

# Europe Tackles Information Chaos



Central European  
Digital Media  
Observatory

**Annual Report 2021/2022**

**&**

**International Conference**

22–23. 9. 2022

Prague

Europe Tackles Information Chaos:  
CEDMO Annual Report 2021/2022 and International Conference 22–23. 9. 2022

Annual Report 2021/2022 and Conference Brochure  
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Prague at the Forefront of Sustainable Development, Innovation and Democracy –  
City of Prague  
The Role and Contribution of the CEDMO Advisory Board – Kornelia Danetzki (DW)  
The War in Ukraine: Lessons learned – Miguel Medina (AFP)

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Central European Digital Media Observatory (CEDMO)

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## Introduction to the Conference

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**Václav Moravec** is the lead coordinator of CEDMO. His area of expertise is in journalistic ethics, audiovisual media transformation and automated and artificial journalism. Currently, he works at the Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism at the Charles University Faculty of Social Sciences as well as at the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (FAMU). He is also a member of the Executive Committee of the Artificial Intelligence Initiative PRG.AI. Moravec has received several international awards for his journalistic work in the Czech Republic and is the host of two discussion programs on Czech television. He has also authored and co-authored several books.

## CEDMO: The First Year

*As long as appearance is not confronted with reality,  
it does not seem to be appearance.  
As long as living a lie is not confronted with living the truth,  
the perspective needed to expose its mendacity is lacking.  
As soon as the alternative appears, however,  
it threatens the very existence of appearance  
and living a lie in terms of what they are,  
both their essence and their all-inclusiveness.*

(VÁCLAV HAVEL, *The Power of the Powerless*, 1978)

Almost three decades of life in digital *mediamorphosis*, as the American journalist Roger Fidler named the complex transformation of means of communication, based on binary code in the late 1990s, offers a fascinating spectacle to the non-participating observer. Words change their original meanings in a matter of minutes. A suitable illustration can be the term *fake news*, originally denoting a satirical genre based on news parodies and fictional news. After several public appearances by the candidate for the American presidency, the concept of fake news has become the subject of many scientific studies that discuss the phenomenon of false news, the aim of which is certainly not to entertain. Since the times of digital medi-

amorphosis, the phenomenon of turbonews and the Twitter effect conquered even science, it didn't take too long for other studies to reveal that the term fake news is misleading, inaccurate, and is therefore a buzzword. Thus, the use of the terms disinformation and misinformation appear to be more appropriate. While the former refers to intentionally spreading lies for the purpose of their monetisation, politicisation, or ideologization, the latter grants the spreaders of lies the right to a fallacy, unintentional spread. However, can two or three of the most commonly used terms sufficiently and accurately capture the complexity of the entire range of information disorders that occur in the digital media landscape, and are they causes of misunderstanding or irrationality of communication?

The above-mentioned fascinating spectacle also includes the emotional and affective charge of digital mediamorphosis. Members of fragmented audiences, from which it is almost impossible to constitute a public sphere in the Habermasian sense of the word, compete to see who offers a better or alternative view of the truth and whose „regime of truth“ becomes the hegemon. Long before the actual war launched by Russia in Ukraine, the war metaphor conquered the discussion about eliminating the consequences of information failures and their spread in the digital space. Above all, the pandemic/ epidemic of the disease COVID-19 and the associated infodemic as information overload, including false and misleading information, which has exacerbated a serious health crisis, has led to the declaration of war on disinformation. The logic of affectivity associated with the war metaphor prevents us from understanding that it is impossible to wage information battles only with a limited set of tools such as fact-checking (alt. debunking) or strengthening selected elements of media literacy (alt. pre-bunking). After all, each of them also has a different weight due to the aforementioned fragmentation of audiences of network digital media. But do we know which one?

Moreover, an independent observer of the consequences of digital mediamorphosis can remain fascinated by how different some of the phenomena associated with information disorders in the Central and Eastern European region are when compared to Western Europe. The reason for the subject difference is the dominance of local-cultural aspects that complement the global-technological ones. One of them is undoubtedly the experience of living a lie, as the Czechoslovak playwright and dissident, and later, after the Velvet Revolution in 1989, Czechoslovak President Václav Havel wrote in the essay *The Power of the Powerless* in the context of communist post-totality. The experience of living a lie or its trace may be one of the causes of the emergence of a kind of a social network, which is re-

presented by a community that massively forwards (so-called chain) emails containing false or misleading information. According to a sociological survey carried out in June and July 2022 by the research consortium CEDMO (Central European Digital Media Observatory) in cooperation with the company Ipsos, almost half a million citizens of the Czech Republic and more than 200 thousand citizens of the Slovak Republic over the age of 18 actively participate at this social network. The oldest generation most often receives so-called chain emails. These emails are mainly forwarded by people with primary education across all age groups.

Central and Eastern Europe can provide a lesson to Western Europe. In Popper's words, it suggests that an open society that is without limits tolerant of flattery and lies in the digital media landscape will eventually be destroyed by flattery and lies. Paradoxically, in this region, the biggest advocates of the aforementioned society without limits are the sympathisers and supporters of the leaders suppressing the open society. Moreover, haven't we been witnessing a historical movement for a long time now, when Western Europe is experiencing a kind of life in a lie thanks to digital mediamorphosis? Is Western Europe not closer to Central and Eastern Europe more than it is willing to admit?

When a year ago, on October 1, 2021, the CEDMO research consortium was established, consisting of eight institutions, including Charles University as the coordinator, it set the ambition of uncovering and understanding the deeper contexts of the existence and consequences of information disorders in the era of digital mediamorphosis, including their elimination. An interdisciplinary approach connecting social sciences (represented by the universities SWPS Warsaw, UCM Trnava, and CU Prague) and computer sciences (represented by KInIT Bratislava and CTU Prague) but also using the application potential of the global news agency (AFP), a platform of local citizen journalism in the field of fact-checking (Demagog.cz), and the technology centre focused on software and infrastructure (ATC Athens) have become necessary prerequisites for the fulfilment of the aforementioned ambition. In the first year of CEDMO's existence, we were able to establish consortium bodies such as the Advisory Board, Strategy Board and Executive Board; to launch websites in three language versions (Polish, Czech and Slovak); to start continuous fact-checking of the most frequently disseminated false or misleading information in the digital media landscape of Central Europe; to carry out four waves of sociological research in cooperation with the Ipsos agency focused on the issue of information disorders, information wars related to Putin's invasion of Ukraine and the blocking of disinformation websites in the Czech Republic and Slovakia; to

lay the foundations for longer-term research into the use of artificial intelligence elements to detect the spread and verification of false or misleading information; to lay the foundations of more effective settings of media and digital literacy; as well as to prepare for the creation of the CEDMO trends, which would benefit from the advantages of longitudinal quantitative research, supplemented by qualitative methods (e.g. focus groups). After all, the fulfilment of the objectives of CEDMO's sub-activities is described in the individual chapters of this annual report (see p. 16–41). However, as indicated above, the activity of the CEDMO consortium in 2022 was fundamentally affected by the war in Ukraine, which is the subject of a special chapter of the annual report (see p. 42–46).

The culmination of the first year of CEDMO's existence is undoubtedly the international conference "Europe Tackles Information Chaos," which takes place on the occasion of the Czech Presidency of the European Union at the end of September 2022 in Prague. Individual panels and events within this international conference benefit from the work of CEDMO teams, demonstrate effective cooperation with other regional hubs of the EDMO network as well as the successful connection of our consortium with EDMO, for which I would like to sincerely thank my colleagues from the European University Institute. The realisation of an important international conference of not only Central European but of European importance would not have happened without the support of the leadership of Charles University, the capital city of Prague, the National Plan for the Reconstruction of the Czech Republic, and the partners of CEDMO. I am honoured that in the past year, we managed to establish cooperation with many local, regional and global companies, which are not indifferent to the quality of the digital ecosystem in Central Europe and its research.

When the playwright Václav Havel described the stability of the post-totalitarian system in *The Power of the Powerless*, he stated that one of its pillars rests on a shaky foundation: a lie. "It works only as long as people are willing to live within the lie," wrote Havel. We hope that in the second year of its existence, the activities of CEDMO shall contribute to "living in truth."

Sincerely Yours,

VÁCLAV MORAVEC

## Věra Jourová, Vice President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency



**Věra Jourová** is currently Vice President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency and deals with democracy, rule of law, media pluralism and fight against disinformation. From 2014 to 2019, she served as EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality. In 2014, before arriving to the European Commission, Ms Jourová held the position of Minister for Regional Development in the Czech Republic. Previous to this, from 2006 to 2013, she worked in her own company as an international consultant on European Union funding, and was also involved in consultancy activities in the Western Balkans relating to the European Union Accession. She holds a Degree in Law and a Master's degree in the Theory of Culture from the Charles University, Prague.

