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<https://doi.org/10.29038/2524-2679-2020-01-166-180>

PRACTICE OF DIGITAL DIPLOMACY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

With the current massive coverage of Internet technologies and ongoing spread as well as progressively growing influence of social media platforms, it is natural that diplomacy as a sphere could not refrain from this phenomenon. Moreover, not only did it not abstain, it has harnessed the new opportunities instead. This paper contributes to the debate on the phenomenon of digital diplomacy which has entered the scientific environment relatively recently and has not yet been comprehensively conceptualized into a single and globally recognized theory. In this paper we study how digital diplomacy is organized and implemented in the Czech Republic.

The paper focuses on the approach of the Czech Republic to digital diplomacy, the country's implementation of its tools and digital diplomacy is embedded within the foreign policy of the state. The author provides an overview of the legal framework underlying development of digital diplomacy in the Czech Republic. The paper also outlines the institutional system operating in the sphere and how its elements contribute to the attainment of the goals typically set up by digital diplomacy. Finally, the author defines the projects created by the Czech governmental and non-governmental bodies aiming at strengthening the image of the country and promoting its brand for the foreign audiences using online tools and solutions. The paper also offers the analysis of efficiency of the primary digital diplomacy tools applied by the Czech Republic in its foreign policy and provides recommendations and conclusions based on the data included for the research.

Key words: *digital diplomacy, Czech Republic, public diplomacy, foreign policy, Ukraine.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Embracing the innovative tools and solutions that worldwide web and social media offered, diplomacy has developed a separate distinct direction – digital diplomacy. Referring to the definition proposed by DiploFoundation, digital diplomacy encompasses «new methods and modes of conducting diplomacy with the help of the internet and ICTs» [1]. Consequently, the key purposes of digital diplomacy include efficient communication with audiences abroad, receiving prompt and relevant feedback, promoting national interests and security with via application of various online tools.

In the research conducted by Portland Communications, the Czech Republic has improved its position in digital sphere and engagement in 2018 compared to 2017 [2]. The research concludes that the country has a strong potential and chance to form its global brand on tourism and business given that it already has reputation of an affordable destination and a well-developed business hub.

As digital diplomacy is a relatively new phenomenon, all the findings on the topic offer various points of view on digital diplomacy and its nature in foreign relations. For instance, Brian Hocking in his work «Diplomacy in the Digital Age» has pointed to digital diplomacy as a natural continuation of public diplomacy [3]. He sees it as a result of the process of digitalization which has altered many areas of human activity including public diplomacy. According to this position, digital diplomacy is a part of public diplomacy made possible by the underlying digital technologies.

From the other stance, Nickolas Cull refers to digital diplomacy as a newly emerged and separate type of diplomacy. In his paper «The Digital Diplomacy Potential, he also tackles the impact of digitalization as Brian Hocking but connects it to fundamental changes in foreign relations and diplomacy which led to creating a new term and a new sphere of digital diplomacy itself» [4].

Another position outlined by Ilon Manor is rather a mitigated opinion. In his study «What Is Digital Diplomacy?» [5], the author also researches the influence of digitalization on diplomacy tracing a positive connection between the development of digital tools and evolution of public diplomacy in response. The researcher suggests that digital diplomacy is a fundamentally different phenomenon which has emerged from the public diplomacy being transformed by digitalization.

Although the scientific discourse about digital diplomacy still lacks unanimous conceptualization, the vast majority of researchers agree that it has first been discussed as a stand-alone sphere and implemented in the US. The origins of these developments can be traced back in the paper «Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice» where Bjola Corneliu and Marcus Holmes outline the practice introduced by Hillary Clinton, the former Secretary of State [6]. She is perceived as a leader in digital diplomacy due to her decision to make respective alterations to the foreign policy strategy of the country with a view to the digital technologies. Her contribution to this field also includes exploitation of social media but the Department of State aiming at engaging the audiences abroad directly.

A different view on the development of digital diplomacy is offered by Wilson Dizard in his work «Digital Diplomacy U.S. Foreign Policy in the Information Age» [7]. According to Dizard, the major cause for evolution of digital diplomacy is the rapid growth in usage of mobile technologies for consuming information. The author points out that due to growing coverage by various carriers around the world, access to mobile technologies and Internet is also spread to the less developed parts of the world.

