to contact technical support of the hosting provider and shut the websites down by reporting abuse.⁵

Suffice it to say that running an antisemitic website from abroad has turned out to be only a partially effective strategy. While the free speech provisions in the US may help to protect the website from being shut down, this does not protect the person behind the website from possible libel suits or criminal prosecution in the Czech Republic, as was displayed in the cases of Vladimír Stwora in 2011 (Zelený 2011) or Patrik Vondrák between 2009 and 2022 (ČTK 2022). The court argued that it is the person who commits the violation by running the website, so the test of jurisdiction has to be applied to the person of the defendant who uploaded the offending content, not the location of the website's hosting hardware (Výborný 2013: 93–94).

5 The author of this article successfully assisted one such victim in shutting down a neo-Nazi website (*Resistance Women Unity*) registered to her name and address.

Gender Distribution

Similar to other Slavic languages, the Czech language uses distinct female suffixes in surnames (“-ová”) as well as distinct feminine first names, pronouns and verb forms. In combination with the overall cultural conservatism of the Czech antisemitic scene, which rejects gender theory, LGBTQ+, or gender-neutral names and pronouns, this allows us to reliably ascertain the gender of a person by either seeing their name or reading a portion of text they wrote. The available data made it possible to establish the gender of antisemitic website editors in 152 out of 292 cases. Judging from this sample, it seems that running an antisemitic website is mostly a male-dominated enterprise. Out of the 152 identified editors or registrars, there were 143 (94%) males and only 9 females. The contrast is even starker within the right-wing subcategory, where only one website, the neo-Nazi website *Resistance Women Unity*, was found to have been run by a female (in tandem with a male partner). All the other cases of female editors belong to the sub-category of “Conspiracism & Esotericism”. The gender imbalance also sets Czech antisemitic websites apart from social media services such as Facebook in Czechia, where men and women were almost equally represented, with women even surpassing men in age groups of 35 and above in November 2022 (Statista 2022). The gender imbalance is likely caused by the higher threshold of entry and lifestyle choices – setting up a website requires a certain degree of IT skills within a scene that often calls to re-embrace the patriarchal lifestyle. As for 2022, notable antisemitic websites run by females included the political movement *Aliance národních sil*, the alternative online radio station *Svobodné rádio*, or the esoterica TV station *Cesty k sobě*.

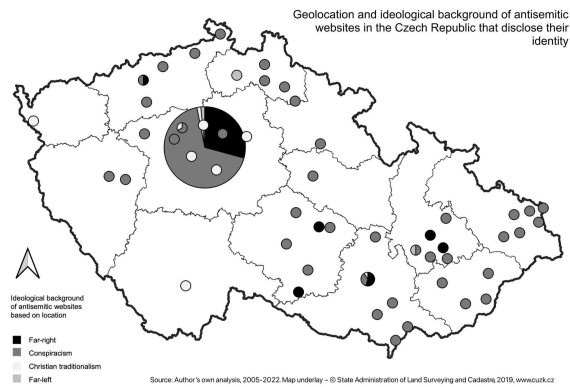


Fig. 5: Geolocation and ideological background of antisemitic websites in the Czech language.

Geographical Location of Czech Anti-semitic Websites

As shown in Figure 3, the majority of Czech anti-semitic websites (170 out of 292, or 58 %) were run from within Czech national jurisdiction. The second most preferred country was the United States (108 websites, or 36 %). This may come as a surprise considering their anti-American ideology, but this is merely due to the pragmatic exploitation of free speech legislation in the United States. Only about half a dozen websites were hosted from other countries such as Russia or Japan. Out of the 170 websites that were located on Czech territory, 137 were also run with a disclosed identity. Using OSINT methods, it was possible to display the 137 antisemitic websites that were run from within Czech territory with a disclosed identity on a map along with information concerning their ideological background (see Figure 5)

A significant portion (at least 65 out of 170) of anti-semitic websites of all types in the Czech Republic are concentrated in the country's capital of Prague, which is also the largest urban and population centre. An additional 11 websites were found to have a connection with the city of Brno, which is the capital of Moravia and also the second largest city in the country. About half a dozen websites were discovered in the Moravian-Silesian capital of Ostrava and its wider metropolitan area. Dozens of additional individual websites of a mostly conspiracist ideolog-

ical background were found operating from smaller towns and villages across the Eastern Bohemian and Moravian countryside.

