

**“BARNEVERNET STEALS CHILDREN”  
AN ANALYSIS OF RUSSIAN INFORMATION WARFARE  
NARRATIVES IN THE CZECH DISINFORMATION MEDIA**

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**Abstract.** The research article deals with the particular example of Russian information warfare in the Czech Republic’s disinformation media. It aims to contribute to the debate about immoral, non-traditional and anomic society narratives used by Russian information warfare actors. The study focuses on such media’s framing of the Norwegian children social welfare system. The study aims to explain which typical Russian information warfare narratives were used in the Czech Republic. Using a content analysis with open and axial sociological coding, general narratives were identified. Then, the article focused on the emerging sub-narratives and their characteristics. The narrative of fascism/Nazism appeared to be very straightforward, it also used some Czech society specific sub-narratives. Narratives of twisted sexuality appeared to be the most uniform. Finally, the narrative of neo-Marxist policy has shown to be mostly using expressions such as social engineering and negative framing of modern left ideologies.

**Keywords:** Russian information warfare, narrative analysis, Barnevernet, children social welfare policy, disinformation media

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## **1. Introduction**

Since the Ukraine conflict and Russia’s interference (see for example Stojar 2015), information warfare has become a popular term in the media, government and academic worlds. While the Western approach to this type of warfare is more technicist, kinetic-based and war-oriented (Reichborn-Kjennerud and Cullen 2016), which might be illustrated by American author’s dealing with Revolution in Military

Affairs (Fučík and Kříž 2013), the Russian approach is much broader, combining technician as well as a society focused one. Kier Giles (2016) points out that the ‘next phase of Russian information warfare’ is much more than just sowing lies and denial, as has been seen in the post-Crimea phase in the media. “Instead, Russian state and non-state actors have exploited history, culture, language, nationalism and more to carry out cyber-enhanced disinformation campaigns with much wider objectives” (ibid.). Therefore, contemporary society weaknesses and its exploit emerge to be an important tool for information warfare.

This approach can be found in information warfare actors’ framing of modern Western European states. They produce narratives of rotten Western European societies that deviate from traditional Christian values. From a sociological perspective, Russian information warfare actors operate with a concept of anomic society, which Emile Durkheim described (see Durkheim 1951). An anomic society suffers from weak norms and moral values. As Durkheim pointed out, it is typical for modern societies, where people cannot follow clear given moral values. Regarding the concept of post-truth society (see for example Corner 2017 or Lewandowsky et al. 2017), characterised by a decreasing of society’s trust in media and information, Buckingham (2019) talks about the alienation of society, its disengagement and the state of anomia. Not propagation of its values in the first place, but the sowing of apathy and chaos are the main objectives of the Russian information warfare (Schmidt 2014). These warfare actors are exploiting the concept of state of anomia, so they can gain strategic advantages with soft power to balance its country’s scarcities of conventional power. Even Soviets preferred not to go head-to-head but preferred to exploit adversary’s weaknesses not necessary in the technological realm, but societal (Adamsky 2011).

For purpose of our research, we chose Norway as a representative of the ideal type of a modern Western society (according to Business Insider, Norway was marked as having the best quality of life in 2016), with its liberal society and advanced social welfare system. Freedom House (2018) graded Norway with the highest marks in all categories (Freedom rating, Political Rights and Civil Liberties). The country has robust anti-discrimination laws and protection for same-sex couples; a gay marriage law was adopted in 2008 (NBC News, 2008). Moreover, Norwegian gay couples have been able to marry in church since 2017 (The Local 2017).

At the same time, the country might be, under framing of Russian information warfare, the model example of anomic society, with its cultural diversity, the chaos of values and immoral people.

To specify, we decided to work with a case of the Norwegian children welfare system (NCWS) that has been resonating in the European media sphere for the last few years. Initiative EU vs Desinfo (2017) considers children welfare issues as an example for a narrative of the moral decay in modern Europe. Also Berzina (2017), studying Russian propaganda narratives of Nordic and Baltic countries, identifies children’s welfare issues as one of them.

A number of Russian state and non-state media outlets have portrayed the NCWS in a negative light and treat it as an example of an anomic society and an immoral

culture. We assume that the tactic described by Giles (2016) as the exploitation of history, culture or nationalism is used to negatively frame how the NCWS functions.

