



ASSESSMENT OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION STRUCTURES AND CAPABILITIES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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December 2023

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This report has been prepared with support from IRI's Beacon Project.
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INTRODUCTION

The primary goals of strategic communication comprise from both an informative role for domestic and international audiences regarding the nation's values, identity, capabilities, and actions, as well as a strategic security aspect to monitor, analyze, and respond to international political developments to enhance the nation's position and avert potentially destabilizing actions from adversaries.

Despite the presence of the concept of strategic communication in Czech strategic documents since 2016, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the state's inability to effectively, uniformly and strategically communicate with the public in crisis situations. The practical implementation became more conspicuous after significant events such as the war in Ukraine or the energy crisis. These occurrences shed light on the shortcomings in the government's communication coordination during crises, highlighting the need for a more cohesive strategy.

The present report aims to delve deeper into the landscape of strategic communication in the Czech Republic. After laying out its legal and institutional framework and main actors involved in its development it seeks to assess the particular Czech challenges and opportunities for developing an efficient strategic communication system. Ultimately, the report aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on improving strategic communication within the country with recommendations for its optimization and alignment with national interests and goals.

BACKGROUND: INFORMATION THREATS FROM FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC ACTORS

The information space in the Czech Republic is formed by a combination of domestic and foreign actors, contributing to the spread of hostile communication. Nevertheless, the primary issue currently lies in domestic actors. They form a 'disinformation ecosystem,' consisting of websites, (dis)influencers, civic movements and social media communities responsible for propagating a significant portion of disinformation. As reported by PSSI's earlier [study](#), they use polarizing topics and business with fear to gain media attention, political capital or even financial profit, targeting national-conservative voters and people dissatisfied with the current political leadership, concerned about their future prospects due to the war in Ukraine and economic crisis. They rely on anti-system narratives in the broadest sense, including anti-democratic, anti-Western and anti-government narratives to erode the trust in democratic institutions and the Czech Republic's current foreign policy orientation.

For now, only the politically active actors seem to have somehow considerable societal impact. However, the danger posed by disinformation extends beyond these figures. Many activists and civil movements that rely on disinformation might currently be perceived as having limited societal influence. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that their engagement with the political dimension of the disinformation space, coupled with their frequent collaboration with politically motivated actors, suggests that future political aspirations cannot be dismissed. This is especially pertinent as these movements and activists are, in essence, political actors themselves, albeit operating outside the realm of formal party politics. Often, their unsuccessful political past has led them to embrace civic activism, and the interplay between political ambitions and disinformation remains a concerning aspect that extends beyond the realm of traditional political actors.

Currently, these actors mainly represent the fringes of the political and media/influencer scene with a limited audience. Nevertheless, a potential threat is posed by their attempts to address people (and voters)

who are undecided about critical issues such as whether the Czech Republic belongs to the West, East, or a neutral position in-between, whether to actively support Ukraine or who to vote for. Ideology built on national interests is a connecting factor between these actors, but political aspirations (and financial competition) seem to actually reduce their chances of cooperation since they become competitors. Within this landscape, it is crucial to recognize the inherent risks of disinformation. The propagation of misleading narratives can contribute to the polarization of society, fostering mistrust towards politicians and the state. Moreover, it risks legitimizing extreme positions and fueling increasing frustration among the population. Even if the hard core influenced by these actors constitutes **a mere 6%**, the narratives they promote can be absorbed and legitimized by broader layers of voters, amplifying the impact on public opinion. This danger is particularly notable in foreign policy discussions, as mentioned earlier, and underscores the need for vigilance in addressing the potential consequences of disinformation

Authoritarian foreign powers, notably exemplified by the Russian Federation, engage in information operations that represent a considerable risk. In the case of Russia, its influence is amplified by the aforementioned domestic actors who rely on hostile narratives and techniques from the “Kremlin playbook”, although this alignment is not necessarily carried out in a systematically coordinated manner or directly funded by Russia. Multiple polling results have shown that only **around 6%** of the Czech population are firm pro-Russian supporters. However, the broader hostile communication of the political opposition, as well as the anti-system communities, often aligns with narratives utilized by Russia. **Recent information** from the Czech intelligence services also underline the Czech tendency to overestimate the influence and capabilities of the Kremlin and at the same time, underscore the role of the Czech society and politicians as major influencers shaping the disinformation landscape.