Using other contextual data, it can be argued that the seemingly less dense areas in the Western rust belt along the Czech-German border (a.k.a. "Sudetenland") do not automatically mean that there must be fewer antisemitic website editors. Since it has been established above that Czech far-right antisemitic websites are twice as likely to hide their identity, it can be argued that the suspiciously empty spots point to areas from which the far-right websites that are anonymously registered in the US actually operate – thus filling the gap without being directly visible on the map. This assumption is supported by the fact that far-right parties receive the highest election results in this region to the extent that one can see party leaders deliberately moving their domicile into these regions, despite not living there, in order to increase their chances of being elected. For example, Republican Party leader Miroslav Sládek ran in the North Bohemian region in the parliamentary elections of 2017 despite having permanent residence in Brno, South Moravia (Czech Statistical Office 2023). In 2022, the Workers' Party leader Tomáš Vandas ran in municipal elections in the North Bohemian town Bílina despite living in Prague (Novák 2022).

The region also saw some of the most notorious cases of anti-Roma riots led by neo-Nazis (Litvínov-Janov 2008, Krupka 2009, Ústí nad Labem 2009, Varnsdorf 2011, Duchcov 2013, Děčín 2013 etc.). Before the era of websites and email addresses, one could find disproportionate numbers of neo-Nazi fanzines listing their editorial or postal addresses (PO boxes) in one of the North Bohemian cities.⁶ Some neo-Nazis even openly stated their affiliation directly in their titles, such as *Radicalboys Brůx*,

⁶ Examples of such late 1990s and early 2000s Skinhead fanzines include: *Conspirators* (PO Box in Chodov), *Hlas Krve* (PO Box in Karlovy Vary), *Skinformátor*, *Evropa*, *Bohemia Warriors*, *Národní boj* (all four with PO Boxes in Most), *Power Europe* (PO Box in Sokolov), *Svoboda* (PO Box in Česká Lípa), *Oi! Rebel* (PO Box in Trutnov), etc.

which referred to the mining town of Most (in German “Brüx”), or the blog *Aussiger*, where we hear the name of the regional city of Ústí nad Labem (in German “Aussig”). Neo-Nazi websites that disclose their identity seem to be using addresses in large capitals, namely Prague and Brno, which may point to increased neo-Nazi activity in larger urban centres, likely in connection to clubs of football hooligans. There is also a noteworthy pattern of Christian Traditionalist antisemitic websites concentrated in and around the capital of Prague, which may contradict the popular expectations given higher Christian religiosity rates in Moravia (Czech Statistical Office 2022).

Attitudes towards Russia

The first concerns about (pro-)Russian influence within the “alternative scene” were raised by the Czech Security Information Service in 2007 in connection with the debate about the construction of an American anti-missile radar installation on Czech territory (BIS 2009, 5). The worrisome growth of (pro-)Russian influence within the Eastern European far-right was discussed in connection to the first Russian-Ukrainian war (Political Capital Institute 2014). The issue of “disinformation platforms” further came into the spotlight again after the first Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014 (Tarant 2019) and was further highlighted during the Refugee Crisis and the Covid pandemic. The *Czech Security Information Service* noted in its public report from 2014 that: “The Czech public was and is greatly influenced by Czech pro-Russian organisations and individuals using websites to present their interpretations of Russian stances. The arguments are put forward in a way that leads Czech citizens to believe they are recipients of opinions held by fellow citizens, not of Russian propaganda” (BIS 2015: 10–11). Czech antisemitism researchers began to raise alarm about Russian influence in the mid-2010s (Tydlitátová 2012; 2017). The Political Capital Institute (PCI)

noted in its report that when the second Russian invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022, multiple “anti-vaxxer” websites were recorded to have switched their agendas to the criticism of Western military aid for Ukraine (Political Capital Institute 2022). The websites referred to in PCI’s report were often the same as the ones analysed in this article.

