

POLITICKÉ VEDY / POLITICAL SCIENCES

Časopis pre politológiu, najnovšie dejiny, medzinárodné vzťahy, bezpečnostné štúdiá / Journal for Political Sciences, Modern History, International Relations, security studies

URL of the journal / URL časopisu: <http://www.politickevedy.fpvmv.umb.sk>

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Article / Článok: The Populist Construct of Migration: Framing within SPD's Communication Strategy ahead of the 2019 European Elections
Publisher / Vydavateľ: Fakulta politických vied a medzinárodných vzťahov – UMB Banská Bystrica / Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations – UMB Banská Bystrica
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24040/politickevedy.2022.25.4.43-68>

Recommended form for quotation of the article / Odporúčaná forma citácie článku:

CHARVÁTOVÁ, D. – FILIPEC, O. 2022. The Populist Construct of Migration: Framing within SPD's Communication Strategy ahead of the 2019 European Elections. In *Politické Vedy*. Vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 43-68. ISSN 1335 – 2741. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.24040/politickevedy.2022.25.4.43-68>

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THE POPULIST CONSTRUCT OF MIGRATION: FRAMING WITHIN SPD'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AHEAD OF THE 2019 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS¹

Denisa Charvátová – Ondřej Filipec*

ABSTRACT

Populism represents one of the major trends in contemporary politics across all European democracies. A key element in the success of populist parties is their communication strategy, with social networks that have become an ideal platform for populist political communication. Concerns about the success of populist groups marked also the recent European Parliamentary elections in May 2019. This also applies to the Czech Republic, where populist rhetoric is mainly represented by the Freedom and Direct Democracy party (SPD). The main objective of the article is to reveal how SPD is framing migration in the political communication on Facebook during the period of three months before the elections to the European Parliament. It mainly focuses on its content and form regarding the posts' visual elements and technical parameters. As migration was the main topic of populist political communication, special attention is paid to the communication regarding this phenomenon, incl. an analysis of selected frames and manipulation techniques in the SPD political communication. The result shows, that migration played the most important role but was communicated selectively and manipulatively. Only the negative effects of migration were emphasised, it was framed in connection with other negative phenomena (especially rape, crime, and terrorism) and illustrated by pictures of aggressive Muslims, emotions of fear, anger, and hatred were evoked among the supporters, which further contributed to the radicalisation and sustainability of the mobilisation of the electorate.

Key words: Migration, Populism, Manipulation, Facebook, European Parliamentary Elections, Freedom and Direct Democracy

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24040/politickevedy.2022.25.4.43-68>

¹ This paper is the result of research project no. E72-91 "Populism and the Construct of the out-group 'Others'" funded by the Internal Grant System of the Metropolitan University Prague.

Introduction

Today's democratic systems face several challenges and problems, many of which are based on current societal sentiments. Although Western societies may enjoy life in prosperity, many of their citizens are dissatisfied because they live in insecurity, or even in fear of their life situation in the years to come. Due to the fact that the established parties are unable to respond effectively to this sense of social distress, these citizens are forced to look for political alternatives elsewhere. Populist parties, on the other hand, are able to work effectively with fear, thanks to which populism has been on the rise in recent years and represents one of the major trends in contemporary politics not only in Western democracies (Taggart, 2000, p. 73–84; Taggart, 2004, p. 282; Mudde, 2004, p. 542), but it is currently a phenomenon across all European democracies (Aalberg, de Vreese, 2017, p. 3), which are facing an increase in the electoral support of populist parties, or even their coming to power, while established parties are losing the support of domestic electorates.

Concerns about the success of populist groups marked the recent European Parliamentary elections in May 2019 as well. European elections² are traditionally evaluated as a second-order contest (Reif, Schmitt, 1980), whose basic characteristics include, in addition to lower turnout, a greater tendency of voters to protest-vote in favour of small, protest-focused, and populist parties; the populist parties have been especially popular in recent years. In the eyes of voters, second-order elections can serve as a kind of verification election, i.e., as an institutionalised tool by means of which it is possible to express their possible (dis-)satisfaction with government policy.

Although populism generally appears in the communication of parties at both ends of the one-dimensional right-left political spectrum and is often connected to opposition parties (Ernst et al., 2017, p. 1348), in most cases it is associated with extreme right-wing parties (Aalberg, de Vreese, 2017, p. 6; Kubát, 2016, p. 18; Lipiński, Stępińska, 2019, p. 78). The present case study focuses in more detail on the Czech party system, in which this area was occupied by the Freedom and Direct Democracy Party (SPD), led by **Tomio Okamura**. Although the SPD itself rejects the far-right label, the topics of its focus and the selection of its partners make it clear that they are taking this position (Svačinová, 2018, p. 210). There is no doubt that SPD's dominant stances represent right-wing populism

² The text also uses the term “European elections” as a synonym for elections to the European Parliament.

(see for example Dvořák 2022; Voda and Havlík 2021, Krotký 2019; Maškarinec 2019).

