



Roundtable Report

# **MONITORING OF THE EU'S GREEN POLICIES: PERCEPTIONS AND NARRATIVES IN THE CZECH AND SLOVAK INFORMATION SPACE**

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February 2023

## About EUROPEUM

EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy is a non-profit, non-partisan, and independent think-tank focusing on European integration and cohesion. EUROPEUM contributes to democracy, security, stability, freedom, and solidarity across Europe as well as to active engagement of the Czech Republic in the European Union. EUROPEUM undertakes original research, organizes public events and educational activities, and formulates new ideas and recommendations to improve European and Czech policy making.

*This project was supported by the International Republican Institute's Beacon Project.*

*This article has been prepared with support from IRI's Beacon Project. The opinions expressed are solely those of the author and do not reflect those of IRI.*



Co-funded by  
the European Union



On 17<sup>th</sup> of January 2023, the EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy organised a closed roundtable discussion titled **Monitoring of the EU's Green Policies: Perceptions and Narratives in the Czech and Slovak Information Space**. The discussion was held under the Chatham House Rule and attended by experts on the EU's green policies and disinformation from think-tank communities and academia as well as by journalists who regularly comment on these topics. The event was moderated by Žiga Faktor, EUROPEUM's Head of the Brussels Office.

The roundtable was organized as a part of the [IRI's Beacon Project](#) initiative called the **"European Green Deal: Mapping perceptions in Central and Eastern Europe"**, in which six partner organizations studied how the European Green Deal (EGD) is perceived in Bulgaria, Czechia, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. At the beginning of the discussion, researchers working for this initiative introduced their research findings from the monitoring of the Czech chain emails, Czech and Slovak mainstream media platforms as well as platforms known for spreading disinformation and political actors. The final versions of these reports are linked below:

**Tatiana Mindeková**, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy:

[Monitoring of the EU's Green Policies: Perceptions and Narratives in the Czech and Slovak Information Space](#)

**Michaela Ružičková**, Infosecurity.sk:

[Green Deal and climate change: communication trends in the Slovak information space](#)

**Kristína Šefčíková**, Prague Security Studies Institute:

[The European Green Deal and the Energy Crisis in the Czech Information Space](#)

After introducing the main findings from the above-mentioned research, participants had a chance to ask researchers clarifying questions and discussed possible improvements to the communication of the EGD. From the discussion, the following recommendations can be identified:

## 1. Building and improving communications strategies of relevant political actors and institutions on the green topics

According to the research results, the debate on EGD is one-sided in Czechia. The highest number of posts related to the EGD and with the top engagements were identified from the Freedom and Direct Democracy party. The results from other political stakeholders or parties were minimal. At the same time, the official websites of the relevant ministries or other stakeholders do not show signs of a coordinated communication campaign about the EGD or about the transformation to carbon neutrality in general. Multiple participants emphasised that the role of these political stakeholders in informing about the EU's green agenda is important, and some also recalled their monitoring results that confirmed stakeholders' potential to influence public perceptions about a given topic.

Participants agreed that more activity from the official bodies can lead to a higher interest in the topic from the mainstream media and their readers. It was also highlighted that the strategy needs to be a proactive one as currently, we see ministries and officials reacting to hoaxes that are already spreading but not trying to be the first to communicate what the new policy developments can bring. Connected to the topic of strategic communication, participants also highlighted the role of communication teams and the use of social media. One participant shared a story of how a change in the media team of the Slovak Office of the Government brought many new followers and interactions.

Participants also discussed the differences in the communication of the EGD between Slovakia and Czechia. It was noted that despite many shared similarities in the decarbonization process, the research showed different levels of communication about the EGD. In Slovakia, the discussion is almost non-existent while in Czechia, the debate is ongoing but almost exclusively in a negative connotation. When comparing the research results, the EGD is in Czech discourse used as a proxy for other topics. In Slovakia, green topics are also discussed but mostly through the prism of the economy. This suggests that while the communication strategies of the EGD in both countries can benefit from similar improvements, Czech stakeholders need to work with the existing disinformation narratives that are already set in the current discourse.

## 2. Choosing the right terminology

A repeated theme throughout the discussion was the complexity of the EGD and how it is difficult to define it even for the experts who are familiar with the EU's green agenda. One of the reasons for this complexity is the fact that it aims for a broad transformation of society and it thus touches upon transport, buildings, agriculture, industry and other sectors. EGD's overarching nature is commonly misused by disinformation sources by connecting it to all current problems in society. At the same time, Czech and Slovak's discourse rarely contains positive messaging about the EGD in relation to, for example, improved air quality or energy security.