Some scholars, like Andreas Sandre, Sean Costigan and Jake Perry, for instance, underline the link between social media and development of digital diplomacy. Andreas Sandre in his paper «Twitter for Diplomats» [8] describes social media as becoming the most popular means of news updates for the modern consumers and naturally transforming into a platform for communication for the diplomatic institutions as well. Costigan and Perry emphasize the creation of a more interconnected international community by social media and their facilitation of the

audience becoming a part of an information space which provides more freedom to all the members [9].

Finally, there is also another approach to conceptualizing digital diplomacy as a derivative from the Internet revolution. Olubukola S. Adesina emphasizes the use of digital media as the key communication tool in foreign relations, therefore, creating the phenomenon of digital diplomacy [10]. The author focuses on opportunities provided by the digital media as well as challenges they face serving as means of communication for diplomats and as a way to reach the foreign audience and promote your state and its interests abroad.

Ukrainian scientific approach to digital diplomacy has been formed by the works of G. Pocheptsov [11], N. Pipchenko [12], Y. Makarenko [13] and others. The key aspects covered by scholars are the role of mass media in the modern society and the opportunities created by the exploitation of the new media and digital platforms in communication with foreign audiences as well as a general idea of transformations of the international relations with the digitalization of many key spheres of life.

Summarizing the approaches to digital diplomacy, there are differences in tracing its origins and settling its position in the structure of traditional diplomacy or beyond it. Nevertheless, the increasing number of publications on the topic and keen interest is definitely indicative of the growing role and value of digital diplomacy in foreign policy of states and international relations in general.

Purpose of the Study. For the purposes of this research it is significant to analyze the practical aspect of implementation of digital diplomacy tools and strategies of the Czech Republic aiming at promotion and further support of national interests. This analysis can therefore be useful for the institutions and organizations in Ukraine as well as for other international actors.

The study primarily provides the analysis of the legal and institutional framework of the digital diplomacy of the Czech Republic which was conducted using open source data and the official documents, strategies and programs adopted by the administrative bodies in the Czech Republic and the materials published by the non-governmental organizations.

Methodology and Data. The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the performance of the key online platforms presented in the course of digital diplomacy implementation by the Czech Republic and aiming at strengthening its positive image and enhancing its representation abroad is conducted on the basis of SimilarWeb, web analytics survives founded in 2007 mainly for online businesses and publishers. For the purposes of this study, SimilarWeb Pro, an extended version of the service, is used in order to access more detailed data and deepen the metrics analyzed.

The period chosen for the quantitative and qualitative analysis is 3 months which is derived from two factors: necessity to see the dynamic development of the websites analyzed as well as the data source, namely SimilarWeb, limitations of access to historical data.

Theoretical Basis of the Study. Primarily we will outline the legal framework that institutionalizes digital diplomacy in the Czech Republic. The first document worth addressing is the Concept of Czech Foreign Policy, adopted in 2015 as a

follow-up to the previous Concept presented in 2011. Apart from other aspects of foreign policy covered in it, this concept sets out 2 major goals for the nation: serving the citizens and the good name of the country. The positive image and «good name» [14] of the Czech Republic is included into the key objectives of the foreign policy. According to the Concept, branding one the country is in focus to enhance the positive perception of the Republic within the international community. The paper also states that communication should be adapted respectively to the target audience and include a wide range of aspects: historical and cultural links, innovation potential, tourism etc.

The other program guiding the Czech Republic on the international arena is the Agenda for Czech Foreign Policy 2018, the 12th edition of the annual paper compiled by Vít Dostál, the Director of the AMO Research Centre (Association for International Affairs). The Agenda of 2018 states that while selecting the Czech priorities in the European policy, the state will need to specially target such topics as research, innovation and digitalization in international relations [15].

The Czech Republic has been attributing a growing amount of attention to the problem of cyber security. Regarding the legal framework, this aspect is based on the National Cyber Security Strategy of the Czech Republic 2015–2020. Serving as the guidelines for the further plans and actions, it outlines the challenges for the country's cyber security in the international environment and the strategic aims set to tackle those challenges [16].

