

Case Study: We Don't Want Islam in Czech Republic

Jaroslav Valuch
May 2018

Summary

Martin Konvicka, co-founder and leader of the “We Don't Want Islam in Czech Republic” initiative (Islám v České republice nechceme – IVCRN) and one of its derivative movements, “Bloc Against Islam,” is currently under police investigation and awaiting trial for inciting hatred via comments on the Facebook page of the initiative. Inciting hatred against a group of persons or restricting their rights is a criminal offence according to the Czech legal code. This initiative started in 2009 as a very successful Facebook page community (the page had up to 160,000 followers in January 2016 before it was blocked by Facebook). It then morphed into a political movement with aspirations to gain representation in the Senate and parliament.

At the height of his public political career, Konvicka and Bloc Against Islam received the endorsement of the President of the Czech Republic, who publicly supported the initiative by delivering a speech on their stage on November 17th 2015, the National Day of Fighting for Freedom and Democracy (anniversary of 1989 Velvet revolution).

Konvicka decided to run in the Senate election in October 2016 with his new initiative called Alternative for Czech Republic (directly inspired by the German Alternative für Deutschland). His run ended in failure, and he finished second from the bottom.

Dangerous Speech Framework Analysis

Social and Historical Context

Since the rise of violent right-wing extremism after the Czech Velvet Revolution in 1989, measures to counter extremism (such as the training of security forces and the adoption of extremism and hate crime legislation) have been gradually implemented.¹ The threat has received serious attention from even the highest political figures.

However, today we are witnessing the mainstreaming of hate narratives that can cause societal division and threaten vulnerable groups such as the Roma, migrants, and other minorities. Hateful and polarizing tendencies, previously associated with so-called extremists on the socio-political margins, are becoming accepted across society more broadly. The traditional focus on countering-extremism no longer addresses the current problem, as extremism violence is no longer the main threat to vulnerable groups. It is the hateful sentiments and fear among the general public and fearmongering by mainstream political actors that pose the biggest threat.²

¹<https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/detail/8000889008/?lang=en>, page 50

² <http://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/soubor/national-security-audit.aspx>

In 2016, a National Security Audit (NSA) was prepared and approved by the Czech government to identify and analyse national security threats.³ The report deals extensively with extremist threats and assesses the suitability of existing legislation and the capacities of the security infrastructure to respond to these. The audit concluded that extremists pose a high risk of splitting society and weakening the state by generating antagonisms based on ethnic, religious, class or other identities, as the majority of the population is polarized based on animosities resulting from different opinion positions. Increased tensions based on ethnic or religious identities, including protests and violence, are serious risks, particularly in combination with the acceptance of extremist ideas in mainstream politics.⁴

According to the security audit, the greatest current challenge faced by authorities is combatting illegal and reprehensible content on the internet. In this regard, security forces face three challenges. First, the enormous amount of internet content, second, the lack of qualified specialists in the field of extremism, radicalisation and hate crimes, and third, servers located in third-party countries that are beyond the reach of national authorities.

According to the Implicit Association Test (IAT) score using data from Harvard's Project Implicit, Czech Republic appears to have the strongest racial bias in Europe⁵. According to Europe Now Journal⁶ and Gallup,⁷ Czech people also hold one of the most hostile attitudes towards migrants and Muslims in Europe while simultaneously having the smallest population of Muslims in Europe⁸. A majority of Czech citizens believe migration and terrorism are the main problems of the EU. Although there are almost no refugees in Czech Republic and the Muslim community is very small and well integrated, Islamophobia appears to be relatively strong in the Czech Republic - especially on social networks, and in the last year also in the mainstream media space.⁹

The increase of mainstream anti-Islamism¹⁰ and the refugee crisis have intensified general negative sentiments towards Muslims and refugees, but also to other groups such as Roma and LGBT¹¹. This 'mainstreaming' of hate narratives is a significant threat, since those narratives are now more widely shared throughout society, not solely within extremist groups. In 2015, Islamophobic attitudes left their virtual margins and entered the public mainstream. It became acceptable to present far-fetched anti-Muslim opinions and borderline racist attitudes.¹² Newly emboldened hate groups have gained a degree of public legitimacy they lacked a decade ago – extremists have discovered that an anti-Islamic platform is socially acceptable to the public, and they use that as an entry point to mainstream their ideology.¹³ Even though there are laws against inciting hatred, many hate group leaders and politicians mobilize their supporters for action using so called 'dog whistle racism', often carefully avoid vocabulary that could be considered hate speech under the law.