The article aims to examine how these specific and blended narratives are used in the Czech media sphere. This country was chosen because of both its vast media coverage of the NCWS and the noticeable presence of pro-Russian actors in the media space.

## **2. Objectives and methods**

The text aims to identify narratives and sub-narratives connected to child welfare issues linked to the NCWS in the Czech Republic disinformation media sphere. We chose the Czech Republic because of an individual Czech citizen's experience with Barnevernet (Norway's central state child welfare institution) and the massive media coverage of her case in the Czech Republic, especially by the so-called disinformation media. We intend to examine how Russian information warfare actors used this incident in the Czech Republic's media landscape.

First, we will define the characteristics of the working narratives using an inductive research method. Next follows the coding; sub-narratives are counted and classified according to their generalness or specificity, as well as other analysis-based attributes. The authors will subjectively interpret the messages of these narratives. However, standardised sociological coding will also take place. For coding, we will use a sample of news articles from the disinformation media in the Czech Republic. For the study, we chose media listed in "Database of pro-Russian Content" in the Czech Republic from the Czech independent investigative website Neovlivní.cz.

The formulated character of general narratives was established using pilot research on a small sample of news articles with the analytic method of open coding. Information from secondary sources, like news articles about Russian information warfare topics of the NCWS and the usual narratives, were also used.

We primarily identified history-based narratives, which were generally tied to historical grievances. As Giles (see above) notes, painful moments in history are a favourite weapon in Russian information warfare which can contribute to schisms in societies. We also identified the presence of narratives derived from anomic society characteristics, especially the lack of traditional moral norms with its chaos in sexual relationships.

We identified the following working narratives for the study:

- a) Narrative of NCWS fascist or Nazi legacy;
- b) Narrative of Norwegian twisted sexuality and moral decay

Usage of these two, which often appear in the analysis of narratives about modern European societies used by Russian information actors (analysed for example by EU vs Disinfo, StopFake or Counter-propaganda) is more explained below, especially with the help of secondary sources.

The authors realise that there are limits of this research design, which could contribute to the distortion of outcomes. Chosen database of pro-Russian content by Neovlivní.cz might not be absolute and maximally objective, but authors considered web platform as the most comprehensive and used by credible platforms (for example Freedom House).

Also, as it was indicated before, the label ‘pro-Russian’ alone might be confusing and inaccurate, because most of the sources probably do not have ties to the Russian state and remain only on the opinion support base or sharing of thoughts from sources with real links. However, contemporary data about Russian information warfare do not bare on strict relations between state and channel. In the age of the internet, actors sharing propaganda content do not have to be financially, personally or by any other way linked to the Russian state. They remain in the role of supportive proxies, so it is the most of platforms listed in Neovlivni.cz.

Another limit is connected with phase ‘disinformation media’, which might be confusing and not accurate as well, but it is preferred in academic discourse right beside ‘pro-Russian’. We decided not to use ‘pro-Russian’ because of the possible impression of a direct link to the Russian state. Our article will implement less suggestive labelling. However, more scientific research about the accurate designation of this kind of media must be done, especially by media and journalism studies.

### **3. Russian view on the Norwegian child welfare system**

The negative view of the NCWS contrasts Russian traditional family policy and gender deviant Europe. In West-European society there is a crisis of the traditional family; feminism and same-sex marriage become more important. Consequently, the Russian approach to this policy is negative. Contemporary Russian identity politics is moving in a non-Europeanist direction (Riabova and Riabov 2017).

These Russian traditional family policy values might be expressed in a negative attitude towards the LGBT community (see for example, Herszenhorn 2013), and they are also ensconced in some Russian laws. This is especially well illustrated by the so-called ‘anti-gay’ laws, whose existence is one of the notable manifestations of this trend (Wilkinson 2014, Springe 2016). In 2010, the Federal Law “On Protection of Children from Information Harmful to Their Health and Development” was passed by the Russian Duma. Two years later some specific amendments appeared, including ‘propaganda’ against ‘non-traditional sexual relations’, especially in relation to internet content. This Federal Law of the Russian Federation from 2013 states its purpose as “... the protection of children from information causing harm to their health and development and separate acts of the Russian Federation aimed at the protection of children from information propagandising the refutation of traditional family values.” Therefore, it is children who should be primarily protected in the traditional family context. In the context of Western European liberalization of family policy, the Russian Orthodox Church considers the legal

norm that allows homosexual couples to adopt and rear children to be especially dangerous (Agadjanian 2017).