This Strategy is followed by implementation document – an Action Plan on National Cyber Security Strategy for 2015–2020. Here are some of the key points from the Action Plan related to digital diplomacy:

- The Czech Republic should take part via both official and unofficial channels on the formation of international consensus on legal standards in cyberspace, preserving the human rights in Internet.
- The state bodies should further deepen cooperation with the private sector aiming at increase of awareness in the area of cyber security.
- School education in the Czech Republic should include the extensive course covering safe and responsible use of the Internet [16].

Finally, adding to the emphasis that the Czech Republic puts on cyber security, it is worth mentioning that it has become one of the first countries establishing a position of cyber attaché and sending its diplomats on such specific mission to Washington, Brussels and Tel-Aviv [17]. It is allegedly building a network in the strategic partner-countries.

The next key program is Digital Czech Republic: Information Concept presented in 2018. This is an umbrella document encompassing 3 main directions: the concept of digital economy and society, the information concept of the state and the Czech Republic in Digital Europe [18]. While the first two directions concern mostly internal policy, the third one has a direct link to digital diplomacy of the country in the EU.

Namely, the part of the Concept – the Czech Republic in Digital Europe – adopted in 2018 extends its action till 2030. On top of dealing with Single Digital

Market policy, the document sets the goals of the state in the digital agenda[19]. The document also aims to set the basic principles of a proactive approach in promoting the related interests of the country and its citizens on the European level.

In addition, the aspect of digital diplomacy is mentioned in the Strategy of Digitalization of Cultural Content of the Czech Republic 2013–2020 which includes such points as digitalization of library collections, aggregation and access to the rarest documents and digitalization of institutions such as museums, archives, libraries [20]. Completion of this project would provide online access to cultural content of the country for the audiences abroad and would ally with one of the key aspects promoted in the brand of the Czech Republic which is its culture and rich historical background.

Within the legal framework we should also address the Innovation Strategy of the Czech Republic 2019–2030 because it offers a whole segment about the smart branding of the country. According to the document, the lack of a comprehensive communication strategy results in fragmented image of the Czech Republic instead of forming a new perception of the republic as a state of innovation, exceptional human potential and opportunities in business and technological sphere [21]. The Innovation Strategy suggests building the strong brand of the Czech Republic as a confident leader in innovation and communicating with foreign audiences more efficiently about the innovation strategy as the key objectives for the foreign policy.

Thus, the steps necessary to attain the aforementioned objectives include:

- Forming a marketing team that will systematically introduce new elements of communication across the administrative bodies, research entities and enterprises;
- Creating of the visual concept and graphic set for the strategy, implementing its elements into international activities and online communication;
- Establishing a mix of communication tools for the concept of the Czech Republic as the Innovation Leader in Europe 2030 using social networks, etc.

Overall the digital diplomacy of the Czech Republic has not yet been developed as a separate concept. That is why AMO has already made an attempt to conceptualize this sphere of diplomacy. In 2016 Vít Borčany has presented a policy paper on Czech Digital Diplomacy [22]. The author himself indicates that his work is a contribution to the current debate as the solid concept of the Czech digital diplomacy is still under preparation.

To sum up, the legal framework underlying digital diplomacy in the Czech Republic currently lacks generalization and comprehensive conceptualization into a strategy that would lead all activities in this sphere. Otherwise, the documents analyzed demonstrate growing interest for digital diplomacy and its implementation in the foreign policy of the country.

Passing on to the institutional point of view, the Czech digital diplomacy is primarily led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In its structure the main departments that are concerned with digital diplomacy are the Department of Public Diplomacy and partially the Press Department which deals with communication with the relevant foreign authorities and embassies.

The other institution concerned with digital diplomacy in the country is earlier-mentioned AMO. The Association was founded in 1997 as a non-profit organisation created for research in the sphere of international relations. AMO deals with digital diplomacy mainly from the theoretical standpoint. The first attempt to create a comprehensive concept of the Czech digital diplomacy belongs to AMO that is why it deserves particular recognition.

Another entity having an integral part in the digital diplomacy practice of the Czech Republic is the group of the Czech Centres established by initiative of the MFA and aims at promoting the country abroad. Initially the network of centres in 22 countries has been conceived as a powerful leverage for public diplomacy sharing materials about the country, promoting the culture, language, tourism thus, creating its favorable image in the recipient countries. It has been involved in the process of digital diplomacy process via the digital platform they have introduced. This platform informs the public in English and Czech about the projects, cultural events and all news combining the goals of digital and cultural diplomacy. Moreover, as a parent platform, it leads to 22 different websites, each available in a foreign language of a recipient country, of the centres in other countries informing about their work and projects there.

