

INFORMATION WAR MONITOR

CENTRAL EUROPE

CEPI's bi-weekly overview of conventional and social media discourse in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia monitors propaganda and disinformation attempts, as well as democratic responses in the on-going information war, in order to increase awareness about this recently emerged challenge and promote fact-based discussion in Central Europe.

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- Brexit

Pro-Russian Propaganda and Russian Politicians Clearly Celebrated Brexit, Together with the Czech Ex-President Václav Klaus

Great Britain leaving the EU could not have happened at a much darker time for the Euro-Atlantic Community of which Britain is a key element. It is expected the UK will be occupied with domestic economic and political turmoil for the foreseeable future while the TTIP between the USA and EU should be ratified, the Syrian civil war somehow pacified, and not to mention the strengthening of NATO's Eastern flank in the CEE against an aggressive Russia. On the upside, the Kremlin and its propaganda machine can take advantage of the recent crisis in political and communications terms as well:

- **Propaganda websites in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary have celebrated the success of the "Leave" campaign and welcomed it as a victory of the people against the oppressive Union.**
- **With Britain leaving the EU, the cooperation between Europe and America countering the Kremlin will be under stress. It could be harder to defend common economic-military sanctions against Russia.**
- **Brexit already has prompted pro-Russian actors in the Czech Republic and Slovakia to push for similar referendums on EU membership. Moreover, in Bratislava, there was an anti-immigration march presented by pro-Kremlin outlets as a march against Brussel's dictatorship.**
- **Consequently, Russian or Pro-Russian propaganda can be expected to exert a greater influence on the European public given Pro-Russian fringe media and Eurosceptic parties all pushing for exit referendum initiatives.**



Source: [Protiproud](#)

In general, propaganda websites celebrated the success of the “Leave” campaign and welcomed it as the victory of the people against the oppressive Union.ⁱ The Czech ex-president Václav Klaus even wrote a commentary which has been published on one of the outlets, saying that Great Britain decided to “stand up against megalomaniac plans to create Pan-European empire for the third time”, the first two cases being in the Napoleon and Hitler era.ⁱⁱ

Still, the pro-Russian and official Russian reactions, on the one hand tried to estimate the Brexit vote’s impact on Moscow’s new negotiating position in terms of realpolitik and diplomacy. On the other hand, the apocalyptic, conspiratorial propaganda and disinformation about the EU or the Euro-Atlantic Community has continued uninterrupted. However, there is also a great deal of uncertainty about how the exit referendum would play out for Britain, the Union, Russia and Europe as a whole.

Concerning realpolitik, the main pro-Russian Hungarian site, operating from a Russian server, the Hídfő rightly pointed out that the string of crises (Greek debt, migration etc.) has weakened the EU, so European leaders need to rethink the “integration project.”ⁱⁱⁱ The Czech Aeronet website published two articles, one claiming that Brexit means the defeat of the US and the TTIP agreement^{iv}, the other one arguing that Brexit will strengthen the US global hegemony.^v The Slovak pro-Kremlin authors expressed that Vladimir Putin will be definitely accused of being responsible by the partly vicious and partly stupid anti-Russian propaganda. According to them, the Western politicians are paranoid and see Putin behind everything.^{vi}

Leading Russian politicians’ statements attest the will to limit the negative economic impact of the Brexit on the Russian economy already in a downturn. Russian PM, Dmitry Medvedev highlighted the new risks of the Euro’s and Font Sterling’s volatility and the lower oil prices. According to Alexei Moiseev, Deputy Finance Minister of the Russian Federation, the Brexit will bear no negative consequences for the Russian economy. Russian decision-makers, however, expect easing criticism or sanctions against Russia, along with the decline of American influence on the continent, not to mention the surge of Eurosceptic forces.^{vii} State Duma Deputy Sergei Zheleznyak warned “if Brussels does not immediately change its policy priorities, a series of referendums in other European countries, the marginalization and the collapse of the EU will become more and more real.” The mayor of Moscow, Sergei

Sobyanin wrote that “without the U.K., there will be nobody in the EU to defend sanctions against Russia so zealously.” Business ombudsman Boris Titov put forward the prospect of the Russian led Eurasian Economic Union by saying: “In 10 years it will be possible to talk about a United Eurasia.”

