

A Case Study of the Shift in Perception of Russia in Czech Politics: Investigation of the Vrbětice Ammunition Warehouse Explosion

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List of abbreviations used

4GW – Fourth Generation Warfare

BIS – Bezpečnostni informacni služba (Security Information Service)

FSB – The Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation

FSC – Full-Spectrum Conflict

GRU – Main Intelligence Directorate (Russia)

HW – Hybrid warfare

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

SVR – Foreign Intelligence Service (Russia)

QCA – Qualitative content analysis

Introduction

Since the Russian annexation of Crimea, hybrid warfare has emerged as a significant security concern across Europe. (Daniel & Eberle, 2021). This form of conflict combines conventional military force with non-military tactics, including cyber operations, disinformation campaigns, and economic pressure, to attract attention, create chaos, or undermine the key values of the targeted state. (Security Information Service, 2018). While extensive research has focused on the operational aspects of this framework, its impact on political discourse, especially within national parliaments, remains unexplored. This work seeks to address this gap by examining how Russian hybrid warfare affects parliamentary discourse, with a focus on securitization and threat perception.

Parliamentary discourse presents a meaningful focus in the case of hybrid warfare as it is a key arena for democratic legitimation and contestation. Furthermore, in the institutionally codified arena of parliament, framing, agenda setting, political contestation, and justification of issues and threats take place. Parliament, as a key legislative institution, is a place of debate on securitization and has the power to elevate certain issues and mobilize public opinion. (Ilie, 2015). In parliament, public voice is reflected and combined with other factors, such as media perception and allies, resulting in a national positioning on security issues. It is a mirror of how external threats influence the domestic meaning-making process. Moreover, domestic parliamentary discourse plays a role in defending its world views by responding to and competing with unwelcome narratives, such as those communicated through Russian disinformation campaigns against Czechia (Miskimmon et al., 2013). Parliamentary discourse can also reveal how the state responds to hybrid threats. Depending on the level of polarization, consensus, or silence in response to the Russian hybrid threat, parliamentary discourse can reveal the perception of the threat through the lens of the political elite.

The Czech Republic presents an ideal case study for investigating this question. As a democratic state in Central Europe with a communist past, it has been repeatedly targeted by Russian hybrid operations, ranging from disinformation campaigns regarding Novichok for the poisoning of Sergei Skripal and the statue of Soviet Marshal Konev, to economic and

political interference in the Dukovany nuclear power plant tender.

A key event in this context is the 2014 explosion at the Vrbetice ammunition warehouse, marking its 10th anniversary at the time of conducting this analysis. Following a seven-year investigation, the Security Information Service (BIS) identified two Russian GRU Unit 29155 agents – also linked to the Skripal poisoning in Salisbury – as the perpetrators (Corera, 2021). Resulting in a major diplomatic crisis, two explosions killed two Czech citizens and caused billions of dollars in damage to both public and private property. The depot, owned by Bulgarian arms supplier EMCO, was reportedly storing ammunition destined for the Ukrainian army (Bellingcat Investigation, 2021). In response to this incident, announced by former Prime Minister Andrej Babis and Minister of the Interior Jan Hamacek on Saturday, April 17, 2021 (Dvorakova & Syrovatka, 2021), Czechia expelled 18 Russian embassy staff members, many of whom were suspected of espionage under the guise of diplomatic missions. Russia, in retaliation, expelled 20 Czech diplomats from Moscow, announced diplomatic parity (Hosenseidlova et al., 2021), and placed Czechia, alongside the US, on the list of “unfriendly countries” (Kratochvil & Sychra, 2022).

This thesis aims to analyze how the Vrbetice incident affected the Czech Chamber of Deputies’ discourse on framing Russia as a security threat, both before and after the public announcement on April 17, 2021. Using qualitative content analysis (QCA) of transcripts from Czech parliamentary sittings, the study traces evolving threat narratives and examines the securitization of hybrid warfare and its framing in democratic, parliamentary discourse. Moreover, a secondary output of the chosen research design is a thorough description of the parliamentary debate surrounding the Vrbetice explosion.

The thesis is structured into four parts. First, it reviews the literature on Russian hybrid tactics used in Czechia and their reflection in parliamentary discourse. Second, the framework of hybrid warfare is introduced and compared with other relevant security frameworks. Moreover, a theoretical overview of securitization, terrorism, parliamentary discourse, and narrative framing will be provided to cover all dimensions related to the topic. Third, the QCA methodology is applied to transcripts of Czech parliamentary debates to identify key themes, narrative shifts, and securitization trends in response to the Vrbetice incident. Moreover, a contextual overview of the securitizing actors in the Czech Republic

and the Chamber of Deputies' party composition is provided. Finally, the analysis's findings are presented, interpreted, and the following research question is answered: *How can hybrid warfare influence parliamentary discourse on securitization in a targeted country?*

The case study of Vrbetice was chosen based on Seawright and Gerring's (2008) typology of case selection. Emphasizing the strategic value of selecting cases based on their theoretical relevance and variation in outcomes or variables of interest, this study employs a typical case design, understanding Czechia as a representative example of a democratic state in the Central European region subjected to Russian hybrid warfare operations. Thus, it serves as an example of how hybrid threats interact with national political discourse in a parliamentary democracy. Simultaneously, the Vrbetice incident emerges as an extreme case (a rare instance of proven foreign sabotage on Czech soil) within the typical country context, illustrating and magnifying the most visible trends. (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). This dual framing allows for the generalization of the trends found in the Czech parliamentary discourse while intensifying the observable implications of hybrid warfare for parliamentary discourse, enabling better theorization.

Despite its importance for both Czech and European security, the parliamentary discourse on the Vrbetice incident has received limited attention. The scholarly contribution of this thesis thus lies in linking the hybrid warfare to parliamentary debates on securitization. By doing so, this thesis provides enhanced understanding of security policymaking in the context of Russian hybrid warfare.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Hybrid warfare and alternative frameworks

The concept of hybrid warfare has emerged as a defining feature of contemporary conflict, particularly in the context of Russian and Chinese military tactics. The Vrbetice explosion and broader Russian influence in Czechia fit into this puzzle, making it a focal point of Russian hybrid activities, especially after the 2014 annexation of Crimea (Renz, 2016). This literature review surveys the existing debates on hybrid warfare and theoretical alternatives to this security phenomenon, the Czech context of hybrid warfare, including government and civil society responses, and finally describes the framing of hybrid warfare in parliamentary discourse.

Hybrid warfare is commonly defined as a form of conflicts that “incorporates a range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder” (Hoffman, 2007, p. 14). While some scholars argue that HW represents a new paradigm, others contend it is a new name for long-established military practices. Johnson (2018) identifies two general schools of thought within this debate. The first school of thought sees hybrid warfare as a novel form of warfare, necessitating innovative responses and counterstrategies. The representative of this school is Frank G. Hoffman, the founder of HW. Contrastingly, the second school believes in the utility of HW paradigm but criticizes it for being a combination of regular and irregular warfare.

The proponent of novelty of HW parading, Fox (2021), states that hybrid tactics is defining feature of Russian warfare rooted in its history, he sees it as a new type of war and underlines role of technology in it: “an expanding approach to war that exploits vulnerabilities in nascent technological innovation in relation to an adversary” (p.62). Glenn (2009) perceives HW as an analytically valuable framework for understanding how adversaries blend different tactics to exploit the vulnerabilities of advanced militaries. McCulloh & Johnson (2017) further elaborate on this framework and explain its applicability to the Middle East and the WWII Eastern Front, while contributing to theory-making by developing seven

principles of HW.

Conversely, a critical stance of literature disputes the novelty of hybrid warfare. Bartels (2016) and Kofman & Rojansky (2016) argue that unconventional tactics, such as sabotage or proxy fighters, have always been part of war and military strategy. Berzins (2020) shares this opinion and highlights the lack of Russian military literature addressing hybrid tactics. However, he acknowledges the impact of Western military strategy on contemporary Russian military strategy. Galeotti (2016) agrees, arguing that Russians are accustomed to a “hybrid” way of waging war, and it thus does not present anything new. As an example, he uses the Night Wolves motorcycle gang. In this aspect, his view resembles that of Fox (2021), who, however, is a proponent of the HW paradigm.

Renz (2016) and Kofman (2016) warn of the oversimplification of Russian foreign policy through the HW concept, leading to a limited understanding of Russian military thinking and a lack of identification of underlying intentions, which may present a handicap in gaining knowledge of Russian military tactics. Schnauffer (2017) supports this position, asserting that “Nothing in any of the explanations of hybrid warfare accounts for a broader geopolitical strategy” (p.19). Moreover, Daniel & Eberle (2021) regard this concept as very vague, consisting of multiple, at times contradictory narratives. Other opponents of the term of hybrid war argue that Russian tactics and behavior are an adaptation to the reality and practices of modern warfare and a reaction to the reality of the contested land, agreeing that the term presents anything new (Galeotti, 2016; Giles, 2016) or is specific to Russia (Popescu, 2017). This group of scholars does not present any countermeasures since, according to their opinion, the term is not new.

The concept of combining regular and irregular forces was already articulated by military strategists such as von Clausewitz et al. (1989), who emphasized the unrestrained nature of war in their work. Such an approach is supported by military historians, who regard hybrid tactics as a perpetual feature of warfare, citing the Peloponnesian War of the fifth century BC (Murray & Mansoor, 2012). To put it simply, Russian hybrid operations are “distinctive in terms of the degree to which they are willing to give primacy to ‘non-kinetic’ means, the scale of integration of non-state actors, and tight linkage between political and military command structures” (Galeotti, 2016, p. 282). These practices emerged following the re-

evaluation and reforms of the Russian military, which began in 2008, after learning from the mistakes of the Chechen Wars and the Russia-Georgia War (Galeotti, 2016; Kofman & Rojansky, 2015; Renz, 2016). In this study, the Czech interpretation of hybrid warfare is adopted and further detailed in the following chapter.

The hybrid warfare paradigm is not applied exclusively to Russia but also extends to other countries, predominantly China. Saalman (2001), for example, emphasizes the centrality of information and cyber operations in Chinese hybrid warfare and the importance of the nation-state. Aoi et al. (2018) apply the HW framework to Asia, claiming that Chinese maritime territorial claims serve as an ideal example of it. In Europe, the focus of most scholarship is on Russian hybrid warfare in the Baltic (Nyemann, 2021; Radin, 2017).

A group of authors addresses countering hybrid warfare, predominantly hybrid threats – the distinction between these two concepts will be explained in the theoretical chapter. Johnson (2018) points out that solutions to hybrid tactics are primarily located in the strategic domain, such as the use of sanctions. In contrast, in the operational dimension, no progress has been made to counter hybrid methods. The scholars do not offer any general tactics to counter hybrid warfare, but they focus on specific subfields of it, such as countering cybernetic threats (Tinnel et al., 2024; Zhang & Thing, 2021). Another type of publication draws lessons from actors such as the EU or NATO (Mälksoo, 2018) or countries countering hybrid warfare (Kong & Marler, 2022). Thematically, the article by Ploumis (2022) on countering HW stands out, based on the strategies proposed by Sun Tzu.

Interestingly, the framework of hybrid warfare appears to align with the Western security concept of the grey zone, which defines a conceptual space between peace and war. In this no-man's-land, modern warfare is waged. The theory is state-centric, describing not only Russian but also Chinese and Iranian influences (Krishnan, 2022; Mazarr, 2015). The grey zone is regarded as an aspect that is part of the hybrid warfare framework (Burrell, 2023).

An alternative framework often discussed in relation to Russian subversive operations is the concept of non-linear warfare, also known as the Gerasimov doctrine. It is inspired by an article written by Valery Gerasimov, the current Chief of the General Staff of the Armed

Forces of the Russian Federation, published in *Military-Industrial Kurier* on February 27, 2013. The main idea presented in this article is the recognition of a blurred line between war and peace, emphasizing that modern conflict does not follow linear patterns. Gerasimov points out that wars are no longer declared and emphasizes the notion that, regardless of the enemy's strength, there is always a way to defeat them, primarily through non-linear methods. The operationalization of this framework can be observed in the example of Russia vs. NATO, where the second actor disposes of considerably stronger manpower and resources. However, it uses non-linear methods of warfare.

Gerasimov's article, initially targeting the Russian audience, mentions the newness in warfare, but only in the context of the information space, which offers a wide range of new possibilities for reducing the enemy's fighting potential. The article aims to explain Gerasimov's view of the changing operational environment and possibilities of future war, rather than introducing new concepts of war or doctrine. Gerasimov views war as a much greater event than military conflict and presents a rough 4:1 ratio of non-military and military measures used in the conflict (Bartles, 2016), considering kinetic and non-kinetic means of war as mutually interchangeable and supporting (Galeotti, 2016). He frames asymmetric measures, such as political pressure or economic sanctions, as instruments of warfare, unlike in the Western perception of war, where such measures are often considered tools for conflict avoidance (Bartles, 2016). Gerasimov emphasizes the blurring of differences between strategic, operational, and tactical levels of conflict, and consequently acknowledges the growing importance of military science.

In line with this argument, Gerasimov states that Russia employed non-linear warfare in the North Caucasus, the invasion of Afghanistan, and WWII. Furthermore, the use of so-called "full-spectrum warfare" is common, a term that describes war as a combination of the following dimensions of conflict: traditional warfare, irregular warfare, deterrence, and competition. This concept is visible both in Russian history and in current Russian non-kinetic, asymmetric warfare. Historical examples, such as the transformation of Cossacks from semi-autonomous fighters to state-controlled forces, illustrate Russia's longstanding use of such methods. This-day parallel is perfectly depicted by the Night Wolves motorcycle club, which evolved from a countercultural movement into a club supporting Putin's regime; some of its members even volunteered to fight in the Donbass region (Galeotti, 2016).

Furthermore, this group has been classified as a security threat in multiple states in the Balkans and predominantly in central and eastern Europe (Boichak, 2023; Harris, 2020, 2023; Kleiner et al., 2023).

Other frameworks competing with the HW paradigm and the Gerasimov doctrine are Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW), Asymmetric Warfare, or Full Spectrum Conflict (Renz, 2016; Schnauffer, 2017). 4GW became more prominent after 2001, emphasizing the blur between war and peace and enhancing the cultural, social, psychological, and moral dimensions of waging war (Benbow, 2008). Similar to the Gerasimov doctrine, 4GW emphasizes the introduction of non-state actors and non-linear tactics as distinctive features of the new generation of war (Lind et al., 2001).

