



The Skripal Case Representation in Czech Television News

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the representation of Agent Skripal's poisoning on the public service broadcasting channel Czech Television (CT) in the first half of 2018, using content, discourse and semiotic analyses. We analysed the representation of this event on the following five television news programmes: Events (Události), Events and Commentaries (Události komentáře), News at 23 (Zprávy ve 23), Horizon CT24 (Horizont ČT24) and 90' CT24 (90' ČT24). The event's representation was based on the presentation of aspects of the event and statements by individual actors. The article shows naturalisation of the British explanation of the event in the Czech television broadcasts. This so-called 'British narrative' was the prevailing framing of the event. Differences in the representation of various opinions and in the proportionality of the time devoted to the individual actors were present. However, significant systematic intentional implications, obvious evaluations or identifiable authorial signposting was not evident in the researched sample. We argue that the television coverage of the Skripal case represents a habitual form of the news reporting by the Czech public service broadcaster within the applicable law.

KEYWORDS

news discourse, discourse analysis, content analysis, Czech public broadcaster, public service television, Agent Skripal's poisoning

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INTRODUCTION

How did the public service broadcasting channel Czech Television (CT) report Agent Sergey Skripal's poisoning in the first half of 2018? The objective of this study was to analyse the representation of the event in five key news and current affairs programmes on channels CT1 and CT24, considering the fact that Czech Television is a public service medium. The sample of the study was the television news stories and interviews related to the poisoning

of Agent Skripal and his daughter, which took place on 4 March 2018 in Great Britain (hereinafter 'the Skripal case'). The incident was investigated by the British authorities as attempted murder (Johnson 2018). Subsequently, as a result of this incident, almost 150 Russian diplomats were expelled from Great Britain, some other EU countries, the United States and Canada (Bristow 2018). Three Russian diplomats were expelled from the Czech Republic. Russia responded in a similar political move (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018).

The event of Agent Skripal's poisoning was selected for the analysis not only due to its international significance but also due to its relevance and connection to the Czech Republic. The intelligence institution, the Security Information Service (BIS), has been drawing attention to the activities of secret agents from other states (especially Russia and China) in the Czech Republic for a long time. Besides, the event had a Czech dimension too, due to the speculation as to whether the substance used for the poisoning – Novichok – was produced in the Czech Republic. On 27 March 2018, the President of the Czech Republic, Miloš Zeman, ordered intelligence services to investigate whether Novichok was handled on the territory of the Czech Republic (Parlament České republiky Senát. 2019). The President's statement was the most significant moment for the representation of the events, as this was the turning point where the case had become directly relevant to the Czech Republic. In a number of the analysed news stories, the representation of the initial event ('the poisoning') then became a context for thematising the representation of the Czech President's statement. Due to the connections to the domestic and international politics of the Czech Republic, the case received media attention for nearly three months.

CT programmes were selected for analysis because CT is a key public service broadcaster in the Czech Republic. Within the network society, CT competes with a number of traditional, commercial media and social media (Bulck et al. 2018). The need for quality public service broadcasting should be evident. However, discussions about CT's broadcasting quality and the need for a qualitative public service medium appear periodically in Czech politics.¹ Indeed, in the context of the threat to media independence in Hungary and Poland in recent years, public service broadcasting has become increasingly important.² At the time of the selected event, CT operated the only 24-hour news channel with CT24. Its all-day audience share was 4.3%, and the daily share for the channel CT1 was 15.8% (Nielsen Admosphere

¹ Broader discussions on the future and innovations of public service media appear in academic and political discourses (see, for example, Ofcom 2019, van den Bulck et al. 2018, Brevini 2015, Burri 2020).

² Public service media is an institution outside the influence of both the government and the commercial sector and should not compete with commercial media. BBC is the role model in setting standards for public service media in the Czech Republic. Following the BBC, Czech Television and Czech Radio strive to provide validated information and a wide range of views, and aim for high professional standards. (Rada Českého rozhlasu, no date; Rada České televize 2003)

2019). Even though the Czech media studies tradition dates back to the 1990s, there are still few academic studies devoted to public service media or news discourses. This applies to research on both Czech Television (Končelík and Trampota 2004; Metyková 2006; Sedláková and Lapčík 2020) and Czech Radio (Sedláková et al. 2016; Sedláková et al. 2019). For this reason, we focused our analytical attention in this article on journalism standards and representation procedures used by public service media.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The analysis is based on media constructionism (Luhmann 2000). As mentioned by Schulz (1989), the media's representation of reality has had implications for the non-media reality because recipients do not have any direct experience with most of the events presented by the media, and they thus use mediated information as a background for their decision-making. Through language and its use, the media create a representation of reality that reflects the dominant ideology and reproduces the existing social structure (Sinha 1988, p. 2; Hall 1997, pp. 1-3; Searle 1995; Kopytowska 2015). Such a representation constructs our understanding of external reality and how the world presents itself in our mind.

The analysis of this article is based on a semiotic approach to news reporting, as elaborated by Volosinov (1973), Hall (1980), Hartley (2001) and Fiske (2001). The semiotic approach understands news reporting as a specific kind of socially shared discourse and analyses news stories as a text constructed through signs (Chandler 2002; Barthes 1982). Semiotics help to analyse the more subtle and less transparent phenomena that take place at the level of semiosis (operating with signs constructing an audio-visual form of narration), both at the syntagmatic and paradigmatic level. Media content represents and spreads the predominant ideologies, values, standards, attitudes and interests of the people or groups dominant in society (Hartley and Fiske 2003). By doing so, they contribute to reinforcing the social status quo. News reporting is no exception. The worldviews of the journalists or the media owners' ideas can be traced in published news (Hall 1980). A semiotic approach perceives ideology as a process of production and reproduction of meanings, ideas and social values (Barthes 1967, 1982; Foucault 1994). According to Hall (1997, p. 228), the most important issue is not what reality media creates, but whose message is communicated. Rorty (1991, pp. 109-110) suggests focusing on the ethical-political level instead of assessing the accuracy or veracity of the representation (i.e. the methodological-ontological perspective). Sinha (1988) demonstrates that ideology stems from subconscious sharing of certain presuppositions within social structures – highlighting and, at the same time, ignoring certain aspects of reality – rather than from the participants or journalists' intention to manipulate. However, in theory, CT as a public service broadcaster is supposed to meet the requirements of Act no. 231/2001 Coll. on Television and Radio Broadcasting and the Act no. 483/1991 Coll. on

Czech Television, which imposes objective, balanced and non-biased broadcasting.³