Aside from the more cool-headed statements, the Pro-Russian propaganda retained its dramatic, apocalyptic visions and propagating blunt lies about Europe’s future. The Czech version of Sputnik, a website officially financed by the Kremlin, focused on reporting of the possibility that the EU might collapse^{viii} and several other websites followed it with claims that the Brexit represents the nails in the EU’s coffin and that there is no way a reform is going to take place. One article even came up with a new word: “Euxitus”, which it explained as dying of the Union.^{ix} At the same time pro-Kremlin outlets in Slovakia praised the Britons for their courage to say no to the Brussels’ Moloch and their ability to escape the “European prison”.^x

It is even more worrisome how the Pro-Russian propaganda showcases and legitimizes referendums about European membership initiated by the Pro-Russian far right across Europe. The Hungarian conspiracy site, Világlátó popularizes the referendum proposals of French Front National, Dutch Freedom Party and Austrian Freedom Party. Czech Pro-Russian commentaries suggested the government should follow the British and push for its own referendum. One outlet attempted to ask some of the Czech politicians what they think about such a possibility and if they would support it,^{xi} although not many relevant personalities commented. Marian Kotleba, the leader of the far-right People’s Party Our Slovakia, which got 14 mandates in the last Parliamentary elections, congratulated the UK citizens for their decision to refuse Brussels’ dictatorship. He stated that “the time has come even for Slovakia to leave the sinking European Titanic” and therefore his party would start to collect the signatures for the referendum to leave the EU.^{xii} The Brexit referendum also affected the pro-Kremlin media coverage of a protest against the Islamization of Europe and against immigrants, which was held in Bratislava on the 25th June. It was mostly described as “protesters marching in Bratislava against the destruction of Europe and Brussels’ dictatorship.”^{xiii}

Still, Pro-Russian propaganda should be taken with grain of salt, since it contains significant overstatements. In Hungary, for example, Jobbik cannot legally initiate a referendum on European membership, and even if it could, most of the Hungarian electorate is very Pro-European in attitude. The petition of the People’s Party – Our Slovakia bears similarly small significance, given the party’s 8% share of the Slovak electorate.

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ⁱ <http://euportal.parlamentnilisty.cz/Articles/15599-brity-pry-premluvil-k-odchodu-z-eu-putin-kalousek-ma-dukazy-a-role-tomase-halika-pri-brexitu-.aspx>

ⁱⁱ <http://euportal.parlamentnilisty.cz/Articles/15595-klaus-skvela-zprava-britanie-se-postavila-proti-napoleonovi-hitlerovi-a-nyni-proti-evropske-unii-v-odporu-k-megalomanskym-planum-na-vytvoreni-celoevropskeho-imperia-.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.hidfo.ru/2016/06/az-europai-unio-500-millio-allampolgara-nemet-mond-az-europai-egyesult-allamokra/>

^{iv} <http://aeronet.cz/news/video-brex-it-je-porazkou-baracka-obamy-a-jeho-globalizacni-smlouvy-ttip-donald-trump-ji-mozna-nahradi-smlouvou-s-velkou-britani-konec-globalizace-zacatek-integrace/>

^v<http://aeronet.cz/news/brexit-podle-ciny-posili-americkou-hegemonii-ve-svete-velka-britanie-misto-ttip-pristoupi-ke-smlouve-nafta-brexit-udela-caru-pres-rozpocet-fedu-skotsko-je-trojskym-konem-globalistu/>

^{vi}<https://www.facebook.com/amerikanofil/photos/a.832502473474293.1073741828.832415466816327/1062687227122482/?type=3>

^{vii} <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russia-reacts-to-brexit-referendum/573389.html>

^{viii} <http://cz.sputniknews.com/svet/20160626/3384244/ekonom-brexit-zacatek-rozpad-eu.html>

^{ix}<http://euportal.parlamentnilisty.cz/Articles/15612-mame-nove-slovo-euxitus-umirani-eu-europapalasi-budou-kolem-sebe-kopat-jako-chcipajici-bestie-budou-strasit-vyhrozovat-prosit-aby-mohli-u-neustale-plnych-korytek-zustat.aspx>

^x <http://zemavek.sk/articles/view/den-nezavislosti-spojene-kralovstvo-odchadza-z-europskej-unie>

^{xi} <http://euportal.parlamentnilisty.cz/Articles/15634-pitomci-neco-hodne-shnileho-v-eu-tito-politici-podpori-abyste-mohli-v-referendu-hlasovat-o-vystoupeni-z-unie-a-tito-podpori-czexit-odpovedi-vas-mozna-budou-sokovat.aspx>

^{xii} <https://www.facebook.com/Marian-Kotleba-443847705690023>

^{xiii} <http://www.hlavnespravy.sk/bratislava-mestom-pochodovali-stovky-extremistov-situacia-je-zatial-pokojna/800552>