The concept of asymmetric warfare introduces two types of asymmetries: those of strength, based on the capacity to accelerate the conflict and surprise the enemy, and asymmetries of weakness, which involve the ability to slow down the pace of war and also surprise the enemy (Treiblmaier, 2021). Through this framework, Munkler (2003) predicts an increase in demilitarization and asymmetry of wars in the 21st century. The framework of Full Spectrum Conflict (FSC) recognizes four parts of Russian warfare: kinetic violence, information warfare, economic and energy influence operations, and political influence operations. This framing of Russian warfare tactics is very similar to the above-described frameworks, although FSC is broader than the other frameworks and is also criticized for it (Jonsson & Seely, 2015).

1.2. Hybrid warfare in the Czech Context

Even though the Vrbetice explosion is one of the most striking examples of Russian subversive activity in Czechia, the research on the event remains limited. Only two papers elaborate solely on the incident. Dvorakova & Syrovatka (2021) examine the perspective of media coverage of the incident and disinformation surrounding the explosion in the Czech media space, describing the event and its media coverage in detail. Meanwhile, Safarik et al, (2018) inform about the incident and discuss broader policy precautions that can be taken to prevent similar incidents from occurring. The ongoing relevance of the topic and the current

research process on this incident are illustrated by a recently published monograph on the Vrbotice explosion in 2025. The author describes and popularizes the investigation of the case. Moreover, the description of the event is supported by interviews with the heads of Czech intelligence agencies (Spurny, 2025).

Examining the Russian influence in Czechia more broadly, several theoretical approaches are employed in the literature to address this issue. An article that theoretically stands out is a case study which views Russian intelligence activities in the Czech Republic as a part of Grey Zone tactics (Baques-Quesada & Colom-Piella, 2021) and the study of Schnauffer (2017), who adopts the concept of non-linear war, seeing it as broader Russian tactics with goal to destabilize the West and will be discussed further. However, the dominant theoretical framework used to examine Russian influence in the Czech Republic is hybrid warfare. Furthermore, a group of authors focuses on a Russian-specific approach to operate in Czechia. Whereas Bren & Matous (2023) situate Russian operations in Czechia within a broader NATO defense context and examine Russian hybrid involvement in Czechia, Eberle & Daniel (2021) explore different narratives within the hybrid warfare framework in a case study of Czechia, moving beyond operational aspects.

In contrast, in their more recent publication, Eberle & Daniel (2023) examine how hybrid warfare influences policies and discourses in EU countries. Similarly, Lanoszka (2016) contextualize Russian activities in the Czech Republic within Russia's broader hybrid strategy targeting Eastern Europe. Notably, Eberle & Daniel (2018) trace the emergence of hybrid warfare discourse in Czechia following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and underline its transformative impact on national security thinking.

A part of prior research describes Russian influence and its hybrid activities in Czechia by narrowing it down to the level of particular events, such as the power politics exercised by the Russian Federation (Binhack & Tichy, 2012) and Russian support of pro-Kremlin actors in Czechia, concretely, paramilitary organizations and far-right groups (Vejvodova et al., 2017).

Disinformation, a central component of Russian hybrid operations in the Czech Republic, is the most extensively studied subfield of Russian influence in Czechia. One of the earliest

Russian attempts to influence the Czech public's view on a domestic event is the U.S.-Czech ballistic missile defense discussions, commonly referred to as the radar debate (Dodge, 2020). Several authors documented how pro-Kremlin narratives infiltrate Czech media (Cabada, 2023; Gregor & Mlejnkova, 2021; Jacuch, 2024). Furthermore, Palickova & Cernoch (2024) provide detailed descriptions of the strategic use of outlet Sputnik to influence the Czech energy sector. Underscoring deep societal divisions that increased susceptibility to disinformation, Filipec (2020) describes the Czech Republic as a “laboratory of Russian hybrid warfare” (p.5). Alvarova (2018) and Kundra (2016) focus their analysis on the structure of pro-Russian propaganda arguments, revealing a systematic and strategic approach to narrative manipulation.

1.3. Government and Civil Society Responses

Following the growing intensity of Russian hybrid threats, a substantive body of literature maps both the government and civil society responses to this situation. While Cabada (2023) argues that the Czech government did not develop any formal strategy against disinformation prior to 2021, the year of the Vrbetice explosion culprits’ revelation, Jacuch (2024) counters the argument by highlighting earlier initiatives, citing the establishment of the Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats in 2017. Jacuch’s view is reflected in the official document of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior, which began referencing hybrid threats in national strategies and audits as early as 2015 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2015; Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2016). Orenstein (2019) and Lanoszka (2019) share the view of Cabada (2023) and elaborate on the Western unpreparedness for the Russian tactical shift and lack of cooperation, emphasizing that Central and Eastern European countries, including the Czech Republic, had long warned of such developments.

Furthermore, a substantial body of literature examines the Czech civil society's response to Russian disinformation. Studies by Syrovatka (2021) and Wenerski (2017) explore national grassroots initiatives aimed at countering disinformation. Several publications assess governmental responses, both negatively (Cabada, 2023), neutrally (Jacuch, 2024), and positively (Vichova & Janda, 2017). Robbins (2020) even refers to Czechia as “one of Europe’s leaders in combatting Russian disinformation.” Alternatively, Suplata & Nic

(2016) suggest a framework for responding to such threats exemplarily. What all the above-mentioned papers have in common is their focus on how the Kremlin influences events in Czechia, labelling it as a fertile ground for disinformation as part of hybrid warfare.

Above-described responses are a part of a regional trend in Central/Eastern Europe (Cizik, 2018; Kuczynska-Zonik, 2020), demonstrated by comparative studies linking the Czech experience of countering Russian disinformation to Slovakia (Rechtik & Mares, 2021) or applying the Czech experience to other regions, such as the Western Balkans (Kraemer & Vichova, 2021), accompanied by concrete policy recommendations.

1.4. Non-security related approaches

Several scholars adopt an alternative perspective, exploring Czech political perceptions of Russia and the Russian diaspora, identifying the persistent, never-ending dilemma of Czechs, whether to treat Russia as an enemy or a friend (Groszkowski, 2015). Apart from security, a plethora of several studies explores Vrbetice explosion in the context Czech-Russian historical relations and their implications on the current events (Kratochvil & Sychra, 2022), either highlighting the change of mutual rhetorics since 1989 (Kratochvil et al., 2006) or dealing with the conception of Czech foreign policy towards Russia and vice versa (Kotyk, 1997; Kuchynkova & Kratochvil, 2010). References to Vrbetice can also be found in the report on broader political developments in the Czech Republic (Kudrnac & Petrussek, 2022).

1.5. Hybrid Warfare and Parliamentary Discourse

Czech parliamentary discourse per se has not been systematically researched until recently. Hoffmannova (2003), for example, analyses the use of humor in potential disagreements in the Czech Parliament, while Berrocal (2017) and Kraus (2003) study rhetorical strategies, including the construction of victimhood on the parliamentary floor and the language tools used to express disagreement. The most detailed study on Czech parliamentary discourse by Madzharova, Bruteig & Ilie (2010) compares the language of Czech parliamentary debates in 2008 to that of the parliament of the Communist regime in the late 1940s.

Despite the existence of a considerable body of literature on Russian hybrid warfare and disinformation in the Czech context, systematic research on how hybrid threats are framed and securitized within parliamentary debates remains scarce. Eberle & Daniel (2021) approach this topic in the Czech context by examining the framing of the hybrid warfare paradigm in official documents from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Interior. More generally, Fridman (2018) discusses the politicization of Russian hybrid warfare in Western discourse and interestingly, determines East European members of NATO (Czechia is included in this definition) as one of the primary sources of politicization of Russia's hybrid warfare against the West, having a supreme voice in redefining Crimea annexation as a new threat for the Western world due to their negative historical experience with Russia coupled with their desire for additional protection. A comparable case study on British political-military discourse regarding Russia's hostile activities (Janicátová & Mlejnková, 2021) reveals the ambiguous use of the term hybrid warfare among UK policymakers. However, it does not focus specifically on parliamentary discourse.

In summary, while a substantial body of literature on hybrid warfare and Russian disinformation exists, key gaps remain unaddressed. Detailed description of how the Vrbeřice event influenced security measures in Czechia and practices of intelligence services, responses of international bodies to the event are not described in a complex way, more research on the opinion of Czechs on Russia is needed as well as a study on Czech parliamentary discourse on Russian threat. Existing studies primarily focus on executive actors and civil society responses, leaving gaps in the legislative dimension research.

This thesis aims to address this gap by analyzing parliamentary narratives surrounding the Vrbeřice incident, uncovering ways in which the hybrid warfare paradigm influences parliamentary discourse on securitization. As a result, this angle is largely overlooked in academic debate.

2. Theory and concepts

2.1. Hybrid warfare paradigm evolution

As outlined in the literature review, this study analyzes the Vrbetice incident through the lens of the hybrid warfare (HW) paradigm. This conceptual framework has gained popularity in both Western and Czech governmental and societal discourse, particularly following the Russian annexation of Crimea and war in the Eastern Donbas region in 2014. These events reestablished the perception of Russia as a threat, especially by NATO, and elevated hybrid warfare as a prominent concept in security studies (Daniel & Eberle, 2021; Fridman, 2018b).

The term hybrid warfare, developed in the US in the 2000s, was initially used to describe the unexpected success of relatively weak actors at that time, predominantly non-state actors such as Hezbollah in the Israel war in 2005 or Taliban fighting against the US and its allies (Hoffman, 2009). In 2007, the founder of the term hybrid warfare, Frank Hoffman, defined hybrid threat as “a full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder” (p.8). This concept emerged as one of numerous other terms, describing “new ways” to wage non-conventional wars using modern technologies and non-military tactics, and appeared in several US strategic documents. Moreover, NATO was the first organization to operationalize Hoffman’s understanding of military conflict and develop a strategy from it (Fridman, 2018b). NATO’s interpretation further broadened the term by including a variety of adverse actions – ranging from terrorism and corruption to ethnic conflict and migration – that adversaries systematically use in pursuit of long-term political and military goals (Aaronson et al., 2011). Eventually, also thanks to the NATO definition, the term has become “ an umbrella term encompassing a wide variety of existing adverse circumstances and actions, such as terrorism, migration, piracy, corruption, ethnic conflict, and so forth” (Aaronson et al., 2011, p. 115).

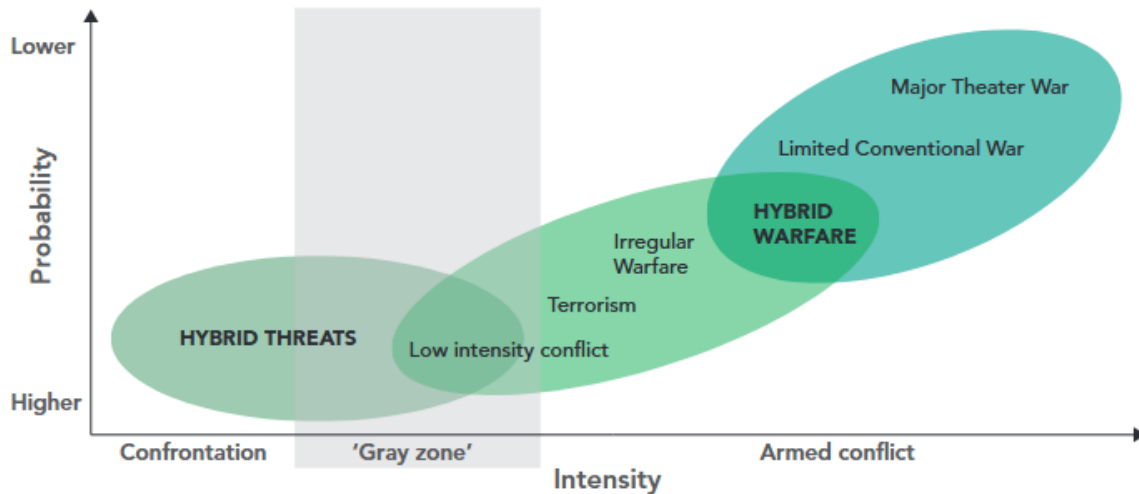
Gradually, the term became much broader, including also state actors, predominantly Russia and China. The term became popular in 2014 and was used to label Russian military actions in Ukraine and the West. The term continuously evolves, becoming more complex, and it

“has taken life on its own” (Kofman, 2016). Now, it covers almost every dimension of Russian military tactics, including hostile activities outside of the war, known in European (including Czech) context as hybrid threats and their subsequent politicization. “The initial narrative surrounding Russia’s actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine has been politicized for domestic purposes, creating an image of Russia as the principal threat to Western democratic values and using this alarmist image for domestic political gains“ (Fridman, 2018a, p. 124)

Hybrid threats present, according to Monaghan (2019), “a nonviolent revisionist grand strategy using multiple means to target vulnerabilities across society that seeks gains while avoiding reprisal through exploiting the gray zone between peace and war” (p.86), defined by 3 key features: revisionism, interdependence within the global system, and technological convergence. This concept, as previously stated, differs from hybrid warfare, which presents a framework for new ways of waging war. Importantly, hybrid threats primarily employ non-violent means, while hybrid warfare combines both kinetic and non-kinetic means. Moreover, hybrid threats are harmful when they accumulate, although they rarely are a matter of life or death (Monaghan, 2019). The difference is visualized in Figure 1. Today's understanding of hybrid threats differs significantly from the original definition by Hoffman (2007), cited at the beginning of the chapter. Therefore, the definition is similar to that of hybrid wars, and Hoffman understood hybrid threats as a synonym for hybrid wars. This example shows how significantly the meaning of hybrid threats shifted in less than 20 years.

Figure 1

Distinction between hybrid threats and hybrid warfare



Note. Monaghan, S. (2019). Countering Hybrid Warfare: So What for the Future Joint Force? *PRISM*, 8(2), 82–99. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26803232>

2.2. Hybrid Threats in the Czech context

As noted by Daniel & Eberle (2021), the development of the HW paradigm in Czechia copied the “international path”. Discussed before 2014 predominantly by military experts, the term HW reached mainstream just after Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2014. As Daniel & Eberle (2018) note, in 2014, there were only uncoordinated efforts to respond to the Russian annexation of Crimea. In 2015, this issue reached the top of the security community's agenda, and 2016 marked a decisive point for Czech security, when a state response to the threat of Russian hybrid warfare was formulated.