According to Birch (1989, pp.15-16), instead of assuming the objectivity of news, it is easier to research the discourse formations that constitute media content. This means focusing on how the news stories of an event or topic are constructed, whose meaning is represented, who is allowed to participate and who is excluded, for what reasons or with what intentions. There are topics and events that are covered by the media repeatedly and more frequently, and other topics that are systematically ignored (Tuchman 1978; Hartley 2001). McCombs and Shaw (1991) and McCombs (2009) showed in their theory of agenda-setting how the media draw the attention of their audience to selected topics, which may then be perceived as 'important'. The idea of 'framing', which journalists use to ground their representations of events, is also derived from the theory of agenda-setting (McCombs and Shaw 1991; McCombs 2009). There are several concepts of framing that primarily differ in whether the frames are related to individual perception or considered to be part of social discourse. The frequently cited scholar, Entman (1993, p. 52), described 'framing' as "select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and make[ing] 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". The process of framing highlights some attributes as more significant, while others are intentionally left aside (Entman 1993). In this sense, framing is a manifestation of social power and reflects the dominating order. Reese (2003, p. 11) stresses that frames are "socially shared organising principles persistent over time, functioning symbolically to enable significant structuring of the social world." According to McCombs (2004), a 'frame' characterises a dominant discursive perspective on the object or event and thus 'frames' the object, suggesting certain ways of decoding of the communicated information to the recipient.

In order to facilitate any representation – not only the media's representation – of any event possible, it is important that the author of the representation carries out the selection and hierarchisation of what is and what is not significant and why, e.g. so that an event can be transformed into a news story comprehensible to the recipients (Hall 1980; Hartley 2001). The selection of characteristics, aspects and connections of the event that are considered as significant – out of all the identifiable and conceivable ones – enable the event to be 'representable' (Hall 1980; Hartley 2001). By nature, the process of general representation

³ There is a dual broadcasting system in the Czech Republic. The public service media is represented by Czech Radio and Czech Television. Both run several channels. As such, CT is subject to Act no. 483/1991 Coll. on Czech Television. The compliance with the law in the broadcasting of these media is controlled by a Board, whose members are elected by the Czech Republic Parliament. "The main tasks of the public service in the field of television broadcasting are in particular: a) to provide the objective, verified, in a whole balanced and comprehensive information for the free formation of opinions" (Act no. 483/1991 Coll. on Czech Television).

routine supports a certain form of bias in the sense of applying a certain point of view to the represented event. Most objects can be described through a considerable number of features, attributes, aspects and connections that characterise them, and it is essential to consider the ones selected. The ways in which the initial data turn into a form of a meaningful news story are further referred to as 'framing-thematisation', establishing the essential form of the narrative through which the event is presented to the recipients.

METHODOLOGY

This study examined the TV news stories on the Skripal case published by the CT1 and CT24 channels in three months after the event on 4 March 2018. The main research questions were the following:

1. What is the key thematic framing of the Skripal case, and what other events or themes is the case linked to?
2. Who are the referenced sources and quoted speakers, and what are the presented points of view in the news broadcasts?
3. Are there any signs of ideological bias in the way the event's narratives were constructed in the news stories?

The aim of the research was not to assess the factual correctness of the communicated information or the correspondence between the news content and physical reality. Instead, we identified the methods around the construction of representation, examining the legitimisation of presented statements and using methods of argumentation.

The following five programmes were selected for analysis: Events (Události), Events and Commentaries (Události komentáře), News at 23 (Zprávy ve 23), Horizon CT24 (Horizont ČT24) and 90' CT24 (90' ČT24). These are the main news and editorial journalism programmes broadcasted by CT during evening primetime. They are different in their format, genre and length. Events and News at 23 publish news programmes exclusively; Events and Commentaries as well as Horizon CT24 also include editorial formats; 90' CT24 consists of news reports and follow-up interviews with guests commenting on the subject and interviews usually lasting 10-18 minutes. In programmes combining news and editorial journalism, the dominant form of representation is an interview with a foreign reporter usually preceded by the news report's introduction (see, for example, Horizon CT24). The research unit of the analysis was the news story including the presenter's opening in the studio.

For the analysis, triangulation of quantitative and qualitative research methods was used.

For the quantitative part of the research, we employed the method of content analysis designed for the quantitative, systematic and objective description of communication content (Neuendorf 2002). The method is based on systematic coding of the manifest content of the message based on quantification of specific characteristics (variables) (Neuendorf 2002). In this study, these included the spectrum of the covered topics, the thematic frames, the sources of information and quoted speakers including their affiliations (i.e. profession and affiliation to a specific organisation), as well as the balance of soundbites. The quantitative coding of the programmes was carried out by one of the researchers, while the coding of the unclear research units was coded by both authors.

Within the three-month period following the event (4 March 2018), we identified 261 news stories that mention the event in the selected programmes. These news stories were categorised into three groups: main topic, secondary topic and reference depending on the relevance of the provided information to the Skripal case. The news stories of the first group provide key information about the event with respect to the time dedicated to it. If the information provided on the case developed or complemented another main topic of the news story, it was classified as a secondary topic. The 'reference' category contained news stories with a reference to the Skripal case without further analysis or details. In our analysis, we examined 227 of the 261 news stories because all of these dealt with the event either as a main or secondary topic. The same sample was used for the qualitative and quantitative analyses.

TABLE 1 Number of news stories on the Skripal case published by programme (absolute frequency)

Programme	Total	Main topic	Secondary topic	Reference
Events	76	46	19	11
News at 23	66	39	18	9
90' CT24	42	28	9	5
Events and Commentaries	39	26	6	7
Horizon CT24	38	31	5	2
Total	261	170	57	34

The qualitative analysis was used to detect meaning and nuance in the news stories. Qualitative methods allow revealing implicit presuppositions – i.e. unexpressed assumptions that are considered generally known and unquestioned – used in the representation, the

narrativisation of a theme and the naturalisation⁴ of communicated meanings (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). The qualitative analysis was conducted based on the methodology of grounded theory by Strauss and Corbin (1998). This approach employs an inductive method of coding. This is how we identified the key segments of news stories, the procedures of the news construction and the means of narrativisation of the event's representation. The methods of discourse analysis (van Dijk 1993; Phillips and Hardy 2002; Wodak and Meyer 2002; Fairclough 2003) and semiotic analysis (Chandler 2002) were combined. Semiotic analysis is one of the most used and most effective analytical tools for the analysis of news. It allows identifying underlying news construction procedures which are not detectable by quantitative methods, i.e. subtle procedures of narration construction, which cause shifts in meaning or emphasise a preferred interpretation with the goal to establish a specific meaning in the representation (Chandler 2002) and favouritise or disqualify specific actors. In our analysis, we tried to identify the use of procedures that could be interpreted as a manifestation of bias, i.e. the implied ideologically grounded attitudes of the speakers, journalists or a specific party, and the use of arguments that (de)favouritise the representation of any party involved in the event. The saturation of data in relation to the observed variables was in the analysed sample. To avoid succumbing to unfounded generalisation of findings, we considered the entire sample and wider socio-cultural context while interpreting the findings.

