

# Growth of Disinformation Media:

Are Traditional  
Media Getting  
Out of Touch  
with Czech Popula-  
tion on Important  
Issues?



\*

MICHAL  
HEJL

One often noted theme by political commentators and the so-called “mainstream journalists” is the growth of what is referred to as “alternative media”. In the Czech context, this label generally means news sources that tend to be more conservative, less cosmopolitan, and more nationalistic than the traditional media. Let us, therefore, attempt to trace some of the reasons why these media have gained popularity.

The rise of disinformation media has been noted world-wide, with traditional media losing readers/viewers and thus getting into financial problems. In the Czech context, this has been compounded by the transfers of media from foreign into Czech billionaires hands.

## **MEDIA OWNERSHIP IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

A diverse selection of media exists in the Czech Republic, albeit not as diverse as say, 10 years ago. This is tied to changes in the ownership structure that will be discussed later. Media can be broadly divided into three categories. These are the public media, that are financed, but not directly controlled by the government; the traditional media, which have been having the same problems as their counterparts in other countries; and the last, newest and most controversial category is the “alternative” media (according to themselves) or disinformation media.

### ***PUBLIC MEDIA***

Czech Television (ČT) can be considered as the most trustworthy source of news in the Czech Republic<sup>1</sup>, is still the publicly owned Czech Television (ČT). It is structured in a similar way as for example the

BBC, and is still partly funded by mandatory public subscription – i.e. anyone who owns a television must pay. It is quite insulated from politics, partly due to its structure and partly due to a previously failed attempt by politicians from the then dominant Social Democratic and Civic Democratic parties, to gain direct editorial control over it (the so-called television strike in 2000). As a result, the editorial tone is set mostly by the journalists working there. As such, the political leanings of the TV could fairly accurately be described as mildly progressive, pro-EU, and centre to centre-left<sup>2</sup>.

The same trend also applies to the other publicly owned media – the Czech press office and the Czech radio. The current government (composed of the ANO party led by billionaire Andrej Babiš, the Social democrats and supported by communists) has been making some moves to gain more control over these media, but so far those have been for the most part limited to placing people opposed to public media on control boards<sup>3</sup>.

Another very important phenomenon to take note of is that the Czech public media are the only ones who still maintain a network of foreign correspondents, and thus are not wholly dependent on foreign media or developments abroad. This dependence is sometimes almost comical, when, for example, reporting on news in Poland is based on what was written by CNN<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> For an example of mainstream right wing criticism see <https://www.reflex.cz/clanek/komentare/85798/ceska-televize-si-muze-za-kritiku-casto-sama-v-mnohem-nestranna-rozhodne-neni.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.lupa.cz/clanky/hana-lipovska-pavel-matocha-lubos-xaver-vesely-rada-ceske-televize-ct/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/zahranicni/volby-polsko-jaroslav-kaczynski-pis.A191014\\_184708\\_zahranicni\\_m](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/zahranicni/volby-polsko-jaroslav-kaczynski-pis.A191014_184708_zahranicni_m)

<sup>1</sup> [https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com\\_form2content/documents/c2/a4893/f9/po190328.pdf](https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c2/a4893/f9/po190328.pdf)



THE CZECH PUBLIC MEDIA ARE THE ONLY ONES WHO STILL MAINTAIN A NETWORK OF FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS, AND THUS ARE NOT WHOLLY DEPENDENT ON FOREIGN MEDIA OR DEVELOPMENTS ABROAD

### **TRADITIONAL MEDIA**

In a sharp reversal to the previous decade, when most of the nation's leading newspapers were owned by foreign (usually German) media companies, most publishing houses today are the property of Czech billionaires<sup>5</sup>. When explaining his motivation for acquiring Mafra, one of the leading publishing houses, Andrej Babiš, the current prime minister of the country, stated, "My reason for buying it was based on the fact

that they wrote lies about me"<sup>6</sup>. As a reaction to the sale, quite a few<sup>7</sup> journalists have left and founded their own, primarily online media (for example, *Echo24* or *Forum24*). These new media have become the fiercest critics of the current government.

The other billionaires<sup>8</sup> usually kept their reasons for buying media to themselves, some even portraying it as an act of charity (nowadays, print media are usually unprofitable). Some observers have even claimed that owning a publishing house has become a sort of a status symbol amongst billionaires<sup>9</sup>.