The key document, the National Security Audit, established the term "hybrid threat" in Czechia (Daniel & Eberle, 2018), mapping Czech security weaknesses. The Audit described a hybrid campaign as a combination of dimensions of influence, referred to as the “DIMEFIL” framework: diplomacy, information, military, economy, finance, intelligence, and public order and rule of law (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, Security

Policy and Crime Prevention Department, 2016). After the publication of this document, other state institutions began publishing security strategies on the topic. One of the central security actors in Czechia, BIS, first mentioned hybrid conflict in its 2016 annual report and expanded its definition in 2017, presenting a Czech-specific interpretation of Russia’s hybrid strategy through a structured framework, as explained more closely in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Russia’s hybrid strategy according to BIS

1	(Pro)Soviet interpretation of modern history, lasting influence of Soviet propaganda	Continuous, latent, Overton window	Non-kinetic tools	Secrecy Imitation Simulation Denial Disinformation Deceptive maneuvers	Establishing agendas, Using foreign - political agendas to influence the internal politics of the target states
2	Information warfare <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information • Disinformation • Propaganda • Lies 	Ad hoc			
3	Networking/infiltration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politics • Economy • Criminal sphere • Espionage • Culture • Education 	Continuous			
4	Military/guerilla actions	Ad hoc	Kinetic tools		

Note. Security Information Service (2018, December 3). Annual Report 2017.

<https://www.bis.cz/vyrocnni-zpravy/vyrocnni-zprava-bezpecnostni-informacni-sluzby-za-rok-2017-d85907e6.html>, translated by the author

The table is further clarified in BIS’s 2018 report, providing a comprehensive definition used in this study’s qualitative content analysis: “The concept of Hybrid conflict is based on the complex (combinations ranging from strict hierarchy/structure to chaotic state) use of all

available military and non-military tools (history, espionage, military action, guerrilla, economics, organized crime, corruption, politics, information warfare, etc.), as well as tools or options offered by the other side (e.g. freedom of speech). The individual segments or components of a Hybrid strategy may be a smokescreen to attract attention or create chaos, i.e., to distract from other, more fundamental components of the Hybrid strategy...The key objective of the Russian Hybrid strategy is primarily to weaken NATO and the EU internally, e.g. by weakening individual member states” (Security Information Service, 2018, pp. 6–7). This definition is reflected in the thesis’s coding frame, as it efficiently contextualizes hybrid warfare within a specific Czech security context. Moreover, BIS serves not only as a key source informing about Russian hybrid warfare in Czechia but also as a crucial securitizing actor – this nuance will be explained further in the work.

As is visible from the definition, it is highly influenced by NATO’s understanding of HW and complemented by Czech-specific features, such as the pro-Soviet interpretation of history. However, as already mentioned, BIS’s definition is one of many similar in Czech security documents. For example, Czech Security Strategy 2015 defines hybrid interference followingly: “synergic use of cyber, disinformation, economic, political, diplomatic, military, intelligence, and other tools seeks to disrupt democratic processes, the functioning of democratic institutions, and mechanisms of the rule of law, as well as our internal security and social cohesion“ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2015, p. 16).

Interestingly, Czech state definitions of HW developed later pronounce the protection of democratic society and technology development, such as the Security Strategy from 2023 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2023) or the National Strategy for countering hybrid interference from the same year (Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic, 2023). The defense strategy from 2023 emphasizes the role of strategic communication by the state in relation to hybrid warfare (Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic, 2023). The importance of the hybrid warfare paradigm for national defense is displayed in the document The Czech Armed Forces vision of future warfare beyond 2040, where it is claimed that “The enemy will conduct hybrid operations, criminal and terrorist activities, psychological and information operations targeting the hearts and minds of soldiers and the population. These operations will dominate the early stages of the conflict. This will be combined with conventional combat operations. The lines

between military and non-military aspects of conflict will be blurred“ (Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic, 2023). This prediction presents nothing new and aligns with Valery Gerasimov’s article, in which he explicitly discussed blurring the lines between peace and war as early as 2013. Moreover, as can be seen from the definitions, the terms hybrid interference, hybrid operations, hybrid strategy, hybrid conflict, and hybrid threats are used interchangeably. This situation must change, and precise differentiation and standardization should be implemented to ensure consistency.

2.3. Securitization

The concept of securitization, a framework developed by the constructivist Copenhagen School at the Conflict and Peace Research Institute (COPRI), was formulated in the work *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998). It marked a significant shift in security studies by redefining the perception of security not as an objective or material threat, but as a performative act and intersubjective construction (Taureck, 2006a). In this view, security is constructed through language and social interaction rather than being linked to material dangers. Notably, securitization theory expands the concept of security beyond the military realm by including other sectors of security, namely political, economic, societal, and environmental aspects. A core contribution of the theory lies in its framing of security as a speech act. Therefore, a threat becomes a security issue not because it is inherently threatening but because it is framed as an existential threat, and accepted as such by a relevant audience (Buzan et al., 1998).

The Copenhagen School differentiates between two models of securitization, philosophical and sociological. The first approach mentioned focuses on the linguistic and discursive construction of threats, regarding the audience as a formal category. In contrast, the sociological model puts an emphasis on the importance of context for securitization, such as the nature of the audience, practices emphasizing mutual constitution of securitizing actors and audiences, and their power relations (Balzacq, 2010; Buzan et al., 1998).

Before diving into the specific concepts of securitization theory, it is essential to present three core assumptions that the theory rests on. First, it is the centrality of the audience, which must agree with the claims made by the securitizing actor. The audience has the power

to enable the securitizing actor to adopt countermeasures against the securitized threat. Another role of the audience is to provide either moral or formal support or both. Without this condition being fulfilled, the securitization is unsuccessful. The second assumption connects the co-dependency of agency and context, meaning that the securitizing move needs to be related and recognize the external reality, including the threatening object, in order to be accepted. If not, it is hard for audiences to justify the securitizing move and thus are more likely not to accept it. The third assumption argues that security is not only produced through speech acts but is created through embedded practices and institutional structures that discipline actors and permit certain practices to be implemented. (Balzacq, 2019; Buzan et al., 1998).

Securitization is the elevation and framing of an issue as an existential threat (known under the term speech act) to a designated referent object (an object that is existentially threatened) and therefore justifying the use of extraordinary measures in order to eradicate this threat and ensure the referent object's survival. The speech act serves as a central rhetorical structure for policymakers, who use it to frame and amplify an issue. Understood as a performative act, it is not uncommon that speech act exaggerates and/or establish a new reality or the threat. In line with the second assumption, a speech act should have a connection to reality to be convincing. A successful securitization follows three steps: first, identification of existential threats, second, initiating an emergency action to deal with the existential threat, and third, application of new rules (Buzan et al., 1998). As a result, successful securitization institutes a new regime of practices (Balzacq, 2019).

In this process, the audience of securitization plays a central role. If the target audience does not accept the speech act of the securitizing actor (the actor who declares that a referent object is existentially threatened), the act remains a securitizing move (understood as a first step towards securitization) and the securitization has failed. The securitization is completed only by acceptance and conviction of the threat by the targeted audience (Balzacq, 2010; Collins, 2016; Eroukhmanoff, 2018; Taureck, 2006a). If accepted, a successfully securitized issue gives a way for securitizing actors to use extraordinary means and eventually bypass the standard policy-making procedure.

The opposite process of securitization is desecuritization, defined as a “removal of issues

from the security agenda” (McDonald, 2008, p. 579). This is often a complex and gradual process, as actors who benefit from securitization may oppose it. Moreover, it is not easy to suddenly remove threat perception in society. Although desecuritization has not been thoroughly discussed in the foundational texts of securitization theory, the process is nevertheless important and increasingly recognized as an important tool for understanding how security narratives are challenged and deconstructed (Otukoya, 2024).

The framework of securitization faces several critiques. The scholars struggle to reconcile whether a speech act is a one-time occurrence that creates securitization if accepted or a long, slow process of convincing the audience over (Buzan et al., 1998). The second point of criticism addresses the nature of speech acts, specifically whether they are intersubjective (requiring audience acceptance) or illocutionary (self-reliant, where the act itself performs the securitization), and thus leading to different interpretations of securitization. The last criticism focuses on the audience's perception. While securitization theory views the audience as a single entity, in reality, it consists of distinct audiences, including the public, allied states, parliament, and others. This variety of audiences is confronted with the same securitizing move and can react differently, based on their nature. Therefore, a closer examination of different types of audiences is necessary (Buzan et al., 1998). Furthermore, theory is also criticized for its oversimplification, neglect of the perspective of non-state actors, and broad application (Otukoya, 2024). Despite this critique, simplification is a function of theory, whose goal is to provide a framework for analyzing complex realities.

Drawing on the description above, securitization theory suggests that language constructs threats to justify political and policy outcomes, establishing non-positivist constitutive causality, a causality which “in its strongest form it theorizes a necessary but insufficient condition for an outcome” (Lebow, 2009, p. 214), not a typical positivist causality where A produces B. Therefore, this study explores discursive mechanisms through which the securitization of hybrid warfare may occur, using QCA to trace their linguistic construction in the case of the Vrbotice explosion. The aim of the study is thus not to test statistical correlations or establish causality in a traditional sense, but to understand how language constructs threat perceptions and legitimizes extraordinary political responses. Instead, it identifies discursive shifts and framing strategies that are consistent with the securitization framework.

2.4. Terrorism and securitization

The Vrbotice explosion has been repeatedly described by Czech political elites as an “act of state terrorism” (McEnchroe, 2021; Rambouskova & Gavenda, 2021). The Senate even issued a formal resolution on this matter using terrorism terminology (Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to critically evaluate the term terrorism in this context.

A major challenge lies in the definition of terrorism itself, which remains quite ambiguous, lacking a universally recognized definition (Schmid, 2011). Definitions vary across academic, legal, and political-security entities, and hundreds of definitions of terrorism exist, often inconsistent. The concept of state terrorism is even more contested. While some authors, such as Schmid (2011), criticize the exclusion of state actors from the terrorism definition as a double standard, others, like Cronin (2009), incorporate the condition of non-state actors into their definition of terrorism.

Despite the aforementioned discrepancies, most definitions contain several core elements. In scholarly definitions, the emphasis is placed on the political character and the terror of the population. Legal and institutional definitions typically focus on the illegality of the activity, the terror of the population, and its coercion by the government (Schmid, 2011). Another pervasive feature of definitions of terrorism is the asymmetric nature of violence targeting non-combatants. A frequently pronounced feature of terrorism is also its psychological effect on the population, inducing fear in the rest of the population not directly targeted by violence. However, as Hayes (2011) argues, this feature is not unique to terrorism, just like illegality and asymmetric nature.

The term terrorism first emerged around 1880 in Russia, describing anarchist groups aiming for revolution using violence that defied moral conventions. The period between 1880 and 1920 is thus known as the first wave of terrorism, specifically an Anarchist wave. After the Anti-colonial wave and the New Left way, today, the world is experiencing the fourth wave of terrorism, so-called Religious wave motivated by religious conviction, enhanced organization of the terrorism groups (Rapoport, 2002). Recently, a new body of literature

has emerged, predicting the fifth wave of terrorism (Czornik & Szynol, 2022; Hess et al., 2020; Honig & Yahel, 2019).

In line with securitization theory, the spread of terrorism can be viewed as a macro securitization – a widely recognized politicized threat within the international community, used to legitimize extraordinary political measures. Perhaps the greatest role in macro securitization of the topic and threat construction was played by George W. Bush by announcing the War on Terror after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre (McDonald, 2008), portraying terrorism as a threat to the Western way of life. Hayes (2015) goes even further, arguing that terrorism is a deeply politicized term that undermines the efforts to tackle political violence effectively. He also argues that there is nothing unique about terrorism as a form of political violence.

Having reviewed key concepts of terrorism, it is debatable whether the Vrbetice incident fits into the category as an example of it. In the Czech Republic, various definitions of terrorism coexist (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2025). This study will stay consistent and rely on the definition provided by the Security Information Service. According to BIS, “terrorism is a violent form of asserting the political interests of the followers of a certain radical ideology (political, religious, nationalist, separatist, ecological, etc.); the target of violence is usually the civilian population” (Security Information Service, 2025).

In the case of Vrbetice, it can be argued that the illegal act of an ammunition depot explosion was politically motivated – to disrupt ammunition exports to Ukraine. However, the intended target of violence was the ammunition (Bellingcat Investigation, 2021). Moreover, no evidence exists that Czech civilians represented the intended target. Importantly, any potential psychological or symbolic impact on the Czech public was significantly diminished by a seven-year delay in the investigation and initial miscommunication regarding the cause (Dvorakova & Syrovatka, 2021). As a result, the first shock pronounced after the terrorist attack did not take place.

For the following reasons, the term “state terrorism” was inaccurately used by Czech political elites, whether due to political strategy or misinterpretation. It is probable that the label of terrorist act contributed to the securitization of the incident, amplifying and

portraying it as an extraordinary threat. A more appropriate term would be sabotage or, more generally, a violation of international law (United Nations, 1945), as it involves intervening in the internal affairs of another country. In the analysis, this inaccuracy in the terminology of political elites will be systematically coded as instances of violation of international law, reflecting the mismatch between political language and definitional accuracy.

2.5. Framing of hybrid warfare in parliamentary discourse

Parliamentary discourse is a part of the broader concept of political discourse. Ilie (2002) defines its pervasive features: “parliamentary discourse is marked by at least two sets of contrary, but somehow complementary, tendencies, namely (i) the struggle for power, i.e. defending one’s already acquired positions of power or attacking and trying to conquer positions of power, vs. the revolt against those holding official positions of power, and (ii) the observance and preservation of convention, or status quo, by those holding power vs. the manifestation of subversion by those seeking power. At the discursive level, these two sets of tendencies are reflected in two parallel practices, namely the use of an institutionally ritualised discourse, on the one hand, and the use of an individually tailored discourse, and particularly metadiscourse..., on the other”(p.72).