This is also illustrated by the 2014 Russian ban on the adoption of children from countries that allow gay marriage. This decree, signed by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev was “aimed at ‘protecting children’s psyche’ from the ‘undesirable effects’ of exposure to unconventional sexual relationships” (The Telegraph 2014).

In contrast, there is the uniqueness of the Norwegian child welfare system. As Kojan (2011) states, the guiding principles of the NCWS are support, prevention, equality of opportunities and early intervention. Critics of this system say social workers are often too quick to separate children from their families. Early intervention, especially, seems to be the most discussed and criticised, and this is also the case with the disinformation media platforms studied in this article. However, it is not only Russia-oriented media that are negatively covering the NCWS. In 2018, the BBC published an article titled Norway’s hidden scandal about a child psychiatrist who played key roles at various levels of Norway’s child protection system, who was accused of downloading images and videos of child abuse (see Whewell 2018). Parents who publicly described their experiences with the NCWS also triggered protests in some countries (see for example Cremer 2016).

The uniqueness of the NCWS, the country’s liberal approach to family policy, as well as these sorts of highly publicized controversies produce conflicts between residents of different cultural traditions (Borenstein 2016), especially conservative ones. As former Norwegian Minister of Children Inga Springe (2016) puts it, ‘family values defenders’ portray Norway as a country of paedophiles and incest, and that this is deeply based on history and cultural traditions. The worst-case scenario for these defenders of family values then shows up in the disinformation media. The NCWS is described as a tool to put foreign children (in this case, Russian children) into LGBT or sexually deviant families. Consequently, the possible adoption of Russian children by Norwegian parents seems like imminent danger. Another example of this presumption could be an explanation why Norwegians want children from Russia. Borenstein (2016) mentions Lithuanian television reports that assert that Norway suffers from extreme inbreeding<sup>1</sup>, which the Norwegian child welfare system exists to combat by seizing Eastern European children to improve the gene pool.

This makes Norway look like a terrifying place to bring one’s children, oversimplifying the process by which a child can be removed from the home even while exposing what looks to be, at the very least, overzealousness on Barnevernet’s part (*ibid.*).

Thanks to the Russian media coverage (especially state-based, i.e. the Sputnik article “Scandinavians Take Kids from Russian Families to Reverse Population Decline”, The Moscow Times article “Norway Thwarts Russian Mother”, or RT’s “Norway authorities remove child from parents over lost tooth”), the Russian audience holds a primarily negative impression about this country’s child welfare system. Consequently, Barnevernet (Norwegian for ‘child protection’) is used to derogatorily refer to a corrupt NCWS (StopFake 2016, EU vs Desinfo 2017).

<sup>1</sup> Recently, Norway’s Prime Minister Erna Solberg warned about the country’s plunging birth rates. Consequently, she urged citizens to have more children (Henden 2019).

Activist organisations also play a role in the dissemination of these anti-Norway sentiments, for example, the Russian Mothers. Its leading personalities are women (mothers) who have had a negative experience with the Norwegian child welfare system or that of another West-European country. Irina Bergseth, a popular personality in the media, presents the organisation's radical opinions (e.g. believing in the kidnapping of Russian children from their mothers by America's 51st state – Norway, adoptions by paedophiles or a European gay dictatorship). Russian Mothers organised a march in Moscow in 2013 with 12,000 participants. Its primary focus was the plight of Russian children adopted and allegedly abused by Western parents (Borestein 2016). Even if Russian Mothers claim to be an NGO, Vladimir Putin's party United Russia supports them. They also tend towards the opinion of Alexandr Dugin, known ideologist of Euroasianism and the Kremlin's policy promoter.

#### **4. History as an assumption for narratives**

Russian conservatives' explanations for why the Norwegian approach towards children is wrong go deep into history. They link them with the Vikings – the bloodiest thieves in history – and their way of life, which is said to have been full of rape, incest and intersex relations. A Google search for Norway and incest will show more than 6000 results. The most frequent criticism of the NCWS is the danger of child abuse. It is claimed that adoption threatens children because Norwegian foster parents have a tendency to commit incest. As Springe points out (2016), this premise goes back to Norway's ancestors – the Vikings. As Radford (2018) explains, art and popular culture have been unkind to the Vikings and produced many misconceptions about their sexuality. Vikings were depicted as rapists who treated women like sex toys; they were depraved, even incestuous people, and were open to homosexual relations. However, "(...) all evidence of reprisal via sexual humiliation comes from Viking sagas, which conflate legend and history."