Hostile narratives appear across multiple platforms such as Facebook, Youtube, and most recently Telegram. It is worth mentioning that before social media platforms became the main channels for disinformation, the Czech disinformation space consisted mainly of pro-Russian “alternative” online media and blogs. This included local language mutations of Russian state media such as Sputnik, domestic media publishing translations of articles from Russian media, or simply outlets with strong pro-Russian stances. These outlets provided a basis for the current disinformation landscape stretched across different digital platforms.

Chinese influence in the Czech Republic initially thrived due to favorable political support from former President Miloš Zeman and the Social Democratic government. However, with their departure from the political scene, China’s direct influence has waned. Nevertheless, China continues to exert its influence through academic and media collaborations, often utilizing Chinese expatriates for its interests. Chinese information influence has been less successful so far, especially because of its inability to localize the disseminated content properly. However, there are ongoing attempts, e.g., from the Chinese Embassy in the Czech Republic or the **Chinese Radio International** and its local language mutation. Pro-Chinese sources also support and attempt to validate pro-Kremlin narratives, for example in relation to the war in Ukraine.

The motivations driving Czech disinformation actors are multifaceted. An earlier PSSI’s **study** highlights financial gain as one such motivation. During critical events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, local disinformation “influencers” garnered substantial followership. These influencers have effectively cultivated devoted supporter bases, willing to support them financially via donations or buying their merch and other products, often amounting to tens of thousands of crowns monthly. Notably, these actions are not solely reliant on financial support from foreign entities like Russia. Instead, they capitalize

on the disillusionment and lost trust among citizens toward the government institutions, media, and the system as such.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

An analysis of the current responses in the Czech Republic in the context of strategic communication reveals an evolving landscape still in its early stages. Despite references to strategic communication in various national strategic documents, a structural and cohesive implementation of a robust strategic communication framework appears to be absent so far. While some progress is evident, there remains a lack of a concrete basis and mandate for an effective and unified strategic communication strategy.

The [National Security Audit in 2016](#) was the first to highlight the need for a conceptual approach to strategic communication. It identified deficiencies in responding to disinformation and recommended fostering transparent information dissemination. Subsequent strategies, such as the [National Strategy for Countering Hybrid Interference](#) and the [National Cyber Security Strategy](#) emphasized the importance of a strategic communication system aimed at delivering unified state positions, especially in response to crises. Furthermore, the [Action Plan for the National Strategy for Countering Hybrid Operations](#) specifically outlines, as part of the imperative of a systematic and comprehensive approach within the Czech Republic, preparation and presentation to the government a draft of the state's strategic communication system, complete with a mechanism for systematically coordinating relevant actors. The Ministry of Defence was designated with the responsibility for this strategic initiative but it was not able to deliver it on time due to the Russian invasion on Ukraine.

However, the Czech Republic has not so far passed a national concept of strategic communication, such as the one present, e.g., in Slovakia, which limits its current possibilities. Generally, the absence of a holistic and formally coordinated approach, coupled with resource constraints and inadequate inter-unit collaboration, remains a substantial hurdle for the implementation of an efficient and impactful strategic communication strategy in the Czech Republic. These elements are vital for the effective implementation of strategic communication but are lacking in the current framework.

Role of Government (Political)

The role of the government, particularly in addressing disinformation and media-related matters in the Czech Republic, has witnessed significant changes and fluctuations over a short period of time, reflecting an evolving and somewhat tumultuous approach in dealing with these issues.

In March 2022, the Czech government established a government representative for media and disinformation. This role was integral to the Office of the Government, aiming to contribute to strategic communication and assist in formulating budgets for government communication. Additionally, the responsibilities of this representative extended to the revision of media laws and the coordination of draft legislation on disinformation. The task also included coordination of preparing and presenting to the government a draft of the state's strategic communication system, complete with a mechanism for systematically coordinating relevant actors. However, this position faced swift dissolution just a year later, amid official [claims](#) that the appointed commissioner had fulfilled the responsibilities assigned. This step followed criticism of the government representative's capability to communicate his role well to the public, which led part of the public to believe his office was in fact a censorship unit. The criticism also suggested that the role had been utilized primarily for political promotion rather than neutral strategic

communication. The representative was also working on an Action Plan for Countering Disinformation. However, the intent of this plan was perceived as more of a guideline than a concrete solution. It included proposals such as centralizing state advertising but drew criticism for the controversial proposition to financially support independent media and non-profit organizations. Ultimately, both the action plan and the position were annulled. Responsibility for managing this agenda was reassigned to the national security adviser, who concluded that such a plan was unnecessary. This development suggested that the disinformation portfolio fell into the background of the government's priorities again and no intensified structural responses are to be expected.