Returning to the MFA as the main body working in the sphere of digital diplomacy, we will outline its structure relevant to the topic in more detail. As mentioned earlier, the key department responsible for this aspect is the Public Diplomacy Department [23]. It is responsible for representation of the state for general foreign audience and with the development of new technologies, has also spread to the representation on the digital arena. It is thanks to the operations of this department, the goal to successfully communicate the Czech values and interests to the foreign public online has been separately emphasized on the roadmap of the work of the MFA of Foreign Affairs.

Concluding this part, based on the analysis of the legal and institutional underlining of the digital diplomacy in the Czech Republic, currently it serves rather as a supporting tool and an integral part of the public diplomacy. It is at them point of active development at the moment, still lacking specific legal framework as well as a stand-alone unit or subunit responsible for digital diplomacy within the structure of the MFA.

2. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Defining the practice of digital diplomacy by the Czech Republic, it is relevant to start with the project czech.cz. This portal has been created as an innovative tool intended to represent the Czech Republic on the Internet. The website is built basing the idea of «one country – one address». Aiming to be a resourceful and extensive information source about the country for different target audiences, the portal is available in six languages and is operated by the MFA in collaboration with the Czech Radio.

The platform offers key details about the work of the governmental bodies mainly concerned with foreign affairs: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Industry and

Trade, Culture and Finance. It covers such major topics as life and work in the country, tourism, business, culture and education aiming to appeal to different target groups. The portal also provides information about outstanding Czech nationals, history and art of the country, language and traditions establishing a positive image of the Czech Republic as an open country with glorious past and vast potential.

Continuing with the projects, a vivid example is Radio Prague International by the Czech Radio available at radio.cz and broadcasted in 5 languages. It also offers short articles on the current developments linked to the Czech Republic and serves as an informative source of updates about the country as well as its business climate, travel routes, life of foreigners, the Czech culture, sports and history. Furthermore, the site offers its users to subscribe to its newsletter in one of the above-mentioned languages. This way, the visitors from all over the world can receive updates about the events in the Czech Republic on the email daily which is a great example of diversifying the online channels of communication.

The other project on the crossroads of digital and economic diplomacy is CzechInvest, the Investment and Business Development Agency. This project is initiated by the Ministry of Industry and Trade. The online platform offers information about the investment climate in the Czech Republic and urges the foreign citizens to start business in the country providing such services as assistance as consulting in the foreign investment projects, follow-up support for the foreign investors already working in the Czech Republic etc. The portal also uses the newsletter subscription.

Another platform realizing the aims of digital diplomacy is CzechTourism portal created by the Ministry of Regional Development with the goal of successful presentation of the country on the foreign markets. The platform is accessible in 9 languages and raises awareness of the Czech Republic as the worthy tourism destination by providing detailed information about sightseeing in different regions of the country, activities available for the travelers and events running currently in different cities. It also suggests some basic travel information, stories for the satisfied tourists and a selection of trips, routes and plans that visitors can use as an agenda for their stay. What is worth underlining is that this portal also offers applications that can be downloaded to your phone which increases the mobility and expands the usage of this online tool.

The final and a more narrow-specified project we will define is CzechLit, a bilingual (English and Czech) website operated by the Czech Literary Centre and conceived as means of supporting and promoting the Czech literature abroad. The portal provides updates about the Czech authors and their work, grants, residencies and other literature news enforcing the image of the country as an intellectual and cultural centre in active development.

For more detailed analysis, we have selected the most popular platforms introduced by the Czech Republic as its representation in the online space: mzv.cz, czech.cz, radio.cz and czechtourism.com. Using the SimilarWeb analytical tools, we have filled in the tables below.