A key element in the success of populist parties is their communication strategy (Aalberg, de Vreese, 2017, p. 3). Social networks have become an ideal platform for populist political communication (Postill, 2018, p. 755, Lipiński, Stępińska, 2019, p. 78). The new media provided (among others) populist politicians with the opportunity to connect more closely with the people (Ernst et al., 2017, p. 1347), as well as with a way to communicate with them inexpensively, not only before the election, but also during the entire election period (Bobba, 2019, p. 12), including the “new” generation of citizens (Aalberg, de Vreese, 2017, p. 6), which has already grown up with social networks and reached voting age. However, the extent and use of social networks for political communication varies across countries. While Twitter became an important communication channel for **Donald Trump** in his presidential campaign (see e.g., Stromer-Galley, 2020), it is Facebook that appears to be crucial to the electoral success of Western European populist parties (see, e.g., Ernst et al., 2017; Blassnig et al., 2020). Similarly, in the Czech Republic, Facebook currently holds the position of the dominant channel of political communication in the online environment, while Twitter rather plays the role of a commentary-information channel. As of June 2020, the social network Facebook had around five million registered accounts in the Czech Republic and accounted for the largest share within social networks (49.83%). This is significantly more than the share of other networks with a different nature of communication: Pinterest (33.41%), Twitter (5.86%), YouTube (5.43%), Reddit (2.18%) or Tumblr (1.57%) (Statcounter, 2020).

The main objective of this article is to reveal how SPD is framing migration in the political communication on Facebook, in terms of its content and form regarding the visual element³ and technical parameters of the posts. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the issue of the SPD’s Facebook communication began to be publicly debated at a time when this article was almost finished. As Facebook has threatened SPD leading politicians (both the party chairman **Tomio Okamura** and vice-chairman of the party and chairman of the parliamentary group **Radim Fiala**) to block their profiles as a result of violations of community principles (Lidovky, 2020) the article may be an interesting contribution to the debate on the limits of freedom of speech, manipulation, and pre-election communication as well.

³ Due to low resolution of images and possible copyright issues pictures are not part of this article.

Communication in the period of three months before the elections, i.e., from 23 February 2019 to 24 May 2019, was monitored by using the content analysis method, which is the most frequently used method for research on political communication both in general (Graber 2004) and online (Brunnerová, Charvát, 2020). Authors understand the content analysis similarly to Holsti: “Any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages” (Holsti 1969). During this period, a total of 442 posts were published, containing a total of 177,744 words which were qualitatively and quantitatively analysed. As a result, content analysis is combining both conceptual analyses, aimed at quantifying and counting the presence of migration-related topics, and relational analysis aimed at discovering relationships between concepts, related to migration. The time range of three months was chosen deliberately: on the one hand, the period makes it possible to observe changes related to the start of the “campaign’s hot phase” (approximately two weeks before the election) and to monitor the development of communication in the longer term. In addition, the article follows up an earlier study devoted to the communication of right-wing parties, which used the same method to analyse the SPD’s communication before the 2017 elections to the Chamber of Deputies (Filipec, Garaj, Mihálik, 2018, p. 183–212), in which the party reached the fourth-highest vote share (winning 10.64% of the vote). The methodological continuity thus makes it possible to compare data within both periods in order to analyse the changes in the communication strategy.

The article is conceived mainly as an overview exploratory case study with elements of comparison in individual parts. As migration was the main topic of communication, the analysis focuses mainly on the communication regarding this phenomenon. The article is divided into three parts. The first part is devoted to the introduction of a theoretical framework for analysis, which is the concept of framing, with a special focus on political campaigns. What follows is the part which aims to place the SPD’s campaign in contemporary political developments in the Czech Republic and, above all, in the specific context of the 2019 European elections. Finally, the third part deals with the analysis of the SPD’s communication on the social network Facebook, with an emphasis on the issue of migration, which became the dominant theme of their campaign before the European elections in 2019, in which the party won 9.14% of the vote. This part is based on both the content analysis of individual contributions and the analysis of the visual side of the campaign. Moreover, the authors of the study are aware of the party’s high degree of personalisation by its chairman, **Tomio Okamura**,

who is the primary communicator of the party (Svačinová, 2018, p. 189) that needs to be taken into account in any research on the SPD's political communication. **Okamura** is active on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, he runs his own blog, and is one of the most watched political entities on Facebook in the Czech Republic.

Social media communication is inevitably associated with framing, a theoretical concept widely used in the social sciences, especially in political psychology and media research (in the context of migration, e.g., Castles, Withold de Wenden, 2006; Roggeband, Vliegenthart, 2007; Balabanova, Balch, 2010; or recently Klein, Amis, 2021), and also sociology and economics (Tewksbury, Scheufele, 2009, p. 18). Because of its diverse application and the diversity of approaches to this concept, there is no uniform definition and often no agreement on what the essence of this process is (e.g., de Vreese, 2005). As with other definitions, we encounter the problem of complexity: too broad a definition may lead to the loosening of the essence, or its disruption by including phenomena that are not quite related to the process; too narrow a definition can lead to the omission of important elements. For these reasons, it is appropriate to explain what the authors of this paper understand by the term framing.

The essence of framing is the creation of patterns that affect the perception of reality. It is this perception that is subjectively influenced by mental patterns (concept maps), which are related to associations, and which the mind assigns to communicated words and phrases or even audio-visual content (Hall, 1997). Therefore, framing is a process in which associations are made and certain abbreviations created that are necessary for the evaluation of information and the subjective perception of reality. From this point of view, framing is associated with the process of social construction (Berger, Luckmann, 1967). This, of course, has far-reaching political implications, as framing affects thinking about all social issues (the cognitive dimension), but also, for example, feelings and emotions related to the phenomenon being communicated. Here we are talking about the emotional dimension (Kepplinger, Siebert, 2012). Both dimensions are then used in political campaigning to elicit the desired response from voters who, on the basis of the framed topics, decide under the influence of their thoughts and emotions who they will vote for, which topics they will prioritise (*agenda setting*) and how they will view the topics (*agenda framing*). Therefore, framing helps to make sense of things and to add meaning to the topics being communicated.