In October 2023, a new adviser to the Prime Minister Fiala was appointed, focused on information literacy and countering disinformation. However, his position lacks executive power and will rely on the PM's willingness to heed his advice. The PM highlighted the imperative of countering disinformation within the fields of security and intelligence. Simultaneously, the emphasis was placed on enhancing people's information literacy and bolstering educational efforts in this domain. However, the shifting responsibilities and strategies indicate a lack of a consistent and unified approach, marked by the evolving nature of government initiatives and the ongoing struggle to define and implement a coherent and sustainable plan to address disinformation and media-related concerns in the Czech Republic.

Generally, Czech politicians can see disinformation and especially counter-disinformation activities are a very sensitive issue for the electorate, often leading to accusations of a return to censorship, echoing traumas from the socialist times. Therefore, there is not much political willingness to be active in this field or to even mention the term disinformation which has acquired negative connotations among the public.

The lack of a consistent policy approach was apparent especially during the harsh lesson of the COVID-19 pandemics that caught the government and relevant ministries unprepared, which led to unclear communicating, imprecise and conflicting messages and inability to face mis- and disinformation effectively. This resulted not only in a sharp decrease of support for the political leadership (former minority coalition of ANO and Czech Social Democratic Party) but affected the general trust in government institutions. Overall, there is a need for a comprehensive assessment of communication strategies, particularly in crucial situations like the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis, where the state lacks a solid foundation for communication. While ministries such as Defence, Interior, and Foreign Affairs have shown individual efforts with campaigns on significant occasions, these initiatives are driven individually rather than as a part of a coordinated system. Generally, the state needs to enhance its communication efforts, especially during communication vacuums on critical topics like vaccination or the energy crisis. Failure to address these gaps creates opportunities for alternative interpretations and activates the well-established disinformation ecosystem in the Czech Republic.

Similarly, the ministerial representatives sometimes diverge from what is represented as the basic tenets of Czech foreign policy. A recent example of this was the Czech Minister of Defence Jana Černočová who called for the withdrawal of the Czech Republic from the UN due to an UN General Assembly's resolution which advocated for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the Gaza Strip but did not condemn Hamas for the terrorist attack in Israel or call for the immediate release of the hostages. Subsequently, reactions came from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the PM, and government members who rejected the possibility of the Czech Republic withdrawing from the UN. Such contradictory statements can lead to confusion, inconsistency, and potential damage to the country's international image. Moreover, they might create a lack of unity in messaging, undermining the strategic objectives set by the strategic communication units.

Role of Government (Civil)

The civil part of government service's involvement in strategic communication in the Czech Republic reveals a diverse and evolving engagement across various ministries. While numerous entities actively participate in communication campaigns addressing critical national concerns, there is an underlying challenge of integration and long-term support.

The Office of the Government's Strategic Communications Unit, established in 2022, operates as an independent state entity. It aims to bridge the communication gap between the state and the public, addressing criticism of inadequate citizen engagement. The unit is structured into two divisions, focusing on sociological surveys and disinformation concerns, reflecting a multifaceted approach.

The Ministry of the Interior's Center Against Hybrid Threats (CHH) focuses on internal security threats, showcasing the evolving nature of security priorities. Moreover, the Ministry also houses a Crisis Information Team, which closely cooperates not only with CHH, but also the Office of the Government or the Ministry of Regional Development. The Ministry of Regional Development has set up an activity called PR Emergency to support municipalities in communicating challenging human rights topics and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs' Communications Department has one member dedicated to strategic communication as a part of their agenda. However, it is crucial to say that a lot of initiatives were created reactively but without long-term support (such as CHH during the previous government), or after the failure of the conceptual approach, they remained as a shell.

In April 2022, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs instituted a Strategic Communication Unit overseeing online and offline campaigns for domestic and international audiences. The unit actively engages in communication related to topics involving international organizations such as the EU, NATO or the UN. Similarly, the Ministry of Defense actively participates in strategic communication, with the Army of the Czech Republic playing a significant role. However, while both ministries are aware of the value of their activities and are building them, there is currently a lack of integration at a more comprehensive level, such as in terms of overarching concepts, documents, or strategies.

