

# INFORMATION WAR MONITOR

## CENTRAL EUROPE

CEPI's monthly 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.

### JANUARY 2016

- Cologne and the Russian girl
- Criticism of the Media
- Weaken and divide the West

At the beginning of 2016, stories about crimes that were allegedly committed by migrants dominated the media space in many countries, including in Central Europe.

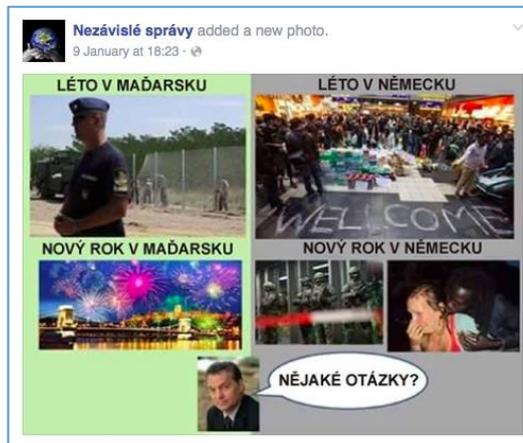
#### COLOGNE AND THE RUSSIAN GIRL IN BERLIN

Group attacks against women during the New Year's Eve in Cologne were instrumentalised by radical actors and propaganda outlets to propel anti-immigration (anti-Muslim), anti-Merkel, and anti-EU emotions. The picture (left) republished by a Slovak Facebook page *Nezávislé správy [Independent news]* compares peaceful celebrations in the "xenophobe" Czech Republic with those in the "tolerant" Western Europe.<sup>1</sup> A similar attempt to discredit Germany by comparing the results of its open door policy with those of Hungary was published by the same outlet one week later, portraying Mr. Orban asking whether there are any questions (centre). To support the narrative, a fake story of a group-raped schoolgirl of Russian origin was introduced in the Russian media space and promoted by local alternative outlets, such as *medzicas.sk*.<sup>2</sup> The story that was later dismissed by the police led to mass protests against migrants and Chancellor Merkel.<sup>3</sup> It was also picked up and used by Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov at his press conference.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.facebook.com/315703259247/photos/a.418624804247.193997.315703259247/10153936245899248/?type=3>

<sup>2</sup><http://medzicas.sk/6-migrantov-pocas-30-hodin-opakovane-znasilnovalo-13-rocnu-skolacku/>

<sup>3</sup><https://dennikn.sk/353117/pripad-udajne-znasilnovej-rusky-berline-ukazuje-silu-ruskej-propagandy/>



Migrants are portrayed as dangerous criminals who are responsible for 186 thousand criminal cases in Germany alone,<sup>4</sup> and who present an economic,<sup>5</sup> as well as cultural danger.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the propaganda plays on welfare chauvinism, the fear of criminality, consequently legitimizing the “self-defence militias” in Germany, Switzerland, or Hungary.<sup>7</sup> Chancellor Merkel is portrayed as an irrational,<sup>8</sup> idealistic politician<sup>9</sup> who is ready to push Europe into chaos and end the European civilization as it is<sup>10</sup> – while facing the prospect of political defeat in Germany.<sup>11</sup> The picture above (right) says that she imperils Germany and might suffer a mental collapse.

The alternative media environment also highlighted that Pegida’s demonstrations that took place in Germany in the aftermath of the above mentioned events were penetrated by provocateurs (including undercover policemen)<sup>12</sup> and that the police encircled the protesters despite asking them to leave.<sup>13</sup>

## CRITICISM OF THE MEDIA

Some of the “alternative information sources” criticize the media for the facilitation of the ‘western suppression of the freedom of speech’. Aeronet.cz blames Germany for creating working groups for monitoring hate speech on the Internet, in cooperation with social networks and non-governmental organizations.<sup>14</sup> The portal argues that Germany has been working on ending freedom of speech on the Internet for a long time. In the portal’s interpretation of the alleged plan, every citizen criticizing migrants will go to jail. The website also warns that similar measures are being prepared in the Czech Republic. The AC24.cz website argues that we cannot have

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.hidfo.ru/2016/01/nemetsorszag-186-ezer-buncselekmenyt-kovettek-el-bevadorlok/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.hidfo.ru/2016/01/merkel-dilemmaja-a-tomeges-betelepites-tonkreteheti-a-belso->

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.hidfo.ru/2016/01/analfabetak-ozonlik-el-europat-a-liberalisok-szerint-jot-tesz-a-gazdasagnak/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.hidfo.ru/2016/01/nemetsorszag-lakossagi-miliciak-alakulnak-a-migransok-buncselekmenyei-miatt/>,