Many of the websites which are listed today as “pro-Kremlin disinformation platforms”, existed long before the first issues with Russian influence were even noted. A case in point would be the influential website *Zvědavec*, whose author even faced criminal charges for Holocaust denial (Zelený 2011). The first snapshot of the website can be found on Wayback Machine dating back to 1999, making it one of the oldest yet still active websites in the country. Additional cases include Esoterica websites *Inner Lighting* (launched in 1999) or *Osud* (launched in 2000, defunct in 2016), *Matrix 2001* (launched in 2001) and many others which in fact belong to the first wave in the mid to late 2000s (*NWOO.org*, *Czech Free Press*, *WM Magazin*). Some were launched as benign projects that were later transformed into openly antisemitic venues (*Aeronet*, launched in 2004 as an online discussion board about aviation, converted by its administrator into a conspiracist news site in 2014). Several sites have changed their ideological direction after 2010, such as *Eportál*, *EUportál*, *Eurabia*, which originally started as neo-conservative pro-American outlets, yet switched into pro-Kremlin conspiracist sites shortly after the “radar debate”.

Since 2014, several private entities and public institutions have assembled their own lists of websites deemed to be ‘pro-Kremlin echo chambers’, such as the public initiative *Nelež* (Voldřich 2020) or the online project *Manipulátoři* (Cemper 2020). A significant portion of the pro-Kremlin websites on these external lists were also independently found to be antisemitic in the course of this study. This is not to say that all pro-Kremlin websites must be antisemitic. Some acquire a neutral stance on Jewish affairs, some avoid the topic, while others seek the opportunity to appropriate the memory of the Shoah for their own purposes. However, 70 % of

active websites in 2022 that were evaluated as anti-semitic in this survey were also found to hold pro-Kremlin positions; the rest were ambivalent, neutral or have not published enough relevant content to estimate their position on the matter (see the table in Figure 6).⁷

The attitudes towards Russia show different patterns across sub-corpora, since the isolated voices critical of the Kremlin usually came from either Christian conservative or far-right venues. In contrast, out of the 93 conspiracist and Esoterica antisemitic websites active in 2022, none were found to be critical of Russia, 76 were pro-Kremlin and the rest were either ambivalent or uncertain due to a lack of relevant material. This shows that if there are any opinions critical of Putin's Russia within the antisemitic scene, they are more likely to originate from Christian Traditionalists or the Neo-Nazi hardcore. The Christian Traditionalists tend to raise the issue of declining morale in Russian society, as well as theological resentments vis-à-vis the Russian Orthodox Church. The Far Right is split in its opinions – four were critical of the Kremlin, seven were strongly pro-Kremlin, but seven more were either ambivalent or have completely avoided talking about the issue. Those who were pro-Kremlin usually repeated the Kremlin's talking points about the West, including the relevant conspiracy narratives – echoing Russian discourse on the Jewish identity of President Volodymyr Zelensky, describing the war in Ukraine as Russia's desperate battle against "globalism of Western financial elites" or depicting Vladimir Putin as the sole warrior against the forces of New World Order (Tydlitátová 2017; Tarant 2018; 2019). Those ambivalent or critical have criticised Russian imperialism as a contradiction to their idea of race and nationhood, which should also respect Ukrainian nationalism. They have also raised the issue of the growing Muslim populations in Russia. Some had personal friendships with the Ukrainian Far Right.