Campaigns conducted by various government ministries of the Czech Republic highlight a growing array of efforts and targeted initiatives aimed at engaging and informing the public on critical national and international issues. The WeAreNATO Initiative (Spring 2019) portrayed NATO as a democratically structured organization contributing to peace and security in the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic's 30th Anniversary Campaign (February to March 2023) focused on illuminating the foundational values and significant achievements of the Czech Republic in its initial three decades as an independent nation. The EU Presidency Initiative (July to December 2022) introduced the "Europe through Young Eyes" campaign, dedicated to children and youth, featuring events organized by non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, and facilities. The Umbrella Against Inflation (Spring 2022) campaign educated the public about support programs devised by the Czech Republic's government in response to increasing prices.

Military

The Command of Cyber Forces and Information Operations, operating within the Army of the Czech Republic, plays an important role in strategic communication efforts specifically but not exclusively on behalf of the armed forces. Their deliberate use of popular formats, such as memes, is notable, producing a more relatable and engaging content. These activities reflect the Czech public's notable trust in the Armed Forces.

es, as highlighted by a recent [Globsec Trends](#) survey, revealing that approximately 80% of Czech citizens express trust or at least a relative trust in the military. In return, this level of trust significantly enhances the effectiveness of the Army's communication strategies. Their role in this sphere was visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, when soldiers from the Army actively [contributed](#) by assisting the Ministry of Health with communication efforts.

However, it is essential to note that the success of the Army's communication strategies and its role during crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, cannot be solely attributed to the efforts of strategic communication. Instead, the military functions as crisis firefighters, historically equipped with clear-headed leadership and operational capacities. Notably, the military's communication focus is apolitical, avoiding engagement with political topics, and lacks the depth of political knowledge seen in other strategic communication fields.

In addition to the military's efforts, the Police of the Czech Republic also actively engages in communication endeavors, demonstrating a concerted effort by law enforcement agencies to maintain a strong and proactive presence in public communication. This is also evident at the local level, where the Police of the Czech Republic serves as a good example of effective communication within communities. Their initiatives showcase a proactive approach to engaging with the public and addressing local concerns. Furthermore, the police force has achieved a notable presence on social media platforms, notably Facebook, where their efforts to de-escalate conflicts and communicate with the public have garnered significant positive attention.

Civil Society

In the Czech Republic, civil society plays a significant role in contributing to strategic communication, often taking on roles that may overlap with or complement the functions of the state, particularly in the realms of foreign policy and international relations. The highly active and diverse civil society is an important contributor to the Czech Republic's overall strong pro-democratic, pro-Western stances, and resilience to manipulative narratives, especially [in comparison](#) to other countries from the CEE region. Their efforts help bridge the gap between the government communication and the general public, although outreach especially among vulnerable groups remains a challenge. An important part are also civil society contributions to the strategic communication concept. For instance, the [proposed](#) Government Council for Strategic Communication is designed as an advisory body, ensuring active participation from civil society and professional organizations. The civil society's activities also include data-based information campaigns and educational activities, fact-checking, prebunking, mapping of the disinformation scene but also public outreach events (initiatives like Czech Elves, Manipulátoři.cz or NELEŽ).

To illustrate, in response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, the grassroots initiative ["A Gift for Putin"](#) emerged, supporting the Ukrainian armed forces. Spearheaded by businessman Dalibor Dědek, the initiative allows online donations for items like ammunition and first aid kits. Formally established as the ["Endowment for Ukraine,"](#) it has collected 585,592,681 Czech crowns (€24,000,000) by November 7. The Ministry of Defence actively participates, overseeing procurement and ensuring efficient use of contributions. The initiative also raised funds for a campaign countering disinformation, highlighting the impactful collaboration within Czech civil society. There are also other examples of the civil society assisting with communication in cooperation and support of the government, mainly via projects supported by programs such as MFA's [Czech-Polish Forum](#) or [Priorities](#) of Foreign Policy of The Czech Republic.

Private Sector

The Czech private sector also displays activity around the topic of strategic communication and countering disinformation. In October 2022, a collective effort by six associations representing communication and research agencies culminated in the establishment of the [Council for Strategic Communication](#). This entity was formed to address the persistent communication deficiencies of the state. The council aims to advocate for an increase in the state budget allocation dedicated to this domain and to develop a robust communication framework. The primary goal is to provide education and training to professionals within state administration, specifically focusing on communication and marketing. Other associations connecting private companies, such as [the Association for Societal Responsibility](#), contribute by organizing networking events for company representatives about the topic of disinformation. These activities are a result of adopting countering disinformation as a part of the Sustainable Development Goals.