We see right now how foreign information manipulation and interference is used as a strategic and coordinated tool by Russia to support its aggression against Ukraine, to get international support for its war and to deflect blame from violations of international law. It is just the latest reminder how dangerous for democracies disinformation and information manipulation can be.

The good news is that Europe is not naïve any longer. We are addressing this threat in a European way – in full respect of freedom of expression – with a mix of legislation, such as the Digital Service Act ([DSA](#)) and unique tools, such as the new anti-disinformation [Code](#).

The DSA creates a law that will make big platforms more accountable and responsible. The new Code goes beyond it and commits the largest digital players, such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok or Microsoft to take strong action in key areas such as understanding algorithms, helping users critically assess the information they see, removing financial gains from disinformation, and ensuring that disinformation in languages spoken by fewer people is not neglected.



The Code will play an important role in the assessment of whether the very large platforms have complied with their DSA obligation of mitigating the risks stemming from disinformation spreading on their systems.

Moreover, to fight disinformation, we need a whole-of-society approach. We will not be able to regulate every aspect of digitalisation. Nor should we. This is why we also invest in education, media literacy, strengthen civil participation and make our democracy more resilient. The stronger independent and pluralistic media landscape we have, the less information space there is for disinformation to plant the harmful seed.

European Digital Media Observatory ([EDMO](#)) plays an important role in this equation. Its activities show the importance of the community of academic researchers and independent fact-checkers. I am pleased that EDMO strengthened its role further with the regional independent structures, such as the Central European Digital Media Observatory. This year a set of further hubs have been selected, aiming to achieve full coverage of the EU. Thanks to this, EDMO will improve its capacity to tackle harmful disinformation campaigns at national and EU level, and should be able to analyse their impact on society from various places and angles.

I particularly welcome the fact that CEDMO is based in the Czech Republic as a country with an experience of totalitarian regime and state-controlled propaganda. This can prove very helpful in the current geopolitical context and ensure calibrated, proportionate, and effective responses.



The European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) is an independent multidisciplinary and multi-national initiative which seeks to improve understanding of the changing nature of media disinformation and the threats it poses to European society. It brings together fact checkers, media experts and academic researchers to better grasp how contemporary disinformation operates, and to learn how to minimise its impact. Beyond raising public awareness of media disinformation, EDMO aims to provide a hub of academic research on the topic in the hope that it will strengthen Europe's ability to effectively combat disinformation into the future.

## **The European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) and its Achievements**

The European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) is bringing together a multidisciplinary community of experts in the field of online disinformation. It is an independent multi-stakeholder platform that gathers fact-checkers, media literacy experts, and academic researchers – collaborating with media organisations, policymakers, online platforms, and media literacy practitioners. The purpose of this network is to deliver a deeper understanding of online disinformation, its mechanisms and actors, its challenges, and its impact on society.

The governance body of EDMO is composed of an Executive Board and the Advisory Board. The network is managed by an international consortium led by the [European University Institute](#) (Italy), which relies on the expertise of the [School of Transnational Governance](#) and the [Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom](#). Our partners include the research centre DATALAB of Aarhus University (Denmark), [the Athens Technology Centre](#) (Greece) – responsible for technological support – and [Pagella Politica](#) (Italy), in charge of coordinating fact-checking activities.

At the EU Member States' level, EDMO relies on national and multinational hubs to increase its capacity to tackle disinformation. The current eight hubs cover Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Swe-

den and, in the EEA, Norway. Following a second call under the EU Digital Europe Programme, new hubs will soon join the network and enable EDMO to expand its geographical coverage to all EU Member States.

EDMO activities cover four aspects of countering online disinformation: fact-checking, research, media literacy, and policy research and analysis. Residential and online training in understanding and tackling disinformation are also regularly organised to respond to the most pressing training needs and recent trends in the fields of disinformation and fact-checking practice.

Finally, EDMO actively engages in tackling disinformation with the local community of experts and civil society. This engagement is in constant evolution with contemporary challenges, as seen in the creation of the [EDMO Taskforce on Disinformation and the War in Ukraine](#) in March 2022. Its purpose is to collect and sort relevant material covering various aspects of the war, such as fact-checking, investigations, rapid analysis, and research on disinformation campaigns, as well as specific media literacy initiatives. The task force also aims to identify relevant datasets needed to understand disinformation campaigns. Recently, the EDMO Working Group on Platform-to-Researcher Data Access released a [report](#), which has been presented to the Cabinet of the Commission's VP, Věra Jourová, during the EDMO 2022 Annual Conference. The report includes a draft Code of Conduct on how platforms can provide independent researchers access to data in compliance with the GDPR. This document provides a framework to facilitate academic research, filling a well-known gap.



## Prague at the Forefront of Sustainable Development, Innovation and Democracy

In recent years, before our eyes, Prague has changed into a metropolis of the 21st century: a phenomenon which has also inspired its foreign partners. The main drivers of change include: innovation and energy sustainability, the fight against climate change through [Prague's climate plan](#), and the management of a crisis of unprecedented proportions which the whole world must now face. Namely, our [Regional Assistance Centre for Ukraine](#) has been praised for its world-class standards by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Nevertheless, Prague still faces the consequences of COVID and the Ukrainian refugee crisis. In each case, data-based governance has proven to be more effective than governance based on impressions. For example, we have used our open-source data platform 'Golemio' to provide us with a wealth of information, and help us share that information with the general public. For instance, the number of occupied hospital beds during the COVID outbreak, and the current number of refugees registered in Prague.

In the first wave of the pandemic, we faced a massive disinformation campaign on COVID. In cooperation with anti-disinformation platforms and [the Prague Innovation Institute](https://www.ockovani.praha.eu), we launched the [ockovani.praha.eu](https://www.ockovani.praha.eu) website. Substantial parts of it were devoted to refuting misinformation – an endeavour which proved to be particularly useful in explaining the topic of vaccination to undecided people who may have been affected by disingenuous propaganda.

We are now facing disinformation attacks from the dictatorial regime of Vladimir Putin, who has invaded the sovereign country of Ukraine, where his soldiers are committing horrific war crimes. As a response to this, the city has now prepared an innovative outdoor exhibition called 'Stories of Gratitude'. It documents this ongoing brutal invasion and provides a space for Ukrainian women, children, and seniors to thank the people of Prague for their help.



**Zdeněk Hřib** has been the Mayor of Prague since 2018. He is the first Pirate Party member to be elected as a mayor both in the Czech Republic and worldwide. He graduated in General Medicine at Charles University in Prague. After graduating, Mr. Hřib worked for several organizations as a healthcare IT specialist and consultant. He has been active in the Czech Pirate Party since 2013 and served as the party's healthcare expert. As the mayor of Prague, he focuses on sustainability, smart city solutions, data-driven city management, transparency and human rights advocacy. In 2019, Prague together with the other V4 capitals – Budapest, Bratislava and Warsaw – founded the Pact of Free Cities in order to defend freedom and democracy and tackle anti-liberal tendencies, inequalities, populism, xenophobia and climate change denial.

## CEDMO Annual Report 2021/ 2022



The following pages cover the contents of CEDMO's Annual Report. The report corresponds to Task 1.3 of Activity 1 which specifies CEDMO's reporting obligations for the period of October 2021–September 2022. The project has received funding from the European Union CEF-TC-2020-2 under contract number 2020-EU-IA-0267. The individual deliverables and information regarding other CEDMO activities are available on our [website \*\*cedmohub.eu\*\*](https://cedmohub.eu).

When it comes to tackling disinformation, the strongest asset at EDMO's disposal is its individual hubs spread throughout Europe. As a result, **CEDMO has collaborated extensively** with the other national and regional hubs as well as with **EDMO**. Regarding the latter, we have reached a bidirectional connection between CEDMO's and EDMO's repositories. Besides this, CEDMO has either participated in or supported a range of initiatives in the fields of regulation, AI, and human rights.

Considering that Central Eastern Europe is one of the regions most affected by disinformation, there is a great need for **effective stakeholder communication**. For this, we have established a regularly updated website, and social media channels in four languages. The **visibility of the consortium**

was further enhanced by several public events, with highlights being the Prague-held conferences [CIC2022](#) and the **fact-checking conference** (Deliverable D8.3). During the former, we presented the project's results as well as strengthened our connections with other hubs. The conferences have attracted significant attention, as they were attended by academics, media practitioners and laypeople.

The war in Ukraine has demonstrated the importance of tackling disinformation to governments, media, corporations and the public. As a result, CEDMO has successfully attracted grants and donations from public institutions (e.g. the Czech Ministry of Industry) or corporate entities (e.g. Microsoft). The **sustainability of CEDMO** is ensured through a growing network of partners offering funding opportunities or collaboration. This creates a sustainable foundation for the project after CEF Telecom's funding of CEDMO ends.