7 Notable cases of pro-Kremlin websites, which had to be excluded from this study as non-antisemitic after closer inspection include: <https://raptor-tv.cz>, or cz.sputniknews.com.

Predominant ideology	Total	Attitude towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict			
		Pro-Russian / anti-Ukrainian	Anti-Russian / pro-Ukrainian	Ambivalent / Neutral	Uncertain / Irrelevant
Conspiracist	93	76	0	6	11
Right-wing / far-right	18	7	4	3	4
Christian traditionalism	9	3	3	2	1
Left-wing / far-left	0	0	0	0	0
Total	120	86	7	11	16

Fig. 6: Attitudes of antisemitic websites in the Czech Republic, active in 2022, towards the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The central website of football hooligans in Czechia, *Hooligans.com*, has even organised a fund-raising campaign for Ukraine.

The 2022 Crackdown and Its Impact on the Scene

When the second Russian invasion of Ukraine began on 24 February 2022, the Czech government approached the Czech domain name registry provider CZ.NIC with a recommendation to block eight websites identified by the Security Information Service as outlets of pro-Kremlin disinformation (Vláda ČR 2022). The list was later expanded to include 22 websites.⁸ It was established above that a significant portion of websites identified as antisemitic under the terms of this study are also listed elsewhere as "pro-Kremlin disinformation outlets". As it turned out, all of the websites affected by this February 2022 crackdown against "pro-Kremlin disinformation outlets" were also the leading antisemitic websites as observed in this study, except for one – the Czech version of the official Russian propaganda outlet *SputnikNews*, which was blocked upon order of the European Commission.

The constitutionality of the blocking is still under litigation (Prchal 2022). Editors of the impacted websites have criticised the blocking as "censorship" (Hroník 2022) and threatened legal action (Hájek

8 Affected websites were: [Ac24.cz](https://ac24.cz), [Aeronet.cz](https://aeronet.cz), [Ceskobezcenzury.cz](https://ceskobezcenzury.cz), cz.sputniknews.com, [CZ24.news](https://cz24.news), [CzechFreePress.cz](https://czechfreepress.cz), [Eurabia.cz](https://eurabia.cz), [Exanpro.cz](https://exanpro.cz), [Infokuryr.cz](https://infokuryr.cz), [NarodniNoviny.cz](https://narodniNoviny.cz), [NovaRepublika.cz](https://novaRepublika.cz), [NWO.org](https://nwoo.org), [PravyProstor.cz](https://pravyProstor.cz), [ProtiProud.cz](https://protiProud.cz), [Prvnizpravy.cz](https://prvnizpravy.cz), rukojmi.cz, [Skrytapravda.cz](https://skrytapravda.cz), [Slovanskenebe.com](https://slovanskenebe.com), [Svobodnenoviny.eu](https://svobodnenoviny.eu), [Svobodny-vysilac.cz](https://svobodny-vysilac.cz), [Voxpupuliblog.cz](https://voxpupuliblog.cz), [Zvedavec.org](https://zvedavec.org)

2022). The court decisions available by this article's deadline (December 2022) that dismissed the motions of the affected website editors have mostly focused on formal aspects and have not yet fully addressed the merit of the case (Horák 2022), which is expected to eventually reach the Constitutional Court. Most of the websites were unblocked in June 2022 by CZ.NIC, with the exception of those that directly violated the terms of registration, such as by not filing proper domain registry details (Fišer 2022).

Using the same SimilarWeb statistics as in this article, Josef Šlerka from the project *Investigace.cz* concluded in the summer of 2022 that most of the affected websites have seen a drop in traffic between 40 to 80 percent during the blocking period (Šlerka 2022). The additional short-term effect of the blocking was a temporary decrease in the total numbers of active antisemitic websites. Some have never recovered, such as *New World Order Opposition (NWO.org)*, which used to be an important hub for the conspiracist scene. In these instances, the crackdown acted as a market consolidation of websites that were on the verge of closure due to financial issues or editor burnout. Several websites were struggling financially and closed down only weeks before the blocking came into effect, namely the website cluster *Český portál (Eportál, EUportál, EURabia, Freeglobe)* (Petřík 2020). The blocking list used somewhat obsolete data, which caused it to target at least one already defunct website (*Eurabia*).