RESULTS OF THE QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The Skripal case received a significant amount of attention by Czech Television. This can be partly explained with the theory of news values by Galtung and Ruge (1965), as the original event incorporates a number of values which make it 'newsworthy' for the media, including frequency, unexpectedness, negativity and conflict, personalisation, continuity, participation of elite nations and people, as well as relevance. Most likely due to the event's connection to the domestic and international politics of the Czech Republic, the case gained media attention for nearly three months. As Figure 1 shows, the amount of coverage on the case dropped in the middle of April, only for the case to return to the spotlight at the beginning of May following President Zeman's statements about the possible production of the poisoning substance in the Czech Republic. On 27 March 2018, three weeks after the Skripals' poisoning, the President of the Czech Republic ordered an investigation as to whether Novichok was handled in the Czech Republic, which led to another spike in the number of news stories covering the event. The latest news story included in our search was broadcast on 6 June 2018.

⁴ We understand 'naturalisation' to mean the process of gradual automatisisation of understanding of originally arbitrary and unsubstantiated representation as absolutely natural and, therefore, accepted and unquestioned (Barthes 1982).

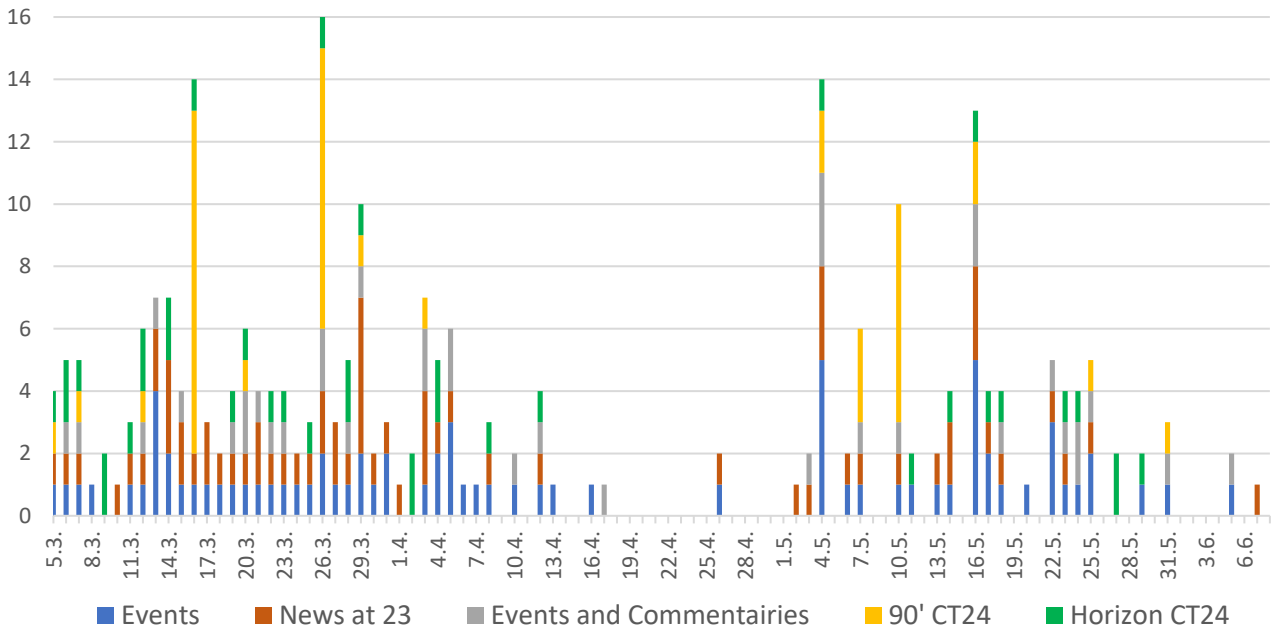


FIGURE 1 Development of the initial coverage of the Skripal case (absolute frequency)

The significance assigned to the event is also evidenced by the placing of the news stories within the programmes and the duration of the news stories. Figure 2 shows that more than half (56%) of the research units were broadcast among the first six news stories in the programme, while 20 (9%) of them were shown as the first news story in the rundown, highlighting the importance of the event.

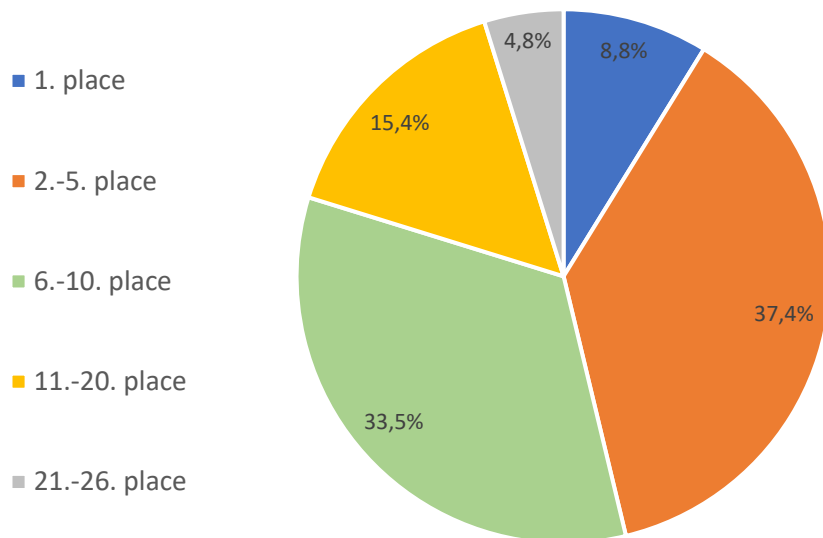


FIGURE 2 Placing of the news stories within the programmes (relative frequency)

Figure 3 shows the duration of the news stories. Three quarters of the news stories (74%) were up to four minutes long. One fifth (18%) were longer stories with a maximum duration of 23 minutes. Only one tenth (8%) of the research units were short news of up to 30 seconds. Longer forms of news were mainly featured in the newscasts 90' CT24, Horizon CT24 and Events and Commentaries, as the broadcast formats provide time for more extensive interviews on any given topic.