Table 1

Audience Engagement and Performance of the Czech Online Platforms

Domains	Monthly Visits (December 2019)	Total Visits (October-December 2019)	Pages per View	Time on Site	Desktop/ Mobile Split	Top Traffic Source
mzv.cz	569,719	1.709,100	4.47	00:04:21	59.13% / 40.87%	Search - 54.99 % Direct - 32.55 %
czech.cz	57,118	171,354	1.45	00:00:54	45.55% / 54.45%	Search - 85.61 % Direct - 13.34 %
radio.cz	552,181	1.656,000	2.12	00:02:00	40.60% / 59.40%	Search - 59.25 % Direct - 24.15 %
czechtourism.com	201,278	603,835	2.29	00:01:48	42.23% / 57.77%	Search - 82.54 % Direct - 12.99 %

Source: compiled by the author according to SimilarWeb data.

Drawing a comparison between the platforms first, the biggest ones in terms of volume for the chosen period are the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs mzv.cz and the website of the Czech Radio radio.cz with almost the same level of a bit more than half a million visits in December and more than 1.5 million visits in total over 3 months. The reason is that these 2 platforms offer the widest selection of topics covered, therefore, appealing to general audience rather than specializing in more specific aspects and gathering more niche readership.

Still, mzv.cz is an absolute leader in traffic volumes overall in 3 months as this website is a multiple purpose platform, raising interest in both domestic and foreign audiences on whole range of questions. Apart from providing news and updates of the institution and its work, the website also offers general information about the MFA, its structure, agencies within it, their functions which is basically evergreen content always in demand by various audiences.

The platform czechtourism.com has demonstrated a fair volume of traffic during the 3-month period in question. Finally, platform czech.cz designed to promote the Czech Republic abroad, notwithstanding its coverage of a wide range of topics and alleged appeal to general audience, has reached the lowest result in terms of traffic volume which points to the necessity of more efficient promotion of the website either by means of search engine optimization, social media or online advertising.

Analyzing such key audience engagement metrics as Pages per view and Time on site, it is possible to conclude how appealing the content of the website is. The amount of pages per view shows how many pages of the site user reads on average demonstrating the depth of the readers' interest. Time on site metric shows the approximate amount of time user spends on the website also indicating the appeal of the content and the level of interest of the audience in the content offered by the website. These metrics combined demonstrate two major parameters:

- how engaging the content is and how efficient the communication is built with the audience;
- if the audience gathered by the website is a proper match with the content and the purpose of the platform.

According to these metrics, the leader is mzv.cz, the website of MFA with more than 4 pages per one user's session and more than 4 minutes spent on the site on average per visit. This result indicates high interest in the work of the institution and is a sign of an efficient communication strategy. The website also has the widest range of different audiences compared to the other platforms as it provides information on foreign relations, entry and residence in the Czech Republic, its diplomatic missions and MFA in general as well as features news and press coverage of the work of the Ministry.

Similar level of user engagement is shown by radio.cz and czechtourism.com, with both platforms exceeding 2 pages per visit and reaching approximately 2 minutes per session of one visitor on the site. For radio.cz these metrics show that the audience generally matches with the website and is gathered effectively but it is worth mentioning that there are 2 types of content offered by the site: news presented as text and news presented as radio broadcast. The time on site metric indicates that currently the website is mostly used to read the news while the radio broadcast has a potential for promotion. Achieving this will respectively increase time on site significantly.

Regarding czechtourism.com, both metrics are sign of efficient audience gathering and attraction as well as of the content that matches the interests and needs of that audience. The website has rather positive user engagement results surpassing even radio.cz in terms of pages per view though radio.cz has more appeal to general audience rather than czechtourism.com is more narrow-themed.

Similar to the previous metrics comparison, czech.cz demonstrated the lowest result out for the period under analysis. These numbers indicate that the communication strategy should be altered as well as the fact that the key audience has not yet been drawn to the website to match properly with its purpose. Therefore, these metrics in this particular case lead to an opportunity for further development and improvement of the platform.

Moving on to analysis of devices used to access the platforms, 3 websites out of four, namely czech.cz, radio.cz, czechtourism.com, receive the majority of their users from mobile devices. Still, the difference between desktop and mobile users is not drastic for these platforms, the split for all three of them is approximately 43 % desktop users to 57 % mobile users. With the overall trend of transferring information consumption on web to mobile devices, this split is in line with the tendency.