The fantasy about the twisted sexuality in Norwegian society goes further in the Russian disinformation media than just to the Vikings. It is claimed that victims were not able to defend themselves because of their lack of masculinity during Anders Breivik's terrorist attack on the island of Utøya in 2011. Consequently, Norwegian women did not motivate men to protect them because they are not entirely women (Counter propaganda 2013).

Another historical construct appears in the process of negative framing of the NCWS. It has been shown many times that fascist or Nazi frames are useful for Russian information warfare tactics. Ukraine, for example, faces propaganda focused on the crimes of Stefan Bandera and his followers in today's Ukraine conflict (see StopFake 2015, Kovensky 2018). Referencing the Volhynia massacre could trigger old grievances between nations (e.g. Ukraine and Poland). Norway is a target for fascist/Nazi narratives in information warfare too. Berzina, for example, mentions allegations of sympathy for the Nazi past. Norway has its history with Nazi collaboration through the National Union and Vidkun Quisling. The narrative

of fascism/Nazism is therefore used by critics of the NCWS, especially accusations about the fascist approach to childcare and child hunting by state. Throughout Hitler's dominance over Europe, thousands of children were kidnapped in an attempt to cleanse them from society, and they were racially screened for possible adoption by Germans. If they did not fit the racial criteria, they were sent to children's homes or killed (USHMM 2018, Jewish Virtual Library 2018).

## 5. The Czech experience

Before the analysis itself, it is necessary to describe Czech Republic's experience with the NCWS. In 2011, a Czech resident in Norway, Eva Michaláková, was suspected of beating and sexually abusing her two Norwegian-born kids (boys 2 and 5). A month and a half after the investigation, Barnevernet decided to place the children into foster care. In 2016, Michaláková lost her parental rights. The children have never been returned to Michaláková; the younger one does not want to see his biological mother anymore.

The case was highly publicized in a wide spectrum of media<sup>2</sup>, and some outlets started to criticize the whole Norwegian state as a representative of the corrupt Western world. These were Russian state media, such as the Czech version of Sputnik (which published the article "Norway's institutions are behaving like the Gestapo when they take kids away from Czech and other parents") as well as the disinformation media with no evident link to the Russian state, but with similar discourse.

Some Czech state authorities noticed this case and consequently it was largely politicized. Jitka Chalánková (TOP 09) was one of the first politicians to comment on Michaláková and Barnevernet. The Czech government (a coalition of left-centric ČSSD – Czech Social Democratic Party, centric ANO 2011<sup>3</sup> – Action of Dissatisfied Citizens 2011 and centric KDU-ČSL – Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party) issued an affair at first in 2014. Minister of Foreign Affairs Lubomír Zaorálek (ČSSD) asked the Norwegian ministry for an explanation, but he could not get any information, because the Czech Republic was not a party to the case. In December 2014, a verbal diplomatic offer was made to Norway. The Czech state offered the guarantee that it would look after Eva Michaláková and her sons if the family could live together in the Czech Republic. Two months later, the Czech Senate asked the government to actively participate in the case through diplomatic means. Consequently, the Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka (ČSSD) asked the Norwegian government for a thorough case investigation and claimed that the Czech government would not cease its diplomatic pressure (Česká televize 2016).

<sup>2</sup> The documentary series *Český žurnál (Czech Journal)* includes a part dealing with the NCWS. An episode from 2017 is called *Děti státu (Children of the State)* and it aims to explain why Czechs are so interested in Barnevernet, how this institution works and how it is linked to Norwegian state culture.

<sup>3</sup> ANO 2011 could also be characterized as a populist party (Cisarf a Štětka 2017: 287).

Some of the European Union representatives also intervened in the case. Tomáš Zdechovský (KDU-ČSL) was active in commenting on the Michaláková case, mostly through media platforms. His attitude towards the Norwegian state and the whole concept of its social welfare system was highly critical. Consequently, the Russian state and disinformation media platforms quoted him often in support of their critical opinion articles.

## 6. Analysis

In our analysis, we used news articles from the disinformation media in the Czech Republic as the unit of research. The study operated with the Database of pro-Russian Content in the Czech Republic from the Czech independent investigative website Neovlivní.cz (information relevant to 7.11. 2016).