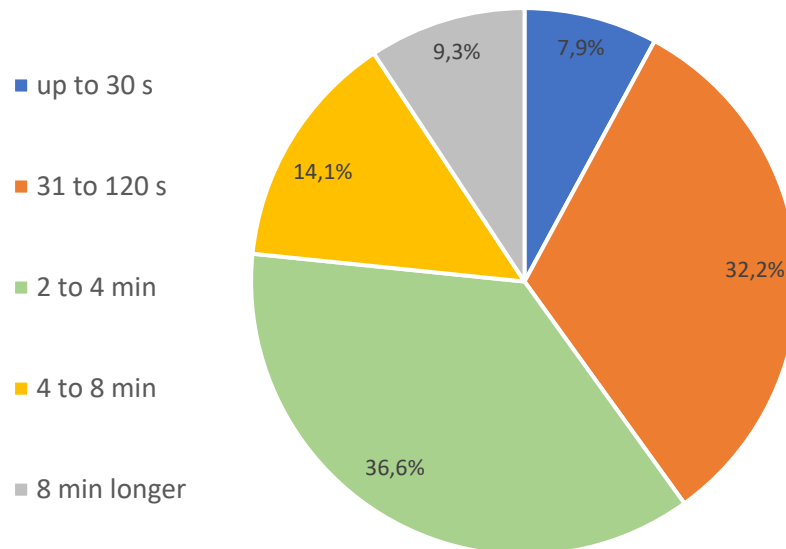


FIGURE 3 Duration of the news stories (relative frequency)

The findings in Table 2 show that the prominent messages of the news stories and the presenter's studio introductions can be categorised into five frames:

1. the poisoning of the agent and his daughter (the event and its participants)
2. the international conflict (Britain and Western countries versus Russia)
3. the diplomatic crisis (expulsion of diplomats)
4. the dispute about the production of Novichok in the Czech Republic (internal political crisis)
5. the international response to the statements about the origin of Novichok in the Czech Republic.

TABLE 2 The thematic framing of the Skripal case in the programmes (absolute/relative frequency)

Thematic frame / Programme	The poisoning of the Skripals	International conflict	Diplomatic crisis	Novichok - Internal political crisis	Novichok - International political crisis	Other
Events	20	12	12	13	6	2
News at 23	15	15	15	9	3	0
Events and Commentaries	12	5	2	8	4	1
Horizon CT24	17	10	7	0	2	1
90' CT24	10	10	9	6	2	0
Total	74 (33 %)	52 (23 %)	45 (20 %)	36 (16 %)	17 (8 %)	4 (2 %)

33% of the news stories provided information on the event itself and its participants, primarily surrounding the progress of their health condition (frame 1). The main narrative of the event was the international conflict between Great Britain with its allies and Russia (frame 2) and the diplomatic crisis (frame 3) with a focus on the mutual expulsion of diplomats. These news stories (43%, frame 2 and 3) were based on the explanations by the British mainstream media and political representatives that Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia were poisoned with a nerve agent and that the incident is investigated by British authorities as attempted murder (see Harding and MacAskill 2018). We refer to this explanation of the event as 'the British narrative'. The narrative was most likely initiated by the British media, which were explicitly referenced in the news from the first day onwards. By comparison, only a quarter of the news stories (24%, frame 4 and 5 together) adopted a distinctively Czech frame as they provided information on Novichok in domestic (16% of news stories) or international contexts (8% of news stories) (see Table 2).

The use of sources and quoted speakers corresponded to the described framing. Table 3 shows that the majority of the news stories referenced several sources. The most frequently cited sources were representatives of the British government (in 50% of news stories), representatives of the Russian state (in 43% of news stories) and government officials of the Czech Republic or their spokespersons (in 43% of news stories). Indispensable sources of

information also included British media and press agencies, with the most frequently mentioned being the BBC and Reuters News Agency (in 41 % of news stories). Statements by politicians from other countries (in 11% of news stories) and quotations of other foreign media (in 10% of news stories) were considerably less frequent. For example, compared to British media sources, references to Russian media sources were considerably less frequent (in 11% of news stories), which supports the above-mentioned dominant framing of the British narrative.

TABLE 3 Sources referenced in the news (absolute frequency)

Programme / Source of information	Total (absolute frequency)	Total (relative frequency)	Events	News at 23	Events and Commentaries	Horizon CT24	90' CT24
British government officials	113	50%	34	31	15	23	10
Russian government officials	98	43%	28	28	16	17	9
Czech government officials	97	43%	32	23	15	10	17
British media and agencies	94	41%	23	25	12	21	13
Czech media and agencies	67	30%	17	17	13	4	16
Czech police, Security Information Service and the army	35	15%	10	10	8	0	7
Other countries' representatives	26	11%	8	12	2	4	0
Russian media and agencies	24	11%	6	3	3	6	6
Other/unspecified media	22	10%	2	8	3	4	5
British police, intelligence service and army	18	8%	5	3	2	6	2
Other foreign police and intelligence services	6	3%	3	2	1	0	0

The news stories often contained a soundbite, i.e. a direct quotation of the speaker's statement. According to Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2009), this is a way of verifying the report or providing contradictory arguments without being accused of bias. In comparison to

statements of randomly chosen members of the public, the statements of official sources, such as government officials, have more authority and can be used to express an official position on a particular topic (Hartley and Fiske 2003). The majority (73%) of the analysed news stories contained a soundbite. Tables 4 shows that the mostly quoted speakers were the British politicians Theresa May (21 times) and Boris Johnson (19 times). Amongst the most frequently quoted people from the Czech Republic were the Prime Minister, Andrej Babiš (18 times), and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Martin Stropnický (14 times). In comparison, Russian representatives, such as Sergey Lavrov (10 times) and Vladimir Putin (8 times), were quoted less often. The total number of British and Russian speakers and their ratio within one news story are comparable, with a slight prevalence of British representatives. The exceptions were News at 23 and Horizon CT24, where slightly more Russian speakers were quoted.

TABLE 4 The speakers quoted most often in the news stories (absolute frequency)

Quoted speaker	Absolute frequency
Theresa May, UK Prime Minister	21
Boris Johnson, UK Foreign Secretary	19
Andrej Babiš, Czech Republic's Prime Minister	18
Martin Stropnický, Czech Republic's Minister of Foreign Affairs	14
Vojtěch Filip, Czech Republic's Leader of the Communist Party	14
Dana Drábová, Czech Republic's Head of the State Office for Nuclear Safety	11
Sergey Lavrov, Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs	10
František Bublan, Czech Republic's former head of the Office for Foreign Relations and Information	10
Vladimir Putin, Russia's President	8
Maria Zacharovová, spokesperson for Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs	8
Karla Šlechtová, Czech Republic's Minister of Defence	8
Miroslav Kalousek, Czech Republic's former Head of TOP09 Party	8
Yulia Skripal	7

We also analysed the meaning and balance of the statements of all speakers and categorised them according to their wording and explicit evaluative expressions. Table 5 shows that, while the majority (57%) of statements were neutral towards Russia as one of the parties in the dispute, one seventh (15%) of the speakers expressed pro-Russian and one fourth (28%) anti-Russian tones.