CURRENT EFFECTIVENESS AND CHALLENGES

The analysis of strategic communication in the Czech Republic reveals a dual landscape of both progress and persistent challenges, illustrating that strategic communication is still a new, evolving concept. There is a consensus across the stakeholders' spectrum regarding the critical importance of establishing a dedicated strategic communication system on the governmental level. The establishment of dedicated strategic communication units, increasing number of communication campaigns and collaboration across sectors suggest a positive trend for the future. However, some basic components are still missing, such as a national conceptual document for strategic communication. The absence of a unified strategy naturally complicates coordination and delivering unified messages, as well as efficient allocation of adequate resources. Unified messaging will be especially important to change the current trend of [decreasing](#) trust in government institutions. However, the communication and level of trust held by the Armed Forces and Police represent a success story to serve as an inspiration for the future. The issue of trust is also closely interconnected with the need of maintaining official state strategic communication apolitical, which was a point of struggle in the early stages of Czech strategic communication.

There are natural constraints on the government's strategic communication that require a certain level of formality. At the same time, its nature puts it into a disadvantaged position online as such content is not attractive for algorithms. Quite the opposite, questionable sources remain in an advantageous position in the context of the current setup of algorithms and overall business model of digital platforms.

The current dominance on reactive rather than proactive communication strategies makes the Czech audiences more susceptible to manipulative and/or external influences and narratives. Questionable sources and hostile actors, in their lack of constraints, are able to dominate certain topics, especially online. This has been the case of the discourse about [green transition and energy security](#), where the minimal strategic communication activity allowed hostile sources to shape the public discourse about these topics in a very negative light, and it will be very hard to turn the trend into a more balanced public debate ex post facto. It is important that this scenario is avoided with future new topics of public interest. To ensure this, the continuous absence of formalized strategic communication units at certain ministries needs to be addressed, including the Ministry of the Environment.

The increasing number of communication campaigns is a sign of rising proactivity. On the other hand, these are primarily short-term campaigns, often related to special occasions. Although they are needed, they should only be a part of more long-term and continuously present communication which remains a challenge for the upcoming years.

Lastly, the constrained authority and influence of strategic communication teams significantly impact their effectiveness and timeliness in implementing communication strategies and campaigns. These limitations hinder their ability to maximize their impact on shaping public discourse and fostering understanding of critical matters. Assessing and addressing these restrictions is crucial for improving resource allocation, skill development, and empowerment within strategic communication teams to bolster their effectiveness. Just as in the case of strategic communication, political willingness remains a decisive factor.

Despite these challenges, there exists a groundwork for potential development. The broad consensus about the necessity of a dedicated strategic communication system is a starting point. This shared recognition is evident in the incorporation of strategic communication in the action plan of the National Strategy for Countering Hybrid Interference 2021. This acknowledgment lays a foundation for future development and serves as a launching pad for structured improvements in the strategic communication landscape. Additionally, civil initiatives and non-governmental organizations have demonstrated active engagement in campaigns related to strategic communication. While these efforts might not directly fill the gaps within ministries, they showcase the potential for civil society to complement government efforts and address communication deficits effectively. Moreover, following the whole-of-society approach, the ministerial strategic communication units have been making an active effort to engage experts from the civil society and academia by exchanging know-how and best practices.

In terms of communication strategies, the use of modern formats like social media and memes by certain strategic communication sources signifies an evolving approach to communication, aiming for increased relatability and accessibility to a broader audience. These initiatives underscore the potential for innovation in the field of strategic communication.

CASE STUDY: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION ABOUT NATO

In general, as observed in the latest [Globsec Trends 2023](#) survey, the Czech Republic stands as one of the most pro-democratic and pro-Western countries in the CEE region, displaying significant support for NATO and Ukraine. This alignment is evident across the political spectrum, with agreement prevailing among voters in both the coalition and opposition regarding the crucial role of NATO's shield in safeguarding against external security threats. There is a consensus on the importance of providing defense assistance to neighboring NATO countries, signifying a shared commitment to collective security and mutual support within the region.