First, parliamentarians, as part of the political elite, respond to hybrid warfare through discourse for various reasons. Drawing on the securitization theory (Buzan et al., 1998), political elites may frame significant external issues as an existential threat, in this case Russian hybrid warfare activities to Czech security, in order to justify and legitimize extraordinary policy measures and precautions (shifts in parliamentary discourse) such as sanctions, laws etc. to eradicate the threat, signal resilience and maintain their credibility (Buzan et al., 1998). In the Czech context, Russian hybrid activities, including the Vrbetice ammunition depot explosion, were framed as such a threat. This securitizing move helped legitimize actions such as the expulsion of 18 Russian diplomats (Deutsche Welle, 2021), a response that would have been politically unviable without rhetorical justification portraying it as a defensive measure against terrorism threatening Czech national security. In the analysis, it is expected to find further proof of the legitimization of this special measure and to expose other examples of such parliamentary rhetoric. In Czech parliamentary discourse context, it is expected to find following arguments, identified by Madzharova Bruteig & Ilie

(2010): acting in the interest of the people, putting interests to the own political party before the interest of the state and the people, negative references to the Communist regime and in contrast, positive references to the First Republic. Another frequent type of framing justification in parliaments is alliance-based arguments (Raunio & Wagner, 2017), which utilize the commitments to international organizations and their policies, such as NATO and bilateral relationships with strategic partners.

Second, hybrid warfare often takes the form of information and narrative manipulation. Miskimmon et al. (2013) introduce the constructivist framework of strategic narratives, which helps to explain how actors respond to such threats by constructing counter-narratives. While the theory was initially designed to describe the behavior of the Great Powers, its logic also extends to smaller states, such as the Czech Republic. The authors point out that narratives about great powers, in this case the Russian Federation, can shape their expectations of them, both domestically and internationally. Through the co-creation of strategic narratives about other states, parliamentary actors can influence perceptions of state identity, threat perception, and the global order. It is a means of responding to the Russian narrative of the world, which is disseminated through hybrid warfare, and of safeguarding Czech and Western views of the world order (Miskimmon et al., 2013). In responding to Russia's hybrid activities, the Czech Parliament and its discourse thus not only react to external narratives but also attempt to reshape expectations about Russia's role in the international order, (re)constructing its identity for example, its power status (Miskimmon et al., 2013) for the domestic audience and possibly for its allies. Hellman & Wagnsson (2017) contribute to the strategic narrative theory by developing a typology of state responses to Russian disinformation, which includes defining counter-narratives, naturalizing narratives, blocking narratives, ignoring unwanted narratives, and a combination of these responses. It is also expected to find such rhetoric in the parliamentary debates, as part of the state response, and it will be reflected in the analysis.

Third, parliamentarians engage in framing hybrid threats to influence public opinion. According to Entman (1993), "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p.52). The term salience is defined as "making a

piece of information more noticeable, meaningful or memorable to audiences” (Entman, 1993, p. 53) By framing Russian hybrid warfare as act of terrorism or war, deputies and political elites can set their agenda, justify policy responses, consolidate public support and increase issue salience. Framing thus serves as a crucial tool in shaping public perception and maintaining political legitimacy. Taylor (2002) goes even further, arguing that such behavior of democracies can be labeled as propaganda.

Zaller (1992) elaborates on this theory, highlighting how political elites influence public opinion through their control of information and narrative primacy. When political elites achieve consensus on the framing of an issue, they are more likely to shape public opinion effectively; however, fragmentation among elites can undermine this influence. In the most extreme case, this type of communication can even result in influencing the democratic processes (Zaller, 1992). Parliamentary debates, thus, as a visible and formalized forum, play a central role in this elite communication process of influencing public opinion.

Variation in parliamentary discourse on hybrid warfare is not random, and it is shaped by a combination of structural, ideological, and contextual factors. First, the ideological composition of political parties in parliament and the dynamics of government-opposition condition how hybrid threats are framed. However, as the authors point out, the ideological patterns are significantly moderated by country-specific factors, especially historical experiences and geopolitics, having a significant impact on policy decisions and the way the debates are led (Mello & Peters, 2018). Therefore, national security discourse reflects not only left-right divides but also path-dependent national narratives and threat perceptions. Second, public opinion and media narratives can contribute to amplifying threats and their perceptions. Media framing may elevate certain issues to a higher position on the parliamentary agenda and reinforce securitizing language in elite discourse (Wodak, 2009). Lastly, in line with Kratochvil & Sychra (2022), it can be expected that the involvement of GRU agents in the Vrbetice explosion revelation weakened pro-Kremlin-oriented politicians and forced neutral players to take a stronger position against Russian activities.

The theoretical framework will be reflected in the coding frame of QCA to demonstrate whether the above-described phenomena and expectations are valid in the case of the Czech Parliamentary discourse on hybrid warfare. Before turning to the empirical analysis, the

contextual information about the Czech security environment and the composition of the Chamber of Deputies will be provided to illustrate the security reality in which the parliamentary debates take place.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This thesis employs the methodology of qualitative content analysis (QCA) to describe and examine the case study of Czech parliamentary debates preceding and succeeding Vrbetice incident to, first, theorize the broader impact of hybrid warfare in parliamentary discourse on securitization by answering the following research question: *How can hybrid warfare influence parliamentary discourse on securitization in a targeted country?*

The second aim of the thesis is to yield more detailed information about the Vrbetice explosion, which remains understudied. The reason why QCA is employed is to extract descriptive data from the existing textual data (Chamber of Deputies sessions) to allow for in-depth interpretation of patterns of parliamentary discourse, extracting recurring themes and categories.

3.2. Case selection

The choice of case study of the Czech Republic is justified by its relevance as an example country targeted repeatedly by a variety of Russian hybrid warfare tactics, culminating in the Vrbetice incident and resulting in serious political and security consequences, triggering diplomatic escalation with Russia. Situated in Central Europe, Czechia, a member of the European Union and NATO, still tries to completely break free from the Russian influence, exercised by repeated disinformation campaigns (Dvorakova & Syrovatka, 2021; Filipec, 2020), cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, and attempts to influence domestic political decisions (Bren & Matous, 2023). Moreover, as a medium-sized European state with a communist past, Czechia is a focal point of focus for Russia, serving as a hub of espionage in Central Europe until recently (Dvorakova & Syrovatka, 2021). For this reason, BIS warned systematically against Russian influence since the beginning of the new millennium, properly documenting Russian subversive activities on Czech soil (Security Information Service, 2001). Therefore, Czechia represents a typical case (Seawright & Gerring, 2008) of a state subjected to Russian hybrid operations, which have been documented for 25 years, making it an exemplary case for studying how hybrid threats are constructed and responded to in national security discourse.

Zooming in on the Vrbetice case, this event represents an unprecedented, confirmed instance of direct foreign sabotage on Czech soil, which triggered a strong reaction from both political elites and media, framing the explosion as a “state terrorism.” The revelation of Vrbetice explosions can thus be regarded as an extreme example within a typical country case (Seawright & Gerring, 2008), allowing for the illustration and amplification of the most visible trends in hybrid warfare framing in parliamentary discourse, resulting in a better ability to generalize the yielded results. Therefore, this event generated rich parliamentary debates on the topic of hybrid warfare, providing ample material for qualitative content analysis. Additionally, a multitude of key domestic actors have responded to the investigation, resulting in the availability of public documents, intelligence reports, and media coverage, which enables solid contextual anchoring. To understand the role of the most important domestic actors in the securitization of the event and their consequent reflection in the coding frame, the following subchapter will provide an overview of their rhetoric on the case. Finally, the structure of the Parliament of the Czech Republic will be introduced for greater clarity.

3.3. Country context: Securitizing actors in Czechia and its parliamentary structure

3.3.1. Main securitizing actor – BIS

One of the leading securitizing actors in the Czech Republic, the Security Information Service (BIS), evaluates Russia as a persistent security threat. The influence of Russian intelligence services in the Czech Republic has been a topic of concern in BIS annual reports since 1998 (Security Information Service, 2000). As early as 2007, BIS identified Russian intelligence activities on the Czech territory as a possible part of “a wider and long-term Russian campaign to undermine the integrity of the EU and NATO, isolate the US (or encourage isolationist sentiment in the US) and regain control of the lost Soviet security perimeter in Europe” (Security Information Service, 2008, p. 4). Although not an entirely independent body (reporting to the Prime Minister), BIS recognized Russian subversive activities on Czech soil as hybrid warfare for the first time in its 2016 Annual Report, providing valuable information about Russian hybrid activities and the state’s response to

them. In 2018, BIS officially identified the hybrid character of Russian operations as the primary national security threat for Czechia (Security Information Service, 2019). This recognition marked a significant step in the institutionalization of the hybrid warfare concept within Czech strategic and security discourse.

3.3.2. Czech President as a desecuritizing actor

An important domestic securitizing actor with an exceptional position is traditionally the Czech president, who influences both domestic and foreign policy. The significant influence associated with this position stems from history, drawing on a tradition of strong Czechoslovak presidents, who have created an influential figure, authority, and symbol that can shape popular opinion, including the (de)securitization of specific topics and drawing attention to them. At the time the Vrbetice investigation was published, the office was held by Milos Zeman (2013-2023), who was in the second term of the presidency. His speeches and appearance significantly contributed to marginalization of the Russian threat in Czech politics and civil society, demonstrated his avoidance of the topic of Russia, even during critical events such as 2014 Crimean status referendum, downplaying Russian involvement in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine and not framing Russia as a security threat at all, and instead suggesting how to resolve the situation (Holzer & Mares, 2019). Furthermore, he questioned the work of BIS and the credibility of its investigation (Kudrnac & Petrusek, 2022) and repeated pro-Russian disinformation (Jacuch, 2024), thereby acting in favor of Russian interests rather than Czech interests. In line with such revelations, Filipec (2020) regards the 2018 presidential election between Milos Zeman and his opponent, Jiri Drahos, as the peak of Russian disinformation activities in Czechia. Overall, the behavior of President Zeman was characterized by desecuritizing tendencies towards Russia and the marginalization of its perceived threat to national security.

3.3.3. External securitizing actors

Czech media serve as an example of a securitizing actor (Dvorakova & Syrovatka, 2021). Most of these outlets are somewhere in the middle of the spectrum between reinforcing Russian disinformation and refuting it, compared to Russian narrative spreading outlets, such as Sputnik CZ (Dvorakova & Syrovatka, 2021). An important securitizing actor is also Czech civil society, which played the role of the audience and agreed with the majority of the governmental conclusion regarding the Vrbetice ammunition warehouse explosions

(Balcova, 2024). The reason why Czech civil society relatively quickly accepted this securitization move is a relatively short history of Russia-Czechia relations. Before World War II, Russia played almost a relatively minor role in Czech politics compared to Germany and its closest neighbors. The role of Russia in the Czech context started to gain significance just after the Soviet defeat of Nazi Germany and the Soviet liberation of Czechoslovakia in 1945. Consequently, Czechs have had direct experience with Russia for only about 40 years, the time of Soviet occupation and control of the country. For this reason, there is no strong historical memory of Russia except relatively recent Communist rule, thus Czech attitude towards Russia can quickly change, and there is a weak link between Russia and Czech national identity – therefore very different from other states with a Communist past, whose relations date back to the Middle Ages and earlier, such as Poland or the Baltic states (Kratochvil & Sychra, 2022). Interestingly, public attitudes towards Russia are connected with public attitudes towards communism. People who are more supportive of communist rule tend to view Russia in a more favorable light, and vice versa (Kratochvil & Sychra, 2022). As a result, after the announcement of the culprit of the Vrbetice explosion, the public opinion towards Russia quickly deteriorated. Steadily, the Czech Republic reports high levels of Euroscepticism, whereas a positive attitude towards Russia remains. Moreover, Czech society is regarded as vulnerable to Russian disinformation and is often unable to recognize it (Jacuch, 2024).

As part of the civil society, Czech NGOs can be counted, whose views of Russia span a broad spectrum. From People in Need, the Initiative on Russian influence started by the Prague Security Studies Institute or the website StopFake.org curated by Association for International Affairs that actively fight against Russian disinformation campaigns to those who spread and reinforce pro-Russian views: The Institute of Slavic Strategic Studies, The Czech-Moravian Slavic Association, New Republic. Moreover, in the Czech Republic, two paramilitary organizations with connections to Russia exist, namely the Czechoslovak Soldiers in Reserves and the National Home Guard (Vejvodova et al., 2017).

3.3.4. Legislative power as neglected securitizing actor

An important securitizing actor, omitted by the literature, is legislative power, which has produced significant debates on the topic both before and after April 17, 2021. An analysis

of such debates is often omitted in both media and scholarly literature. However, it can reveal new information about the entire case, complete the picture, and shed light on how the hybrid warfare paradigm influences parliamentary discourse. In the Czech Republic, a parliamentary democracy in the heart of Europe, the parliament plays a pivotal role. For this reason, parliamentary debates, especially in the Chamber of Deputies, fully align with the securitization theory. The deputies assume the role of securitizing actors, and their parliamentary speeches can be considered as speech acts.

3.3.5. Ambiguous approach towards Russia from Czech executive

Examining the open sources that describe the Czech government's (lack of) actions and policy responses to the repeatedly pronounced Russian intelligence threat on Czech soil, it appears that the government did not join BIS in securitizing its subversive campaign, and some politicians even downplayed the risk Russia poses to Czech security. This disparity suggests a pattern of desecuritization.

As already discussed in the literature review, the scholarship remains ambiguous regarding the Czech government's preparedness to face the Russian hybrid threat. On the one hand, the government launched the National Security Audit, which assessed readiness of Czechia against threats to internal security, establishment of Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats as a part of the Ministry of Interior in 2017 and in the same year, publication of a new Czech Republic's Defense Strategy . On the other hand, the government continuously desecuritized and thus downplayed the Russian threat in the energy sector, as reported since 2004 (Security Information Service, 2005), followed by attempts to penetrate the Czech energy market and highlighting the important Russian position in nuclear energy in 2009 (Security Information Service, 2010). The Russian state company Rosatom was not excluded from the Dukovany nuclear power plant tender, despite being reported as a major security risk by the BIS (Security Information Service, 2021). In January 2021, the Czech government decided to exclude China from the tender, even though both the EU and NATO member countries' security services have recommended that both Russia, expected to be a strong contestant, and China should be excluded on national security grounds (Muller, Lopatka, et al., 2021).

Even though the government of Andrej Babis implemented various strategies to combat hybrid warfare, it did not take into account the advice of experts on Russian threat points, including the desecuritization of Russia and inconsistent rhetoric towards it. One more example is the Czech reaction to Russian disinformation campaigns, which became harder line after the Vrbetice explosion. Furthermore, Prime Minister Fiala announced in his policy statement an intention to establish the position of National Security Adviser, aiming to deal more transparently and professionally (Cabada, 2023). In this way, it can be argued that the Vrbetice incident contributed to creating “a wake-up call” for the Czech government to take the Russian threat more seriously. Based on these events, the upcoming QCA can bring clarity to this ambiguous approach to the Russian hybrid threat.

