

RESEARCH REPORT

Czech Republic



Radicalisation in the Czech Republic

The biggest current risk associated with radicalisation in the Czech Republic, similar to other countries of Eastern Europe, is the radicalisation of mainstream society towards minorities (anti-Roma activities, anti-Islamic movement / Islamophobia etc.), when the Czech society always looks for a vicarious sacrifice in a situation of economic crisis.

Highly visible risk is the perspective of possible radicalisation of purely “home-grown” extremist groups from both wings of the political spectrum or “overgrowth” of all forms of intolerance and extremism in the manifestations of terrorism. Moreover, there occurs self-radicalisation of lone strikers - of specific individuals without formal ties to terrorist or extremist structures.

The threat of terrorist attacks is always relative. In comparison to Belgium or France, the threat in the Central and Eastern Europe is considered to be relatively minor. According to available information, terrorists use this region more as a transit territory, sometimes as a place to rest. However, a terrorist attack cannot be ruled out today in any state. The aim of terrorists is to cause big fear and chaos, the more is written and broadcasted of them, the greater is the panic among citizens, and the terrorists become actually successful.

From the publicly available information and from what the Czech political representation and secret services claim, there is no current threat of a terrorist attack in the Czech Republic. However, this situation may change due to unpredictable changes in the world and the rate of engagement of the Czech Republic in the world, but in comparison, for example, with France, Germany, Great Britain, and possibly with other countries that already have a very long experience with terrorism of any kind, the Czech Republic does not certainly belong among the most threatened countries. It might also be good to say that Islamist terrorism in the long term is not the only one that threatens Europe.

In terms of power and the number of victims, the so-called ethno-separatist terrorism of ETA, the Irish Republican Army, and also the left-wing or right-wing ideology oriented terrorism has dominated in Europe for a long time. So the threat of terrorism in Europe is real and does not only refer to Islamist terrorism. However, the threat in the Czech Republic is relatively low compared to some neighbouring countries. Nevertheless, in case of all security risks there is the need not to underestimate them and take adequate and preventive measures sooner than any terrorist attack would have occurred.

Migration

The Czech Republic lies in the traffic-exposed central part of Europe and the country is threatened by the same migration and migration related threats such as France, Belgium and Germany. The risk of this phenomenon is in the Czech Republic much lower than in Western Europe.

The Czech Republic belongs to European countries which are less important transit and destination places and therefore, the most serious threats are not connected with the immediately ongoing migration wave, but with its medium- and long-term effects in a European context. It is mainly about the threats that arise from the fact that it is virtually impossible integrate a large number of foreigners from different cultural background into European society. Consequently, closed communities will be formed which might cause problems to the European cultural environment. These communities can create ideological or logistical support for the criminal activities of various characters.

Currently no international smuggling network organizing transit of refugees operates in the Czech Republic. Europol identified the criminal structures that provide migrant transfers between selected European countries, in the Czech Republic, however, there were detected in principle only individuals or small criminal groups, which offered only limited transportation and services to refugees.

The real problem is abuse of the fear from foreigners which causes restlessness and other concerns in society. In the atmosphere of uncertainty, whether the other countries are able to deal with the issues of migration, some extremist and populist political parties have profited, the political environment have been radicalised and popularity of extremist parties has grown.

The year 2015 was also typical for action of such entities which did not profile themselves on the traditional left-right political spectrum and were not based on any extensive ideological assumptions and positions. They seemed to be more like protest initiatives that were oriented to criticise the Czech membership in international organizations, particularly the EU and NATO, so-called Post-November development and political representation and social elites. These initiatives usually with origins in the environment of virtual social networks were involved, namely people from both far-right and the far-left spectrum. From many reasons, these platforms often inclined to sympathize with the uncritical adoration of the Russian Federation and President Putin. Often they helped to spread the Russian propaganda.