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.hidfo.ru/2016/01/simicsko-es-a-svajci-milicia-tarsadalmi-zavargasok-jonnek/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/SouthFrontHu/posts/1137976452880084>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.hidfo.ru/2016/01/osszeomlott-angela-merkel-kepzelt-vilaga/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.hidfo.ru/2016/01/angela-merkel-belulrol-szamolja-fel-az-europai-civilizaciort/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.hidfo.ru/2016/01/merkel-valasztasi-veresegre-keszulhet-a-migransok-miatt/>

<sup>13</sup> [http://ac24.cz/zpravy-ze-sveta/7270-pochod-pegidy-rozrusili-agenti-provokateri-vztekej-se-protestujici?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=o\\_kremelske\\_propagande\\_v\\_cesku\\_no\\_7\\_2512016](http://ac24.cz/zpravy-ze-sveta/7270-pochod-pegidy-rozrusili-agenti-provokateri-vztekej-se-protestujici?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=o_kremelske_propagande_v_cesku_no_7_2512016)

<sup>14</sup> [http://ac24.cz/zpravy-ze-sveta/7256-zverejnene-video-ze-vcerejsi-demonstrace-ukazuje-sokujici-tvar-taktiky-nemecke-policie-ktera-ve-skutecnosti-obklicila-](http://ac24.cz/zpravy-ze-sveta/7256-zverejnene-video-ze-vcerejsi-demonstrace-ukazuje-sokujici-tvar-taktiky-nemecke-policie-ktera-ve-skutecnosti-obklicila-demonstranty?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=o_kremelske_propagande_v_cesku_no_7_2512016)

[demonstranty?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=o\\_kremelske\\_propagande\\_v\\_cesku\\_no\\_7\\_2512016](http://ac24.cz/zpravy-ze-sveta/7256-zverejnene-video-ze-vcerejsi-demonstrace-ukazuje-sokujici-tvar-taktiky-nemecke-policie-ktera-ve-skutecnosti-obklicila-demonstranty?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=o_kremelske_propagande_v_cesku_no_7_2512016)

<sup>14</sup> [http://aeronet.cz/news/nemecko-zrusilo-svobodu-slova-za-nepeknou-vetu-na-facebooku-proti-nelegalovi-si-pujdete-sednout-dohled-nad-cenzurou-v-nemecku-bude-mit-neziskovka-byvale-spolupracovnice-vychodonemecke-stasi/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=o\\_kremelske\\_propagande\\_v\\_cesku\\_no\\_7\\_2512016](http://aeronet.cz/news/nemecko-zrusilo-svobodu-slova-za-nepeknou-vetu-na-facebooku-proti-nelegalovi-si-pujdete-sednout-dohled-nad-cenzurou-v-nemecku-bude-mit-neziskovka-byvale-spolupracovnice-vychodonemecke-stasi/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=o_kremelske_propagande_v_cesku_no_7_2512016)

freedom of speech without accepting the possibility that someone might feel offended, and that Western attempts to restrict freedom of speech are characteristic of totalitarian ideology.<sup>15</sup> The server blames experts, feminists, and liberals for downplaying the Cologne attacks, as well as the public Czech Television.<sup>16</sup> A Slovak version of the media-bashing targets mainly liberal newspapers, such as Denník N and SME, but also the main commercial TV stations (in the picture below, their logos are put on uniforms of soldiers that are about to shoot the truth, saying it is “the first victim of the information war”).<sup>17</sup> The picture was published on the Facebook page of the ultra-right group *Slovenské hnutie obrody* [Slovak revival movement], with a watermark of the beo.sk website (which claims it is influenced by nationalist paradigm and racial realism)<sup>18</sup>. A standardised opinion ‘package’ for cosmopolitan ‘intellectual’ youth includes reading Denník N (newspaper), supporting President Kiska, and welcoming refugees and anti-Russian sentiments, according to an anti-US Facebook page *Prečo amerikanofilom hrabe* (on the right).<sup>19</sup> The ‘alternatives’ in Slovakia also target and ridicule their opponents, the best known of whom is Juraj Smatana, the author of the list of pro-Russian websites.<sup>20</sup>



## WEAKEN AND DIVIDE THE WEST

There is also a general tendency to divide the West or widen already existing fractures within the alliances based on the disagreements regarding the migration crisis<sup>21</sup> and the United States allegedly spying on Hungarian politicians.<sup>22</sup> Another geopolitical goal is to militarily/politically isolate Poland, known for its strong pro-American

<sup>15</sup> [http://ac24.cz/zpravy-ze-sveta/7277-rozhodla-se-evropa-pro-sebeznicení-svoboda-slova-uz-neexistuje-pouze-ta-s-rysy-totalitní-ideologie-pise-judith-bergman?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=o\\_kremelske\\_propagande\\_v\\_cesku\\_no\\_7\\_2512016](http://ac24.cz/zpravy-ze-sveta/7277-rozhodla-se-evropa-pro-sebeznicení-svoboda-slova-uz-neexistuje-pouze-ta-s-rysy-totalitní-ideologie-pise-judith-bergman?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=o_kremelske_propagande_v_cesku_no_7_2512016)