3.3.6. Czech parliament structure and political parties

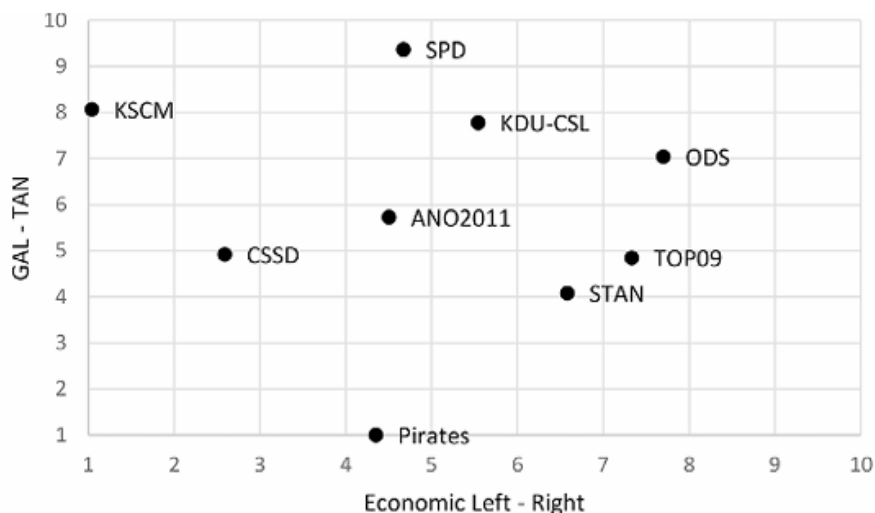
For the context of QCA, which will reflect on the ideological composition of the Chamber of Deputies, it is essential to outline the main characteristics of this Parliament and briefly introduce the elected political parties. Firstly, the main legislative body of the Czech Republic is the Parliament, which is divided into two parts: the Chamber of Deputies, the subject of analysis in this thesis, and the Senate, which represents the interests of regions. The Chamber of Deputies consists of 200 deputies, whose term in office lasts four years, and are elected by secret ballot based on proportional representation. (Embassy of the Czech Republic in Copenhagen, 2025) Political parties enter the Chamber of Deputies if they cross the threshold of 5% of valid votes at the national level. Two-member coalitions must have at least 8%, and coalitions with three or more members must have at least 11%. (The Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, 2025) Following the QCA will encompass parts of two electoral terms, specifically the 8th (November 2017 to November 2021) and the 9th (November 2021 to 2025). In the 8th electoral term, the following political parties were represented in the Chamber of Deputies, in order by the number of elected deputies: ANO, Civic Democratic Party (ODS), Czech Pirate Party, Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM), and the Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD), Christian and Democratic Union (KDU-CSL), TOP 09, Mayors and Independents. ANO won the parliamentary elections and

formed a government in coalition with CSSD, with the external support of KSCM, led by Prime Minister Andrej Babis (Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, 2017).

The current 9th electoral term comprises the Chamber of Deputies, with the following parties: ANO, the Coalition SPOLU (ODS, KDU-CSL, TOP 09), the Coalition of the Czech Pirate Party and Mayors and Independents, and SPD. SPOLU won the parliamentary election and created a government with the Coalition of the Czech Pirate Party and Mayors. The Prime Minister is Petr Fiala from the ODS. (Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the

Figure 3

Positions of Czech political parties in the political space



Note. Havlik, V., & Lysek, J. (2022). The Czech 2021 General Election and Its Impact on the Party System. *Politologicky Casopis*, XXIX(3), 225–238.

<https://doi.org/10.5817/PC2022-3-225>

Czech Republic, 2021) The ideological positions of Czech political parties are illustrated in Figure 3.

According to Jacuch (2024), the government of ANO in the 8th electoral term failed to present a coherent policy towards Russia. According to Jacuch (2024), the government of ANO in the 8th electoral term failed to present a coherent policy towards Russia. For example, ANO leader Andrej Babis is in favor of dialogue with Russia and sees the EU sanctions as a negative factor for the Czech economy. Despite this, he condemned the annexation of Crimea. The 2017–2021 Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech

Republic, Radek Vondracek, is considered to be the most supportive of cooperation with Russia in the ANO. As proof can serve his condemnation of Russia's international isolation and, in October 2017, meeting with Russian politicians under EU sanctions, among others (CT24, 2018).

On the other hand, the foreign minister, 2018–2021, Tomas Petricek (CSSD), supported the expulsion of three Russian diplomats as a gesture of solidarity with the UK after the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in March 2018. However, Petricek's actions align with his party's line, which advocates for good, strategic relations with Russia. "The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia is regarded as the unambiguously pro-Russia party on the Czech political scene, though it owes its vote of confidence to the minority government of ANO-CSSD" (Ogrodnik, 2019).

3.4.Data

The data for this qualitative content analysis were collected from an open, primary source, specifically from the digital library of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament. This digital repository includes Stenographic Reports in Czech language from all sittings (with certain omissions in the older files) of the Chamber of Deputies from 1848 to this day. Stenographic Reports are verbatim transcripts of speeches, discussions, and legislative deliberations delivered in the Chamber of Deputies, providing insight into parliamentary discourse and framing.

The following analysis comprises 28 transcripts of sittings from the timeframe preceding the Vrbetice explosion and 7 transcripts of sittings from after the Vrbetice depot explosion. The research will follow the following timeframe: the reference period before (4.3.2018 – 16.4.2021) and the reference period after (17.4.2021 – 24.2.2022). The start date was chosen because March 4, 2018, marked a poisoning attempt of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in the British town of Salisbury (Faulconbridge & Holden, 2018), and it was the single most important sabotage act performed by the Russian Federation on European soil since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. February 24, 2022, was chosen as the end date because it marks the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This incident is expected to overshadow

the reveal of Russian agents' involvement in the Vrbetice explosion, marking a significant international event. The transcripts suitable for the analysis were thematically chosen based on the frequencies of the keywords "Russia", "Russian influence", "hybrid warfare", and "security threat". Each transcript in the corresponding timeframe was scanned for the specified terms, and only those meeting the minimum threshold were retained (Berg, 2004). The transcript from the 98th sitting of 2021 is included in both reference periods, as it took place immediately before and after the revelation of the Vrbetice explosion investigation. The relevant parts of the transcripts are coded in their respective reference periods.

3.5. Operationalization

This thesis employs a qualitative content analysis (QCA) following the methodology outlined by Schreier (2012). The analysis was performed using MAXQDA software to simplify the process of code manipulation, coding, and generating statistics, such as code frequencies.

Firstly, the coding frame was built by combining a concept-driven (deductive) and a data-driven (inductive) approach. This means that the starting phase of the coding frame, the main categories, was developed by drawing upon the thesis's theory (analytic categories). Then, the coding frame was built upon by an inductive strategy, utilizing the analyzed text to develop and specify the subcategories of the main ones. Both categories and subcategories are defined by a name and a description, and, in cases of ambiguity, examples and decision rules are also used. In this analysis, the formal segmentation criterion is employed, examining the speech of one deputy at a time, with parliamentarians serving as the unit of analysis. The basic coding unit is a sentence, and more than one code may be assigned to it, because of the complex nature of the text and more thought appearing in sentences. The analysis is limited to manifest content (the surface structure present in the data) due to the high subjectivity of latent symbols and the limited capacity to incorporate independent corroborative techniques, such as agreement between independent coders. A minimum of three occurrences of a code will be considered as a pattern (Berg, 2004).

After completing the coding frame, consistency and reliability were tested through intra-coder verification. It was conducted by recording a subset of the material approximately 10

– 14 days after the initial coding. However, due to ongoing refinements of the coding frame during the early stages of analysis, the calculation of a formal intra-coder agreement metric was not feasible. Instead, coding consistency was ensured through iterative comparisons, reflexive memo-writing, and alignment checks across both coding rounds.

In this context, consistency refers to the quality of always behaving or performing in a similar manner, in this case, assigning categories and subcategories in a predictable and consistent way. Reliability refers to the instrument (in this case, the coding frame) that yields data free from error. Validity represents an idea that the coding frame captures what it sets out to capture (Schreier, 2012).

Both documents will be analyzed in their original Czech language to maintain authenticity and preserve unique meaning, nuance, and context. Additionally, translation bias was omitted. The coding frame and translated code excerpts will be provided in English to promote replicability and transparency of the coding. The results will be presented in the following manner: First, the coding frame will be described to introduce the central topics of discussion on the securitization of hybrid warfare. Second, the frequencies and relations between the main categories and their subcategories will be compared between the reference periods, and the prominent trends will be identified and theorized. The analysis will be concluded by answering the research question, followed by a discussion on the shortcomings and potential further research ideas.

3.6.Limitations

This study faces several limitations arising from the qualitative content analysis research design and the inherently interpretative nature of securitization theory. In particular, the interpretation of political rhetoric, especially concerning the interpretation of the rhetoric of Russian and Czech political actors, relies on subjective judgment. The researcher's own background and proximity to the case can influence interpretation. To minimize the subjectivity and make the QCA as transparent as possible, the research design is described in a methodologically transparent way, adhering to the above-described code of conduct. Moreover, the results, including a replicable codebook with well-defined categories, are provided in the appendix.

Although all the data were coded initially in the Czech language to retain as much context as possible, the coding frame was developed in English, and key illustrative examples were translated into English to ensure greater replicability. An inter-coder reliability check is not possible due to the independent nature of the thesis. Instead, coding consistency was ensured through iterative recoding and memo-writing.

Moreover, the analysis of parliamentary discourse is inherently limited, as it typically does not provide a full context and should ideally be triangulated with media analysis, party manifestos, expert interviews, and other relevant sources. This procedure is not possible due to limited time and capacity. In addition, conventionalized norms and procedural standards in parliaments, such as forms of address, hierarchical role distribution, or a ban on certain types of language, limit parliamentary discourse and establish boundaries for it (Ilie, 2002). Furthermore, the temporal boundaries of the study, although theoretically grounded, may have excluded earlier or ongoing shifts in securitizing discourse not captured within the defined periods.

As a single-case study, the findings are not generalizable to other countries. The unique geographical, political, historical, and socio-economic nuances of Czechia shape the discourse in ways that may not be transferable to other states. Finally, as noted in the chapter on theory, QCA cannot establish statistical causality. Rather, it serves as a tool to describe the case in greater detail and to underline the discursive mechanisms, framing strategies of threat construction, and the role of language in these processes (Berg, 2004).

4. Research findings and interpretation of the results

4.1. Coding scheme introduction

The coding frame yielded from the transcripts has 4 levels. The total number of assigned codes was 1430, of which 1030 were assigned to the timeframe before the Vrbetice explosion and the rest, 400, to the period after. One of the reasons for this disproportion can be the varying length of the reference periods – the timeframe before comprises 1,140 days and 28 transcripts, and the timeframe after contains 314 days and 7 transcripts. By following this logic, before it assigns approximately 37 codes per transcript and after approximately 57 codes per transcript, which is almost one time more than before. In reality, the codes are distributed quite unevenly throughout the transcripts, ranging from 7 in 80. session of the Chamber of Deputies to 217 codes in 98. Session of the period after. Importantly, 98. The session appears in both timeframes because it spans the time period between them, and page 423 marks a division between these periods. The QCA has identified 8 first-level categories, specified by 2nd and 3rd-level subcodes, and in some cases, even 4th-level subcodes, to describe the different aspects of the parliamentary debates on Russia in detail. The categories with numerous 2nd level or hard-to-grasp outcomes will be visualized to enhance their understanding.

4.2. Russian hybrid warfare

The first-level categories will be described, starting with the Russian hybrid warfare category. It identifies instances when the deputy describes hybrid warfare activities in connection with Russia, both domestic and international. This category contains 8 subcategories, used for further specification of the type of hybrid warfare, namely disinformation, election influence, cyber-attacks, historic revisionism, economic influence, energy dependence, influencing politicians, and the general. The disinformation category also contains its subcategory, named from the Communist deputies, which links the spread of disinformation to the Communist Party. It is not unusual that speakers discuss multiple tactics of hybrid warfare in one speech, as can be demonstrated in this example, which combines cyber-attacks and disinformation spreading, as illustrated by speech of deputy Jan Lipavsky (Czech Pirate Party): “There is information that Russian and Chinese hackers attacked the EMA and managed to obtain some information, which then became public in a

modified form. This is precisely an example of hybrid action, of the disruption of society and, again, of attacks on the rule of law and on legal procedures, which we here in Europe and in the Czech Republic should cherish as much as possible, and not undermine them by saying that some group of people would like to have the vaccine because they have probably learned on some disinformation server how great and wonderful it is” (Transcript from 87th Session 2021, p. 558). The entire coding frame, along with a precise description of the subcodes, is attached to the thesis as an appendix.

4.3. International political events

The second first-level category is called International Political Events + Russia and encompasses discussions of Russia's international presence. This category, again, consists of 6 subcategories, namely Preparation to invade Ukraine, Russia in int. organizations, Navalny solidarity, Russian influence in Syria, Russian occupation of Ukraine, Crimea, Georgia, and the Skripal poisoning plot. As can be observed, these events marked the most prominent instances of Russian activity within the selected time frame and were discussed in the Czech parliament accordingly. As can be seen from Appendix 4, Russian subversive activities on Ukrainian soil received the most attention from the Czech deputies, signifying the importance and resonance of the topic in the Czech environment. The Skripal poisoning plot describes an unsuccessful attempt to poison former Russian military officer Sergei and his daughter Yulia Skripal in the British city of Salisbury. This event is significant because it was the single largest uncovering of Russian activities in Europe before the Vrbetice investigation was released. Furthermore, the deputies often compare the Vrbetice explosion and the subsequent diplomatic reaction to it with the Salisbury poisoning plot. For example in this case speech of Marketa Adamova Pekarova (TOP09): “And when I compare the act that was here in Vrbetice seven years ago and the act that was in Salisbury, I think that perhaps it is quite obvious that in the case of state terrorism, an act that took two lives here and put thousands of others at risk because otherwise those people would not have been evacuated from their homes repeatedly, that the quotation marks are very clearly against what happened here in the Zlin region, as well as the material damage” (Transcript from 98th meeting 2021, p. 437).