One of these topics is the migration that was used to mobilise voters. Negative public opinion on migrants (e.g., the Eurobarometer survey) is largely

the result of the negative framing of migration. The very word “migration” evokes negative associations, i.e., connections with unpleasant ideas and negative abstract constructs connected with other negative phenomena: violence, crime, disease, and threats to the labour market, abuse of social security support, cultural threats, terrorism, and others. Positive and neutral associations are rather rare (Filipec, Vargová, 2019). Perception is thus largely influenced by framing and its nature depends on the input and intervention variables. We can talk about a certain “moderation” of framing and about moderators (see, e.g., Chong, Druckman, 2007).

Among the most important moderators influencing the framing effect are values. **Chong and Druckman** mention several studies that show that people with strongly anchored values are less susceptible to the effects of framing. Strong (though partly controversial) individual factor is the initial knowledge of the topic being framed. Therefore, the level of education affects the outcome of framing. However, some moderators may appear not only on the consumer side, but also on the instrument side. Another of the important moderators is the strength of the frame. This may be due to its credibility (there is an overlap with fake news), whether in terms of content or source or other attributes, such as communication, environment, timing, etc. (Chong, Druckman, 2007). These effects are well observable in the case of the SPD's framing of the campaign.

1. SPD and campaign framing

In the case of the SPD's framing of migration, the negative framework is supported by the interaction of these moderators. First, given its right-wing populism, negative attitudes towards migration, harsh Euroscepticism, and nationalist attitudes, the SPD can be positioned on the right wing of the political spectrum. The party itself voluntarily acknowledged its affiliation to this political family before the European elections when it launched its campaign with a rally in the centre of Prague at which prominent representatives of European right-wing populist parties appeared, such as Marine Le Pen (Rassemblement national), Matteo Salvini (Lega Nord), and Geert Wilders (Partij voor de Vrijheid). The SPD unequivocally rejects liberal democracy in its representative form, with an emphasis on direct democracy. Although the party may be considered a rather system-oriented party, it is critical of the current system settings. Among its supporters, we find former voters of the communists and far-right parties such as the Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia and other

Eurosceptic and anti-liberal entities. That is, parties that are critical of migration in terms of the anchoring of values.

Second, the level of education of the SPD's voters is rather lower. For instance, according to the Median election model for August to December 2019, the SPD's support was 4.9% among university students, while among people with apprentice qualifications or without a secondary education diploma (the "maturita" exam), its support was 10.9%, which is 3 percentage points more than the national average of 7.9 % (Median 2019). In general, there is a relatively strong relationship between the level of education and the perception of migration. University students perceive migration more positively than people with a lower level of education (European Commission, 2016). Similarly, we can talk about a person's "membership" of a socio-economic group. The lower the standard of living, the higher the negative perception of migration. In the 2017 parliamentary elections, the SPD was relatively successful among the socio-economic group characterised by lower income, higher unemployment, and possibly distrains (Lebeda, 2017). This was later confirmed by a survey from March 2019, according to which the SPD enjoyed potentially higher voter support in the upcoming European elections in segments belonging mostly to the lower social class (for more see Tungul et al., 2019).

Third, in general, information is purposefully taken over from less credible "alternative" sources. On the contrary, more objective sources (such as the public service media) are described as manipulated and fake. Precisely because these media disrupt the frames communicated by the SPD, attacks are carried out against the public service media, especially by SPD representatives and supporters. In the 90 days before the 2019 European elections, 14 Facebook posts attacked the independence of the "do-gooder Czech Television",⁴ which was accused of, among other things, mismanagement, manipulation, and biased attitudes towards the SPD.

Fourth, as shown below, the frames themselves are designed to evoke a negative emotional response. The posts are often repeated (the "stay on the message" argumentation principle), and dissenting comments are deleted, and their authors banned.⁵ This creates a relatively aggressive instrument that is

⁴ The term "*do-gooders*" (*sluničkáři* in Czech, literally translated as sunshine people) is a specifically Czech term, a neologism that has been used since 2013 in the context of the European refugee crisis, especially for people with a supportive multiculturalist approach to Islamic culture and immigration. It is mainly used pejoratively, primarily from their critics.

⁵ For a long time, there was a Facebook group called "Tomio Okamura banned me" that brought together

disseminated in a toxic environment and targeted at a group that is easily influenced and therefore manipulated by these frameworks because of its values and educational and social status.

2. Specifics of the 2019 European elections in the Czech Republic

The overall atmosphere in Czech society and the local perception of the European elections represent important contextual factors influencing the form and style of political communication. The European Parliamentary elections in May 2019 were generally accompanied by a number of expectations, in particular as a result of recent economic and political developments in European societies, which have gone through several major crises over the last decade. Before they managed to shake off the economic crisis at the turn of 2000s and 2010s, the migration crisis began in autumn 2015, and was soon accompanied by a crisis of legitimacy of the European integration project as such, which was further accelerated and exacerbated by the result of the Brexit referendum in June 2016.⁶ Some comments even said that the European Union was facing an existential threat, and the results of the 2019 European elections were intended to indicate the possibilities for the further development of the Union.

Moreover, the EU Member States' political systems underwent a revolutionary development, facing the rise of electoral support for populist parties or even their coming to power, while established parties lost their electoral support. The dominant narrative of the European elections was the threat of anti-Union sentiment. Indeed, many of the populist groups emphasise a more or less Eurosceptic ethos when defining themselves against Brussels' political elites, or against the Union as such. Fears of their success in the European elections, which voters often use as tools to express their protest to the current domestic government, only underscored the atmosphere of the expected clash of advocates and opponents of European integration, in which the May 2019 elections were seen not only as a challenge to the European Union's political

the users who were denied access to post comments on Tomio Okamura's website. Its members shared the facts or arguments for which they were banned. At present, there is a similarly active page called "Diagnosis – Tomio Okamura", which mainly deals with the manipulation and misinformation disseminated by the SPD. As of July 2020, it had 15.5 thousand members.