### **"ALTERNATIVE" MEDIA**

Currently, the biggest and most noticeable "alternative media" outlet in the Czech Republic is *Parlamentní listy* (*PL*). The name means parliamentary newspaper, and it is quite the misnomer. The publication has no affiliation with the Czech parliament and it is, at the moment, an online-only media source. Its critics consider it to be the main source of disinformation in the Czech Republic<sup>10</sup>.

*PL* is based on several ideas. The first is the production of a large volume of articles with as sensational headlines as possible, akin to a tabloid. More importantly, *PL* also offers politicians the ability to publish their articles free of charge. Thirdly, its critics allege that *PL* also offers political parties the op-

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.denik.cz/ekonomika/babis-koupe-mafry-byla-chyba-radeji-jsem-mel-koupit-blek-20141018.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://zpravy.tiscali.cz/novinarsky-exodus-je-cas-udelat-babisovi-papa-318919>

<sup>8</sup> For example Zdeněk Bakala, Ivo Valenta or Daniel Křetínský

<sup>9</sup> <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/denik-insider/miliardari-jako-vlastnici-medii-proc-si-babis-a-bakala-kupuji-noviny/r~i:insider:article:23286/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://hlidacipes.org/ondrej-neumann-jak-parlamentni-listy-siri-dezinformace-tentokrat-e-o-propozeni-geoge-sorose-a-ceskych-novinaru/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mediaguru.cz/clanky/2019/03/aktualizovana-mapa-vlastniku-ceskych-medii/>

tion to publish their press releases as news articles without noting the source<sup>11</sup>. The last ingredient for success is the presence of almost unmoderated discussions under individual articles. After a promising start, *PL* was purchased by Ivo Valenta, a billionaire and current senator. The political orientation of *PL* is nationalistic, conservative, and against the current form of the European Union (EU)<sup>12</sup>. It is often claimed to be pro-Russian, but the evidence is not quite clear, since due to the aforementioned structure, both pro and anti-Russian texts get published there.

There are many other so-called alternative media, which may, roughly speaking, be categorized into several "camps". Perhaps the best known are the openly pro-Russian media such as *Sputnik* (which is directly owned and controlled by *Russia Today*, a state-owned enterprise based in Russia) and *Aeronet* (an anonymous project most notable for its conflict with Svoboda a přímá demokracie, the biggest Czech nationalist party). Media like these have been described by the Czech government as sources of Russian propaganda<sup>13</sup>. Simply put, these media support the current Russian foreign policy – including the occupation of Crimea, for example. They also tend to support Czechxit, are extremely socially conservative, and fiscally very left-wing<sup>14</sup> (and so may be perceived as national socialists – but still not Nazi).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.respekt.cz/special/2017/dezinformace/most-na-druhy-breh>

<sup>12</sup> <https://archiv.ihned.cz/c1-66094730-jsem-pro-odchod-z-eu-rika-senator-a-podnikatel-ivo-valenta-a-chysta-se-nakupovat-dalsi-televize>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.respekt.cz/z-noveho-cisla/putinuv-hlas-v-cesku>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.lidovky.cz/byznys/media/parlamentni-listy-jsou-radikalni-listy\\_A150817\\_124641\\_in\\_nazory\\_ELE](https://www.lidovky.cz/byznys/media/parlamentni-listy-jsou-radikalni-listy_A150817_124641_in_nazory_ELE), <https://www.forum24.cz/aeronauti-z-ruska-v-akci-komu-jejich-web-patri-a-kdo-to-asi-plati-no-hadejte/>



## THE VAST MAJORITY OF CZECHS ARE NEITHER PROGRESSIVE NOR PARTICULARLY GLOBALIST

A much older group of the media is the far-left media outlets. Some of these have existed for quite some time, with few existing since the 1990s (the oldest continuous run is from 1996). These include such publications as *Britské listy* or *Deník Referendum*. When compared to the previous category, these tend to be much more upfront about what they want and who writes the articles. The editorial line includes extreme-left economics and very progressive social ideas.

### COMMENTARIES

Once, almost every online news media outlet featured the option of users posting comments under the articles. Over time, many websites have either eliminated this feature completely, or made it available only to registered readers due to the time required moderating the discussion boards. As such, active commenters have congregated on the remaining websites with a distinct set of opinions not necessarily related to the editorial line of the newspaper itself.