Nevertheless, even with the above-mentioned proportion, only radio.cz has a mobile version of the website. The other two platforms do not adjust automatically to mobile devices which has a negative influence on user experience. The website without a mobile version becomes less user-friendly and navigable on mobile. As both czech.cz and czechtourism.com currently receive majority of their traffic from mobile devices, it is crucial to develop a mobile version to cater to their mobile

audience and improve user experience which will also have positive effect on audience engagement.

Only one platform, mzv.cz, has demonstrated an inverse split with almost 60 % of visitors using their computers to access the website. This proportion shows that the majority of readers use the platform either from work or in-home environment which itself indicates that the website is considered a credible resource as people tend to use it when they are more concentrated and focused before they desktop screen.

Still, it is worth mentioning that mzv.cz has a mobile version developed and running for all the mobile users who access the website. Therefore, it is a vivid example of well-thought strategy to communicate efficiently with different audiences using different devices and making sure that the information presented by the platform is easily accessible and consumable for the readers.

The final aspect in this part if the research is analyzing the platforms by the traffic sources. There are typically 5 sources: direct, social, search, referral and advertising. Direct traffic is a loyal audience who access the website directly intending to learn information exactly on this site. Social traffic is the audience redirected to the website from any social media platforms. Search traffic comes from various search engines, such as Google, Bing, Yahoo and others and is characterized by interest in a particular topic but no preference on the source where readers receive information from. Referral traffic comes from other websites linking to the website under analysis. Finally, paid traffic can be generated by advertising of all kinds starting from email marketing to display advertising campaigns.

With all four websites we see similar results: the majority of traffic comes from search engines with the next biggest source being direct traffic. Beside this common trend, we can divide the platforms into 2 groups:

1. czech.cz and czechtourism.com with more than 80 % of search traffic on the website;

2. mzv.cz and radio.cz with a bit more than 54 % of search traffic.

The key difference between the two groups is that in the case of the first group, readers are already interested in a particular topic, they search for it intending to find some information and they use search systems for that purpose. They supposedly are not aware of the platforms in question and are looking for any sources of information. When they conduct their search, they find these platforms in the search result and deem them as credible and choose them as an information source. This indicates 2 trends:

- websites in the first group are not well-known resources for the audience interested in the respective topics they cover;

- at the same time, websites in the first group are perceived as credible sources of information and are eagerly used by the visitors searching for information in the niches these websites work, namely, finding out more information about the Czech Republic and tourism in the country.

The second group shows higher results of direct traffic (mzv.cz – 33 % and radio.cz – 24 %) which demonstrates that these two platforms are on the right path to building their own audience and their image as the best source of information on a

particular topic. Audience searches exactly for these websites and afterwards navigates within the website instead of randomly looking for a website to learn the information needed.

In the case of mzv.cz, this also correlates with the highest Pages per View metric out of the 4 platforms showing that readers access the website intentionally and then proceed to reach information they want within the website’s structure. For radio.cz, the correlation is not in place which indicates that the audience is well-aware of the platform and its capabilities but once accessed does not always provide for the needs of its audience. This also demonstrates room for improvement of the website’s positioning and content strategy.

Another point for analysis relevant for digital diplomacy aims is the audience of these platforms, namely their geography.

Table 2

Geographical Allocation of Traffic on the Czech Online Platforms

<u>mzv.cz</u>		<u>czech.cz</u>		<u>radio.cz</u>		<u>czechtourism.com</u>	
Country	Percentage of Traffic	Country	Percentage of Traffic	Country	Percentage of Traffic	Country	Percentage of Traffic
<i>Czech Republic</i>	40,00 %	<i>Czech Republic</i>	32,87 %	<i>Czech Republic</i>	28,76 %	<i>Poland</i>	19,35 %
<i>Russia</i>	13,42 %	<i>Mexico</i>	14,50 %	<i>Germany</i>	13,03 %	<i>Germany</i>	14,74 %
<i>United States</i>	4,08 %	<i>Germany</i>	6,10 %	<i>France</i>	10,19 %	<i>United States</i>	9,50 %
<i>Ukraine</i>	4,07 %	<i>Russia</i>	4,69 %	<i>Russia</i>	8,93 %	<i>Czech Republic</i>	9,46 %
<i>Turkey</i>	3,47 %	<i>United States</i>	3,93 %	<i>United States</i>	7,88 %	<i>Italy</i>	4,70 %

Source: compiled by the author according to SimilarWeb data.