⁶ In the referendum in June 2016, 17.41 million voters (51.89%) voted to leave the European Union, while 16.14 million voters (48.11%) preferred to remain in the Union.

system, but as a decisive vote on the future of the Union as such. If for so long the European elections have been seen as secondary and of little political importance, this was not supposed to hold true for the 2019 European elections; on the contrary, they were seen to be more important than all previous elections to the European Parliament.

If we focus on the Czech Republic, we must remind that Czech society is generally rated as one of the most Eurosceptic in the Union because of its long-term attitudes (Charvát, 2017, p. 118; Havlík, 2019); an April survey found that the European Parliament and the European Commission, which are more or less relevant to the European elections, enjoyed the trust of just over a third of the respondents, while almost a half of the respondents declared that they did not trust these institutions. At the same time, the European elections represented the least important elections in the Czech Republic for the respondents.

Pre-election surveys conducted in the first half of 2019 further indicated that all nine parliamentary parties that succeeded in the parliamentary elections in autumn 2017 had the potential to run for representation in the European Parliament. On the contrary, and despite the European elections took place around the middle of the (first-order) election cycle, neither the non-parliamentary nor newly formed parties showed significant support in the election polls, and it seemed that their chances were only minimal. Voters of parliamentary parties differed in their evaluation of their satisfaction with the Czech membership of the Union, with respondents from the right-wing declaring a higher level of satisfaction, while dissatisfaction was most prevalent in the voters of the SPD and Communist Party. Dissatisfaction with membership of the Union was, of course, also declared by determined non-voters, while dissatisfied respondents stated significantly more often that they would not participate in the European elections. However, while the Communist Party has been able to rely on a declining but disciplined electorate for a long time, the SPD was forced to look for a strong mobilisation topic in order not to fail in the European elections. And migration seemed to have the potential to become such a topic.

Although there was no single common overarching issue that would be of interest to Czech voters, which was later reflected in the party campaigns themselves, whose focus was relatively broad and lacked a dominant topic (for more, see Shavit, Rosenfeldová, Pečenková, 2019, p. 82; Charvát, Maškarinec, 2020, p. 71–81), one topic – migration – stood out above the others, even though only a seventh of the respondents mentioned it. Although migration to the European Union was far less intensive than in previous years, pre-election

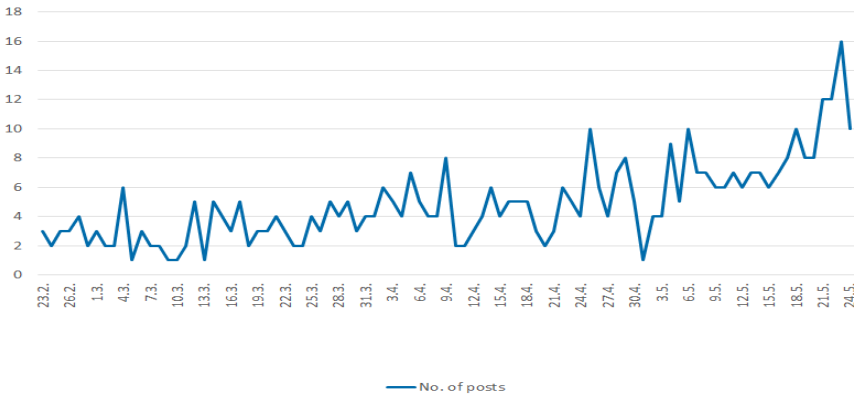
opinion polls revealed that for part of the Czech electorate, this was still a relatively strong mobilisation topic. At the same time, respondents who were about to vote for the SPD were the most dismissive of accepting refugees. It is no coincidence that migration has become a dominant topic in the SPD's promotion, which has framed this issue as a real threat to the security of the Czech Republic, its citizens and culture. The migration crisis was portrayed as a manifestation of the failure of domestic and European political elites (Havlík, 2019). This is one of the reasons why the SPD distinguished itself most critically and emotionally from the relevant Czech parties in its attitude towards the Union and was the only relevant party that mentioned Czexit in its campaign.

The relevant Czech parties used all possible traditional ways of pre-election presentation, such as free TV spots on public service television, paid advertisements, billboards, or posters; as the election date approached, they focused more on contact campaigns with potential voters. However, a significant part of the campaigns took place on social networks, not only on Facebook but also on Twitter and Instagram, the extensive use of which in election campaigns was a novelty in Czech case (Shavit, Rosenfeldová, Pečenková, 2019, p. 78). And the SPD was one of the most active parties on Facebook in the entire Union, as it had the sixth-highest number of posts of all running parties (Novelli, Johansson, 2019, p. 26; Charvát, Maškarinec, 2020, p. 85).

3. Facebook communication of the SPD

From 23 February to 24 May 2019, the SPD posted a total of 442 posts on its Facebook profile. On average, each post had 822 likes, 235 comments, and 254 shares. Apart from two cases from 25 April 2019, when only a video was shared, the text of the status was always supplemented by visual elements in the form of an image or video. When compared this data to the 2017 parliamentary elections research, the SPD's activity on Facebook doubled (it increased from an average of 2.48 contributions to 4.91 statuses) while the number of likes and shares of individual contributions decreased significantly (in 2017 the average per contribution was about 1,400 likes and 700 shares as compared to the current 822 likes and 254 shares).

Figure 1: Number of posts on Facebook per day



Source: Authors, data collected via Facebook.