Nowadays, the biggest media discussion boards are those at *idnes.cz* (which are centre-right, more conservative than progressive, opposed to Andrej Babiš, and somewhat skeptical of the EU) and the boards of *novinky.cz* and *parlamentnilisty.cz*

(which tend to support Babiš and are even more conservative and EU-skeptical). The more progressive commenters tend to use Twitter or Facebook. However, needless to say, Facebook also has significant nationalist pages<sup>15</sup>.

CNN is, for some reason, treated by Czech journalists as the US version of BBC, while it is structurally anything but the BBC. *The Guardian* is a British newspaper noted for its progressive stances. Politically, it can be categorized as left-wing.

The odd one out is Reuters, a British news agency, striving for an as objective a language as possible. As such, Reuters was the only one of these four sources of news that tried to take on a rather neutral position on the aforementioned issues. The problem, of course, is that the vast majority of Czechs are neither progressive nor particularly globalist. This unfortunate selection of news sources has, therefore, created a disconnect between mainstream media and their audiences.

## MIGRATION CRISIS

The migration crisis was a shock to most Czechs. Until mass migration hit the news, the summer of 2015 was a veritable “silly season” with the better half of July being dominated by the news of the break-up of a Czech beach volleyball duo. However, when migrants started to cross to Hungary, the problem could no longer be ignored. And thus, Czech media started to report on the issue, mostly by simply translating articles from the above-mentioned four foreign sources. This phenomenon immediately created a deep disconnect, since Czechs were, and still are, adamantly op-



## CZECHS ARE VERY HOSTILE TO THE IDEA OF ACCEPTING REFUGEES

posed to admitting a larger number of migrants [See: Table 1].

Furthermore, as the data suggests [See Tables 1 and 2], Czechs are very hostile to the idea of accepting refugees. The key reason as to why, is likely a fear shown by the majority thinking that refugees are a threat to the security of Czech Republic, the European Union, and even to world peace. These feelings have remained basically unchanged throughout the years, and it is safe to assume that they are not going to change any time soon. The only notable change is the considerable reduction of interest in the situation, which is not surprising due to how the human attention span and news cycles work<sup>16</sup>.

## CZECH MEDIA, REPORTING ON THE MIGRANT CRISIS, AND THE REACTION OF THE PUBLIC

In contrast to general opinion, most of the mainstream media reporting was what its supporters would call “emphatic”, but its critics would label it as “bleeding heart naïve” as can be seen in the contrast between the tone of the report and the tone

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/hnutispd/>, <https://www.facebook.com/tomio.cz/>, [https://www.facebook.com/MilosZemanMujPrezident/?ref=py\\_c](https://www.facebook.com/MilosZemanMujPrezident/?ref=py_c), <https://www.facebook.com/Antikavarna.cz/>, <https://www.facebook.com/hejobjcane/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/apr/16/got-a-minute-global-attention-span-is-narrowing-study-reveals>, <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/analyza-zpravy-o-migraci-se-objevuji-v-mediich-hlave-pred-volbami/1817346>

Table 1: Czech opinions about refugees in 2015

Question	Yes (2015)	Yes (2019)	No (2015)	No (2019)
Should the Czech Republic admit war refugees?	35 % only until the end of the war, 4 % permanently	31 % only until the end of the war, 2 % permanently	59%	63%
Should the Czech Republic admit refugees from Middle East and North Africa??	16%	15%	79%	81%
Are refugees a security threat for the Czech Republic?	79%	72%	18%	22%
Is ISIS a threat to the Czech Republic ?	77%	Not asked	17%	Not asked
Are refugees a security threat for the EU?	88%	84%	9%	14%
Are refugees a threat to world peace?	78%	75%	17%	20%
Are you interested in the refugee crisis?	74%	57%	21%	43%

Sources: <https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/cz/tiskove-zpravy/politicke/mezinarodni-vztahy/1967-postoj-ceske-verejnosti-k-prijimani-uprchliku-rijen-a-listopad-2015>; <https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/cz/tiskove-zpravy/politicke/mezinarodni-vztahy/4970-postoj-ceske-verejnosti-k-prijimani-uprchliku-kveten-2019>

Note: The numbers do not add to 100 %, because the table omits the "I don't know" answers

of the discussions. For example, an article reporting about the rescue of 150 migrants has the following as the second most voted up comment: "Rescue? You mean rescue of human trafficking business"<sup>17</sup>. That is to say, most of the coverage was casting the migrants in a sympathetic light and were not looking at the whole picture and implications of the migration wave. Sometimes, the reporting repeatedly described the same stories; migrants were, for instance, described as "mostly doctors and engineers" or "quiet and grateful"<sup>18</sup>. Such framing of

the debate quickly entered the public discourse, but was mostly used by opponents of migration to denigrate the integrity of the reporting.