Introducing our activities has been delegated to our **Advisory Board (AB)**, composed of multidisciplinary experts offering guidance on our strategy with insights from their respective fields. The following pages, including a few words from the chair of CEDMO's AB Jochen Spangenberg, offer a detailed description of **CEDMO's core activities during its first year**, including fact-checking, research, media literacy, technology and regulation.

## The Role and Contribution of the CEDMO Advisory Board

### Who Are the CEDMO Advisory Board?

The CEDMO Advisory Board is one of the main bodies of governance for the initiative. The Advisory Board is made up of a variety of experts from several disciplines who provide insights from the latest developments in their respective fields. As such, they provide guidance on the organisation's strategy, and monitor the activities of CEDMO for compliance with project guidelines and principles.



### Meet the Chairman of the Board

**Jochen Spangenberg** is the Chair of the Advisory Board of CEDMO. His main occupation is as Deputy Head of Research and Cooperation Projects for Deutsche Welle. He also serves on the advisory board of EDMO and lectures on Media & Communication Sciences at the Free University Berlin. In addition to this, Spangenberg works as an advisor and instructor for the NGO Lie Detectors, which aims to bring media literacy into the classroom. Much of his career has focused on understanding and countering disinformation in the media, as well as grappling with the opportunities and challenges presented by media digitisation.

### A Message from the Chair

*I still vividly remember the moment when I was approached by the CEDMO consortium to become Chairman of its Advisory Board. I felt both humbled and honoured, initially wondering whether I would be the right person for this role and whether I should accept this kind invitation. Serving as an Advisory Board member of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), I know such extra activities are extremely worthwhile and important. On the other hand, they require additional time, commitment and dedication. While time is often scarce, commitment and dedication are something I am always willing to give to the best of my abilities if at all possible – especially to worthy and important causes.*



*That is why, after talking with the wonderful and equally-dedicated Adriana Der- gam, CEDMO’s project coordinator, I said “yes” and accepted the role as Chairman of CEDMO’s Advisory Board. A “yes” I have not regretted. A “yes” that resulted in me playing another small part in this incredibly relevant and worthwhile field – namely, to tackle disinformation, foster media literacy, and be active in a variety of related activities. After all, nothing less than our democracy and the way the ma- jority of us have chosen to live – in a free, open, democratic society – is at stake.*

*I am happy to do my little bit and contribute in any way I can, be it through my re- search work with Deutsche Welle; by visiting schools to teach young people how to counter disinformation and to explain to them how quality journalism works (with the NGO Lie Detectors); through my involvement with EDMO (where I also contri- bute to the work done by the taskforce on disinformation about the war in Ukraine), and by serving as CEDMO’s Chairman of the Advisory Board. In the latter role, and also in my personal capacity, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to eve- ryone who is part of CEDMO for their dedication and commitment to their role in this immensely important undertaking. I wish the team every possible success and I will continue to accompany you to the best of my abilities on the journey ahead.*

Jochen Spangenberg

## Meet the Advisory Board

Jochen Spangenberg works with a multidisciplinary team of senior experts, each of them offering insight and expertise to help tackle disinformation and the threat it poses. We would like to recognise the efforts of the Advisory Board and thank them for their persistent and impactful work throughout the last year of the CEDMO project.



**Victor Breiner**

Advisor to the Slovak Minister of Defence on Hybrid Threats, and Founder of Infosecurity.sk



**Iwona Hofman**

Director of the Institute of Social Communication and Media Studies at Maria Curie Skłodowska University, and President of the Polish Society of Social Communication



**Roman Imielski**

Investigative Journalist and Deputy Editor in Chief, and Political Editor of Gazeta Wyborcza



**Sylvie Kauffmann**

Editorial Director of Le Monde and Member of the Centre de Formation des Journalistes in Paris, and the European Council on Foreign Relations



**Tomáš Kriššák**

Information Security Expert and Founder of Confident Slovakia and Checkbot. Currently works for the Slovak company Gerulata Technologies



**Ľuboš Kukliš**

Chief Executive at the Council for Broadcasting and Retransmission of Slovakia, and Chair of the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA)



**Petr Očko**

Czech Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade, responsible for the new division of Digitalisation and Innovation



**Michal Pěchouček**

Professor at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering of the Czech Technical University in Prague, and Chief Technology Officer at the Cybersecurity Company Avast



**Radek Ptáček**

Clinical Psychologist and Professor of Medical Psychology at the Psychiatric Clinic of the First Medical Faculty of Charles University



**Jacek Żakowski**

Co-founder of Gazeta Wyborcza and Chair of the Department of Journalism at the Collegium Civitas in Warsaw

# Production and Display of a Continuous Flow of Fact Checks

## Activity 4

Lead: [AFP](#)

Partners: [Demagog.cz](#) and [KInIT](#)

Subcontractors: [Demagog.sk](#), [Infosecurity.sk](#), [Konkret24.pl](#)

### I. Overall Goals

This activity aims to provide a continuous flow of fact checks in four languages – English, Polish, Czech, and Slovak – while focusing on their credibility and pluralism. This effort strives to be at the forefront of tackling disinformation speedily and effectively.

An increasingly important aspect of fact-checking has become its communication towards other stakeholders. For this, CEDMO officially launched its [website](#) on February 10, 2022. Even though the website serves primarily as a shared repository of fact-checks, it promotes and makes widely available tools for retrieving factually-correct information.

Agence France-Presse, having a long-standing fact-checking reputation, was tasked to coordinate the publication of the fact-checks produced by AFP and other fact-checking organizations, such as Infosecurity.sk, Konkret24, and Demagog.cz/sk. AFP provides fact-checks in all languages, while Konkret 24 publishes in Polish, Demagog.cz in Czech, Demagog.sk and Infosecurity.sk in Slovak.

The ultimate objective is to provide a total of 1157 fact-checks until February 2024.

### II. Achievements and Progress of Work: First year of CEDMO

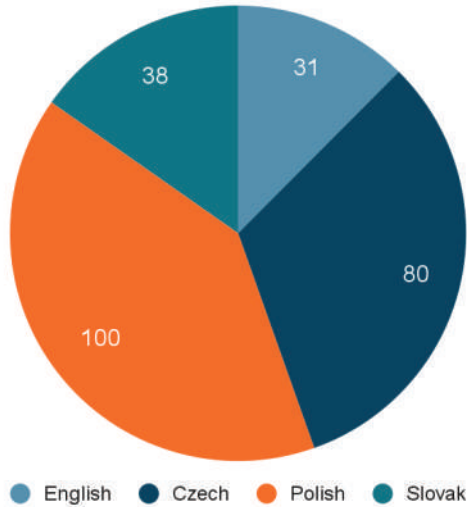
The first year of CEDMO has proven to be fruitful in international achievements as well as in steady progress towards our fact-checking objectives.

In the past year, we have managed to:

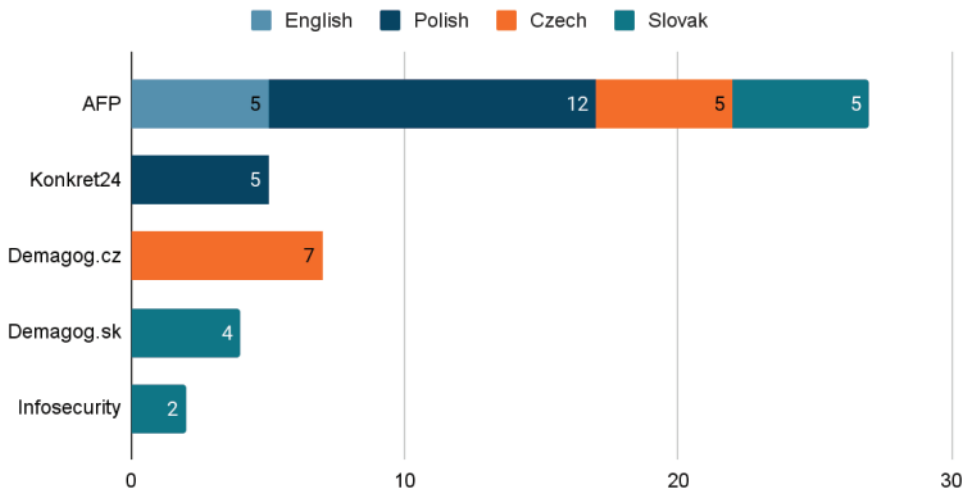
**T4.1 – Coordinate and harmonize the publication of fact-checks in all four languages** – Having reviewed the Communication and Dissemination plan (D8.1), we have adjusted our social media communication channels (D8.2) so that our fact-checks reach a broader audience.