While the average number of contributions per day was 2.9 two or three months before the election, in the last month before the election, the average number increased to 7.3 (by 252%). Despite the doubled intensity, the average number of likes fell to 735, compared to 946 likes (by 23%) in the first period. An even bigger drop can be seen in the comments, from an average of 284 in the first period to 207 (by 27%) in the last month before the election. The number of shares dropped from an average of 364 in the first period to 191, i.e., of almost 50%. Therefore, the question is whether the SPD's intensification of communication paid off in the context of the possibility of overwhelming the users. Unfortunately, it is not possible to find out how many interactions under individual posts took place between the same users. This analysis would require more detailed data. However, it can be stated that a larger number of contributions leads to a lower average interaction.

The lower number of likes and shares may be the result of several factors, or even their mutual interaction. First, the increase in the number of posts per day could have led to a certain overload and thus a lower level of interaction from SPD fans. Second, the elections to the European Parliament and the associated communication were not very significant (Charvát, Maškarinec, 2020). However, because of the extensive similarities between the topics communicated before both elections, the influence of the first factor is probably much more significant. It is also possible that the mobilisation potential and the way of communicating topics on Facebook had been exhausted to a certain degree. A long-term

observer of the profile is bound to notice that the SPD, for example, uses the same series of photographs depicting the aggressiveness and non-adaptation of migrants, as well as other similar posts, very often emphasising the criminal activity of migrants (cf. Charvátová, Niklesová, 2020). A change in the form of contributions may also have had a certain effect. While before the 2017 parliamentary elections, approximately 86% of the contributions were videos, before the European elections, videos accounted for only 14.2% of the contributions. Previous research has shown that videos have a much higher viewership rate, and therefore more likes and shares when compared, for example, to images (cf. Filipec, Garaj, Mihálik, 2018). Shifting the emphasis of communication to images could thus largely explain the theory behind the fundamental decline in likes and shares in the case of the European elections. But there is a certain problem here.

If we look at the current data for the European elections, we find that the average viewership of the videos is lower than that of the images. On average, the SPD videos had 618 likes, 186 comments, and 244 shares in the period that was monitored, which means they had 28% less likes than texts with images. Similarly, lower values can be seen for comments (23.5% less than images) and shares (on average 4% less than images). Thus, a question arises about the quality of the shared videos, or other specific influences, such as paid advertising and its impact etc. However, in the case of SPD, we can conclude that the higher activity on Facebook did not lead to a higher response rate from the followers – it even had an effect to the contrary.

The question is to what extent this effect is related, for example, to the second-order nature of European elections and the lower level of interest of citizens in this contest. But the answer to this question requires access to different data and a deeper analysis. Moreover, such an analysis would likely not help significantly in clarifying the issue, as between the two periods that were monitored, the network administrator may have reconfigured the algorithms as a result of the fight against misinformation which could have had a significant effect on the SPD (because of the creation and sharing of objectionable content).

3.1 SPD's communication of migration

The content analysis shows that migration had a dominant space in the SPD's communication. Moreover, for the SPD, the elections to the European Parliament represented a referendum on the European Union and on migration. The topic of migration was mentioned 852 times in the posts that were monitored,

which is almost ten times a day. In the “campaign’s hot phase”, the theme of migration appeared in 78% of cases. In the remaining contributions in this period, there were only brief mentions of **Okamura’s** participation in pre-election discussions or comments on events in government or other opposition parties. A word with more positive connotations, “refugee”, was mentioned in another 126 cases, in connection with opponents of SPD policy (e.g., “do-gooder” with 230 occurrences, or “neo-Marxist globalists” with 80 occurrences). However, this frequency was largely artificially created by the presence of these terms in the SPD platform (often together with the candidate list), which were often copied into statuses, even those that did not otherwise address migration, e.g., in posts regarding dual food quality.

The anti-immigration rhetoric is already clear from the SPD’s manifesto. There are slogans such as: “NO to the liquidation of nation states and nations and the creation of one multicultural EU state. The current EU cannot be reformed and the current form of European integration must end”; “NO to supporting immigration”; “NO tolerance for the Islamisation of Europe”; “NO to positive discrimination in favour of minorities and support for political non-profit organisations”; “WE WILL SUPPORT cooperation in the fight against terrorism and international crime”.

Table 1: The SPD manifesto for the European Parliamentary elections

In the European Parliament, we will clearly and together say:

- NO to dual quality of food and consumer goods. EU - stop making us your dustbin!
- NO to the liquidation of nation states and nations and the creation of one multicultural EU state. The current EU cannot be reformed, and the current form of European integration must end.
- NO to further restrictions on citizens’ rights, including the right to own a weapon.
- NO to new regulations and meaningless restrictions on business activities.
- NO to support for immigration.
- NO to tolerance for the Islamisation of Europe.
- NO to positive discrimination in favour of minorities and support for political non-profit organisations.
- NO to the adoption of the euro by the Czech Republic.
- NO to a European army led by the Brussels elite.
- NO to the further transfer of power from the state level to the EU.
- In the European Parliament, we will promote the following:
- WE WILL SUPPORT the repeal of the Lisbon Treaty and new cooperation between nation states on the basis of freedom and sovereignty.

- WE WILL SUPPORT the common market and the free movement of citizens of the nation states of Europe.
- WE WILL SUPPORT joint transport and energy infrastructure projects.
- WE WILL SUPPORT joint scientific projects and scientific cooperation.
- WE WILL SUPPORT cooperation in the fight against terrorists and international crime.
- WE SUPPORT the right of citizens of the Member States to decide in a referendum on all fundamental issues, including withdrawal from the EU.
- WE WILL SUPPORT the phasing out of unnecessary EU bureaucratic bodies.
- WE WILL SUPPORT social projects for working families in the nation states of Europe. The demographic genocide of European nations and their replacement by immigrants must end.