The reaction of the public was fairly homogeneous, regardless of the news medium (with the exception of the far-left media)<sup>19</sup>, which is something that has not really happened with any other issues in the past. There was widespread scorn to the way the media tried to frame these issues. Almost every online comment section was rife with anti-migrant sentiment, sometimes descending to outright racism. More im-

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/zahranicni/recko-rhodos-migranti-zachrana-egejske-more.A200828\\_061532\\_zahranicni\\_wass/diskuse](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/zahranicni/recko-rhodos-migranti-zachrana-egejske-more.A200828_061532_zahranicni_wass/diskuse)

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/zahranicni/na-madar-sko-rakouske-hranice-dorazila-dalsi-vlna-uprchliku.A150910\\_060948\\_zahranicni\\_ane](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/zahranicni/na-madar-sko-rakouske-hranice-dorazila-dalsi-vlna-uprchliku.A150910_060948_zahranicni_ane)

<sup>19</sup> This is because these publications have made the plight of various disadvantaged groups one of their foci long before this crisis.



## THE MEDIA UTTERLY FAILED TO PERSUADE THEIR AUDIENCES THAT THE CZECH REPUBLIC SHOULD HELP THE MIGRANTS/ REFUGEES

portantly, links to news sources that were allegedly less biased started to proliferate, hence the growth of the disinformation media, which used this opportunity to cast themselves as truth-speakers.

Consequently, the media utterly failed to persuade their audiences that the Czech Republic should help the migrants/refugees. More importantly, the idea that the media were lying started to circulate more often and with greater force than before. The fact that “alternative media” started to greatly increase in number around 2015 is thus not a coincidence.

### **BUILDING PUBLIC DISTRUST IN MEDIA**

The most notable event that successfully contributed to generating distrust of the public opinion in the Czech Republic towards media was probably the 2016 US presidential election. The reason why is similar to that of the migration crisis, only more magnified this time. In the end, if one used CNN as their main source of in-

formation for the US elections, there was no chance to receive the full picture. The one-way reporting done by most media in Czech Republic, coupled with the fact that the election did not end the way they predicted, only deepened the distrust.

Some events, most notably the Czech television (CT) special called “American Election Night” (sic!) aired on X November 9<sup>th</sup> 2016 were even the subject of formal reprimand by the country’s Council for Television and Radio Broadcasting due to biased coverage. The CT has, however, refused any criticism and asked the Council to reconsider<sup>20</sup>. On a personal note, having watched the said special, I can say that it could not be considered impartial reporting and had resulted in my significantly decreased trust in the CT after that.

The trend of favoring progressive (or “liberal”, in media parlance) candidates is fairly constant, regardless of the country in question<sup>21</sup>, and has, in aggregate, caused many conservatives to stop trusting the mainstream media completely. A major issue then is the fact that there are no conservative news sources in the Czech Republic that stay out of the disinformation business.

### **CAN MAINSTREAM MEDIA REGAIN THE TRUST OF LOST AUDIENCES?**

The question whether Czechs trust the media is surprisingly difficult to answer. There

<sup>20</sup> <https://hlidacipes.org/nevyvazena-ceska-televize-ct-zada-rrtv-o-prezkum-usneseni-k-vysilani-z-americke-volebni-noci/>

<sup>21</sup> For a criticism from the left see <https://www.spec-tator.co.uk/article/will-the-bbc-become-a-victim-of-its-own-bias->, from the right <https://thehill.com/opinion/white-house/495927-in-the-age-of-trump-media-bias-comes-into-the-spotlight>, a data point <https://www.npr.org/2017/10/02/555092743/study-news-coverage-of-trump-more-negative-than-for-other-presidents>, <https://www.em.muni.cz/veda-a-vyzkum/10296-duverou-v-media-otrasla-polarizace-spolecnosti>

Table 2: General trust in media 2019

Question	Yes	No
Trust in media, according to digitalnewsreport.org <sup>22</sup>	33% in general, 39% towards the media I use	X
Trust in television, according to CVVM <sup>23</sup>	44%	53%
Trust of newspapers, according to CVVM	41%	55%
Trust of internet, according to CVVM	42%	50%

Note: Yes and No aggregated responses such as "I (dis)agree completely" and "I mostly agree/disagree"



THE TREND OF FAVORING PROGRESSIVE (OR "LIBERAL", IN MEDIA PARLANCE) CANDIDATES IS FAIRLY CONSTANT AND HAS, IN AGGREGATE, CAUSED MANY CONSERVATIVES TO STOP TRUSTING THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA COMPLETELY

have been quite a few surveys with widely differing results [See: Tables 2 and 3].