³ <http://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/soubor/national-security-audit.aspx>

⁴ <http://www.mvcr.cz/cthh/soubor/national-security-audit.aspx>

⁵ https://figshare.com/articles/European_map_of_Implicit_Racial_Bias/4750588

⁶ http://www.europenowjournal.org/2017/02/09/why-is-the-czech-republic-so-hostile-to-muslims-and-refugees/#_ednl

⁷ <http://news.gallup.com/poll/209828/syrian-refugees-not-welcome-eastern-europe.aspx>

⁸ <http://www.pewforum.org/chart/interactive-data-table-world-muslim-population-by-country/>

⁹ <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/download/120227342>

¹⁰ http://4liberty.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/4liberty.eu-Review_4_FULL-VERSION_Single-Page.pdf, page 131

¹¹ <http://www.hatefree.cz/blo/analyzy/1049-analyza-verbez>

¹² http://4liberty.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/4liberty.eu-Review_4_FULL-VERSION_Single-Page.pdf

¹³ <http://www.mvcr.cz/soubor/zprava-o-extremismu-na-uzemi-ceske-republiky-v-roce-2015.aspx>, Page 6

Message

The reason for Konvička's prosecution for inciting hatred are two specific utterances in his comments on the IVCRN Facebook page:

1. "If it comes to worst, there will be concentration camps for Muslims FORTUNATELY. They asked for it themselves."¹⁴
2. "It doesn't even have to be necessarily illegal. Simply: if you, dear politicians, don't take action, we will enter politics and we will win elections. And as the winners of the election, we will grind you, beloved Muslims, into meat-bone flour."¹⁵



Later he suggested, that those comments were just a joke that he didn't mean seriously. According to his statement, he just wanted to calm down his supporters and that his goal was to mute the fear of Islam.¹⁶

Despite the fact that these two instances are the only ones cited in the charges against Konvička, it is necessary to take into account the context. These comments were not the only hateful comments he had ever made. His speech was often targeting his opponents as well, such as in his comment describing his view on how to counter Islamic invasion:

"You know, my friends, those strong talks ... the problem is that pouring a pig's blood will NOT HELP. They will scream, but at the same time they don't give a dam. Words about 'Shooting them out' will NOT HELP, because the words fly and water flows. The only thing that will help is pressure on politicians, MPs, journalists to do anything to stop Islamic


¹⁴ October 3, 2015.

¹⁵ September 27, 2015.

¹⁶ <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/konvicka-chce-do-politiky-svobodni-spolupraci-odmitli/r~11d0c7be41a611e5bd0a002590604f2e/>

invasion. Even if it required changing the legislation, shutting down the borders, militarization of society and yes, even stripping off civil rights of those 12-16 percent of the population that sympathises with Islam”¹⁷

To se mi líbí · Odpovědět · 6 hod


 **Martin Konvička** Vite, přátelé, ty silácké řeči ... potíž je, že NEPOMŮŽE polit prasečí krví, to oni budou sice řvát, ale současně na to kašlou, a NEPOMOHOU řeči o vystřelení, neb řeči se vedou a voda teče.


Jediné, co pomůže, je tlak na politiky, zastupitele, novináře, aby udělali vše pro to, aby se islámská expanze zastavila.

I za cenu překopání zákonů, zavření hranic, militarizace společnosti a ano, klidně i zbavování občanských práv těch 12-16 procent populace, která s islámem sympatizuje.

Dávejte politikům a stranám najevo, že jinak je volit nebudete - a volte takové, kteří k těm obětem budou připraveni.

Že se EU zjančí a nastanou ekonomické potíže a bída...?
Pche. Zeptejte se kosovských nebo syrských křesťanů, co nás čeká, když budeme pokračovat v nastoupeném kursu.