However, we worked only with media that covered the topic of the NCWS at least five times ( $n > 4$ ) in the period chosen for research.

We focused on articles from 2014, when the Ukraine crisis began, and a wave of Russian internet information warfare spread to other countries, including the Czech Republic. We collected data until the end of 2017. This was also the period when the Michaláková case resonated in the media most.

News outlets that meet the given requirements are:

Parlamentní listy  
Bez politické korektnosti  
Protiproud  
Rukojmí  
Svobodné noviny  
Czech free press  
Vlastenecké noviny  
Svět kolem nás  
Aeronet

Parlamentní listy (in translation the Parliament Papers) deviate slightly, because it shares a wide range of opinions from both sides of the political spectrum. On the other hand, the platform uses manipulative techniques typical of disinformation media (Gregor a Vejvodová 2016). Controversial businessman and politician Ivo Valenta (Soukromníci) owns 70% of Parlamentní listy, and he is currently a senator in Czech Parliament (Aust 2017).

Vlastenecké noviny (Patriot News) defines itself as conservative, however Holecová (2016a) argues that its content is practically the opposite. The portal uses an expressive style, shares other disinformation media articles, and adores Vladimir Putin's actions. Bez politické korektnosti (Without Political Correctness) shares opinion articles and commentaries by external authors. It focuses mostly on Czech President Miloš Zeman and topics related to the migration crisis. Its discourse is

anti-immigration, anti-European, anti-American and pro-Kremlin (Evropské hodnoty 2018). Vlastnecké noviny and Bez politické korektnosti are both owned by Radek Velička. Velička is a publisher known for his active participation in the action D.O.S.T., which is a radical conservative association with a Catholic national character (Hanzelka 2013: 46).

Protiproud (Counter Current) is a media portal that discusses the moral decay of the West. It shares conspiracy theories, adores Putin and adopts a Russian view on global politics (Neovlivní.cz 2015a). Similar articles are shared by Rukojmí (Hostage). For example, its contributions criticize the West and admire Russia. The occupation of Crimea is seen as legal. Publisher and former contributor of Parlamentní listy Břetislav Olšer is the editor-in-chief of Rukojmí (Holecová 2016b). The server Svobodné noviny (Free Press) tends to use expressive discourse. It primarily covers the Ukraine crisis from the Russian perspective. Its contributor, Jiří Vyvadil, former Senator of Czech Parliament, is a known proponent of Vladimir Putin. Vyvadil is the head of the association Přátelé Ruska v České republice (Friends of Russia in the Czech Republic) (Neovlivní.cz 2015b). In Czech free press there is a dominance of discourse against Muslims and refugees. Western governments are framed as stupid and incompetent (Holecová, 2015). Svět kolem nás (The World Around Us) shares controversial articles on a mixture of topics, including pro-Russian discourse. The articles do not have authors (Holecová 2016c). Finally, Aeronet (which means American European News) is openly pro-Russian and pro-Putin. It writes about the 'fascist' Ukraine regime, the 'rotten' United States and the 'brave' President of Russia. Its owner is Lukas Brian Ross, who supposedly lives in Georgia (Neovlivní.cz 2015c).

For our article search, we used standard internet search tools with the entry Barnevernet or Norway. We chose only articles dealing with children welfare issues. Most of the articles with this topic use the name Barnevernet. Consequently, it is well known by the Czech media audience.

## **7. The outcome of the analysis**

The analytical sample consisted of 176 news articles. The media outlets differed in the number of relevant articles (from 5 articles dealing with NCWS in Aeronet to 43 articles in Parlamentní listy).

We first focused on the overall framing of the NCWS. Negative ethos prevailed, mostly with the use of emotional, rough and expressive phrases. Only a few articles in Parlamentní listy (22%) and Vlastnecké noviny (16%) used neutral and independent discourse to report on the affair.

The articles mostly presented Norway as a country with a bad children's welfare policy, 'child stealing' mechanisms and criminal behaviour that tends towards child molestation.

### 7.1. Narrative of fascism/Nazism

We continued our analysis with the open coding of news articles, which produced general categories of sub-narratives. A narrative based on fascism or a Nazi legacy was present in all chosen media outlets. The portal Svobodné noviny used it in more than 50% of its articles dealing with the NCWS. The lowest number occurred in Parlamentní listy (14%) and Vlastenecké noviny (15%).