This short case study delves into strategic communication, actors and narratives surrounding NATO on Facebook as the most widely used platform in the Czech Republic. This exploration aims to analyze and compare how various entities, particularly government or official sources and questionable or unofficial sources, communicate and portray the activities, roles, and significance of NATO, using data from the last month provided by the CrowdTangle tool.

In the past month, the top 10 sources communicating about NATO consisted half of official or mainstream sources and half of hostile or at least questionable sources. Although this might suggest a relatively balanced discourse, the hostile sources rank, based on interactions, generally higher. These include representatives of both far-right and far-left parties, which underlines their general ability to utilize digital platforms better than official strategic communication sources do. The highest number of interactions was attracted by Czech Television, a public broadcaster which remains an independent and quality source, but followed

very closely by Jindřich Rajchl and Tomio Okamura, leaders of anti-system, far-right parties. Moreover, to reach almost the same amount of reactions, the hostile sources need only one post, while the Czech Television needs four.

However, this composition also needs to be viewed in the context of the very low overall communication about NATO in the monitored month. NATO was not a featured topic, not among the information sources themselves, nor among the Czech audience given there was no actual event, situation relevant to NATO in the monitored period. Posts by hostile actors dominated the flat debate with the narrative presenting NATO (alongside EU and the Czech government itself) as concepts incompatible with Czech national interests and sovereignty. The only sources that managed to push through these hostile narratives were mainstream media, namely accounts of television channels, with very sterile, informative news concerning NATO. State strategic communication was virtually invisible. Although the Armed Forces attempted to actively communicate on a joint Czech-Slovak military exercise, as well as their preparations for defending the eastern flank of NATO, this communication did not attract a broader audience.

The composition of sources (successfully) communicating about NATO reflects the broader situation in the Czech information space, namely the disparity between the attention drawn by official and questionable sources. In the last month (as of November 9), questionable sources amassed a total of 1,181,908 interactions, surpassing the 704,907 interactions reached by governmental sources during the same period. Among official governmental sources, the President of the Czech Republic Petr Pavel was the most successful source. Conversely, among questionable sources, the far-right non-parliamentary leader Jindřich Rajchl reached the highest level of interactions. This discrepancy in interactions underscores the considerable and more easily achievable online reach of questionable and hostile sources, particularly far-right leaders, even in a country that retains its resilience to manipulative narratives and conspiracies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since 2016, the concept of strategic communication has been a part of Czech strategic documents but lacked implementation. Particularly the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the state's inability to effectively, uniformly and strategically communicate with the public in crisis situations. Lacking practical implementation became more apparent after other significant events such as the war in Ukraine or energy crisis. These events spotlighted deficiencies in the government's communication coordination during crises, emphasizing the need for a more cohesive strategy. A positive basis is provided by the overall consensus that strategic communication is an important tool that needs to be explored. These capacities are being developed in a local information space that is targeted by hostile information operations, especially by the Russian Federation, but it is mainly domestic actors who significantly influence the disinformation landscape.

The legal and institutional framework of Czech strategic communication reveals a mixed and evolving landscape. Critics usually point out the absence of a coordinated approach, inadequate resources, and insufficient inter-unit collaboration. This state of strategic communication illustrates the need for a national conceptual document for strategic communication, which is currently missing.

The role of the government, including both political entities and civil components, has gone through significant changes and fluctuations. The Office of the Government and several ministries have established their strategic communication units and initiated multiple campaigns aiming to communicate about critical topics, such as NATO, Czech EU Presidency, or inflation. The military and police also actively engage in communication endeavors, leveraging social media and sometimes even innovative strategies to interact with the public. Additionally, the civil society plays a crucial role and often fills up the gaps official government communication is not able to cover.

Although there are evident efforts to establish dedicated teams and campaigns, challenges persist. Lack of cohesive integration among governmental bodies, and a focus on reactive communication strategies pose potential vulnerabilities to both domestic and foreign authoritarian influences and hostile actors. Especially far-right hostile actors have proven their ability to effectively use social media to dominate certain topics with hostile narratives, also exemplified by the case study of strategic communication about NATO.