To se mi líbí · Odpovědět ·  26 · 6 hod

 1 odpověď

Another of Konvička's comments was mentioned in a Human Rights Watch report in 2015¹⁸. While discussing ISIS, Konvička commented:

“If there is a naturally dominant girl born among Muslims (*Konvička used a derogatory term for Muslims*), she has two options: To revolt and let herself be beaten to death by her family... or she will internalize the Islamic bullshit, will get crazy about it and will turn her dominance into even stronger Islamism. As in the case of a ‘woman gestapo’ of ISIL. Again I say: GAS – every method is legitimate to eliminate rabies”¹⁹

 **Martin Konvička** via **Daniel Palivec**
September 27 at 7:48pm · 

Když se meuzi musly narodí a vyrůstá přirozeně "dominantní" děvče, má dvě možnosti.

Vzpouzet se a nechat se ubít vlastní rodinou ... nebo si islámské hnusy internatizovat, ulítnout na nich, a dominanci si realizovat ještě usilovnějším islámováním. Jako v případě "ženského gestapa" ISIL.

A znovu říkám: PLYN, vzteklinu je legitimní tlumit všemi prostředky.

¹⁷ <http://denikreferendum.cz/clanek/20625-tri-roky-za-schvalovani-atentatu>

¹⁸ <http://zahranicni.eurozpravy.cz/eu/131128-jeste-ze-svet-neumi-cesky-human-rights-watch-se-pustila-do-cechu-kvuli-migrantum/>

¹⁹ September 27, 2015.

Because of comments like this, the IVCRN initiative also became well known for its spread of hateful²⁰ content, disinformation and outright lies²¹

Besides his daily commenting on social media, Konvicka also spread lies and disinformation in mainstream media. According to independent factcheck demagog.cz, Konvicka lied 7 times about Islam and related topics in one TV show, speaking the truth in 5 cases.²²

Speaker:

Martin Konvicka is a Czech anti-Islam political activist and a professor of entomology at the University of South Bohemia. He is the most prominent member of the “We Don’t Want Islam in Czech Republic Initiative” (IVCRN) and one of its derivative movements, “Bloc Against Islam.” He became famous for his open, vocal, and indiscriminate criticism of Islam.²³

From its establishment in July 2009 until the beginning of 2014, IVCRN operated exclusively in the virtual environment as an unorganized opinion-discussion platform on Facebook, focused on raising awareness about the negatives of Islam and gathering information about Czech Muslims by infiltrating Islamic groups on social networks. The platform has an obscure personnel structure, with administrators only using nicknames.

In 2011, Konvicka, inspired by other European anti-Islamic leagues, initiated the foundation of the Czech Defence League (CDL) organisation, a group that was closely interconnected (personally and ideologically) with the IVCRN initiative. The goal was, according to Konvicka, to expand the scope of activities of the Czech anti-Islamic movement.²⁴ This upgraded the movement to a higher organisational level. While IVCRN was mostly a disorganised discussion online platform, the CDL aimed to build structures and offshoots in cities across the country.

In April 2015, after a discussion within the IVCRN in which members of various political parties also took part (former politicians from the Civic Democratic Party, Czech Social Democrats Party and the Freedom Party), the IVCRN publicly announced its intention to influence the public sphere more intensively and declared intent to form regional branches and a political party²⁵.

Disagreements over future activities led to a split. As of spring 2015, there were growing tensions in terms of varying opinions on further activities. Some representatives led by Martin Konvicka intend to shift the core of the group’s activities into the public sphere, while others wanted to maintain the existing structure and centre of activities. The opinion break-up led to the establishment of an initiative called Blok Proti Islámu (Block Against Islam) in June 2015 that was supposed to be an organized superstructure of IVCRN.