Although the data is rather unclear as regards the trust in various Czech media outlets, some conclusions may still be drawn. First of all, when asked to rate the media as a whole, Czechs tend to rate them lower than when asked about an individual source, which is not so surprising. The reason behind this dichotomy probably stems from most people having a news source they like thus pushing the overall ranking higher.

Secondly, the levels of trustworthiness go from the public media being most trusted, through mainstream newspapers, to alternative media, and finally tabloids. It should, however, be borne in mind that *Blesk*, the tabloid mentioned before, has the highest print circulation of all media in the Czech Republic, which strongly suggest

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/czech-republic-2019/>

<sup>23</sup> [https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com\\_form2content/documents/c2/a4893/f9/po190328.pdf](https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c2/a4893/f9/po190328.pdf)



Table 3: Trust in selected individual media 2019 [in %]

Do you trust this medium?	Yes	No
<i>Czech Television</i>	74/56.6	18/19
<i>Czech radio</i>	53/56.8	14/10.3
<i>MF Dnes</i> <i>Idnes.cz</i>	45/37.5 64/37.5	23/18.1 25/18.1
<i>Hospodářské noviny</i>	42/39.5	17/10.8
<i>Právo</i>	35/28.2	24/18.9
<i>Novinky.cz</i>	58/31.8	30/13.5
<i>Aktualne.cz</i>	54/34.9	22/10.6
<i>Blesk (T)</i>	12/7	56/62.2
<i>Aha! (T)</i>	5.5	54.8
<i>Parlamentnilisty.cz (A)</i>	25/16.7	33/20.7
<i>Deník Referendum (A)</i>	5.8	7.2

Sources: Before parentheses: AMI communications<sup>24</sup>; after parentheses or if parentheses not present: MUNI<sup>25</sup>. "Alternative media" are marked with (A), tabloids with (T).

Note: Large numbers of responses were "I don't know" or "Neither trustworthy, nor untrustworthy"

that readers of tabloids care more about salaciousness than factuality.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, this connection cannot be so easily established with the so-called "alternative media", which suggests that many recipients of alternative media consume them,

because they think the other media are lying and the alternative ones do not.

There exist various interpretations as to what drives the distrust of the Czech public opinion toward the media. It is a common trope, for example, to assume that the elderly are easy to manipulate, whereas the youth are more media savvy [See: Table 4].

<sup>24</sup> By the way, when writing, I was instantly reminded of this clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DG-scoaUWW2M>

Table 4: Distrust of media by personal factors [in %]

Factor	Distrust
University-level education	48.5
Basic education only	46.9
Often watches/reads media	35.9
Seldom watches/reads media	51.9
Votes for right-wing parties	43.1
Votes for left-wing parties	50.6
18-29 years old	53
Over 60 years old	44
Very low income	62.3
Above average income	46.7
Unemployed	67.3
Retired	41.5

Source: <https://interaktivni.rozhlas.cz/duvera-mediim/>

Moreover, there are very strong correlations based primarily on economic data. It is clear that distrust towards the media is often driven by poor financial situation status and, perhaps, a need to find some other force outside themselves to blame for their poor state of life. It is very interesting to note the below-average distrust that elderly people show towards the media, which, ironically, makes them more, not less vulnerable to disinformation as they are less likely to question what they consume.

## REMEDYING THE SITUATION

The majority of leading newspapers in most EU countries have been struggling due to a pattern of losing subscribers and labor costs going up<sup>25</sup>. The fact that anyone with a video camera (i.e. everyone with a smart-

<sup>25</sup> For example in Germany there has been a decline in newspaper circulation going back 2 decades despite population growth <https://www.statista.com/statistics/380784/circulation-daily-newspapers-germany/>, similar in the US, eg <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/11/media-apocalypse/546935/>



## DISTRUST TOWARDS THE MEDIA IS OFTEN DRIVEN BY POOR FINANCIAL SITUATION STATUS

phone) can become a content creator has not helped either. Media have lost much of their former power to shape the narrative and act as gatekeepers of information.