TABLE 5 Statement balance in relation to Russia (absolute and relative row frequency)

Tone of the statement / Programme	Pro-Russian	Neutral	Anti-Russian
Events	13 (12%)	69 (62 %)	30 (27 %)
News at 23	17 (16 %)	56 (51 %)	37 (34 %)
Horizon CT24	17 (23 %)	43 (58 %)	14 (19 %)
90' CT24	8 (12 %)	42 (61 %)	19 (28 %)
Events and Commentaries	9 (14 %)	36 (55 %)	20 (31 %)
Total	64 (15 %)	246 (57 %)	120 (28 %)

Although the ratio of pro- to anti-Russian statements varied by programme, the anti-Russian tendency was more prevalent in four out of five programmes. By nature, it is impossible to ensure an absolutely balanced representation of the opinions of various parties and participants, as one of the parties will always be over-represented to a certain extent. For this reason, we used the qualitative analysis to examine this unbalance further.

RESULTS OF THE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Journalism tools used in the representation of the Skripal case

The media's representation of the case over the analysed period and across all the analysed programmes is characterised by a relatively high proportion of the following features, which are, in most cases, co-functioning and reinforcing one another:

1. highly structured and often detailed narrations
2. the use of statements of various participants
3. frames that reinforce the British narrative surrounding the case as well as the gradual naturalisation of the discourse.

The first feature refers to the representation of the event and its development in the form of a detailed and structured narrativisation, including details such as the location in the South of England, the reason for the daughter's arrival, a detailed description of the Agent Skripal's background and evidence provided by experts.

The second feature refers to statements by the various kinds of participants or parties involved, such as representatives, institutional sources, witnesses of the event, experts and so on. These took the forms of direct speech – i.e. direct statements of the participants recorded either verbally or in combination with shots of the interview – and indirect speech – i.e. the presenter or reporter paraphrasing the participant's statements. In the majority of the news stories and segments across the programmes, the emphasis lied on the description of the event, with the general framing establishing Great Britain and Russia as the main parties involved. The statements and opinions of both parties were identified in most of the news stories, using either generalised ('according to Britain/Russia', 'according to London/Moscow', etc.) or individualised language ('according to the foreign minister', 'as the press secretary said', etc.).

Although the event was represented in a wider context, this was in line with conventionally used media routines in news production operations, which describe a standardised way of news production operations, such as the contextualisation of the event (e.g. accentuating the interviewee's profession), the legitimisation and authentication of the news story through witnesses, as well as the use of statements by institutional sources and the use of (contradictory) statements by representatives of the different participants/parties involved (Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Tuchman 1978). In the representation of the Skripal case, the statements of external parties were key elements. The selection of guests who were interviewed, especially in programmes combining news and interviews, can be understood as a semantically implicative prediction of the event's nature. This does not mean that the selection of guests appeared significantly biased in terms of assumed favoritism. Indeed, the majority of the invited guests failed to show their inclination in terms of opinion or ideological affinity. However, the very first guests were not criminal investigators or experts in chemical substances, but a political scientist and an expert in international law, implying the international and political nature of the event.

Such a selection is consistent with the event's framing in accordance with the British narrative established in the very first days of the event's coverage. This refers to the third feature mentioned above. Example 1 represents a typical form of the construction of the British narrative in the initial stages of the event, which gradually naturalised and established the framing of the following stages of the event's representation. The way of leading the interviews was based on the implication of the conflicting nature of the event, its (international) political aspect, the quite explicit identification of the opposing parties involved (although, at the given moment, the only participants in the event were two poisoned people) and, most importantly, the implication of a 'guilty' party.

EXAMPLE 1 9 March 2018 - Horizon⁵

PRES: "Mr. Smid, if we worked with the hypothesis that it is really Russia that is behind the attack in Britain, as many suggest, what can actually be expected from the side of Great Britain?"

ACT: "[...] the Russian trace does not have to automatically mean the Kremlin's blessing. [...]"

PRES: "Naturally, one thing is a visible reply, blatant, and then there is the reply that you can't see, that we might never learn about, or in several years only, but where this incident could plunge British-Russian relations [...]"

[...]

PRES: "[...] but, nevertheless, whatever happened, we can expect some kind of united response from the European Union, or the North Atlantic Alliance, at least at a political level then, or are the two organisations so divided that it is unimaginable"

ACT: "[...] how to proceed against Russia if the Russian trace is really confirmed, which hasn't been confirmed so far [...]"

The framing of the Skripal case reproduced the official discourse which understood the event as the poisoning of an agent (and his daughter). This narrative in the case's representation was identified across all the analysed programmes from the very first day. This primary event's framing was likely initiated by the British media – not just because of the event's close geographical location – as references to the British media were explicit in the news from the beginning. This served to highlight one of the possible aspects (the poisoning) by which the narrative in the following representation was established. Based on the findings of the qualitative analysis, the British narrative was most distinct in the majority of the news stories. This is illustrated by Examples 2a, b and c which include news stories that were broadcast on the day after the incident.

EXAMPLE 2A 5 March 2018 – Events

PRES: (news report read in a studio combined with news agency clips): "And now very fresh news from Great Britain – the man, who is in critical state after being exposed to an unknown substance in a shopping centre in Salisbury, is a former Russian spy who had worked for London. Sergey Skripal was granted asylum in Britain after the spy swap in 2010. He was previously sentenced to 13 years in prison for espionage in Russia."

⁵ This article uses the following abbreviations to identify the different types of speakers: PRES = presenter; REP = reporter, editor; ACT = actor/participant, i.e. any kind of speakers apart from the editorial staff.

EXAMPLE 2B 5 March 2018 – 90' CT24

PRES: "The spy was probably poisoned by an unknown substance in Salisbury, in the South of England. Sergey Skripal (66) was found unconscious by the police in a shopping centre. According to press reports, he could have been exposed to a very strong opioid. An approximately 30-year-old woman was admitted to hospital in a serious condition along with him. Skripal was sentenced in Russia 12 years ago for carrying out espionage for Britain, after which Moscow swapped him for spies held in the US."

ACT: (Craig Holden, Assistant Chief Constable – direct speech in English with voice-over translation): "Two people, who probably knew each other, were taken to Salisbury District Hospital without obvious injuries. They are under treatment for suspected exposure to an unknown substance. Both are in serious condition in the intensive care unit."

EXAMPLE 2C 5 March 2018 – News at 23⁶

PRES (headlines): "A former Russian agent was poisoned in Britain. He was sentenced to 12 years in his home country for espionage."