Peculiarly, 3 out of 4 key websites designed to represent the Czech Republic abroad in the online space receive the majority of their visitors from the country itself. This result is understandable for mzv.cz and radio.cz as both sites have versions in Czech and also have domestic direction informing the Czech citizens about the work of MFA and recent developments.

Still, for czech.cz this result shows a necessity to work on the platform’s promotion abroad as a reliable source of information about the Czech Republic and gathering more foreign audience around the topics covered by the site.

Starting with mzv.cz, the highest interest to the foreign policy and Czech institutions is shown by visitors from Russia which is underpinned by the vested interest of this country on a strategy level in the Czech Republic as a partner. The next 3 countries have similar levels of traffic on the website, namely the United States, Ukraine and Turkey with Ukraine also having close ties with the country,

Turkey building strong trade relations and the Czech Republic supporting Turkey's accession to the EU and the US being a close trade, educational and cultural ally of the state, especially since the accession of the Czech Republic to the EU.

Czech.cz receives the majority of its foreign audience from Mexico. This audience easily finds the necessary information about the Czech Republic on the website because it is available in Spanish. The reason for this proportion is that czech.cz offers its visitors 2 extensive sections: Life & Work and Business, both concerned with some economic and trade issues which raise interest of the readers from Mexico in the light of rather active economic cooperation between the countries.

After Mexico, the traffic to czech.cz is gradually divided between Germany, Russia and the United States. All three countries similarly to Mexico and to the case of mzv.cz above, show interest in economic cooperation. Their needs are met by the platform covering these topics. In addition to this, the website is also available in German, Russian and English which facilitates its usage by the citizens of these countries due to easier consumption of information making it a strong advantage of the platform.

For radio.cz, top countries where its foreign audience comes from are Germany, France, Russia and the US with a similar portion of readers. Like czech.cz, the website is also available in German, French, Russian and English additionally appealing to these audiences. Germany and France are on the top-5 list due to being fellow-EU members and Russia and the US thanks to the reasons outlined earlier for the other platforms under analysis. Website radio.cz caters to various audiences covering the widest range of topics from history to business, travel and sports therefore, attracting more saturated audience and communicating to a wider spectrum of readers.

Finally, czechtourism.com is the only platform reaching its goal in terms of geographical distribution with the visitors from the Czech Republic reaching only 4th place in top-5 countries. The highest interest in tourism in the Czech Republic is demonstrated the readers from Poland. The other countries researching the topic also using this platform are Germany, the US and Italy. It is worth mentioning that the website is available in the respective languages: Polish, German, English and Italian, therefore, enabling the visitors from these countries to navigate freely within the platform and finding the details that they need.

Another aspect worth pointing out when drawing a comparison between geographic proportions of these platforms is that thanks to building a system of different websites the Czech Republic succeeded in reaching out to various audiences located in different parts of the world. And notwithstanding the fact that many countries are repeated in the top-5 lists of these platforms, every platform without exception includes high percentage of visitors from a country which is not present in the list of the other platforms. Namely, mzv.cz has Turkey and Ukraine, czech.cz has Mexico, radio.cz has France and czechtourism.com has Poland and Italy. Therefore, by differentiating of these platforms, they became appealing for different audiences from different countries resulting in promoting the image of the Czech Republic over a wider section of counters using digital tools.

Therefore, having analyzed the major audience origin, traffic sources and user engagement metrics, we can make a conclusion that the Czech online platform although operating separately without an aligned and unified national strategy, still demonstrate growing efficiency in attracting the foreign audience and informing it about different aspects of the country, its foreign policy and institutions. There is a range of issues we have also indicated to be improved and further worked on to improve the efficiency of communication. Overall, the platforms show clear purpose and specification, thus being well tailored to cater various audiences and leading to increase of the coverage and interest to the Czech Republic abroad.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

To summarize, as the general scientific approach to the term and phenomenon of the digital diplomacy has not yet been unified internationally as we have indicated in the first part of the paper, similarly, the digital diplomacy of the Czech Republic is under the active but mosaic development due to a decent amount of projects, initiatives and plans as well as due to the lack of precise legal framework and institutional independence of the sphere from other foreign policy bodies and institutions concerned with other diplomacy specifications. Based on the findings of this study, we can conclude that at this stage, the digital diplomacy in the country is functioning as an essential part and addition to the public, economic and cultural diplomacy with its aspects being integrated to the national strategies of all these types of diplomacy but still not clearly defined as a separate development goal.