A majority of the extreme left have been trying to present to the public their activities that cannot be regarded as an extremist, but rather as a value-indifferent, or even civilly commendable. Some members of the extreme left organizations and sympathizers turn in pursuit of its goals to violent activities (e.g. attacking their ideological opponents, arson attacks, damaging another's property, etc.). It should be borne in mind that their openly formulated ideological foundations are based on intolerance (class, to ideological opponents), unwillingness to run democratic dialogue and to respect pluralist political system.

In terms of Czech regions these symptoms are experienced especially in the capital city Prague. Major public events were also held later in bigger cities such as Ostrava, Brno, Ceske Budejovice and Plzen.

Anti-Islamic and anti-migration groups

In connection with the so-called 'migration wave' the various populist parties, political movements and initiatives have been activated. The main issue of these groups is to define a migration towards Muslims. It is usually used as a purpose-built statement that all migrants are Muslims, that Islam is inherently intolerant religion, and that every Muslim is a terrorist or has a coded prone to pathological behaviour. Anti-migration and anti-Islamic groups are able to selectively choose certain news to confirm this construction.

Most of protest movements came from social networks on the Internet. After reaching a certain level of popularity, these groups began to move their activities to the public. Some activists, originally active only in the virtual space, began to show ambitions to break into real politics.

The main entities:

Block against Islam (Blok proti Islamu) - stands out dramatically against Islam as a religion, as well as against the presence of Muslim community in the Czech Republic, respectively, throughout the European Union, and against German Chancellor Angela Merkel. From their point of view these all is seen as the originators of migration waves.

Dusk - The National Coalition (Úsvit – Národní koalice)

Freedom and Direct Democracy (Svoboda a přímá demokracie)

Right-wing extremism

The key issue of mobilisation has been migration in 2015 and 2016.

Besides the change in the relative strengths of two main far-right parties (Workers' Social Justice Party and National Democratic Party) and in connection with the immigration crisis there were reported some attempts for cooperation of members of right-wing extremist scene.



The main entities:

Worker's Social Justice Party (Delnicka strana socialni spravedlnosti)

National Democratic Party (Narodni demokracie) - trying to generate interest through controversy and very radical speeches, as well as through the establishment of new alliances. Its anti-immigrant demonstrations organized under the title "people camps" were broadcasted by several Medias.

Workers' Youth (Delnicka mladez) - focuses its activities primarily on addressing the younger generation and attracting new supporters. In the long term, the recruitment of new members and sympathizers had been unsuccessful. The cells were active mainly in the Moravian-Silesian, Olomouc and South Moravian region, partly in Prague.

Generation Identity (Generace identity) - a grouping that works as a Czech branch of the French anti-immigration initiatives, which has been operating for many years, put emphasis on spontaneous events, lectures and other activities focused on promotion.

For-Motherland (Pro-Vlast) – specialization especially in the field of anti-Islamic activities

National Resurgence (Narodni obroda)- participation in demonstrations of other entities (parties), especially the National Democracy (Narodni demokracie)

Activities:

- continue to prevail especially local activist groups that operate mainly in Prague, Ostrava, Brno, South Moravia, Olomouc and Plzen.
- rallies and public events - a typical example of the so-called "People Camp" - anti-Islamic and anti-immigration theme
- concerts organized for supporters of the far-right scene
- increasing prevalence of hate speeches disseminated through the Internet, especially virtual social networks - easy way to provide several users with various materials or texts with hateful or derogatory content against certain groups of people based on their religious or political beliefs, or racial or ethnic origin, e.g. website Whitemedia.info.

Left-wing extremism

The key issue of mobilisation has been migration in 2015 and 2016.

Counter-demonstrations have become a regular phenomenon that accompanied the rallies and public events of right-wing extremist or anti-Islamic and anti-immigration parties. Within the extreme left-wing parties there were created various initiatives aimed at helping refugees. A Czech branch of the international platform "Refugees Welcome" has been relatively active.