Amongst others, the framing of the Skripal case presented the event in the context of past events, Agent Skripal's professional identity, the events related to it (e.g. his conviction for espionage and the spy swap) and using the analogy of another case of a poisoned Russian agent, Litvinenko. This analogy was reproduced in several news items following the incident. The incident's contextualisation with Russia is reflected in the duration allocated to these aspects within the news stories as well as in the formulation of the questions asked by the presenter. Then, as early as the first day of coverage, another aspect of the event was thematised: the possible consequences for international relations between Great Britain and Russia. This is interesting as such because, at the beginning of the case's coverage, the media reported of 'attempted murder', even though the poisoning of the former agent could have been attributed to a number of causes, including accidental poisoning, a consequence of careless handling of a toxic substance or attempted suicide. In such cases, the construction of the news stories would have, most certainly, been different to the British narrative, and the contextualisation with the death of another Russian agent would have been illogical. Thus, at the time, one could have questioned the way in which the case was represented, especially

⁶ This example presents the headlines. It illustrates one aspect that could be perceived as problematic in terms of the semantic implication that, in this case, can be understood as indication of liability for the action. The first sentence of the statement relates to the description of the represented event; the latter does not describe the event itself and becomes the tool for its possible thematisation. The limited length of statements within the headlines diminishes the space for accurate statement formulation and can be regarded as an indication of the preferred interpretation and the speaker's attitude to the event.

given the moderate statements of institutional sources (e.g. police) which were in contrast to the case's representation. However, statements that questioned the case's representation only rarely appeared in the examined programmes.

Example 3 demonstrates the British narrative more closely, as it contains a probably not intentional but significant shift in meaning caused by the omitting of the word 'alleged' in Vladimir Putin's statement. The referenced statement taken from the British press should have been phrased: "Vladimir Putin is alleged to have said". Furthermore, the way Putin's statement is used and framed implies a possible involvement in the represented event, which is enhanced by the selection of speakers and soundbites.

EXAMPLE 3 7 March 2018 – Events; Horizon CT24

PRES: "Former Russian intelligence service officer, Sergei Skripal, and his daughter Yulia were deliberately poisoned by nerve gas, according to British police."

[...]

ACT (Mark Rowley, the head of the counter-terrorism unit, statement in English with subtitle translation): "We believe the two people who originally became unwell were targeted specifically."

REP: "An espionage affair terrified a town with a population of 45,000 in the South of England [...] The British media recall Vladimir Putin's statement eight years ago that traitors would meet an end and choke on the 30 pieces of silver they got."

[...]

ACT (Edward Lucas, expert in intelligence services and commentator for The Times, text translation of his direct speech): "We wouldn't go to Russia and try to kill Anna Chapman. It's astonishing to me but Russians come here and try to kill Mr Skripal. It is a reckless and crude breach of every rule of espionage."

The implicit framing of the British narrative was prominent in several statements throughout the case's reporting. This could be the consequence of the routinisation of the news construction, as the analysis confirmed gradual naturalisation of the British narrative in the development of the incident's coverage (see Examples 4 and 5).

EXAMPLE 4 7 March 2018 – Events and Commentaries

PRES: "[...] British media write of the suspicion that there is a certain country behind the attack, namely Russia, that dealt in a similar way with its former agents in the past [...]"⁷

⁷ The formulation of the second part of the statement is based on a constative form (implying the provision of a verifiable or already documented fact, i.e. not as a conditional, potential fact, hypothesis, assumption, etc.).

EXAMPLE 5 6 March 2018 – News at 23 (news headline):

PRES: "A former Russian spy and his daughter are in critical state after the poisoning. London threatened Moscow with a response."

REP: "If the involvement of the Kremlin is confirmed, the British Head of Diplomatic Service in Westminster threatened sanctions."

The formulation of the statements, consistent with the British narrative, appears repeatedly in the representation of the event across all the monitored programmes, also using other syntactic-lexical variations, such as the choice of the word 'retaliation', which is usually understood as a reaction to a previous action. For example, this can be seen in the Events headline "British retaliation against Russia", published on 11 March 2018. The stylistic construction implies the factual involvement of Russia in the event and thematises actions if there were to be another similar 'hostile' activity. Similarly, 90' CT24 reported on 16 March 2018: "Great Britain is, at the same time, ready to freeze Russian assets if further hostile activity were to occur".

The adoption and the gradual naturalisation of the British narrative in the analysed sample of CT broadcasting can be seen as problematic as it *a priori* represents the parties involved in the event in a biased way. This does not mean that the broadcasting did not include any opposing opinions. The analysed news items presented the opinions of both parties and opinions problematising the British narrative (for example, on Events and Commentaries, published 13 March 2018). However, those views were considerably under-represented. Instead, the typical method of the case's representation showed various (implicit) forms of presenting the British narrative.

Tools of narrativisation supporting the bias

The qualitative analysis – consistent with the results of the quantitative analysis – revealed the considerable extent of disproportion, not only in the allocated space, but also in the nature and form of the representation of opinions of particular parties involved in the event. For example, the opinions and statements extended by countries that side with Great Britain⁸ received significantly more distinct time and space. They were presented more prominently and tended to appear in the form of well-structured statements. By comparison, the opinions

This is interesting because the statement is – at least according to available sources – problematic to evidence. Within the structure of the entire statement, the second part functions as the first part's legitimisation.

⁸ For example, this is manifested in statements about the expulsion of Russian diplomats and the Czech President's statement on the production of Novichok in the Czech Republic.

of the Russian party were represented less prominently and in a distinctively less structured form. Regarding the style of the news stories' construction, a relatively neutral representation of the individual parties prevailed. However, news stories carrying favourising or disqualifying potential were recorded. Various types of rhetorical figures and tropes were used to reinforce the above-mentioned imbalance of representation. This is demonstrated in Example 6.