**T4.2 – Archive materials (previous fact-checks) imported into hub’s internal infrastructure** – To provide context for our audience, we have decided to upload a number of previously published fact-checks into CEDMO’s repository – 65 to be precise – from our archives ahead of the website’s launch.

**Number of fact checks through July 15 (total 275)**



**Number of fact checks per month**



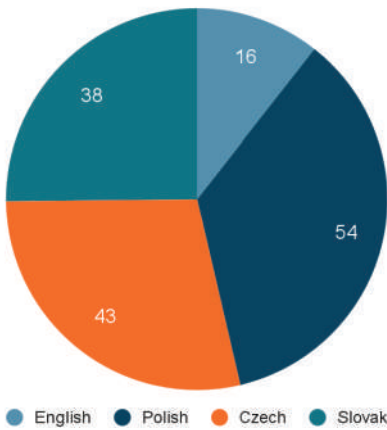
**T4.3 – Production and publication of 400 fact checks (M12)** – At the time of writing, we have [published](#) 275 fact-checks (69% completion). Moreover, we have also revised the number of fact-checks to be published every month to ensure steady progress.

**T4.3 – Cooperation with researchers** – In CEDMO, we consider the cooperation between fact-checkers and ML/AI research especially important. For this, we have participated in numerous workshops on the topic of AI-enhanced fact-checking with our partners from KInIT.

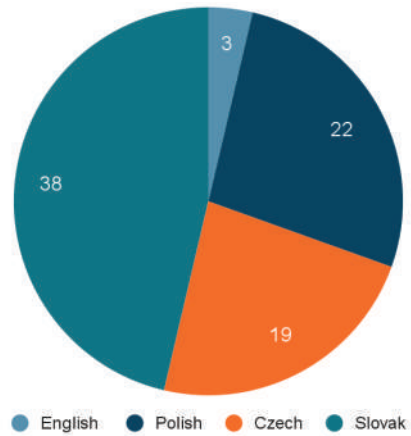
As far as the topics we cover, we have divided them into eight themes – COVID-19, Economy, Environment, Health, Politics, Science, Society, and Ukraine. While the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic and the flood of disinformation/misinformation that followed occupied fact-checkers to a great extent through February 2022, the war in Ukraine and the disinformation it spawned quickly changed the focus. Misinformation related to the war quickly overtook the pandemic and kept fact-checkers busy.

As a result, we decided to create a separate tag on the website dedicated to fact checks related to the war, as we had done for COVID. The fact-checks focused on manipulated pictures, false statements, deep fake videos, and out-of-context images.

**Number of fact checks on Ukraine (through July 15)**



**Number of fact on COVID-19 (through July 15)**



The most widely viewed (nearly 2,600 page views) was one in Czech by Demagog.cz about Soňa Peková, a Czech geneticist speaking about the alleged development of biological [weapons](#) in Ukraine.

In English, an AFP fact-check on claims that Russia attacked Ukraine with a [vacuum bomb](#) was viewed the most.

In Polish, a Konkret24 fact-check debunked claims that Ukraine issued postage stamps with images of SS soldiers got the most hits.

In Slovak, a Demagog.sk fact-check on Ukraine concerning claims of [genocide](#) in eastern Ukraine was the most viewed.

The number of fact-checks related to disinformation concerning the war in Ukraine and the pandemic has decreased in the last month or so but is likely to go up depending on news events. We know that disinformation and “fake-news” that saturate the media landscape today follow the news cycle to a great extent. As an example, when a blistering heat wave swept through Europe in July, disinformation related to the subject spiked. The same happened following the US Supreme Court vote to strike down the landmark Roe v. Wade decision on abortion.

### **III. Challenges and Opportunities**

Like all other media organizations, the fact-checking partners involved in the CEDMO project have had to quickly adapt to a world of non-stop propaganda and conspiracy theories. As we face this new reality, our job as fact checkers is to help the public navigate through the onslaught of fake-news and disinformation campaigns that are testing our democratic systems.

During our first year, we encountered multiple challenges. First, we have come to realize that fact-checking organizations are often understaffed with little to no attention paid to the mental health of fact-checkers. Second, the obfuscated information environment of the CEE, currently under heavy information ‘shelling’ from Russia, makes fact-checking especially difficult. Lastly, the primary challenge for CEDMO remains the fragmented reach of fact-checks as working in several languages poses additional challenges. Nevertheless the challenges, both Petr Gongala (Demagog.cz) and Peter Duboczi (Infosecurity.sk) agree that CEDMO is an essential project despite its perhaps limited immediate impact.

Speaking of opportunities, we have embraced the interest of the public in fact-checking and provided [tutorials](#) teaching users how to do an advanced web search, advanced Twitter search, how to use metadata, geolocation, reverse image search and reverse video search. We are also in the process of completing two short question/answer tests on how to spot fake-news. In addition, news organizations are increasingly using artificial intelligence to help fact-checkers with their work. Lastly, as Renata Gluza from Konkret 24 puts it, the diversity of cultural backgrounds at CEDMO, and hence the variety of disinformation claims, provides an interesting and well-rounded dataset for further research.

## MOST READ FACT CHECKS



1.

This visual effects video does not show 'Russia's vacuum bomb attack in Ukraine'



2.

Video does not show media faking Ukraine victims, it is from the set of a TV series



3.

Video of mannequin shows TV drama, not Ukraine 'taking dead bodies' in Bucha



1.

Soňa Peková a americké biologické laboratórie na Ukrajine



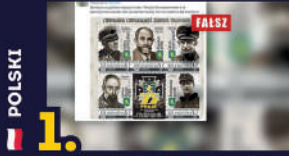
2.

Pětice údajných výroků Markéty Pekarové Adamové



3.

Ukrajina a její hranice byly uznány i Ruskem



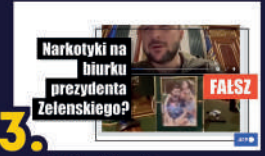
1.

"Poczta Ukraińska wydała takie oto patriotyczne znaczki"? To nieprawda



2.

"We wraku rosyjskiego helikoptera znaleziono pralkę"? Nie, to coś innego



3.

Narkotyki na biurku prezydenta Zelenskiego? Nie, białe linie widoczne w nagraniu z prezydentem Ukrainy to nie są narkotyki



1.

Genocidni na Ukrainie nikt niepotwierdził, počet obětí vojny na Donbase nie su zavražděni civilisti



2.

Zem a Vek šíri klamství na základě dezinterpretovaných slov experta na energetiku



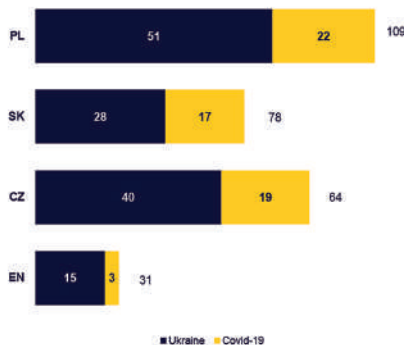
3.

Bádatel pokračuje v dezinformování o očkování proti Covid-19

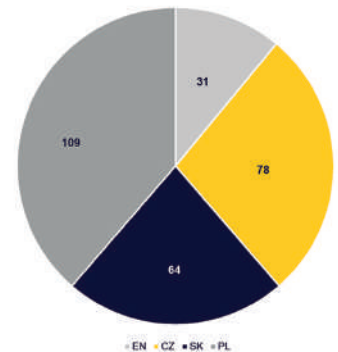
source: cedmohub.eu - Analytics - 10 February to 12 July

## FACT CHECKS OVERVIEW

Number of fact checks per main topics



Number of fact checks per language





# Analysing the Impact of Disinformation on Society

## Activity 5

Lead: [SWPS University](#)

Partners: [Charles University](#), [University of SS. Cyril and Methodius](#)  
in Trnava

Subcontractor: [Collegium Civitas](#)

### I. Overall Goals

The aim of Activity 5 of CEDMO is to conduct extensive interdisciplinary research on disinformation. The research concerns the diverse contexts in which disinformation operates, and is conducted using a variety of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. During the first year of our research activities, we sought to gain a deeper understanding of disinformation and its function in traditional and social media in Poland, Slovakia and Czechia through a series of surveys. The results can also be abstracted to other geographical areas and used as comparative material.

This is the first time research has been done on such a large scale in Central and Eastern Europe – and using such a diverse and comprehensive methodology. In the framework of the project, as well as in relation to subsequent activities, it will be used as a basis for the planning and implementation of educational activities in the field of media literacy.