4.4. Czech Russian political events

Czech Russian political events is the name of the 3rd type of first level codes. This category focuses solely on Czech domestic political events where Russia plays a central role. Subcategories, ordered by their overall frequency, are as follows: Dukovany tender, Sputnik vaccines, Konev statue, Embassies disproportion, Vrbetice explosion, Memorials of Legionnaires, Novichok for Skripal, Hamacek's visit in Russia, Vondracek's visit to Russia, Disagreement with Russian Duma, Membership in Russian banking institution, Babis's son at Crimea, and Nikulin Asylum. The themes mentioned earlier presented the most discussed events in Czech parliamentary discourse. The Dukovany tender, with the highest frequency, underscores how important the topic of the Dukovany nuclear power plant tender and Russian involvement, as well as subsequent exclusion from it, were in the Czech context. Although it may seem surprising that the Vrbetice incident is the third most frequent, the reason for this is that it gained prominence only after the investigation was revealed in April 2021. Previously, Czech governmental discourse and deputies were preoccupied with other urgent security topics, such as visits by government members to Russia or the Ricin affair (Novichok, as in the Skripal case). As a demonstration of discussion about the Dukovany tender, the speech of the Prime Minister Andrej Babis (ANO2011) can be cited: "So to the question about Russia's possible involvement - no? That is the point. In the tender for the supplier of the new nuclear power plant at the Dukovany site, I would like to state for the umpteenth time in the context of the interpellations what our Government has declared from the outset, namely that the main supplier will be selected in a competitive tender, the aim of which is, of course, to obtain the best offer in terms of price, feasibility and other conditions, including the involvement of Czech industry and the transfer of know-how" (Transcript from 72nd meeting 2020, p. 320).

4.5. Deputies' view on Russia

The 4th category of first-level codes, and the most comprehensive one, is the deputies' view on Russia category, which divides the MP's rhetoric on Russia into the following categories (2nd-level codes): Neutral, Rhetoric for, Rhetoric against, and Fragmented towards Russia. Category Rhetoric against exhibits the greatest frequencies both before and after April 17th, 2021, followed by Neutral, Rhetoric for, and Fragmented towards Russia, which describes speeches characterized by divergence in opinions of deputies towards Russia and disagreeing

interactions between them, with no further subcodes. This category yielded the following subcategories (2nd-level codes) of the presented 1st-level codes. Neutral: Other countries' relations with Russia, Conception of Czech foreign policy towards Russia, Czech society on Russia, Media's view on Russia, Other, Russian diaspora in Czechia, Russia-Czechia equal relations, Bad relations with Russia. Fragmented towards Russia had no subcodes, as the category itself is pretty self-explanatory, describing divergence in opinions among the MPs. Rhetoric for is represented by the following subcodes ordered by their overall frequency: Against Russia (this subcode was used when condemning Russophobia/anti-Russian rhetoric), Dialog with Russia, Russia is no threat, and Helping Czech companies/workers in Russia. As an example of code, Russia is no threat, can serve the speech of MP from the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, Leo Luzar: "Thank you for the floor. Dear Mr. Chairman, honorable Government, ladies and gentlemen, I was struck by this detail that was discussed in the words of the previous speakers - the evil Russia. And did you notice the texts that were spoken from this place? It was back there - we are fighting against that evil Russia. That evil Russia. I'm not taking away your worldview, but I'm going to go back to the basics of what we're talking about here today" (Transcript from 30th Session 2019, p. 519).

The last 2nd-level category describes Rhetoric against Russia. Its subcodes are following: Linking Communists with Russia, Allied against Russia – pointing of the importance of alliance of Czechia and other states against Russian subversive activities, Serving Russia, not Czechia, where the deputies argue, that particular behavior of other deputies serves more to the Russian interests than Czech interests and it can be illustrated by the commentary of Jan Bartosek (KDU-CSL): "What you are doing at the moment is that you are not having an informed debate, you are using expedient, and all you are doing is being an instrument of hybrid warfare, which, for example, Russia is using arguments to challenge the basic instruments of democracy" (Transcript 35th Session 2019, p. 287). The following subcategories are: Subordinate position towards Russia, Need to defend - an appeal to enhance defense against Russia in Czechia, a call to securitization, Disagreement, Breaking international law, whose application was explained in the discussion on securitization. The last subcode, Security threat, has 2 third-level codes – implicit and explicit threat. The complete list of codes and their explanations is contained in Appendix 3.

4.6. Czech historical experience with Russia

The 5th category of first-level codes is titled Czech historical experience with Russia, and it aims to describe historical events and Russian historical influence in Czechia, which is used to illustrate and add to currently debated topics in the Chamber of Deputies. This category includes 3 subcodes ordered by their frequency: 1968 occupation, Other, and Czech Legionnaires. As an example of the 1968 occupation, the speech of Deputy Tomio Okamura (SPD) can serve: “The efforts of some Russian politicians to admit war veteran status to participants in the military invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 are a disgusting attempt to legitimize the occupation. The only result in damage of mutual relations between the Czech Republic and the Russian Federation. The year 1968 was a brutal aggression and marked the occupation of Czechoslovakia” (Transcript from 30th Session 2019, p.504).

4.7. Security community opinion

The 6th category of first-level codes is named Security community opinion and contains no subcodes. Nevertheless, this category occurs fairly often in the coding frame. It aims to capture instances when deputies retrieve information from the security community or utilize the security community's opinion, such as Security Information Service reports, in support of or justification for their argument about the Russian threat. The term “security community” is often associated with domestic intelligence services, including military intelligence services and parliamentary security advisors. It can be illustrated by the following quote of Zbynek Stanjura (ODS): “And now the argument. This is not a dispute between the government or the government and the communists against the opposition parties. That would actually be a standard political issue. The government set up an ad hoc advisory body to assess the safety risks of this construction. The government approached a total of six institutions - three intelligence agencies, the NCIP, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Interior. This task force unanimously, unequivocally, and strongly recommended to the government to exclude Russian and Chinese firms from the tender, in principle and at the consortium level. So the government is not acting at this point in time according to the recommendations of its advisory bodies, according to the recommendations of the security community, and also of the two ministries” (Transcript from 79th Session, 2021, p. 692).

4.8.Zeman-Russia

The 7th category of first-level codes addresses the behavior of Milos Zeman, the Czech president of that time, infamous for his pro-Russian rhetoric and spreading of disinformation. The code Zeman-Russia captures how this controversial figure's relation towards Russia is perceived in Czech parliamentary discourse. The yielded subcodes are as follows, ordered by their overall frequency: Making own politics, Pro-Russia, Presidential campaign financed by Russia, and Visit in Russia. As an example of Making own politics code together with Fragmented towards Russia code can be considered the speech of Deputy Jan Lipavsky from Czech Pirate Party: "So we finally have Mr Petricek at the Foreign Ministry in the Czernin Palace, we have a president who is implementing his own axis of policy, to the chagrin of the government" (Transcript from 20th session 2018, p. 273).

4.9.Political Parties

Last but not least, the 8th category of the first-level codes, named Political parties, represents deputies' membership in a political party in the Chamber of Deputies. Each second-level code represents an intersection of political parties elected in the 2017-2021 and 2021-2025 electoral terms. Those parties are: Mayors and Independents (STAN), Social Democratic Party (SOCDEM), Christian and Democratic Union (KDU-CSL), Communist Party of Bohemia and Czechia (KSCM), ANO, Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), TOP09, Civic Democratic Party (ODS), and the Czech Pirate Party.

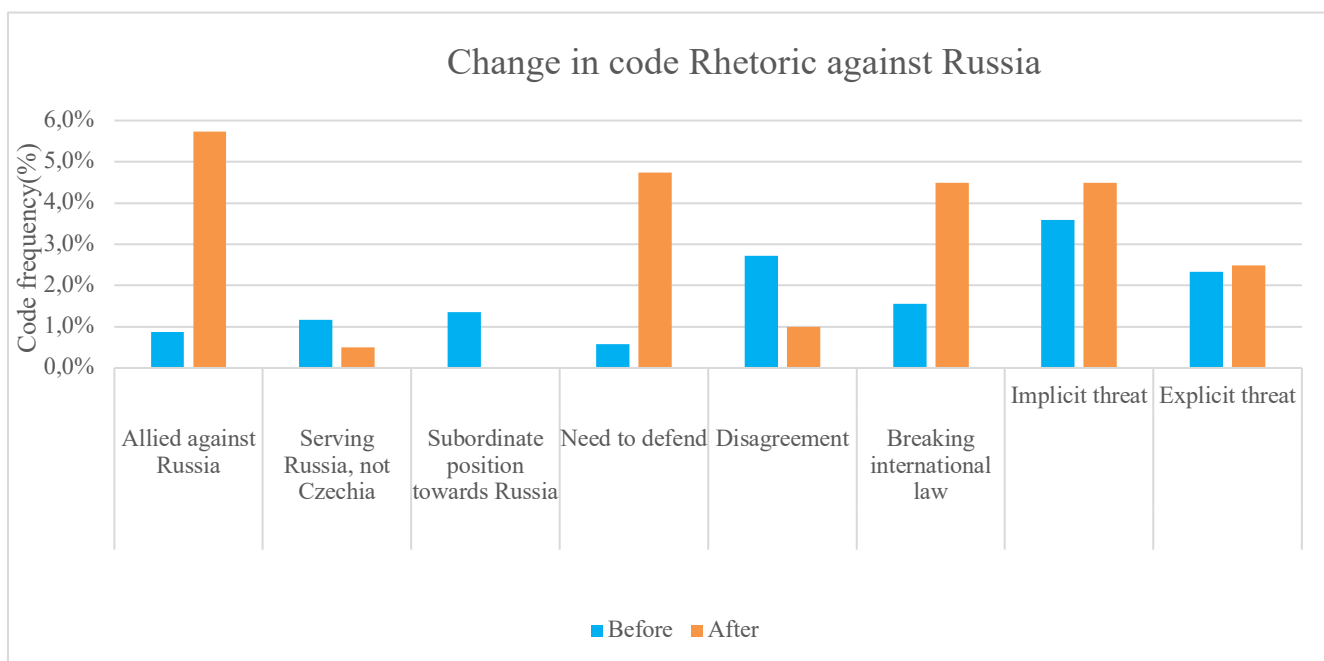
4.10. Results interpretation

Notably, the analysis recorded a higher frequency of codes describing Russia as either an explicit or implicit threat after the Vrbetice explosion revelation, compared to the period before. Therefore, a trend of increased securitization of Russia in Czech parliamentary discourse can be observed following the revelation of the Vrbetice explosion. Although the QCA cannot provide evidence of causation between the Vrbetice investigation results and the more frequent threat framing of Russia, it illustrates the growing trend of securitizing Russia as an actor and the construction of a strategic narrative about it. This finding suggests that the Vrbetice explosion may have served as a securitizing event, in line with the Copenhagen School's framework. However, due to the nature of the analysis, this claim

cannot be confirmed. The growing trend of securitization of Russia can have different root causes, such as other domestic or international events, or a change in the composition of the government.

Interestingly, a growing threat framing of Russia was supported only by partial increase in values of anti-Russian rhetoric. Recording the growth of 5 out of 8 remaining subcategories relative to the total number of codes assigned over the timeframe, signifying a shift in rhetorical framing of Russia as a threat rather than an absolute opinion shift in Czech parliamentary discourse. The 3 subcategories that did not follow this trend were emphasizing Russian interests over the Czech interests, expression of disagreement with Russian politics, and a subordinate position towards Russia. The last subcode appears exclusively in the first reference period. This trend is visualized in detail in Figure 4:

Figure 4
Change in code Rhetoric against Russia



Note. Table based on the author’s own analysis of parliamentary speeches.

Examining alliance-based justifications (especially NATO) more closely when framing Russia as a threat, this development aligns with Raunio & Wagner's (2017) argument that obligations to international organizations can shape and influence parliamentary discourse on securitization. The rise of rhetoric supporting enhanced defense against Russia, as well as the argument of international law violation (often used in discussions about the Vrbeice

explosion), supports the claim of increased securitization and threat framing of Russia. Anti-Russian rhetoric, including labelling Russia as a security threat, was voiced predominantly by TOP09, the Czech Pirate Party, KDU-CSL, and ODS.

Rhetoric favoring Russia, including warning narratives of the Russophobia and anti-Russian rhetoric, intensified across all 4 second-level subcodes. This development indicates strong pro-Russian discourse that has not been shaken even by Russian involvement in the Vrbetice explosions. These narratives originate predominantly from the far-left Communist Party and the far-right SPD (Freedom and Direct Democracy Party). Such voices decried “Russophobia” and claimed that Russia is not a threat. It can be observed that the trend of securitizing Russia, which is displayed across the majority of the political spectrum, can serve as a trigger for ideologically extreme parties (SPD and the Communist Party), stimulating counter-narratives and reinforcing parliamentary polarization around the topic. As evident from this development, framing Russia as a threat does not garner support on the extreme ends of the political spectrum and signifies fragmentation of political elites' opinions on this matter (Zaller, 1992). This fragmentation could have led to ineffective communication by the government regarding this issue (Dvorakova & Syrovatka, 2021). Furthermore, this finding aligns with the literature’s assertion that the ideological composition of parliament has a significant influence on parliamentary discourse (& Peters, 2018). Moreover, it supports the findings of Ogrodnik (2019), who considers KSCM as “unequivocally pro-Russian party.” In contrast, this finding does not align with Kratochvíl & Sychra (2022), who theorized that a significant event, such as the Vrbetice explosion, would weaken pro-Kremlin-oriented politicians.

As displayed in Figure 5, neutral discourse on Russia remained relatively stable. 4 out of 8 subcodes of neutral rhetoric, relative to the total number of codes in each time period, have lowered and vice versa. The subcodes of Czech society's view on Russia and the amplification of equal relations between Czechia and Russia appeared exclusively in the first time period. In the total number of codes, the rhetoric has slightly increased. The far-right SPD emerged as the most frequent user of neutral language, particularly in discussions about Russia’s relations with other countries. This trend signals an attempt by SPD to distance itself from taking either pro-Russian or anti-Russian stands, portraying itself as independent and being “pro-Czech” as its priority. Such rhetorics can be illustrated by speech of the leader

of SPD, Tomio Okamura: “The SPD is not sponsored from anywhere abroad, not from Russia or America or God knows where, so that is why we can afford it, that is why we are such a thorn in the side of the other parties, because we are completely independent. We are completely independent, and we do politics only for the benefit of the Czech Republic and our citizens. I also wanted to emphasize that so that no one here says anything again about us being pro-Russian or pro-Kremlin, some nonsense. I have already said it here: these are desperate arguments, and of course, the SPD has nothing to do with this and will have nothing to do with it. We will do patriotic politics, we do it for the Czech Republic, and we follow our own judgement” (Transcript from 9th session 2022, p. 58). This development can be attributed, together with the rise of pro-Russian rhetorics, as a reactionary counter narrative to increased threat framing of the Russian Federation and is in contrast with the claim of Kratochvíl & Sychra, (2022) who predicted that after significant hybrid warfare sabotage, neutral players will be forced to take a stronger position against Russian activities.