EXAMPLE 6 16 March 2018 – 90' CT24

<p>PRES: "And I would like to remind everyone that the United States, Germany and France backed Great Britain and together appealed to Moscow to explain the use of a military-grade nerve agent in the British territory. Russia denies its involvement in the incident and distances itself from the development of Novichok nerve poison."</p>	<p>This part of the presenter's statement formulating the attitudes of both parties can be considered relatively unproblematic in terms of framing.</p>
<p>"The United States is independently tightening sanctions on Russia. The alleged reason is cyberattacks, including attempts to influence the election."</p>	<p>This part of the presenter's input contextualises the primary event with the representation of another event that is not related to the actual event (attempts to influence the election were not proven but presented as a fact, which is problematic)</p>
<p>REP: "The British Prime Minister arrived in Salisbury where, on Thursday, two Russians collapsed after being exposed to the nerve agent Novichok, mainly to calm the situation in the town. A day earlier, however, decisive, like the leaders in the Cold War era, she [Theresa May] announced a retaliation:"</p>	<p>The presenter's statement introduces the direct speech of Theresa May. There is evaluation of the former Prime Minister's "decisive[ness], like the leaders in the Cold War era", which is implicative and, in the case's context, establishes a positive valence, although it does not problematise the following statement by Theresa May as such.</p>
<p>ACT (Theresa May; subtitle translation): "We will not tolerate the threat to lives of British citizens and others on British soil from the Russian government, nor will we tolerate such a flagrant breach of Russian international obligations."</p>	

<p>REP: "Moscow, which came under strong pressure from Americans in the United Nations Security Council, resolutely denies involvement in the case. It offers conspiracy theories; someone is allegedly trying to discredit Russia."</p> <p>ACT (Sergey Lavrov; subtitle translation): "I cannot judge what the motives of our British colleagues are, but I think that their motivation is insincere."</p>	<p>Contextualisation of another event is used in the presenter's statement. Russia is represented in the form of 'explicit double doubting' – allegedly initiated by Russia (i.e. the source of the conspiracy theories) and supported by the uncertainty of the statement (allegedly).</p> <p>The soundbite is neither explicitly related to the previous introduction by the presenter nor supports it in any way.</p>
<p>REP: "But for the West, the time for an explanation has expired. The leaders of Britain, the United States, Germany and France announced that Russia as the perpetrator of the assassination in Salisbury is the only convincing explanation."</p>	<p>The presenter's statement without any significant implications represents the opinion of the given parties and, from a syntactic point of view, states a proposition which is completed by the following joint declaration of Great Britain, Germany, France and the USA.</p>
<p>ACT (subtitle "joint declaration of Great Britain, Germany, France and the USA"; written text read by REP2): "This way of using a military-grade nerve chemical of the kind that Russia developed represents the first offensive deployment of a nerve agent in Europe since the Second World War [...] It threatens the security of us all. Source: Reuters"</p>	

<p>REP: "The use of Novichok obviously came at a moment when there is a need to choose sides."</p> <p>"The Secretary General also presented his North Atlantic Alliance annual report. He mentioned Russia and its recent actions quite often. He made mention of the annexation of Crimea, support for east Ukrainian separatists, unwanted military presence in parts of Georgia and Moldova, interference in Montenegro, attempts to undermine democratic elections and institutions. The attack in Salisbury, according to him, crowns the series."</p>	<p>The statement polarises the event's representation and establishes the frame as the principle of a so-called ideological square.⁹</p> <p>This statement's narrative uses the opposition of 'us' vs. 'them' based on the principle of a semiotic square through contextualisation, the disqualification of Russia and the representation of events that are not immediately linked to the current case.</p>
<p>ACT3 (Jens Stoltenberg; direct speech with text translation): "We do not want a new Cold War. And we do not want to be dragged into a new arms race."</p>	<p>This statement corresponds to the principle of the semiotic square: Our positive actions and characteristics are in contrast to previous actions, and statements are hypertrophying negative actions and characteristics assigned to them.</p>
<p>REP: "Vladimir Putin shows his weapons more and more often. At the beginning of this month, he bragged about new nuclear missiles which are supposedly able to hit any place in the world. He tests his military power in Syria. On Sunday, Putin is highly likely to be elected the President of the Russian Federation for the next six years for the fourth time. The West is trying to decide how to deal with Russian threats; it cannot have much hope for a new beginning. Milada Megratova, Czech Television."</p>	<p>There is repeated use of a semiotic square, confirming and extending the representation of negative actions and characteristics of 'them'. In addition, they are hypertrophied by means of rhetorical figures carrying intense implicative potential – a disqualified participant "shows his weapons", "bragged about new nuclear missiles", "tests his military power"; Russian threat vs (lack of) hope of the West for a new beginning, even presented as a constative with 'Russian threat' being a fact.</p>

⁹ Production and interpretation of ideologies are, according to van Dijk (1993), based on so-called mental and shared models. They are mental representations of experience, impressions, events or situations and opinions that 'we' have on 'them' (van Dijk 1993). According to van Dijk's ideological square (1993), we tend to place more significance to our good deeds and minimise our weaknesses while emphasising the shortcomings and lessening the merits of others.

The qualitative analysis also revealed the use of other, subtle methods in the construction of the case's narration that, as such, might not seem problematic. Considering their different use for the representation of the individual parties, they acquire either a favourising or disqualifying potential. One such example refers to the choice of words used in the voiceover when journalists refer to different actors (see Example 7). Hypertrophied authorisation was used to indicate that this is only a statement of a particular person or case party. It can be understood as a rhetorical strategy in the instances when the intense use of authorisation suggests that it is a particular participant's statement or attitude, and not the statement of a fact, while non-authorised propositions can be understood as stating "generally accepted facts" (Hartley and Fiske 2003). From the point of view of pragmatics, such a method is also used to indicate that the speaker presenting the statement distances himself from the statement's content. Regarding the declared requirements on the sources of the communicated information in the programmes, this is not problematic. The rhetorics contribute, however, to the bias of the general representation if they are not used equally for the case's representation of all participants and parties' opinions. Within the analysed sample, such wording was identified, to a considerable degree, in the Russian party's statements (see Example 7). This fact is understandable in the context of the dichotomisation of the case's participants: the British party was, in many instances, described as 'allies', while the Russian party, *de facto*, was not similarly labelled. At the same time, this was another form of a disproportionate representation of the event's individual participants in the analysed programmes.

EXAMPLE 7 21 March 2018 – Events¹⁰

PRES: "Due to the poisoning of the ex-agent and his daughter with a nerve agent, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs invited all accredited ambassadors to Moscow and expressed concerns that Britain could destroy key evidence. What exactly was said at the meeting is a question for the commentator, Miroslav Karas."

REP: "Good evening. Russian ministry, first and foremost, tempered their original tone. Russia does not blame anyone for the poisoning of Skripal any longer, and the previous reference to the potential of the Czech Republic or Sweden [to produce Novichok] was allegedly only to serve as an example of the advanced level of the research in chemistry.

The reference to Slovakia was, according to Ermakov from the Ministry, a mistake as it was allegedly meant to be Czechoslovakia.

¹⁰ This piece of news was preceded by a news item containing a statement by the Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs denying allegations made by the Russian party. The reporter's statement in the example is typographically – using indentation and spacing between lines – segmented into separate sentences to highlight the accentuated authorisation in each of them.

Criticism for this was very strongly pointed directly at London. Ermakov even said that he felt ashamed for British diplomats and experts.