Source: Tomio Okamura's Facebook profile

The anti-immigration discourse was communicated on several levels, which complemented each other and intertwined. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify six categories of the thematization of migration, namely Islam/Islamisation, migration, migrants, migrant culture, foreign policy, and the SPD and its fight against migration. Not surprisingly, Islam and the Islamisation of Europe are presented by **Okamura** as a threat. Okamura often promotes on his profile claims such as that there is no such thing as moderate Islam, that it is a “hateful ideology whose promotion should be banned” (Okamura, 21 May 2019), or that “Islam itself is in conflict with democracy and fundamental human rights and civil liberties” (ibid.). After all, similar phrases can be seen here in interviews with other party candidates of the SPD, who are repeatedly asked questions such as whether Islamisation is a threat, whether there is a threat of the extinction of Europe, or whether it is still possible to save the states of Western Europe. The rationale for these statements is that Islam proclaims, *inter alia*, the inferior status of women or the enslavement and murder of non-believers, homosexuals, and apostates of Islam.

The SPD also comments in a similar manner on the issue of migration, which is also perceived as a threat and a problem that needs to be dealt with. Migration is linked to terrorism (which occurs 199 times), rape, murder etc. According to the SPD, it is mainly the Schengen system that allows the “free movement of terrorists” and manages the migration. Migration thus serves the “planned destruction” of European nations (SPD, 5 May 2019). Other statuses indicate that this is “the plan of globalists to create a multicultural world order” (SPD, 14 May 2019). According to the SPD, the EU is not only failing to solve the migration crisis

but is even planning a further increase in migration (SPD, 17 May 2019); therefore, those who read the statuses receive a warning about the threat of massive migration, as a result of which the citizens of the Czech Republic will become second-class citizens in their own country and/or its victims.

The SPD is quite clear regarding the causes of migration, although there are some differences. In general, the EU and the US, which destroyed the order in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and even Afghanistan and Ukraine, are responsible for the migration crisis. Regarding the differences, for example, in one of the interviews for the disinformation web called *Parlamentní listy*, the (successful) MEP candidate **Ivan David** stated that: “Immigrants are a consequence, caused by “welcome people” who want to be hosts in a country that does not belong to them...” (SPD, 13 May 2019).⁷ Elsewhere, we learn that one of the causes of the migration crisis is Schengen: “Schengen is one of the causes of the migration crisis and it introduced the principle of collective irresponsibility, whereby individual states allowed immigrants to pass through their territories after they crossed the EU’s external borders, which Greece and Italy and the Frontex agency guarded only very laxly. There was no external barrier, so the flood of immigrants spread across Europe. If the external barrier does not work, we must have our own national barrier” (SPD, 19 April 2019). Or, in general, the absence of the EU’s will to stop the crisis (SPD, 26 February 2019). Elsewhere, the main cause is understood as being the EU in general (SPD, 20 May 2019).

The rhetoric of fear is also used by **Okamura** in other categories that carry a negative connotation, especially in the case of migrants. The posts portray them as primitive, non-adaptable, lunatics, thieves, rapists, and murderers; they are associated with crime, murder, and terrorist attacks; they are encouraged to go back where they came from, or, since they already came, to assimilate. In addition, the SPD devotes a particularly large amount of space to the topic of rape. In principle, two types of contributions can be distinguished: one that informs about acts of rape and describes some crimes committed by migrants, and the other, in which Western Europe and the EU are described as an area in which rape takes place. As for the second case, the followers were able to read several times, for example, the following call: “If you do not want us to end up as Islamised as Western Europe, where there are immigrant ghettos police officers

⁷ Like “do-gooders”, the term “welcome people” (*vítači* in Czech) is used to refer to people who do not reject migrants, but on the contrary, defend the policy of accepting migrants into the EU. It is also mainly used pejoratively.

are afraid to enter and where women are routinely raped by immigrants, please vote in the European Parliamentary elections on 24 and 25 May!" (SPD, 4 April 2019).

Deceptive arguments were also made in the post of 13 May 2019: "The do-gooders keep telling us that there are no immigrants here, that there are no problems with them, and that migration is not a problem either. This do-gooder nonsense is again contradicted by several news items from recent days. Police detained four migrants (allegedly from Afghanistan) in Praha-Řeporyje on Saturday afternoon; they arrived in the Czech Republic in a fruit truck. But that is not all; far from it" (Okamura, 13 May 2019). However, the truth is that according to police statistics, in 2018 the number of incoming migrants did not differ significantly from previous years. In 2018, a total of 4,992 illegal migrants were detected in the Czech Republic; however, they most often came from Ukraine (1,470 persons), Moldova (567 persons), Vietnam (312 persons), or Russia (273 persons) (ČTK, 2019). In the first quarter of 2019, a total of 1,372 people was detained in the Czech Republic. Of these, 1,269 people were detained during their illegal stay, and they were nationals of 78 states. Most often, they were citizens of Ukraine (406 people), Moldova (188 people), Vietnam (101 people), and Russia (63 people). Out of the total number, 59 people were detained during this quarter during illegal transit migration, including nationals of Iraq (18 people), Afghanistan (10 people), Syria (7 people), and Yemen (7 people), but in most cases, their final destinations were Germany or the UK, not the Czech Republic (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2019).