Most of the affected antisemitic websites chose to move outside the Czech domain (.cz) to an international one (.news, .info), where providers also offer additional privacy protection, such as not disclosing registrar details into Who.Is records. This included some of the most influential ones, such as *Aeronet, Zvědavce, Czech Free Press* or *Protiproud*. After comparing SimilarWeb statistics collected for this article with the ones from the blocking period, it appears that most have regained most of their visitor traffic. Future years will show whether this crackdown will have influenced the *modus operandi*

of Czech antisemitic websites in any way regarding their attitudes towards privacy protection or choice of jurisdiction. It is expected to force some of the editors deeper underground, while their readers will have gained some experience with using Virtual Private Networks. The trend of increased secrecy, as documented in Figure 4, is likely to be fuelled by this crackdown. Last but not least, the blocking turned out to be a double-edged sword – while targeting the spread of disinformation with mixed results, it also temporarily blinded researchers and analysts of the antisemitic scene, including the author of this article.

Conclusion

The Czech antisemitic scene has undergone profound changes over the past twenty years – from a scene dominated by neo-Nazis and other flavours of the Far Right to a more complex ideological configuration without a clear Left or Right leaning. The unifying element seems to be conspiracy narratives, esotericism and strong pro-Kremlin attitude. Conspiracist websites were found to have a longer lifespan than the far-right ones and to attract much larger audiences, thus potentially disseminating antisemitic conspiracy narratives longer and further than the far-right. Currently, they may be able to attract tens of thousands up to hundreds of thousands of readers every month, allowing them to directly influence tight elections, while also generating tens of thousands of dollars in revenue. Editors of these websites were found mostly to be males living throughout the country and not only in impoverished regions. They initially took less precautions regarding the protection of their identity, but have started to become more secretive since 2018. This trend is likely to continue as a result of the antisemitic scene being caught up in the February 2022 crackdown against “pro-Kremlin disinformation platforms”

The majority of right-wing antisemitic websites and all of the conspiracist antisemitic websites were

found to be pro-Kremlin. Isolated voices critical of the Kremlin were found only within the neo-Nazi hardcore or among Christian traditionalists, who oppose the Russian establishment on theological and moral grounds. This study has confirmed the reports by the Czech Secret Information Service that the majority of “pro-Kremlin” websites are in fact run by domestic actors. Voices critical of the Kremlin were extremely rare on the Czech antisemitic scene. Not a single website was found to be antisemitic yet pro-American or pro-Western at the same time. There appears to be a strong connection between occidentalism and antisemitism in the Czech online sphere. In other words – Jews are often included into conspiracy theories as some kind of sinister force that drives the global West. Similar to the majority of the far-right in Eastern Europe (Political Capital Institute 2014; Tarant 2018), editors of antisemitic websites call for “national independence” or “neutrality”, but very often do it while simultaneously echoing Russian geopolitical and ideological concepts.

Zbyněk Tarant
Department of Middle Eastern Studies, University of West
Bohemia
ztarant@kbs.zcu.cz

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Bio

Mgr. Zbyněk Tarant, PhD, was born in 1982 in the former Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic). After graduating from the University of West Bohemia in the field of Cultural Anthropology of the Near East, he continued his postgraduate studies at the same institution, earning his Ph.D. in 2012. While his main topic of research is the history of Holocaust

memory and its institutions in both Israel and the US (the topic of his doctoral dissertation, defended in 2012), he has also been actively involved in researching contemporary antisemitism since 2006. His speciality is monitoring cyber-hate and analysing emerging threats in contemporary Central European antisemitism.

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