The research concerns:

1. The impacts and perception of disinformation by the audience using qualitative methods
2. Awareness, definition and approach to disinformation in different professional groups – especially journalists, fact-checkers and PR specialists
3. The textual and graphic structure of disinformation
4. The role of disinformation in a geopolitical context using mathematical modelling tools

The results of completed research will be the publication of 14 scientific reports.

## II. Achievements and Progress of Work: First year of CEDMO

So far, the following studies have been carried out:

1. The perception and impact of disinformation on audiences in Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, with particular reference to disinformation on the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

The reports are to be published on [www.cedmohub.eu](http://www.cedmohub.eu)

**The effects and structure of individual forms of disinformation on the population in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic in:**

**Report 1.** the Czech Republic; **Report 2.** Poland; **Report 3.** Slovakia; **Report 4.** the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia (comparative report); **Report 5.** Social impact of disinformation campaigns and fake news in Poland.

### Goals:

The overall goal of this activity was to estimate the scope of disinformation in CEE societies. Recent research on fake news shows that disinformation is especially potent when featuring highly divisive topics (e.g. COVID-19, the war in Ukraine). Our aim was to measure the range and extent to which disinformation penetrates public opinion. Besides this, we sought to discover the number of people affected, who these what are their views and what narratives they are particularly susceptible to.

### Methods:

The survey was conducted in three countries: Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It was done by using the CAWI method on samples representative for the adult population. The number of respondents in each case was at least 1000 people.

### Results:

By conducting the survey, we gained insight into what – in the opinion of the respondents – the dominant themes and methods of disinformation were regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, and how susceptibility to disinformation correlates with other characteristics of the respondents (demographics, media use, etc.)

Consequently, a report was published comparing the results from Czechia, Poland and Slovakia.

## 2. Verification standards and journalists' awareness of fake news in Poland, Report 9

### **Goals:**

The research strived to discover the level of journalists' knowledge and awareness of disinformation and its related phenomena.

### **Methods:**

The survey covered 300 journalists from all over Poland. The research was open to journalists preparing news and current information in all types of media, traditional and online. The survey was conducted using the CAWI method.

### **Results:**

We gathered information on how journalists define disinformation and the main sources of disinformation they indicate; the types of disinformation they encounter in their work; the most common editorial practices in this context; journalists' opinions on the role of disinformation in modern societies, dominant information trends, and desirable ways to prevent disinformation.

## 3. Information verification standards among Polish media specialists (fact-checker community), Report 11

### **Goals:**

The goal of the study was to identify the professional identity and self-description of a group of professional fact-checkers.

### **Methods:**

Considering their role in tackling disinformation, we treated the fact-checkers as an expert group and decided to use the qualitative method of in-depth interviews (IDI). Interviews were conducted with representatives of all significant fact-checking institutions in Poland.

**Results:**

As a result, it was possible to map the professional identity of fact-checkers, especially in relation to the professional group of journalists. We have also identified the basic standards of work, good practices, and problems fact-checkers face. The results further indicate that fact-checkers do not place themselves in the group of media professionals. Besides this, they demonstrate limited trust in institutional media and their mechanics.

#### 4. Disinformation campaigns and geopolitical order (in the context of Poland), Report 13

**Goals:**

The research focused on two issues: the COVID pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The study investigated the links between disinformation and the conduct of extremist movements.

**Methods:**

Content analysis of far-right and extremist activists' and politicians' social media accounts (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook).

**Results**

The research attempted to find links between groups promoting anti-vax disinformation, and groups disseminating anti-Ukrainian and pro-Russian disinformation on the war in Ukraine. Correspondingly, we identified and analysed ideologically and geopolitically consistent sources of (dis)information that produce content spread by prominent figures of those groups researched.

### III. Challenges and Opportunities

The most pressing challenge for the planned activities was the sudden shift in the external social environment. In practice, the topics associated with the pandemic have lost their relevance at the expense of Ukraine-related disinformation, which has proliferated since February 2022. To tackle this, we modified our research objectives and tools. Ultimately, this increased the value of the results obtained.

Moreover, we observe a progressive diversification of disinformation, which poses a challenge for research on the linguistic and visual structure of disinformation activities. It appears that more focus should be on nar-

rative analysis and qualitative discourse analysis without, of course, abandoning more quantitative studies of language.

Among the emerging **opportunities** that were exploited in the course of the project was the expansion of the range of research that produced data from all consortium member countries. This applies both to research on the perception and impact of disinformation and also the analyses of language structures, which will probably be conducted for all three languages. Besides this, the shift in the external environment allowed for the development of a more reliable model of the reception and impact of disinformation. The technological advancement of the consortium members has enhanced the data collection process in the context of this analysis. Lastly, in-depth interviews with professional journalists were planned, which opens new venues for important research.

# Campaigning for Media Literacy and Education

## Activity 6

Lead: Charles University

Partners: All

Subcontractor: [Palacký University](#)

### I. Overall Goals

Due to the constant transformation of the media landscape and the huge amount of information that comes to us every day from various sources, greater and greater demands are placed on consumers of media content. They must be able to assess information, verify it, critically judge it, recognise different forms of manipulation, and so on. In other words – media consumers must have strong media literacy skills.

Based on various media literacy studies in Central European countries, we have proposed a mixture of different educational tools tailor-made for the characteristics of different groups of people in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland. We target teachers and journalists, and also prepare educational tools for students, parents and the public.

**The objective of our activities is to strengthen media literacy in these target groups in the territory of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland.** As the CEDMO project is aimed at dealing with information chaos around us, our media educational activities are especially focused on strengthening the following skills:

1. Ability to read different types of texts critically and with understanding
2. Ability to critically evaluate information from the media
3. Ability to orientate oneself in media products and genres
4. Ability to recognise manipulative elements in media messages (e.g. in advertising)
5. Get acquainted with the techniques of media manipulation, especially to recognise common kinds of cognitive bias
6. Effectively recognise typical kinds of hoaxes and misinformation, and differentiate them from satirical messages

## II. Achievements and Progress: First Year of CEDMO

During the first year of the CEDMO project, we have been working on our first deliverables and disseminating information on our outputs and future plans.

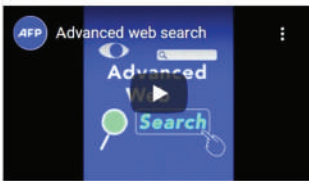
### Activities focused on increasing media literacy

We are committed to completing the following four tasks, and we have already done much of what we promised:

#### 1. Empowering the public in fact-checking

Agence France-Presse provided a set of [tutorials](#) and two online guides to help journalists, fact-checkers and the public fight disinformation. AFP has been working on creating an interactive quiz focusing on fake news and disinformation which will be available on [cedmohub.eu](#) during autumn 2022.

Advanced web Search



Advanced Twitter Search



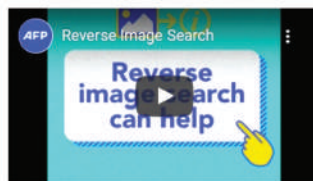
Using Metadata



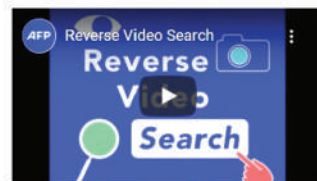
Geolocation



Reverse Image Search



Reverse Video Search



#### 2. Educational events

While we are committed to organising two educational events per country throughout the project, our plans are more ambitious.

##### The Czech Events

Starting in September 2022, the Czech team is organising six lectures for teachers and future teachers, and for journalists and future journalists. They have put together a handbook which offers participating teachers

some inspiration on teaching topics such as disinformation and media manipulation. The Czech team has also prepared a shorter brochure for non-participating teachers and the public, which describes the team's approach to media education and gives examples of activities for classroom teaching in schools.

### **The Polish Events**

The Polish team is preparing three webinars and one live workshop for teachers and a workshop for journalists. Beginning with a teachers' webinar in November 2022, they will apply their first year's experience to developing training materials. They are also putting together a guide for parents to be published online in March 2023.

### **The Slovak Events**

In Slovakia, the plan is to arrange four different media education activities. In May 2022, the Slovak team launched a teachers' competition to collect educational projects to be analysed from October that year. The team's online disinformation course for teachers has been underway since June 2022 and will proceed in October 2023. From January to October 2023, the team will be organising two online/ live courses in fake news and critical thinking for selected groups of primary and secondary school students. Since December 2021, the team has been working on an analysis of educational projects focused on online disinformation in the Slovak environment, which has been extended to the Czech environment. The database for this Czechoslovak comparative research project was built in September 2022, and the team has been analysing the data set.