<sup>16</sup> [http://ac24.cz/zpravy-z-domova/7248-vyzva-vsem-kterym-uz-ceska-televize-leze-krkem-prestane-platit-koncesionarske-poplatky-pise-petr-zantovsky?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=o\\_kremelske\\_propagande\\_v\\_cesku\\_no\\_7\\_2512016](http://ac24.cz/zpravy-z-domova/7248-vyzva-vsem-kterym-uz-ceska-televize-leze-krkem-prestane-platit-koncesionarske-poplatky-pise-petr-zantovsky?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=o_kremelske_propagande_v_cesku_no_7_2512016)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/SHOsvk/photos/a.125296196836.116136.105028701836/10153259130166837/?type=3>

<sup>18</sup> <https://beo.sk/portál>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/amerikanofil/photos/a.832502473474293.1073741828.832415466816327/966315233426349/?type=3>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/amerikanofil/photos/a.832502473474293.1073741828.832415466816327/958660064191866/?type=3>; <https://www.facebook.com/amerikanofil/posts/960301387361067>; <https://www.facebook.com/amerikanofil/posts/958360930888446>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.hidfo.ru/2016/01/europat-nemetsorszagot-is-megosztja-a-migracios-valsag/>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.hidfo.ru/2016/01/magyar-politikusok-utan-is-kemkednek-az-amerikaiak/>

stand, by claiming that the new Polish government is unable to unite Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)<sup>23</sup> and “betrays Europe” by following the American military doctrine,<sup>24</sup> and that the new Polish-Ukrainian military brigade serves the establishment of Great Poland.<sup>25</sup> Besides the US, the EU and NATO also never fail to attract criticism. The picture (left) posted by the Facebook page of the Slovak alternative website *Nezávislé správy* [*Independent news*] ridicules those who believe that grants are coming from the EU (an analogy of children believing that the money comes from the ATM is used).<sup>26</sup> They forget to mention, though, that while Slovakia and other Central Europeans contribute to the common EU budget, they are at the same time net receivers of financial support. The same source explains (through a picture in the Czech language, in the centre) the role of NATO as a tool for the US to extort what they want by the use of force.<sup>27</sup>



The reshuffling of the name of a famous sci-fi movie series points out that the United States’ presidents are warmongering celebrities (right).<sup>28</sup> ‘Quality reporting’ on the issue is followed by the speculations of the former leader of Czech communists (they are still a parliamentary party), who argues that it would be better for the EU as well as the Czech Republic to relinquish its “blind pro-American orientation towards coups, aggressions, and occupations supported and co-organized by NATO”.<sup>29</sup> A number of websites drew attention to a commentary by a former US ambassador saying that the US is a nation of killers who are seen by others as insane and threatening to the international community.<sup>30</sup> However, as we are assured in a translation of a German article on the Czech website *Parlamentní listy* [*Parliamentary letters*], the US will have to face economic collapse very soon.<sup>31</sup>

Edited by **Milan Šuplata**, senior fellow at Central European Policy Institute; **Péter Krekó**, Director at Political Capital Institute; **Jakub Janda**, Deputy Director at the European Values Think-Tank; **Lóránt Gyóri**, Analyst at Political Capital Institute. This document was published in the framework of projects run by the **Slovak Atlantic Commission** and supported by the **National Endowment for Democracy**.

© Slovak Atlantic Commission

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.hidfo.ru/2016/01/lengyelorszag-nem-tudja-kozos-nevezore-hozni-a-tersegi-oroszagokat/>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.hidfo.ru/2016/01/europa-aruloiva-valhatnak-a-lengyelek/>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.hidfo.ru/2016/01/bekehadtest-vagy-nato-alakulat/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/315703259247/photos/a.418624804247.193997.315703259247/10153938898919248/?type=3>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/315703259247/photos/a.418624804247.193997.315703259247/10153957628744248/?type=3>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/amerikanofil/photos/a.832502473474293.1073741828.832415466816327/959718974085975/?type=3>

<sup>29</sup> [http://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/politika/politici-voicum/Grebenicek-KSCM-NATO-nechce-a-Evropa-neumi-delat-mir-417637?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=o\\_kremelske\\_propagande\\_v\\_cesku\\_no\\_7\\_2512016](http://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/politika/politici-voicum/Grebenicek-KSCM-NATO-nechce-a-Evropa-neumi-delat-mir-417637?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=o_kremelske_propagande_v_cesku_no_7_2512016)

<sup>30</sup> <http://prvnizpravy.parlamentnilisty.cz/zpravy/politika/americane-jsou-v-zahranici-narodem-vrahu-pise-exvelvyslanec-usa/>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Ekonomicky-kolaps-USA-je-pry-za-dvermi-Prestizni-nemecky-denik-chmurne-lici-co-to-bude-znamenat-415480>