The SPD has even created a construct of immigrant culture which they contrast with "our" endangered culture and the demise of the multicultural order. The category is full of warnings about the threat of the extinction of European culture, the impossibility of integrating immigrants, or even the idea of beatings and the humiliation of women becoming the norm. Furthermore, we can learn that immigrants do not adapt to the place they come to, but they Islamise the place, which results in the creation of ghettos and no-go zones. A piece of information that certain states have given up the assimilation of immigrants and started teaching in Arabic for their benefit has been repeated several times. This turned out to be false, as it was only a transformation of a piece of information from a fake report on the *iDNES* news portal (Tomeček, 2019; for more details, see below).

The topic of migration also appeared in the SPD's approach to foreign policy. The party leader perceives the EU as the perpetrator of the evil associated with

the influx of migrants (the EU is synonymous with immigration for Okamura) and therefore he publicly distances himself from the EU. He calls it the United European Emirates and speaks out against individual states (Germany, France, which he calls the “degenerate West”), but also against EU officials, Merkel, Macron, and Soros. Regarding Merkel, for example, he states that “she has invited more than 1.5 million illegal immigrants to her country, caused problems for the countries through which the immigrants went to Germany, and calls this a success! According to her, the crimes of immigrants, terrorist attacks, and the dead people of Europe can probably also be described as a success! Are Islamic Sharia law and no-go zones a success?” (Okamura, 10 May 2019).

If all the previous categories work with the emotions of fear and threats of migrants and Islamisation, in the last case (“The SPD and its fight against migration”), a defensive character and patriotic logic prevail. The SPD takes on the role of the defender of sovereignty, borders, freedom, culture, and traditional social values. At the same time, the SPD promotes its connection to its foreign friends, which it sets as a model for reducing migration (Italy and **Matteo Salvini**). Okamura claims that without the support of foreign allies, the influx of migrants will resume. Rejecting quotas and defending Europe also seem crucial.

3.2 Framing migration

The posts are completely dominated by photographs that usually depict the SPD leader **Tomio Okamura** or other politicians from the SPD leadership or its foreign partners (**Marine LePen** and **Geert Wilders**). Okamura appears in 175 photos out of 480 (36.5%), often with citizens, in a gym,⁸ or consuming meat and beer like “ordinary Czechs” like to do. Photos with migrants have a much smaller share (19 out of 480 photos). Although the photos of migrants represent only less than 4% and are very suggestive, they usually show migrants in aggressive situations, and roughly the same number of photos present Islamists, terrorists in masks, or perpetrators of terrorist attacks. If we add other manipulative photos such as children trying on Muslim clothing, or photos from the sites of terrorist attacks, it can be concluded that the topics of migration, Islam, and terrorism account for about 10% of the visual communication while 2% of the photos show meat, which was used in communication to spread the false information that “the EU is forcing us to eat bad meat” (the dual quality of food was one of the main

⁸ Even a photo from the gym was not entirely true as Okamura had artificially made his muscles larger, which he had to admit later, because the edit slightly distorted the iron in the gym.

themes of the campaigns before the European elections in the Czech Republic; for more details see, e.g., Charvát, Maškarinec, 2020).

Photographs are intentionally combined with false or misleading content to amplify and support it. Ultimately, the information in the posts moves even further into the territory of the completely false. Topics such as migration are deliberately framed to evoke an emotional response in the form of fear, anger, or hatred, while the whole manipulation remains hidden from the lay user of social networks. E.g., one of the posts on the SPD website spoke about the alleged Islamisation of Germany: *“You must read this. Germany confirms its Islamisation. It de facto legalised Islamic Sharia law when the Federal Court ruled that a new law prohibiting child marriage could be unconstitutional because all marriages, including marriages under Sharia law, are protected by the Constitution (Grundgesetz). If you do not want our country to end up as Islamised as the countries of Western Europe, please support the SPD movement”* (SPD, 14 April 2019). The article is accompanied by a picture in which there are men (probably Muslims at first glance) holding the hands of girls in white dresses. The context thus suggests a mass wedding of much older Muslims with pre-adolescent age girls and implies paedophilia.⁹

Another post (SPD, 24 April 2019) speaks of “imposing homosexual ideology” on Muslim children in Britain, which is to prove the clash of “neo-Marxist do-gooder principles with Islamic civilisation”. The article is linked to a picture showing young children, some in Muslim clothing, praying on a prayer rug, probably somewhere in a preschool facility (toys can be seen in the background). A lay person is thus led to believe that this is a photo from a British school, and it is intended to give the impression that this is the current situation in Europe (the article was used several times on the SPD Facebook pages). This is further supported by the information in the post.¹⁰ The photographs showing the violence

⁹ In fact, the girls in the picture are not brides, but bridesmaids accompanying the grooms. The picture was taken at a mass wedding organised by the Islamic Society that is considered by a number of countries and the EU to be a terrorist one and the Islamist ideology presented by this organisation is also considered radical among the majority Muslim society. That is why many Islamic organisations have condemned this mass wedding. Besides, the article falsely claims that “German courts support the creation of a parallel Islamic legal system in the country” or that “the judgment actually legalised marriage under Sharia law”. In fact, the German court only recognised the binding nature of a marriage contracted under Sharia law, but which was entered into by a married couple on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic before coming to Germany.

¹⁰ However, the photo does not come from Britain but from a Muslim school in Morton Grove, USA. The image is more than 13 years old and it has been edited; in its front portion, the teacher who was

of migrants¹¹ are often intended to depict the situation in the countries that accept migrants (at least according to the accompanying texts in the articles). However, many of the photos do not come from the countries that are mentioned at all or have nothing to do with migrants. Some of the photos even appear in another version as part of collages on social networks, in which the events on the pictures are blamed on **Barack Obama**. And if some pictures already do illustrate what is happening around migrants, they only abuse incidents from the time of the largest escalation of the migration crisis in 2015 (Moláček, Tvrdoň, 2020). Although it is possible to find images full of potential tension from refugees and migrant communities, these photographs are also taken out of context and used in a manipulative manner.