### ***3. Video campaigns and podcasts***

The Polish media education campaign consists of 12 short films and 10 podcasts. While making the short films, the team will target Polish youth and cooperate with social media influencers, vloggers and bloggers. The objective of this task is to highlight fake news as an important problem for young people, and for them to gain competence using internet tools to verify information. Some of the videos and all the podcasts will be produced for the adult audience – particularly fact-checkers, journalists, teachers and parents – and the first episodes will be available on the CEDMO website in December 2022.



#### **4. *Serious game on the topic of misinformation***

The Slovak team has developed the “Factology Checker” – a digital game that uses simple game mechanics to strengthen the player’s critical thinking. This is a fun way for the player to learn how to effectively apply aspects of semiotic and content analysis, enabling them to evaluate any type of media communication. The first completed deliverable was a document describing the game design (March 2022). Since then, the team has been working on a prototype of the game and it will be delivered in March 2023.

#### **Disseminating information about our work**

To develop cooperation with other hubs and projects, we have taken part in meetings and events, sharing our research, education experiences and information on our outputs and future plans. To this end, our unit has participated in EDMO’s workshops on media and information literacy, EDMO’s other trainings, and in various meetings with other hubs or projects (e.g. Profact, EU-HYBNET).

### **III. Challenges and Opportunities**

At the beginning of the project, we struggled with terminology, but soon discovered that our views on definitions and approaches to media education are not that different. Nevertheless, it is a challenge to create a unit with common goals and unified activities while respecting regional differences and national teams’ preferences.

While organising media education events and creating educational tools, we realised that there is a lot of space to study media education in relation to disinformation. That is why we extended one of our outputs – the Slovak team’s analysis of media educational projects on disinformation – to the other countries. Unfortunately, all three countries could not agree on the research goals, so we only extended it to the Czech environment (as a supplementary Czechoslovak comparative study).

We also discovered that there are at least two other important groups that our media education campaigns do not sufficiently target – parents and seniors. Going forward, we would like our work to address these topics and groups.

# Development and Research of Technological and AI-based Fact-checking Support

## Activity 3

Lead: **Kempelen Institute of Intelligent Technologies**

Partner: [Czech Technical University](#)

### I. Overall Goals

The main aim of CEDMO's technology and AI-related activities is to make fact-checking more effective. We support fact-checkers through the research and development of tools built on top of AI-based methods. These tools will support or even automate selected steps of the fact-checking process. The tech and AI activities are primarily addressed by two CEDMO technology members, namely the Kempelen Institute of Intelligent Technologies (KIIT) and the Czech Technical University (CTU).

We decided to research and provide AI-based support and utilize AI methods in the following fact-checking process steps:

1. Check-worthy document detection,
2. Check-worthy claim detection,
3. Previously fact-checked claim detection,
4. Evidence retrieval.

As CEDMO includes five fact-checking organisations from Czechia, Poland and Slovakia, multilingual capacity plays an important role in the region. Our tools will primarily support three local languages (Czech, Slovak and Polish) as well as English. Our local fact-checkers may also work with content in English, and additional English language support will lead to the potential adoption of tools for fact-checkers outside the CEDMO consortium.

All the above-mentioned research is primarily focused on supporting textual content processing. In the case of multimedia content, it will be transformed into text. For example: we employ speech-to-text tools to transcribe YouTube videos.

The proposed methods and tools will be (re)used in various scenarios. For example, the detection of check-worthy claims will aid the search for previously fact-checked claims, as well as for evidence retrieval.

## II. Achievements and Progress of Work: First year of CEDMO

As we progress in our technological aims, thus far we have achieved the following results:

1. Analysis of fact-checkers' needs and (non)functional requirements;
2. Identification of fact-checking steps to be supported by human-centric AI;
3. Analysis of existing works and available resources (internal as well as external);
4. Technical design proposal of the prototype solution;
5. Preliminary verification of the proposed solution's viability.

In order to understand fact-checkers' needs and requirements, we have surveyed fact-checkers and fact-checking organisations. Their needs and requirements were collected and evaluated in two stages: through **semi-structured in-depth interviews**, followed by an online questionnaire. In total, 21 fact-checkers from around Europe were involved. Questions asked during the interviews and in the questionnaire covered the **whole fact-checking process** and the **technologies** that fact-checkers currently use.

Our results indicate that the **biggest pain points for fact checkers** lie in the monitoring and verification parts of the process. The fact-checkers are often overloaded with potential disinformation. Finding fact-check-worthy claims is time consuming. Furthermore, it would be helpful if there were better filtering for fact-checkers – beyond a 'virality' criterion, for example. However, the claim verification itself is not such a pressing issue – the significant problem lies in searching for sources of evidence. Also, searching within the existing fact-checks is considered to be very difficult.

Based on the needs identified, and our studies of related works, tools, datasets and state-of-the-art techniques, we outlined the proposed end-user (fact-checker) tools (see also mapping to identified needs in the following Figure).

**Check-worthy document detection tool**

A fact-checker will open a news article, blog or social media post and, upon request, an automatic analysis of the document will detect indicators of low credibility and potentially high impact. For example: an anonymous author, the presence of propaganda techniques/argumentation fallacies, citing unreliable sources, the predicted popularity of the content. Several techniques will be used, from a simple lookup in whitelists/ blacklists, up to advanced ML/ NLP models that will, for example, classify typographical and stylistic characteristics of texts.

**Check-worthy claim detection tool**

The fact-checker will select a whole document or the part of the text that might contain the check-worthy claims and, upon request, the check-worthy claims will be highlighted. The algorithms employed will be based on the methods of extractive and/ or abstractive summarisation and Natural Language Inference (NLI) models.

**Previously fact-checked claim detection tool**

A fact-checker will highlight the sentence containing the check-worthy claim and, upon request, the automatic detection of previously fact-checked claims will be performed. Matching will be made against the previously fact-checked claims in multiple (primarily European) languages, as it is expected that the same claim may have appeared elsewhere.

Needs and requirements of CEDMO fact-checkers	End-user tools to support CEDMO fact-checkers
Searching for the source of evidence for verification of the potential disinformation	Evidence retrieval
Seeking factual claims suitable for fact checking in a selected article	Check-worthy claim detection
Searching within the existing fact checks (both their own and from other fact-checking organisations)	Previously fact-checked claim detection
Filtering from the monitored outlets	Check-worthy document detection

**Fig.** Mapping fact-checkers’ needs and requirements for proposed end-user tools.

## Evidence retrieval tool

A fact-checker will highlight the sentence containing the check-worthy claim and, upon request, documents that can potentially help determine the claim's validity will be recommended using automatic detection. The tool will include a claim verification module for estimating veracity.

## III. Challenges and Opportunities

The CEDMO consortium is in a position to exploit multiple existing technological assets:

- [Monant platform](#) (by *KInIT*). The purpose of which is to gather and store data (user-generated content along with its own context) that potentially contains disinformation. The platform allows the integration of methods for automated data analysis.
- *Slovak language models and tools* (by *KInIT*), such as [SlovakBERT](#), a [sentiment analysis model](#), [semantic textual similarity model](#) or [POS-tagger](#).
- *Fact-check annotation platform* (by *CTU*) used to collect custom datasets in the FEVER format (built around arbitrary verified corpora) and to support source-document preselection, claim extraction, mutation and labelling.
- *Czech fact-checking datasets and models* (by *CTU*), like [CsFEVER](#) and [CTKfacts](#).

**Our next steps** in researching and developing AI-based fact-checking tools are as follows:

- The web monitoring module of the Monant platform will be enriched with new data providers, putting the highest priority on real-time collection.
- A new version of the AI core infrastructure will be developed to enable the flexible deployment of services behind the proposed tools.
- The largest portion of the work will be dedicated to the development of the proposed tools themselves. This will include two major subtasks. The first one is to aggregate existing datasets and, since there are no suitable datasets for our local languages, new datasets must be created. The second one is to apply NLP/ ML models (mostly outcomes of other research projects) to develop the proposed tools.
- As soon as the first prototypes of the proposed tools are available, we will start integrating them into the fact-checking platforms/ toolboxes.

# Monitoring the Media Landscape and Proposals for Better Regulation

## Activity 7

Lead: Charles University

Partners: All

### I. Overall Goals

The main goals of CEDMO activities are to map the state of occurrence, perception, and regulation of disinformation, promote the public debate on how to approach and deal with this phenomenon, and to contribute to the formulation of evidence-based policies and laws.

These goals are achieved through three main activities:

#### 1. Empirical research on the perception of disinformation

We map the perception of the impact of disinformation on society through public opinion surveys. For instance, these surveys provide information on how people react to disinformation, or how they perceive their own rights. This empirical research provides us with real-life data on particular social problems that help us formulate better, evidence-based policies.

#### 2. Monitoring the status of disinformation regulation

We continuously follow policy and regulatory developments in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland, and prepare annual monitoring reports based on this. These reports provide an overview of how each state approaches challenges posed by disinformation. We also evaluate the efficiency of the policies based on several criteria. The first monitoring report will be published in October 2022 and the second monitoring report will be published in October 2023.