Consequently, leading from this trend, the institutional and foremost the legal framework of the Czech digital diplomacy has also been attributed with mosaic nature and growing potential at the same time. Currently, it needs comprehensive approach on a strategic level as at the moment it lacks clear and general conceptualization to be then followed by tactic and operational actions and projects by different governmental bodies and non-governmental institutions. At the current stage, an increasing attention to the online space, opportunities it has created and the importance of efficient representation of the country in it has evolved into a wide range of works and policies partially applicable to digital diplomacy in the Czech Republic.

Similarly, on the institutional level digital diplomacy in the state lacks clear definition and imposition of a separate responsible unit or department. Therefore, synchronized division of digital diplomacy from other foreign policy activities on both legal and institutional levels will result in defining its purposes and provisions as well forming a precise structure of the bodies responsible for attaining its aims. This will further lead to increase the efficiency of the existing project and proactive development of the new ones.

Another conclusion we have come to in this study is that notwithstanding the absence of an aligned legal and institutional framework to underly this process, the key platforms designed to represent the Czech Republic in the online space have demonstrated an increasing effectiveness in pursuing their goals. They have been

actively communicating with the audience, informing it about the news, current developments in the country and abroad, work of MFA, embassies and consulates, the opportunities the country offers for business, traveling, investment, trade and others. Moreover, due to aforementioned diversification and specialization, the existing platforms manage to cater for audiences with different interests and gather them into communities dedicated to a particular aspect. This will allow further more efficient communication with the well-built and settled audiences and tailoring information for them respectively.

Therefore, the further necessary steps would include conceptualizing digital diplomacy in a single program, creating a body or a subdepartment responsible for this direction within the structure of the MFA, unifying the online representation and communication policy of the Czech embassies and expanding the scope of information and services provided for the foreign citizens online.

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ПРАКТИКА ЦИФРОВОЇ ДИПЛОМАТІЇ В ЧЕСЬКІЙ РЕСПУБЛІЦІ

У сучасних умовах масового поширення Інтернет-технологій та охоплення їх аудиторії, тенденції до переважного використання мобільних пристроїв у споживанні контенту, а також прогресивно зростаючої ролі й впливовості соціальних медіа-платформ природним є те, що зовнішня політика та дипломатія як сфери не могли залишитись осторонь цих глобальних трендів. Більше того, вони не лише не утрималися від змін, а й натомість ефективно використали нові можливості, тим самим створивши окрему галузь – цифрову дипломатію. Відтак цією статтею ми долучаємося до наукового дискурсу про явище цифрової дипломатії, яке порівняно нещодавно ввійшло в наукове середовище, а тому досі не було концептуалізовано в комплексну загальноприйнятую теорію.

Отже, у цій розвідці проаналізовано організацію та впровадження цифрової дипломатії в Чеській Республіці. Ми зосереджені на теоретичному підході Чеської Республіки до цифрової дипломатії, її позиції в зовнішній політиці країни та досвіді практичного впровадження її інструментів у зовнішньополітичну комунікацію. У цьому розрізі подано огляд теоритично-правової бази, що покладена в основу розвитку цифрової дипломатії в Чеській Республіці. У статті також проаналізовано інституційну систему у сфері цифрової дипломатії та роль її елементів у сприянні досягненню зовнішньополітичних цілей держави. Крім того, визначено ключові проекти, розроблені чеськими урядовими й неурядовими організаціями та спрямовані на зміцнення іміджу країни й просування її бренду серед іноземних аудиторій за допомогою онлайн-інструментів і медіа-платформ. Як результат, у статті також запропоновано аналіз ефективності вибірки основних інструментів цифрової дипломатії, застосованих Чеською Республікою у своїй зовнішній політиці. Урешті, у праці сформульовано низку рекомендацій та висновків на основі даних, отриманих у рамках дослідження.

Ключові слова: цифрова дипломатія, Чеська Республіка, публічна дипломатія, зовнішня політика, культурна дипломатія, економічна дипломатія.

Матеріал надійшов до редакції 06.02.2020 р.