Britain, according to the Ministry, carries out tests of chemical weapons in Porton Down, not far from where Skripal lived, while Russia, as he said, destroyed all 40,000 tons.

According to the Ministry, it is another strongly falsified and unlawful provocation, hysteria and a manifestation of Russophobia.

The Russian Ministry stated that it was a terrorist action against Russian citizens in the territory of Great Britain and demands further explanation.

Here, in Moscow, also the words of the head of British diplomacy, Boris Johnson, attracted attention. He said that Vladimir Putin was using the upcoming football World Cup in a similar way to Hitler's use of the Olympic Games in 1936.

An immediate response came from the spokeswoman of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Zakharova, who said that the comparison of Russia to Nazi Germany was absolutely unacceptable."

The construction of identical statements indicating the authorisation of propositions lies at the foundation of another phenomenon that was identified in the analysed sample. This was the narrative or its (partial) construction based on the statement of one of the parties in the event, albeit without explicit authorisation. Although this may seem as subtle detail, it is important to emphasise that it is related to the description of a feature that pervaded the case's representation in the analysed programmes, which might have fundamental consequences in relation to the representation's construction and its legitimacy: the implication or even indication of a presumed initiator of the event. If this aspect is presented as the statement of a particular participant or party involved in the case, it is indisputable, legitimate and consistent with the news reporting's requirements. However, if the insinuation of a possible initiator is presented as a journalistic statement, e.g. extended by the presenter, editor, editorial staff or CT, it might become a source of disqualification or problematisation of the validity of the case's representation. Example 8 provides an illustration.

EXAMPLE 8 23 March 2018 – Events and Commentaries

PRES: "A strong message from the European Union to Russia. The European Union recalls their ambassador from Moscow for consultations, and at least some member states are also planning to expel some of its Russian diplomats. The Czech Republic will probably join them as well as it wants to manifest unity with Britain after the recent attack on an ex-agent, Sergey Skripal, for which Russia is probably responsible."

In Example 8, the explicit authorisation of the individual propositions is completely missing. Instead, they are presented in the form of a news report on external reality (i.e. not as an attitude or opinion of a particular participant). The final part highlights this, i.e. by stating a fact that, from a pragmatic point of view, can be related to the author of the statement. The phrase “for which Russia is probably responsible” could be perceived as the presentation of a statement characterised as a generally accepted fact. Authorisation is missing in this news story, and its separate parts are formulated as the newscast’s description of actions. The final part of the statement can then be understood as an opinion that the author of the statement identifies with, which means that CT could be seen as biased and taking the side of one of the parties involved in the event.

In addition, the use of stylistic actualisation, hyperbole, defamiliarisation, etc. cannot be understood as a neutral representation due to their figurative nature. As such, these expressions can be perceived by viewers of the public service newscast as biased. In Example 9, the presenter’s statement identifies the parties in the conflict using a neutral tone, but the subsequent introduction in the reporting semantically disqualifies one of them. This can be perceived as the journalist (reporter / editor) siding with one of the parties.

EXAMPLE 9 19 March 2018 – Events and News at 23

PRES: “The European Union demands immediate answers from Russia on the questions of the British regarding the recent nerve agent attack in Salisbury and stated foreign ministers of the member countries of the Union in a joint statement. Moscow denied anything to do with the attack and, on the contrary, demanded an apology from London.”

REP: “The Russian flag on one of the diplomatic buildings in the centre of Brussels. It turns whichever way the wind blows, and European diplomats are annoyed with Russia’s twisting and turning. They demand clear answers from Russia and the end to prevarications.”

ACT (Boris Johnson; direct speech with subtitle translation of the statement): “The Russian denying is more and more absurd. First, they say they never produced Novichok. Then, they say they produced it, but they destroyed it all.”

REP: “Such prevarications of the facts, according to the foreign ministers who arrived here in Brussels today, means [...] one thing only – that this is the Russian strategy [...]”

Apart from the stylistics themselves, which can be understood as inconsistent with the genre of news reporting, the different representations of the individual participants and parties in the case can be seen as questionable. This is due to the fact that using principles of semantic

disqualification causes a potential disqualification of one of the party's credibility by means of the reporter's construction of statements. It should also be mentioned that an equivalent representation was not present in the other party's representation. This makes the representation of the event's participants or parties not only disproportionate but also – at least implicitly – biased.

CONCLUSION

Although the majority of the analysed news stories on the Skripal case corresponded to Czech media law, the conducted analysis identified an inclination of CT's media reporting on the Skripal case to the representation of the British narrative. In the course of the event's development, political representatives of other countries, including the Czech Republic, supported the British version of the case. In the examined programmes, they supported it verbally – by a prevailing identification with the British party's attitude and approaches in terms of the sub-event on the existence of Novichok in the Czech Republic – but also in the form of actual international steps, such as the expulsion of Russian diplomats. From the perspective of social science, CT fulfilled its institutional function within the current social order and its ideological frame. However, as a public service broadcaster, CT is supposed to provide high quality content and set the professional standards. The quantitative and qualitative analyses indicated questionable, biased features in the representation of the Skripal case, including the different representations of various parties and participants and the proportionality of time allocated to them. However, in the context of the analysed sample, these findings were not prominent to the extent that they could be interpreted as a fundamental violation of the legislatively defined functions of a public service medium in the Czech Republic. The significance of the identified 'problematic' reporting needs to be seen in the context of the case itself, with it having been a considerably ambivalent event with a relatively complicated course of development and limited available and verifiable facts. The entire case was actually nourished by and derived from a considerable number of mutually contradicting opinions and differing interpretations. CT, as one of the mainstream media institutions in the Czech Republic, constructed the case's representation in line with Czech official political discourse.

Although the article presents the case study's findings based on a selected sample, the findings could be seen from a more general perspective. These findings are consistent with the conclusions of other studies of the Czech public service media operation (Křeček 2017; Sedláková and Lapčík 2019), which indicate that the Czech mainstream media accept the official political discourse and reproduce it. This ideological discourse is characterised by the use of the dividing dichotomy of 'us' and 'them', which understands the 'others' as 'strangers'

or 'enemies' who can serve to strengthen our own national identity. Such 'others' can be very diverse and include members of some political parties (Křeček 2017), immigrants (Sedláková et al. 2016) or, in the Skripal case, Russia. CT, in the long term, represents the slightly right-wing liberal policy, which was implemented in the Czech Republic in the years after the fall of communism; liberal-right orientation prevails among Czech journalists as well (Volek and Urbaniková 2017). However, it is difficult to prove a disbalance or a deliberate bias in public service broadcasting. The findings of this article show rather subtle meanings that are never communicated openly and are not present on the manifest level of the content. Future research needs to conduct a long-term systematic study of the broadcast content within the cultural and political context.

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