The structure and entities of the scene

The main streams in the domestic forms of the extreme left are formed by the anarchist movement, then the long-term marginal Trotskyist and Marxist-Leninist groups. Certain activities have been also produced by radically environmental groups and squatters e.g.:

- Anarchist Federation (Anarchistická federace)
- No Racism Initiative (Iniciativa Ne Rasismu)
- Voice of Anarchopacifism
- Animal Liberation Front
- Socialist Solidarity (Socialistická solidarita)
- Left Perspective (Leva perspektiva)
- Communist Youth Union (Komunistický svaz mladeze)
- The Union of Young Communists of Czechoslovakia (Svaz mladých komunistů Československa)
- Czech Communist Party 21 (Komunistická strana česka 21)

Activities:

- protest demonstrations and rallies against the actions of the extreme right and anti-Islamic and anti-immigration groups
- concerts and events of interest (e.g. Fluff Fest in Rokycany)
- arson attacks

Alternative news websites

Alternative news websites can significantly affect domestic extremist scene, but also some groups of the public who feel that the mainstream news intentionally conceal or misrepresent some information - attempts to manipulate public opinion and even to provoke protests and other events. These sites clearly contribute to the polarization of society and mobilization of certain groups of the public.

Among the central "alternative sources of information" there can be included Aeronet (AE - News), a Czech version of SputnikNews, First Reports, AC24 and Came-up (Stalo-se).

Foreign influences impacting on the Czech extremist scene

Manifestations of extremism are no longer only a national matter of the individual states. Due to more accessible ways of communication, especially via the Internet, the extreme political movements have been increasingly internationalized.

The cross-border action is evident in cooperation of various groups, taking over the activities of related international organizations, mutual support, expressing solidarity by state repression to the affected persons, creating a Czech branch of international networks, etc. The main and decisive topic has become the migration wave and other symptoms associated with it, especially hate crimes against Muslims.

The fight against violent radicalisation

The fight against violent radicalisation takes place at the national and international levels. At the national level radicalisation issues are dealt particularly within the themes of extremism, terrorism, active shooter, protection of soft targets (Jewish buildings, schools, transport hubs, shopping centres).

At the national level, the Czech Republic has been actively engaged in fighting radicalisation and terrorism since 2002. The current key document in the Czech Republic concerning this area is the "Strategy of the Czech Republic in the fight against terrorism" - a document that summarizes the basic principles of the fight against terrorism in the Czech Republic and outlines the current weaknesses in the security system of the Czech Republic which are connected with this region.

Among the main priorities in the fight against terrorism there remain following activities: improvement of communication and cooperation between the bodies involved in the fight against terrorism and improving conditions for better outcome of their activities, furthermore, population protection, critical infrastructure targets potentially vulnerable to terrorist attack, security performance, education and public awareness in relation to specific aspects of the fight against terrorism, the prevention of radicalisation in society, combating recruitment into terrorist structures and, last but not least, legislative and international legal issues.



Internet and social networks

Internet and social networks play an important role in the process of radicalisation. Internet mainly provides a quick access to information worldwide, greatly accelerates communication among radicals at a great distance and is a great tool to recruit young people. Some experts have concluded that people were not able to critically evaluate and process the great amount of information that the Internet and social networks offered. This often leads to simplification and adoption of radical thoughts. According to some experts internet discussion forums play an important role in the process of radicalisation within which exchange, reinforcement and validation of extreme and radical attitudes occur. On the other hand, Internet and social networks have and will have their important role in the fight against terrorism and radicalisation.

There is a wide range of organizations on the Internet spreading extremist ideology in English - some of the groups that currently operate a website in English are "Odpor" ("Resistance"), "Vzdelavaci institute" ("Educational Institute"), "White Justice" and "Combat 18" or the Terror Machine Division of Bohemia (a branch of the much larger international extremist group "Blood and Honor"), accessible on their websites: [http://white-media.info./](http://white-media.info/), <https://cz.sputniknews.com/>, <http://www.ac24.cz/>.