The IVCRN initially tried to establish contacts with the political scene solely through electronic and written communications. Upon entering the public space (about halfway through 2014) and in an

²⁰ <https://www.clovekvtisni.cz/media/publications/553/file/1459365027-hate-speech-zaverecnazprava-final-verze.pdf>

²¹ <http://www.mvcr.cz/soubor/situacka03-2014proweb-pdf.aspx>

²³ https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Konvi%C4%8Dka

²⁴ https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/detail/8000889008/?lang=en_page_5

²⁵ https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/detail/8000889008/?lang=en_page_14

effort to promote adjustment of certain legal standards, the IVCRN managed to establish personal contacts across the political scene, where the opinions on the IVCRN diverge. The Úsvit (Dawn) movement, led by Tomio Okamura, current Deputy Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies,²⁶ established cooperation with the activists of Bloc Against Islam. The project was designed by a political businessman Vit Barta²⁷ whose own political “business-firm” party Veci Verejne (Public Matters) unexpectedly succeeded in the parliamentary elections in 2010 on an anticorruption and direct democracy platform. In 2011 the party collapsed after a series of corruption scandals^{28,29} and Barta’s secret plan from 2008 to establish a political party that would ensure him and his company political influence and economical gain became public.³⁰ The cooperation of Úsvit and Bloc Against Islam led to a break up initiated by Konvicka in 2016 after disputes over financial affairs such as financing of the election campaign.³¹

In November 2015 while he was the chairman of the BPI,³² Konvicka, was charged by the police of inciting hatred. At the time, the IVCR was still supporting him. By the end of 2015, however, there is a definitive break-up, and both groups – in the words of their representatives – proceeded independently of each other.



At the height of his public political career, Konvicka and the Bloc a\Against Islam received the endorsement of the President of the Czech Republic, who publicly supported the initiative by

²⁶ As of December 2017

²⁷ <https://www.novinky.cz/domaci/397590-vit-barta-rozklada-usvit-s-blokem-proti-islam.html>

²⁸ <https://zpravy.idnes.cz/afery-veci-verejnych-0rn-/domaci.aspx?klic=64146>

²⁹ <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/politika/sponzorske-smlouvy-vv-nesou-zrejme-falesny-podpis/r~i:article:697482/>

³⁰ <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/politika/tajny-plan-barta-pry-sel-do-politiky-kvuli-zakazkam/r~i:article:696512/>

³¹ <https://www.novinky.cz/domaci/402390-usvit-chce-po-konvickovi-miliony.html>

³² Blok Proti Islámu (in Czech), Block Against Islam (in English)

delivering a speech on their stage on November 17, 2015, the National Day of Fighting for Freedom and Democracy.³³

Zeman said that “he also doesn’t want Islam in Czech Republic” when asked about Konvicka’s activities in 2015.³⁴ In October 2015, IVCRN was invited by populist parties and under the auspices of the president to organize a conference on Islam in the Senate, after it held a conference in October in the Parliament. At this time, the president supported their arguments, e.g. stating that a “moderate Muslim is a contradiction in terms”, talking about a threat of a “super-holocaust” coming from the Islamic state.³⁵

Konvicka decided to run in the Senate election in October 2016 with his new initiative called Alternative for Czech Republic (directly inspired by the German Alternative für Deutschland), ending in total failure, second from the bottom. He currently leads an initiative called “Sedmá republika” (7th Republic) that profiles itself as the Czech Alt-Right News Network. Its activity is mostly online (with 20,000 followers on Facebook). They comment on current affairs on social media, burn Koran and occasionally organise public talks.³⁶

Last time Konvicka significantly raised public attention was when he and a group of other activists stormed to the Old Town Square in the centre of Prague in a Hummer car, dressed up as ISIS members with fake guns, and launched feigned fire accompanied by sound effects from loudspeakers. This event was supposed to be a media stunt but caused panic and injuries, as the crowds on the square did not realize what was happening.³⁷

According to political scientist Miroslav Mareš from the Masaryk University in Brno, these initiatives were not successful because of disputes and flawed marketing strategies. They were overshadowed by other personalities, especially Tomio Okamura.³⁸ Okamura, with a new political party, Freedom and Direct Democracy (Svoboda prima demokracie – SPD) created after the split of the Usvit party, achieved a significant success in recent (2017) parliamentary elections, winning 22 seats in the Parliament, after a campaign strongly based on radical anti-Muslim rhetoric.



³³ The anniversary of 1989 Velvet revolution.