I wonder if a little bit of ideological clarity would not help in the Czech Republic. To explain: unlike in most Western countries, here newspapers still tend to pretend (and are expected to pretend by much of the population) that they are a neutral source of information – which they are not<sup>26</sup>. As such, the media could, paradoxically, become more trustworthy by owing up to their own biases and “coming out” – by, for example, stating their political affiliation “we are a centre-left, progressive, pro-EU” newspaper, which is a common practice in the United Kingdom. At the very least, the wind could be taken out of the sails of conspiracy theorists, claiming that the media

have some hidden, nefarious agenda. There also exists a long-term solution to the problem at hand. Like the much harped on teaching on better understanding of written text in schools. But that is a question that is part of a much larger debate on how education should work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the end, much of the onus is on the journalists themselves. Of course, nowadays some progressives seem to question the very concept of informative journalism, and tend to dabble into activism with the idea of writing with justice, transparency, or clarity, not objectivity as the goal, so a change might not be forthcoming there. Nonetheless, regardless of how post-modernists twist the meaning of once perfectly clear words, deceiving one’s readers, is still not going to be a viable long-term strategy for securing credibility. It might, however, be one for continued financial success, as studies show that an increasing number of people want to read newspapers news sources that confirm their views instead of reporting the truth<sup>27</sup>.

In light of these phenomena, public/state-owned media should probably exist to provide mostly unbiased information. However, it must be stated, that in some cases, state-owned media may serve as mouthpieces for the government – as is, at the moment, evident in Poland or Hungary. This sort of situation certainly does not serve to increase trust in media.

A solution to remedying the situation may at first glance be to have publicly owned media in the vein of the BBC, and thus theoretically have independent and informative media. I agree that such media are independent, but am very skeptical on the lack of activism. This progressive activism

<sup>26</sup> Right wing criticism: [https://www.expres.cz/zpravy/jan-zahradil-nora-fridrichova-168-hodin.A190902\\_142658\\_dx-zpravy\\_stes](https://www.expres.cz/zpravy/jan-zahradil-nora-fridrichova-168-hodin.A190902_142658_dx-zpravy_stes), left wing criticism: <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=6&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiuprDEydnrAhWN0cAKHf-BBAkQFjAGegQIBhAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fblisty.cz%2Fart%2F66591-kauza-baborova-problemem-jsou-zaujata-media-a-pasivni-volici.html&usq=AOvVaw0L8hoiCAOzuvrYSCyz70XT>, point of view of politicians: <https://www.info.cz/zpravodajstvi/strategie/spor-o-ct-nejde-o-hospodareni-poslancum-vadi-zaujati-redaktori-tvrdi-zaoralek>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/07/090701082720.htm>

”

THE MEDIA  
COULD,  
PARADOXICALLY,  
BECOME MORE  
TRUSTWORTHY  
BY OWING UP  
TO THEIR OWN  
BIASES  
AND “COMING OUT”

is something that is just not acceptable to many of the more conservative readers.

## CONCLUSIONS

The so-called “alternative media” in the Czech Republic would have started to grow regardless of the aforementioned problems, just like they did in other countries. Nevertheless, biased media coverage of some issues such as the migration crisis gave them a completely unnecessary boost. Getting those readers and watchers back to mainstream media will be close to impossible, since people are not likely to start trusting media again, as they believe that they are being lied to, due to divergences between public opinion and media opinion.

One popular initiative happening in many countries that tries to address this are various fact-checkers. It is questionable how much this can help. The issue of trust remains the same, people disinclined to trust mainstream media are not likely to trust fact

checkers or are supported by them. Also, the “alternative media” will try to claim that the people doing the checking are biased against them, as has already happened in the Czech Republic<sup>28</sup>.

Perhaps time will resolve the issue and the amount of lies and disinformation may eventually drive most of alternative media readership from it. But the question is where will they go? Back to mainstream media or to another alternative media? And will there be any real mainstream media to go back to?

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Jak-funguje-overovani-pravdy-Pracovnik-odhaluje-podivne-praktiky-na-serveru-Demagog-593221>, <https://www.televizeznam.cz/video/jb-talk/xaver-63988896>



\*

MICHAL  
HEJL

.....  
An analyst at the Institute of Social and Economic Research, a new independent political think tank based in Prague, the Czech Republic