Among other communication tools we can include:

■ Internet - Facebook (4.7 million users in the Czech Republic), Twitter (300 000 users in the Czech Republic), Instagram (924,000 users in the Czech Republic), YouTube

■ Viber

■ Votsap

Dealing with the problem of radicalisation of youth in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic has a broad spectrum of organizations actively working with youth. These organizations are largely unprofitable. They work with young people in informal and recreational activities.

- Junak
- Skaut
- Domy deti a mladeze (Children and Youth)
- Leisure Centres
- School clubs
- Open clubs, T-club
- Religious organizations (Christian congregations, Salesian clubs ...)
- Sport centres and clubs (Sokol, Orel, etc.)

The activities of these organizations are not directly focused on radicalisation. Based on the development of the situation in recent years, it is appropriate to implement some activities concerning radicalisation into their programs.

It would be beneficial to create programs for front line workers as well as teachers which will be specifically designed to radicalisation and focused on youth work. The program should be used both in after-school activities and also during school hours.

The development of activities for youth workers in the field of digital skills and competencies is essential. It is necessary for them to improve their computer literacy because currently we are in the situation where young people dominate these new technologies - increasingly using modern technology such as smart phones, tablets, laptops, etc.

Summary

The threat of radicalisation in the Czech Republic cannot be comprehensively defined. There is a great difference between large cities (e.g. Prague, Brno, Ostrava) and other places in our country.

The capital city is threaten by the danger of radicalisation the most – high concentration of people of various ethnic groups and countries (among them obviously immigrants from Islamic world, Russian-speaking countries – especially Russia, Ukraine, further we meet with Vietnamese, Chinese, etc.) Large number of people from the Islamic world and also Russian-speaking countries lives also in Karlovy Vary – a spa, further in Brno, Plzen, Ostrava and Hradec Kralove. In these places the people from previously mentioned ethnic groups create own communities.

The other places in the Czech Republic are not affected by this threat. Naturally there are also people from the ethnic groups mentioned above, however not in such rate. In most cases, these people have been already integrated in Czech society. They have jobs or their own businesses. Their children visit Czech schools.

The separate chapter is a Roma population. There is a problematic integration of Roma in the society, namely lack of interest in education and work. It is easier for them to use the Czech social system (various welfare benefits – housing benefit, child benefit, one-off social benefits, and pensions).

People who are the most at-risk of radicalisation in the Czech Republic are mainly individuals with basic or vocational education who are easily suggestible. These people who are attracted to the radical ideologies try to gain the sense of importance, power, and domination over others.

Internet and social networks certainly belong to the most widely used communication tools among the supporters of radicalisation. Internet mainly provides a quick access to information worldwide, greatly accelerates communication among radicals at a great distance and is a great tool to recruit young people. Some experts have concluded that people are not able to critically evaluate and process the great amount of information that the Internet and social networks offer that often leads to simplification and adoption of radical thoughts.

In the Czech Republic the most widely used internet communication tools are:

- Internet - Facebook (4.7 million users in the Czech Republic), Twitter (300 000 users in the Czech Republic), Instagram (924,000 users in the Czech Republic), YouTube
- Viber
- Votsap

The Czech Republic has a broad spectrum of organisations actively working with youth. These organizations are largely unprofitable and work with young people in informal and recreational activities (Junak, Skaut, leisure centres, school clubs, religious organisations, etc.)

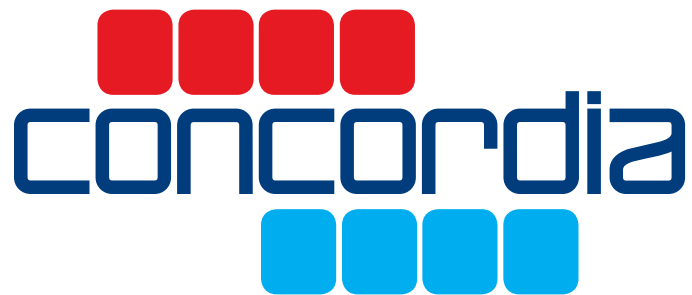
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