#### 3. Proposals for better regulation

In April 2023, we will present the results of our research to the respective national authorities, along with proposals on how to tackle regulation based on real-life data and the results of our legal analyses. The proposals shall respect guidelines from international law, EU law, and specific national laws.

## II. Achievements and Progress of Work: First year of CEDMO

In the spring of 2022 CEDMO, in collaboration with IPSOS, conducted a public opinion survey on how the populations of the Czech Republic and Slovakia perceive disinformation and freedom of speech. Among other results, the survey describes how people react to disinformation on social media and how they perceive the information war.



**Fig.** The number of citizens who perceive the Czech Republic or Slovakia as part of the disinformation war led by Russia has been decreasing (IPSOS Survey for CEDMO, April-June, 2022).

In order to prepare our first report, we also mapped policy and regulatory developments in Central Europe.

### Czech Republic

**Summary** The Czech Republic has not yet taken any specific regulatory steps regarding disinformation. However, in recent weeks the government began considering adopting a new law that would tackle disinformation. The first version of the new law was recently prepared by the Czech Ministry of the Interior.

**Definition** There is currently no legal definition when it comes to disinformation. Similarly, there is no specific legislation that would cover disinformation.

**Reaction to Ukraine** In relation to the war in Ukraine, several websites were blocked in the Czech Republic. However, unlike in Slovakia, there was no legislative act to support this action. On 25th February 2022, [CZ.NIC](#) (a Czech domain registry) blocked 8 websites. Later, on the 1st March, more websites were blocked by the operators. After months in a legislative vacuum, the websites were unblocked on the 24th May. However these actions were only based on the Government's statement from 25th February and not on an actual legislative act. Currently, there are multiple lawsuits suing either the state or the domain registry due to the absence of a legal basis for being blocked.

### Slovakia

**Summary** Out of the three observed countries, Slovakia has come the furthest when it comes to regulatory proposals. In recent months a new regulation concerning the media landscape was proposed. The new media regulation was firstly introduced on the 7th October 2021. However, the legislative process has not moved much further since then. Similarly, there have been attempts to introduce a new criminal code concerning the spread of disinformation. However, this proposal has been widely criticised.

**Definition** There is currently no legal definition. The definition proposed in a Penal Code amendment was criticised as being too vague.

**Reaction to Ukraine** In reaction to the war, the cybersecurity law was amended. This amendment gave the [Slovak National Security Authority](#) the power to block disinformation websites until 30th June 2022. However, the current law does not include any specific mechanism or procedure when it comes to identifying problematic websites.

### Poland

**Summary** Poland uses general regulatory provisions and has adopted its own [Code of Good Practice](#). Disinformation is currently regulated by general provisions of media law, civil law, criminal law, and law on the provision of electronic services. Non-legislative tools are applied, such as fact-checking and the Code of Good Practice. In December 2020, the Polish Ministry of Justice introduced a specific law on protecting the freedom of speech of social media users. This proposal was criticised as a potential tool for online censorship. In May 2022, a number of signatories adopted the Code of Good Practice prepared by Polish experts.

**Definition** Disinformation is defined in the Code of Good Practice.



**Reaction to Ukraine** The Special Services and Police reveal disinformation and warn the public against it. The Polish Government publicly refutes war-related disinformation.

### **III. Challenges and Opportunities**

**Challenges** Regulating disinformation is challenging, as it may interfere with freedom of speech. At the EU level, disinformation is generally defined as “*verifiably false or misleading information*” created for either economic gain or with the intention to deceive the public which may cause public harm. From the perspective of imposing sanctions, each piece of information should be checked as to whether it complies with these criteria. Any general solution that does not consider specific elements of each – *speech act* might interfere with individual rights to freedom of speech. Moreover, proving the intent of a person creating or spreading disinformation can get very complex. As a result, there is a tendency to come up with general solutions that shift controlling obligations to intermediaries. This, however, may lead to over-compliance and blocking otherwise lawful content.

**Examples** Experience from Slovakia shows us that it is very difficult to come up with a precise legal definition of disinformation. Experience from Poland shows us that well-intentioned regulation promoting freedom of speech could become a tool for online censorship. Experience from the Czech Republic shows us how problematic it is to find a balance in blocking disinformation websites. Questions arise, such as whether we should block an entire website or only some of its content.

**Opportunities** We are presented with an opportunity to shape a new legal framework that would more precisely clarify the scope of freedom of speech in the world of online media. Moreover, we have a unique opportunity to contribute to shaping public policy on the use of Artificial Intelligence for identifying disinformation and individual evidence-based technical enforcement of policies and laws.

# The War in Ukraine: Lessons Learned

Written by: Jakub Rybníkář

## Background

The war in Ukraine marks a notable shift in the role of disinformation campaigns during times of crisis. Although primarily fought on the ground with firearms, it is clear now that both parties have actively attempted to seize control over narratives and information channels. Some [commenters](#) have gone so far as to call the conflict 'the first TikTok war' given the unprecedented importance of social media platforms and video content. The spread of Ukraine-related disinformation seems to be the most prominent among populations of Central Europe.

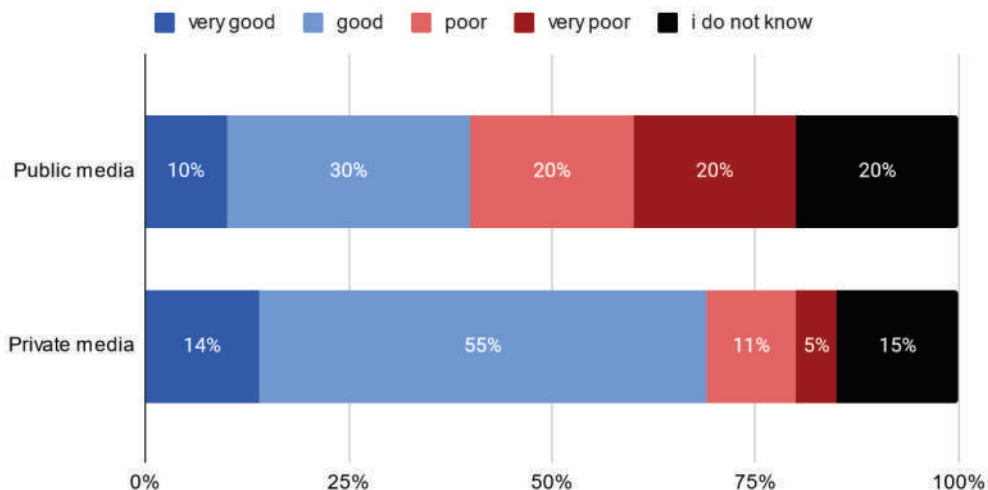
CEDMO, positioned as the primary research hub on disinformation, has set its objectives for the first year according to the region's information disorders. Accordingly, the vast majority of CEDMO's activities have focused on COVID-19 related disinformation. The abrupt shift within the information domain has prompted us to adjust our activities and exploit the possibility of analysing the immediate effects of disinformation campaigns concerning Russia's military invasion of Ukraine.

## Independent research and access to data

The primary challenge to CEDMO's research agenda was the unforeseen shift from COVID-19 to this surprise all-out war. As a result, the defining characteristics of the information flows monitored have changed. To counter this, CEDMO adjusted its planned quantitative research and promptly included questions pertinent to the ongoing war.

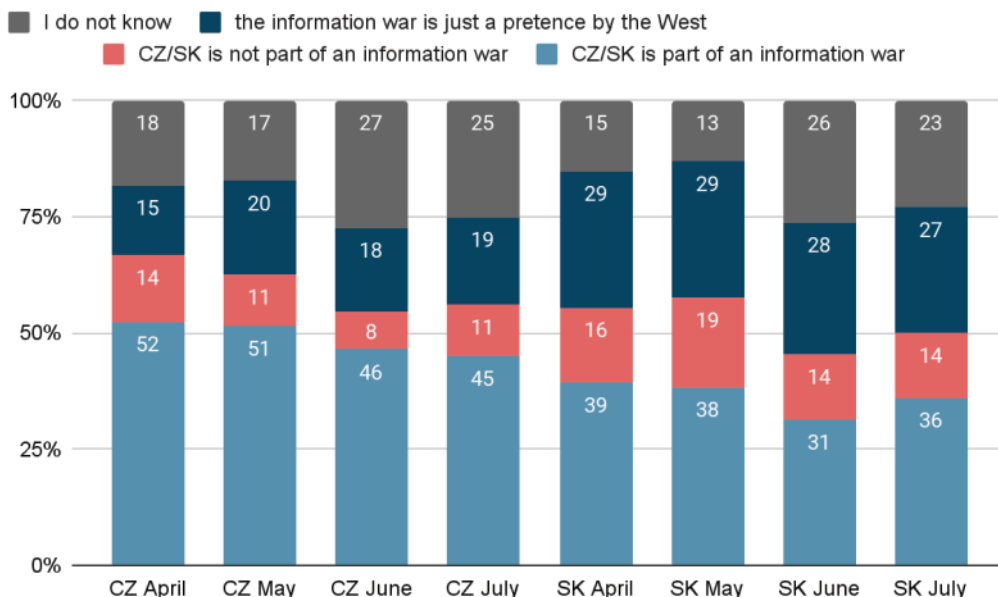
The study reveals a rather worrisome trend regarding trust in the Polish public media. At least 40% of the respondents consider public media reporting on Ukraine biased, while almost 70% believe that private media is capable of delivering impartial news. This demonstrates a paradigm shared across the CEE countries, where politics is intertwined with the function of public media, which significantly decreases public trust in these outlets. As of July 2022, CEDMO experts are working on an in-depth comparative analysis of the results from this survey.