Quite popular by **Tomio Okamura** and the SPD is the photo of the Kashmiri activist and Islamist **Shakeel Ahmad Bhat**, who even earned an internet nickname “Islamic rage boy”, and that dates back to 15 September 2006 and was taken in Srinagar, Kashmir (Moláček, Tvrdoň, 2020). Like many other photographs, **Okamura** was not using this on social networks for the first time before the 2019 European elections; he also used it on various platforms in previous years. In the context of the recent European elections, the image appeared on **Okamura**’s Facebook profile on 14 May 2019, and it was supposed to demonstrate the Islamisation of Sweden. The attached text deals with the destructive influence of multiculturalism, immigration, and Islamisation on Sweden, and contains a number of half-truths and inaccuracies.¹²

This misinformation became, *inter alia*, a source of false claims for **Okamura** even on 25 May 2019, when he used the above photograph of praying children and accompanied it with a text with a similar wording, only swapping Swedish schools for French schools. Similarly, other pictures have been displayed multiple times in different contexts. For example, on 25 February 2019 and 20 May 2019 same picture was used to accompany the post claiming that EU helps

leading the disciples’ prayer before the beginning of Ramadan was “cut off” (Kott, 2019).

¹¹ Picture which was often used comes from Germany and opponents of migration have often shared it as evidence that refugees who came to Germany after 2015 attack police officers with a flag of the Islamic State. In fact, the picture comes from a fight in Bonn on 7 February 2012, two days before the state elections in North Rhine-Westphalia. At that time, IS did not yet exist in its infamous form. The far-right Pro-NWR party sought to attract voters through provocations at Friday Muslim prayers. These provocations resulted in clashes between anti-Muslim radicals and Muslim radicals, and the police had to intervene (Moláček, Tvrdoň, 2020).

¹² It was based on a false report published on Sunday, 12 May 2019, on the *iDNES* news portal (Tomeček, 2019), parts of which Okamura took over and published under the above photograph.

Islamization and is unable of reform, while the second post informed about EU push against member states to implement redistribution quotas and questions the independence of the Court of Justice of the EU.¹³

Another picture of aggressive migrants was used on SPD's Facebook on 1 April to illustrate the threat of immigration from Africa claiming that according to Afro Barometer study "about 120 million Africans will leave for Europe". Despite scaring people with numbers, this use of the picture is closest to its real context.¹⁴ Less than a month later, 29 April, SPD used this picture to illustrate criminality of young migrant from Nigeria who reportedly committed more than 100 offences against the law in two years. According to SPD, the issue of Nigerian migrant is "direct evidence of the bestiality of mass migration and nonsenses of the multiculturalism". About four weeks later, the picture was displayed twice. First on 22 May when it had to illustrate the SPD's claim that Court of Justice of the EU ruled out that the EU Member States cannot return migrants to the country of origin in case migrants will be persecuted there (according to the SPD's interpretation, the EU forces the Member States to host and protect "thieves, thugs and murderers"). Two days later it was dedicated to the criminality of migrants in the Netherlands when SPD was accusing Dutch authorities of data manipulation.

Conclusion

The aim of the paper was to reveal how Czech SPD is framing migration before the 2019 European elections. In the period from 23 February 2019 to 24 May 2019 (i.e., three months before the elections), 442 Facebook posts were published while migration played the most important role (the word was mentioned 852 times). But migration was communicated selectively and manipulatively, with only the negative effects of migration being emphasized. As it was framed in connection with other negative phenomena (especially rape, crime, and terrorism) and illustrated by photographs of aggressive Muslims,

¹³ This photo comes from Greece, specifically from the border crossing between Greece and North Macedonia. SPD purposefully used depiction of an isolated incident associated with the escalation of the migration crisis and it comes from 2015. It cannot be said that it corresponds to the reality of the whole country or even EU.

¹⁴ In fact, Figure 8 shows African migrants celebrating the entry into the Spanish enclave in North Africa. However, due to recognizable "improper" or "unnatural" behaviour of the migrants on the picture (many users don't know about the celebration and expressed emotions in motion), the image is used to depict asocial or criminal behaviour of migrants.

emotions of fear, anger, and hatred were evoked among the supporters, which further contributed to the radicalization and sustainability of the mobilization of the electorate and made the ground for labelling SPD as an anti-immigration party. In this regard, SPD is not an exception among other right-wing populist parties in Europe.

The main communication strategy of the SPD was to stay on the message, especially by the repetition of slogans, requests, and main manifesto appeals. These messages were intentionally framed to have the desired cognitive and emotional effect. From a cognitive point of view, the SPD's statements confirmed, affirmed, and further developed the anti-immigration, anti-Muslim, and hard Eurosceptic views of their supporters. Moreover, there were no positive topics relating to the EU, which confirmed the party's hard Euroscepticism. From an emotional perspective, the posts contained a stimulus, usually supporting feelings of frustration, fear, anger, or resistance to migrants, or "other parties", be it the SPD's political opponents (the do-gooders, neo-Marxists) or the European Union and its representatives. As a result of the blocking of opponents and deleting of dissenting comments, an environment was created in which only negative attitudes were shared, which has further strengthened beliefs. Facebook thus serves as a "trap" for potential voters.

When comparing Facebook communication with the 2017 Parliamentary election, the SPD was more active on Facebook in 2019. However, the increased level of activity led to a lower response rate among its supporters. There are several explanations, such as page and user congestion, the change of algorithms, or the exhaustion of topics in the second-order contest. However, a deeper empirical analysis of the individual explanations is, for the time being, lacking.

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