³⁴ <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/download/120227342/?lang=cs>, page 22

³⁵ http://4liberty.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/4liberty.eu-Review_4_FULL-VERSION_Single-Page.pdf

³⁶ <https://hlidacipes.org/martin-konvicka-a-bojovnici-proti-islam-dnes-co-dela-muz-ktery-sliboval-koncentraky-pro-muslimy/>

³⁷ <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/curaffrs/far-right-politician-stages-islamic-state-invasion-in-old-town-square>

³⁸ <https://hlidacipes.org/martin-konvicka-a-bojovnici-proti-islam-dnes-co-dela-muz-ktery-sliboval-koncentraky-pro-muslimy/>

Medium

Roots of the IVCRN initiative reach back to July 2009, when the opinion-discussion platform of the same name was established on Facebook. From the beginning, the site has been managed by several administrators who publish information about events in the world of Islam, primarily by posting news articles (both Czech and foreign) and adding negative commentary. With 160,000 followers at its height, the IVCRN was one of the strongest and most active online communities on Czech internet.

The content spread via the facebook page could be categorised as following:

1. Complimentary comments and information about activities against Muslims
2. False or manipulated information related to Muslims
3. True information about mostly criminal or immoral acts connected to Muslims
4. Theological arguments proving alleged evil nature of Islam³⁹

The names of the administrators and the site's founders cannot be found on the Facebook page or elsewhere. It required further investigation to identify the administrators of the page. Later on, when IVCRN became active and more visible in the public sphere, they confirmed their roles within the movement. What is certain is that within the same year, the entomologist Konvicka, who is, according to his words, the "amateur de-Islamizer" joined the platform and became the most prominent figure of this Czech anti-Islamic movement.

The Facebook page of IVCRN was repeatedly banned by Facebook (first banned in 2014, unbanned by Facebook a couple of days later, banned again in January 2016, unbanned by Facebook a couple of weeks later and finally banned in December 2016 when it had 60,000 followers. Currently the page remains closed.⁴⁰

The banning of the IVCRN Facebook page in early 2016, according to social media analysis expert Josef Slerka, didn't do any harm to the initiative. On the contrary, it helped. The "dead souls" (non-active followers) dropped off, and only healthy hard core activists remained. On the backup page (established after the ban) the engagement, reach and other metrics generated better results than on the original site.⁴¹

While the official Czech Defence League worked almost solely in the virtual environment, the IVCRN extended its activities and entered the public space. An initial point of action occurred when the group organized a written petition against a higher degree of state registration of the Muslim Congregation Headquarters.

Since approximately the autumn of 2014, the initiative has actively appeared in public, and they receive growing media attention and exposure. The awareness of the Czech public of course grows in this respect. The first public demonstration in the streets took place in November 2014, followed by other protests in Prague and three other Czech cities within the next four months. The participation in each event was in the hundreds of protestors and supporters.

³⁹ <https://www.respekt.cz/politika/jak-se-siri-nenavist-pripad-islam-v-cr-nehceme>

⁴⁰ As of December 2017.

⁴¹ <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/download/120227342/?lang=cs>. Page 16

The increased visibility of the IVCRN was undoubtedly caused also by external events such as the attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris and the onset of the so called “migration crisis”. IVCRN, the strongest initiative of its kind, naturally attracted strong attention of the media and became publicly well known.

Audience and Response

The primary audience for Konvicka’s comments were followers and sympathisers of the IVCRN. The IVCRN initiative, with its very numerous and engaged Facebook page community (up to 160,000 fans), had a significant reach and engagement on the Czech internet. As was mentioned previously in this report, the initiative members and supporters used online space and other channels to threaten and harass their targets⁴² and mobilise themselves during campaigns, petitioning, elections.