While discussing what can be done to improve this, two different routes were defined. The first strategy builds on the findings from the sociological research which show that the Green Deal as a phrase now has a similar negative connotation as the word migration in the Czech general public. This can lead to the politicians deliberately not using the phrase to avoid losing support. The first suggestion is thus to shape the terminology and use a new positive overarching

term instead of the Green Deal that could bring positive connotations or focus on the individual solutions and changes that citizens see positively, such as improving air quality or saving Czech forests. In this case, communicators of the green issues should look for arguments on why changes that the transformation can bring are good even if there was no EU or no EGD. One of the participants used the example of the Czech Minister of Industry and Trade's communication during the Czech presidency as he was not using the term EGD but still supported green transition while highlighting the need for improved energy security. The second strategy is to connect the term EGD and the communication on green issues more, especially on the websites of ministries and other official institutions, in an effort to put the term into the subconscious of the readers.

### 3. Sharing and reporting the success stories of decarbonization and providing them to the opinion-makers and media

A general agreement of the participants was that politicians continue to be the main opinion-makers and their approach to the topic of the EGD continues to be important. Yet, the complexity of the EGD plays a role here again as even these opinion-makers can struggle with grasping the topic and can share misleading information, often without knowing it. From this perspective, there is a lack of knowledge and education on the topic in general. While we cannot expect detailed knowledge of all the aspects of the EGD from all involved stakeholders, the current situation can be much improved.

One of the suggestions on how to improve communication about the EGD was to provide success stories and brief the politicians by using these stories. A representative of a think-tank noted that they are looking for stories that can be shared by politicians and mainstream media but they keep hearing that climate topics cannot win elections. Their strategy is to focus more on the topics connected to it, such as the lack of snow or the protection of the forests. Still, from

their perspective, the number of actors that communicate the positives of the EGD is very small.

A recommendation for the experts writing about these stories is to use existing research on citizens' preferences while preparing their outputs. For instance, the development of renewable sources has almost the full support of the public when the label of the EGD is not used. Therefore, connecting energy security and the use of renewable energy can bring positive reactions. Stories can also be tailored to certain regions. For instance, citizens from areas with severe air pollution will be more interested in the policies related to air quality and politicians need to be able to highlight different aspects of the transformation.

#### 4. Utilising current political news and developments to shape the discourse

Participants also discussed how the recent political developments, such as the start of the Russian war in Ukraine, the energy crisis or the Czech presidency of the Council of the European Union influenced the research results. During the monitoring period, researchers identified an increased number of EGD-related posts from the political stakeholders but the interactions with the posts did not grow. Increased activity of the ministries that promoted the Czech presidency was also identified, but these posts did not relate to green issues. While some participants highlighted the positive actions of certain stakeholders related to these developments, others noted that the Czech presidency of the Council of the European Union was an opportunity for the Ministry of Environment to improve its communication strategy, but it was not used well. Similarly, mainstream media monitored by the research did not start to communicate the positive effects of renewable energy more often than before the crisis.

The monitored disinformation platforms, on the other hand, showed a quick adaptation to the new developments and were able to build war and energy crisis into their existing messaging while blaming the EGD for the increase in prices. These platforms were also able to connect policy developments such as Fit for 55 or RepowerEU into their narratives and again make a direct connection with the EGD.

The ongoing energy crisis continues to be an opportunity for the opinion-makers as well as the media to shape the discourse surrounding the use of renewable energy and highlight its positive impacts. At the same time, participants agreed that a good communication strategy will not only emphasise the positives of the EGD but also answer the fears of the citizens connected to the increased living expenses.

## 5. Supporting future research

The challenges of the terminology in the communication of the Green Deal were also brought up in relation to the existing and future research. While a search that used only the phrase 'Green Deal' (in its Czech and Slovak translations) brought a small number of results in Czechia and almost no results in Slovakia, participants pointed out that the issues directly related to the EGD seem to be discussed more but by using different phrases. One participant pointed out that stakeholders that oppose the use of renewable energy describe it as 'occasional energy' and that these phrases will be hard to identify in different groups and countries. The challenges of the terminology should be then taken into consideration for future research.

Another recommendation tied to the research is to support projects that combine different areas of expertise in an effort to improve communication on the green topic. During the discussion, experts with different backgrounds and expertise also had slightly different opinions on how to improve the communication of the

EGD, based on their experience as journalists or researchers. The research focused on Czechia also concludes that certain NGOs such as Hnutí Duha are doing a good job of communicating the Green Deal as their posts were receiving a high number of interactions. Moreover, NGOs are in a good position to combine the different research areas and establish new connections between media, opinion-makers and businesses. The work of the mentioned NGO and similar organisations should thus also be supported by the government.

To conclude, the spreading of disinformation and lack of positive messaging about the European Green Deal continues to pose a threat to a balanced discussion and future implementation of the policies. Looking for improvements and solutions to this threat thus remains essential for moving forward. Therefore, in the name of the EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, we would like to thank all the participants for their presence and their contributions.

In addition to the reports presented at the roundtable, the following blogs were written as part of the project:

[Climate, Energy and the Green Deal in the Czech Chain Mails](#)

[How do Czech and Slovak governmental parties perceive the EU's green deal?](#)

[Online monitoring of Facebook posts](#)