How do you evaluate the impartiality of public media (TVP, Polish Radio...) with regard to their reporting on the events in Ukraine?  
(DRB Survey for CEDMO, July 2022)



Besides the adjustments in the planned research, CEDMO has partnered with research agency IPSOS and conducted a large sociological [survey](#) consisting of four rounds of data collection (April, May, June, July) analysing the perceptions and attitudes of Czech and Slovak populations regarding Ukraine. Each round of the study involved over 1,000 respondents from both countries, who took part in a short CAWI questionnaire.

CEDMO in Context



(IPSOS Survey for CEDMO, April-July, 2022)

The respondents were asked to indicate which of the statements above reflects their opinion regarding the war in Ukraine. The results show a decline in the number of people who believe that their respective countries are part of an information war. In stark contrast, almost a third of both populations have grown unsure about the situation (10%+ increase). This unsettling trend, where the population drifts towards uncertainty, may be explained by several factors, such as a shift of attention towards other issues, or information overload. The results illustrate the complexity and dynamics of the information domain, which in turn provides opportunities and data for further research.

### **Media Literacy**

The conflict in Ukraine is reflected in the media education activities prepared by CEDMO, especially in its lectures, workshops, podcasts and films. Prior to the war, CEDMO's media literacy experts had already planned to include the topic of war propaganda, manipulation techniques, how to recognise suspect information sources, and so on. However, the current situation in Ukraine serves as a concrete and actual example of disinformation phenomena. Media education should be related to current social and geopolitical events, as news coverage and the media can (mis)inform the public.

### **Fact Checking**

Slowly recovering from the previous acute phases of the COVID-19 infodemic, the region has faced a series of fast-paced disinformation campaigns from the very start of the Russian invasion. AFP, in collaboration with CEDMO and its partners, has verified over 275 claims (31 in English, 80 in Czech, 100 in Polish and 64 in Slovak). Similar to other crisis scenarios, information channels were filled with disinformation, especially during the early stages of the war. As a response, CEDMO has increased its fact-checking output supported by a dedicated section on its website. By June, however, the conflict had shifted to a war of attrition. In such warfare, disinformation narratives easily lose their momentum, and hence the steady decline in new false information and related fact-checks.

Despite the efforts to sow malign information in various directions, there appear to be three main themes of disinformation. The first theme attempts to push pro-Russian narratives featuring [genocide](#) and [fascism](#). The second theme features the unruly [behaviour](#) of Ukrainian refugees in Central Europe. The third theme seeks to sow uncertainty and chaos by denying the [Bucha](#) massacre or amplifying the presence of the Ghost of Kyiv.



### **EDMO Task Force on Ukraine**

The rapid spread of mis/ disinformation featuring Ukraine has led to the creation of a special rapid response team, the [EDMO Task Force](#) on disinformation on the war in Ukraine. The primary role of the task force is to pool resources through a network of European experts from various domains and disciplines in order to understand and tackle disinformation. Besides building resilience across societies, the task force has created an unprecedented network of fact-checkers throughout Europe – including non-EDMO members from the Baltics and Bulgaria – which has significantly boosted the EU’s fact-checking capabilities. CEDMO, with the experience of being at the eastern frontier of the EU, has contributed to the task force’s ten recommendations on the war in Ukraine thanks to three media and disinformation professionals: **Mr. Jochen Spangenberg**, **Mr. Grzegorz Rzczkowski**, and **Mr. Roman Imielski**.

Their respective comments are below.

Where do you see the added value of the task force?

Mr. Jochen Spangenberg: *“Especially in times of war and conflict, propaganda (and respectively the spread of false and deliberately misleading information) is rife and is used as part of warfare. That is why it is important to pay special attention to what is happening in the digital space surrounding the war in Ukraine, raise awareness about methods and mechanisms that can be observed, investigate disinformation narratives and do whatever possible to raise awareness and counter disinformation.”*

Mr. Roman Imielski: *“From my perspective, the most important value of the task force is the sharing of many points of view, because the Polish perspective is different from the Italian perspective, for example. We can share our experiences from different media outlets and universities. It’s an interesting mix of journalism and science.”*

# Sustainability and Circular Economy in CEDMO

Written by: Caroline Beach and Adriana Dergam

CEDMO plays a key role in identifying, researching and prioritizing the most critical sources and causes of information disorders in Central Europe. Part of CEDMO's mission is to use our platform as a media observatory to contribute to the UN's [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). This UN project outlines 17 goals for international cooperation towards more equitable societies and the environment. CEDMO aims to primarily focus on the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

- [SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions](#) – promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels;
- [SDG 17: Partnership for the Goals](#) – strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development; and
- [SDG 4: Quality Education](#) – ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

A free and pluralist media sector is a prerequisite to functioning democracies and supporting the creation of peaceful, just and inclusive societies. We aim to create and strengthen international partnerships among various stakeholders in the media, the private sector, research institutions and governmental bodies. Another aim is to educate the public on their sources of media and information. Due to CEDMO's widespread sphere of influence, we contribute to a similarly wide range of other SDGs. For example, when fact-checking COVID-19 related content, we play a role in [SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being](#).

CEDMO recognizes the urgency of the SDGs and the importance of the Circular Economy. We committed to organizing the CEDMO International Conference 2022 (CIC2022) with minimal impact on the environment, and consulted with experts on organizing sustainable events to carefully select suppliers that meet our environmental standards.

We partnered with [CIRA Advisory](#), which specializes in the circular economy in order to reach our sustainability goals. CIRA supports its clients in sustainable technical solutions, project management, formulating circular stra-

tegies, organizing sustainable events and communication services. They have the expertise to implement the circular economy within Czech companies and support their adoption of circular business models. CEDMO joined CIRA's client list of other major local corporations such as Kofola, CPI and Komerční Banka. They are also part of the Sustainability Committee of the Czech Olympic Committee and they evaluate sustainable business projects for the SDG awards by the Association of Social Responsibility: TOP Responsible Company and Sustainable Business of the Year.

Our efforts towards sustainability are also in line with [The City of Prague](#), one of the main sponsors of the CIC2022. Prague has drawn inspiration from other major European cities and has issued two major strategy documents that guide its decisions: [The Climate Plan 2030](#) and [Circular Prague 2030](#).

CIC2022 focused on [SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production](#). Specifically, in these areas of interest:

- **Transportation:** Our venue's central location allowed guests to enjoy Prague's convenient and sustainable public transit, which aligns with [SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities](#).
- **Venue:** We optimized our technical equipment to be energy efficient, by activating functions such as sleep mode when equipment is not in use, and set the climate controls to a more efficient temperature.
- **Digitally Native Approach:** All informational and promotional CIC2022 materials were extensively distributed in digital formats. We encouraged guests to first look online for information before reaching for printed materials.
- **Catering:** Our catering team provided reusable dishes and cutlery, and refreshments made from locally grown and seasonal produce. Vegetarian and vegan options were available to accommodate our variety of guests and information was available concerning the carbon footprint of the served refreshments.
- **Hotels:** For our speakers, we selected hotels with commitments to sustainability and circular economy.
- **Gifts:** To show our appreciation for their time and expertise, our panelists received local products made from upcycled materials in enterprises that employ disabled or otherwise disadvantaged people. This is in line with circular economy principles, as well as [SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities](#), and [SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth](#).



# The Global Goals For Sustainable Development



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We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the CEDMO Project over the last year for the commitment, diligence and passion which they consistently brought to the initiative and whose tireless efforts made CEDMO's first year such a success. We would further like to thank everyone whose energy and dedication helped to make the CEDMO international conference 2022 possible.

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