There have been accusations that the IVCRN is an extreme right wing extremist initiative. For such claims, however, the context is important. In 2015, Islamophobic attitudes left their virtual margins and entered the public mainstream. It became acceptable to present far-fetched anti-Muslim opinions and borderline racist attitudes.⁴³ Despite the fact the Ministry of Interior listed IVCRN and CDL as right wing extremist organizations⁴⁴, the evidence doesn’t point to a significant following from right wing extremists. In 2014, the subjects of the Czech far right began adopting the same framing as the IVCRN. The Workers Party started to use sharp rhetoric against the Muslim community in the Czech Republic and Europe. Together with other similar subjects, it abandoned the so-called primitive racism directed formerly against the Roma community and began to focus more on anti-Muslim topics.⁴⁵ However, in reality, regarding the mutual relationship between the Czech extreme-right scene and the IVCRN, the situation is unambiguous. Although some entities from the extreme right-wing spectrum (eg. the Workers Party) have sought to establish cooperation, IVCRN is strict in this regard and refuses any cooperation with extreme right-wing subjects. Whether there are right-wing extremists in the ranks of the IVCRN, it cannot be reliably excluded, given the presence of persons belonging to the extremist right on the demonstrations organized by the IVCRN.

And are there extremists among the Facebook page’s followers? Based on social network analysis of the affinity of followers of different Facebook pages and communities, analyst Josef Slerka suggests that most of the IVCRN fans are not active on extremist pages. “You can meet there middle-class parents, metal music fans, EU opponents, nationalists as well as the Pirate Party members”, adds Slerka. According to him, there is nothing else that connects supporters of IVCRN other than resentment of Islam.⁴⁶

Incidences of Violence

There has thus far been no incidence of violence directly linked to Konvicka’s comments. Nevertheless, the WDWICR initiative strongly affected the sentiments of the wider population and turned into a real political force, public events organiser and online influencer. There was also an unprecedented rise of verbal, online, and physical attacks against organisations and individuals who help victims and vulnerable groups or that are active in the field of hate prevention.⁴⁷ This also

⁴² <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/detail/8000889008/?lang=en , page 7>

⁴³ http://4liberty.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/4liberty.eu-Review_4_FULL-VERSION_Single-Page.pdf

⁴⁴ <http://www.mvcr.cz/soubor/situacka03-2014proweb-pdf.aspx>

⁴⁵ <http://www.mvcr.cz/soubor/situacka03-2014proweb-pdf.aspx>

⁴⁶ <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/download/120227342/?lang=cs>. Page 24

⁴⁷ http://www.lidovky.cz/neziskovky-celi-odpurcum-migrantu-dup-/zpravy-domov.aspx?c=A150618_161924_in_domov_jzl

includes business and private companies, which are labelled as traitors since their work is regarded as going against the interests and security of the state.⁴⁸

The targets of the anti-Muslim campaign (bordering often with cyberbullying⁴⁹) were activists and public figures who expressed positive attitudes towards the Muslim community and multicultural society⁵⁰. Furthermore, anti-Muslim activists also engaged in pouring pig's blood on "Muslim" shops and other vandalism. Verbal attacks on, for example, Muslim woman with headscarves were also on the rise. The IVCRN did not distance itself from such acts; on the contrary, they often felt "amused" by them⁵¹. The Ministry of Interior also attributed to CDL the burying of pig heads on a property intended to be sold to Muslims in one of the Czech cities⁵² as well as spread of disinformation and lies to defame the Muslim community.⁵³

⁴⁸ "Accepting migrants as a prosperous business for NGOs? Absurd, NGOs react" Available at: http://www.lidovky.cz/prijimani-uprchliku-jako-vynosny-byznys-absurdni-ohrazuji-se-neziskovsky-1t5-/zpravy-domov.aspx?c=A150205_181429_ln_domov_mmu

⁴⁹ https://www.lidovky.cz/facebook-opet-zakazal-antiislamskou-stranku-cesce-tam-za-pomoc-afghanci-hrozili-smrti-gq7-/zpravy-domov.aspx?c=A161209_121016_ln_domov_rsa

⁵⁰ <http://www.mvcr.cz/soubor/situacka03-2014proweb-pdf.aspx>

⁵¹ <https://www.ivcrn.cz/teplicky-cunik/>

⁵² https://zpravy.idnes.cz/zrpava-o-extremismu-ministerstva-vnitra-fla-/krimi.aspx?c=A141111_155519_krimi_cen

⁵³ <http://www.mvcr.cz/soubor/situacka03-2014proweb-pdf.aspx>