While the necessity for a dedicated strategic communication system is broadly recognized, the absence of a formalized framework within ministries, legal gaps, and a lack of unified strategies hinder a cohesive management. However, the consensus among state administration and political spheres, the involvement of civil society, and the innovative approach to communication strategies offer potential for development. Based on this analysis, PSSI provides the following recommendations:

1. **Integration of Strategic Communication:** Strategic communication should be fundamentally integrated into the core operation of government institutions. Rather than being a secondary component, it should be recognized as a vital and inseparable element that underpins and guides all activities undertaken by government institutions.
2. **National Conceptual Document:** Effective strategic communication requires a national conceptual document that would clearly outline the goals of Czech strategic communication, integral values that are supposed to uphold, assign concrete roles to concrete governmental entities and clarify how strategic communication falls within the existing frameworks.

3. **Depoliticization and Neutrality of Strategic Communication:** It is crucial to insulate strategic communication from political influence, ensuring its impartiality and autonomy. This neutrality is crucial to maintain the credibility of official sources and counter the current trend of decreasing public trust in government institutions, as well as lower attention being paid to their communication.
4. **Solutions Over Problems:** Especially during times of crisis, strategic communication should focus on emphasizing solutions. Instead of addressing problems with vague phrases of persistence and unity, the public needs to be presented with specific solutions, tools and other support provided by the government and information on how to access it.
5. **Establishment of Ministry-Specific Teams:** Following the idea of strategic communication underpinning all government activities, each ministry should have its own strategic communication unit, operating in coordination with the Office of the Government's Strategic Communications Unit. The current shaky effectiveness of the government's communication shows standard press departments are not enough anymore to underpin strategic goals. This integration will ensure a unified and consistent approach across ministries, promoting cohesive communication strategies. Besides the existing units communicating in a more value-based manner about foreign policy, defense or internal affairs, more practical strategic communication is needed from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Industry and Trade and all others.
6. **Continuous and Proactive Strategic Communication:** Strategic communication cannot be reduced to a reactive approach and activity reduced only to crisis situations. Based on polling and audience analysis, it needs to predict crucial topics for communication and actively assert itself in shaping the public discourse about topics of public interest. Considering the outreach of questionable and hostile sources, official strategic communication needs to make sure communication about crucial national topics is balanced and not shaped by hostile actors. Moreover, the focus needs to shift from temporary and reactive campaigns to long-term continuous communication that would establish the presence of strategic communication sources.
7. **Informed Communication Strategy:** Strategic communication should be a result of informed strategizing. This means, on the one hand, a continuous monitoring and analysis of the information space to determine the most important topics and shapers of discourse, as well as to predict future developments. Secondly, it means polling in regular intervals to have an overview of public attitudes and potential contentious issues. Sociological research should also be the basis for identifying distinctive target groups and tailoring campaigns for them specifically, rather than just targeting the general public at large.
8. **Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Both of the aforementioned tasks are time and labor-intensive and present a practical opportunity for collaboration with the civil society sector and its expert community. The Czech civil society often naturally fills in the gaps that government institutions are not able to cover with their current capacities and has built an expertise that should be used as a resource. However, it's crucial to note that this collaboration, while potentially impactful, has been underfunded in this role by relevant institutions, limiting its full potential.

9. **Regional Outreach:** An active effort should be targeted at effectively reaching the population in all regions in the Czech Republic, especially the less developed ones. People living in regions with less accessible services, infrastructure and good quality education are especially vulnerable to the influence of hostile actors and feeling of neglect by the system. Strategic communication sources need to establish a firm presence here as well, ideally with initial personal visits and outreach activities (e.g., at schools and community centers), followed by maintaining dedicated communication channels.
10. **Enhancing Strategic Communication Channels:** Besides content, the channels and formats of strategic communication are equally important to consider. A starting point is asserting the presence of strategic communication sources in both offline and online spaces. Especially online, cross-platform presence is important to make sure no platform is left to be dominated by hostile sources, like it is currently happening on the messaging application Telegram. Strategic approach to digital platforms' algorithms is also needed to boost the outreach of official sources. That means adapting to a diversity of formats, especially audiovisual ones like short videos, podcasts, pictures and even memetic content when possible. An alternative could be setting up separate dedicated social media accounts for more informal, accessible communication with the citizens.
11. **Training and Capacity Building:** The state should invest in the training and development of communication professionals, enhancing their skills in crisis communication, information verification, and audience engagement across various platforms. Moreover, this investment should extend beyond communication specialists to encompass all civil servants. While civil servants often face criticism, their training is crucial for improving the overall quality of public services, forming a fundamental precondition for successful strategic communication.