The following classification showed that operating with the narrative of fascism/Nazism was mostly very straightforward, using publicly well-known and general attributes. The most common phase or sub-narrative formulation labelled Norway as a country using Nazi, fascist or Hitlerian methods. One of the mentioned methods was the re-education of European children, mostly Slavic, using the legacy of Nazi Germany and its policy towards non-Nordic children. The terms Lebensraum and Hitlerjugend were also mentioned as a part of the contemporary Norwegian policy approach to child welfare.

Most of the sub-narratives were general and could also be used in other countries that had had negative experiences with Nazism. However, even rare, country-specific sub-narratives appeared as well. Some articles used the Lidice tragedy and the subsequent re-education of Lidice children as a metaphor for what is happening to Czech children in Norway now. Re-education of children from Sudetenland was also used.

Additionally, some Norway-specific historical events appeared. These included Vidkun Quisling's Nazi collaboration and Anders Breivik's extreme-right terrorist attack and were intended to invoke ideas of the nature Norwegians and their inclination to extreme right ideology.

We identified the following sub-narratives (From the most present to the least):

- Nazi Methods
- Lebensborn Policy
- Re-education by Germans
- Fascist State
- Anders Breivik's Country
- Re-education of Lidice/Sudeten Children
- Hitlerian Approach
- White/Clean Race Policy
- New Hitlerjugend
- Final Solution of the Slavic Question
- Germanisation of Slavs
- Nazi Germany Memento
- Cryptoracism

Example: Extract of an article using the sub-narrative Nazi Methods

*“Unfortunately, I did not think that in Europe there would be a country acting like Nazis against Slavs 70 years after the defeat of Nazism”* (translated from Czech; Lhot'an 2016).

### *7.2. Narrative of twisted sexuality and moral decay*

The narrative of twisted sexuality and moral decay tended to contrast the concept of the traditional family with the ‘modern’ approach of Western democracies. The analysed articles describe the NCWS as a propagator of non-traditional family or non-traditional sexualities. The most common sub-narrative was homosexual propaganda, which portrays the state or its services as giving preference to homosexual parents or ‘turning’ children into homosexuals. Some sexual deviations of adoptive parents appeared too, mostly paedophilia or tendency towards incest.

We also recognised some specific sub-narratives, such as the legacy of Lysenkoism in the NCWS or propaganda of Muslim parenthood. No specific sub-narratives for the Czech Republic were found. A general character of narrative was found; it praised traditional European values and derided modern ones as rotten.

We identified the following sub-narratives:

Homosexual Propaganda  
Anti-Traditional Family Policy  
Non-Gender Children Policy  
Child Abuse  
Incest of Norwegians  
Heterosexual Discrimination  
Lyskenism Policy  
Sexual Deviation  
Muslim Parenthood Propaganda  
Deviation from Traditional Values  
Down Syndrome Rise  
Gender Policy

Example: Extract of an article using the sub-narrative Incest of Norwegians:

“Norway is a country where incest is very common and it is necessary to provide new blood” (translated from Czech; Miturová 2016).

### *7.3. Narrative of neo-Marxist policy*

The open coding phase enabled us to identify another narrative. We can describe this one as the neo-Marxist policy narrative, which is applied to the NCWS.

The third narrative analysis outcome was shown to be unilateral. The neo-Marxist policy approach of the West, or of Western politicians, which negatively influences child welfare services or the whole education system, is the central node of the network. A given method or an application of policy is represented as social engineering; this was identified as the second most present sub-narrative.

In addition to neo-Marxism, other left-based ideologies or their general components appeared. Marxism-Leninism, Collectivism, Etatism and Nationalisation, all vestiges of socialist policy, were identified as forms of child welfare policy approaches.

This narrative also covered the modern forms of leftist ideological components like Socialist Feminism, Post-Modern Left and Euroamerican Cultural Left. All these sub-narratives were often used synonymously, in different combinations.

This narrative used the country-specific sub-narratives, for example, frequent mentions of former Czech Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Michaela Marksová Tominová, who dealt with the Eva Michaláková issue while in office. Marksová Tominová was always negatively framed and marked as a Marxist because of her approach to the affair and her two-part surname. In general, the whole Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) was negatively framed and mixed with neo-Marxist ideology.