Figure 5
Change in code Neutral rhetorics towards Russia



Note. Table based on the author’s own analysis of parliamentary speeches.

Fragmentation towards Russia (divergence in opinions of deputies towards Russia and disagreeing interactions between them) among the parliamentarians has sharply declined, indicating a lower level of disagreement in the parliament. By reducing the rhetorical ambivalence like this, the deputies reinforce the binary nature of securitization and prepare

the ground for effective framing of the issue, possibly resulting in effective influence on public opinion (Zaller, 1992).

Interestingly, media discourse on Russia has been discussed in the parliament only marginally, suggesting that in the case of Czech parliamentary discourse on Russian hybrid warfare, the media did not play a significant role as an external actor influencing it. This finding, therefore, contrasts with what was expected in theory, suggesting that media narratives can contribute to the amplification of certain issues and threats (Wodak, 2009).

The frequency of references to the Czech security community shows a heightened tendency after the Vrbetice explosion, most frequently cited by KDU-CSL and TOP09. The references often overlap with both explicit and implicit security threat labelling rhetoric, indicating an increased threat framing of Russia, supported by references to the security community. This trend suggests that the security community's assessments and recommendations are increasingly used to legitimize securitizing moves and threat framing. This finding aligns with the literature that argues external actors can influence parliamentary discourse on security policy and securitization (Wodak, 2009), thereby contributing to the legitimization, justification of extraordinary policies, and greater credibility of the proposed political agenda. Moreover, the security community serves as a credible actor and authority, enhancing the parliamentary strategic narrative about Russia.

This phenomenon can be exemplified in the case of the Dukovany tender, when the security community, represented by both Czech intelligence services and parliamentary security advisors, counseled against this decision, and deputies used it as support for their arguments for banning Rosatom from the tender. Such an argument can be demonstrated in the speech made by Jan Lipavsky (Pirate Party): “The answer is that we must listen to the warnings of the security community. When it comes to building a nuclear power plant, and the security community says that Russia should not be invited into the process, Karel Havlicek did what? He ignored it. Moreover, the tender could have been called sometime on December 17th or 16th. Instead, they invented some kind of pseudo-security procedure to keep Rosatom there. As late as Sunday, Minister Havlicek was whining, as in quotes, that it would be a pity that Rosatom wasn't there. That is just wrong, the security warnings must be taken seriously” (Transcript from 98th Session 2021, p. 460).

When it comes to the parliamentary discourse on former president Milos Zeman as a prominent actor with a friendly approach towards Russia, QCA showed that parliamentary discussions about him became less prominent. All five frequencies of subcodes describing Milos Zeman fall within the second reference period. This trend can indicate a shift in focus to other, more imminent topics and the overshadowing of Zeman. As a result, it can be argued that the president's opinion on Russia was becoming more marginalized and irrelevant, since his typical positive approach towards Russia stood in opposition to confirmed Russian hybrid involvement on Czech soil, including the most damaging one, the Vrbetice warehouse explosion. Moreover, Zeman's view never aligned with the strategic narrative of the majority of the Chamber on Russia, which framed it as a threat to Czech security. This claim can be illustrated by the names of the yielded subcodes from QCA: presidential campaign financed by Russia, making own politics, pro-Russian, and visit in Russia. The subcodes reveal a negative view of the former president, portraying him as an actor with close ties to Russia, pursuing his own approach to foreign policy, even to the point of breaking the law. Surprisingly, deputies across the spectrum were unanimous in their opinion on Zeman, and no voices in the Chamber of Deputies have been recorded advocating for his behavior, instead portraying frustration with the opposing actions of the highest representative of the state. The Czech Pirate Party and TOP09 discussed Zeman the most often; any other significant overlap was not detected. As is visible from the names of the yielded subcodes, the parliamentary discourse on Milos Zeman corresponds to the medial one described in the thesis's theory.

The general framing of Russian hybrid warfare has decreased in all categories except energy dependence on Russia. This development highlights the growing importance of critical energy infrastructure security, particularly in relation to the Dukovany nuclear power plant tender and the potential realization that not excluding Rosatom from the Dukovany tender was a mistake, especially following the revelation of the Vrbetice explosion. However, this behavior could have been caused by other events, such as a change in government, a situation in energy markets, or a combination of factors. There are two possible explanations for this behavior. First, it can display a shifted focus among Czech parliamentarians – from warning about hybrid warfare to dealing with its consequences, and thus replacing the more theoretical and abstract rhetoric of hybrid warfare with discussions on real-life events and

countermeasures. A second possible explanation is the replacement of hybrid warfare framing and rhetoric with a different, already explained, increased rhetoric of threat framing, calling on allies to answer, or labeling Russian action as provocation and a breach of international law.

In line with the first offered explanation, even though the general use of the term hybrid warfare declined, specific topics gained traction, especially the frequency of discussion on the Vrbetice explosion, as well as the disproportionate embassies in direct response to it (as visualized in Figure 6). Naturally, the Vrbetice explosion code did not appear in the first reference period before the explosion. Nevertheless, this development suggests a shift from abstract hybrid warfare framing to tangible concerns, exemplified by the Vrbetice incident, as already indicated in the previous paragraph. The most frequently narrated by ODS, the Vrbetice incident appears in combination with the argument of breaking international law, which is understandable concerning the seriousness of the situation. What is more, this dominant framing contributes to the strategic narrative of Russia as a threat. It can serve as a tool to shape expectations of the state in direction of expecting other breaches of international law (Miskimmon et al., 2013) and subsequently lifting the issue (securitizing it), influencing public opinion and preparing the soil for proposing of extraordinary measures as a reaction to the breach of international law (Buzan et al., 1998).

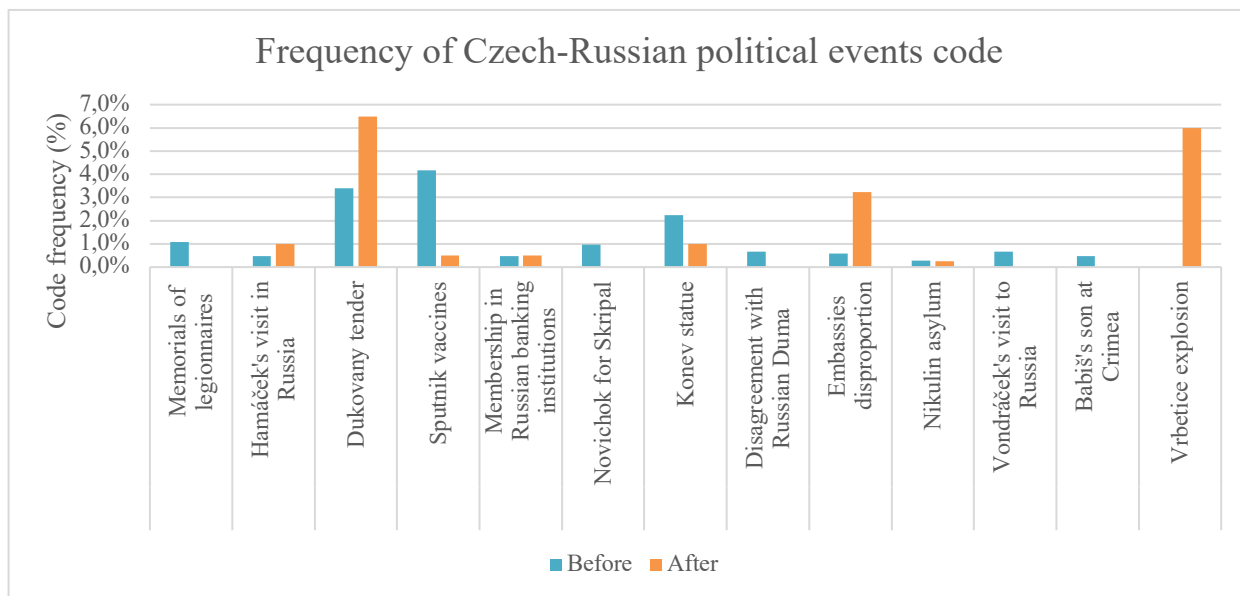
As already explained, the topic of the Dukovany nuclear power plant tender gained prominence, particularly in connection with energy dependence and the implicit threat posed by Russia. The Pirate Party has most frequently engaged in discussions of this topic, tying it to energy security and advocating for the exclusion of Rosatom, possibly criticizing the government for not doing so earlier. This event serves as an opportunity for the parliamentarians to frame Russia as a threat, regarding it as a danger to Czech energy security. As can be concluded from the subsequent events, this framing was successful because Rosatom was eventually excluded from the Dukovany power plant tender, and the decision was implemented by the government (Muller, Hovet, et al., 2021).

Unsurprisingly, the event of the former Minister of the Interior Hamacek's visit to Russia gained prominence, as immediately after the Vrbetice revelation, the opposition had higher incentives to investigate and ask questions about this event, considering it a potential security

threat, which created political contention. This event drew attention because the timing of Hamacek’s visit in Russia clashed with the political elites’ strategic narrative of Russia, and the threat framing of it was possibly amplified by the recent revelation of Vrbetice’s culprits. Such contention could have undermined the perceived consensus among political elites on the framing of Russia immediately after the Vrbetice revelation, resulting in a lowered capacity to influence public opinion and a negative perception of governmental communication regarding the Vrbetice explosion revelation (Dvorakova & Syrovatka, 2021).

The most significant drop in Czech-Russian political events was recorded in parliamentary discussions of the topics of Sputnik vaccines and the Konev statue, as displayed in Figure 6. These events were overshadowed by more immediate matters, as explained above. At the same time, this development was supported by a gradual decrease in the intensity of global pandemics and a gradual calming of the Konev statue dispute.

Figure 6
Change in code Czech-Russian political events



Note. Table based on the author’s own analysis of parliamentary speeches.

Overall, references to Czech historical experience with Russia have declined in all categories, indicating that the historical illustration of the Russian threat is no longer

necessary, as Russia has demonstrated a real-life, tangible hybrid threat. This argument is similar to the discussion about reshaping and declining rhetorics of hybrid warfare to focus on real-life, tangible events, framing, and their replacement. The declining use of historical illustration points to a similar trend, shifting the focus from history to current, more relevant events. However, the mere presence of references to the 1968 occupation in Czech parliamentary discourse implies ongoing association and framing of today's Russia in connection to historical experiences with this state, supporting the argument of Mello & Peters (2018) who argue that significant historical memories continue to shape parliamentary discourse even when more immediate threats are present. Using historical references is a path-dependent rhetoric that can embrace the strategic narrative about the country's identity (Miskimmon et al., 2013) and, in the Czech case, serves predominantly as a tool to support negative, threat-based framing of Russia. Most frequently reminisced about by KDU-CSL, the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact is almost as frequently mentioned as other historical events.

Another phenomenon stemming from path dependency and historical experiences is the emergence of the subcode 'Linking Communists with Russia', which supports the claim that members of the Communist Party are associated with Russia in the Czech context and are framed negatively (Madzharova, Bruteig, & Ilie, 2010). This fact can be demonstrated in the rhetoric of the Communist Party, which is a proponent of pro-Russian rhetoric condemning Russophobia, thus challenging the strategic narrative of Russia as a threat. The declining popularity of Russia and the threat framing of it in Czech parliamentary discourse could have been one reason behind the poor election results of KSCM, which failed to cross the 5% vote threshold to be eligible to enter the Chamber of Deputies in 2021 (Strokan & Pokorna, 2021).

Conclusion

By using a case study of Czech parliamentary discourse on the Vrbetice explosion, the qualitative content analysis and its subsequent interpretation provided an answer to the research question: *How can hybrid warfare influence parliamentary discourse on securitization in a targeted country?*

It is essential to note that the above-displayed results pertain only to the given case study of Czechia, and therefore, the generalization of the results of this study is limited, as parliamentary discourse is unique to each country, with its geographical, political, and socio-economic nuances. The countries in the Central European region, with historical experience with Russian influence, can gain the most from this research, as their geopolitics, history, and parliamentary culture are the most similar. Therefore, the results of this analysis are most beneficial for research on Polish, Slovak, and Hungarian parliamentary discourse.

To begin with, the analysis highlights a rising trend of securitization of Russia in Czech parliamentary discourse throughout the selected timeframe, in line with the Copenhagen School framework, marking a clear shift from discussions about hybrid warfare to discussions about tangible, immediate threats. This trend was illustrated by the code Security threat, whose prevalence increased after the Vrbetice explosion.

Next, while the findings indicated an increased threat narrative, the anti-Russian rhetoric did not increase uniformly. This development signifies a shift in the rhetorical framing of Russia as a threat, rather than an opinion shift in parliamentary discourse. Legal and alliance-based narratives appeared as the most frequently occurring justifications for threat framing. This finding aligns with the literature, which claims that obligations to international organizations influence parliamentary discourse (Raunio & Wagner, 2017).

Pro-Russian rhetoric also gained traction, predominantly the narratives condemning Russophobia, advocating for dialogue with Russia, denying it as a threat, and lastly, emphasizing Czech economic interests in Russia. This finding can be interpreted as a counter-narrative emerging in response to the rising securitization of Russia in parliamentary discourse, reinforcing parliamentary polarization of the topic. Such a narrative was,

according to the analysis, predominantly voiced by ideologically extreme parties, namely the KSCM (far-left) and the SPD (far-right). This finding supports Mello & Peters (2018), who regard the ideological composition of the parliament as a crucial element shaping its discourse, and the findings of Jacuch (2024), who regards the KSCM as pro-Russian. However, this outcome is in contrast to Kratochvil & Sychra's (2022) expectations of weakening pro-Kremlin narratives resulting from the heightened securitization of Russia, possibly reinforced by the Vrbetice explosion. An exception is former Czech President Milos Zeman, whose discourse has become less prominent, standing in opposition to proven Russian hybrid engagement in Czechia, which does not fit into the strategic narrative of the Chamber on Russia.