We identified the following sub-narratives:

Neo-Marxist policy approach  
 Social Engineering  
 Socialist Approach  
 Marxist Michaela Marksová  
 Collectivism and Etatism  
 Socialist Feminists  
 Euro-American Cultural Left  
 Marxism of the ČSSD  
 Marxist-Leninist approach  
 Nationalisation of children  
 Taking Children by the Left

Example: Extract of an article using the sub-narrative Social Engineering

*“For example, Marianne Haslev Skaanland, a Norwegian professor of linguistics at the University of Bergen, pointed out that the whole system is an example of social engineering, where children belong to the state which finances jobs of tens of thousands of ‘child experts’”* (translated from Czech; Lisál 2016).

#### 7.4. Narrative bridging

During the coding, we identified cases of narrative bridging – linking attributes together. For example, the NCWS follows a re-education policy, which is inspired by the Nazis. This policy is necessary for Norwegians because they suffer from inbreeding caused by its society culture of twisted sexual relations including homosexual partnership or incest. The next two typical examples are shown in the graphics in the appendix. We can assume that all the narratives can form a whole with a general message; critically framing the modern Western societies with its inclination to leftist ideologies and pervert historically disproven policy practice.

## **8. Outcome, interpretation and summary**

In the presented article, we analysed the usage of narratives linked to the Norwegian social welfare system in the Czech disinformation media. The practices of the Norwegian children social welfare system – Barnevernet – are salient to the Czech audience because of the direct experiences of a Czech citizen residing in Norway.

We worked with a database of pro-Russian content by Neovlivní.cz from the 2014–2017 period. From the two predefined narratives – the narrative of Nazism/fascism and the narrative of twisted sexuality and moral decay, we identified particular sub-narratives typical in the Czech disinformation media sphere.

Regarding analysis, we can assume that general narratives about modern or West-European society performed by the case of NCSW are also present in the Czech Republic disinformation media system. The most uniform narrative without any Czech society typical specification appeared to be a narrative about twisted sexuality and moral decay. Regarding this outcome, we can propose a hypothesis that propaganda content about the collapse and anomia of modern or Western world values is also used in Czech society by disinformation media. All the sub-narratives as homosexual propaganda, anti-traditional or anti-gender policy are highly generalizable.

The narrative of fascism/Nazism consists mostly of straightforward sub-narratives and general attributes too, with few country specific ones. The most common sub-narratives are the use of Nazi methods by the NCWS, a Norwegian Lebensborn policy approach and a re-education policy reminiscent of that used for children from WWII-era Lidice and Sudetenland. Nazi history is sensitive for the whole Europe, so its usage might be generally attractive. An emphasis on specific examples of Nazi terror in nation states could be more sensitive and grievances triggering for audiences.

During the coding and pre-defined narrative analysis, we identified another narrative. Due to its character, we named it the narrative of neo-Marxist policy. It has its basis in criticisms of the modern left in contemporary Western societies, which is, by critics, inspired by extreme-left ideologies, mostly Marxism-Leninism. This narrative showed country-specific sub-narratives, mostly mentioning Czech politicians and their political practice. Therefore, at first, there is a connection to modern European societies' decay by an inclination to rotten ideology. Second, we can trace its specification by the usage of a particular country's political reality, which might stress the narrative and its message more.

As the analysis emphasised, the three narratives showed connections. Thus, we can assume that Russian information warfare actors can connect different narratives, use general ones in various countries, and specify them for the particular society's reality. This phenomenon can highlight the information operation's message and get the attention of its audience better. Narrative bridging identified in this case study might be an interesting topic for future study.

To conclude, there is a need for more research of this issue. The next study should

focus on mainstream media's coverage of the NCWS topic and compare results with this research. Then we could more confidently propose a possible connection between specific narratives of Russian information warfare and content designed as disinformation or pro-Russian.

A comparison of states that are experiencing similar information campaigns about the NCWS might also be valuable. Lithuania, for example, shares a similar experience as the Czech Republic with NCWS, as well as with media's noticeable coverage of this issue. On the other side, concerning Russia (by demography, history, culture), there are differences between these two societies. Comparisons of two similar, as well as different societies, might contribute to the understanding of information warfare narratives used in countries with various Russian influence and rate of threat.

Direct narrative origin tracing would be another interesting research topic, for example, through the discourse of media outlets or authorities. Where do different narratives originate from? What was the first source which used them? What types of societies produce these narratives, and which are resilient?

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