Neutral rhetoric remained stable, with the party SPD emerging as the leading neutral voice, presenting itself as a "pro-Czech" rather than taking a clear stance. This trend can be attributed, together with the rise of pro-Russian rhetoric, as a reactionary counter-narrative to increased threat framing of the Russian Federation. Such a finding contrasts with Kratochvil & Sychra (2022), who expected a decline in neutral rhetoric and pressure to adopt a clear position towards Russia.

At the same time, the fragmentation of opinions towards Russia after the Vrbetice explosion revelation has sharply declined, suggesting a lower level of displayed disagreements and thus reducing rhetorical ambivalence between deputies regarding Russia, reinforcing the binary nature of securitizing discourse – either pro-Russian or anti-Russian. This finding aligns with Zaller's (1992) theory, which posits that if political elites reach consensus on the framing of an issue, they are more likely to shape public opinion effectively.

The analysis also proved the importance of external actors in shaping the parliamentary discourse on securitization. In the Czech case, it was the Security Information Service and NATO, aligning with Wodak's (2009) finding that external actors significantly shape parliamentary discourse on security. Contrary to expectations, the media did not play an important role in influencing parliamentary discourse. References to the Security community were increasingly invoked and used to legitimize the securitization moves and framing of Russia as a threat. Political elites used this type of justification to propose their political agenda, amplify the threat, and outline countermeasures. Overall, the rhetoric on Russian

hybrid warfare decreased after the Vrbetice event, whereas discussions on the energy sector, the Vrbetice explosion, and the related embassy staff reduction gained prominence. This shift indicates a change of rhetoric from abstract narratives of hybrid warfare to specific concerns about Czech security.

In line with the literature, the analysis showed that extreme ideological parties (KSCM and SPD) are the greatest users of pro-Russian rhetoric on the parliamentary floor. At the same time, SPD shows the pattern of appearing neutral and representing Czech interests. The parties TOP09, the Czech Pirate Party, KDU-CSL, and ODS reach the highest frequency of anti-Russian rhetoric. Moreover, TOP09 labeled Russia as a security threat most often. Mayors and independents do not show any distinctive or stark rhetoric towards Russia. Interestingly, ANO does not appear in the most frequent places in either pro- or anti-Russian rhetoric, which is surprising given its extensive representation. This trend signals a moderate approach towards the Russian hybrid threat and is in line with Jacuch (2024), who highlights ANO's ambiguous rhetoric on Russia, significantly depending on the deputy.

Discussions on the Czech historical experience with Russia, especially the 1968 occupation, have declined, signifying a decline in historical references and their replacement by real-life, tangible threats that have appeared. However, the high frequency of the code before the explosion points to a higher significance and interconnection of historical memory in Russia with its current perception in Czechia. This finding aligns with Mello & Peters (2018), who claim that historical experience and geopolitics can strongly influence parliamentary discourse on certain topics. Moreover, using historical references is a form of path-dependent rhetoric that can influence the strategic narrative about the country's identity (Miskimmon et al., 2013), and in the Czech case, serves as a tool to support a negative, threat-based framing of Russia. An interesting path-dependent trend is also linking the Communist Party with Russia, which, according to analysis, often occurs in Czech parliamentary discourse. This finding is supported by literature, claiming that Communism and the Communist Party are linked with Russia and framed negatively (Madzharova Bruteig & Ilie, 2010).

To sum up, hybrid warfare can influence parliamentary discourse on securitization in numerous ways. It intensifies the threat narrative and the construction of a strategic narrative about it. In contrast, the intensification of hybrid warfare does not completely shift the

rhetoric against the referent object (actor), but rather gives traction to counter-narratives against the rising securitization of the referent object, which is mainly instrumentalized by ideologically extreme political parties. In addition, the intensification of hybrid warfare may lead to less fragmentation of the securitized referent object, reducing rhetorical ambivalence and, consequently, increasing the effectiveness of influence on public opinion (Zaller, 1992). Neutral rhetoric remained stable, in contrast to the expectations (Kratochvil & Sychra, 2022). Moreover, alliance-based and legal-based narratives played a crucial role in justifying parliamentary discourse on the securitization of hybrid warfare. The role of the domestic security community proved to be especially important, serving as a tool for legitimizing the framing of securitizing moves.

Additionally, the shift from the rhetoric of theoretical concepts of hybrid warfare to their tangible manifestation was recorded. In the regional context, path-dependent arguments, such as historical references to Russian influence and the association of the Communist Party with Russia, continue to play a significant role. These trends are supported by literature on drivers of parliamentary discourse (Buzan et al., 1998; Mello & Peters, 2018; Raunio & Wagner, 2017; Wodak, 2009).

By mapping discursive shifts in securitization, this thesis contributes to the limited research on the topic of the effect of hybrid warfare on parliamentary discourse. Additionally, it helps to describe the Vrbetice explosion in greater detail. Future research should build on the thesis's findings and expand this analysis by comparing it to other Central European parliaments' perspectives and focus on the causality between securitization and parliamentary discourse more closely. Alternatively, exploring the influence of external actors on parliamentary discourse regarding securitization or path-dependent policy justifications would be helpful.

Závěr

Kvalitativní obsahová analýza a její následná interpretace na případové studii českého parlamentního diskurzu ohledně výbuchu ve Vrběticích poskytla odpověď na výzkumnou otázku: Jak může hybridní válka ovlivnit parlamentní diskurz o sekuritizaci v cílové zemi?

Je potřeba zdůraznit, že výše uvedené výsledky odpovídají pouze dané případové studii Česka, a proto je zobecnění výsledků této studie omezené, protože je parlamentní diskurz jedinečný pro každou zemi a její geografickou, politickou a socioekonomickou situaci. Tento výzkum je nejvíce užitečný pro země regionu Střední Evropy s historickou zkušeností s Ruskem, a to z důvodu podobné geopolitiky, historie a parlamentní kultury. To znamená, že výsledky této analýzy jsou nejpřínosnější pro polský, slovenský a maďarský výzkum parlamentního diskurzu.

Analýza nejprve poukazuje na rostoucí trend sekuritizace Ruska v českém parlamentním diskurzu ve zvoleném časovém období. Toto zjištění je v souladu s konceptem kodaňské školy, a to jasným posunem od diskusí o hybridní válce k diskusi o hmatatelných, bezprostředních hrozbách. Tento trend byl ilustrován kódem Bezpečnostní hrozba, jehož četnost se zvýšila po výbuchu ve Vrběticích.

Ačkoli zjištění znamenala zvýšený narativ o hrozbách, protiruská rétorika se nezvýšila jednotně. Tento vývoj značí posun v rétorickém rámování Ruska jako hrozby, nikoliv názorový posun v parlamentním diskurzu.

Jako nejčastěji se vyskytující zdůvodnění rámování hrozeb se objevily právní a alianční narativy. Toto zjištění je v souladu s literaturou, která tvrdí, že závazky vůči mezinárodním organizacím ovlivňují parlamentní diskurz (Raunio & Wagner, 2017).

Četnost proruské rétoriky se také zvýšila, převážně narativy odsuzující rusofobii, prosazující dialog s Ruskem, popírající Rusko jako hrozbu a konečně zdůrazňující české ekonomické zájmy v Rusku. Toto zjištění lze interpretovat jako protinarativ vznikající v reakci na rostoucí sekuritizaci Ruska v parlamentním diskurzu, posilující parlamentní polarizaci tohoto tématu. Tento narativ byl dle analýzy nejvíce používán ideologicky extrémními stranami KSČM (krajní levice) a SPD (krajní pravice). Toto zjištění je v souladu s Mello & Peters (2018), kteří považují ideologické složení parlamentu za klíčový prvek utvářející jeho diskurs, a zjištění Jacucha (2024), který považuje KSČM za proruskou. Tento výsledek je však v rozporu s očekáváním Kratochvíla & Sychry (2022) o oslabení prokremelských

narativů v důsledku zvýšené sekuritizace Ruska, případně posílené výbuchem ve Vrbětících. Výjimku představuje bývalý český prezident Miloš Zeman, jehož diskurz ztratil značně na významu, protože byl v opozici vůči prokázanému ruskému hybridnímu angažmá v Česku a nezapadal do strategického narativu Sněmovny o Rusku.

Neutrální rétorika zůstala stabilní, přičemž hlavním neutrálním hlasem se stala strana SPD, která se prezentuje jako „pročeská“, a tím se vyhýbá zaujetí jasného postoje vůči Rusku. Tento trend lze spolu s nárůstem proruské rétoriky vnímat jako reakční protinarativ na zvýšené rámování hrozeb ze strany Ruské federace. Toto zjištění je v rozporu s Kratochvílem & Sychrou, (2022), kteří očekávali pokles neutrální rétoriky a tlak na zaujetí jasného postoje vůči Rusku.

Zároveň se po odhalení ruského zapojení ve Vrbětících prudce snížila fragmentace názorů vůči Rusku, což naznačuje nižší míru neshod ve Sněmovně – snížení rétorické ambivalence mezi poslanci vůči Rusku a zdůraznění binární povahy sekuritizačního diskurzu - buď proruský, nebo protiruský. Toto zjištění je v souladu s prací Zallera (1992), který tvrdí, že pokud politické elity dosáhnou konsenzu v rámcování problému, je pravděpodobnější, že budou efektivně formovat veřejné mínění.

Analýza také prokázala význam externích aktérů při utváření parlamentního diskurzu o sekuritizaci, v českém případě to byla Bezpečnostní informační služba a NATO, což se shoduje se zjištěním Wodaka (2009), který tvrdí, že externí aktéři významně utvářejí parlamentní diskurz o bezpečnosti. Oproti očekávání nehrála média při ovlivňování parlamentního diskurzu významnou roli. Reference na bezpečnostní komunitu byly často skloňovány a využívány k legitimizaci sekuritizačních kroků a rámování Ruska jako hrozby. Politické elity využívaly tento typ zdůvodnění k navrhování své politické agendy, zdůrazňování hrozeb a následných protipatření.

Celkově se rétorika o ruské hybridní válce po událostech ve Vrbětících zmírnila, zatímco diskuse o energetice, výbuchu ve Vrbětících a souvisejícím snižování počtu zaměstnanců velvyslanectví získaly na významu. Tento posun naznačuje změnu rétoriky od abstraktních narativů o hybridní válce ke konkrétním obavám o bezpečnost České republiky.

V souladu s literaturou analýza ukázala, že proruskou rétoriku na parlamentní půdě nejvíce používají extrémní ideologické strany (KSČM a SPD). SPD zároveň vykazuje neutrální a pročeskou rétoriku. Nejvyšší frekvence protiruské rétoriky dosahují strany TOP09, Česká

pirátská strana, KDU-ČSL a ODS. TOP09 navíc nejčastěji označovala Rusko za bezpečnostní hrozbu. Starostové a nezávislí neprojevují výraznou rétoriku vůči Rusku. Zajímavé je, že hnutí ANO se neobjevuje na nejčastějších místech v používání proruské, či protiruské rétoriky, což je vzhledem k jeho rozsáhlému zastoupení překvapivé. Tento trend signalizuje umírněný přístup k ruské hybridní hrozbě a je v souladu s Jacuchem (2024), který upozorňuje na nejednoznačnou rétoriku ANO vůči Rusku, výrazně záviselí na jednotlivých poslancích a poslankyních.

Diskuze o české historické zkušenosti s Ruskem, zejména o okupaci v roce 1968, prudce klesl, což značí úbytek historických odkazů na tuto dobu a jejich nahrazení reálnou, hmatatelnou hrozbou. Vysoká frekvence kódu před výbuchem však ukazuje na důležitost a propojení historické zkušenosti Rusko s jeho současným vnímáním v Česku. Toto zjištění se shoduje s Mello & Peters (2018), kteří tvrdí, že historická zkušenost a geopolitika mohou silně ovlivňovat parlamentní diskurz o určitých tématech. Používání historických odkazů je navíc formou rétoriky závislé na cestě, která může ovlivnit strategický narativ o identitě země (Miskimmon et al., 2013) a v českém případě slouží jako nástroj podpory negativního, na hrozbě založeného rámování Ruska. Zajímavým trendem závislým na cestě je také spojování komunistické strany s Ruskem, k němuž podle analýzy dochází v českém parlamentním diskurzu často. Toto zjištění je podporuje i literatura, která tvrdí, že komunismus a komunistická strana jsou v českém kontextu negativně spojovány s Ruskem (Madzharova Bruteig & Ilie, 2010).

Závěrem lze říci, že hybridní válka může ovlivnit parlamentní diskurz o sekuritizaci mnoha způsoby. Zintenzivňuje narativ o hrozbě a konstrukci strategického narativu o ní. Naopak intenzifikace hybridní války neznamena celkový posun rétoriky proti referenčnímu objektu (aktérovi), ale dává průchod protinarativům namířeným proti rostoucí sekuritizaci referenčního objektu. Tyto narativy jsou používány především ideologicky extrémními politickými stranami. Intenzifikace hybridní války může také způsobit menší fragmentaci vůči sekuritizovanému referenčnímu objektu, čímž se snižuje rétorická ambivalence, která vede k účinnějšímu ovlivňování veřejného mínění (Zaller, 1992). Neutrální rétorika zůstala oproti očekávání stabilní (Kratochvil & Sychra, 2022). Při zdůvodňování parlamentního diskurzu o hybridní válce sekuritizace hrály klíčovou roli právní narativy a narativy podtrhující důležitost aliancí. Zvláště důležitá se ukázala role domácí bezpečnostní komunity, která sloužila jako nástroj legitimizace sekuritizačních kroků. Zaznamenán byl

také posun od rétoriky teoretických konceptů hybridní války ke konkrétním projevům tohoto typu války. V regionálním kontextu stále hrají významnou roli argumenty závislé na cestě, především historické odkazy na ruský vliv a spojování komunistické strany s Ruskem. Tyto trendy jsou v souladu s literaturou zabývající se vlivy na parlamentní diskurz (Buzan et al., 1998; Mello & Peters, 2018; Raunio & Wagner, 2017; Wodak, 2009).

Mapováním diskurzivních posunů v oblasti sekuritizace přispívá tato práce k omezenému výzkumu na téma vlivu hybridní války na parlamentní diskurz a pomáhá podrobněji popsat výbuch ve Vrbětících. Budoucí výzkum by měl navázat na zjištění práce, rozšířit tuto analýzu o srovnání s perspektivou jiných středoevropských parlamentů a blíže prozkoumat kauzalitu mezi sekuritizací a parlamentním diskurzem. Případně by bylo užitečné zkoumat vliv vnějších aktérů na parlamentní diskurz o sekuritizaci nebo politické zdůvodnění závislé na cestě.

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